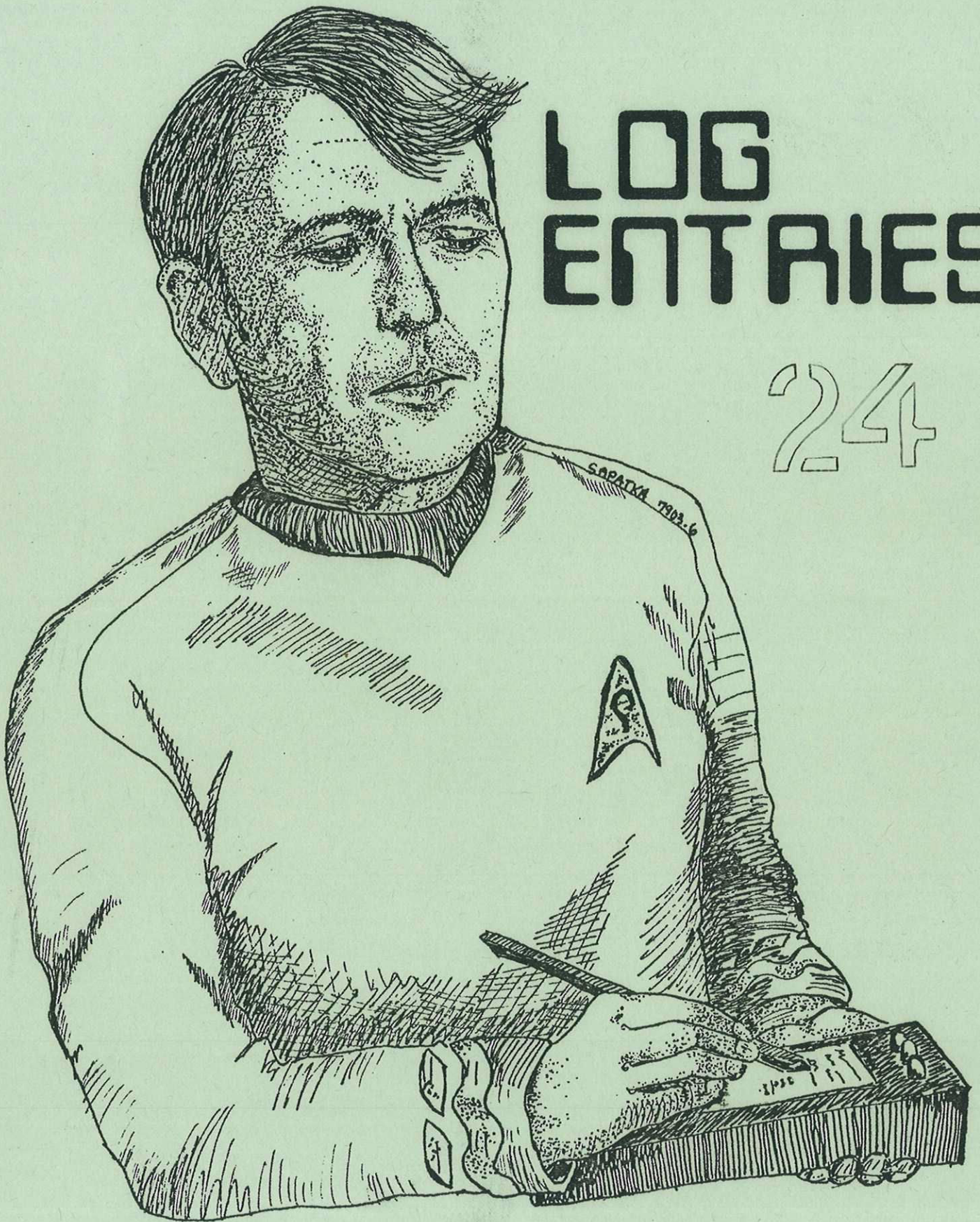


LOG ENTRIES

24



A Star Trek Fanzine

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Hello again, and welcome to Log Entries 24.

As you all know by now, the price has gone up. We've managed to hold prices steady for at least two years, but unfortunately in the last four months the price of paper has gone up twice; one rise we might have been able to cover, but not them both. So, unwillingly, we were forced to push the price up. We hope to hold it steady at 85p for a while, but again we're at the mercy of several factors outside our control - and the immediate one is the possibility that the new Government will put up the standard rate of VAT. If that happens - depending on how much it puts costs up - we'll have to think about a further increase in charges. The foreign rate is unaffected for the moment, but we're watching that closely too; at the moment the exchange rate is yo-yoing at a level where we can afford to keep the cost unchanged, but if it goes much higher - and stays up there - then we'll have no alternative but to put the foreign price up too. The other factor, of course, is postage; the Post Office has been making soft muttering sounds about increasing postage rates for a while, and if that happens, once again we'll have no option but to take a good look at prices. We need some profit on zines to keep the club viable - membership dues alone don't cover the costs of day to day running of the club and getting out the newsletters.

This time, the zine is made up of two longish stories and a couple of shorts, unlike LE 23 which was made up almost wholly of very short stories. British readers will realise from references in it that The Future Belongs to You was written some time ago - in fact I've had it in my files for at least two years, waiting for a selection of stories it would balance with. Which is the main reason why some excellent stories I have on file haven't been printed yet. Some editors, particularly in the States, work from zine to zine, putting everything they've got into each issue (which is one reason why a lot of the US zines are so long) - I prefer to keep a selection of stories on file (if possible) so that I can try to keep a certain amount of balance in the stories - necessary when stories seem to come, as I've said before, in cycles - at the moment, a lot of writers seem to be featuring the minor characters. And I, for one, don't want to put out a zine devoted entirely to the minor characters, much as I enjoy one story in a zine that features any one of Sulu, Uhura, Chekov or Chapel, (I don't entirely count Scotty as a minor character), as long as the other stories are about the main characters.

For next time we have stories by Valerie Piacentini, Simone Mason and C.E. Hall, among others. We also have rather more artwork - quite apart from anything else, this time, there wasn't room to fit any artwork in and still stay within the 59 pages maximum for Log Entries. Which length may seem purely arbitrary, but remember we're usually putting out two zines every two months; to make it longer would add tremendously to the pressures put on us by the fact that two months is only eight weeks and there's a newsletter to go out in that period too. All of which has to be done in the evenings and at the weekends, since we all hold down jobs.

Enough of that - read, and enjoy!

June 1979



Non-members of STAG can get information on back issues, current and forthcoming zines by sending an DAE or addressed envelope and two International Reply Coupons to

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Ann 10/78

JOURNEY OF TERROR by Audrey Baker

It all began because Kirk was ordered to investigate the loss of a **Federation** freighter in his sector and when he finally traced her to an unmapped area, Spock told him emotionlessly that she had been destroyed but there was no indication as to how it happened.

Kirk was angry. He had known the Captain of the freighter personally and he always took a friend's death badly. He knew the freighter had been unarmed so she could hardly have been aggressive. He declared he was going to hunt down her destroyers. As a result, when the sensors showed another spacecraft approaching them rapidly, with markings no-one recognised, he ordered the phaser banks to stand by.

"Captain, you cannot attack without warning!" Spock said. "You do not know that this ship has any connection with the destruction of the Venus."

"I've got a hunch that it has," Kirk said grimly. "And it doesn't look too welcoming, either."

The strange ship confirmed Kirk's suspicions by opening fire the moment it was within range. Kirk, thinking that now he knew what had happened to the Venus, ordered the Enterprise to return the fire and blew the alien craft to pieces.

"That shot, Captain," said Spock rather reproachfully, "was possibly intended merely to halt us, not hit us. For an attacking shot, it was poorly aimed."

"You think so?" said Kirk, tight-lipped. "Well, too late to find out now, Mr. Spock. I don't like alien vessels firing without warning on my ship."

Spock turned back to his instruments. "No survivors," he reported expressionlessly.

"Serve them right," said Kirk. Dave Bramfield had been an old friend of his...

The next moment he had disappeared in a searing flash of light. The bridge was left in uproar behind him, but he knew nothing about that. He materialised suddenly on the surface of a planet, standing facing a row of grim-faced women in long grey robes. There were five of them, one considerably older than the others, and it was she who now spoke in a harsh, curiously sexless voice, her sunken black eyes staring dully at Kirk.

"What excuse have you?"

Trying to collect his wits, Kirk could only gape at her, and she repeated her question in the same tone.

"I don't know what you mean," Kirk said finally, playing for time. "I am Captain James T. Kirk, Captain of the U.S.S. Enterprise, and I would like to know what I'm doing here."

He tried to look about him, but the whole place seemed to be veiled in some kind of fog. All he could see clearly was the yellow dais the women stood on.

"You destroyed one of our ships without any provocation," the same woman said coldly, ignoring his question.

"No provocation? When they fired on me first?"

"We were merely requesting you to halt."

"I guess you did the same with that freighter," Kirk said, unrepentant.

"We know nothing of any 'freighter'," the woman said. "You were trespassing in our airspace and we had every right to check you and find out your business. You, on the other hand, had no right whatsoever to destroy our ship."

"Your ship made an attack on mine," Kirk stubbornly reiterated.

"Our ships do not attack unprovoked," was the reply. "You displayed quite

unwarranted aggression. We do not like people of your kind here, and as a lesson to those who may follow you, we intend to destroy your ship and all its crew forthwith."

"You might not find that so easy," Kirk said, bluffing furiously. "She can defend herself. She's no unarmed freighter."

The woman shrugged. "Believe me, your weapons are futile against ours. We hold your ship now, like this..." And she held out her closed fist. "She cannot move without our permission. She is at our mercy, and so are you."

Kirk reached for his communicator and then realised he hadn't got it. He said, "Do you honestly expect me to believe that you'll blow my ship apart? When your own ship couldn't do it?"

"That in itself proves that you attacked it unawares," the woman said. "Had we really wished to destroy you we would have done it before you knew it."

My crew and my ship destroyed! Kirk thought frantically. I must stop it!
But how? Steady now, don't lose your head. Play it cool.

He spoke desperately & swiftly. "Listen. You can't condemn everyone in my ship for what I did, for what I ordered them to do. It was all my own idea. They only did what I told them to when they destroyed your ship. Why should they die for obeying orders? I'm the one responsible, and you've got me. Let the others go."

The elderly woman said, "You accept the full responsibility, then?" She seemed a little surprised. The other four, standing two each side of her, showed some reaction for the first time. They murmured together.

Kirk said stoutly, "Yes, I accept full responsibility. Let my ship go." He was sincere in what he said, but he could see that he had impressed the women favourably and he started to hope again. It was obviously the right tack to pursue, so he must continue with it, he thought.

The elderly woman turned to talk to her colleagues. Kirk thought, looking at them, that they looked like the witches in 'Macbeth', with their flowing grey draperies and the twining mist tendrils about them.

The oldest had a witch's face too, although the other four were younger and at least one of them, Kirk noted typically, wasn't bad looking. He didn't dare to move, because he couldn't see his feet in the mist and he didn't know if he stood on a pinnacle of rock or a floor. He stood motionless, waiting. It had all happened so suddenly he could hardly credit any of it, even now. It was like a bad dream. Perhaps he was going to wake up soon and find himself in his quarters on the Enterprise.

The five women at last turned back to face him. Again the eldest acted as spokeswoman. He noticed now that she had some kind of wreath twisted in her lank black hair, almost like a crown of sorts. It was hard to see distinctly, but occasionally it shone with a sudden blink as the light caught it.

"Your sentence is that you are to face the wilderness and the harpies," the woman said tonelessly.

"What does that mean?" Kirk asked.

"You will soon see," was the ominous answer.

Kirk hesitated a moment, then said, "Can you tell me who you are now that that's all settled? I'm just curious to know who I've been judged by," he added sardonically.

"The woman said, "I am the High Priestess of Medusa. Is there anything else you wish to know?" Her touch of sarcasm matched Kirk's.

"No," he said. "I think that's enough." Some religious sect, he thought,

Just my luck! He knew what they could be like. And women, too... He had no illusions about the 'gentle' sex. His eyes roved over the other four younger priestesses and he saw one of them, the good-looking one, gazing at him. She too had the lank black hair, but without the crown, and it was thicker than the old woman's. Her face, even now on the gaunt side, showed signs of developing into the living skull that was the face of the High Priestess, but her eyes were kinder. Kirk smiled at her, putting all his charm into it. Who knew, funnier things had happened. She turned to the High Priestess and murmured something to her. The old woman looked dubious, glanced at Kirk, then rather grudgingly nodded. The younger woman came forward to the edge of the dais she stood on and spoke direct to Kirk.

"I like your courage, Captain." She had a rather deep and vibrant voice. "Because of it I have requested that you should know something of what faces you and that you should receive the same advantages as our own miscreants."

What do you know, it paid off! Kirk thought, but outwardly he merely nodded.

"You have a chance of survival," the woman continued. "Not a strong one, but it does exist. We in this world live on the tops of our mountains. Around me, below, is wilderness, unexplored, filled with wild creatures we barely know. All we know is that the harpies are there, monsters that attack the mind, that send people mad. If you can work your way from here to our temple on the far side of the continent, you will go free. It has happened, once or twice, but rarely. It takes an exceptional person to accomplish it, as you might believe. We give our criminals so sentenced a compass and a slingshot. With these they are turned loose, to make their way as best they can. Most are never seen again. The High Priestess has consented to allow you the compass and the slingshot. You do have that faint chance - for you seem to be quite an exceptional person and perhaps capable of achieving this."

Kirk said, "I've been through worse, perhaps, in my time."

The woman looked at him and he was now certain that it was with respect.

"You are not afraid?"

"Oh yes, I'm afraid all right," he said cheerfully, "but that isn't going to help me, is it?"

"Most of our prisoners scream and beg for mercy when they hear their sentence."

"I am a Starship commander and I'm not in the habit of begging for mercy," Kirk said briefly.

The woman turned and spoke again to the High Priestess, who shrugged. "It might as well be two as one," she said.

The younger woman turned back. "Captain Kirk, I have won you yet another boon. You do not have to go into the Wilderness alone," she told him. "If you can find someone who will voluntarily accompany you, we will fetch him from your ship. But he must go willingly. We have no grudge against your subordinates, since you have claimed full responsibility."

Spock! thought Kirk at once, then tried to banish the thought. No. I can't ask it of him. He's done so much for me already. He'd come, I'm sure of it, but no. Aloud he said, "Thank you, but I'd sooner go alone."

All five women looked astonished, he was glad to see. "Alone? You would rather face the Wilderness alone?" the High Priestess exclaimed.

"Yes. I don't want to condemn any of my friends to death," Kirk explained.

"Your chances of survival are far higher if you go with someone," the younger woman said.

"Probably, but I'll go alone," Kirk insisted.

"Is there no one who would willingly accompany you?" she asked.

Kirk thought briefly of McCoy and Spock. "There are two that I know of. Not

many men could say as much, I guess. But I can't ask it of them."

"Not even if it might save your life?" the younger woman urged. She now seemed very keen that Kirk should survive. Kirk guessed that had it been up to her, he would have been let off, but she had the High Priestess at her elbow and the old woman wasn't having it.

"How high do you rate my chances anyway?" he asked.

The High Priestess answered. "On your own, extremely low. With a strong and resourceful companion, reasonably high."

"Take someone with you, Captain Kirk," the younger woman said again. "It is only common sense. Surely you ~~are~~ needed on your ship. What will happen if you don't return?"

Kirk finally nodded. He saw that there were no more concessions forthcoming; the younger woman had gone as far as the High Priestess would let her.

"All right," he said reluctantly. "I'll ask Spock and see if he'll come. He's got a logical mind and he might refuse for the sake of the ship, but I'll see what he thinks."

"And who is 'Spock'?" the High Priestess inquired.

"You can't mistake him," Kirk said. "He's half Vulcan, got pointed ears, the only pair on the ship. And can't you give him some warning before you whisk him away like you did me?"

The High Priestess merely said, "Our methods are unalterable. If he cannot survive the shock of being brought here then he is no fit person to accompany you into the Wilderness."

One of the women went away into the fog. A moment later a rather ruffled and faintly astonished Spock was standing beside Kirk. He had been snatched off the bridge in the middle of a frenzied search for his Captain. The first thing he said was, "I warned you not to attack that ship." Then he saw the women watching them and fell silent, looking back at them with interest. One brow slowly rose.

"Fascinating," he observed.

"Is this the man?" the High Priestess asked Kirk, ignoring the scrutiny.

Kirk nodded. "Can you let me talk to him alone for a moment?"

The High Priestess stepped back and signalled to the others to follow her. They disappeared into the mist.

"Mind where you're moving," Kirk said sharply to his friend. "I don't know what we're standing on, it may well be a mountain peak for all I know."

"And what are we doing here?" Spock inquired.

"I'm under sentence of death for destroying their ship," Kirk said tersely. "And don't say 'I told you so'."

"I would not dream of it. And where do I come in, then, if it is you who is to die?" Spock spoke with admirable calm, but somewhere deep in his eyes there was both shock and anxiety. "Did they fetch me here to watch the sentence carried out?"

"No," said Kirk. He explained, swiftly and concisely. Spock opened his mouth to speak. Kirk checked him. "Not a word! You know what it entails. You might die just as well as I. Think of the ship, left without either of us. One of us should stay with her, and obviously I can't, so it should be you. Just let your logic take over for a bit - " Spock looked indignant " - I fetched you here largely to explain the situation to you, not to ask you to come with me. I know Bones would come if I asked him - " Spock looked even more indignant " - but he's as necessary to the ship as you are. It seems I should take someone, though. Who do you recommend, completely without prejudice?"

Spock ignored being suspected of prejudice, which showed how anxious he really was. "You are honestly asking me to recommend someone to take my place?" he said glacially.

"Oh, forget that side of it, will you!" snapped Kirk. "I'm not taking you with me, and that's that. You're too valuable. Who else could I take?"

"No-one. I could not recommend anyone for such a task."

"That's how I feel about it too, but I must take someone if I'm to have any hope of survival."

"Naturally. And you have someone."

"Leave yourself out of it!"

"Really, Captain, I do not know why you sent for me, but now that I am here, I am not leaving without protest," Spock said stiffly.

"But think of the ship!" Kirk said firmly.

"There are times when the ship must come second. I know my place." Spock folded his arms and stared in front of him.

Kirk suddenly smiled. "Do you know, although I half wanted you to refuse and go back, I'm glad you wouldn't. So you'll come?"

"Did you ever doubt it for a moment?" said Spock, insulted.

"No, not really. Here are the priestesses again."

"Is that what they are?"

The women came up to them, walking through the shifting mists. "Well?" asked the High Priestess. "Is he going with you, Captain Kirk?"

"He says he will," Kirk said shortly.

"Good. Then come with us."

"My ship - what will happen to her?" Kirk wanted to know.

"We shall inform your crew and keep them here until you have had time to reach the Eastern Temple."

They followed the five women across through the mist, moving blindly. Something huge and solid loomed up ahead of them, then solidified into the solitary peak of a mountain, in the side of which was cut a stone door. It was open. The women halted in front of it.

"You descend here," the High Priestess said. "The lift will take you down to the Wilderness below. Then you are on your own."

The younger woman who had befriended Kirk handed him a sling-shot made of leathery substance and a small compass enclosed in dull green metal.

"You head East," she said. "I hope you survive, Captain Kirk."

Kirk turned to his companion. "Are you sure?" he asked. "Now's the time to turn back, if you want to. I've got to go through with this, but you haven't. They'll take you back to the ship right away if you like. You haven't got to come unless you really want to."

Spock looked at him rather pityingly. "Shall we go, Captain?"

Kirk gave a rather wan smile and stepped into the lift. Spock followed, the door slid to behind them and they began to move downwards.

They were pretty cramped for space in the now-hurtling lift. Kirk fiddled aimlessly with the sling-shot. "I've never used one of these darned things, have you?" he asked.

"A sling-shot? Once or twice. They are not hard to manage if one keeps a steady hand and eye," Spock replied gravely.

"I guess I'll manage before long. I only wish I knew what we were up against," Kirk mused.

"Were you given no information?"

"Nothing more than I told you. Harpies and unknown animals."

"What precisely are 'harpies'?"

"I don't know what these people call harpies," Kirk said. "The harpies I know of were mythical creatures, half woman and half bird. All I know about these here is that they drive men mad."

"Interesting. Are we intended to use the sling-shot to keep off animals or to get food?" Spock inquired.

"Damned if I know. Both, I should think. You're not going to fancy it much, are you? If we have to exist on meat," Kirk said.

"I will face that problem when we get to it. If there is nothing else fit to eat, then I will be obliged to eat flesh," Spock said calmly.

"We don't know if even that's fit to eat out here - if there is any."

"There must be some form of sustenance, else how did the others survive?"

"That's true," Kirk conceded, feeling more cheerful.

The lift drew up slowly and halted. The door slid open. They looked out onto a vast plain, shimmering away into the distance. Towering above the horizon was the huge dull red bulk of a nearly planet.

"We must be on a satellite," Kirk said, looking at it.

"It would indeed seem so," Spock agreed. "Shall we start out while it is still light?"

They took their bearings and set off. The ground was hard and dusty and there was little vegetation. They trudged on and on toward the looming orb on the horizon, and as they went towards it it lifted slowly higher and higher in the sky.

"Isn't there any water in this place?" Kirk said eventually. He was thirsty.

"I have seen no signs of any," Spock said.

"There must be some."

"There are trees on the skyline."

"I can't see them."

"No, but I can. Presumably water is there. Are you hungry?"

"I'm more thirsty."

"I can do little about that, I am afraid, but if you give me the sling-shot a moment..."

Kirk handed it over. Spock selected a stone from the many that lay at their feet, fitted it, aimed upwards and stared into the sky. A second later the sling cracked. The stone whirled up. There was a pause, then Kirk saw a small black dot coming down towards them. It thumped to the ground nearby, a strange little blackish-green bird with clawed wings. It was dead. Kirk picked it up.

"I do not know when we may see anything else," Spock said rather apologetically. "I do not like taking life, of course, but --"

"We have to live ourselves," Kirk said briskly. "If we can get to those trees we might be able to make a fire. I don't think I could eat raw bird, not yet."

"No, nor I," Spock said with decision.

They went on, Kirk carrying the bird, Spock the sling-shot.

They reached the trees just before nightfall. They turned out to be part of a large band of woodland, trees of a sort Kirk had never seen before, with high straight branches and strap-like leaves. Their trunks were enormous. There was very little undergrowth. The two men searched around and finally came on a small soggy pool half filled with dead leaves. They scraped as many of these out as they could and then drank. The water tasted rather bitter but had no ill effects. Kirk, who knew a good many things about camping, set to and made a fire by rubbing sticks together. Over this he roasted the bird, and later made quite a reasonable meal off it. It tasted rather like duck. Spock refused to share it. He looked around for some kind of vegetable food but could find nothing that seemed even remotely edible. In the end he gave it up and came to sit by the fire, but he still refused to eat the half of bird Kirk had kept for him.

"No, I can go without food longer than you, Captain. It will not hurt me to miss a meal or two, and I would sooner wait and see if I can find something that is not flesh," he said.

On his insistence, Kirk ate the other half of the bird himself and then they settled for the night, with Spock keeping watch at first. It was an uneventful night, and they changed places half-way through. Kirk sat long in the firelight, watching the flames flickering and looking at the form of his friend curled up asleep nearby. He was thankful to have him here, but he still thought sadly of his ship. How did he know that that old bitch wouldn't blow the Enterprise to atoms the moment he'd gone?

They moved on the following morning, walking through the trees. This time neither of them had eaten anything. There was nothing to eat, either flesh or vegetable. They drank deeply at the pool before they left it, having no means of carrying any water with them, and they washed their heads and hands. After about an hour or so of walking Spock shot a funny little animal rather like a large rabbit. They carried it a while further and then Kirk made another fire and cooked it. This time Spock was looking somewhat lean and hungry, but he still stubbornly refused to eat the meat. Kirk grew annoyed.

"It's all very well sticking to your principles about flesh-eating," he said tartly, "but someone in your position can't afford to have any. If we found any berries or nuts we wouldn't know if they were poisonous or not and we've no means of finding out. The only safe stuff to eat here is flesh, like it or not. To weaken yourself and lessen your chances of survival for the sake of being a vegetarian is ridiculous. You'll darn well eat some of this stuff, because we don't know when we'll find any more and I'm not having you passing out on me from sheer hunger. Go on, take it!" and he thrust a hind leg into the revolted Spock's hand.

"I do not like eating it," Spock said protestingly, gazing at the leg, which still oozed a little blood, Kirk not having cooked it through.

"Stuff it in your fool face and forget it's meat!" Kirk said impatiently, taking a bite out of the other leg, which he held. "It doesn't taste bad."

"It is half raw," Spock said with revulsion.

"All the better for you. Get it down."

"I shall probably vomit."

"You do and waste that good food and I'll...I'll knock your head off! Eat it!"

Reluctantly, Spock bit into the leg. He hardly chewed at all, swallowing the meat down with an expression of martyrdom. Kirk watched him, half amused, half annoyed.

"You don't know how lucky you are to have it!" he pointed out. "You'd better get used to it, because it's about all you'll be eating until we break through,

if we do. And if you don't chew it you'll throw up. Go on, what do you think the good Lord gave you teeth for?"

Spock, still registering distaste, ate doggedly through his joint until nothing was left but a few strings of sinew and the bone. Although he wouldn't admit it, he had seen the good sense of Kirk's remarks.

They moved on after they'd eaten, and managed to cover quite a long distance by nightfall. This time Kirk took the sling-shot and managed after a couple of misses to bring down another bird. Wild life was rather scarce, but it all seemed small and harmless. This time Spock ate the bird too, without protest. When asked, he said that he did not like the taste of meat, but he realised there was no choice.

They found nothing the next morning and moved on with empty bellies. They were still in the wooded country but suddenly they came on a deep chasm that split the ground in two rather across their path. On the other side the wood continued its march to the horizon. They stopped and investigated. The chasm appeared to run for miles in both directions and it seemed pointless to try to get around it. They would have to go down it and up the other side, as it was far too wide to jump. They did a little hunting first and killed a deer-like animal with huge ears. They found some water and had their meal alongside it.

"Well," said Kirk as they chewed, "so far, so good. We haven't come across any monsters or any harpies. It's just possible they don't exist."

"I would not like to guarantee that," Spock said gloomily, daintily licking the grease off his fingers and managing to convey an air of utter detachment as he did so. They were both looking a little the worse for wear now, even the Vulcan had lost his usual appearance of immaculate neatness and his shirt was distinctly grubby. Kirk's face was rimmed with stubble and he kept rubbing it because it itched. Spock's beard did not grow so quickly, so he was not so disreputable - yet. "We have a long way still to go," Spock continued. "Do not become careless."

"Don't worry," Kirk said grimly. "I'm not relaxing."

He reflected as he looked at his friend crouched by the fire chewing at his meal that he was glad he had Spock with him. Nothing could be quite so bad if Spock was there too. Somehow, together, they'd win through.

Presently they got up and decided on the best place to tackle the chasm. This settled on, they started the downward climb. Neither of them was a mountaineer in the strict sense of the word, but they were physically tough enough to cope with most exercise, and they were always in training. As there was nothing to use as a rope, they had to go separately. Kirk, who had a shorter reach than Spock, happened to hit on an easier part and reached the bottom a little ahead of his friend. They both stood there and surveyed the climb up. After weighing it up carefully they decided on their paths and once again set off. Kirk was getting into the knack of it now and swung along quite briskly. Spock, who was by nature more cautious, tested every hold before he put his weight on it.

They were close to the top when Kirk trod on an unstable rock. It crumbled under his foot and he slipped. He was off-balance and unable to save himself slipping down. Fortunately, he didn't go far, as he ended up on a fairly wide shelf some twenty feet below, where he managed to check his fall by clinging to some handholds until his arms all but cracked in two. Spock, off to one side, had seen him fall but had been quite unable to do anything about it except halt in his own progress upward and stare with horror.

"Jim!" he cried once the tumble of loose stones had ceased. "Are you all right?" He found it hard to breathe until Kirk answered him.

"Yes, I think so. Ow!"

"What is it?" Spock craned out dangerously from his position in an effort to see more of Kirk than the top of his head.

"My ankle. I've twisted it, I think. Don't know how bad it is, but I don't think it's broken."

"Can you climb up again?"

"I - think - so. Damn well have to, won't I? You go ahead. No sense you risking your neck too."

"I shall wait here until you reach my level," Spock said stubbornly.

Slowly Kirk hauled himself up again, gritting his teeth with pain. Somehow he made it, slowly and laboriously, sweat pouring down his face. Spock tried to move over to help him and was sworn at for his consideration.

"You let me make my own way, damn you! No reason to endanger both of us!" Kirk said furiously (among other, less polite, things) and Spock obeyed.

At last they clawed their way over the top of the cliff. Kirk collapsed, gasping, nursing his ankle, his face livid with pain. Only his superb self-discipline had brought him up that cliff, but for a man in his job self-discipline was second nature by now.

Spock bent above him and together they managed to get Kirk's boot off before the ankle swelled too much. It was a bad sprain, no bones broken, but Kirk could hardly put his foot to the ground.

"We'll have to lie up a bit," he said at last with disgust. "I can't go far on that. Maybe it'll be better in a day or two, if we put some water on it. Compresses. You can tear some of my shirt. We'd best find somewhere to live for a while."

Spock went off to look, leaving the sling-shot with Kirk. He came back after a time to report he'd found a hollow tree that would answer the purpose well enough. There was a pool nearby. He half carried Kirk to the place and installed him comfortably enough in the tree, which was like all the others, remarkably big. He bedded Kirk down on dead leaves, of which there were plenty around. He then took a piece of cloth Kirk had torn off the hem of his shirt and, having soaked it in water, bound it tightly round the swollen ankle.

Kirk suddenly chuckled in the midst of his wincing. "God, what a sight I must look! All whiskers and rags!"

"That is hardly your fault," said Spock, rather repressively. He didn't like seeing his Captain in such a state. "Is that comfortable?"

"As much as can be expected."

"Then I shall go and hunt. Give me the sling."

"You must hate doing this," Kirk remarked as he handed it over. "I know how you feel about taking life."

"Only if it is unnecessary," Spock said. "I have no objection to killing for food if it is unavoidable." He went off into the trees and left Kirk to his thoughts.

If I'd been here alone I'd have been finished, Kirk reflected. Thank goodness that priestess insisted I brought someone with me! He wondered how long the injury would hold them up and how long the ship would be kept.

He had plenty of time to think during the next few days. His ankle remained obstinately swollen in spite of the compresses and he couldn't get his boot on. He tried to stand once or twice but nearly fainted with the pain. He stayed in the hollow tree looking at the huge pitted red orb of the mother planet looming through the wood at him, talking to Spock when he was there, thinking when he was left alone while the Vulcan hunted. Spock had become quite expert with the sling-shot and he didn't often return empty-handed.

One day it started to stream with rain like a torrent. They squeezed

together into the tree and sat watching it. It put their fire out. Usually Spock slept by it, leaving the tree to Kirk, but the ground was so wet once the rain stopped that Kirk insisted that he come into the tree too once night had fallen. There was barely room for the two of them to lie down, but they did their best. Kirk tried to make a joke of it, pretending he didn't know his arms and legs from Spock's, but in actual fact the crush hurt his ankle. Spock huddled as far away as possible in a corner, anxious not to touch the wounded leg any more than he had to. With anyone else this cringing away would have been for quite different reasons - he never allowed anyone to touch him if he could help it.

It was the day after the rainstorm, when Spock was away hunting, that the harpies came.

Kirk was lying in the tree half asleep, when suddenly he had a sense of stifling, of blind terror, of beating wings about his head. He sat up with a cry, fighting them off, but there was nothing tangible there to fight. He could see nothing, but he could feel. It felt as if his head was full of screeching, flapping birds, beating at him with wings and claws, birds as black and hideous as Hades, reeking of horror and nightmare. He had never known such terror. Half mad with it, he dragged himself out of the tree, ignoring his ankle, and staggered across the ground, reeling and struggling with nothing. He started to shout frantically for Spock.

"Spock! Spock! Spock!" The maniacal yells echoed round, growing in volume and intensity as he struggled. Somehow in the recesses of his fear-crazed mind he knew Spock could help him, if only he'd come.

Spock was hunting some way away, and had just shot another deer-like creature. As he bent over it to pick it up, he felt suddenly uneasy and straitened to listen. Nothing. He bent again over the carcass, but the uneasiness persisted. Something was wrong. He hefted the body and set off towards Kirk, walking faster than usual. He told himself as he went that it was nonsense, but he couldn't quell the sense of danger. Before he'd gone quarter of a mile he stopped dead, rigid as a stick. Then he dropped the animal he was carrying and ran.

The closer he got the faster he ran, forcing the last ounce of speed out of his angular, bony frame. Kirk's yells were ringing in his ears, and he was frantic. It occurred to him that he had no weapon but the sling-shot, nothing to defend themselves with. That made no difference - he had to get there and find out what was wrong. If he died fighting barehanded with some unspeakable monster he didn't care.

Kirk had come to rest against another tree, clinging to it with frantic hands. The harpies still screamed in his brain, smothering his very reason. Somehow Spock's voice, calling his name, penetrated the fog of terror and he hurled himself against the Vulcan with such force he nearly bowled him over. He clung there, almost burrowing into Spock's body, gibbering with dread.

Spock knew at once. The harpies had come. He caught Kirk's head between his two big hands, forcing it back so that he could look into Kirk's eyes. He felt the harpies too, but he could control them. They didn't rule his Vulcan mind with its superior discipline. He shut them off, although he knew they were there, screeching in the background.

"Jim... Jim..." he murmured. "Fight it. Fight."

But Kirk couldn't. They had taken possession. There was only one thing for it, a thing Spock hated doing as it revealed so much he would sooner remain hidden. He tightened his hold on Kirk's head and melded their minds. He had a hard fight, but the harpies couldn't hold out against him for long. Relentlessly he forced them back and out of the mind they'd dominated.

Kirk felt them go, reluctantly and angrily, and taking their place, soothing the ugliness and horror, was a warmth and gentleness that filled his mind like growing light after darkness. It was unspeakably comforting and he relaxed with a sigh, knowing he was safe now.

After a moment, however, he lifted his head and blinked like someone waking. "God, I've never known anything like that! Those were the harpies."

"So I had deduced," said Spock. "Come and sit down."

"How did you get rid of them?" Kirk asked, doing so.

"They have no domination over my mind, fortunately. I am too strong for them," Spock said calmly.

"Thank God for that! I'd have gone mad."

"I believe it."

"They'll be back. They won't leave it so easily," Kirk said apprehensively after a moment.

"Possibly not. But I shall be here," Spock assured him.

"All the time?"

"Well, I must hunt, of course, or we will starve. But I will not go far."

"No, don't." Kirk was not normally a coward by any means, but the harpies were another matter. They turned his blood to ice, even thinking about them. He huddled now over the fire, shivering. Spock looked at him with concern.

"You need something to eat, Jim. I dropped an animal a little way back when I heard you. I will go and fetch it."

Kirk nodded, steeling himself to be left alone. Spock looked at him again, then quickly left. He ran all the way back to the body of the animal, expecting any second to hear Kirk's yells again, but when he returned to the fire again Kirk hadn't moved. Spock set to work and skinned and cut up the animal, then put it over the fire to roast. Kirk said nothing, merely sat, exhausted. Presently, when it was cooked, Spock cut the meat up with a sharp flint-like stone they used as a knife, and urged Kirk to eat some of it.

"It is a good thing you did not bring Dr. McCoy instead of myself," he remarked suddenly as Kirk half-heartedly chewed away. "You would both have been insane by now."

There was a touch of smugness in the words that made Kirk grin in spite of his dread and weariness. "Oh well," he said. "We both know there's no-one like you, don't we?"

Spock gave him a suspicious glance over the hunk of meat he was eating but made no answer.

Darkness fell and Kirk watched it with apprehension. He knew the harpies hadn't finished with him, and no more they had. In the dead of night they came again, swooping onto him like bats. He woke with his head whirling in horror. Spock, sitting by the fire, was with him in a flash, throwing the whole of his powerful mind against the enemy. When they had gone, furious and thwarted but by no means finally defeated, Kirk fell limp and sweat-soaked, drained of everything. Spock banked up the fire and climbed into the fallen tree with him, holding him in his arms for the rest of the night, his mind a barrier between Kirk's and the creatures that lurked waiting their chance. By the time the morning came they were both weary.

"We'll have to move on from here," Kirk muttered as he peered, bleary-eyed and whiskery, from the tree at the looming red planet in the sky.

"But you cannot walk far yet," said Spock, climbing out and cautiously stretching the kinks out of his long body. He felt stiff all over. "I could, of course, carry you for a way."

Kirk disposed of that idea with one brief rude word. "I'll make shift somehow," he added. "My ankle's not as bad as it was."

"It is still far from recovered and the running you did yesterday has not helped it," Spock observed dampeningly.

"Well, I can't stay here," Kirk insisted. "We seem to be in their territory. Maybe we could get out of it."

"If they have any boundaries," said Spock, still gloomy. "I shall bathe your ankle now. Can you take the bandage off?"

"Yes, here it is. I've got to get away from here, Spock! They won't leave me alone until I do."

"How do you know they will not follow you?"

"Goddam it, I've got to have some hope!"

"Very well," Spock sighed. "We shall try if you insist."

Spock went quickly to the pool, washed himself as much as he could and re-soaked the bandage. Still with his hair plastered down and dripping, he returned and re-bound Kirk's ankle.

"I must get some food," he said then, straightening up.

"All right. Just don't go far, will you?"

"I shall endeavour not to, but we must eat," replied Spock unanswerably as he took the slingshot and left.

He hoped to find game fairly near, but the fates were against him this morning. He went to all the places he knew of, but found nothing. He was forced to go further and further, hurrying as much as he could but unable to go really fast because of the resulting noise. Half his mind was on the problem of getting food, but the other half was back with Kirk, wondering how he was.

The harpies knew he'd gone. They gave him good time to get out of earshot and then attacked. Kirk, crying out wildly, staggered limping out of the tree, knowing only that somehow he had to find Spock. His ankle hurt excruciatingly, but he ignored the pain. Shouting and screaming, he headed off into the trees.

Spock eventually found a large bird rather like a grouse and shot it. There was enough on its plump body to feed them both, and thankfully he gathered it up by the feet and started off back. Several times as he got closer to their 'home' he stopped to listen, but heard nothing. Through the trees the great red ball of the mother planet leered at him ominously. He went on hastily, loose-jointed and clumsy with anxiety. He'd been away far too long for safety.

He was hardly surprised when he got back to the tree and found no-one there. He put the bird down, straightened slowly and listened. Nothing. But Kirk couldn't have gone far with that ankle. He scouted around the area, bent over looking for tracks, but the leafy ground was bad for showing signs. He called. No-one answered. He went back to stand by the dying fire, and he was really perturbed now. Not for himself. That he might be stranded alone in the wilderness never crossed his mind, and wouldn't have worried him if it had. All he could think of was Kirk lost somewhere in the wood at the mercy of the harpies. He was so upset his habitual calm forsook him for once and he stood there shivering, aghast, not knowing what to do next. How did he know which way Kirk had gone? How could he ever find him in a maze of trees?

I should never have left him, never! he rebuked himself. But he knew this was nonsense. If they were to move on, Kirk needed nourishment and how

else could he have got it? It was pointless thinking now what he should have done.

He forced himself to sit down and stay perfectly still, shutting down the terrible clamouring images of Kirk mad, lost, perhaps even now dying. He shut his eyes and tried to concentrate. Now, what to do? Obviously he must try to find Kirk, but where did he look? He remembered with a sudden chill that they weren't far from the chasm where Kirk had hurt his ankle. Supposing he'd gone stumbling there in his madness and fallen again, but this time all the way? Well, at least it gave him some notion of where to go first. He set off at once for the chasm, trying for a moment to walk, although quickly, but breaking into a frantic run before he'd gone five yards.

At the top of the cliff he called; he lay down on his stomach and peered down. Nothing, no sound. He looked for signs of blood but found none. There was also no sign of any recent rockslide. He sat up slowly and called again. Nothing but silence and that watching red ball in the sky. He got to his feet and stood irresolute. If only he had some indication where Kirk had gone. Where would a man, driven mad with terror, go?

He started to move back to the hollow tree, and as he went a certainty shaped itself inside him. If Kirk never got back to safety, nor would he. He would die in the Wilderness, looking for Kirk, rather than save his own skin and go on alone. And if he found him already dead, he would stay with him. Perhaps one distant day someone might find their bones.

He thought calmly of the life he knew - the ship, the fleet, the scientific work. He dismissed them all as insignificant. None of it counted if Kirk lay dead somewhere in the wild. Either they both came through or neither of them did.

He got back to the hollow tree and the fire and the dead bird, and nothing had moved. He stood for a moment, gazing into the tree where Kirk had lain, and he clenched his fists and said aloud, "Let me find him, dead or alive. Let me only find him." He had no idea who he was talking to.

He went back to the edge of the little clearing by the fire and called, listened, head cocked, all his concentration centred on his ears, so keen to catch the faintest sound. He moved after a moment to another spot, tried again. Finally he went back and stood in the middle of the clearing by the tree. He closed his eyes and forced his senses inwards. Somehow he must find Kirk. Could he sense Kirk's location as he could pick up the vibrations of other Vulcans? His mind stretched and felt as he concentrated, standing rigid. Where are you? Call to me, even only in your mind, and I may be able to hear you. The sweat stood out on his face. He began to turn slowly, facing in a circle like a scanner. He wasn't sure even now, but he had a faint sense of response from one direction. He tried it again. Yes, but was it Kirk? He hesitated no longer. He set off that way, running again.

As he went, he became more and more sure. His speed picked up. He crashed through leaves and debris, slid down slopes with an ungraceful scramble. He didn't know where he was going, but somehow he knew this was the way. Suddenly he burst out of the trees onto the bank of a river.

He stopped short. River! Had Kirk fallen in? Sick with dread, he went on, but more slowly now. Then he called, and the voice that emerged from his dry throat was like none he'd ever heard from his body before.

"Jim! Jim!"

The echoes died flatly away across the water, and a hideous ragged livid green bird hauled itself into the air with a furious squawk and flapped turgidly away. Spock automatically registered its appearance - it looked to be a carrion bird. Carrion? He rushed forward like a bull through the coarse reeds at the edge of the water to the spot where the bird had been. He caught his foot in a root, stumbled, nearly came headlong, recovered with a frantic lurch. But he

barely noticed it. All he had eyes for now was the sodden bundle lying half in the water, a bundle dressed in a torn yellow shirt and black trousers.

"Jim!" His eyes were keen to spot any trace of blood or injury but he could see none. As he blundered up, feet in the water and utterly unaware of it, the bundle stirred and tried to sit up, raising a touselled wet head.

"Spock? I knew you'd come."

For one blinding second Spock tried to remember he was a Vulcan, that Vulcans had no feelings, or didn't show them if they had. The expression on his face, had anyone seen it, would have been comical. It was such a mixture of dignity and self-control and crazy heartfelt gladness. Kirk was beyond seeing it, though. He was half-blinded by mud and water, half unconscious. He only knew that he was all right now - he was safe. Somehow he'd been found.

"Jim, are you all right?" Spock said hoarsely, dropping down beside Kirk regardless of the mud.

"I'm all right...now!" Kirk mumbled, reaching out blindly to pat his friend's arm.

"The harpies?"

"They went. I think...I got outside their territory."

"How long have you been lying here? Never mind. Come, I must get you on to dry land."

Kirk tried again to sit up. He was looking terrible, exhausted, gaunt, his face grey under the whiskers. He co-operated all he could as Spock hauled him as gently as possible up onto the bank. His ankle was once more badly swollen, and his foot, where he'd run on it, was grazed and bruised. Spock bound the ankle up once more and cleaned up the foot. He then scouted around nearby - keeping well within earshot - and found a place where a tree had fallen across another, making a kind of cave. He installed Kirk here, on a bed of dry reeds and grass. Then he went once more to the river, tearing off some of his own shirt, and with it cleaned Kirk up as well as he could.

"We had better remain here for the present," he said when he'd finished.

Kirk, who'd revived a little, grinned weakly. "I don't think we've got much option."

"We will have to eat."

"Fish?"

"Possibly. I will investigate. How does one catch fish? I have never done it before."

Kirk said, "Rod and line - but we can't use that. No line or hooks. It'll have to be spear-fishing. I'll get a fire going if you can find me some wood, and we'll harden a spear in the fire."

"Very well, you are the knowledgeable one," Spock said. "I shall follow your instructions to the letter."

"One thing, Spock. My boot."

"Yes. That is back at our last camp."

"Can you find the way back?"

"I should think so, but it would not be wise to leave you here alone."

Kirk shook his head. "They won't come back. It's not their ground, and they were only concerned about our trespassing, nothing else. The minute I got here by the river they went. If I went back they'd attack me again, but while I'm here I'm safe. You go and get my boot, I'll need it soon."

"It can stay where it is for the moment," said Spock stubbornly. "I shall

get you some fuel and you can begin to manufacture the spear. We have neither of us eaten since last night."

"No, we haven't, have we? No wonder I feel so lousy!" Kirk observed.

Spock, thus encouraged, withdrew to find fuel. A moment later Kirk heard the crack of the sling-shot and Spock reappeared carrying by its legs some kind of waterfowl. The sight perked Kirk up like nothing else could do. Very shortly he had a fire going and the bird was roasting on it, and smelling so delectable that he could hardly wait for it to cook. Spock, suffering slightly from reaction, also showed an unusual amount of enthusiasm as he hacked the bird up and wolfed it down. They picked its bones.

"We'll make it yet, Spock," Kirk said, complacently lying back and folding his hands over his full stomach. "We haven't done too badly so far."

"Who knows what lies ahead?" Spock said, refusing to be cheered.

Kirk was moved to throw a bone at him, but a moment later he said suddenly, "What the hell would I do without you?"

Spock said expressionlessly, "You would be dead by now."

"Don't I know it! Spock -- "

"No, Jim, don't," Spock responded instantly, breaking in. "You are under no obligation to me, nor ever have been. I do what I do because it is my duty."

Kirk, who was feeling vastly better since his meal, shook with suppressed laughter. "There speaks the Vulcan!" he applauded.

"I do not see anything amusing about it," Spock said chidingly.

"No, but I do. 'Because it is my duty'!" Kirk mocked, but affectionately.

"Very well then, let me put it another way. I do what I do because I must. Does that satisfy you?"

Kirk said with a smile, "I guess so."

"And therefore do me a favour, Jim."

"What?"

Spock raised his head for a moment from his work of shaping a spear to fish with. "In future, never even consider requesting Dr. McCoy or anyone else to accompany you on journeys of this nature."

"I hope there won't be any more journeys of this nature," Kirk said promptly. "One is quite enough to last a lifetime, thanks."

"Please Jim, do not be facetious. You know very well what I mean."

"Yes, my wanting to ask Bones along really offended you, didn't it?" Kirk mused with a grin.

"My place is at your side, and always has been." The knife continued scraping. "After all," Spock continued, considering his handiwork with his head on one side, deciding it needed more sharpening and resuming, "that is only logical."

"I was only trying to save your fool neck," Kirk teased.

"You might have saved your breath in that case. What good would McCoy have been to you last night?" Spock persisted, still scraping.

Kirk sat back and laughed aloud, and Spock looked at him with some indignation.

"Have you finished that spear yet? Let's see it," Kirk said finally. "Yes, that'll do."

A few minutes and one lecture on fishing later, Spock could be seen heading for the river, armed.

They lived by the river under the fallen tree for some days, eating fish and

waterfowl. Spock disliked spearing fish, he said the sensation of the spear going in and the sight of the wretched fish flapping and impaled was barbaric. He preferred using the sling-shot, and his eye was now so good he invariably brought his quarry down almost at once. He did own, however, that he preferred the taste of fish to that of meat, but he wished there weren't so many bones.

Down by the river it grew cold at night, when the mist rose from the water and covered the banks. They dared not move to higher ground yet, though, because of the harpies, so they had to remain. It was handy, they could drink and wash without trouble, and there was enough to eat. The only drawback was the cold, and they had no blankets or anything to cover themselves with but what they could scrape up from the ground, and neither of them now could boast a complete shirt to wear. They were driven to huddling together in a kind of nest of dried reeds and leaves, all buried except for their heads. Spock in particular hated the cold, having been born of a race who were accustomed to extreme heat. He was also too lean and bony to have much defence against it, unlike Kirk, who had a reasonable padding (although not so much now as he'd started with). He would shiver and shiver half through the night, keeping Kirk awake with his restless search for warmth. Gradually, though, they would warm each other up and drift off to sleep.

There was something they both knew but didn't discuss yet. They had come right out of their way and they would have to go back into the harpies' territory when they continued.

Kirk found these days by the river strange in that for all their predicament and the unknown dangers ahead (not to speak of the harpies) he was somehow happy. It was very peaceful and quiet here, with no noise but the ripple of water and an occasional bird. Or the sudden 'thwack!' of the sling-shot as Spock brought down their next meal. Kirk could hobble about a little now and did so, but too much exercise brought up the swelling again and he still couldn't put on the boot Spock had recovered from their old camp. He had, perforce, to sit still and he found it pleasant after such an active life. He was curiously reluctant to move on, although he knew they must, at the earliest opportunity. Spock rarely moved out of his sight, except the once he went to get the boot.

They said little, but there was no need of words between them after so long. They sat sometimes for hours on the bank of the river, silent, like two creatures sunning themselves. When night came they piled on the vegetation and the feathers of their meals and wormed their way in before the mist came up and chilled them, lying there with their heads poking out, side by side. From there they would watch the mother planet slowly roll beneath the horizon and the darkness fall like soft dust. Every now and then Kirk would make a sleepy remark and turn his head slightly to see the slanting dark eyes beside him, watching him. If the eyes were closed when Kirk spoke and looked, they would slowly open. One night, Kirk found himself thinking of the women whose faces he'd seen resting beside him in bed, and they seemed strangely remote. Soothed by the Vulcan's quiet breathing he slowly drifted off to sleep. Spock lay awake some time longer, gazing at the stars, his mind far away. Then he felt warmer, and turning over, he burrowed and also fell asleep, with a large leaf placed carefully over his uppermost ear to keep the cold out.

"We shall have to move on as soon as we can," Spock said one morning as they went down to the river, Kirk still limping but not so badly now.

"I can walk a little way. We might as well get away from here today," Kirk said without eagerness.

A short while later, after they'd eaten their fish breakfast, Kirk said, "What the heck have you got there?"

Spock, holding a tool of some kind on one hand, said, "It is a razor, of sorts. I have given it a sharp edge. We must tidy up, we look like savages."

"Hell!" said Kirk ruefully. "This is going to make the Spanish Inquisition look like a hoe-down!"

The next ten minutes were filled with agonized howls and oaths from Kirk as he wielded the stone razor, none too skilfully. Spock was equally inept when his turn came, but considerably less vocal. The result was somewhat patchy when they'd finished, but at least most of the whisker was gone. Kirk peered mournfully at his battered visage in the water. It was streaked with blood.

"Now I look as if I'd been in a brawl!"

"At least you less resemble a Rigellian prickleback," said Spock stiffly, rinsing off the razor. His own face was somewhat battered too, although his beard hadn't been as thick as Kirk's. Kirk couldn't resist a chuckle and got an outraged stare in return.

They decided to move on that morning, but it seemed that they'd have to go back through the harpies' territory, the river cut them off in all other directions and it was too wide and too deep to wade. Kirk doubted if he could swim it with his ankle and Spock was extremely reluctant to chance it.

"Do you think you can survive if we are attacked by harpies again?" Spock inquired with some concern.

"I'll have to," said Kirk briskly. "We've got to go that way. As long as you stay with me..."

"I shall do that, constantly."

Spock shot a large duck-like bird with the sling-shot to take with them. Kirk found he could get his boot on again without too much pain. They gathered up their possessions, such as they were. The stone knife, the compass, the sling-shot, the dead bird - and set off, Kirk limping noticeably but stepping out.

The harpies let him know it the minute they crossed the boundary. The terror descended on Kirk again and Spock had to hold him and fight the monsters with all his power. Eventually they withdrew, and the two men sat down, exhausted. Sweat was rolling down Kirk's face.

"How much of this can you bear, Jim?" Spock asked anxiously.

"As much as I have to," Kirk said, tight-lipped. "At least having you with me keeps off the worst of it."

"I shall never leave you for a minute."

"Thank goodness they don't affect you, Spock!" Kirk said, and meant it.

"Indeed, we have cause to be thankful," Spock said shortly.

Presently they went on, cautiously.

The following three days were a living nightmare. The harpies swooped at all times, unexpectedly, flinging themselves screaming and battering at Kirk's oringing brain. He tried to tell them he meant them no harm; he was only passing through - but it was no use. They either couldn't or wouldn't understand. They resented him bitterly and let him know it. He spent their attacks clinging to Spock like a terrified child, sweating and shaking. Spock's mental barrier kept off the worst of the terror, but he couldn't blot it all out, it was draining his own resources. He also tried to communicate with the frenzied creatures, but without success. They were made up of hate and fear and livid malice, there was no reaching them, either mentally or physically. Spock never dared leave Kirk's side for an instant, they knew when he'd gone. The second he moved more than a few feet away they came screaming down. For the whole of that terrible period he and Kirk lived like Siamese twins, day and night, side by side. Had they not known each other so well this might have had its awkward moments, particularly for the reserved Vulcan.

At last, on the fourth morning, as they walked along, Kirk suddenly straightened and gasped, "Gone!"

Spock halted. He was carrying half a big-eared deer over one shoulder, and it showed how completely he'd accepted their new situation in that his shirt was

stained with blood from the dripping carcass but he ignored it. He looked at Kirk now, inquiringly.

"They've gone," Kirk said. "We must be off their territory at last."

"Indeed, I sincerely hope so," said his friend with some feeling.

They walked on, encouraged now. Kirk felt that the worst was over. He'd survived the harpies, surely there couldn't be much more?

For a while all seemed serene. They were reaching some kind of hills now, low ones, still wooded. Spock brought down a different kind of bird, one they hadn't seen before. It looked very beautiful, with downy white feathers, but it turned out to be more bone than meat. They decided not to bother with any more if possible.

As they climbed, the weather grew colder. The wind became piercing, cutting through their torn shirts and inevitably Spock began shivering. Kirk, whose ankle had almost mended by now, took the lead. He made a fire and insisted his friend sat by it while he went hunting. He was successful - he'd practised with the sling-shot during their time by the river - and before long he was back with a small animal. During the night it got even more cold. Once again they were forced to huddle together by the fire, half-covered with leaves.

"The Babes in the Wood!" Kirk commented.

"I do not find that remark amusing," Spock said, shivering.

"Do you know who they were?" Kirk asked, surprised.

"I only know that you are being facetious as usual. We can hardly be termed 'babes', either of us."

Kirk, who was keeping his spirits up by finding the funny side, said, "The birds came and covered the poor little things with leaves when they died."

"I suppose you know what you are talking about, Jim. I am sure that I do not," Spock said, unimpressed.

"Are you really very cold, Spock?"

"No. I am shivering just to amuse myself."

"Now who's being facetious?"

When they moved on the following morning it was still icy. In an attempt to keep warm, Spock set a cracking pace that Kirk had difficulty in coping with. Before very long it began to rain, suddenly and in torrents as it had done once before. In a trice they were soaked to the skin. They poked about, looking for shelter, but it took them time to eventually locate another hollow tree, and by then they couldn't have got any wetter. They squeezed into it like two drowned rats.

"And to think we were worried about finding water!" Kirk observed wryly.

Spock said nothing. He was shivering violently and his normally pale face was distinctly green.

When the rain ceased, as suddenly as it had begun, Kirk squelched through the mud searching for some dry fuel for a fire. It took him a long time to find any, as everything was drenched, but in the end he collected some from another hollow tree and found a flat stone to put it on. He went back to discover Spock still where he'd left him, propped up against the inside of the tree, still shivering and looking like death. He tried to apologise for not helping, but Kirk cut him short. Beginning to be seriously worried, Kirk managed to get a fire going and dragged up a branch, unfortunately wet, to sit on. He made Spock come and sit by the fire while he took the sling-shot and went to hunt.

He got a partridge-like bird that he knew from experience was good eating. He took it back to Spock, who was still hunched shivering by the fire in his wet clothes. He had, of course, nothing else to put on, Kirk reflected anxiously,

but he should somehow be got out of them. He himself felt perfectly fit now, his exertions had warmed him up and his clothes were only damp. Anyway, he told himself, I'm more used to being cold and wet than he is. There's precious little rain on Vulcan and never any cold winds. Kirk plucked the bird rapidly and put it to cook. Spock, after looking round at him when he first appeared, made no further move, except for shivering as if he was going to fall apart.

"Spock, you're ill," Kirk said.

Spock didn't answer for a moment. Then he said slowly, "I am afraid so." His voice sounded husky and unnatural.

Kirk thought. Spock rarely fell ill, but when he did, it hit him like a phaser. It looked as if he was in for one of those turns now. It wasn't an encouraging thought. Kirk had no medication and no knowledge of how to use it if he'd had any. He hoped it wasn't pneumonia.

Spock, shoulders hunched round his ears, was hoping the same thing. His resistance had been lowered by the tremendous output of energy demanded of him to fight off the harpies and look after Kirk. He had been under par already, and he knew it. Now the cold had been the last straw. He was reluctant to eat the bird Kirk had cooked, but Kirk insisted so forcefully he gave in and grudgingly consented to take about a quarter of it. He had trouble swallowing it past his sore and swollen throat, and even more trouble keeping it down. Kirk searched until he found some dry leaves under a fallen tree and set to work with them to rub Spock down, chafing away at him vigorously with handfuls of them. He noticed Spock closing his eyes against the waves of nausea that threatened him, and when the Vulcan, evidently by a tremendous effort of will, stopped himself from retching, Kirk's anxiety mounted.

"Somehow you've got to be kept warm!" Kirk said almost violently.

Spock reeled to his feet dizzily, clutching his shirt. "I will...go and lie down..." he mumbled. He headed for the hollow tree they'd sheltered in. Kirk went after him and tried to cover him as much as possible, but there was little that was dry. Spock closed his eyes immediately, heaved once or twice as if about to be sick, downed it, and remained still. He no longer felt cold, on the contrary, he felt as if he was on fire.

Well, I'm on my own now, Kirk thought. He straightened up and reflected. There seemed so little he could do. He longed for Bones, for his knowledge and brusque kindness and skill. But Bones was far away.

He's got to be warm, Kirk thought. That's the main essential and about all I can do for him.

He took the sling-shot with a grim look on his face and set off.

It took him quite some time to shoot enough animals to make a reasonable covering for a six-foot man out of their skins. None of the animals they'd so far seen was bigger than an average-sized dog. Kirk fetched his trophies back, looked at Spock who lay unmoving, and sat by the fire skinning and scraping hides until late. By nightfall, however, he'd got Spock tucked up in a rather ragged-looking fur rug, fur side inmost. The other side was messy still and inclined to stink. He knew what his fastidious friend would say about it when he noticed it, but Spock showed no sign of noticing anything, even Kirk himself. He lay in a kind of coma, oblivious to everything. His breathing was very harsh and rapid and his skin burned to touch. He was obviously very ill indeed and Kirk felt lost and helpless.

He sat by the fire that night and didn't sleep. There was enough meat to feed them for several meals now, that was one thing. He needn't leave Spock.

During the next day Kirk added dried-out leaves to the fur rug. He found a gourd-like thing on a tree and with infinite patience managed to brew up some broth in it. He forced some of this down Spock's unwilling throat. Spock was too ill to know or care, he swallowed reluctantly when Kirk poured the broth

into his mouth. He sometimes muttered and snarled half-heartedly at this ministrations, and when Kirk wiped his burning face with a torn piece of shirt dipped in cool water. For the most part, however, he lay motionless and uncomprehending, breathing still in that harsh rapid rhythm that frightened Kirk. Sometimes he gave a dry rasping cough.

One night Kirk, sitting wretchedly by the fire, knew it was touch and go. He waited, sick, to hear the breathing stop and to know he was all alone. Once or twice it caught and wavered, hesitated, then went on. Kirk sat with his head in his hands and prayed, from the bottom of his heart. There was simply nothing else to do. He found himself offering up, to a God he barely believed in and hadn't thought about since childhood, all manner of sacrifices, if only He would spare Spock's life. Please God, I'll never touch a woman again...if only You'll save him! Please God, I won't neglect You any more if You'll save him... It was like a child at prayer, promising to be good if... One part of Kirk's mind knew it was useless and absurd, but the other part argued it might not be and he couldn't afford to neglect it if it was of any help. And anyway, what else could he do? So he clenched his fists against his head, listening to that terrible breathing in the tree beside him, and he prayed on.

He didn't have to come with me, but he insisted on it. Supposing he dies? He did it for me. He wouldn't grudge it, I know, but I grudge it! I want him. I need him. So many years together, we've shared so much. He's been my right hand, and I don't know how I'll get on without him if I have to. Spock, don't die! How shall I get through without you? God, save him! I don't care what You do to me, but save him!

And it went on again, like a rat in a trap, his thoughts and his fears and his frantic bargaining with a God he didn't really believe was there anyway.

He got up and went to look at the inert body, and he swore at it, pouring out his grief in the only way he could.

"That's right, you lousy son-of-a-bitch, die on me and leave me to manage on my own! A lot of good you've been to me! I should have brought someone else instead of you, maybe Bones! Just like you, to quit and die! Nothing to do but have me wait on you, feeding you like an infant, washing your lousy face! Damn your Vulcan hide, you ought to be skinned alive for the trouble you've put me to! Don't you know that if you die, I haven't a goddam chance?"

Then his face crumpled suddenly and he went to sit by the fire again. Spock never moved, but the breathing laboured on.

Kirk fell asleep crouched by the fire, worn out. He woke with a start around dawn to hear a husky voice calling him.

"Jim - can I have a drink?"

Spock was up on one elbow, looking at him out of the trees. He was still very white and drawn but he looked better. Kirk scrambled up in one movement and went to get the gourd that he'd kept filled with water. He brought it over and Spock reached for it, then looked at it curiously.

"Where did you get this?"

"I found it, on a tree down there," Kirk said. "Careful, don't upset it. Can you manage?"

Spock nodded and drank cautiously.

"I thought I'd lost you for sure," Kirk said harshly.

Spock looked at him with understanding and said, "Well, you have not. Did you think I would leave you alone in such a place?"

"I didn't think you'd much choice!" Kirk said wryly, taking back the gourd.

Spock lay back and said, "I am still not very strong, but no doubt I shall recover in time. How long have I been ill?"

Kirk said, "Darned if I know. I didn't count the days. Too long, anyway."

"And what is this?" and Spock lifted part of the fur rug and wrinkled his nose at the somewhat pungent smell of untanned skin.

"I had to keep you warm somehow," Kirk answered.

"Of course. I might have known you would find a way."

"Well, I couldn't let you be smarter than I am."

Spock was still very weak, but he was on the mend now. He spent his time for the next couple of days sewing together the furs with sinew, using a bone needle. He got quite skilled at it, and in the end had made himself a fur cloak of sorts, complete with a hood to keep his ears warm. Kirk couldn't shoot enough animals to provide skins to make himself a cloak as well, but he made do with a kind of hip-length poncho effort that was better than nothing. The skins were rather stiff and smelly, but that didn't matter much, they kept the wind out. When Spock first put his cloak on Kirk had trouble restraining a chuckle - the Vulcan's gaunt face peering out under his fringe (which had grown somewhat and was inclined to get in his eyes) surrounded by a framework of fur was oddly out of place, like a wolf in a toby collar. But, as he said, it kept him warm.

They moved on after a few days, when Spock felt strong enough, and his Vulcan physique picked up strength very quickly. Leaving the hollow tree far behind, they trudged on in their furs, carrying an additional item, the gourd.

The wind continued to snarl at them until they had crossed the range of low hills and were once more on a level plateau, which took them the better part of a week. Kirk was worried about the ship, in case she was sent off without them after all, the priestesses thinking they must have died. There seemed to be so many hold-ups, and there had been no indication of how long they were supposed to take on their journey. There was nothing to be done, however. Spock, who sensed his anxiety, said as much in a tone that brooked of no argument.

"We are doing the best we can," he said.

"We've done darned well to have gotten this far, considering what we've had to deal with," Kirk observed.

"Indeed. We have much to be thankful for."

"Do you really think it's the end for us, Spock?"

"I shall reserve judgement on that."

On the second day after they left the hills they came, towards evening, on a river, either the same one or another, they had no way of knowing. They'd never been seriously short of water, but since leaving the other river their main source of supply had been from small soggy pools, brackish with vegetation, and it was a welcome relief to see clean open water once more. Kirk, who was better at it than his friend, speared a large golden fish and they cooked and ate it beside the water. It made a nice change after the meat they'd had for so long. They'd bedded down where they were, and the following morning had another fish for breakfast and moved on.

The plateau stretched on as far as the eye could see and the endless trees of the wooded belt had gone, except for isolated instances. The ground was now of rough turf with gorse-like bushes in clumps, not easy to walk over as it was so uneven. It became hot as they plodded on. Presently they stopped to confer about their possessions. It was far too hot to wear the fur coverings they'd made and carrying them slung over one shoulder or an arm was almost as bad. They presented rather a problem now, but Kirk hesitated to get rid of them, as who knew when they might be needed again? The heat was also adding another discomfort to carrying the furs - it made them stink even more.

"I don't think we should throw them away, all the same," Kirk said

regretfully, rubbing his bushy hair. "It might get cold again, further on, and there mightn't be any fur to be had. We'll have to keep on carrying them."

"They are extremely unpleasant to have in close proximity, and are becoming more so every minute," Spock objected. He was suffering more than Kirk, as his sense of smell was more acute.

"I know that, but we'll have to grin and bear it - literally - I'm afraid," was Kirk's response.

Spock sighed and hefted his cloak again. "Very well, no doubt you are right."

They went on, the gourd bouncing at Kirk's hip, attached by a piece of sinew to his belt.

"For a place supposedly full of monsters, we've seen nothing," he remarked after a while. "The harpies seem to have been the sum total."

"We are not yet at our destination," Spock reminded him gloomily.

"No, I know, but surely we must have come half-way by now at least?"

"I do not know. Possibly."

Water was evidently not as plentiful here as it was in the wooded area, but after some scouting around they discovered a small stream, half buried in turf. As it headed more or less in their direction they followed it for the remainder of the day and settled by it at nightfall. Kirk, out with the sling-shot, made the discovery of a nest with four eggs in it. They looked exactly like duck eggs and he brought them back with him as a change of diet.

Spock eyes the eggs with brows raised.

"Well, they make a change," said Kirk with a grin. "Where's the gourd?"

"By your right foot."

Kirk filled it with water and put the eggs in it to boil. He hard-boiled them and when they were ready he and Spock had two apiece, cracking the shells off and biting into them. They tasted very good and had no ill effects, but Kirk wished he'd had some salt. When they'd finished their meal the two men sat on by the fire, nursing their knees and looking into the flames, deep in their own thoughts. Around them the world darkened and the stars came out once more in their flaring white beauty.

"The Enterprise must be up there - I hope?" Kirk said breaking a long silence. "I wonder if we'll ever see her again."

"You keep saying that, but there is no answer," Spock retorted somewhat tartly. "We shall no doubt find out in time."

"Are you ready to die, Spock?"

"That is an absurd question. No-one is. No, I shall qualify that last statement. No-one who is healthy and in possession of his full faculties is. For those who are old or sick, it is of course another matter."

"I seem to have left so much undone when I think back," Kirk said with a stifled sigh.

"Who has not?" Spock said matter-of-factly.

"Oh, I don't know. Some people seem to achieve a lot."

"And you think you have not?"

"A fair amount, I guess. But was it really worth it all?"

"What does that mean, precisely?"

Kirk shifted into a comfortable position. He was in a pensive mood. "Oh, I don't know. Have you ever done something in your life you regret doing, Spock?"

"Regret is a pointless emotion, Jim," Spock said, rather primly.

"Putting Vulcan philosophy to one side, have you?" Kirk persisted.

But Spock wasn't to be drawn. "I endeavour never to put Vulcan philosophy to one side," he said firmly. "As I said, regret is both pointless and a waste of time. I do not propose to review my past life, even if you do, and if you will take my advice, you will follow my example. We have enough problems to contend with at the moment without your troubling yourself over what you should or should not have done years ago."

He curled down by the fire without another word, reaching to pull his cloak over himself. Kirk sat on, staring into the flames, thinking, but after a time he shook himself, sighed, yawned and decided Spock had been right after all. What did it matter now? With a glance at the motionless furry heap on the other side of the fire, he bedded down too.

Another half a day's march fetched them back again to the hills and woods. They were glad of it - both fuel and water were scarce on the plateau, and the woods were cooler. Before long Spock had donned his cloak again although Kirk continued to carry his. The wind got up and was fresh and teasing. They shot another of the big-eared deer things and ate it for their dinner sitting by an outcrop of rocks on the top of a hill. Kirk wondered with amusement what in all hell the crew of the Enterprise would have thought if they could have seen them, crouched together by a fire, chewing like savages on hunks of half-cooked meat. He had no illusions about his own appearance. His beard was now flourishing in an untidy brush of spines about an inch long (they had never had another go with the stone razor, it had proved too agonising even for Spock's stoicism); and his hair, always inclined to be on the wavy side, was now a touselled dishevelled bush. To round off this elegant apparition was the torn shirt, that was so dirty with blood and earth stains that its original colour was hardly discernable. His trousers, being black, showed the dirt less but one knee had a tear in it, making him look like an urchin. He knew he must look terrible because he only had to see how Spock was looking, and if he, with his inborn fastidiousness and neatness, could look like he did, then what the hell must anyone else look like?

Spock, however, wasn't quite so altered as Kirk, due to the slower growth of beard, but his hair had grown out of its usual tidiness and was showing a decided tendency to straggle. His fringe in particular had grown long and gave the impression of almost hanging in his eyes. The famous quirked brows were in fact half hidden now. He also had a torn and flapping shirt, the colour of which was marred considerably with stains, as was Kirk's, old blood (from shot game), earth, sweat, grease dripped from meat as he held it to eat. The fur cloak hadn't helped matters much either, although he tried to keep his clothes clean if he could. There was now a decided aroma of uncured skins about him all the time, whether he wore the cloak or not. He had got used to it, of necessity. And so had Kirk, whose own coat didn't exactly smell of roses and who had ceased to notice anything in the air.

When they'd finished eating Spock went to wash his hands and face in the nearby pool and Kirk lay back for a little siesta. Presently, when the Vulcan returned, they put out the fire and gathered up their belongings to move on.

"Over that hill," Kirk said, checking with the compass and indicating the direction.

They descended into the valley between the two hills. It was very still suddenly, the wind had dropped. The trees weren't so thick as they'd been further back and they could see the sky quite easily. Their footsteps sounded unnaturally loud crunching on the dead leaves.

Kirk suddenly looked round at his companion. "Do you feel it too?" he asked.

"Yes. Be very wary, Jim."

"Don't worry. I hope to God it isn't any more of those harpies."

They walked on, senses alert for the danger they both instinctively felt but couldn't identify.

At the foot of the hill, in the valley between the two, they both stopped dead.

"What was that?" Kirk breathed, his heart pounding.

"Listen!" Spock threw his head back, frowning with concentration, all his mind focussed on his ears.

After a moment they heard it again. A distant mournful hooting noise, coming and going on the wind. It went on for about half a minute, then ceased. Utter silence followed it.

"I don't like it!" Kirk muttered, the hair on the back of his neck bristling with a strange prickling feeling.

"Nor I," admitted Spock. "I do not know what it is, however. It may well be something quite harmless."

"We haven't heard anything like that before," Kirk pointed out.

"No, but there must be much here that is unknown to us," Spock said reasonably.

"There it is again! It's coming nearer!"

They froze, listening again. The hooting was certainly closer. It was coming from over the hill they'd just left.

"It's following us," Kirk said.

"We do not know that," Spock argued, trying to remain logical.

"Well, it's coming our way, whether intentionally or not," Kirk said sharply. "I don't like it. There must be more danger in this world than we've encountered up to now. Let's get under cover, and fast."

Spock said, "We do not know what we are hiding from, as yet, so cannot know the best location to hide."

Kirk grabbed him by the arm. "Stop arguing! Come over here!"

Together they ran over to a low-growing tree and ducked under its branches. It wasn't much cover, but better than nothing. If whatever it was wasn't after them, then the chances were it wouldn't see them. Breathing quickly, they stood there and watched the crest of the hill. Kirk flexed the sling-shot, which he'd been carrying. Spock shifted his hold on the shaft of the fish-spear, which they'd taken along too as a possible weapon.

The hooting was now almost continuous and growing ever closer. It was impossible to tell what was making it. Suddenly, however, they saw it and they stared in horror.

It burst up over the hill, striding towards them over the trees. It was unbelievably huge, towering against the sky, the trees looking like grass round its feet. It had three spindly legs with large knobbly knee joints. On top of this tripod balanced a round sphere of a body, which inflated and deflated as the creature hooted. It had no visible head. This obscenely swelling and collapsing bag ambled down the hill towards them, lifting its clawed feet high above the trees with each step, continually hooting. It was heading straight for their hiding place.*

"It's after us!" said Kirk grimly. He looked at the sling-shot in his

* * * * *

* If any sci-fi buff recognises this monster, yes, you're quite right and I must apologise to Clifford Simak, for I 'stole' it from his WAY STATION, being unable to resist the temptation. What a monster! A.B.

hands and almost laughed aloud. Oh for a phaser now! Spock's fish-spear looked like a toothpick.

Spock muttered, "One of us at least stands a hope of escape. If I decoy the creature..."

"No," said Kirk with decision. "If it gets one of us, it gets us both." He fitted a stone to his sling-shot. Useless, but better than doing nothing.

It was very near now, looming over the trees above them. It blotted out the sun. The hooting was ear-shattering at close range, a constant hoo-hoo-hoo like bellows, in and out. Right above them it stopped.

Kirk set the stone and lifted it to aim through the branches, straight onto the bloated body. The hooting ceased. The body swelled hugely. Kirk could see no eyes on it at all, but he suddenly saw the mouth - a gaping pink fleshy orifice like some obscene flower, on the underside in the centre of the three legs. The legs began to bend at the knobbly knee joints, outwards, sticking up above the creature's back as the huge body began to lower itself towards them, the mouth first. And that was the way they were going to go!

Out of the tail of his eye Kirk saw Spock balance the spear to hurl it right into the creature's mouth. It would barely have felt it. Then he remembered, in a sudden flash, the remains of their dinner, about half of the deer.

Swiftly Kirk turned his head towards his friend. There was no time to waste in explanation. The old telepathy between them had to work.

"Spock - the animal!"

Just a few barked words. And Spock knew. He unslung the animal carcass with one unbroken movement and hurled it straight into the descending mouth. Then he and Kirk both turned tail and ran, in different directions, ran as if every monster ever dreamed of was after them.

The tripod engulfed the deer. It slowly straightened up on its stick-like legs as a strange rippling ran through its bloated body. It stood, digesting, while the two men fled into the trees, doubling and swerving, zig-zagging, confusing their trails, running through water. Kirk ran until he felt his lungs would burst. He dared not stop, but once, looking back, he saw the huge sphere of the tripod still looming over the trees behind him. It hadn't moved. Once or twice he saw a flicker in the trees to his right, where Spock momentarily appeared and vanished once more, also imitating a greyhound. They were running uphill, which made it harder, for they had carried on in the direction they were originally going, although in parallel lines. Kirk's ankle, which had given him no trouble now for some days, began to twinge again with the effort. He ignored it. He came across a stream, jumped into it with both feet, ran through it a few paces, leaped out, ran on. He didn't know if the tripod hunted by scent, tracks, hearing or some unknown sense, but he was taking no chances.

Spock, running as fast as he could lay foot to the ground, charged through a clump of underbrush and startled a huge fat bird that had been sitting there. The Vulcan saw the movement and hurled himself at it bodily, coming down full length with the flapping bird pinned under him. He scrambled up, holding it by the neck and gave it a sharp jerk. Its flaps ceased and it hung inert. Carrying it, he doubled back, came to a clear area, stood, whirled the bird above his head and threw it, with all his strength, away far off to his left. It thudded heavily down and he gave one glance at the motionless tripod above the trees and rushed off once more on his original course. If the tripod felt hungry after eating the dinner it had unexpectedly been presented with, there was a second course ready and waiting for it.

He reached the top of the hill at last, to find Kirk there, waiting for him with some anxiety, although he could see for himself that the tripod still

hadn't moved. They looked at one another swiftly, saw there were no injuries beyond scratches, and set off without a word down the hill on the far side, leaving the hooting monster behind.

They kept up a solid pace for a good hour, not daring to stop and constantly listening for a renewed burst of hooting that would tell them they were still being hunted. It didn't come. The tripod, presumably, had only been after food, and having found it, went back to where it came from. However, the horror of their escape kept them walking a long time, until Kirk was utterly exhausted and they'd put a good many hills and valleys between them and the tripod. Finally they dared to stop for the night and Kirk made a fire while Spock hunted. They looked even more tatty that night, as their headlong flight had put more tears in their clothes. They ignored it and fell asleep as they were. Spock was too tired to care, although across his sleepy mind there did wander a vision of a paradise where his hair was cut close and clean again, his uniform spotless and perfectly fitting and he no longer reeked of uncured skins or had filth engrained under his finger-nails; and the ragged hairy individual opposite him looked more like a Captain of a Federation Starship and less like poor Ben Gunn.

When they woke, after an uneventful night, they found a large pool nearby and set to on a prolonged scrubbing session. Crouching naked by the water's edge, with his shaggy fringe, Spock reminded Kirk suddenly of some old pictures he'd seen back on Earth of the now extinct Amazon Indians before the jungle had been destroyed. All Spock needed now was a necklace of teeth. Kirk grinned to himself at the thought. A hungry Amazon Indian, he mentally amended. Spock's shoulder-blades could almost have passed for wings.

Wearing their damp clothes, they went on their way, feeling cleaner to some degree but there was nothing to be done about their barbering problems or about their fur cloakes either.

The trees ceased suddenly as if cut off by a knife about mid-morning. In front of them loomed an enormous grey cliff, of unguessable height and impassable steepness. They stood together, looking up at it.

"We'll never climb that," Kirk said with conviction. He was game to try most things, but he knew when he was outclassed. It was something a Starship commander had to know.

Spock nodded agreement.

Kirk looked along to their right and left. The cliff continued unbroken.

"What do we do now? Don't tell me we can't get any further, I know that."

"I am not telling you anything of the sort," said Spock prosaically. "If some of the others managed the journey, there must be a way over."

"I dare say, but in which direction? We might walk for weeks and not find it if we went the wrong way."

"It is a chance we must take, seemingly."

"Have you any feelings on the subject, Spock?"

"No. I do not subscribe to guesswork, as you know," Spock said firmly.

"Well, nor do I if I can help it, but guesswork's got to be our guide now. We've nothing to go by," said Kirk impatiently.

Spock stood considering. Then he said, "Perhaps if you climbed a tree..."

"Might give me a better view. Good idea!" Kirk moved briskly over to the tallest tree in sight. "Do you climb better than me?"

"No, I am sure I do not," Spock said with decision.

Kirk grinned. "Maybe my mis-spent boyhood wasn't so mis-spent after all." He caught onto a low branch and swung himself up. Spock moved in closer,

ostensibly to watch but also to catch if need be. There was no need, however. Kirk scrambled up the tree, delighting in what had once, long ago, been one of his favourite pastimes. He had lost none of his old skill. Spock, watching alertly from below, reflected wryly that he resembled a monkey.

At the crown of the tree Kirk clung to a branch and looked out across the length of the cliff. There was no visible break to the north - his left - but away in the distance to his right he thought he could see a dark gash in the cliff face. It could be a chasm. He slid down the tree.

"Over to the right," he said, dusting leaf mould off himself. "There could be a gap."

Spock collected his cloak, spear and the stone knife, and they set off.

It was indeed a gap, a vast chasm that had split right down the cliff dividing it into two. The interior was dark and forbidding and there was no seeing the end of it. Again the two men stopped and looked.

"Doesn't look very welcoming," Kirk commented.

"No. But it is the only apparent way to take," Spock responded.

"Well, we can only try it, I guess. Ready?"

"I think perhaps we should take some supplies with us," said Spock carefully. "We do not know what lies beyond."

"True. All right, I'll see what fuel I can find and you get some meat."

They separated and in due course met once more by the chasm's mouth, Kirk carrying a small bundle of sticks tied together, Spock holding a large rabbit-like creature by the legs. They could do nothing about water - they'd never found another gourd, search though they might, and there was no way of keeping water enclosed in the one they had, as it had no lid.

They took one last look at the reasonably hospitable and sunny land outside and turning, plunged into the chill and gloom of the chasm.

There was no problem about carrying their cloaks. Before five minutes were up they were both glad to be wearing them. Spock longed to put his hood up and cover his freezing ears, but he knew this deadened his hearing and he felt it would be unwise. He plodded on, wishing he was back on the ship, indeed, anywhere but here.

He muttered something to himself, and Kirk, hearing it, said, "What was that?"

Spock said, "I trust that you will keep your impetuosity in check next time."

"I never learn, do I?" sighed Kirk.

"No, and it is high time that you did. If it had not been for your insane desire to attack that ship we would not be here now," Spock pointed out remorselessly.

"And if it hadn't been for your insane desire to come with me, you wouldn't be here," Kirk pointed out in his turn.

Spock hunched his shoulders nearer to his maltreated ears. "You say some remarkably ridiculous things at times, Jim."

"And so do you!" retorted Kirk, and strode on. Spock said no more.

The top of the chasm was far above their heads, a narrow slit of light. It was dark and cold and smelt musty and damp in the cleft. Their footsteps and breathing echoed loudly in the stillness. Behind them the entrance they'd come in by dwindled to a small light slot. There was no sign of any exit ahead. Their eyes grew used to the gloom, although Spock inevitably saw better in it

than Kirk. It was he who first sighted the stream running across their path. It was fast-running and icy cold, about a yard wide. They stepped across it, then drank at it, not because they were particularly thirsty but because they felt it wiser not to miss the chance. The noise of the water was uncommonly loud in the confined space. It appeared to be an underground stream for the most part, popping up out of one wall and disappearing into the other. They went on and gradually the noise of it faded. The entrance had quite disappeared now, possibly some imperceptible bend in the cleft had shut it off. They were alone in the gloom, with only the thin ribbon of light overhead.

"This is like a dragon's lair," Kirk commented.

"Fafner's," said Spock surprisingly. "Were you hoping to come on the Rhinegold?"

Kirk looked at him. "I didn't know you were a Wagnerite, Spock."

"The music is, of course, highly emotional and romantic, but it has its moments," Spock conceded rather loftily. "What I could never see was the Teutonic fondness for Siegfried. A blusterer and a bully."

"Nevertheless, he'd be useful now," said Kirk. "With that sword of his. What was its name?"

"Nothing," said Spock. "And I fail to see what he could do in this situation, with or without it."

"Except shatter our eardrums with that goddam horn," Kirk agreed with a grin. "I wouldn't mind a Valkyrie or two, though."

"You may yet find one and wish that you had not," Spock said warningly.

The ground began to slope upwards slowly and the crack above them began to widen, letting in more light. It also let in more wind, and it whistled icily about them. Spock surrendered prudence to comfort and hooded his frigid ears.

As they stumbled along they became aware of a strange smell, pungent and not at all pleasant. They checked.

"What the heck is that?" Kirk asked, sniffing.

"I do not know, and I have no particular wish to find out," Spock declared with distaste.

"It's like some kind of animal's den."

"That is precisely what it may be. Let us be wary."

"Phew!"

They advanced cautiously. The smell grew stronger. Suddenly Spock said in a low voice, "Jim - " He pointed.

They looked down at a scattered litter of bones, gnawed and splintered. Kirk carefully turned one larger one over with his foot. Empty sockets stared up at them.

"Humanoïd," said Spock unnecessarily.

"Yes," said Kirk. "One of the ones who didn't make it."

They stood with their furs flapping stiffly round them in the bitter wind, gazing at the shadowy walls. Kirk said, "Give me the spear, I'll give you the sling. You're better at it than I am. We don't know what did this."

The exchange was made. They listened. They could hear nothing. Carefully they moved on, keeping to the middle of the chasm and well away from the walls. The stink intensified. More bones appeared, all chewed by massive teeth. Presently they saw a cave in the right hand wall. Nothing stirred, but the smell was obviously coming from there. They crept past it, expecting any moment to be attacked by some frightful monster, but nothing happened. Either the creature was away or it wasn't interested in them. As they hastened on,

glancing over their shoulders, the smell faded away.

"God, we were lucky!" said Kirk explosively. "I don't know what that was, but it was no pet!"

"No. We have indeed been fortunate," Spock agreed soberly.

"We're getting out of this goddam chasm at last," Kirk said a moment or two later.

"It seems so," said Spock, still wary.

The ground was definitely rising now and the crack was widening. The wind howled down to meet them, lashing their cloaks about them. They set their teeth, lowered their heads and plodded doggedly on. Spock's hood blew off and he left it, wanting to use his ultra-keen hearing. He couldn't forget that noisome cave or the litter of humanoid bones.

They had nearly reached level ground once more and were within a few hundred yards of the end of the chasm walls when Spock put out his hand and pulled Kirk to a sudden halt. Coming towards them down the slope was a huge lurching figure.

The light was behind it and it was indistinct, but it seemed to be on its hind legs and to be something like a massive bear.

"The creature from the cave!" hissed Kirk.

"It seems likely."

"Think it's seen us?"

"I do not know."

"Right. I'll go that way, you go over there. And lie low!" Kirk ordered.

There were scatters of boulders at the low sides of the chasm, and amongst these the two men hid, one each side. They crouched there, holding their breath, as the creature hulked closer. As it became distinct Kirk could see it was some dreadful travesty of a man - about ten feet tall, broad in proportion, covered in thick shaggy hair. It lurched along on two short bowed legs, helping itself with the knuckles of its muscular hands. Its small head was thrust forward between massive humped shoulders, and tiny eyes twinkled under heavy brows. Under its flat nose it had a mouth furnished with one of the most fearsome arrays of teeth Kirk could remember seeing in a beast of its size. The upper canines, in fact, hung down to its chin like walrus tusks. Those teeth would have no trouble in tearing a man to pieces and chopping up his bones like straws. This was the cave monster, no doubt of it, coming home.

As the creature drew level with Kirk it halted suddenly. Its nose wrinkled and sniffed. Then it turned slowly towards him. Kirk shortened his hold on the spear, which seemed again a ridiculous weapon. Unless he could hit home in a vital spot he was as good as dead. The beast suddenly roared, showing its full dental equipment, and charged like a bull.

It came straight at him, across the rocks, with amazing speed for its size and bulk, and after that one roar, it came in deadly silence. Kirk leaped up, knowing it was no use hiding now. He braced himself, hurled the spear at one of its eyes. It missed, clattering uselessly on the ground. Kirk snatched up a large rock. He hit out with it, using all his strength. It rebounded off one shaggy shoulder and made no difference. The massive arms snatched Kirk in a grip like hell itself.

Kirk was half stifled by the reek of the beast's body, which was like the oldest and vilest fur rug in existence. He fought madly, knowing it was useless. The gaping jaws with teeth bristling in them were inches from his throat. Over its shoulder Kirk suddenly saw Spock, standing aiming the slingshot. The Vulcan met his eyes, then jerked his head to the right. Kirk followed suit without thinking - they had no need of words at times like these.

The stone whirred singing through the place where his head had been a moment before, slicing open the monster's cheek as it went. Spock had another stone fitted almost before it hit.

The ape creature roared echoingly and turned to face its new enemy. The second stone caught it squarely in the centre of the forehead and with a grunt it folded up and thudded to the ground. Kirk was out of its arms in a flash, snatching up the largest and sharpest rock he could find. He brought it crashing down, point first, on the monster's head and blood gushed out.

"And now let's get the hell outta here!" he shouted to Spock and followed his own orders at the double.

They ran, side by side, out of the remainder of the chasm, out onto a second plateau, but high this time, fringed by mountains in the distance.

"Am I glad you learned to use a sling-shot as a boy!" Kirk panted, slowing up at last.

"One never knows when the most insignificant thing may not become important," Spock observed airily.

"I guess you'd resent any thanks?"

"You guess correctly, Jim."

"Then I won't bother you with any."

They walked on.

It was tough on the high plateau - not so much game, little water, bitter freezing wind. They tightened their belts and went on, two odd-looking nomads in their furs. It was a long hard march before they reached the foot of the mountains.

"Have we got to go over these too?" Kirk asked with some despair.

"I do not think so. There is what looks like a pass over there," Spock said, keener-eyed.

"So there is. Let's go."

The pass was narrow and high and also bitterly cold. They stumbled along, panting in the thin air. When darkness came Kirk couldn't find enough fuel to light a fire. They had only one small skinny little bird to eat, and this they had to eat raw. They ate it. They were beyond being fussy by then. They huddled in their furs in a small space between two rocks, trying to keep off the wind.

They spent a very cold and uncomfortable night and when they emerged stiffly the next dawn Spock said but one thing.

"Humans have the curious notion that hell is hot. They are entirely mistaken!"

Empty-bellied and thirsty, they went on.

They ate nothing all that day and bedded down again the following night cold, hungry and miserable. They said little, but both knew they were near the end of their endurance.

They went on the next morning, Kirk slightly in the lead as usual, Spock hunched in his cloak and hood loping dismally in the rear. He was as gaunt and ragged as a scarecrow now, but his eyes were still alert.

They climbed up a steep incline, stumbled over stones, and reached the top of a ridge. Kirk stopped as if he'd run into a wall.

"I don't believe it!" he croaked.

"What is it?" demanded Spock, clambering up beside him to look.

About a mile away across another high plateau, was a massive building.

"The temple!" Kirk said in a dazed voice. "There's the temple! We made it! No - I don't believe it. It's some trick of theirs..."

Spock, who'd been staring in silence as if he couldn't believe it either, reassured him. "No, it is real. I can see it also. We have ended our journey, it is no hallucination. Only a little further now..."

Kirk pulled himself together with a visible effort. "All right. Come on!"

Heartened, they started on the final stretch.

They were met before they reached the temple by the same five women who'd seen them go. The High Priestess surveyed them with considerable respect.

"So you managed it," she said. "I must congratulate you."

"My ship?" panted Kirk, who had only one idea at the moment. He half expected to be told that she had gone without him, but the High Priestess said calmly -

"It is waiting for you, Captain. We will send you back now - but remember, do not come near our territory again!"

"Don't worry, I haven't the faintest intention of it!" Kirk retorted tartly.

The Enterprise was in uproar with the missing pair appeared on the bridge again, as suddenly as they'd gone.

For a moment, with their rags and whiskers, they weren't recognised, but then a familiar voice spoke out of the hood.

"Fascinating!" it observed clinically.

The next instant the pair of them were surrounded and trying to fight off the questions they were being bombarded with.

"I need a bath, a change of clothing and a meal," Spock finally announced loudly and pushed his way towards the turbo-lift.

"And in that order!" said McCoy emphatically, holding his nose. He then turned, beaming, to Kirk. "Well, you don't seem to have come to any real harm, either of you. In fact, in one way, Jim, the experience has done you good!"

"And what's that?" Kirk inquired.

McCoy grinned and jabbed him in the midriff. "You've at last lost some weight!"

ESCAPE by Ann Neilson

Deep within my being lies
a part of me that forever cries.
Hidden in shadowy recesses of my mind,
ever seeking, trying to find
release from this prison of pain.
Are all my hopes and dreams in vain?
Surely somewhere there must be
escape - a way to set me free.

Spock: I did not come here to be insulted, Doctor.

McCoy: Where do you usually go?"

THE FUTURE BELONGS TO YOU by Jean Thompson

The Enterprise was at present orbiting twentieth century Earth. It was an assignment which occasionally fell upon the ship and her crew. An interesting one for the Historians - but a headache for Scotty and the Engineering crew. It meant a carefully planned high-speed trip around the sun in order to go back in time. Such a trip always caused a certain amount of strain on the engines and at this moment Scotty had his hands full repairing the engines for the return trip forward in time. And then the accident happened.

The panel that Scotty was working at began to give off sparks and then it exploded, throwing Scotty backwards onto the floor, cracking his head on a chair as he fell. He had been promptly ordered to Sickbay, but somewhere between Engineering and Sickbay, he disappeared. A search was organised, a search which found Transporter Chief Kyle unconscious in the transporter room. It could only be assumed that Scotty had beamed down to the planet. They had to find him before he could cause any damage to the future. They had had enough experience of that on the Time Planet and did not want any similar occurrence this time.

Meanwhile, on a windswept beach somewhere in Scotland, a figure had sparkled into being amongst the sand dunes. He put a hand to his throbbing head and tried to shake away the mist that clouded his thoughts. He decided to walk to the shelter of a dune to get away from the rain-laden wind that blew across the grey sea. He barely made it before he found the sand rushing up to meet him and all became dark.

Later, a figure wearing an orange cagoule could be seen walking along the beach throwing a stick for a black dog to catch. The stick was thrown once more and clattered across the sand to land next to the silent figure in Starfleet uniform. The dog raced after it but stopped to sniff at the unconscious figure. Its owner soon appeared.

"What is it, Scooky? Where's your stick?" The girl caught sight of Scotty and went over to him. She stared down at him, puzzled, thinking that in some way he looked familiar. She knelt down at his side and turned him gently over. Recognition came swiftly.

Scotty? One of the Star Trek characters? she thought. But what's he doing here? And in costume, too...

She stared at him in astonishment, noting the gashed forehead and the bruises surrounding it.

Suppose I ought to try to bring him round, she thought, fishing in her pocket for a handkerchief to bathe the cut. But she didn't need to bring him round, as he suddenly stirred and opened his eyes to stare curiously at the girl.

"Oh, my head!" he groaned. "Where am I? Who are you?"

"You're on the beach at Auchendarg. And I'm Sheena Campbell. How did you manage to cut your head?"

"One of the panels blew in Engineering..."

"On the Enterprise?"

"Yes - how do you know that?"

"I know that you're Lt-Commander Montgomery Scott, Chief Engineer on board the USS Enterprise. I also know that you're hurt. Let me help you."

In reality, Sheena knew that poor James Doohan, the actor, had probably got a dose of amnesia, but to ease his mind she decided to play along with him until she could get a doctor to take care of him.

On the other hand - if there really was an Enterprise somewhere out in space and if there really was a Scotty, a Captain Kirk and a Mr. Speck, she

could be breaking their Prime Directive by fetching a doctor. As a Trekker, she knew that she could not do anything which might infringe that Prime Directive in any way. Of course, she could get a doctor to treat Scotty - or Jimmy - or whoever he was, but doctors have records and reports to make and the sudden appearance of a Starfleet officer - as this man claimed to be - might prompt some questions which might not be answered easily. Firstly, however, she decided to get him out of the chilly wind and into her house, where he could be kept until someone arrived to claim him, either as James Doohan or as Scotty. She looked down as he made friends with her dog.

"Can you get up? I'll take you to my house, it's not far from here on the other side of the railway - you can see it from here. There's no-one in - my parents are in England just now, so no awkward questions will be asked."

Scotty stood up, putting his hand to his head. Then he stared curiously at Sheena. "This is Scotland? How did I get here? Have I been so badly affected by the explosion that I don't remember anything since then? Am I on sick leave? Where's the Enterprise?"

"I really can't answer your questions - I'm not sure what happened to you! I think we'd better go, though - someone might see us. Here - " she went on, peeling off her cagoule, "put this on over your uniform and come on."

Sheena whistled her dog as Scotty put on the cagoule, then they set off towards the bridge over the railway.

While Sheena was putting the key into the door, three columns of shimmering light appeared on the beach near where Scotty had been. The columns solidified into the figures of Kirk, Spock and McCoy, dressed in the appropriate clothing of the period.

"We can only assume Scotty beamed down here. Kyle couldn't tell us all that much, after all," Kirk said.

"Most efficient, that," commented McCoy. "Starfleet says that only one person is needed in a transporter room - to operate and to guard it. So if you knock that person on the head anyone can beam down and play God on any planet of their choice."

"That is true, Doctor; however, such incidents are rare and only occur through an accident such as the one Mr. Scott had. You yourself should know this since you decided to pay a visit to the Time Planet, courtesy of an overdose of cordrazine."

McCoy gave Spock the full force of one of his best glares. Kirk decided he'd better call the meeting to order. "Gentlemen, this doesn't help us to find Scotty. Spock, is that device of yours working?"

"Yes, Captain. It is tuned in to Mr. Scott's brain pattern; the closer we approach him the quicker it will beep."

"Well, I hope we reach him quickly. He might be dangerous. Who knows what a bump on the head might do to him? Such things have unpredictable effects, Jim."

"Don't worry, Bones, we'll find him. Spock, where did ship's sensors place him?"

"Going off in that direction, sir." Spock pointed towards the railway bridge. "He appears to have been accompanied by another person and a dog."

"So he's been found. And what will the consequence of that be?" Kirk looked grim, remembering the time he had had to sacrifice the woman he loved in order to prevent history being changed. "Spock, switch on the machine. We must find him."

Meanwhile, the object of their concern was sitting in Sheena's house while

she bathed the cut on his head. Sheena was talking to him.

"You mean you don't remember anything since the explosion? Don't you remember beaming down?" On consideration she had decided to use that phrase instead of saying 'how you got here'.

"No, not at all. That part of my memory is a blank. But you've made me curious - how do you know so much about the Enterprise?"

Sheena smiled. She was beginning to believe he really was who he seemed to be. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"Oh, please tell me." He looked at her pleadingly.

Sheena laughed at his expression. "O.K. Well, here we have a thing called 'television'. Do you know what that is?"

"Yes, yes. Go on?"

"And on TV there is a science fiction show called 'Star Trek'. It is about the adventures of the USS Enterprise, commanded by Captain James T. Kirk. The First Officer is Vulcan, and his name is Spock. There's also Dr. McCoy, and the Chief Engineer is - "

"Is myself. I don't believe it - it's impossible!"

"It's true. In fact, Star Trek is on today, so you can watch and be amazed! Then there's..."

"Don't tell me any more. You've surprised me enough already. I'll watch your TV and then I'll see what you're on about."

But Sheena was the one to receive a greater surprise. She had been surprised enough to find Scotty, but three more surprises, including one with pointed ears, were approaching the door. Kirk reached for the bell and rang it, mentally rehearsing what he would say.

They had a few moments to wait while Sheena warned Scotty to stay put then dashed to the door. She opened it, and gasped,

"C - Captain Kirk!"

It was Kirk's turn to be surprised. "How do you know my name?"

"I'll explain inside. Come in - Scotty's here."

They filed into the hall and Sheena shut the door. "You can take your hat off, Mr. Spock, I know you're a Vulcan. No, Scotty hasn't broken the Prime Directive, but if you'll stay for an hour to watch a programme on TV I can explain how I know all this." She grinned and led the way into the holly-decorated living room.

"Captain! Ooh, I'm awful pleased to see you!" cried Scotty, standing up and then sitting again rather quickly as a wave of dizziness swept over him.

McCoy noticed this immediately and set to work with his medical kit to treat Scotty. While this was being done Kirk and Spock turned to face Sheena, who then proceeded to surprise them by holding her hand up in the Vulcan salute and saying, "Live long and prosper, Mr. Spock, Captain Kirk."

Spock duly returned her greeting, rather mystified by her obvious knowledge of the Federation, but he stayed silent, knowing that an explanation was in the offing. Sheena smiled and began to explain.

"I am a Trekker. We have here on TV a programme called Star Trek. It deals with a Starship - the USS Enterprise. The actors are your doubles and the characters they play are you. You aren't by any chance beings from UFOs who have picked up the transmissions and are imitating those people?" she added suspiciously.

"No, we are Humans - from your future," Kirk assured her. "But we didn't

know of such a show's existence. We are genuine Federation personnel. We travelled back in time to study twentieth century Earth."

"I suppose you used a high speed journey round the sun in order to get here?"

"Yes..." The word fell from Kirk's astonished lips. "How...?"

"One of the episodes dealt with that. Now, Star Trek's on today - in just a few minutes, in fact.- so you can watch it. It's Christmas, you see, and dear old Auntie Beeb has decided to give us a treat by putting on Star Trek. It's on every day this week. Unfortunately it's on in the mornings and a lot of fans are working - though I hear most of them have managed to change their lunch hours to suit!"

"Who is this 'Auntie Beeb'?" asked Spock.

"The British Broadcasting Corporation - BBC. 'Auntie Beeb' is a colloquial name for them. I think you'll enjoy watching it. I'd better switch on now - find yourselves chairs."

They obeyed and sat gazing as the TV screen, after showing the last of a programme of doubtful value to anyone, faded to a picture of stars against a black background. Then the Enterprise was seen and the voice of the Captain came over the air. This caused several astonished looks but all continued to watch silently as the episode entitled 'The Tholian Web' progressed.

"Why, that is the bridge!" exclaimed McCoy. "Everyone's in their proper places! They've even got Spock!"

"Doctor, you could not possibly expect them to dispense with me. A Science Officer is essential to the running of the ship - but as for Chief Medical Officers - "

"Dr. McCoy, Mr. Spock, kindly shut up! I want to watch this even if you don't!" cried Sheena.

"Oh, I assure you that we do - " began McCoy.

"Sssshhhh!"

The rest of the episode was watched in silence.

When it was finished, no-one spoke until McCoy broke the silence. "Well, what can we say? It's an amazing coincidence."

"I don't know if coincidence is the right word," said Scotty, "but it's certainly unusual. I canna explain it."

"Do you think this programme was inspired by the imagination of one man, or did some visitors from the future tell him about their time?" wondered Kirk. "Those events did happen."

"That's a bit of a chicken and egg idea - we don't know which came first," McCoy replied.

"I think it was an original idea that started the TV series. Nothing's been said otherwise," Sheena said.

"I don't suppose anyone will ever know," Kirk said. He looked round at his officers. "We must beam up now, but I have an idea which might just please you. How would you like a trip around the Enterprise? But remember, you can never tell anyone."

Sheena's eyes lit up and she smiled delightedly. "Smashing! Oh, yes, please! I won't tell anyone, I promise. They'd never believe me anyway," she added half ruefully.

Kirk laughed and pulled out his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise - five to beam up."

When they solidified on the transporter platform Sheena blinked, stared

around her and said, "Oh..."

"Welcome aboard, Sheena," said Kirk, removing his coat to reveal a Starfleet uniform. "Now let's start that little trip."

All five walked out of the transporter room. Sheena was in seventh heaven as they went round, and then after a meal it was time for her to return. They assembled in the transporter room to say their farewells.

"I'll never forget this. How can I? But I can assure you that I will try to work to make this a reality," Sheena smiled, only too well aware that a great deal of hard work still lay between her own time and this future she had been privileged to see.

"I have no doubt that you will do so. It was people such as yourself who were responsible for pulling Earth through its bad times and for causing her to be a founder member of the Federation," said Spock.

"We have much to thank you for," McCoy added.

"I must thank you too - now I really know what we have to work for," Sheena said.

Scotty stepped forward and hugged Sheena, "Thanks for helping me, lass. You were very kind to me."

"I only did what anyone would have done! Now, promise me you'll keep away from exploding machinery," said Sheena, turning faintly red.

Scotty laughed. "I promise - and you take care, too!"

"Captain, thanks for inviting me aboard. It's certainly been a great day for me. I'll never forget it." Sheena moved to the platform and stood ready. "Goodbye, my friends - live long and prosper."

As they said their goodbyes she raised her hand in the Vulcan salute; it was still raised as Scotty moved levers and she shimmered out of sight and was gone.

Spock finally broke the silence. "Gentlemen, I think this may interest you. I checked the computer banks to discover Miss Campbell's future history. This is the same Sheena Campbell who laid the foundations of the government which arose after the Eugenics Wars and paved the way for Earth's becoming a founder member of the Federation. A fascinating thing, Gentlemen - to learn that we may be here today because a young girl liked a certain television programme."

And Spock had the last word.

SONNET by Theresa Hewitt

I thought myself content to be a thinking man
 Within me, not emotion, but cool logic ruled.
 The loneliness I felt I hid, as only Vulcans can,
 Denying all, by all denied, well schooled.
 I thought myself content...and then - he smiled, looked deep
 Into my soul, saw all of me; did not despise
 But offered love - I gave him up my heart to keep.
 Logic failed to defeat his warm and friendly eyes.
 The marble statue of my cold soul dissolved
 And I loved, and was loved; my Vulcan half betrayed
 It cost me that, to have my loneliness resolved.
 But I am glad that you saw past the stone face I portrayed,
 For through my darkest hours you stand fast at my side.
 There is nothing now we do not share, our lives forever tied.

FIRST LETTER by Rita Oliver

Dear Father,

Perhaps you had not expected to hear from me. Ever. Perhaps I never expected that I'd want to reach you. After all, didn't mother and I just walk out of your life? (As I recall, there were no lingering backward glances on that momentous promenade.) But no matter how unexpected this letter is to us both, Daddy, there are some things I just have to explain.

'Daddy'. I wrote it quite naturally. A slip back into my childhood, I suppose, the time when I remember you best. For you see that's how I think of you now...part of my childhood...part of my past. I've grown up a lot just lately, although mother still says I'm a child, but then mother would.

Just recently, very recently, I grew up. Or rather, I felt grown up, and that's halfway to being there, isn't it? It was as this historic occasion took place that I discovered some pretty amazing things about myself. Good and bad, but all true.

I discovered I don't like being alone. But at the same time I found I never am. I have friends. Good friends who help me often.

Just lately, I've thought a lot about my friends, how they held me together through a part of my life we both must recall with sadness.

When the family suddenly broke up. When there were suddenly two halves; mother and me; and you.

I blamed you. You were the one who broke up our home. You hurt mummy. You hurt me.

That's how I felt; I'm ashamed to admit it but it is true.

I was hurt, angry, confused. All at once! A pitifully lonely creature, but gradually I found a niche in life. A group of people with whom I could relax. They cured me, father. They've made me whole with their friendship. They've shown me that there still is peace and love in the world. They helped me and I slowly came to understand I had no right to lay all the blame at your door. There was fault all around, it is regrettable but true. You also were hurt. They taught me that.

I was lucky. Thus you see why I value those friends above all else. In the time since then they've stayed with me, grown with me. But it is only now that I see them with new eyes. Only now do I see their true worth.

As I sit here praising myself on my good fortune, I think of you. Why?

Because I realise I was lucky in finding them. And because I wonder - who did you find?

When we parted, we were each of us alone. At least mother and I had the symbol of each other. But you... You were alone and had no-one.

And I guess that's why I'm writing you this letter. My conscience, heavy with guilt, is kicking great holes in my new-found complacency. This letter is really a fraud! I just want to assuage my guilt. I want you to write and say,

'Oh no, dear Joanna, I was all right. A little sad at first, but that soon went. Found a nice home, nice people...no, don't you fret about me. I'm all right.'

Even as I know it is impossible, that's what I want you to say. And I realise now that's what I've been hoping for years; that I'd get a card,

'Dear Joanna - Weather fine, new life wonderful. Wish you were here. Father.'

But in my newly 'grown-up' state I know I've been dreaming. You were hurt as well. As much. More, I expect. So as I sit here gloating of my new-found friends and happiness I feel guilty that you might not have echoed my find.

But I know my childish whims are wrong. You went out into the empty reaches of space and found them...empty. That's why I'm writing - to stop feeling guilty.

Also I want to say I'm sorry.

For I am gripped with sorrow as I think of you with nothing, and no-one to turn to but the stars.

I picture you out there on some heartless planet looking up into its alien night sky. You count the tiny beacons of light and (I am vain enough to think) you wonder which one I am on.

Then I think of all those miles between us and I am sad...for you.

I do so really hope you found help. A place to hide. A place to forget. A place to remember again.

I remember you. You should have friends. Good honest men and women worthy of your love. A love mother and I neglected to allow.

You should have friends. Perhaps one or two really good friends that you can be yourself with. One who can charm you out of a dull mood with a lightheartedness you find infectious. Or one who notes your 'down' feeling and leaves you in gentle peace.

One whose childlike heart mirrors your own as you both throw yourselves into relaxing. Or one who is willing to suffer your good mood in deference to his own sad feeling.

One who leads you gently into the truth. Or one who constantly aggravates you into seeing the truth about yourself.

One who can share your laughter. Or one who can share your silence. One with whom you can share your grief. Or one who can share your grief and yet protect you by shielding you from his.

One with whom you would share a secret. Or one with whom you do share a secret. One in whom you would place your trust. Or one who trusts you.

One who would risk his life for you. Those for whom you would give yours.

That is what I found, father. I hope that you found friends like that. A warm bridge across the yawning chasm of loneliness. I hope you found them, male or female; why - even if they were alien, I do hope they reached out to you and cared. Because it helps.

Perhaps this is just the emotional outpouring of an adolescent's guilty conscience; but I feel it, and illogical as it may seem, after all this while, I wanted you to know...

Leonard McCoy let his eye fall to the signature at the end.

... Your daughter,
Joanna.

For several minutes he was lost in wistful thoughts until his attention was drawn back by the arrival of his Captain.

"Hi, Bones!"

"Hello, Jim..."

Kirk suddenly realised his friend appeared busy. "Oops - sorry, didn't mean to interrupt - "

"No, come in! I was just going through some of Joanna's letters."

Kirk looked at his friend with a suspicious gaze, then looked at the pile of tapes upon the desk. He touched them gently.

"They go back some time..." It was a question as much as it was a statement.

McCoy smiled easily as he looked at the pile of tapes. "I suppose they do... Right back to..." His voice trailed wistfully away. Again Jim Kirk looked searchingly at his friend. It was not a demanding gesture but a warm-hearted desire to help. McCoy saw the almost concern there; his smile widened.

"It's all right, Jim. I'm not in the throes of some maudlin depression. If anything..." He picked up a tape. It was the one he had just been reading, and he seemed to weigh its worth in his hand. "...If anything, they just cheered me up. Showed me how lucky I am!" He was lost a moment in quiet thought; Jim Kirk waited in resonant silence.

"She's a bright kid," McCoy finally remarked. Kirk smiled, agreeing with his friend's often stated remark. "Should have called her Cassandra!"

Kirk questioned him with a look.

"Oh, nothing!" McCoy assured him, happily slapping him upon the shoulder. "How about a drink? Come and share my laughter, let your childlike heart mirror mine as we throw ourselves into relaxing!"

Kirk looked quizzically at the dramatically gesturing doctor. "You sound as though you're a couple up on me already..."

"O.K., I'll give you a head start, how's that? Nothing's too much for a friend!"

McCoy scuttled happily away to find bottles and glasses, leaving Kirk to consider this new depth of happiness in his friend. At that moment the Vulcan Science Officer entered.

"Hiya, Spock!" called the doctor, rattling glasses and bottles. "Do you want a drink - just a small one?"

As a wild animal strains all its senses to taste the night air, the Vulcan, examined the atmosphere of the room.

He found good humour, pleasure... Ever sensitive to the moods of his friends, the Science Officer tried to suit his Vulcan facade to the moment. By a fraction of a degree the straight line of his shoulders relaxed. McCoy and Kirk shared a smile.

The doctor thrust two glasses at them. "Here!"

They took them, then each man sampled the liquor even as they tasted the pervading friendly atmosphere of the room.

As they relaxed further - into a chair, upon the desk, a light relaxed stance, a gentle silence fell on them.

McCoy privately patted himself on the back. No doubt about it, Joanna was a bright kid!

TREKKER'S NURSERY RHYME by Susan Meek

All I want is a sehlat
To keep me safe from harm
So I can cuddle close at night
He'll keep me nice and warm.

I won't be put off by a tribble
Or a cold old horta rock -
And if I can't have a sehlat,
All I want is a Spock!

TIME OF TESTING by Susan Meek

"We couldn't," said Leonard McCoy, gazing dispiritedly at the landscape that surrounded him, "have picked a more dismal place to beam down, Jim. Why do you always bring me along on these expeditions?"

Perhaps, thought Kirk, because when I'm venturing into the unknown, it's you and Spock I want beside me. McCoy was right, though, Iola IV was dismal. The sky above them was grey and the old sun that burned in it offered little illumination. In fact, the whole place seemed old, from the broken-down ruins of the city in front of them to the cracked, hardened ground they stood on.

"If Starfleet orders, it's our place to obey, Bones. They must have considered the results of that drone probe interesting enough to have us investigate."

"Science Centre considers every old ruin they find these days worthy of investigation. I'm glad this is only a preliminary survey. I'll feel very sorry for any archaeologists stationed here permanently. There's something depressing about this place."

"An illogical attitude, Doctor." Spock had just walked over from examining the perimeter buildings. "There may be interesting discoveries to be made here."

"Spock, of course," the doctor said, turning to Kirk, "is completely impervious to atmosphere. Anyway, I doubt there's anything of interest to me here. I'm a doctor, not an archaeologist."

"I sometimes wonder, Doctor, if you are even that." Spock's delivery was so perfectly cool that McCoy was left, for once, speechless. Kirk shook his head, laughing. Would they never stop, the pair of them? They were always hitting out at each other, and yet...perhaps after all this time it had merely become a habit. It was perhaps the only way they knew to express the hidden regard they felt for each other.

He smiled. "That was below the belt, Mr. Spock. Anyway, what have you been able to discover about the ruins?"

"They appear to be of extreme antiquity. If tricorder readings are to be believed, something in the order of 20,000 years. Possibly older."

"Level of civilisation?"

"Difficult to say, sir, but it does not appear to have been remarkably high."

As they walked towards the main body of buildings, Spock hung back slightly with Kirk. "Sir, 'below the belt'?"

"Don't give me that! 'Humourless Vulcans', indeed! I sometimes think you enjoy playing up the cold logician bit just to annoy McCoy."

Both eyebrows climbed up the Vulcan's forehead. "Captain! An illogical assumption."

"Yes, well... Spock, can you sense anything here, that all is not as it appears? I...get a strong feeling about this place."

"You...frequently do, Captain." A warmth appeared in the Vulcan's eyes. "However, on this occasion, I believe it is more a matter of Dr. McCoy's annoyance communicating itself to you than your own intuition."

Spock, always reassuring. Kirk's eyes followed him with affection. This past year, it had moved from the level of Captain/First Officer to something like a true friendship. Spock had mellowed from his first cold, totally Vulcan responses. If there was still some reticence, well... Spock had his heritage, his needs. Kirk was prepared to take whatever he offered.

Still, he couldn't feel completely at ease. He kept getting the feeling that something was watching them...

(*A presence. After so long...*)

Intelligent?

Is that possible? They are not of the free energy state as we. How can anything tied to a physical body be intelligent?

We were once thus ourselves, perhaps...

Perhaps. This must be investigated...)

"Can't you just feel the ancience of this place, Bones?"

"Yes. I wonder what happened to the inhabitants? Maybe they didn't like it here either and just left?"

They were in the centre of the ruins now, and suddenly in the air around them there was a colour, a glow coalescing out of nothing. It hung, a pulsing, diffuse energy, a rainbow sparkle. It was breath-takingly beautiful.

"What...are you?" Kirk said in wonderment.

A voice, perhaps a thought, on the surface of their minds. *We are life. Energy. We have no name. We belong to this place. What is your purpose here?*

"I am Captain James T. Kirk of the Starship Enterprise. We represent the United Federation of Planets. These are my officers, Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy." He swallowed. "We came here to investigate your world, not knowing there was any life here. If we have offended by our presence, it was unintentional."

"No readings on sensors, Captain." Spock's voice was a low whisper.

That is because we have not allowed it. The glow began to break up into three distinct forms; one red, one a delicate silver, the third a beautiful greenish-gold. The lights moved over their bodies and there was a slight, though not unpleasant, tingling sensation.

Purpose? Any purpose in such low creatures is unimportant.

But they are fascinating. They must be studied.

Spock flinched suddenly. *The different one. He attempts telepathic contact. Presumptuous.*

Hold their ship. We will investigate.

McCoy's communicator was open. "Jim, I've lost contact with the ship."

"What's the idea of this?" Kirk spoke no more. It seemed that the glow was entering him, dissolving until it seemed even his body was starting to disintegrate...

"Mr. Scott, we've lost contact with the landing party."

Scott saw something like a silver sparkle forming around the ship. It was too late for evasive action.

"...A forcefield, sir. It doesn't appear to be interfering with ship's functions, apart from contact with the landing party and use of the transporter."

"Something, laddie," said Scott, sitting tensely in the command chair, "obviously wants to keep us up here, and them down there."

"Speculation, Mr. Spock?" The three members of the landing party had awakened in a small square room with stone walls and some kind of glowing

material in the ceiling for illumination. A simple but effective door barred their exit.

"I would say we have been moved a short distance by an effect similar to transportation, sir."

"Spock, did you try a telepathic contact?"

"A tentative one, Captain. I felt my mind replused - by something incredibly powerful."

"So they seem to be very advanced. I wonder what they want with us?"

"Unknown, sir."

"And of course you wouldn't care to speculate," McCoy said sourly as he climbed to his feet. "My head feels like it's been kicked inside out."

Spock was helping him up when the glow returned.

"Where have we been brought? And why?" Kirk was careful to keep his tone firm.

You are underneath the city where you stood before.

"My ship?"

Safe. Merely held.

"Then why have you brought us here?"

For study.

"What do you want to know?"

What you are. Open your minds to us.

"Just a minute, we'll tell you anything you want to know," McCoy spoke. "But surely we have the right to say whether you enter our minds or not? The first experience...wasn't pleasant."

Your co-operation is unimportant. It would be easier for you. But no matter.

"Wait a moment!" Spock spoke in precise and logical tones. "No doubt that would be possible, but every sentient being has the right to privacy of the mind. Surely beings as advanced as yourselves could work out a more logical approach than mere force?"

Listen. Presumption. He will be the first.

A glow formed around Spock's figure and he clutched his head in his hands. He shut his eyes in concentration.

"No!" One harsh word was torn out of him. His eyes opened and Kirk saw the pain in them. Then he began to feel it himself, like a diamond-head bit drilling into his mind. If the first touch had been unpleasant, this was... nightmare. Beside him, Spock collapsed, then McCoy. The alien force worked meticulously through the compartments of his mind, stirring up a maelstrom of pain and terror...

This thing they call 'emotion'. Fascinating.

Anger. Hate. Passion. The energy bound up in them, under so little control! A little more restraint in the Vulcan, perhaps, but all so primitive.

Did you not see the other thing? The...love, they call it. Compassion. Empathy. It seems to bind them all, but particularly the leader and the Vulcan.

Yes, but not so interesting as the baser emotions.

Have we not seen enough? We have emptied all that is in their minds.

No, they must be tested. We must understand these processes.

The other, McCoy, is unimportant for now. We will remove him and concentrate on the other two.

Kirk had nothing to compare it with. Rape of the mind was the best analogy he could think of. The alien had systematically raked through his memories and personality. It knew every feeling, every hope, every dream he'd ever had. It was like having his soul laid bare and he did not like the sensation at all.

He was not sure whether he had passed out or not. One minute the alien was there, the next it had gone. The relief was enormous. He looked up to see that McCoy had vanished, but Spock was still lying on the floor.

"Spock?" The Vulcan trembled a little, but looked up at him. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, sir. A rather...draining experience."

The Vulcan's talent for understatement was coming to the fore again. It had been bad enough for Kirk, but for a Vulcan to have his innermost mind breached and his privacy destroyed like that must have been horrible. Spock's control over his mask was even more rigid than usual, indicating something of the effort he was making to quell his feelings.

"Well," said Kirk, "they certainly found out plenty about me, but I didn't sense much about them. Did you?"

"A little. It was more impression than direct telepathic contact. They seem to be some kind of composite free energy organism. There are three parts that can operate independently, but are essentially as one. They seem very old, so old that they are not even sure of their own origins. The one certainty is that they are bound to this planet, so they may have evolved from the life that inhabited the city above."

"There is a coldness, a ruthlessness, in them."

"Yes. I sensed great curiosity and power. Their intelligence is undoubted. They seem to have been quiescent, sleeping almost, for a long time. We are the first extra-planetary life-form they have encountered in millenia."

"They want to mentally dissect us. I wonder what happens next? And where's Bones?"

Your friend is safe. The voice came into their minds, but this time there was no sparkle. *He is nearby. It is you and Commander Spock who interest us now. We wish to experiment.*

"Experiment?" Spock sounded curious. "You have already seen everything in our minds. You know that our purpose here is peaceful and that we came only for knowledge. What more can there be?"

To test what you are. The essence of you. First Captain Kirk.

For Kirk the room disappeared completely and he was surrounded by blackness. The only illumination was the coloured lights darting around him, red, gold and silver.

Whispers skittered through his mind. *Your concept of good and evil. Interesting. How can you feel as you do about the Vulcan if he resembles the vision of your Earth's 'Devil'?*

"Appearances," said Kirk, "are not all there is to a living being. Spock..." He was suddenly outraged. "Why should I talk to you about him?"

Your 'morality'. How do you know your Federation is so right?

"No man ever knows if he is totally right. He must simply live as best he can according to what he believes."

Your petty principles! You Humans are so sure of yourselves.

"At least we respect others' privacy. After what you've done, why should I discuss my beliefs with you?"

This conversation leads nowhere. Perhaps we must show you how weak you are, how your fine feelings are merely a veneer of your primitivism.

Kirk found himself in some kind of dungeon, chained to a wall. Spock was beside him, unconscious. In front of them were two barred doors. Through one he caught a glimpse of something horrible and reptilian that made his skin crawl. The other door seemed to be an escape passage. A great voice boomed in his ears.

"Captain Kirk, in a few moments those doors will open. The shackles on one of you will be released. The other will be killed by the creature you see. Both cannot live. A simple choice, your life or the life of your friend. Life, Captain. You want to live."

There was really no decision to be made. He would not compromise. "Let him live."

The scene dissolved around him, and he was back in the cell, Spock watching him anxiously.

This is too easy, it is not producing the desired effects.

His memories... He resists.

Unimportant.

A blackness filled Kirk's mind. And when he awoke...

He could feel instantly that he was not in his own body. It was a woman's body and he had been there before. Janice Lester's.

Consciousness was just returning. He found himself lying on a bed in a security room, with Spock pacing to and fro beside him. Then Janice, in his body, entered.

He shut his eyes, pretended to be asleep. He had to find out what was going on. This was not how he remembered it.

"Just what are you doing here, Mr. Spock?"

"I expected you, Captain. Perhaps you would dismiss the guards. We have much to discuss."

The men were ushered out of the room. "Well, Mr. Spock?"

"You know the reason for my presence here, Captain. Or should I say - Miss Lester?"

"How dare you! You're as mad as she is. You realise I could have you court-martialled for what you've just implied?"

"Yes, but you won't. I now have indisputable personal proof. I had suspected for some time, and now have confirmation. I have just been in contact with his mind."

"You are mad!"

"Please, further denials only waste time. I know the truth. But I am sure the situation can be handled logically. You will not disclose any of our conversation, because you need me."

"You seem very sure of yourself!"

"I am. Let me congratulate you on your performance so far. Your use of the ancients' equipment on Camus II was quite brilliant. Your James Kirk is highly plausible, but not totally convincing. Some of the crew are a little suspicious already, Dr. McCoy, your 'friend', especially so. But if we reach agreement, I can easily go back to the Doctor, tell him I linked with Dr. Lester's mind, and that she is, in fact, insane."

"If I court-martialled you?"

"Unwise. You might be able to disprove me in a court, but bringing the issue out in public would only undermine your credibility."

"So in return for your silence, you want a deal? A partnership?"

"I am offering you much more than silence. I can teach you how to become James Kirk, how to react like him, to be so in character that it will convince even McCoy."

"I'm...interested."

"I thought you would be. A woman who is willing to give up her womanhood is extremely ambitious. I can give you this starship. But once you have it, you will not be satisfied for long. With my guidance you could become a commodore within two years. After that, with me behind you, who knows?"

"So power is what you want. With you behind me every step of the way. I see."

"You are a very intelligent and cunning woman. But you will need occasionally to have your thinking tempered with logic. Your contempt for men, especially this one, could overwhelm you."

"Mr. Spock, if I had found a man like you before I might not have given up my femininity. What about him?"

"James Kirk had great potential. He had charisma, great powers of leadership, was one of the galaxy's best strategists. He could have gone so much further than this starship. But he 'loves' the Enterprise. And his 'humanity' is his weakness."

"Yes, his damn humanity! I never knew you were so ruthless, Mr. Spock."

"I have only ever allowed Humans to see what I wish them to see. He thinks I am his friend. It is an illusion I have taken great care to create over the past few years. He thinks that he sees my 'Human' side. But I am tired of being merely second-in-command to this James Kirk."

"So we agree. There only seems to be one difficulty - him. Perhaps we should remove him permanently?"

Kirk couldn't believe his ears. He tried to tell himself that this was all illusion...but it seemed so very real. Who could help him now, trapped in this woman's body? Only Spock had been able to help him before. And this Spock...despised him...

"No, it would be better," Spock was saying, "if we stick to your original plan to have 'Dr. Lester' declared insane. I can meld with him, he trusts me completely. By gradual stages, I can convince him of his insanity."

"You've thought of everything. I wouldn't like to have you as an enemy, Mr. Spock."

The unreality of the situation had gripped Kirk totally now, and a surge of panic went through him as Spock began to walk towards him. Strong Vulcan hands held him down and a powerful, black force entered his mind.

You are Janice Lester. Not James Kirk. Not James Kirk...

This time when Kirk regained consciousness, he found himself on what seemed to be the Romulan flagship, in his disguise, and he was talking via communicator to Spock. "Yes, the device is down the first corridor to the left as you approach the Commander's office, closely guarded and off-limits to all but authorised personnel."

"I'll get it. Will you be able to get back to the Enterprise without attracting their attention?"

"Unknown at present."

"Someone coming. Out."

Then his viewpoint shifted, to the Commander's quarters. Spock had just put away his communicator and the Commander was resting one hand on his shoulder. The other reached out to flick an intercom switch.

"Security, the Human known as Kirk, whom we believed dead, has penetrated this ship, surgically disguised as a Romulan. He intends to steal the cloaking device. Stop him. If necessary, kill." She turned and smiled at Spock. "Now that's out of the way, we have...other things to talk about, Mr. Spock."

And then once again he was back in his own body. A Romulan guard was closing in...

The scene was Organia.

"If he is lying, he will die. If he is telling the truth, well, he will find that business has taken a turn for the worse. Guards, remove him." Kor was ordering his men to take Spock to the mind-sifter.

"No," the Vulcan said purposefully. "That will not be necessary. I can tell you all you need to know without the mind-sifter. This is Captain James T. Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise, sent here to persuade the Organians that they would be better off on the Federation side."

"So...Captain Kirk. I should have known. But that means you are his First Officer. Why...?"

"I do not relish your presence here, but I must accept it. I expect the normal courtesies of a prisoner of war, Commander. I judge it more logical to sit out the war here than be turned into a vegetable by your machine. I do not intend to lose my sanity over this issue."

"Spock!" Kirk stared at him in disbelief. "Spock, what is this - ?"

A guard cuffed him over the head. "Silence, Human!"

"Yes, Mr. Spock, you will be granted the usual courtesies of a prisoner who has given us information voluntarily." There was an undertone of disdain in Kor's voice. "We will not use the mind-sifter on you, but there should be no objection to your Captain."

And the guards dragged him away...

Something like schizophrenia gripped Kirk's mind, tearing him apart. Spock. Traitor. Coward. Hating him. It could not be so, and yet he had seen it.

It was illusion, surely? But it seemed so real. A slow anger began to build up in him, an anger that he knew to be in some way not of his own making, yet could not stop.

This time he found himself truly awake, and dark eyes were staring into his. Dark, alien eyes... Spock.

The anger came to flash point. "Traitor! Filthy traitor! Cold, unfeeling alien!"

The Vulcan was surprised by Kirk's punch and went sprawling. Then the Captain was attacking, in a killing mood. 'It is an illusion I have been careful to create.' That had been the cruellest thing of all. It was as if everything he had ever felt for Spock had been polarised into a hatred the like of which he had never known before.

The Vulcan tried to hold him off, but it was made more difficult by the fact he had no desire to hurt Kirk. After a long struggle he managed to grab

the Human by the wrists, hauling him to his feet.

"Jim!"

Dark alien eyes staring into his... Hated... No. This was Spock! For one moment, sanity returned. "Spock, what are they doing to me? Link with me, please!"

The pressures in his mind almost made him scream. The struggle between his true feelings and the artificial hatred they had stirred up in him seemed to be tearing him apart.

Until there was a familiar presence in his mind. Cool. Soothing. Reminding him of the way it had been. He had not been betrayed, to the Romulans, the Klingons or Janice. Spock had stood beside him as always. Eventually he became calmer. He realised that Spock had withdrawn from his mind some time ago, and that he had fought the rest of the way back himself. When he finally opened his eyes, he saw Spock sitting some way from him, allowing him his privacy while he recovered.

Kirk was surprised to see the Vulcan's face a mess of cuts and bruises. "Spock? I did this to you?"

"You were...not yourself, Captain. It is not important."

"It is. They made me want to kill you." He shuddered at the memory. "You were in my mind. You saw what they did."

"Yes, Jim. They appear to have powers of illusion similar to those of the Keepers of Talos IV. Also an ability to draw on and alter our memories, even create 'situations' in which to set us."

"Why, Spock? They've already seen everything in our minds."

"This is...only hypothesis, but I believe now they have tasted the power of manipulating minds, they - " Spock's voice became stiff with revulsion, " - are beginning to find it pleasant."

"Yes... I could sense one of them vaguely in my mind, just before they withdrew. Enjoying it, feeding on it. Spock - " he shuddered. "If they come again, I don't think you'll be able to pull me back - next time." Spock said nothing but they both knew it was true. "But that's not what worries me. I think next time it will be you."

Spock had never been one for avoiding realities. "Yes, Captain."

"You have a stronger mind than I. Do you think you can resist them?"

"You underestimate the strength of your own mind. Vulcan techniques may allow me a little more time; that is all."

Kirk put a hand on the Vulcan's shoulder and found the muscles there knotted, tense. It had been bad enough for him, but for a Vulcan to have his perception of reality torn from him might result in insanity.

"Maybe they had enough with me. Anyway - " he squeezed the tense shoulder, " - we can't do much about it now. Why don't you try and get some rest?"

"It should be you who is resting, Captain. What you have just experienced is mentally exhausting."

"No more tiring than your linking with me and pulling my mind back from near insanity. I'm making it an order, anyway." He smiled. "Haven't you learned yet to put up with my Human stubbornness?"

"I suppose that I should have, Captain." The tone was dry, but the eyes smiled. The Vulcan leaned back against the wall, and it was not long, despite himself, before he drifted into a light sleep.

Rest while you can, his Captain thought. You may need your strength.
/When,/ he asked himself, /did it change from friendship into...a special kind

of love?/

The thought of what had just happened to him happening to Spock was almost unbearable. It was only the bedrock knowledge of Spock's loyalty that had held him up during his ordeal. Looking at the Vulcan to make sure he was asleep, Kirk lifted his head and spoke softly. "You. Whatever you are. I'm making you an offer. If you want any more experiments, use me. If you want to know about emotion - he's a Vulcan, you've no need of him. Just take me away somewhere where I can't hurt him. But please, don't tamper with his mind."

He waited for the shimmer to come, but there was nothing, only stillness in the air. "I know you understand me. Why don't you answer?"

There was no reply. He paced the cell, looking from time to time at the Vulcan and trying to ignore the quiet despair that was growing inside him.

Should we not acknowledge him? Surely this offer proves the strength of their bond.

I am not convinced. The clashes of the violent emotions are much more interesting. But I see no further point in using the Human at the moment. The other one has more interesting possibilities.

Is this really necessary?

He must be fully tested. Separately from the other would be best. Let us arrange it.

A heavy drowsiness began to overcome Kirk. He sat down against a wall. It was not until he was almost asleep that he realised it had been artificially induced...

This belief in the concept of differences in combination. Is this not merely an excuse to try and resolve the duality of your nature?

Spock was in a circular room, on his knees, bathed in the light of the rainbow shimmer. "No, it is the basic tenet of the Vulcan people."

Another 'voice', more insistent, greedy. *Let us into your mind. Cooperate.*

"No. Every individual has the right to mental privacy. Beings as advanced as yourselves should be able to recognise that."

You can make this easier for yourself.

The agony increased. "You have been into my mind once. I will not allow... I will not..." Had he not been Vulcan, he would have screamed. Wave upon wave of pressure, breaking in upon his mind... Everything within him struggled to resist until the pain obliterated all conscious thought...

He woke to more pain, but this was something he had experienced before. Vague memories of the surface of Deneva stirred; the creature attacking, infiltrating his nervous system and trying to take over his mind.

It seemed for a while that he was winning. He became aware that he was lying in sickbay, McCoy and Kirk standing beside the bed.

"Jim, aren't you bothered? His pain - nearly going off the scale!"

"Bones, how can I bother about what's happening to that half-breed when my brother's just died?"

Half-breed. Half-breed. The hurtful words tore into him; words used so many times against him with wounding intent. But never by him.

This was illusion, there could be no logic or reality in this situation. He was in the cellar of a ruin on Iola IV.

Then why was there...? Pain. Rising in intensity like a flood until it obliterated everything...

"Spock!" Kirk had awakened abruptly to find the cell deserted. "Where have you taken him? Damn you! What are you doing to him?"

What they were doing was placing him in another situation...

The ship was orbiting above Omicron Ceti III. He and Kirk were in the Transporter Room and the spores' effect had just worn off.

"At last! I've been wondering how long it would take to get through your thick skull! I discovered that anger, violent emotion, breaks the spores' hold."

Still shaken, Spock got slowly to his feet. "Those things you said?"

"Nothing like a few home truths to break up a dream, is there, Mr. Spock? Personally I wouldn't have minded if you'd stayed on that planet and rotted, but I happen to want my ship back. For that, I need you. So hadn't you better get that computer brain of yours working on a solution?"

"Certainly, sir." Spock held himself stiffly. This Kirk was a total stranger.

"You took long enough to pull round. I never understood how those spores got hold of you in the first place. I didn't think there was anything there to be affected. Or how that girl could..." There was undisguised disgust in his Captain's voice.

This was not real. It had not happened. It was merely the cruel twisting of an actual event.

He found himself back in the cell again, on his knees, every part of his body bathed in a cold sweat.

This is more difficult than we anticipated. His mind is strong, he resists.

I maintain that the bond is responsible. It seems it is stronger than anything we can use to remove his sense of reality.

He is not so different from the other. The violence has been bound up in him by convention and training.

Perhaps we should create another situation...

*His ancestors were of a savage, more violent people than the Human's. Surely...?"

There are some interesting memories. This one...

Yes.

They came again, but this time their power thrusting into his consciousness like a knife, piercing to the core of his very being...

It was hot, the heat coming from the sun of his native planet Vulcan. And the white heat of pon farr burned in his heart.

He was at the place of koon-ut-kal-i-fee, the sash of combat being placed around his waist, the lirpa in his hand. But the only thing that had any meaning for him was T'Pring...and her cry that reverberated in his soul.

"Kah-i-farr!"

T'Pring. Every cell in his body ached for her. The need consumed him.

And he was being kept from her by this...Human who stood across the stone circle from him.

T'Pring's Champion. How weak he seemed, how ill at ease he was when he held the lirpa... It would not be long before he no longer stood in the way.

He was pure Vulcan male now. The passions of his ancestors had robbed him of all logic, of everything but pure rage. With a great cry, he launched himself at his opponent.

Spock was not aware that he was, in fact, rising, tearing open one door, then another, until he came face to face with a startled Kirk.

As the door of the cell burst open, Kirk stood aghast. There was no mistaking the look in the Vulcan's eyes. It had been there only once before... He tried to draw back, to protect himself.

Such was the power of the illusion that he also entered Spock's vision of the cell as the place of koon-ut-kal-i-fee.

Events unfolded in a way that was horribly similar to that first time. The only real difference was that this time they had no weapons, only their bare hands. For Spock, with his strength and skill, that was enough. Kirk was fighting as before with all his power to survive, but the Vulcan's totally unrestrained strength began to get the better of him. And this damn hot sun, sapping his strength...

"NO!" Kirk gave a mental shout. "This is not Vulcan, it's Iola IV!" For him the cell became real again. He managed to trip Spock and hold him down for a second. "Spock!" He was almost breathless. "This is an illusion!"

The Vulcan rose up, ignoring his appeals, giving him a great blow that sent him smashing against the far wall...

The energy! The intensity of it! I never imagined anything like this!

They will destroy each other.

What matter? We have four hundred and thirty other specimens on the ship.

"Spock, no!" It was useless. Spock had Kirk against the wall and his hands reached for the Human's throat. Powerful hands...choking the life out of him... Thinking abstractedly as he looked into those wild eyes... Not this way. Anyone but you...

Then it seemed for a moment that there was something else in Spock's eyes; that the Vulcan was actually looking and could see what he was doing. Such a battle of will...

And then the hands released him. A great sob was torn out of Spock. "No! I will not... I cannot kill you a second time!"

As Kirk regained some awareness, he saw a faint shimmer in the air and heard the voices in his mind.

I do not understand. Why has he stopped?

I told you...

They faded and Kirk was left looking at the slumped figure of Spock, his shoulders shaking convulsively. "Spock, it's all right. I'm still alive, you know."

Spock kept his face turned; he did not dare to face Kirk. "I...have tried to kill you...twice. I have struck at you in rage. It is...unforgivable." His voice was only a whisper, hoarse with emotion.

"Spock, that was not you. And I'm all right."

Still the Vulcan would not face him. "Twice... I swore an oath of loyalty to you. I have broken every rule I hold as a Vulcan." The voice was a little calmer now, but still shook.

Spock. look at me."

The Vulcan turned to him slowly. Tears were streaming down his face, and for one of the few times in his life Kirk saw his friend without any mask to hide what he felt inside. Something in the sight moved him more profoundly than anything he had ever seen in Spock.

"I never believed such ferocity existed in me."

"It exists in all of us," Kirk said gently. "Look at what they did to me a few hours ago. It was me tearing at your throat then. They brought back my wolf easily enough." He reached out a hand. "The important thing is, you were stronger than them. You broke out of it, and you beat them."

"I should never have allowed it to happen. I am no longer fit..." He sounded calmer now, but still bitter, not forgiving himself. Spock stood before him now, Kirk realised, probably more vulnerable than he had ever been before. Ashamed of what he'd almost done, of having emotion forced from him... Kirk knew he had to say the right thing now.

"Spock, you never talked rubbish to me before. That was not you, any more than it was the first time. When you're a puppet in the hands of a force like that, you can't be responsible for anything it does. If you can forgive it in me, then why not in yourself? Spock," he went on sternly, "please be logical about this. I need you and your logic right now more than I've ever done before."

He got up and walked to the other end of the room. He turned his back, and after a few minutes, Spock's voice reached him.

"Jim. Thank you."

Kirk turned to see his friend's face composed once more. "Good. Now maybe we can see if this door leads anywhere."

It didn't. All they found was the circular room where Spock had been held, and the short corridor in between. There was one other door, but it seemed tightly secured and nothing would budge it.

"So, it seems they only open doors when they want to."

"Captain, are you injured in any way?"

"No, I just, uh, ache a little. You?"

"The same. I suggest we try to clean up as best we can."

Kirk took his first proper look at himself, then at Spock. They were a mess. Dirt, bruises, blood from cuts and scratches; red or green, it seemed to have no preference. "Mr. Spock, we gotta stop meeting like this. It's playing hell with our uniforms."

One eyebrow rose. "It occurs to me, Captain, that only you could make that type of remark in a situation like this."

Kirk laughed. The levity of the moment had broken, and Kirk felt some of the tension draining out of him. "Well, let's try to clean up. They may be back, but... I don't think they can throw anything worse at us."

The Vulcan still looked pale and shaky, but distinctly better than he had before. Kirk thought, Nothing has broken us apart yet. And somehow, I doubt anything can.

*The violence, the energy. It...exhilarates. I have never known such

sensation.*

The fact that the Vulcan broke from our control, has this no significance to you?

Unimportant. We must have more experiments, but later. Now we must rest. I will digest what we have experienced.

The silver radiance hovered. *I will observe the other Human, McCoy.*

The gold also rose. *And I the other two.*

The red, left alone, seemed to pulse more vividly. The violence... The energy... There must be more...

McCoy was in a separate cell where he had been kept sleeping most of the time since the first intrusion into his mind.

"Jim! Spock!" He had awakened a few minutes before, and tried unsuccessfully to call for his friends. When that didn't work he began to pace the room and curse his captors.

"Well, why don't you show yourselves? Where are my friends?" He was unprepared for the silver shimmer that suddenly appeared in the air and enveloped him.

McCoy. Healer. I have shared with the others. Now I will try this sensation with you for myself.

The cell vanished around McCoy and he found his mind being bombarded by sensations of fear and great pain that were somehow familiar... Gradually he realised that he was hanging in midair, his wrists manacled. He became aware that this was Minara, and that he was dying...

He felt careful hands releasing him, supporting and then easing his tortured body down. He struggled to regain full awareness, hearing two voices.

Jim and Spock. Of course.

"Heart, severely damaged; signs of congestion in both lungs; evidence of massive circulatory collapse."

McCoy opened his eyes to look into Spock's. They were strangely devoid of compassion. Kirk was beside him, looking down at the Doctor. Yet his eyes also held that look of...vacancy.

Something was very wrong here.

Spock was continuing. "Captain...he's dying. We can make him comfortable; that is all." Then the Vulcan turned to look at Kirk. "It is as I told you, Jim. He is weak, always has been. It is as the Vians said. His own fears have killed him."

"Yes, I never listened to you before. But you're right. There's nothing that can be done for him anyway." The Jim Kirk that looked down at McCoy like some insignificant insect was a complete stranger. "The Vians have offered us a way out of this. Let's take it."

"It seems the logical thing to do, Captain..." And they walked away...

McCoy woke up in the tiny cell, a glowing silver radiance pulsating in front of him, the slow sting of salty tears filling his eyes...

It had been several hours since their last contact with the energy beings. They had speculated and worried about McCoy. Spock thought the beings, powerful as they were, needed time to regain energy after each mind-assault. Eventually they decided to try and rest, Spock sitting down against the wall. Possibly he had intended to take only one of those Vulcan 'cat-naps' where only the

body rests, but had slipped into a deeper state of relaxation.

This has been hardest on you, thought Kirk, watching him. His mental battles had exhausted him. There was a curious vulnerability about Spock in sleep. It reminded Kirk...

A golden luminescence formed in front of Kirk. "Spock - "

Captain, do not wake your friend.

That was strange, there only seemed to be one of them this time. Usually there were three, and this one only disturbed the surface of his thoughts, not his inner mind as it had done before. "What now? More 'tests'?"

*Captain Kirk, if I were to make you an offer - *

"Well?"

The lives of your friends, their freedom, against the lives of the people on your ship. What would you say?

Kirk stared, curious. "Are you making me an offer?"

It is theoretical. What would your answer be?

"I don't bargain with people's lives. But -- " he swallowed hard " -- any such choice would have to be for my ship. That is my duty. They would do the same."

But at great personal cost. Thank you, Captain. That is all I wanted to know.

"Why are you here?"

You are what your people call 'a man of principle'. You will see me again. It faded.

"Spock! Spock, you're not going to believe this, but I think one of those things is trying to help us..."

The McCoy creature is interesting. There is an abundance of material for testing.

We must stop this. We must release them.

Why? We are only beginning. There are many interesting things to try. We must go for a three-way link, the two Humans and the Vulcan...

No, do you not see? Search what you have learned from their memories. The Sargonites, the Providers, other advanced life-forms they have encountered. They almost destroyed themselves with their lust for power and control.

There is no connection. We merely experiment.

The 'experiment' is becoming an obsessive need for you. You are feeding from their violent emotions. Have you not perceived their bond?

The 'love' concept...unimportant. The baser instincts are more interesting.

You will not be able to break the bond. The more you try, the harder it will bind them.

Negative. They are such easily manipulated creatures.

We must free them and their starship.

For what reason?

The golden entity pulsed like a living sun. *It is not right.*

*I see you have absorbed their concept of 'morality'. Irrelevant. We are

essentially a composite organism, and as we two do not agree with you, the subject is ended. We will rest then bring the three together for a greater experiment. If they are destroyed...we will obtain replacements from the ship.*

McCoy was pacing his cell, and the next thing he knew, the golden light covered him then he materialised in the others' room.

"Bones!"

"Jim, Spock, are you all right?"

Listen, all of you. They turned to face the golden light. *In a few moments I intend to release your ship. Captain, have your communicator open, ready to make contact. I will be able to hide my thoughts from my companions for a little longer, but they do not agree with me. I will have to fight them. I am only one force against two; and the others will try to keep you here. I suggest you link with Spock. Concentrate on...your bond. When you get to your ship, move away from the planet as quickly as you can and never return.*

Kirk was almost speechless. "All right, and thank you. Why?"

I have learned from you. Again it pulsed with its own glory, like a living sun. *It is not right. We have tested. I have not found you wanting.* It disappeared.

"Well, gentlemen, we'd better do as it said."

Spock's hand went unquestioningly to Kirk's temple. There were no doubts. Then - "Doctor?" He hesitated just for a second.

"Damn Vulcan! Do you even have to ask?"

Kirk flipped open his communicator and was absurdly glad to hear Scotty's voice answering him.

"Scotty, three to beam up. Quickly!"

They felt the familiar transporter beam begin to take hold. At the same moment a fiery silver-red radiance filled the air and it seemed that an enormous force was pressing them to the ground and tearing their minds apart.

The mental anguish was enormous, and yet...part of their minds lay cradled in Spock's link. They were together and somehow nothing else mattered.

From somewhere the golden power, sun-like, filled the room.

NO! Would you condemn us to stay here, lifeless again?

The price is too high...

And then they were in the Enterprise Transporter Room.

"We're home! Thank God."

"It's not over yet, Bones. Spock - the bridge. Scotty - take us out of orbit, fast!" Kirk was at the intercom, then followed his First Officer.

"Er, welcome home, Doctor," said a somewhat bemused Kyle. "What happened to you?"

"Actually, I spent most of the time sleeping. You'd better ask the Captain of Mr. Spock."

"Who are - "

"On the bridge, which is where I'm going. Goodbye, Kyle."

One of these days, Kyle supposed, he would get used to his senior officers rushing around like crazy. Or was he the crazy one?

"Status, Mr. Spock?"

"We appear to be pulling away from orbit with no problems so far, Captain. However, two energy-entities are now pursuing us from the planet's surface." Everyone looked at the viewscreen. There behind the ship was an angry silver-red glow.

"Mr. Scott, I suggest we increase speed to Warp 3," Kirk ordered. "And pray." The glow was speeding up to envelop the ship.

"She's slowing, Captain."

"Increase to Warp 4."

"The ship is still slowing," said Spock in his calm, measured tones. "Our efforts appear ineffective."

And then they saw a green-gold glow coming out from the planet. The ship shuddered for a moment as it too closed over.

Then, amazingly, they were free. Behind them lay a seething mass of energy, falling rapidly back towards the planet.

"So it did what it said! Spock, what will happen to them?"

The Vulcan considered. "Judging from their previous behaviour, and what we have observed of their power, it is logical to assume they will destroy themselves. As they are composed of energy and partially dependent on each other, it will not be a quick process. They could remain locked in combat for many years."

"Er - welcome home, Captain, you too, Mr. Spock. I never had the chance to say it before."

"Thank you, Scotty, and for the prompt transporting. You were there when we needed you."

McCoy entered. "What have I missed? Are we safe?"

"Yes, Doctor. You seem to have acquired a propensity for getting the last word."

"Not quite. My God, have you two seen yourselves? In the excitement, McCoy and the rest of the bridge crew had only just got a real look at Kirk and Spock. Sickbay, while I check you over. The pair of you. Now!" McCoy's voice left no room for argument.

"Scotty, can you look after the bridge for a little while longer while I humour this overbearing medic?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Doctor, I wish to record the decay of the energy-entities..."

"Spock, you get that look in your eyes every time I mention sickbay. O.K., ten minutes - no more. You'd better be there..."

Kirk and McCoy finally entered the turbo-lift and finally relaxed. "Jim, that was rough."

"I'm not going to disagree with you about that, Bones. Do we really have to go through this sickbay bit?"

"Look at you!" McCoy snorted. "How did you get that way, Jim? The energy-entities were more into mental than physical manipulation, so - " He looked in wonder. "You and Spock? To each other?"

Kirk spoke very quietly. "They put him through pon farr again, Bones."

"Oh my God."

"I'd appreciate it if you didn't mention it to him. He's gone through enough today, for me, for us. No teasing, please?"

"Of course not. The rest?"

"Mainly relived memories, with nasty twists in them. They seemed to enjoy trying to drive us apart. Yours?"

"Just one...experience, very nasty. I'd rather not talk about it just yet, Jim."

Kirk nodded. "Still, I think we all learned something today. About ourselves and about each other."

"Do you think Spock will...profit by the lesson?"

"That's his decision, Bones. I stand...by whatever he wants."

It was just over ten minutes before Spock's arrival. McCoy had checked Kirk over and found that apart from a couple of strained muscles, he was fine. He had cleaned up and was sitting at McCoy's table with a drink when his First Officer entered. Spock had obviously stopped off at his quarters to change and apart from some facial markings looked his usual neat self.

"The energy-entities, Mr. Spock?"

"It appears to be as we expected, sir. Sensors show that they are trying to tear each other apart."

"Destruction. I'm afraid it's a concept they probably absorbed from us."

"They also absorbed...other things, Captain. The golden entity..."

"Ah, my favourite reluctant patient! On the bed." McCoy could not help but look smug. "You can take that look of aggrieved patience off your face, Spock. Do you think I enjoy recalibrating my instruments just for you?"

In fact the examination did not take long and all McCoy prescribed for them was rest and a glass of his Saurian brandy. All three sat down together.

"You are disgustingly healthy, Spock. You are also disgustingly logical."

"Why, thank you, Doctor."

"Shut up, you two." Kirk laughed. "Now I know I'm home. Spock, the golden one...when it came to help us, it must have known it was virtually committing suicide. And yet it willingly sacrificed itself for beings that were not even like it."

Spock considered for a long time. "Perhaps it absorbed concepts from us which it considered worth the sacrifice, Captain."

"Yes, good old-fashioned Human - " McCoy halted, looking at Kirk and then at Spock. "I - er - just remembered something I have to see Nurse Chapel about. Help yourselves to brandy, gentlemen." He went out.

"A remarkable creature, Spock."

"Yes. Very intelligent. Its death was a waste. Had there been some other way of contact..." When he was sure McCoy was out of earshot, he said very quietly, "Jim. Thank you for today. I do not really deserve to remain as your First Officer after what I did." He seemed to be regarding the bottom of his glass with remarkable interest. "Should you wish to prefer charges of striking a superior officer..."

"Yes, I could. And you'd just stand and take it, wouldn't you?" Kirk looked at Spock with a strange mixture of affection and exasperation. "Don't you know, you stubborn Vulcan, that I could no more put you on a charge than... I know about your humility, Spock, but at times - ! You did a remarkable thing today, you know. You fought them back and you broke out of their control. Can't you just accept that, after today, without questioning it? And my gratitude?"

"If that is what you wish, Jim. After today... I believe there is much I can accept."

They looked at each other. In some ways it was like a new beginning. Today, both had suffered. But they had also seen the full measure of each other. Kirk had seen the full sum of Spock's loyalty, and any doubts that had previously remained that what Spock felt for him was only regard or respect, all that he could expect from a Vulcan, had vanished. He had seen today that it was, in fact, love.

Spock raised his glass. "Live long and prosper, Jim."

Kirk did the same and a slow smile spread over his face. "Peace and long life, Spock."

They knew without saying that there were now no bars to Spock's accepting his friendship. From today there would be total trust, complete faith in each other. Not only the aliens had tested them today. In the words of the golden entity, each silently said to the other, 'You have not been found wanting.'

In the years to come, the thing they had would grow with a richness and fullness that would last them through any dangers they had to face, and for the rest of their lives.
