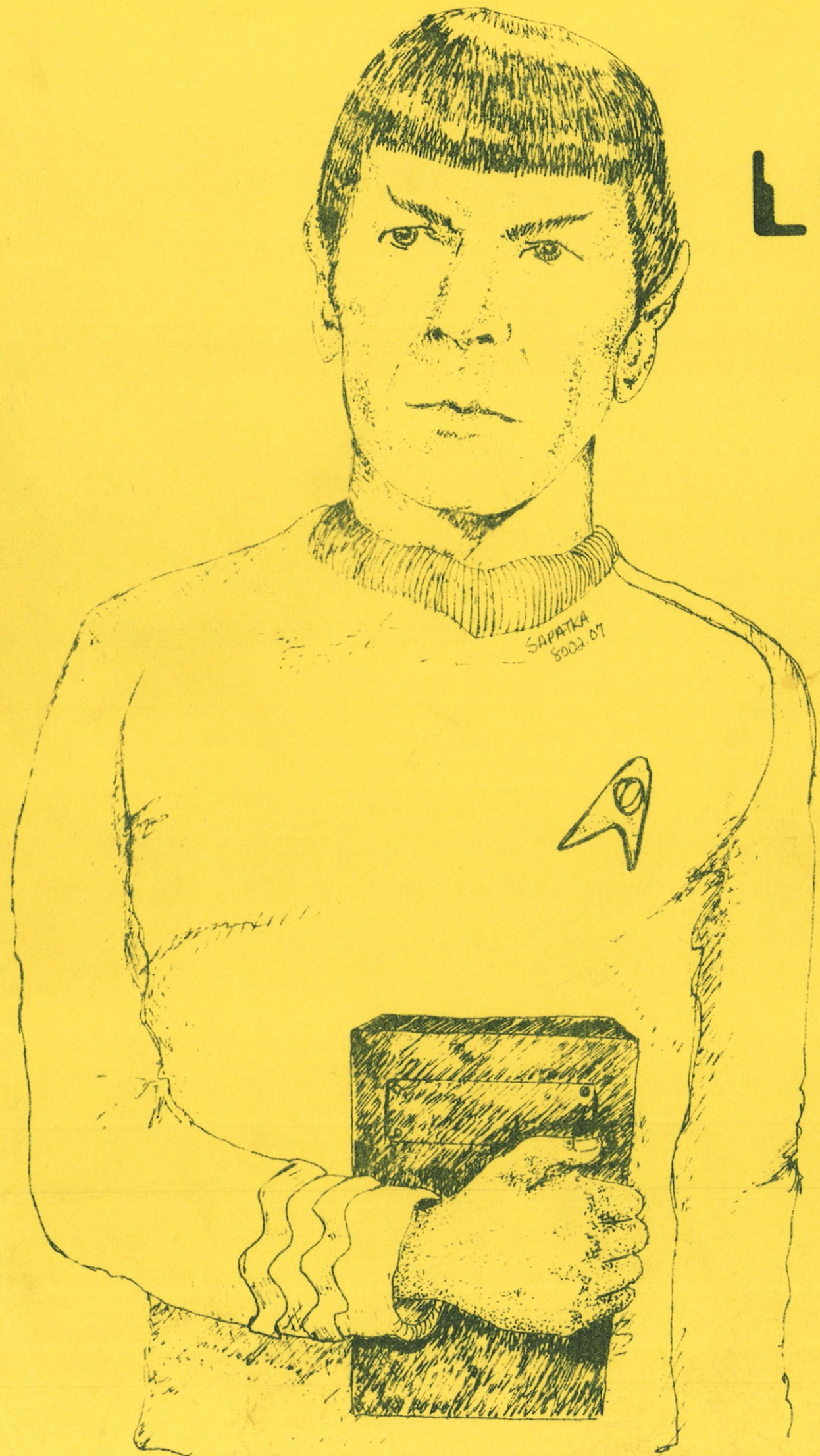




LOG ENTRIES

38

a *STAR TREK*
fanzine

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A STAG publication.

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Log Entries 38, price £1.10 inside the U.K., is put out by the STAR TREK
 Action Group and is available from

Sheila Clark, 6 Craigmill Cottages, Strathmartine, by Dundee, Scotland.

Foreign rates - U.S. airmail \$5.50 (£2.50); Australia airmail, £2.75;
 Europe and all countries surface, £1.50 (\$3.50 U.S.) If you pay by dollar
 cheque/bank draft please add \$1.00 per total order to cover bank charges.

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Hello, everyone, and welcome to Log Entries 38. We were checking back on the number of zines we've put out recently, and in total it's now more than fifty - I would say that that makes us just about the most prolific source of zines there is, even though we rarely have more than twenty titles in print at any given time. No wonder I keep losing count of which Log Entries we're currently working on - I accidentally got two cover stencils cut, recently, with the same number - my heart-felt thanks to Allison Rooney, who manfully stencilled the correct number onto 400 covers for us.

Unfortunately, nobody has sent in an entry for the competition I announced in LE 30 - however, if anyone is still working on a story from that idea, I'll be glad to consider it at any time.

Indeed, we have in this issue a story - Home Sweet Home? - that was originally begun as an entry for a N/L competition, months ago, for a story in which Kirk was faced with an impossible choice. We knew when we set it that it was a very difficult subject, and it seems that most of you thought so too; at any rate, the entries that came in at the time were all very short and mostly based on jokes. Josie has finally managed to come up with an excellent story.

We also have one of the runners-up in a previous N/L competition, the one for a story explaining why Spock went back to Vulcan, as well as the winning story for one studying McCoy's reaction to being 'drafted'.

We have a lot of rather short stories this time - more than I'd intended, in fact, and the final story (A Day in the Life of...) was originally meant for inclusion in LE 39 - I had to push it forward an issue because so many of the other stories turned out to take up fewer pages than I'd expected. Different typeface on different typewriters...

At this point, I'd like to thank my little band of collators - we couldn't manage without them. They visit me on Tuesdays and uncomplainingly spend time most weeks gathering up sheet after sheet of paper... One of them even bought herself a car so that she could get out more easily! Thanks a lot, girls. We appreciate your help very much.

Non-members of STAG can get information on zines in print, and on forthcoming zines, by sending a SAE (foreign, addressed envelope and 2 IRCs) to

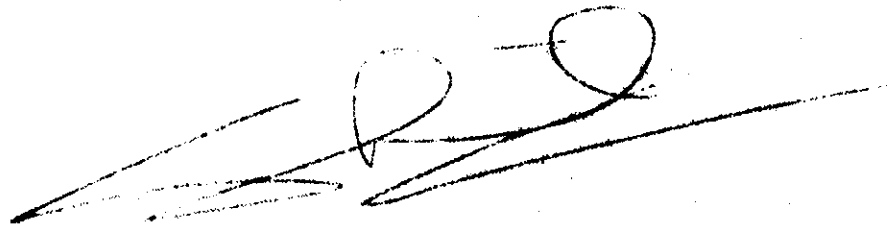
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We put out a new sales list every two months, and there are usually two new zines on each.

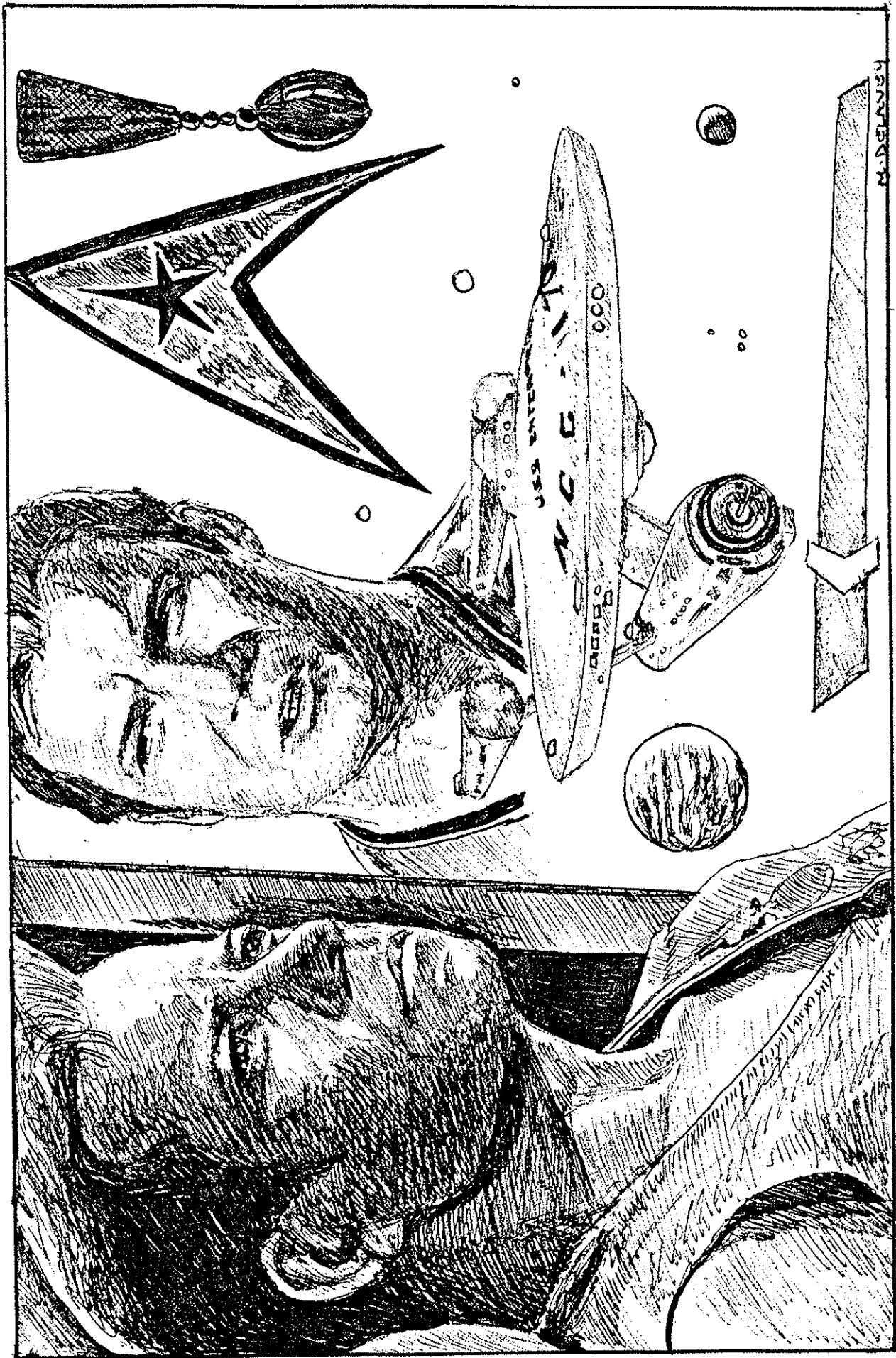
I hope you enjoy the stories in this issue as much as I did.

Peace,

October 1980



P.S. - As postage costs are going up shortly, the price given on the contents page is only a guide.



THE ENCOUNTER by L. Chapple

The picture on the main viewscreen was at once both explicit and mysterious. The Enterprise had entered a small planetary system on a routine mapping mission. All had gone smoothly until they had approached the third planet out from the sun, at which point an alien vessel had appeared - seemingly from nowhere - and had situated itself directly in their path. Evasive manoeuvres had proved ineffective, although it was soon noted that the vessel made no attempt to follow them if they reversed course; it simply refused to allow them to continue on their way to the third planet.

Finally convinced that he wasn't going to be able to dodge it, and having been told - for the fifth time - by Uhura that it was not responding to hailing frequencies, Kirk sat glumly back in his command chair and tried to think of something new to try. It was at that moment that Spock decided to drop his bombshell.

"Captain, we are being scanned."

Kirk looked over to his first officer with a mixture of concern and interest. The Vulcan hastened to reassure him.

"No hostile moves, sir, merely a standard sensor sweep. It does, however, seem to have a far greater field density than ours, which enables it to cope with our deflector shields without too much trouble."

He was able to go no further with his report as all activity on the bridge was suspended due to the wash of static that suddenly crashed over the bridge speakers. Uhura made a startled movement towards her board, then turned to gaze apologetically at Kirk.

"Sorry, Captain, I left the bypass circuit on by mistake."

The communications officer moved to switch off the offending circuit, but before she could do so, the speakers sprang into life again. This time, however, it was no stray burst of static that was heard; instead it was a cool, clear, soft and unmistakeably feminine voice that spoke, a voice with a strange echo as though two identical people were speaking at the same time.

"Unidentified starship. You have been scanned and recognised to be a craft from a race other than the ones already on our record tapes. You will note that you are now entering the immediate space of the planetary body designated as Yirredelos. This planet has been declared off-limits to all beings save those that the Khnumm High Council have cleared. Any attempt to proceed beyond this point will result in automatic defence procedures being initiated."

Dead silence greeted this startling message, and it was several minutes before Kirk could gather his scattered wits together. He glanced towards Uhura once more, then turned his attention back to the screen. The alien craft hung lazily, its smooth lines hinting at efficiency and power.

"Try hailing frequencies again, Lieutenant."

"Aye, sir... Sir, I have a response!"

Without being asked, she switched over to the bridge speakers and once again the clear, echoing voice was heard.

"Please state the reason for this communication."

"Ah, this is Captain James T. Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise. We are on a survey mission on behalf of the United Federation of planets and desire contact with the Khnumm High Council. Could you please assist us?"

There was no reply for several minutes, but just as Kirk was about to press further the voice returned.

"I am not programmed to deal with alien contact. I have instructions however, which state that I am to direct any peaceful alien contactees to the star Ishkiel, which lies 3.7 light-years away from this system to the Galactic West of this sun. Is this information sufficient for your needs?"

Kirk shot a quick look over to Spock who was reading a computer print-out. The small nod that he received was all he needed. He signalled Uhura to re-open communications.

"Thank you, yes. We will inform our superiors of this new knowledge and proceed to contact the Khnumn. Can you bring our existence to the attention of the High Council?"

Again there was the delay, but when the speakers sprang into life again, it was a totally different voice that answered - a rich bass voice which seemed to convey authority and compassion at the same time.

"We already know of your existence, Captain Kirk. The High Council will await your arrival at the star Ishkiel."

At that, the communications link went dead, and despite the best efforts of Uhura, they were unable to raise either the original voice or the sudden strange one. Kirk sat back and considered his options and was pleasantly surprised to find that he still had any; usually the appearance of an alien artifact programmed to keep intruders out meant a great deal of trouble. It seemed that this time was going to be different. He came to his decision.

"Mr. Chekov, plot a course for the star Ishkiel - Mr. Spock will supply you with any details you require. Mr. Sulu, as soon as the course is ready, ahead warp factor five."

The star Ishkiel proved to be a small G-type yellow dwarf, with three planets circling it. One was a barren, airless lump of rock, the second a gas giant roughly the size of Sol VII, but the third... Kirk had rarely seen such a lovely world, and he'd had quite a bit of experience. This, he thought, must be what Earth looked like before Man started altering everything in sight.

The dazzling white clouds contrasted with the sapphire of the seas and the emerald of the land. It took him a while to realise that Spock had spoken - he was definitely homesick.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Spock. Would you mind repeating that last?"

"Certainly, Captain. Sensors show no sign of intelligent life on the planet below. There are no settlements, power sources or agricultural regions. This is merely wilderness."

"No intelligent life? But there has to be, Spock! We were directed to this star and this is the only life-supporting planet in the system."

There was a deep hum and a small spot of light appeared out of nowhere and hovered just in front of Kirk's face.

"Correction. It is one of two life-supporting planets in this system. If you would care to return to the gas giant, Captain Kirk, perhaps we can get on with the business of getting to know one another."

Three weeks later Kirk watched the image of Ishkiel recede into the distance. He was feeling physically and mentally exhausted and knew he was showing it, so it was with small surprise that he turned to see McCoy enter the bridge.

"I suppose Spock's been telling tales on me again, Doctor?"

McCoy snorted a little crustily, but couldn't quite manage to stop the grin that eventually fought its way onto his face.

"After the examination I just put him through I suppose he wanted to get even with someone and you were as good a victim as any. Now be a good Captain and let someone else have the con while I get you down to Sickbay to check on whether all of you got back from that godforsaken planet."

Laughing a little at McCoy's tactics, Kirk told Uhura that she had the con

and followed the doctor into the turbolift. Once they were out of sight of the crew, McCoy lost some of his bantering attitude and gazed curiously at his friend.

"What was it like down on that planet, Jim? Spock won't admit it but whatever he went through has really exhausted him. He even submitted to a physical without an argument!"

Kirk grinned a little at McCoy's mock outrage, then sobered as he thought back to his recent sojourn on Khnumx.

"It was an eerie world, Bones, but a beautiful one. The Khnumn technicians provided us with a kind of capsule that let us move about like the natives, but the gravity was still a strain. They look like eels with fringes, but without eyes or mouths. Evolution failed to provide them with manipulatory digits so they turned instead to their minds and the power locked inside that. Do you know, Bones, that one time I watched a young Khnumn shape molten metal into the required shape and then cool it? And she'd heated it before that in order to make it more adaptable; all with the power of the mind.

They haven't been in space for long, but they're learning fast. It seems that they discovered a semi-intelligent life-form on that last planet we were approaching, so they built a defence computer and shoved it into orbit while they figured out what they should do about contacting the primitives. They're a very nice people, Bones, and not at all stuffy. Can you imagine what would have happened if I'd made the same mistake with some influential Federation Council that I made with them? It would have been impossible to deal with them for at least a week. But all the Khnumn did was laugh!"

"Seems to me that the Federation bigwigs should take a leaf out of Khnum's book. But knowing Starfleet, it won't be long before every Khnumn diplomat is as full of himself as his alien associates."

"Bones, it saddens me that you are such a cynic."

"Is that so, Captain? Well, if you wouldn't mind sliding towards my diagnostic bed with the same ease you exhibit sliding towards the door, then we can have a nice chat about my cynicism while I check if you're fit for duty."

"Bones, you're a hard man."

"The bed's nice and soft. On you get, Captain..."

+++++

AFTER V'GER by Katy Deery

Tired pressures of the mind,
that now reveal a softly whispered dream,
that tear away veneers that must hold strong,
and play doubts upon your very sanity,
you who only see things as they seem
must question that placed firmly in reality;
for no longer is it placed firmly in its scheme.
And yet this hand held tightly in your grasp
can guide you through the alleyways so dark;
eyes that once looked upon landscapes
emotionless and grey
can see colours, now, through this vital spark.
You now accept nature's intent for you,
for in this simple feeling you know is real,
this hand held tightly in your grasp, at last
ends the nightmare that has taught you
how to feel.

+++++

"IN SIMPLER LANGUAGE, CAPTAIN. SIR. THEY DRAFTED ME."by P.M. Andrews.

Having successfully dealt with V'ger and thus saved Earth from imminent destruction, Kirk felt completely at home in the command chair. The outcome had been pleasing; Spock had originally arrived on board, determined to exorcise his Human half completely, but had come to accept and return Human friendship unashamedly; Dr. Leonard McCoy, 'Bones' as he was known to Kirk, was in charge of the ship's medical facilities, and Admiral James T. Kirk himself had command of the Enterprise. Steepling his hands in front of him, Kirk mused that it was like being welcomed to one big, happy family after a long departure. He had now shrugged off the past two and a bit years; Bones had officially logged him as captain of the Enterprise and he felt as sharp as he had been on his former voyages. The question was, could everyone else do the same? With the Enterprise heading out into deeper space, he decided that it was time to celebrate the occasion.

"Bones, Mr. Spock," he said, turning towards them. "Perhaps you would care to join me in my cabin - now?"

Spock seemed to have divined what was in the Captain's mind. Would the Vulcan indulge himself in a celebratory drink? Very rarely did he touch alcohol.

"Thank you. I should like to finish recording my observations on V'ger, Captain, but I will join you in twenty minutes' time, should that be convenient with you."

Kirk grinned, nodding his assent. "Well, Bones?"

McCoy seemed a little hesitant, rather like an excitable, nervous puppy. "I'd love to, Jim, but I've got a very urgent interstellar letter to write. Give me twenty minutes, too."

"Okay, Bones." Kirk was puzzled. McCoy desperate to write a letter? He noticed, too, how the Doctor warped out of the bridge to his quarters.

As the door closed behind him, McCoy flopped to the chair in front of his desk. What should he say? What did one say under the circumstances? How did one begin? Dictate on tape? No, he could not trust the steadiness of his voice. Spoken words betrayed feelings, might reveal too much of his emotional turmoil. It would have to be written; at least that would afford him greater authority, giving him a chance to explain without violating his integrity and dignity, and consequently making a fool of himself. McCoy fished out everything necessary for his task, then sat back, preparing to compose his thoughts. So much had happened in some ways, and yet so little in others. He filled in the conventionalities of the letter, then paused for thought. Normally he was vociferous on every occasion, but no words seemed to force their way out, no constructive thoughts emerged, except feelings of pain, anger, regret and happiness; the Doctor found himself half drowning in a sea of weltering emotions. Resolutely, he put pen to paper, and after much struggling broke through his inarticulateness to write:

"My dear, I hope you will understand what I am about to write. There was not time for explanations and, once again, it seems as if I've run out on you, but, as you will see, I took your advice. I think you know why. You were quite right. I hope you will not be too upset or angry that I could not properly say goodbye. You filled my life with much pleasure and I have many happy memories over the past months..."

The memories suddenly overwhelmed his mind. He drifted back into the past...

... His decision to resign from Starfleet over Kirk's appointment as Admiral had been made in anger, not because he felt jealous; his protest, despite

creating more than just a few ripples in the lake of Starfleet's Admiralty, had been dispassionately received, practically ignored - unjustly so, since McCoy had grown to know Kirk almost empathetically over the years, partly out of his duty as ship's Doctor, partly also out of genuine friendship. Kirk had always turned to Bones for advice, and their friendship was deep. It had been out of his medical duties that McCoy had dared protest. He knew Kirk and he knew that promotion was, psychologically speaking, a retrograde step. When Starfleet had overridden his appeal, McCoy felt his position as Chief Medical Officer had been compromised. He resigned.

Once the sheer emotion of it all had died down, the doctor had to find some new occupation in life. It shouldn't have been difficult; his breadth of experience and knowledge would have made him the envy of most doctors. Private practice was one possibility. That had been his work when his marriage had gone wrong. After his divorce, McCoy had decided to escape from his failure and unhappiness by joining Starfleet's Medical Section, and he had studied hard to achieve just that. Private practice would have been extremely lucrative for a man of McCoy's talents but he rejected it on the grounds that it might also lack the stimulation he had grown to love; although he enjoyed dealing with his own kind, there was a special fascination in coping with aliens.

Other tempting offers of jobs had come his way, companies offering ludicrously large sums of money for his experience. It had been difficult to choose which of these offers would satisfy him intellectually and emotionally, rather than financially, and McCoy had been very well aware of the psychological readjustment which would have to be overcome now that he was a free 'civilian' on terra firma rather than a Starfleet surgeon freewheeling around deep space. He delayed making a decision for as long as he could until he had acclimatised himself to his new existence, travelling around on a sort of slightly extended vacation.

It had been at that time that a new offer had come along. It was not as well paid as the others, but it would allow him to live comfortably, and there were personal memories to encourage him to take it.

Experience had taught McCoy to be cautious but he felt that he had now made a reasonable readjustment to life. Unlike his analysis of Kirk's situation, in which he knew himself to be correct, it was more difficult, almost impossible, to be as objective about himself but he finally made his decision and took the job as Medical Director of a programme researching application of Fabrini medicine among surface dwellers, because it offered him the challenge of almost pioneering a different area of the universe; a remote backwater on Earth. At the interview, he had been the logical choice on account of his knowledge and experience. The former he had diligently upread prior to the occasion, although there had been little to digest since he had always made a professional point of updating his knowledge. In space, the latter made him valuable; but more precious still was his personal knowledge of Fabrini medical technique. So the job was his.

McCoy shuttled out to the backwater, isolated from the hustle and bustle of the metropolis like a desert in humanity, which suited the doctor for he still felt himself to be a loner, at least for the present. As he had been given carte blanche to inaugurate the programme, the next few weeks kept him extremely busy, setting up equipment, obtaining supplies and designing schedules of work. At the end of them McCoy was delighted at the prospect of actually getting to grips with the research side. Never had he been one for red tape and decorum. His work had very often been his life and yet it neither narrowed his outlook on his fellow human beings nor destroyed the spark of humanity that was shrouded beneath his cynical, gruff exterior.

It seemed strange not wearing Starfleet uniform; worksuit and boots were more practical, he had to admit, especially when he was away testing out medicines on various volunteers in assorted trial locations. One night as McCoy settled down in his quarters for the evening, he realised how tiring the establishment of the programme had been. He had been bustling around like a worker ant

for over three months. The culmination of it all was the official opening ceremony in a week's time but the research teams and experiments were already under way. McCoy's personal project was to collect, analyse and interpret data on the Kalandan Organism, a disease which was one hundred percent fatal, still incurable and even untreatable, and using Fabrini techniques to seek for some remedy. With great relish, indeed, did he anticipate launching this venture.

He went to have a wash. The mirror caught his reflection. McCoy paused, studying his face as he washed; a completely new life, a new job, new challenges... Did he need anything else? Little nagging doubts entered his mind. It would have been nice to share this with Jim, Scotty and the others. He recollected evening drinks with them, leisurely talking about the latest narrowly averted incident involving the Enterprise, or even getting Sulu to help him in the field of medical botany. His heart warmed to these memories and for a fleeting second he imagined himself and his friends on board the Enterprise. Then the realistic side of his personality, the crabby stubbornness that hid the pain in his life, shuttered out the image. He had sworn that he would never return to Starfleet. Briefly recollecting his unhappy marriage, he realised that he had carved out a new life for himself after its trauma and he had to admit that he'd been successful. The divorce had been his only big failure, his thorn in the flesh, but otherwise he couldn't complain, so if he'd done it once, he could do it again.

"Forget the past - think of the future," he mumbled to the mirror. It was a good philosophy. McCoy beamed aboard the Enterprise, months later, wearing a beard. It had grown as a result of his immersion in his work, yet, in a way, it symbolised his new life. Yes, the beard and worksuit image seemed more appropriate at that time.

... In the seclusion of his cabin, McCoy concentrated his thought on the opening ceremony...

... It was a big moment in his life. He even dressed up for the occasion. Some bigwig from somewhere was coming to declare the Centre officially open and although he couldn't remember the names, it was his duty to show this V.I.P. round. McCoy snorted in disapproval as he paid extra attention to his dress that morning. This was going to be the biggest red-tape bore of his life, as well - probably...

... In retrospect the Doctor grinned wryly as he remembered the outcome...

... There weren't exactly crowds gathered to mark the occasion. McCoy had been standing on the steps to the Centre, waiting with a small party of officials, nervous and prickly at having to waste time on this when he could have been in the laboratory or poring over some research reports. An elaborate shuttle crew up, out of which stepped a gentleman, the Chairman of the Sponsors for the Centre, and a lady. A lady, incredibly beautiful, with lustrous black hair piled up in loops, tall, slim, utterly feminine, who glided gracefully towards him.

Mr. Riches, the Chairman, introduced the Doctor with a flourish of his hand. "This is our Chief Director, Dr. Leonard McCoy, late of the U.S.S. Enterprise."

The lady's eyes flickered at the mention of the names. McCoy had reached forward to shake her hand; instead, he kissed it.

"I'm very honoured to meet you, ma'am," he said, staring directly at the delightful face in front of him.

He didn't remember much about the guided tour round the Centre; his thoughts were in the past, but he was lucky enough afterwards to be able to take the lady out to dinner before she had to return home.

After the meal they had gone back to his quarters for coffee. McCoy escorted the lady to the most comfortable chair and then embraced her.

"Natira!" He kissed her.

"My McCoy!" she replied.

They had spent the hour left of Natira's visit reminiscing. McCoy felt the warmth of her affection and wondered whether he had made a mistake in accepting this job; he too was overjoyed, overwhelmed at their meeting, but he could not resign so soon. He had not seen her since the people of Yonada had landed on the Land of the Promise and the Enterprise had been present at the disembarkation. There was much to talk about. Natira was glad that her McCoy was involved with the Centre because her people were descended from the Fabrini and the doctor had been one of the men who had saved them from disaster. Her people would be delighted. The hour sped by until Natira had to leave.

"Since you left I still have had no husband. Will my McCoy not come back with me?" she had asked at one point.

McCoy struggled; he almost ached to go back with her but they had loved when he was seriously ill, and although he thought he still loved her, the circumstances were different - he couldn't be sure that he loved her for the right reasons. He explained about his new job, his new responsibilities.

"When I was dying on Yonada," he replied, "things were black. You gave me reason to live. You gave me a dream, to seek a cure for myself, for everybody."

The younger Natira might have cried, but the older one appreciated the element of truth in his statement and perceived the thoughts that were behind it. She put a finger on his lips.

"And so you did, McCoy. You still dream; this Centre is only a part of it. I know, I understand. Always shall I think of my dear McCoy," she added, kissing him.

McCoy carefully took her hand, kissed it. "I, too, will always love you, Natira," and left his hand outstretched as she drew away from him.

This meeting shook McCoy more than he cared to admit, not so much because it reminded him of his loss, which, naturally, it did, but because Natira had once again filled him to the very quick of his being with confidence and hope. In a strange way, too, it had evoked memories of the Enterprise; Kirk's open anguish when McCoy told him that the ship's Chief Medical Officer had xenopolycythemia; Chapel's hands shaking as she had administered the Fabrini antidote; Spock's impassive face radiating joy as he read the display read-out (purely out of logical relief that the ship's doctor would not need to be replaced by a possibly less efficient organism); the way Spock and he had worked on the Fabrini tapes afterwards. Great Jupiter! How could he go getting sentimental about a logical creature like Spock! McCoy remembered how on that note he had resolved to go to bed.

McCoy was quite happy, satisfied in his work, although results were painfully slow. Only now and again did recollections of the Enterprise's crew flicker through to disturb him and these were quickly blurred in the flurry of his work. He got on well with the research teams and he led a quiet, dignified sort of social life, but still felt something of a recluse. There was still some undefinable thing missing from the quality of his life; something minor, yet sufficient to make his life sober, less dynamic but nonetheless pleasant enough, like flat lemonade. It was in the stupid, little idiosyncracies of his former crewmates; gone were the Vulcan's pointed ears, uplifted eyebrow, the constant arguments he had had with Spock; Uhura's sense of humour: he even missed not being called 'Bones' any more. Why was it that these trivial details seemed ridiculously important? McCoy had snorted them away. - Just shows how much I was due for a change! when he came to the conclusion that perhaps he had become a programmed creature of habit...

... "Brother," chuckled the Enterprise's Chief Medical Officer as his thoughts encompassed the biggest shock of his non-Starfleet life, "little did you know!"

... McCoy had been in his job for over a year when the major change walked into his world, and added another dimension to his existence. With the programme of research being extended, it became necessary to expand the personnel working

in the Centre. McCoy was not personally involved in the decision-making so he paid little attention to its progress. In fact, the new shift of extra workers included extra hands for the sickbay in the Centre; technicians, doctors and nurses. It was one such nurse who caused this change.

McCoy's colleague, Dr. Neilson, had been working with some computer controlled equipment for body scans and lasersurgery when the whole thing had malfunctioned, bursting into flames and emitting dangerous gamma rays. Neilson was knocked unconscious, McCoy blown clear of any danger. Nobody else was present at the time. Considerably shaken, but not unduly hurt by the blast, McCoy, choking, struggled to find and then drag Neilson's body out through the fire to safety, then he collapsed, exhausted, into the arms of some helpers.

When McCoy woke up he was in the Centre's sickbay, bandaged up rather like an Egyptian mummy. His eyes didn't seem to be focusing properly - everything was a sort of grey, then he realised that there were bandages over his eyes. Was he blind? Panic waved over him. Fingers of fear insidiously crept through his body. What would happen to his career? The bandages on his fingers disclosed no further clues, so he tried to sit up, but failed to accomplish that. Still struggling, he hollered,

"What in Heaven's name is happening here? Where is everyone?"

A young nurse heard him yelling and ran into his room. "Easy, sir - you must rest," she soothed.

"Rest? How can I rest? My eyes - what's happened to them? What's my condition? Where's the doctor? How's Dr. Neilson?..." The nurse was bombarded by a barrage of questions as she tried to pacify the Doctor's emotional outburst. "Don't pussyfoot with me, Nurse - I'm not a typical patient to be kept quiet at all costs, I'm Dr. Leonard McCoy!"

Don't I know it! thought the nurse, but she refrained from voicing the thought. "All right, sir, if you'll be quiet and rest, I'll answer your questions."

McCoy obeyed without further protest.

"Your eyes received some damage during the accident, but they should be all right, providing you rest - however, I should warn you that...that there is a possibility of partial blindness. As to your condition, well... You have some burns which are healing quite well under the circumstances - you were exposed to radiation, you know. Still, judging from that commotion, I would say that you're tough enough to pull through, providing you - "

"Rest, I know," interrupted the patient.

"No - obey instructions," she corrected.

"Same thing," observed the Doctor, gruffly.

"Well, if it helps, Dr. Neilson is alive," she added. "He should just about make it."

"Yes, but how exactly is..."

The nurse pulled out an air-hypo and gave McCoy a strong dose of sedative which made him lose all interest in the proceedings.

McCoy didn't remember a great deal about the early weeks in sickbay - they were a confusing mixture of grey unconsciousness and cloudy consciousness punctuated, almost too frequently it seemed to him, with injections - hyronalin, sedatives, analgesics, but the outcome was a successful return to work with all systems go. To the nurse who looked after McCoy, there was plenty to remember; he wasn't exactly a model patient. He expected cures to be achieved overnight, was eager to return to his research, fretful over the injuries to his eyes in case they should ruin his career, and fussed over this and that, but he did at least leave the treatment to the other doctors - reluctantly.

After he had returned to work, the same nurse used to visit him when she could. In fact McCoy came to treat her as one of the family; in a paternalistic sort of way he grew very fond of her, although the two of them were quite independent of each other. The doctor found this satisfying but difficult to control to avoid interfering in her life. At first he had tried to exorcise his father-like concern, once he had overcome the shock of it. He had wanted to help her as much as he could. He tried to analyse his motives. What was he compensating for? His marriage? McCoy began to feel the needs of a father, but was too proud to allow himself the indignity of living his life through her; there had already been too much pain in his life for that. Besides, their initial meetings had been very stormy affairs and even now there were upsets; both had to try to understand and to learn to trust each other, even a little. It was very difficult and would take time - however, there were some signs of progress. Originally the nurse had felt obliged to keep an eye on the doctor; now she visited him less out of compassion, more out of interest. McCoy had forced himself to come to terms with the situation by keeping himself very much on the sidelines, lest he should destroy the tentative friendship that had been developing. Then events had intervened.

It had been a little over two years since McCoy had taken that job when he received an important message from Admiral Nogura. Without a chance of refusal, Nogura had reactivated his commission to the rank of Commander and Chief Medical Officer on board the refitted Enterprise...

... McCoy recollected his feelings of indignation, outrage at being manhandled in this way, but then he reflected that Starfleet had manipulated Jim Kirk as well, so what made his case an exception? The message stated that he was to report personally to Nogura before being transported to the ship.

McCoy felt a tingle of excitement at the thought of beaming aboard his previous home, but then he told himself not to be stupid; the Enterprise had been refurbished and the crew was most certainly going to be unfamiliar - it wouldn't be the same as before. His enthusiasm dampened. The reserve activation clause, he knew, was little more than a polite request - the days of drafting for Starfleet were over. He could refuse - even felt like refusing. He was master of his own life now, not some desk-pusher in Federation Headquarters. Yet old memories and the fact that Nogura clearly wanted to see him had aroused his curiosity. On the other hand, the nurse was one reason for remaining at the Centre.

He told her about the message instantly, along with his doubts and anger. To his surprise she listened sympathetically and with insight, understanding clearly that he was subconsciously preparing to accept, although to McCoy that was the very last thought in his mind at that time. She knew that even this kind of work did not stretch the Doctor's ability enough. So she persuaded him not to ignore the message, but to go, to at least satisfy his curiosity, since Starfleet obviously considered that he alone out of all their medical staff was suitable for whatever plan they had, and also he could let off steam to Nogura about the handling of the matter...

McCoy's thoughts drifted back to the interview with Nogura...

... Really he should have tidied himself up a bit. Instead, he had stormed in, complete with beard and worksuit, even boots, as a protest, and had phasers and photon torpedoes ready locked onto target. In no uncertain terms did he tell Nogura how he felt about the request. The oriental Admiral smiled inwardly at McCoy's insubordination but weathered it with implacable charm and patience, motioning the irate doctor to a seat. Then he had disclosed a few details about an emergency and insisted that the doctor was the man for the job. McCoy still remained sceptical but the Admiral now played his trump.

"Come, now, Doctor, you are intrigued, admit it. Besides, I can guarantee that you'll be at home there. Quite a few of the old crew are on board and the Captain is an acquaintance of yours!"

"Captain?" echoed McCoy.

Nogura smiled. "Yes, James Kirk." He looked at the doctor then added casually, "I believe you were very good friends."

McCoy gulped. "Yes...yes..." He was completely disarmed at this revelation.

Nogura was quick to push home his advantage. "And you would have the advantage of working alongside your old colleague, Christine Chapel." McCoy nodded slowly. "You can always resign your commission after this assignment if you still feel doubtful about it. We can arrange for your present job to be held open." McCoy was still nodding. Nogura continued, "Good. Well then, Doctor, as there isn't time to get you kitted out now..." He paused, surveying McCoy's beard with disapproval, "We'll see about dress regulations when you have been beamed up. You'll have to leave right away if you are to catch the Enterprise in time."

Before McCoy knew it he was being shuttled away. He had bribed the young driver to delay his departure so that he could leave a very hasty message at the Centre for the nurse, and said that he would explain at the first opportunity...

... With his thoughts now exhausted, McCoy found the inner calm to write the rest of his letter; the words began to flow. At last it was finished. The doctor sighed. The buzzer at his door announced a visitor.

"Come!" ordered the medic. Kirk, his long-time friend, entered and saw the letter.

"What's this, Bones - your resignation?" he joked.

McCoy looked at him carefully. "Well, no, Jim," he said slowly as the last memory floated through his mind...

... Before he had left for Nogura's office, the nurse had looked at him and said almost casually, "If you were to go, I guess I might just miss you a bit, but if it's right for you to go, you must do it. Okay?"

McCoy had stared at her. The dividing line between pain and happiness was wafer thin. "Okay." Then, realising that there was a small bond between them, more than he had ever allowed himself to hope for, he had lightly kissed her and left...

... The doctor hesitated again. "Well, no, Jim." Then, carefully picking up the letter, "It's to my daughter Joanna. You see... For eight or nine months I guess I started to learn just a little of what it was to be a father."

Kirk nodded. So that was why McCoy had appeared angry at being beamed back. "I'm glad, Bones," he said, clapping him on the back. "There's a dispatch due shortly," he said as they left the cabin to head for their celebration.

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This story has drawn information from the following Star Trek books and I gratefully wish to acknowledge them:

G. Roddenberry: Star Trek - The Motion Picture

Starfleet Medical Reference Manual

S. Whitfield & G. Roddenberry: The Making of Star Trek

J. Blish: Star Trek 8 (Rik Vollaerts: For the World is Hollow and I Have Touched the Sky)

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Chekov: I've borrowed Scotty's bagpipes.

Sulu: But you can't play them.

Chekov: Neither can he while I've got them.

+++++

MUDD AGAIN! by Sandie Cowden

Harry Mudd, what have you to say?
 What have you been up to today?
 Is that how you greet
 The best of Star Fleet?
 In powerful battle array?

Where did you get hold of that ship?
 The name of the place you'll let slip.
 Or a phaser you'll find
 Aimed at your behind -
 And you'll be away for a trip!

Now Jim-lad, don't yell in that way.
 There's a reason for all you survey;
 We're all pirates bold,
 With a full cargo hold -
 But it's Klingons we're robbin' today!

The ship - well it's Klingon too,
 And so is the rest of the crew.
 The truth for to tell,
 I'm stuck in this hell,
 And I'd rather be on board with you!

It started as I was quite broke,
 And pirates are nice kind of folk.
 But the boss is a brute
 When sharing the loot -
 My cut's nothing more than a joke!

I'll be a good lad if you say
 I can come aboard right away.
 Just beam me over
 An' I'll be in clover,
 But hurry, I've not got all day!

Now, Harry, if this is a trap,
 You'll find yourself having a nap,
 With a jaw-ache that big,
 On the floor of the brig -
 And your face like a great contour map!

Just one thing before you embark -
 Where's the crew of that old Klingon ark?
 You say they are there,
 But just tell us where?
 Are they hidden away in the dark?

Why Captain, they're all with their hoard,
 Down where the cargo is stored.
 The reason you see,
 Why they're after me -
 I transported tribbles aboard.

You see now why I want away?
 As soon as ever you say.
 With them on the loose
 Their phasers in use -
 There'll be tribble for me if I stay!

Harry Mudd, will you never mend?
 Is every law made just to bend?
 We'll take you again
 Right to Starbase Ten -
 And let's see your roguery end?

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NEGATIVE IMAGE by Vivian Young

An Alternate Universe story.

"To all mankind - may we never find space so vast, planets so cold, heart and mind so empty, that we cannot fill them with love and warmth." -
Dagger of the Mind.

Captain James T. Kirk of the Federation Command Ship Enterprise regarded his reflection with satisfaction. His looks, handsome by any standards, would have been even more striking had his face contained any hint of warmth or compassion, but its firm contours were harsh and unyielding, and the hazel eyes which gazed back at him from the mirror were cold and expressionless.

Easing a finger round the collar of a closely fitting green uniform, he settled the narrow belt on his hips and passed a hand over his gold-brown hair, smoothing it into place. Satisfied with his appearance at last, he left his quarters and made for the bridge.

"Report, Mr. Spock!" he snapped curtly as he stepped from the lift.

"The attack has been successfully completed, sir," came the swift reply from his First Officer, although there was a trace of indefinable emotion in the calm voice. "Our sister ships have now left orbit, and the surviving Relan ships have surrendered," he continued. "Four of their craft are totally destroyed, a further three have self-destructed. Our annexation of the planet would now appear to be a formality."

"Excellent!" Kirk murmured, his mouth curving in a smile. "Uhura, notify Command Headquarters of the results of our action and request permission to institute proceedings. Also request details of our next assignment. Mr. Sulu, you have the con. Maintain standard orbit. Mr. Spock, you and I will beam down with a full security team," he ended as he turned to leave.

"Yes, sir," the Vulcan replied quietly as he followed his Captain from the bridge.

Inside the main government building Spock watched expressionlessly as, without remorse or pity, his Captain forced the ruling Relan council to accede to his demands. The conditions of surrender which Kirk coldly outlined were harsh, but by no means unusual. The young and healthy members of the population would become slaves and be shipped to the various parts of the galaxy under Federation control where they were most needed, and the remainder would rebuild their shattered lives under Federation occupation.

Stripped of their freedom and self-respect, the Relan council had no choice but to accept Kirk's conditions. The business was quickly concluded and, having left a strong security force behind, Kirk, with Spock at his side, was soon back on board the Enterprise.

He turned to his First Officer as they stepped from the transporter. "Mr. Spock, a word with you in my quarters."

Spock inclined his head in acknowledgement.

Once inside his quarters, Kirk, clearly displeased, regarded the Vulcan coldly. His manner was formal, his speech clipped.

"Mr. Spock, I have been observing your behaviour closely of late. I am not pleased with what I have seen. I have sensed...disapproval of my actions. Explain!"

"I regret conveying such an impression, sir," he answered carefully.

"But you do disapprove?" Kirk questioned harshly.

"I might perhaps regret that our dealings with the Relans were...of necessity...so harsh," Spock continued guardedly.

"But they refused to accept Federation control peacefully," Kirk persisted. "They chose to resist, and they have reaped the consequences."

Spock realised that in some strange way Kirk was seeking to justify his actions, and desired his reassurance and approval, though why either should be necessary to him, he could not fathom. Nevertheless a glimmer of hope rose in him.

"Of course, sir," he replied levelly, "but as a Vulcan, I occasionally regret the use of violence in such a situation..."

"Come on, Mr. Spock, that attitude died out years ago," Kirk cut in abruptly. "You know as well as I do that your home planet recognised the need to use force to effect progress."

//Indeed! Why then is it so hard for me to accept the logic of that need? Perhaps because I know from the teachings of Surak that it was not always so...//

When Spock did not reply Kirk continued ominously, "You will persuade me to re-evaluate your suitability as my First Officer if you lead me to believe that you disapprove of our cause and the methods we employ to attain it. And there was no other alternative in this instance."

The glimmer of hope flickered and died. "No, of course not, sir."

"Very well. Do you wish to make any further observations?"

"No, sir." And then, thinking quickly, he added, "But perhaps it might be possible to allow the crew a little relaxation, maybe even selected leave, sir, now that this mission has been successfully completed. I sense...an atmosphere of tension aboard ship, and some of the crew are clearly exhausted. Our recent schedule has been...extremely tiring," he concluded, watching warily for Kirk's reaction.

To his surprise Kirk seemed to consider his suggestion carefully. "Thank you, Mr. Spock. Your observations have been noted and will be acted upon if possible."

A vague feeling of unease and dissatisfaction descended upon Kirk after Spock had left. He noted with some irritation that such feelings had become more frequent of late, but was at a loss to explain them...and they always seemed to be more marked after conversations with his First Officer...

He tried to shrug the mood away. No doubt he was overtired. After all, no man could keep up such a back-breaking schedule without suffering from fatigue.

But...Spock... The Vulcan nagged at his mind somehow. That calm demeanour...those dark eyes which seemed sometimes to bore into his very soul... It was almost as if Spock succeeded in making him feel...ashamed...

He knew he should get rid of him, but realised he would have to look long and hard to find a replacement of equal efficiency... Spock was an excellent First Officer. And for some indefinable reason Kirk valued their association... the warm presence always by his side, and the inexplicable reassurance it radiated...

Struggling to escape from his despondency, Kirk's mind alighted on a sure means of dispelling it. He remembered the pretty young yeoman who had come aboard only a few weeks ago. She was obviously afraid of him, he noted amusedly, as he reminded himself of her terror-stricken eyes on the few occasions he had had cause to speak to her. But...no matter. That would only serve to make the encounter more...stimulating.

Yes - she would provide an interesting diversion for the evening - a perfect antidote to the vague self-doubts which continued to plague him.

Smiling slightly in anticipation, he punched his intercom, giving the order for her to report to his quarters, and then sat back to await her arrival, a smile

still playing on his lips...

In his quarters Spock laid aside the scientific report he had been studying and considered the day's events. During the eighteen months he had been aboard the Enterprise he had watched James Kirk become ever more ruthless in his dealings with enemies and allies alike. His behaviour was becoming...frighteningly predictable...

The actions in which Spock was forced to take part were becoming increasingly abhorrent to him, and he knew that it was wrong for him to remain in the Federation's service and under Kirk's command.

But...he was strangely drawn to this apparently cruel Human. He could not explain why, but he was unable to rid himself of the notion that, under the layers of command training which had warped his personality, there was much that was worthwhile in James Kirk. He sighed deeply - illogical though he knew his decision to be...he was resigned to remaining at Kirk's side - at least for the time being...

The following day it was clear that leave would not be forthcoming for any of the crew. The Enterprise was ordered to Llias II, a recently annexed planet, to assist in quelling an uprising, for a group of inhabitants had formed themselves into a resistance group against the Federation.

The large landing party materialised in the hill country where it was believed the resistance forces had their headquarters. Kirk immediately despatched several security parties to investigate the area and, together with Spock and four security men, he moved in the direction of a wooded copse, which seemed to be a likely place for concealment. Splitting up, they circled the area, phasers at the ready.

After a few minutes of unproductive exploration, Spock's sensitive ears picked up a sound in the bushes behind him. He turned in time to see a man appear from the undergrowth. Armed with a knife, he jumped Kirk from behind. Kirk was taken by surprise, and a desperate struggle ensued.

Even as Spock raced to the scene he saw the knife plunged into Kirk's chest and stomach. By the time he arrived, Kirk had fallen, and his attacker had fled.

Spock rolled Kirk onto his back. The deep wounds were bleeding heavily and Kirk moaned softly as Spock tried to examine him. The green tunic was already soaked with blood and Kirk was breathing harshly.

Spock saw that Kirk's communicator had been crushed during the attack, and reached into his belt for his own communicator. It wasn't there! He searched the surrounding area frantically and to no avail. Baffled, he was about to retrace his steps and begin a further search, when Kirk cried out in pain.

Returning, he bent and gingerly lifted Kirk into his arms. Surveying the area quickly, he made for a group of trees which offered some concealment and set Kirk down. Ripping open his tunic he tore a strip from the hem and tied it firmly round Kirk's chest as a makeshift bandage, in an attempt to stem some of the bleeding. He gritted his teeth against the pain he knew his action was causing Kirk, who moaned but did not cry out again. Spock was surprised at the extent of his reaction to Kirk's plight, and realised, with a shock, that he did not want this man to die...

When he had finished, Spock regarded Kirk anxiously. Although he was conscious he was ghostly pale, his face covered by a fine sheen of sweat, his eyes large with pain.

"Captain, can you hear me?"

Kirk managed to nod weakly.

"I have mislaid my communicator," Spock continued urgently, "and yours is

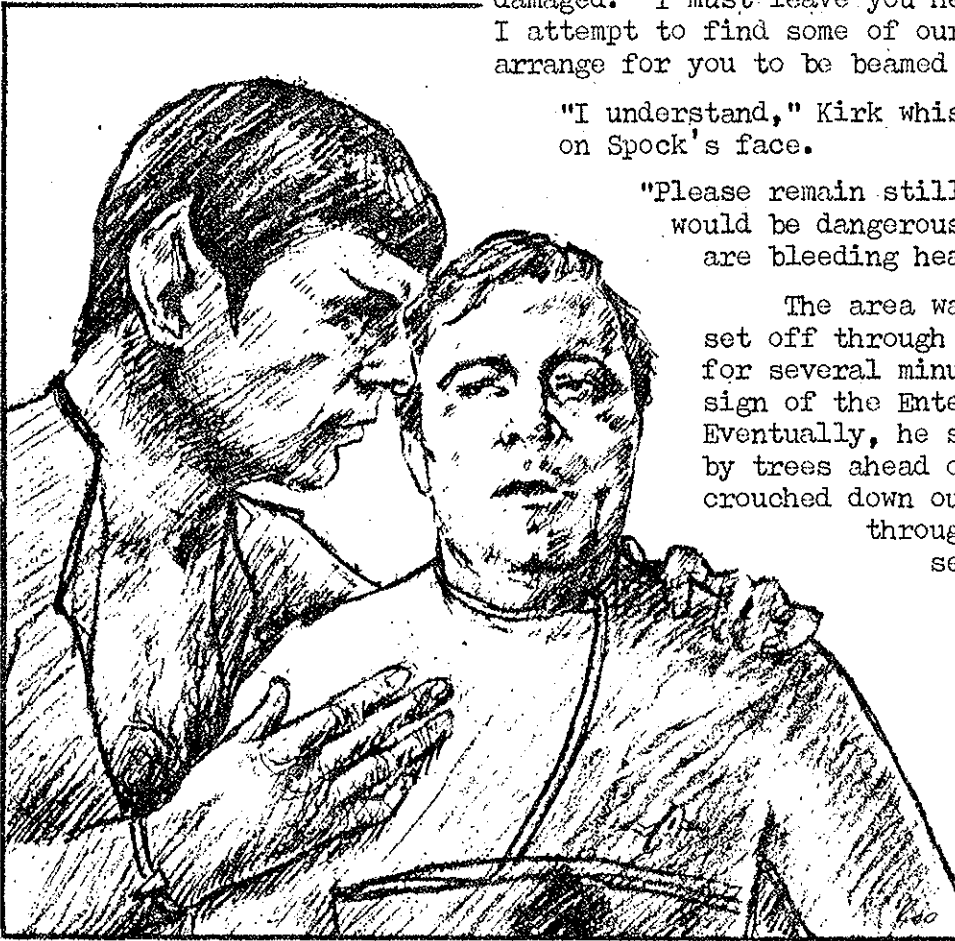
damaged. I must leave you here for a short time while I attempt to find some of our security guards and arrange for you to be beamed back to the ship."

"I understand," Kirk whispered, his eyes fixed on Spock's face.

"Please remain still," Spock ordered. "It would be dangerous for you to move - you are bleeding heavily."

The area was deathly quiet as Spock set off through the trees. He searched for several minutes without seeing any sign of the Enterprise security team. Eventually, he saw a clearing surrounded by trees ahead of him and, hearing voices, crouched down out of sight. Peering through the trees, he saw

several of the Enterprise team being herded into the centre of the clearing by a group of armed men, who were obviously members of the resistance forces. Spock watched as the men were moved off by their captors. The party soon disappeared from sight,



and, as soon as he considered it safe to move, Spock made his way back to Kirk.

Kirk was tossing in pain, apparently oblivious to his surroundings.

Knowing that their best hope of rescue was to try to get back to their original materialisation point, in the hope that the Enterprise would investigate when they did not return, Spock studied Kirk carefully for a moment, and then bent and touched him gently on the arm. Kirk's eyes flew open in alarm as he instinctively tried to move away, and then cried out in the agony the movement had caused him.

"The pain is severe?" Spock questioned and, as Kirk nodded, he continued, "Captain...I regret...I must move you. Several of our guards appear to have been captured. We must try to get back to our original position in the hope that the Enterprise will find us."

Wasting no further time, Spock lifted Kirk as gently as possible. He covered the ground swiftly and reached their starting point within a few minutes. He found a shaded spot and laid Kirk down carefully, and, as he watched him anxiously he realised it was a miracle that he was still alive.

An idea began to formulate in his mind and, after a moment, he withdrew slightly and sat nearby, deep in concentration. Then, having made his decision, he rose and returned to Kirk.

Seeing that he had his attention he began haltingly, "I regret, I am unable to offer any physical aid, but there may be another form of assistance..." He paused momentarily, before continuing. "There is a form of concentration which Vulcans term mind-melding. It involves a mind contact, during which I may be able to transfer some of your pain to myself. As a Vulcan, I am able to endure a higher level of pain."

Aware of the intimacy of what he was proposing he forced himself to continue, although his embarrassment was evident. "I have never...melded with a Human

before...it may not be possible...but do I have your permission to try?"

He waited anxiously, not even sure that Kirk understood what he had said. The dark-circled hazel eyes looked deeply into the alien ones which were regarding him with such concern. Finding comfort there, Kirk replied, "Thank you, Mr. Spock. Please go ahead."

Spock's mind was a mass of conflicting thoughts and emotions...the implications of melding with an outworlder troubled him deeply...and there was also the possible danger to both himself and Kirk to be considered...

Pushing his doubts to the back of his mind he continued, "Trust me please, Captain. All I require is that you do not resist me." So saying, he tremblingly placed his hand in the meld position. He was deeply afraid - not only of the possible consequences of this act, but also of what he might find in the Human's mind...

Kirk found the cool fingers on his face curiously comforting. He felt the warm presence and knew that the Vulcan had begun, but his command training made him automatically resist the intrusion into his mind. After a moment he relaxed imperceptibly and was aware of the gentle voice in his mind urging, /Captain...I am here...do not be afraid...please open your mind to me.../

Through his pain Kirk heard his own mental voice question haltingly, /How?/

/Welcome me to your mind, that is all. I will not attempt to...read your thoughts in any way...only to touch the pain./

Kirk felt himself relaxing further into the warmth which was spreading through his mind. God, this was so...pleasant, so...comforting, this warm, caring feeling. As he tried to concentrate fully on maintaining the tenuous mental link he knew the pain was being pushed further from his consciousness. His confidence increased as he relaxed more deeply into the security and trust which Spock was transmitting to him.

He was experiencing a succession of delightful sensations now...feelings of compassion...affection...and then he realised that he was seeing Spock's loneliness and isolation, the painful conflict of the struggle to come to terms with his dual heritage...the longing need for understanding and acceptance... Filled with compassion, Kirk realised, with a sense of wonder, that the Vulcan was revealing himself totally in an attempt to gain his trust. All of this was a gift from the Vulcan, freely given...allowing Kirk into his most private thoughts...

Aware only of the emotions he was experiencing, Kirk barely sensed his pain receding still further... Then the contact changed and there were no words to describe the exquisite sensations which were filling his mind. He felt his consciousness heighten, saw things with startling clarity, his heart constricting with joy in the selflessness of Spock's concern for him...

Then he drew in his breath sharply as he saw himself as the Vulcan saw him, and then, fleetingly, as Spock wished him to be. He found himself clinging desperately to that fleeting vision, wishing it for himself, too, in that moment. Hesitantly, he tried to reciprocate, finding the effort of concentration almost unendurable, until he realised triumphantly that he was succeeding in conveying his joy and affection to Spock. He experienced a feeling of pure ecstasy in the knowledge that his response had reached Spock and was welcomed. Their minds linked in a single instant of total understanding, and then Kirk felt the contact receding, and was simultaneously aware that his pain had lessened to a dull, throbbing ache. He knew that Spock was gradually breaking the meld, but he clung to it until the last possible moment, unwilling to lose the miracle of togetherness. Finally, with a sense of loss, he knew that the Vulcan had withdrawn completely.

Kirk turned and studied the lean, drawn features with an expression of uncomprehending wonder. Visibly shaken by the experience, Spock's face also openly showed his emotions for an instant, but, as Kirk held his gaze, the dark eyes quickly became unreadable.

It was obvious that Spock was exhausted and, after a moment, he turned away a trifle unsteadily, and rested his head in his hands, breathing deeply.

Kirk was aware that there was a great deal he wanted to say to this strange Vulcan, but not knowing how to begin, he hesitated and then said simply, "Thank you."

When there was no response he reached out a hand to Spock and questioned with concern, "Spock, are you all right? Are you in pain?"

When Spock turned to face him there was a new expression of hope in the depths of the alien eyes as he replied softly, "Please do not concern yourself, Captain. I am easily able to control the sensation. It is by no means severe," and then questioned, "has your pain lessened?"

"Very much so," Kirk replied gratefully.

"I can do nothing to stop the bleeding," Spock added quietly, "But... Perhaps you could try to rest now?"

"Yes, I think I could at that, Mr. Spock," Kirk replied with a weak smile.

As he closed his eyes, he relived the sensations of the meld, and the feeling of warmth remained with him as he fell into a deep, dreamless sleep. Spock remained motionless at his side, watching, silent, his eyes filled with triumph. He was still sitting in the same position hours later when the Enterprise finally locked onto their co-ordinates and beamed them both aboard.

Dr. McCoy, the ship's Chief Surgeon, turned wearily from his patient to find Spock in the doorway.

"He should be dead he's lost so much blood," he informed the Vulcan expressionlessly.

There was barely concealed tension in the lean frame as Spock enquired, "Will the Captain survive, Doctor?"

"I think so," McCoy replied wearily, and then added sarcastically, "more's the pity!"

"Doctor, that is dangerously close to a mutinous statement," Spock warned him sharply.

"Maybe so, Mr. Spock, but I don't give a damn! Put me on report if you like!" the Doctor replied vehemently. "I'm not on this damned ship by choice anyway - I only follow Federation orders - and maybe I've watched that maniac attack too many defenceless people to feel any differently about it."

Ignoring his outburst, Spock replied softly, "You misjudge Captain Kirk, Doctor."

"Do I, indeed?" McCoy questioned caustically.

Spock eyes were concentrated on the sleeping form in the bed behind them as he continued calmly, "Please keep me informed as to the Captain's progress," and then added somewhat guardedly, "I trust you will do all you can to ensure he is as comfortable as possible, Doctor?"

McCoy felt rising anger. "God, do you think I'm inhuman?" he snapped. "Are you suggesting I would deliberately let him suffer? Do you think I'd allow anyone to suffer unnecessarily, no matter what I think of them - even him!"

Spock regarded him intently for a moment. "No, Doctor, I do not. I apologise if I have offended you." And with that he turned and walked quickly down the corridor.

James Kirk was young and healthy and recovered quickly from his injuries. Within three weeks he was back at his command post.

Spock had not referred to the meld and Kirk had not felt able to raise the subject either, but the warmth of the experience still lingered, and he felt a tenuous bond between the Vulcan and himself. It was a curiously pleasant sensation, and one which was totally new to him.

He began to realise how much he missed simple companionship. The fact that he was more or less friendless had never occurred to him before, for his command responsibilities had seemed to fill every corner of his life, but now he longed to experience again the closeness of the mental contact with Spock, and knew that he would welcome the Vulcan's friendship.

For the first time in his career he also found himself seriously evaluating his actions and questioning the nature of his command...

The losses on Llias II had been heavy. Almost the whole security team had been lost, and further searches had proved fruitless. The Federation had finally decided to cut its losses and the Enterprise had been instructed to abandon the mission and divert to Starbase 10 for re-staffing and to take on much needed supplies.

Much to Spock's relief, leave had also been granted, but en route to the Starbase, the Enterprise picked up a distress call from a previously uncharted planet, which had been hit by a particularly virulent fever. The distress call requested immediate medical assistance, as almost half the population were suffering from the disease and there would be little hope unless an antidote could be found.

The disease was known to the medical staff of the Enterprise and providing the antidote posed no problems, but normal Federation procedure in such cases was investigation, followed by destruction or occupation, not voluntary medical aid.

Fully expecting Kirk to refuse medical aid, McCoy was astounded when he was instructed to beam down with a full medical team and offer assistance.

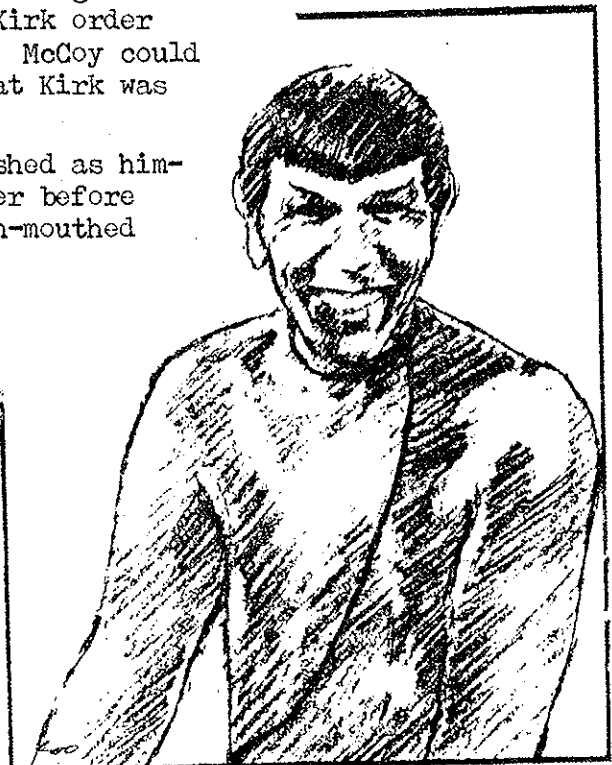
The Enterprise remained in orbit around the planet for several days while McCoy and his team completed their work. When he was confident that the disease was under control and no longer contagious, McCoy contacted the ship and requested permission to beam up.

Once on board he made his way to the bridge to make his report and arrived just in time to hear Kirk order Chekov to set a new course for the Starbase. McCoy could hardly believe his ears. Was it possible that Kirk was actually leaving without taking any action?

The bridge crew was obviously as astonished as himself. Chekov stammeringly rechecked the order before plotting their new course, and Uhura was open-mouthed in amazement.

McCoy looked at Kirk closely, but his expression was totally unreadable, and then glanced across at Spock. The Vulcan's eyes met his for a brief second, then he was instantly leaning over his viewer again, apparently deep in concentration, but McCoy had caught a glimpse of what looked like exhilaration in the dark eyes.

The Doctor would have been even more astonished had he been in the turbolift as Kirk and Spock entered it together at the end of their shift. As the doors closed behind them, Spock turned to his Captain and enquired, somewhat hesitantly,



"Are you familiar with the game of chess, Captain?"

"Yes, Mr. Spock, I have played in my time, but I'm afraid I'm not very good."

"I wondered if you might...care for a game this evening, sir - I do have a chess set in my quarters."

Spock's uncertainty was replaced by pleasure as Kirk turned to him, his face lit by a smile.

"Thank you, Mr. Spock. That would be very enjoyable. I accept."

"Very good, sir. Shall we say in about an hour?"

"Certainly," Kirk replied as he stepped from the lift. "I shall look forward to it."

It was fortunate that the corridor which led to Spock's quarters was deserted as he too left the lift, for any crewmember seeing him there would have been amazed to find him striding along wearing an uncharacteristic and quite dazzling smile.

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SARGON'S LAMENT by Susan Meek

We came, perhaps, as close
To being gods, as a people can be.
We knew glory and splendour beyond imagination;
The secrets of the universe.

Yet there were flaws.
Absolute power is said to corrupt absolutely;
We intended merely to guide,
But the temptation to manipulate
To use the lesser ones, is too strong.
The longing to feel, to breathe,
To live again, is great.
For all the maturity, wisdom can still be outruled
By the wayward heart.

We must go now
And leave the way free
For our children.
So full of spirit and hope
They may achieve a greatness
Beyond ours
And avoid the traps
We fell into!

There is one comfort.
My Thalassa is with me;
With her at my side
I do not mind
The thought of eternity.
Together, it only seems
Only a brief span.

Perhpas this is our greatest achievement -
That we still know the value
Of love.

Love...will survive,
After we are gone.
This is the legacy
We leave for our children.

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IDIC? TENSE, NERVOUS IDIC? by Therese Holmes

Spock glanced at the printed brochure with scant interest, pausing only long enough to take in the title. Then he turned his attention to the message tape he held in his other hand. It was from Vulcan - one of the messages sent out regularly by his mother, which never failed to reach him at least six months late. Dutifully, he always listened to them, and replied promptly. It seemed to keep his mother happy.

Suppressing a slight sigh, he sat down at his desk and started to run the tape. His mother's face appeared, speaking the usual formalities. Then she visibly relaxed and began relaying the family gossip. For the hundredth time, Spock wondered how she could believe he was interested in hearing this chit-chat; and how Sarek could allow her to continue in such a belief. He was no stranger to Vulcan scandal; indeed, he had caused much of it himself, one way or another. But he sometimes wished his mother could be made to understand that on Vulcan the by-words of life were propriety and decorum. Scandal might be tolerated; gossip was looked on with definite disfavour.

Today he felt less inclined than usual to listen to the stream of sordid confidences issuing from the screen. He had not the slightest desire to know what his half-cousin Stink had said to step-aunt T'Rollop on the occasion of the latter's unfortunate accident with the windchimes, nor how his uncle's brother-in-law's IDIC came to have a dent in it. Usually he was affectionately amused by his mother's chatter. Today he was impatient for it to finish. Only filial duty prevented him from turning it off in mid-flow.

For today was Jim's birthday. His gaily wrapped present was lying beside the viewer and Spock's eye kept straying to it. He wanted to deliver it before Jim went to the bridge for the morning watch; more than that, he wanted to see Jim's face when he opened it. Spock had expended much time and mental effort on choosing the gift, and growing anticipation of the event had kept him awake for several nights preceding this great day. Over and over again he had imagined to himself the look of dawning recognition spreading across Kirk's face as he unfolded the picture of Koloth; the mischievous grin as he picked up the set of darts that accompanied it. Spock was particularly proud of those darts. They bore some modifications specially designed by himself. Instead of feathers, they were each tipped with a small ball of fur which bore a striking resemblance to a miniature tribble. He wasn't sure that this improved the aerodynamic qualities of the missile, but that was a small price to pay for artistic integrity. Kirk would soon get the hand of using them; perhaps there would even be time to try them out this morning.

With some relief he realised that his mother's discourse was drawing to a close.

"... next time I hope I'll have some more news about T'Mill and the trouble there, but until then, Spock dear, look after yourself and keep warm. Goodbye, dear."

Spock reached out to turn off the viewer, but to his surprise the blank screen suddenly sprang into life again. His surprise deepened when he saw that it was Sarek. His father did not usually bother to share Amanda's 'gutter tapes' (her own phrase). His rare communications with his son were of an altogether more formal nature.

Spock noted with some bewilderment that his father was acting very strangely. His manner was furtive and he was speaking in an undertone. Suddenly he seemed to start, and glanced over his shoulder. Leaning forward, he lowered his voice almost to a whisper.

"Remember, Spock, what I - " At that point the tape finally ran out.

Spock sat for several minutes, silently marshalling his thoughts, before he realised that in his astonishment he had not heard a word his father had said. Rewinding as far as Sarek's untoward entry, he replayed the tape. As he listened, his eyes went to the brochure lying forgotten by his hand. He picked it up and

eyed approvingly the tasteful colour scheme on the cover, the coaxing words of the title.

For all its unorthodox delivery, Sarek's voice still carried the commanding note that was its most characteristic trait. Spock had never, since childhood, been able to shake off the feeling of awe it induced in him. He had learned from long experience that if Sarek had something to say, it was worthwhile listening.

"Your mother does not know that I have appropriated this tape in order to communicate with you. We see you so rarely these days, and - er - I felt a desire to speak to you."

He seemed uncharacteristically ill-at-ease and hesitant.

"I - er - I hope you are quite well, Spock. Your mother and I are - er - we're quite well. The weather here at Shikahr has been quite - quite as usual. How is it where you...that is...ah - how are you, Spock?"

Was this the legendary Sarek of a thousand Council debates, flooring his opponents with flowing rhetoric and matchless oratory? Spock caught himself wondering whether his father had been ~~drinking~~, and rebuked himself sharply. Amanda would never allow it.

The voice stumbled on. "Your mission will soon be coming to an end - er - son. I wonder if you have any, ah, plans for your future? Perhaps you might consider, well, Vulcan? I know of a pleasant - well, fairly pleasant - that is, not too unpleasant - spot out in the desert. Close by that statue that your mother - . There's a Lodge there; the Grand Master is a friend of mine. You might take a look at the brochure I'm sending with this tape. If you get the time, of course. Your mother and I - "

Here he broke off guiltily, as though he heard someone coming. Spock watched again as he leaned towards the screen, whispering hoarsely, "Remember, Spock, what I - "

The screen went blank.

Spock was mystified. He could not for the life of him imagine what might have possessed his father to talk such nonsense. He noticed again the brochure in his hands; perhaps this held the answer.

He began to read.

Kirk stared bad-temperedly at the garishly coloured leaflet being thrust under his nose.

"Well, what the hell is it, Spock?"

"It's a passport to a new future, Jim."

"A...what?"

Kirk began to wonder if his First Officer was feeling quite all right. He had burst in ten minutes ago without so much as a 'happy birthday', and had begun babbling some nonsense about 'inner truth' and 'ultimate meaningfulness'. At first Kirk had thought he was teasing, but it had soon become clear that this was no pretence. Spock had forgotten his birthday.

Finally he had produced this objectionable piece of literature and demanded that Kirk read it. For one moment - but no; by no stretch of the imagination could it be described as a birthday card, even by Vulcan standards.

Kirk rubbed his eyes wearily. "Mr. Spock," he said. "I'm a busy man. Could you summarise it for me?"

Spock sat down eagerly. Kirk glanced idly through the pages of the brochure. Here and there a phrase caught his eyes.

'...do they kick sand in your face on Vulcan's Forge?!.... 'is your self-awareness all it should be?' ... 'tarnished logic? You need the Kohlinahr!'

The what?

He turned back to the title page. There was that word again:-

'Don't take offence: take THE KOHLINHR.'

He resumed his perusal as Spock's voice gathered animation. At the back were the inevitable 'before and after' photographs, and the signed testimonials.

'...worth every inch of hair...'

'...even the robe didn't seem to matter after a while...'

'...I look at my Symbol of Logic and feel not the slightest stirrings of pride...'

He realised that Spock had stopped and was waiting for him to speak. Dammit, what was he supposed to say? Surely Spock wasn't taken in by all this? He certainly seemed sold on it - the cool, rational Vulcan and the oldest trick in the book. Kirk hastily concealed a smile.

"Well...Spock..."

"You see, Jim, this could be just what I've been looking for. My father certainly seems to think so."

"Your father?"

"Yes. Haven't you been listening? The message tape..."

"Oh. Yeah, yeah."

Kirk frowned once more at the brochure. He was feeling less than charitable towards his First Officer this morning, and inclined to the opinion that if Spock's idea of a good time was to sweat it out with his Id on the plateau of Gol, that was his affair.

Spock was speaking again. "We make Earthfall in less than two days. I can be on Vulcan in a week..."

"You seem all set on it, Mr. Spock. What did you come to me for?"

"I - thought you'd like to know."

"I'm all ears, of course. To me your welfare is as mine own." He paused. "But Spock. Are you really serious about this...this..." He brandished the brochure in his fist, "This con-trick?"

Spock stiffened visibly. "Con-trick, sir?"

"Yes, con-trick. Short for confidence trick. As practised - "

"I am aware of the meaning of the phrase, sir. Are you implying, Captain, that the Kohlinahr, the oldest and most revered discipline of our people, is some sort of fraud? A delusion? If so, sir, you insult not only myself but the whole of Vulcan."

"My, you are touchy this morning. I only meant that any fool could see through this advertising patter, and I'm surprised you even looked at it."

"And my father; Is he a fool too?"

"Oh, come on, Spock - "

"I have heard enough. I thought you would understand; it is plain you do not. What is also plain is that my entry into the Kohlinahr is considerably overdue. I will prove to you, sir, that every word written in that brochure is true. I shall leave for Vulcan immediately we reach Earth. You need not trouble yourself about my resignation - I shall send the papers directly to Starfleet HQ."

He was at the door before Kirk found his voice. "Well, if this Kohlinahr does anything for your memory, mister, then I'm all for it!"

There was no reply as the door swished shut.

One more look, just one more look. Cramped as they were, Kirk had grown fond of his quarters. They were bare now, of course. All his belongings had been transported down, and the Enterprise was in dry-dock preparing for a complete refit.

As he turned reluctantly to leave, something on the bed caught his eyes. A small box, wrapped in paper of such fluorescent brightness that he winced. Curiously, he picked it up and unwrapped it. Inside were a picture of a very familiar Klingon, and six strange-looking darts. Who on Earth...? A note, tucked in the wrapping, fluttered to the bed.

He recognised the writing immediately.

"Jim,
For your birthday, t'hy'la,
Spock."

'T'hy'la?' He'd have to look that up.

Underneath, obviously scrawled in a hurry, were the words,

'I ask forgiveness.'

Oh no, Spock. It is I who ask forgiveness. I should have known you hadn't forgotten.

With a smile of infinite sadness, the new Chief of Starfleet Operations rewrapped his present.

"You don't have to prove a thing, Spock," he whispered as he left his quarters for the last time. "Not a thing."

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WEB CONFRONTATION by Susan Meek

"It hurts, doesn't it, Spock?"

Yes, how it hurts!

Why didn't I see it before?

It is as though his words

Have lifted a veil from my eyes -

I see now the pain that shadows your dark eyes.

I have lost a friend

But what have you lost?

Everything?

Or at least everything that made life worthwhile

Instead of a mere existence.

The only one to whom you would entrust

The secret of your inner self.

Already I can see you

Withdrawing behind logic's protective shell

In the face of my hurtful and unthinking taunts;

Where else could you go?

I'm not saying that I could replace him -

It would be impossible

and I wouldn't even try.

But for the sake of what he meant to both of us,

Please, let's try at least

To see this thing through

Together.

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THE MAN WITH THE CHILD IN HIS EYES by Rita Oliver

Here on the narrow cots, clothed in numbered gowns, lie women who are insane. I am one of them.

Somewhere there is a piece of paper and on it that fact is stated in words. I am insane: categorised and certified an inmate of this institution of mid-greys and half truths.

Some while ago I was afraid for my reason. Daily I grew more confused and bewildered and I had to tell someone: 'There is something wrong with my head.'

They, the other women who are here being cured, did they too once say 'There is something wrong with my head'? They are getting better, I can see it. But there is still something wrong with my head.

My days and mind are empty. From the first light that elbows its way through the barred windows to the last dregs of daylight that are torn from my eyes, I sit and wonder and think and stare.

There had been days, outside, when I had longed to make my mind blank. Here I have my wish and find that having a blank mind whilst awake is a horrifying experience. Almost as horrifying as looking down into that black pit of madness, I feel the grasping hands of depression reaching up at me, I look down from my so lonely tower of isolation and consider.

Am I going mad; Or am I, alone, sane in this world, owning some unique and personal insight of reality?

As their bright and yellow illumination is snapped off, I contemplate sleeping. It is the time of day I dread. It is the moment when I can gauge and judge the criteria of my madness. Yet I long all day - and all days - for this same moment when I hear his voice.

As foolish as it sounds - I hear voices. Or rather, I hear a voice.

I hear it as I go to sleep, as I pull the blankets up about my ears and prepare for the comfort of sleep, his strong tones enter my thoughts and wake me.

I realise he's there when I turn the light off and turn over. I hear his gentle voice whispering in the deep recesses of my mind, like the murmuring of many thousands of bees on a hot and lazy day. He lulls my mind and he 'speaks' to me.

Nobody knows about my 'man'. They think 'him' lost on some horizon...and 'He' was, my gentle Agar, murdered as he fought against the black Empire of Gotha. (Was it really so little time ago?) But this man lives in another place. Another world. In another plane of life.

They know nothing of him, this voice that haunts my dreams.

I sleep; and I find myself listening to a man I've never known before. I listen and this man tells me of his life and loves. Of space and time and humanity. Of his home: Earth. There is a word to conjure dreams.

He lives in a world I barely comprehend, he speaks of people and places alien to me. Yet his hopes and dreams are things I can understand.

He tells me of his life; how he grew from an eager young boy to a responsible man who holds the lives of four hundred men and women in his hands.

He speaks to me of his 'ship', his one and only love, the only woman to successfully resonate so completely with his soul.

But he has loved women. Beautiful women, but time and tide have drawn them from him. Each time, I was with him, hearing of his burning love and then of his sad despair.

Yet I have 'shared' his successes too. When he has saved a world, his ship or just one man, I heard and shared his joy. Yet also I shared and bore his despair when he had to decide which of his friends he must send out to certain death.

I know all of him. Every facet. Yet I doubt he knows I exist. It is as though I eavesdrop on his soul's confession, yet I cannot shut my ears. Nor do I want to.

Yet he cannot be real. But I wonder.

Where is he? Who is he? How do I hear him?

The answers are so complex and frightening, it is easier to accept that I am mad.

But I know him. I see him. He is fair of face and strong of limb. Brave and fearless yet often as gentle and vulnerable as a child.

He laughs! And in that instant I really see him. His mouth curves gently into a lazy grin and a devil glint glows in that sidelong look of mirth.

I catch my breath, as always, at that precious sight of the little boy in him.

Then he talks again; about his loves and fears. He's so very understanding and so aware of every situation, can he possibly be aware of me?

But listen to me! Speaking of him as though he were real!

I am mad.

But do I only imagine I hear him? I remember it clearly. But sometimes I remember a dream clearly.

No! I hear him!

They say, "No...no...it is an illusion." Miss Davies, so prim and gentle and disbelieving, with that look in her eyes you would not mind seeing in the eyes of your cat, says,

"There is far too much to be done in the world without story telling... You will get well sooner if you face reality."

Perhaps she's right and I just 'took a trip'...and he is what I found. What I wanted to find?

Yet...

But here I am again, wondering. I could, as Miss Davies says, stop 'story telling' and face 'reality'. But I am afraid.

I am afraid that if I do not listen...no-one will be there to listen. And he will be lonely, borne down by unshared grief.

No. I cannot leave him...I think he needs me. He tempts me into madness, but he needs me.

But listen! He's here again...the man with the child in his eyes.

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EDITH: IN MEMORY by Katy Deery

A woman always to love,
A woman briefly to hold,
A woman I turn and reach for,
When my heart grows heavy and cold.
The Edith I knew and loved and lost.
What price our future,
Who counts the cost.
Edith, my love,
Who mourns for thee?
None in the Galaxy -
No-one, save me.

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HOME SWEET HOME? by Josie Timmins

Gloom pervaded the ship. Disappointment dulled the faces of the bridge crew. Kirk's fingertips drummed an irritated rhythm on the arm of his command chair as the Enterprise sped through a rather monotonous sector of space.

They had been a mere two days from much needed shore leave at Starbase 15 when an urgent message had been received from Commodore Brousse, Commanding Officer of the base. Brousse had been apologetic, but the orders were clear; Enterprise was to divert to the Comus star system and make the long-overdue pickup of the Federation trade delegation from its second planet, Valasso. The U.S.S. Potempkin, which had taken the delegation to Valasso, was in quarantine - most of her crew sick with a mystery virus - and the only available Starship in that sector was the Enterprise.

Wearily, Kirk had changed course, and informed his crew that their much-anticipated shore leave would have to remain a dream for at least another month. The crew had accepted the disappointment with great stoicism, but there was no denying that the light-hearted atmosphere of the ship had vanished.

Only one man seemed unaffected by the change of plan, but then Mr. Spock's idea of rest and relaxation did not depend on his environment. Normally it was one of the many qualities that Kirk admired in his friend, but at that particular moment it just increased his irritation.

Spock's calm voice broke into his thoughts. "Library computer is ready, Captain."

Kirk stirred. "Put it on audio, Mr. Spock. We might as well know where we're going."

The Comus system was a recent discovery and the available facts were few. The Potempkin had made contact with Valasso scarcely two years before, and found it to be a hot, earth-like planet with an intelligent humanoid population. The Valassans had a fast and efficient method of space travel which had enabled them to take full control of their star system and colonise two of the other five planets. They had failed to invent a warp drive, however, and had never ventured beyond their own system. Instead, they had developed their own world and its neighbours into a reasonably high state of technology, and enjoyed a secure - if insular - lifestyle, until the exciting day when a Federation Starship drove up to their door.

The computer recited patiently to its largely indifferent audience until one piece of information caught Kirk's attention. Apparently the Valassans, in their early space exploration, had discovered a primitive, but intelligent, life form struggling to survive on the fifth planet of their system. Many of these people had been taken to Valasso where their descendants now lived as 'secondary citizens', chiefly employed as domestic workers.

Kirk turned to Spock with a puzzled frown. "Stop the computer, Mr. Spock. What does it mean by 'secondary citizens'?"

The Vulcan shook his head, unable to help. "The description is certainly vague, Captain, and there is no further data available."

"'Secondary citizens'," mused Kirk. He frowned. It was only a two-word phrase, but he didn't like it.

Uhura looked up from her communications panel. "It could almost be a euphemism for slavery," she said softly. "Secondary citizens engaged in domestic work..."

Kirk's frown deepened, and then he shook his head. "No. The Federation wouldn't consider trade with a slave society. We shall just have to wait till we get there."

But the next two weeks were monotonous, and time and again the words 'secondary citizens' crept into Kirk's mind to tease him - and worry him.

In due time the Comus system loomed on the main viewscreen and the skills of Chekov and Sulu were tested to their limits. The whole system was an obstacle course of planets, asteroids, artificial satellites, small space stations and spacecraft - the latter being somewhat unwieldy and unimaginative in design. Slowly the Enterprise nosed her way through the obstacles to her destination; the second planet, Valasso.

Their welcome was very cordial. The large red-skinned man on the screen introduced himself as Vad Tyrro, President of the Valassan High Council. He spoke in careful English, expressing great regrets that 'his friends' the Potempkin crew were ill, but welcoming 'his new friends' and their beautiful vessel.

With him was Commissioner Manuel Santee, leader of the Federation trade delegation, a slightly-built, nervous-looking man, who blurted out, "We became rather worried when the Potempkin didn't arrive on time, Captain. You understand, we are out of touch with the Federation here. It's fortunate you were able to come to our rescue.

Kirk smiled, and explained deliberately how his crew had given up their shore leave to come to Valasso. It had the desired effect.

"My dear Captain," exclaimed Vad Tyrro, "your crew must take some time to relax on our planet. No - I insist. We are completely at your disposal."

"That's kind of you, sir. My crew will welcome the chance to feel the ground under their feet again, even for just a couple of days. Will that be all right with you, Commissioner?"

Santee agreed. Apparently a small party of trade delegates from Valasso was to return with the Federation people on an exchange visit, and it would help to ease the final arrangements if the Enterprise stayed for a while.

A few hours later the senior officers of the Enterprise found themselves in the middle of an Official Reception in their honour. The large, elegant room at Government House was several degrees too hot for Kirk, already stifled by his full dress uniform, but Spock seemed quite comfortable. The Vulcan also approved of the non-alcoholic drinks that were being served.

It was a friendly gathering with many smiling faces, but restrained. There was no loud laughter, no expansive gesturing. The Valassans had a lot in common with the Vulcans, Kirk decided, although they obviously did not take their emotional control to the extreme limits laid down by the Vulcans.

It was no wild party but there was much to enjoy. The food was appetising, and so were the women. Not one of them was shorter than Kirk, and all were strikingly attractive. Their complexions ranged from pale lilac to plum, their hair was white and their eyes a very light blue. Delightfully inadequate draperies floated round their full figures. Kirk was trying to pull his eyebrows down to their accustomed position when he suddenly spotted Commissioner Santee lurking behind a marble pillar and remembered again his doubts about this society. Catching Spock's eye he indicated the Commissioner and together they went to join him.

The leader of the trade delegation was good at his job but was not a very sociable man. He disliked such receptions and was relieved to find that Kirk wanted to talk seriously about the Valassan people. He was full of praise for their industriousness, their high moral standards, and their civilisation in general, but was taken aback when Kirk said sharply,

"Yes, Commissioner, I'm sure the Valassans are all you say, but my information is that there is another race of people on this planet who are not given equal treatment. Are there any here tonight?"

"Oh, no, Captain. The Elzoans would have no place here. They are quite a primitive species, you understand, fit only for domestic work."

"How 'primitive', Commissioner? Have you spoken to many?"

Santee looked around nervously then replied, "Well, actually, I haven't spoken to any. You just don't see them around usually, they live mostly with

private families..." His voice trailed off and he looked distinctly unhappy.

Kirk's eyes narrowed and he pursued the point. "I've heard the Elzoans described as 'secondary citizens'. What precisely does that mean? In what way are they secondary?"

"You should be asking the Valassans those questions, Captain, not me."

"I'm asking you, Commissioner, because you have signed trade agreements with these people. What I am interested to know is if you have committed the Federation to doing business with a society that holds another race in slavery!"

Horried, Santee begged him to keep his voice down. "Captain Kirk - you've got it all wrong. There is no slavery on this planet. The Elzoans are a happy people, from what I've seen. Their freedom of movement is restricted, I believe, but that hardly amounts to slavery. You must be very careful to get your facts right before you start making accusations, Captain. The Federation needs what this system has to offer."

"Don't worry, Commissioner, I won't make wild accusations, but I intend to find out the truth before we leave."

As Kirk walked away he could hear Spock soothing the Commissioner's ruffled feelings and showing a polite interest in the trade delegation's achievements. Spock's 'bedside manner' was invaluable with serious, nervy types like Santee.

A moment later he bumped into McCoy and Scott who were both grinning in a rather silly fashion and looking remarkably cheerful for men who'd been on fruit juice all night. McCoy slapped his back heartily. "Hi, Jim boy! Who so miserable? You obviously haven't tried this pale pink lemonade!"

He waved a glass of the aforesaid liquid under Kirk's nose and then promptly fell about laughing. Scott was in the grip of similar hysterics. Puzzled, Kirk looked from one to the other, his annoyance fading as their laughter infected him. "What's the joke?"

McCoy managed to say, "This is, Jim boy. It tastes just like lemonade - but the effect is 90% proof!"

Their merriment caught him and with a chuckle he allowed them to bear him off to where the drinks were being dispersed.

From over the head of Commissioner Santee, Spock's eyes followed their progress. He might have known it was too good to last. The Commissioner's words floated up to him: "Pergium and topaline, Mr. Spock, of incredible purity. The Federation just cannot afford to miss this opportunity..."

The following day brought its reckoning. McCoy found himself dispensing hangover pills - not only to Scott and Kirk, but to several other officers who had discovered the secret of the 'pale pink lemonade'.

Straight after breakfast half of the crew was allowed down to the planet for a full day's shore leave. Vad Tyrro had provided a guide for the commanding officers and, though Kirk would have preferred to explore the main city alone, he felt it might seem rude in the circumstance, so he went down with McCoy and Spock. Scotty was only too happy to take command of the ship and stay out of the glare of the sun.

It was very hot indeed, but most of the trip was taken in a hover-car and a slight breeze helped to refresh them. Their guide was a woman named Vel Mora, just as tall and attractive as those they had seen the night before, and she spoke in good English. Kirk usually preferred women with less florid complexions, but after a few moments appreciation of her lightly-covered and very rounded figure, he decided that her colour was quite unimportant. From the smile on McCoy's face he felt the same way, but Spock, after the preliminary greeting, turned his eyes to the sights of the city.

It was a pink and white marshmallow of a place. Clean, modern, pastel

coloured buildings were interspersed with clean, modern pastel coloured squares and gardens until the Enterprise men longed for contrast. There was none. Even the grass and flowers were milky toned, and in the distance pale mauve hills touched a pale pink sky. The buildings were like the spacecraft they had seen on their way through the Comus system; unimaginative in design, repetitive, uninspiring and earthbound. It was all very pleasant, all very dull.

Eventually their guide suggested refreshments at a pavement cafe, a suggestion greeted with relief by all three. It was at the cafe that Kirk saw his first Elzoan. As he turned his eyes, sore from the glare of the street, to the dim and much cooler interior of the building, he caught sight of a creature standing in a doorway with a trayful of glasses. It was the flash of colour he noticed first, bright orange, the first solid colour he'd seen all day in that pastel city.

The creature was there for only a few seconds, then it put down the tray and disappeared again into the gloom. It was enough for Kirk. The Elzoan was small and slender, covered with reddish fur and wearing a one-piece orange suit. The eyes were enormous black globes in its tiny face, the ears like open fans on each side of its head. It wore a silver collar round its neck. For a split second the creature had looked at Kirk and then it was gone. No-one else had seen it. They sat in polite conversation with Vel Mora, completely unaware of the turmoil in Kirk's breast.

They were on the point of leaving the cafe when Spock turned his head towards an archway some distance away and was evidently listening to something which interested him.

"What is it, Spock?" asked McCoy. "What can you hear?"

"A great many people, Doctor. And the language is not Valassan." He looked questioningly at their guide. Vel Mora shook her head, as though dismissing the matter.

"It is the Elzoan market place. There is nothing of interest in a market."

"On the contrary," put in Kirk hurriedly, "it's of great interest. Why do you hide the Elzoan people from us, Vel Mora?"

Their guide was obviously surprised at this. She said stiffly, "We do not hide the Elzoans, but they are simply domestic workers and the market is their meeting place. If you wish to see it..."

She found herself addressing their backs and had to hurry after them as they strode purposefully towards the archway.

Colour - that was their first impression. Colour and noise... Intense, bright colour and loud, humming, chattering noise. They were in a large square which seemed to be full of moving bodies and market stalls laden with a variety of food-stuffs and other goods. The Elzoans were all under five feet tall, dressed in one-piece outfits, and the colours were brilliant - not a pastel shade in sight. They all wore engraved silver collars and most of them had their huge eyes shielded by tinted glasses. Many carried shopping baskets and were busily buying from the market stalls, but just as many were sitting or standing in pairs or small groups talking animatedly. Their language was quite unlike the Valassan tongue they had been hearing all day.

"Tell us about the Elzoan people," Kirk demanded.

Vel Mora shrugged. "There is little to tell. They were brought from their own planet five centuries ago. It was for their own good. They were trying to survive on a world where the air was thin and little vegetation grew. They were a primitive people and we had to find work they could do, so we trained them to work as household servants. That is what most of them still do today."

"They don't seem so primitive to me," said McCoy, who had been watching with the practised eye of a medical man.

"They have developed under our care and guidance," said Vel Mora proudly. "These are modern Elzoans who know little of the world from which they originate."

They are Valassan citizens now."

"Secondary citizens," murmured Kirk.

"Who have kept their own language," added Spock.

"They have been encouraged to keep their own tongue. We do not wish them to lose their racial identity."

Kirk leaped on this. "Why not? They have lost everything else, haven't they? Why do they wear collars, Vel Mora? Why are they not allowed to walk in the streets with their Valassan masters?"

Their guide's red skin was turning a deeper shade under the pressure, but her voice was controlled. "The Elzoans are not forbidden to walk on the streets, but there is no reason for them to do so. Their collars are a simple identification mark bearing the name and address of their master or mistress."

Kirk's voice was icy with contempt. "On our home planet, only pet animals wear collars. Why don't you admit the truth - those collars are a badge of slavery; a badge recognised all over the galaxy wherever slavery exists."

The woman turned her pale eyes on Kirk and said firmly, "The collars once served a useful purpose when this primitive race was brought to our world. The Elzoans knew nothing of cities and were often found wandering far from home. The collar markings were a means of identifying the lost one. They have since become a traditional part of the Elzoan costume. We are not a slave society, Captain."

Kirk said nothing more but sat rigidly through the rest of the tour. However the atmosphere had deteriorated so much that it was a relief for all of them when they finally bade Vel Mora goodbye. McCoy took it upon himself to apologise to the woman for any offence she might have felt, but she politely assured him that no offence had been taken.

Kirk kept his feelings to himself till they were safely back in the Enterprise transporter room, then he let his fury out.

"Slavery! They can deny it - but they can't hide it! And thanks to Commissioner Santee and his delegation the Federation has signed contracts with a slave society. Great! Next week we'll be trading with the Klingons!"

McCoy caught his arm and pulled him round. "Jim - that's enough. It may be a slave society, but then again it may not. We have no real proof the Elzoans are slaves. They looked happy enough to me. I know that's not the point, but you can't go accusing the Valassan people without a shred of evidence to back you."

"I'll get evidence, Doctor." With that Kirk turned and marched out. McCoy looked sharply at the silent Vulcan.

"Cat got your tongue, Spock?"

"Uninformed opinions are worse than no opinion at all, Doctor. I will not judge the situation until I have seen more of it." He went out.

McCoy looked round the empty room in exasperation. "Isn't that exactly what I've been trying to say?"

Next morning Kirk announced his intention of returning to the planet and talking to the Elzoans. McCoy turned down the invitation to join him, saying, "Sorry, Jim, I've got other plans. Some of Scotty's lads found the Valassan equivalent of a red-light district yesterday - come to think of it, 'pink light' might be a better description in the circumstances - so Mr. Scott and myself are going sight-seeing."

Kirk grinned and turned to Spock. "Well, Mr. Spock, are you coming on my crusading mission, or do you want to see the Valassan naughty ladies too?"

"I'll be happy to accompany you, Captain." One Vulcan eyebrow twitched. "Personally, Doctor, I think the Valassan ladies are more than you can handle."

He left quickly with his chuckling Captain before McCoy could find a suitable retort.

Equipped with tricorder and translator the two men beamed straight down to the market place. The scene had not changed although it was much earlier in the day. The Elzoans paid them little attention and it soon became clear that they didn't want to talk either. Then Spock pointed out one little fellow sitting on a low wall watching them. From his grizzled hair and loose belly he was obviously an old man, and, as Kirk knew very well, elderly people with time on their hands, whatever their race, are usually ready to chat.

This proved to be the case. The Elzoan looked curiously at their faces and their equipment and then indicated that they should join him on the wall.

"You were here yesterday," he said.

Kirk smiled at him. "Yes. We are very interested in your people. My name is James Kirk, and this is my friend Spock. The little machine will help us to understand each other."

It was unlikely that the Elzoan had ever seen a translator before but he had lived too long to be impressed by machines. He ignored it. "My name is Tegvizzi. That is my master's house over there." He pointed to a well-proportioned white house, the only building which actually faced on to the square. "My master is the market superintendent - an important man."

"What are your duties for your master?"

The old man straightened up proudly. "Once I was in complete charge of my master's household. He trusted my judgement absolutely. But now I am very old and my duties are light. I act as doorkeeper; I sit here in the sunshine and watch for visitors to the house."

"How many other servants does your master have?"

"There are five others - it is a big house."

"How many servants do most people have?"

"Perhaps two - or three if they can afford them."

"Afford?" Kirk's eyes lit up as he sprang on the word.

Tegvizzi smiled. "It all comes down to money, sir. We Elzoans are small people but we have big appetities."

"Oh, I see." Kirk looked at Spock and realised the Vulcan was trying to pass on a message. A small crowd of Elzoans was beginning to collect around them, listening intently. Kirk pretended not to have noticed them, and pressed on. Spock was recording the conversation and he was determined to get spoken evidence that these people were slaves.

"Is your master kind to you, Tegvizzi?"

"Of course," said the old man, surprised. "So was his father before him."

"You worked for his father first?"

"Yes. I belonged to the old master first, and when he died I was passed to his eldest son."

The light of triumph had come back into Kirk's eyes. "Why do you say you belong to your master?"

Tegvizzi looked puzzled. "Because I do. Who else should I belong to?"

There was a shout from the back of the crowd of Elzoans. "We should belong to ourselves, old man, and not to our masters!"

The voice belonged to a tall young man with rather spiky fur. An angry young man, thought Kirk. There's always one.

A slight murmuring had started in the crowd. He turned back to Tegvizzi, choosing his words carefully. "Tegvizzi - your people do not originate on this world. Do you know anything about Elzo? Do you ever think about your home planet?"

The old man shook his head. "No, why should I? We belong to Valasso now. There is nothing for us on Elzo."

The angry young man was pushing his way to the front of the crowd. "That is what they tell us to keep us quiet, old man!" he cried. "How do we know what is on Elzo? They say it is a barren world with no life; they say it is cold and dark and airless. But our bodies are made for just such a place. Why do we have thick fur and large eyes and ears - so that we can swelter and be blinded on Valasso?"

There was louder murmuring from the crowd. Some of the Elzoans were shaking their heads, dismissing his words, but many were acknowledging the truth of what he said. The young man lowered his voice dramatically.

"Some of us believe there is another Elzoan race; a race that still lives on its own planet; a race that belongs to no-one but itself; a race that is free! The Valassans deny it because they know the truth will cause unrest. They..." He stopped as his eyes caught a movement at the other side of the square.

There was a sudden scramble - and Kirk and Spock found themselves alone with Tegvizzi. The Elzoans had almost completely vanished, just a few shopped nonchalantly at the market stalls.

Two Valassan men wearing pale green uniforms came across the square. They smiled pleasantly and one spoke. "Good morning, gentlemen. I hope the crowd wasn't bothering you?"

"Not at all, er...officer. Why should it?"

"The Elzoans are quite harmless, sir, but they get over-emotional sometimes in a group. We don't encourage them to congregate in crowds. We hope you are enjoying your visit, gentlemen. Good day to you."

As they walked away, Kirk and Spock looked at each other over the Elzoan's head. Tegvizzi said, "Law-keepers - they are never far from the market place."

Spock asked, "Why did everybody run away? Is it a punishable offence to be part of a crowd?"

"If you are found guilty of causing a disturbance you are sent away for a while."

"Where are you sent?"

"You have to join the punishment force and go wherever there is work to be done. You may have to build roads or work in the mines or dockyards. Hard work." The old man shook his head sadly. "The young man with the silly ideas, Tegvarra, he has been sent away twice for causing a disturbance. If he does it again he will be taken away from his master for ever. He will spend the rest of his life in the punishment force."

Kirk frowned. "That seems very hard on him - just for causing a disturbance."

"Those are the rules and he knows them." Tegvizzi got up suddenly. "Someone is approaching my master's door. I must go."

"Just a moment, Tegvizzi," said Kirk quickly. "Before you go - what do you really think of Tegvarra's ideas? Do you think there may still be people living on Elzo?"

The Elzoan looked at them. "I don't know, gentlemen - and I'm too old to care."

As they watched him cross the square Kirk said, "Not a bad morning's work, Spock. If these people aren't slaves they're the closest thing to it. There's obviously a great deal of discontent. I think it's time to have a word with

Commissioner Santee."

"I doubt he will help," replied the Vulcan. "He is very proud of what the trade delegation has achieved and he obviously knows next to nothing about the Elzoans."

"Well, we'll see what he has to say after he hears our tape. But if he won't help, Spock, then I'll take my protest higher up."

He opened his communicator - and the transporter took them.

Spock was right about the Commissioner. Santee was furious with what he described as Kirk's meddling.

"Have you any conception of the importance the Federation attaches to these trade agreements, Captain? We have plans to build a new starbase in this sector. The planets of the Comus system can provide 90% of the basic materials needed to build that starbase at a very economical rate. It means much needed expansion, new horizons -"

"It means the Federation is forging links with a people that holds another in slavery," interrupted Kirk angrily.

Santee threw up his hands in despair. "Slavery! Captain Kirk - you have slavery on the brain! My people have been here for months and seen nothing to disturb them. You have been here two days!"

"Perhaps you should revise your ideas of what constitutes slavery, Commissioner. It doesn't have to be manacles and guards with whips. It can be much more subtle; engraved collars worn for the sake of 'tradition'; an old man who talks about the master he 'belongs' to; a young man who has been arrested twice for preaching freedom. Does that sound like a free society, sir?"

"Captain, your tape proves only that there are dissatisfied people on Valasso, just as there are on every planet - including our own."

Kirk looked at Santee through narrowed eyes; the Commissioner was definitely bothered. "A man who does not want to see a rotting body can close his eyes, Commissioner, but he smells the corruption all the same. I believe you do have doubts about the Valassan social system."

"Valasso has its faults. I have never described it as a perfect society, but then how many perfect societies are there? You have high ideals, Captain. Excellent - so has the Federation. But high ideals, like everything else of high quality, are expensive to maintain. Sometimes we just cannot afford them."

Kirk couldn't believe his ears. "Commissioner - are you telling me that the Federation is prepared to destroy its own integrity in order to acquire topaline and pergium at an economical price?"

Santee straightened himself and looked directly into Kirk's eyes. "No, Captain, I am telling you that my delegation was sent here to arrange trading rights with the Valassan people. We have done our job and are ready to go home. You, Captain Kirk, were sent to take us back. I suggest you carry out your orders and let those more qualified sort out the rights and wrongs of the Valassan social system."

"And that," said Kirk several hours later, "was the end of the interview." He was in his cabin with McCoy, Spock and Scott, enjoying a drink before retiring for the night.

"He's right in a way, Jim," said McCoy. "His people had a job to do and they did it. Our job is to take them back to Starbase 15. You aren't paid to be the Federation's conscience, Jim."

Kirk sighed. "It isn't as simple as that, Bones. How many times during the last few years have we represented the U.F.P. to alien races; To many of those

racers we are the Federation. Everything we say and do is what the Federation would say and do. We try to behave as the Federation expects; we risk our lives in its service. And why? Because we believe in its absolute integrity. We have fought slavery on other worlds in the name of the Federation, so I'm not going to sit back now!"

"There seems to be nothing more we can do here, Captain," said Spock. "I suggest we make a formal protest to the highest authority when we return to Starbase."

"Count me in on that," put in McCoy. "I didn't like what I heard on that tape one little bit."

Scotty nodded his agreement. "Well, I've only seen one Elzoan - and he - or she - was carrying a tray of drinks at the time - so I canna say I've seen any slavery with my own eyes, but I agree with the Doctor. That tape will take an awful lot of explaining. I'll sign your protest, Captain."

Kirk smiled, suddenly feeling more relaxed. Then he remembered something. "Hey, you two haven't told us what happened today. Did you find...what you were looking for?"

"Oh, yes, we found it," said McCoy. He looked across at Scott and they both grinned hugely. "It was what you might call an 'interesting' experience." And they both laughed at a very private joke.

The trade delegation came aboard the next day with a small group of Valassan ambassadors. The latter was led by an upright and very self-assured man who turned out to be Vad Tovo, Vice-President of the Valassan High Council. Kirk assumed his friendliest manner, although it cost him an effort, but he immediately took a dislike to the Valassan. Vad Tovo had a pleasant smile but Kirk suspected the man was really made of solid tritanium.

"This is an honour for us, Captain," said the Vice-President. "We are the very first of our race to travel beyond our own solar system."

"The first of many, I trust," was the polite reply.

Shortly afterwards the Enterprise left orbit, but not before Chekov had plotted a course that would take the ship out to Elzo. There were too many unanswered questions about that planet and Kirk was determined to find the answers to some of them.

Sulu piloted the Enterprise with care and skill through the over-crowded Comus system, and they were halfway through when Uhura picked up an automatic distress signal. The call was coming from a small ship, damaged and drifting just ahead of them. Spock quickly ascertained that there were life forms on board in need of help - urgently. Whatever had damaged the little ship had punctured the hull and the air in the vessel was rapidly leaking away.

Kirk slammed the intercom button. "Transporter room stand by - Mr. Spock is on his way. Sickbay, prepare to receive casualties."

Five minutes later fifteen limp Elzoans were being revived by the expertise of the medical team. Sixteen had been beamed up from the stricken ship, but help had come too late for one female.

A little later McCoy looked at their furry patients, who had perked up remarkably quickly, and smiled. "They're in better shape than we would be under the same circumstances. Their lungs were designed to cope with the thin air conditions of their own world."

Kirk and Spock stood in the middle of the room and looked round at the Elzoans. Fifteen pairs of huge black eyes were lowered; like naughty children, they stared at the floor. Kirk picked up the translator.

"I'm pleased to see you've all recovered. Now - who's going to tell me what happened?"

"Captain, I believe we have already made the acquaintance of that young man." Spock indicated a tall Elzoan in the corner whose face was almost hidden. The face wasn't necessary - Kirk immediately recognised the spiky red fur.

"Tegvarra - what are you doing here? Causing another disturbance?"

The Elzoan slowly raised his head and met Kirk's questioning gaze. He straightened up and said firmly, "We took a ship from the repair dock. We were trying to get to our homeland on Elzo."

Captain and First Officer looked at each other. Spock raised an eyebrow thoughtfully while a score of questions tumbled round Kirk's mind, each fighting for first place. He managed to get one out. "You took a ship that was being repaired?"

"No, no," murmured several voices.

"The ship had been repaired," corrected Tegvarra. "It was fuelled and ready for take-off."

"But what about the guards? Why weren't you stopped?"

The Elzoans grinned, showing sharp teeth. "The guards do not bother about us," said one. "Most of us work at the docks on the punishment force. We come and go without attracting attention."

"So you took the ship - somehow. But how did you get it so far? We understood that your people were only capable of menial tasks."

There were low mutterings from the group as Tegvarra spoke up firmly. "We learn as quickly as our Valassan masters, but we cannot learn what we are not taught. Our people have been held down by their ignorance for centuries - but we were kept in ignorance because it suited our masters."

"Then who piloted the ship?" inquired Spock.

All eyes turned towards a particularly small creature whose embarrassment, in spite of his fur, was obvious. "Tegvollo knew how to control the ship. His master was the regular pilot."

Spock's eyebrows rose in polite astonishment while Kirk tried not to smile. He had rarely seen a more insignificant-looking creature. The situation was getting more ridiculous by the minute.

He stared hard at Tegvollo. "Are you telling us that your Valassan master taught you how to pilot a spacecraft?"

The little Elzoan almost shook with nerves as he replied. "Please let me explain, sir. We made regular supply trips between Valasso and the colony on Zecco, the fourth planet. Our ship was old, but not difficult to control, and my master used to let me handle it when he was bored. It amused him, you see. I always accompanied him to look after his needs and usually there were only the two of us on board, so no-one saw what we did. It was against the regulations, of course."

"So what went wrong?"

Tegvollo's voice dropped in embarrassment. "The course was pre-set for our usual destination, and when I tried to alter it for Elzo I made mistakes. I wasn't sure what to do, you see. Then we were hit by something and started to lose air. I don't really know what happened - it was all so fast, so confusing."

The Elzoan who had spoken before immediately chipped in with, "You were not to blame, Tegvollo. We knew the risks when we persuaded you to take us."

"I doubt that very much," commented Spock quietly. "If you had really understood the risks involved in this venture you would have realised that your chances of even reaching Elzo, let alone achieving a safe landing, were extremely slight."

The Elzoans were undismayed at this depressing news. Tegvarra looked at his

kinsmen and spoke for them all. "We had to make the attempt, sir, even if death lay at the end of the flight. Most of us here are either on the punishment force already or are heading for it rapidly. It's a life sentence, sir, and for no more reason than wanting to be free. Taking the ship was a criminal act; the only criminal thing any of us have ever done."

Tegvarra stopped and looked around at the others who were sitting with bent heads. "All we ever wanted was to be free men, Captain. We want to stand on our home planet - free Elzoans."

Kirk cleared his throat. "I think we can arrange that for you, gentlemen - and ladies." He had noticed during the last few minutes that three of the furry creatures were females. Fifteen pairs of eyes turned towards him; fifteen mouths dropped open slightly. "We happen to be on our way to Elzo at this moment, so we shall beam you down when we have found a suitable place. After that, of course, you are on your own. We won't be around to pick you up if you don't like it."

Pandemonium broke out. Sickbay was suddenly filled with dancing, cavorting bodies, while the air rang with their shrill, excited chatter. As Kirk smiled at the scene like an indulgent father he became aware that Spock's face was looking more than usually grave.

"Captain, may I speak with you privately, please?"

Kirk turned away from his adopted children. "Certainly, Mr. Spock, but I warn you now, I have given them my promise and I will stand by it."

They walked back to the bridge, in gentle argument all the way. "Jim, the Valassans have their solar system carefully organised and controlled. The Elzoans must have been tracked by their monitoring systems - if not followed by a pursuit ship. It is quite certain that somebody knows that the runaways are on the Enterprise."

"So long as those people are on my ship, Spock, they are in my care. If the Valassans want them back - they'd better have a good reason."

"We could be accused, quite justly, of interfering in a domestic problem, Jim. It's hardly a good time to cause a diplomatic incident."

"On the contrary - it's a very good time to cause a diplomatic incident. Trouble now may persuade the Federation to reconsider the wisdom of allying itself with Valasso."

The turbolift opened onto the bridge. Spock looked with a troubled face at his Captain. "Providing the Federation backs you in this, Jim."

Kirk grinned. "Relax, Spock. We don't even know for sure that anybody has spotted our pick-up."

Spock pursed his lips in a very Human fashion but said nothing and went to his science station.

"How much longer, Mr. Sulu?" Kirk went to his own chair.

"Eleven minutes, Captain."

Kirk was just about to sit back when Uhura turned to him. "Captain, the head of Valassan security wants to speak to you urgently."

Kirk sighed. "Put him on, Lieutenant."

Spock swivelled round in his chair. He had been expecting this, but not for a moment did it cross his mind to say - or even think - 'I told you so'.

The voice was pleasant and polite, but very firm. "Captain Kirk - Valassan security has been tracking a stolen space vessel, registered under the number 5186/31. The vessel has been found damaged and abandoned and we have reason to believe that its Elzoan passengers are aboard your ship."

"We did answer a distress call, Commander. The Elzoans are now recovering in our sickbay."

"We are very grateful for your assistance, Captain. If you will be so good as to hold your position we will send a ship to take off the Elzoans."

A grim smile slowly spread over Kirk's features. "I'm afraid that won't be possible, Commander; the Enterprise has urgent business elsewhere."

The Security Chief's voice took on an edge of steel. "Captain Kirk, we will not delay you for long, particularly as our sensors show that you are not on the point of leaving our system but are about to enter orbit round our fifth planet."

"A slight detour, Commander, that's all. If you wish to collect the Elzoans from the planet's surface - that is where we shall be leaving them. They have asked to be put down on their home planet and I have agreed to their request."

There was a slight pause and when the man replied his tone was very frosty. "Captain Kirk, it is good of you to be so obliging, but the fact is that your group of Elzoans are absent without leave from a punishment squad and have committed a criminal offence by taking a spacecraft. Elzo may be their planet of origin but these people are Valassan citizens and you, Captain, are interfering in a domestic matter. I request once more that you hold your position until we arrive."

Kirk remained unmoved. "It is not my wish to interfere, Commander, but my passengers are my responsibility and I have promised to transport them down to the planet's surface. If you wish to pursue the matter then you know where they are, but the Enterprise has business elsewhere."

There was silence on the bridge while the Valassan mentally counted to ten, then the voice returned. "Captain - I believe your ship is carrying our Vice-President, Vad Tovo. I request permission to speak to him."

"Anything to oblige, Commander," Kirk replied, only too aware of his own sarcasm. He nodded to Uhura. "Put the Commander through to the Vice-President, Lieutenant."

Spock appeared at his side and both men stared at the planet looming large on the viewscreen; a dull, brown, inhospitable-looking ball.

"Jim, is it wise to antagonise the Valassans?" murmured the Vulcan.

Kirk smiled wryly. "I didn't intend it but matters have reached boiling point faster than I intended, Spock. I'm not breaking my word to the Elzoans. I shall put them down as promised. If the Valassans want them badly enough they can go and look for them."

A few moments later he was summoned to the Valassan quarters by an apoplectic Commissioner Santee. At the bridge doorway he turned to Spock. "Mr. Spock - if I return from this interview in one piece, I shall want to know everything there is to know about Elzo and I want a suitable landing site for the Elzoans."

The turbolift deposited him almost in the arms of Santee who was prowling round the corridor like a caged beast.

"Captain Kirk - are you trying to ruin everything? What stupid game are you playing?"

"I don't play games with people's lives, Commissioner."

The passenger quarters allotted to Vad Tovo were heated to a temperature which could satisfy the most sensitive Valassan, but Kirk's breath seemed to freeze as he walked in. The source of the chill was standing motionless in the centre of the room, controlled anger in the staring, ice-blue eyes.

"Captain Kirk - I am informed by the Valassan Security force that Elzoan criminals are being entertained on this vessel and that you are refusing to co-operate with our law enforcers."

"There are fifteen Elzoan refugees being cared for in sickbay, Vice-President. It is my intention to put them down on the surface of Elzo - which happens to be the planet we are now orbiting. After that the matter is entirely in the

hands of the Valassan authorities - should they wish to pursue it. I did my duty as a ship's Captain by rescuing people in distress, but it is not my place to judge whether they are criminals or not."

Vad Tovo shook his head with exasperation. "Captain, you are playing with words, you are well aware that the Elzoans are criminals. You must know that they have absconded from a punishment squad and have stolen a valuable space vessel."

"I agree that it was an offence to take the ship, but the vessel has been recovered and can, no doubt, be repaired. Apart from that the Elzoans assure me they have done nothing criminal, so why waste your time and effort on them?"

Vad Tovo smiled grimly. "You say that you are in no position to judge the Elzoans, Captain, but you have already judged them and found them to be innocent!" He turned to Santee. "Does the Federation actually encourage its servants to meddle in the internal affairs of other races, Commissioner, or is Captain Kirk a law unto himself?"

While Santee struggled to reply, Kirk said quickly, "Vice-President, what will happen to the Elzoans if they return to Valasso?"

"Obviously, they will be tried in the Court of Justice."

"On what charges?"

"Absconding from the punishment force, leaving Valasso without permission, and the theft of the space vessel. There may be other charges."

"Presumably they will be found guilty?"

"There is little doubt of their guilt, Captain."

"And how will they be punished?"

Vad Tovo hesitated for a second and then said in a much lower tone, "The punishment is death."

"Death!" Kirk and Santee gaped at each other and then turned back to the Valassan, whose cold stare was unwavering.

Kirk said slowly, "You mean fifteen people will be executed for stealing a worn-out spaceship?"

"No, no - the theft of the ship is a minor offence. The crime which carries the death penalty is that of leaving the planet without permission."

Kirk exploded. "In God's name, why? what is so serious about escaping from Valasso that death has to be the punishment? Haven't you any detention centres, any prisons?"

"No, Captain, the Valassans are law-abiding people and prisons are unnecessary. But the Elzoans are a different matter; they are hot-headed and emotional; where one leads the others follow. Punishment for an offence usually means service in the punishment force, but for this sort of crime - which, by its example, could lead to unrest and possible uprising among the Elzoan people - there is only one punishment. Your 'refugees', Captain, know what would happen if they were caught."

Kirk shook his head sadly. "You must be very unsure of the Elzoans if you believe that mass execution is necessary to frighten them into submission."

The Valassan's reply was scornful. "You know nothing of the situation on our planet, Captain Kirk. Five hundred years ago we gave refuge to a people whose world was dying. They were very different from ourselves, but we gave them homes, gave them shelter, and cared for them in every way. We are still caring for them - although their numbers now almost equal our own. Most of them are grateful but there have always been a few who have rebelled. It is for their own well-being that the death penalty exists. Fear of it prevents them from trying to get back to their own planet and dying painfully on its barren surface."

Nothing can exist on Elzo, Captain, and we must make that clear to Elzoans once and for all. If we are now orbiting Elzo then by all means show your passengers what their world is like, but then they must be returned to Valasso for trial. Better that fifteen die than the whole race be left in a state of unrest - yearning for a golden world that doesn't exist."

His speech had obviously impressed Santee; the Commissioner was nodding his head in agreement. Kirk turned away in disgust. "I still think you are wrong, Vice-President, and I am not prepared to hand over the Elzoans for you to kill - no matter how justified you may believe you are."

The Valassan straightened up and looked at him coolly. "Very well, Captain, I understand how you feel. I trust your Federation will also understand and forgive you for losing the trading agreements that Commissioner Santee has spent months negotiating."

There was a gasp from the helpless Santee. Vad Tovo turned to him. "I am truly sorry for this, Commissioner, but my people will not tolerate interference in their domestic matters. As Vice-President of the Valassan High Council I have the right to rescind all our trade agreements with the Federation, and I will do just that if Captain Kirk persists in his unreasonable behaviour."

There was silence in the room. Santee's face was ashen - he sat paralysed, staring at the floor. Kirk felt bewildered - outplayed. Normally far-sighted, his sympathy for the plight of the Elzoans had blinded him to this most logical turn of events. As he searched for a reply the Valassan came to his rescue.

"As this matter seriously affects both our peoples, Captain, I am prepared to give you a few minutes to reconsider your position, but if your co-operation is still not forthcoming my party will leave your ship and return to Valasso."

Kirk found himself in the corridor. After a few moments in thought he moved to the wall intercom. Kirk to sickbay. Dr. McCoy - bring the Elzoans up to the bridge. Yes - all of them. Now."

When he got to the bridge he threw himself wearily into his chair and answered Spock's enquiring look straight away. "I've been given an ultimatum, Spock. Either I hand over the Elzoans or the Valassans go back home and take all their trade agreements with them."

"Then, as a representative of the Federation, you have little choice."

"That's not all, Spock. The Elzoans are likely to be executed on their return to Valasso. Apparently there is a death penalty for what they have done."

Every head turned towards him. Appalled faces stared in disbelief. He shrugged. "So - if the Elzoans face death on Valasso - what are their chances on their home planet? In very simple language, please, Spock, I haven't time to go into details."

"In simple language, Captain, they face death on their own planet too - unless they are given assistance. The air is thin and the climate very cold. There is little vegetation or surface water. There are signs of life - but nothing larger than small mammals - very small. There is certainly no race of Elzoans still living on the planet."

He followed his brief summary of the situation with a few pertinent figures about the oxygen content of the atmosphere and temperature levels in different areas of the planet. It all boiled down to one sad conclusion: the 'Valassan' Elzoans would die - and die quickly - if they were abandoned on the unwelcoming surface of Elzo.

As Spock was speaking the bridge doors opened and McCoy entered with the Elzoans. They stood, overawed, huddled together, looking utterly pathetic. A lump came to Kirk's throat. It was all so unfair. Just for once, why couldn't there have been gold at the end of their rainbow?

He looked pleadingly at his First Officer. "Spock - their ancestors survived down there..."

"They were born there, Captain. They were used to the conditions. These people will die long before their bodies have learned to re-adapt to the cold and the atmosphere. Beside which, there are definite signs that the climate has worsened during the last five hundred years. The Valassans have been telling the truth about Elzo, Captain. They have undoubtedly saved a dying race."

Kirk's heart seemed to have dropped right out of his body. He took McCoy's translator and turned to the little Elzoans who were staring in wonder with their huge eyes at their red-brown world.

"The planet you see on the viewscreen is Elzo. Unfortunately, it seems that the Valassans were not lying to you. Elzo is uninhabitable. If I put you down on the surface, you will die quickly - and painfully."

There was no reaction at all from the listeners. Hurriedly, Kirk explained what conditions were like, and then waited. Tegvarra looked round at his countrymen and then said, "Thank you for bringing us, Captain. When may we go down?"

"But, Tegvarra, there is nothing for you down there. You will all die. Anyway, the Valassans know you are on board - they are insisting that we hand you over to them."

Sadly, the Elzoan said, "We will also die if we return to Valasso, Captain. We cannot go back there and we do not want to. At least on Elzo we will die free men on our own planet." He looked at the sympathetic faces of the bridge crew and then back to Kirk. "You promised us, Captain."

After a moment, Kirk said, "Yes - I did. Go back to sickbay and I will tell you when it is time."

He watched them leave and then turned to find McCoy looking at him with great concern. "Jim, Spock has just been telling me about the Vice-President's ultimatum. You aren't going to be very popular with the Federation if you lose those trading rights."

"Don't rub it in, Bones. I'm wrong whatever I do. If I honour my promise and let the Elzoans go, they will die and I'm likely to end up in a desk job at Starfleet. If I hand them over to the Valassans they will still die - and I'll never be able to look at my own reflection again." He glared at the screen. "How did I ever get myself into this mess?"

McCoy stopped at the door. "What about the mess the Elzoans are in, Jim? They'll die whatever you decide to do." He went out, leaving his words ringing in Kirk's ears.

Spock said thoughtfully, "Captain - the Elzoans might survive if they are given assistance to help them through their early difficulties. Their bodies may eventually adapt to the climate, and there could well be enough food to sustain them if they are given time to learn how to acquire it."

"Fine - but the immediate problem is getting them there without causing a diplomatic crisis. I'd better go - my time's up."

"Shall I come with you, Captain?"

"I thought you'd never ask, Spock."

Commissioner Santee was sitting in the same position when they got to the Vice-President's room. He looked up anxiously, didn't like what he saw in Kirk's face, and dropped his gaze again. Vad Tovo's manner was brisk.

"Well, Captain - may I have your decision, then we waste no more time?"

Fighting for time to waste, Kirk said, "One moment, sir - my First Officer has a question."

This was news to Spock but he followed Kirk's lead smoothly. "Out of interest, Vice-President, what form does the death penalty take on Valasso?"

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Vad Tovo wasn't expecting this and he certainly didn't like it. "That's hardly your business, Mr. Spock, but as a matter of fact there is no fixed form. So far as I know, no-one has been executed on Valasso for nearly two centuries. Obviously the High Council will have to discuss the matter before any decision is reached, but I can assure you that the execution will be quick and painless."

Kirk seized a faint chance. "Isn't it going to be rather embarrassing for the High Council - a law-abiding society suddenly having to find a means of executing fifteen people? Embarrassing and distasteful?"

Vad Tovo hesitated before he replied, and when he did, there was emotion in his voice. "Embarrassing, distasteful - and upsetting. We care about the Elzoans, Captain, in a way you do not understand. They are like children to us - children who must be looked after, kept from harm, and disciplined. The death of these children is necessary - they broke our laws quite knowingly - but we take no pleasure in it, no pleasure at all." He shook his head and there was real sadness in his eyes for the first time.

Treading very carefully, Kirk said, "Vice-President, it may interest you to know that the Elzoans themselves accept that they must die. But they ask that they be allowed to die on their own planet - naturally." The ice-blue eyes bored into his own. "If you will permit it, then I will also be grateful to you for allowing me to keep my promise to them."

"Justice must be seen to be done, Captain."

Spock said quickly, "No civilised person would want to watch fifteen people die, sir. Surely the word of the Vice-President would be accepted by the High Council?"

"Of course it would be accepted, but what you suggest is highly irregular."

"The death penalty itself is irregular, Vice-President," said Kirk. "You have admitted that you don't even know how it will be administered, so why should it not be done this way? You need have no fears that the Elzoans will escape - Mr. Spock assures me that they will not survive the first night - and you can make whatever formal announcement you wish to the rest of their people on Valasso. Surely this is the best way to handle the situation peaceably?"

Vad Tovo gave the matter careful thought, and then agreed. "But I insist on being present when the Elzoans are transported down, Captain."

"Naturally you must preside over the situation, sir. However, it will take a few minutes to prepare the transporter and get the Elzoans together, so I suggest you stay here until we are ready."

Once in the corridor Kirk let out his breath. "Spock - I'm beginning to think I'd like a nice, easy desk job! Now get down to stores and start arranging things there while I explain to the Elzoans. I'll fetch them down and between us we'll teach them how to use the emergency equipment. I just hope they're quick learners."

Twenty minutes later Kirk and McCoy led the Elzoans into the transporter room where Mr. Scott was beaming down the last of the supplies.

"Everything safely down, Mr. Scott?"

"Aye, sir. Er...Captain, ye dinna think the Valassans will check the planet after we've gone, d'ye?"

"I doubt it, Scotty. Spock was checking up on Valassan technology earlier and he says their sensor systems are not sophisticated enough to identify a few small life forms from orbital status, and it's hardly likely they'll go down to the planet. They have no transporter system and they would have to search the whole place to find them. Besides, Vad Tovo has called off the security forces and sent a message to the High Council. I don't think our deception will be noticed."

Tegvarra touched Kirk's arm. "Captain - I speak for all my people when I

say that words cannot express our gratitude for all you have done for us."

"I wish I could have done more, Tegvarra, but save your breath now - you'll be needing it in a few minutes."

The door opened to admit the Vice-President and Commissioner Santee, escorted by Spock. Vad Tovo was wearing a mask like expression once more, but Santee was visibly startled at being so close to the Elzoans.

"Do you wish to say anything, sir?" Kirk asked.

Vad Tovo looked at his people and said, "Are you quite sure this is what you want?" Fifteen heads nodded the answer. "Very well. Captain - you may transport them."

Two minutes later there were only six people in the room. The Vice-President said, "This has been a most difficult business, Captain Kirk. I trust our future dealings with your Federation will be smoother." He swept out, followed by Santee who stopped just long enough to give Kirk a withering look on his way out.

"I'm afraid the Commissioner will never forgive me for all this," said Kirk with a wry smile.

"You'll survive," said McCoy. "I wonder if the Elzoans will?"

"They have a good chance - provided they use their supplies wisely," said Spock.

McCoy grinned suddenly. "Hey - there are three women in the group - they may start a new race of Elzoans."

Kirk groaned. "I hope not. One race of Elzoans is enough."

"Captain - d'ye still intend sending a letter of protest about the Valassan social system?" asked Scott.

Kirk looked serious. "I certainly do. But I think I'll try a bit of diplomacy and send a strong recommendation instead. I shall recommend that an inquiry be held before any further agreements are made with the Valassan people. It may be that slavery is the wrong word for what goes on there, but there's gross inequality being practised, that's for sure."

McCoy took his arm and pulled him towards the door. "Well, I recommend that Captain Kirk and the U.S.S. Enterprise are not used for the investigation. I further recommend, Captain, sir, that you point this vessel in the direction of Starbase 15 and get us that shore leave we were promised. If you don't hurry up I'll be too old to enjoy it."

The transporter room emptied and fell silent. On Elzo, life struggled to begin again.

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ELAAN by Katy Deery

You weep your tears
as crystal rain
lies soft upon my hand.
You twist my mind
and leave me weak,
too bewildered to understand.
Yet even as you hold me now,
my mistress of the skies
beckons me to return to her -
and I follow my Enterprise.

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A DAY IN THE LIFE OF... by Lesley Walker

It had begun as a normal day for me. The usual alarm call at 04.00 hours (groan), a shower, change of uniform, and finally the usual inspection of that old familiar visage getting older and more familiar every day. Then, suitably prepared for the day, a light breakfast of toast and coffee, a quick chat, and out into the corridor. A quick stretch and yawn while I'm waiting for the turbolift, and onwards to Engineering: Communications Technicians - or E.C.T. for short - to begin another day.

Being an ensign (underling-first class) in charge of the calibration and repair of all defective communications and equipment appertaining thereto has its compensations - you don't get your hands dirty. To translate my function into English, I repair dud hand-communication devices, inter-ship communication devices and anything else of that genre which becomes malfunctioning during the course of its lifetime which, judging by the ham-fisted gorillas we have in our crew who handle this usually robust equipment, is three standard days.

Anyhow, on this particular duty watch, I ambled into E.C.T. and took over from Ensign Radcliffe (dear little man) as usual at 04.55 hours, and he, as usual, stumbled and yawned his way to the door, wrenching a sleepy "See you" from his exhausted body as he wheeled his way through the automatic doors.

Let me explain this to you. Our department isn't what might be termed 'overworked', neither is it essential when compared with something like the medic or science departments, but without us, the likes of our illustrious Captain would be communicating to his crew with two pieces of wood and a loud-hailer. We are the little people that help to keep this highly sophisticated (and expensive) piece of technology ticking over nicely, day in, day out.

Of course, this doesn't mean that one has visions of grandeur, or false ideas of self-importance, but it is gratifying to know that without Radcliffe and myself, the Enterprise would be as silent as the proverbial grave - well, except for people tapping on the air-duct pipes or shouting down the Jeffries tubes at one another, which is not conducive to the accurate conveyance of specialised information.

To get back to the subject, today was just like any other day. Raddy (Radcliffe) had logged in one defective hand-communication device (sat on and squashed by our ever-forgetful, but always loveable, security guard, Yeoman Priest, a giant at 1.90m with a heart to match. As tough as he looks, he has the personality of a tribble) which needed repair, and a logic board from Lt. Uhura's communications console, which had apparently been substituting the letter 'S' for the letter 'B', and thus transmitting some highly irregular messages to the befuddled amazement of Mr. Scott in Engineering. So, with my huge workload for the day, I settled down in my seat, elbows on the table and logic board in hand.

In the midst of examining what looked to me like a faulty capacitor, I heard the intercom bleep and immediately dropped the board in complete surprise, as nobody bleeps at 05.10 unless it's pretty urgent. I sloped out of the chair, and pressed the 'SPEAK' button.

"E.T.C. Ensign Sawyer here."

"Bridge here, Uhura speaking. I have another fault on my panel. Every time I try to signal Engineering, I get the signal straight back on my board and end up talking to myself. The joke is wearing a little thin."

To calm our unusually disgruntled sounding communications whiz, I promised I'd be right up to fix her problem, before she went crazy with frustration and launched her console into orbit.

So, with my trusty tool pouch in hand, I stepped briskly out into the corridor, and stepped into the nearest turbolift. With some trepidation, I commanded "Bridge," and off we shot. Visits to the bridge are a rare occurrence

for me, because Lt. Uhura is a VERY capable woman, who can fix almost anything she operates and thus my presence is usually negated. I guess even she gets tired of swapping transistors, though, and I am paid to do the mundane chores, after all.

Busily daydreaming (as is my usual occupation at that time of the day), I hardly noticed the lift doors open. Suddenly faced with the main viewscreen full of stars and twinkling lights, I froze in a state of panic, pulses racing and mouth wide open (and I wondered why they never promoted me to bridge duty!). Fear aside, I stepped as boldly as I was able onto the bridge and peeked nervously at the con.

It was Mr. Sulu's duty watch, so thank god I didn't have to cope with the extra nerve-crunching experience of any of the big guns on duty, especially the biggest gun of all, Captain Kirk. If he had been there, yours truly would have gone catatonic on the spot. However, a quick glance over at the comm. console saved my bacon, as I saw the grin of welcome on Uhura's face, and I was able to announce myself with a certain amount of confidence.

"Ahem. Reporting as requested, ma'am."

"Oh, hi, Lee. Now you're here, maybe I can get on with my job and leave you to it."

"Sure thing, Lieutenant."

And there I was, on my knees, unwrapping my black toolpouch and removing the cover panel from the comm. console.

Over my shoulder, I could hear all the noises of everyday bridge life; the regular inter-ship communications (except for Engineering, ahem) and the odd word of command for a change in course, etc.

Ensign Chekov was at the helm, busily working on some figures, Mr. Sulu was sitting facing the viewscreen looking very relaxed, the navigation officer (couldn't recognise him from the back of his head) was busily - well, navigating, I guess - and there was I, checking Radcliffe's replacement logic board, marvelling at the way these people get to do all the interesting things.

After a random check on the logic board, and finding no fault, I moved onto the data board, and began another fault-find. No, the board hadn't gone into a 'loop' condition, and so it wasn't sending back its own data. Yaawwn. Really must get to bed early tonight. Shouldn't have spent so much time reading... Aah! A burnt-out transistor. Could be that. Now, where's the spare...? That's it! All in place, brand spanking new. Just check the other cards to see if there's anything else, and then close up shop...

The next thing I knew, I was lying flat on my back with half a data board in my hand. The whole universe was exploding around my head. What in the H-E-L-L had happened?

"Lee? Lee! Are you all right? Lee!!! Speak to me!!!"

Uhura was holding my very deflated body up under the arms, looking straight into my face with a very worried look in her eyes.

Shaking my head from side to side, I managed to open my mouth. "Wha... What happened?"

"I don't know, but you got flung out from my console and BAAM - there you were, lying at my feet!"

"Yeuk - my head's killing me. Still, couldn't have been a voltage surge or I'd be saying hello to my forebears by now!"

Groaning in true strong-silent-type fashion, I struggled to my knees, and inspected the damage - to myself and the console. The data board was rent in two. Not much of that left to repair. My head hurt - that was Dr. McCoy's bag. Maybe we should swap jobs - well, it was an idea. Peering inside the guts of the console, I looked to see if during my reverie I had put the wrong board in the

wrong place. Nope. All clear - and the other half of the data board was lying inside the console. Maybe I'm in the wrong job, I thought... Oh well, back to E.C.T. for a replacement.

"Any sign of the trouble, Lee?"

"No, just that you'll be without communications to Engineering for a while."

"Tell me something I don't know," giggled Uhura.

"Promise you I'll be back in a flash," I said, trying to creep out before she noticed the awful pun. Knees wobbling a little, I nipped into the turbolift, back to E.C.T. My hands were sadly shaking and my head was pounding out a tattoo of its own. Ugh. On top of that, I couldn't figure out, not yet anyway, what had caused the accident. Maybe I just have a cursed family.

Still puzzled, I arrived at E.C.T. and went to the stores, and picked up the only spare data board I had, leaving the other half behind to examine later before I junked it,

I made my way back to the bridge, and stepped out onto the magic fairyland, only to find - to my horror - Mr. Sulu had gone off duty and had been replaced by the old man himself - Captain Kirk.

Yike!! Even my eyeballs were trembling. Here was the man who had encountered every possible kind of life form, now being approached by amoebic little me, clinging for dear life to a data board. My stomach churning, and attempting to remain as inconspicuous as possible, and praying that a) Uhura would not draw attention to me or b) that the Captain would not be driven by a sudden compulsive desire to turn 180° clockwise, I crept back to the comm. console.

It's at times like these that I become very aware of my fat knees poking over my boots, and wish that I could be issued with a nice red Engineering overall. Funny how self-censuring you get when you're over-awed, isn't it?

Anyhow, stealthily (and wobbly) I slipped toward my goal and - horror of horrors - he turned around.

Immediately my legs gave way and there I was, on the floor again, this time face downwards and wishing as hard as I could that the deck would open up and swallow me...

"Ensign! Are you all right?"

Immediately, I recognised by the timbre of the voice asking the question that it was not Uhura. Inwardly groaning, I managed to lift my now very red face off the floor and managed a feeble reply.

"Yes, I think so, sir. Must be an after-effect of that shock I got earlier." (Well, I had to think of something, didn't I? I couldn't very well tell the Captain that at the very mention of his name my blood runs to water at the soles of my boots, could I?)

The next thing I knew, a vice-like grip was around my right elbow and as I staggered to my feet we met eye-to-eye. That was it. I froze. Starship Captains are not conducive to low blood pressure. I had only ever spoken face to face with the Captain once before, and the results were not too dissimilar. I'm sure he thinks I'm one of the few uncertified lunatics that slip through the psychological test the Fleet makes you take.

"Are you quite sure you're all right?"

Splutter. Choke. Cough, cough. Gasp, my throat had gone tight.

"Yes." Splutter, splutter, cough. "Just a little twinge..." Groan. Groan. What a great impression of super-coolness and self-control I must have presented to this stalwart of the skies. Aaargh! If only I could quote a little Shakespeare - or even just manage a coherent sentence...

He lifted me to my feet (good grief, I never guessed he was that strong!)

and looked right into my eyes - first mistake. I managed to keep standing upright and averted my eyes in a shy-girl routine. You have to play up to these star men - makes them feel masculine. Not that he needed any reassuring as far as I could tell.

"I think you'd better report to sickbay, Ensign."

"No, no, sir - really, I'm quite all right."

"Well, if you're certain...but don't hesitate to leave if you feel you must. If you're not well, you'll be better off with Dr. McCoy looking after you."

"Thank you, sir, but I really am fine." Thanks a bunch, Captain. I'm twenty five years old and you talk to me like I'm five. Chauvanism is not dead - it lives on under the guise of Captain James T. Kirk.

"You really are sure?"

"Positive, sir." (Har, har, Sawyer. Who are you trying to kid?)

"Okay, finish what you started and let's get back to work, shall we?"

"Yes, sir." (Depends what work you want finished, handsome!)

By now, everyone was goggling at me. As much as I like the

centre stage, I don't like it when I feel like this! Anyway, after a few seconds of nudging each other and grinning knowingly, they went back to work and I carried on making a chump out of myself.

Kneeling down in front of the comm. console, I shoved my probe in, disgusted with myself, creasing my face in the usual frown lines it has grown accustomed to.

"Hey, cheer up. It may never happen."

Uhura was kneeling next to me. I managed a wry sort of smile.

"Sure you're O.K.?"

"Yes. Fine. I just get intimidated by gold braid."

She giggled. "He doesn't bite, you know."

"I'll take your word for it. Now, the sooner I get out of here, the better my nerves will feel."

She giggled again. "Well, at least you got noticed."

I managed to defrost a little. "Yeah, was a little hard to ignore me, wasn't it?" I smirked.

Then, giving her a knowing wink, I retrieved the remaining half of the old data board, checked for obvious power leaks, carefully inserted the new data board and covered my head. Quiet as a mouse. Plucking up courage, I stuck my head in further and found the REAL culprit - a faulty power convertor - (naughty old thing nearly killed me) - which, although wired in, was not seated in its



covering correctly, and would send sufficient current through the data board to blast it in half, and affect the capacitors in the data board so that they gave off a short, sharp spurt of power - and shook the idiot hanging on the end of it - in this case, me.

It probably worked loose like half the stuff on the Enterprise - what with all the buffeting from photon torpedoes, phaser fire and the like from our not-so-friendly neighbours in space, it's a wonder anything remains fixed for longer than an hour. God, I've sat through enough of those teeth-rattlers to last me a lifetime.

Using my insulated tongs, I clamped hold of the convertor, wired it in place, and stood back to admire my handiwork. (Pat on the back, old bean.)

"Try that for size, Lieutenant," I said, fingers and eyeballs crossed.

Uhura buzzed Engineering. In my state of mind, this action appeared to take three hours for her to perform. I stood in morbid anticipation, waiting to hear her own voice come straight back at her.

"Bridge to Engineering," she called again.

Answer, Scotty, Answer!

"Engineering. Scott here."

Crumpled Ensign coming up.

"Seems our problem is fixed, Mr. Scott."

"Aye, that it is. Scott out."

Big sigh of relief from me, and uncrossing of various crossed limbs. Big sighs all round, in fact. A big smile from Uhura, and an even bigger smile from the Captain. I was tempted to smile back - but one mustn't get too familiar with one's superior officers - well, not that familiar. So I grinned, as a compromise.

Feeling smug, I closed up the console and prepared to heave-ho. I heard the Captain's sonorous tones over my shoulder.

"Ah, Ensign; before you go, my intercom has taken to producing static noises at peculiar hours of the morning, and I wonder if you would do me the honour of fixing it before I tear it out of the wall?"

"Aye, aye, sir. Consider it done."

Fixing his intercom. My, my - we are going up in the world.

I flashed a smile at Uhura as I slipped into the lift, and as the lift doors closed behind me, I slid into reverie, recalling a certain smile on a certain face... Chuckling to myself, I realised the turbolift was back at E.C.T.

Just as I was about to step out, I found myself nose to nose with Mr. Spock. Yike. This guy really does frighten me out of my skin. However, I am assured by my fellow crew members that he would not eat me, as he is a confirmed vegetarian.

"Ensign Sawyer, I have a message for you. The Captain informs me that you have left your tool pouch on the bridge and wonders if you would care to retrieve it?"

Why the hell Captain Kirk couldn't have told me himself, I couldn't figure out, but the workings of the executive mind have always eluded me.

"Yes, sir, of course."

I remained inside the elevator and - shock, horror! - Mr. Spock joined me. I thought I might get an allergy from all this gold braid.

"Bridge," he commanded. Funny how he did it more convincingly than me. I always managed to sound like I was asking the stupid thing a question.

Now, this was the man I would give my right arm to talk to. His knowledge



of computer science was so far above what was known by the rest of the bods that he made us all look like ants by comparison.

Oh, well, one could but dream. I'm probably too stupid to understand half of what he could tell me anyway. I looked at him out of the corner of one eye. Stone faced, as usual. He caught me looking at him, and I reverted to eyes-front. I managed to see that irrepressible eyebrow shoot up. The urge to laugh was overwhelming. However, I managed to swallow my guffaws and maintained a suitable composure.

Back to the bridge again. Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more...

Out into limbo, onto the deck. This was getting to be quite a habit.

"Hi. Forgot my tools."

Uhura handed me the pouch and the other half of the data board, and I turned to go.

Kirk swivelled round and looked me full in the face -

and grinned. "Don't forget my intercom, will you?"

"I won't, sir."

"Glad to hear it, Ensign." (The name is Lee, Captain!)

He swivelled back to face the viewscreen and barked a few orders here and there; and I left the bridge to itself. Spock was seated and as I left he nodded an acknowledgement at me. ME???? I was surprised too!!!

Back in the turbolift.

"Deck level five."

Must fix his intercom first, mustn't I? He'd have my proverbials for garters if I didn't! Grinning ear to ear, I found the door to the Captain's quarters and pulled the front of the intercom. A resistor was lumped out, so it was a swift change and presto - no more early morning buzzes. I turned on my heel, trying not to look too self-satisfied, and made my way back to the Pits (E.C.T.).

Back to reality - the illusion crashing around my ears could have been heard on the bridge. Heavy sigh. I walked through the doors and saw the logic board and communicator staring back at me. Oh, well, at least today was different...

I poured myself a coffee, and sat down at my workbench. I flung the other half of the data board to join its companion for post-mortem examination, and started where I had begun, holding the logic board. No bleep this time.

Sipping my coffee, I examined the board. Transistor RS2 - check. RS3 - check...one potato, two potato...

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YET ANOTHER DAY IN THE LIFE OF A STARSHIP CAPTAINby Rita Oliver

Today, I saved the Universe.
 It was the least that I could do.
 After all where would we be
 Without our star spangled view?
 After lunch, I took a rest,
 But someone took my mind,
 We fought so hard to get it back,
 So that I might save Mankind!
 Before tea we had a Klingon war,
 We were desperate we should win,
 But against our strategy and cunning,
 Those Klingons soon gave in!
 Later, right before my eyes,
 The Doctor dropped down dead.
 "With my trusty Vulcan sidekick,
 I shall avange you, Bones!" I said.
 So up we got and beamed away
 To find those villains bad,
 To see his boney friend so dead
 Made my Vulcan aide so mad.
 So off we went to a Hell on Earth,
 To find, somehow, a cure.
 I won't bore you with the details,
 But we found one there for sure.
 We raced back to our Starship
 (After fleeing from the Kelps!)
 We cured our friend the Doctor
 Just in time to get his help.
 For whilst fighting on the planet
 My Vulcan friend was hurt,
 It seems that in a cut he got,
 He must have got some poisoned dirt.
 The Doctor strove all evening
 To save our Vulcan pal,
 At last he drew him back to life,
 So calm and logical.
 So now we're back to normal,
 Efficient, bright and gay.
 We'll stop and rest our bodies,
 Take a breather while we may.
 No doubt, around the corner,
 Some Being lies in wait,
 Just to sabotage our routine,
 And change the course of fate.
 But in our usual fashion,
 We will, no doubt, come through,
 We'll go out and face the monster
 And go on to dangers new.
 Sometimes I get disheartened
 That I should feel so bored -
 But some day, something EXCITING will happen;
 Of that, I am assured.

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