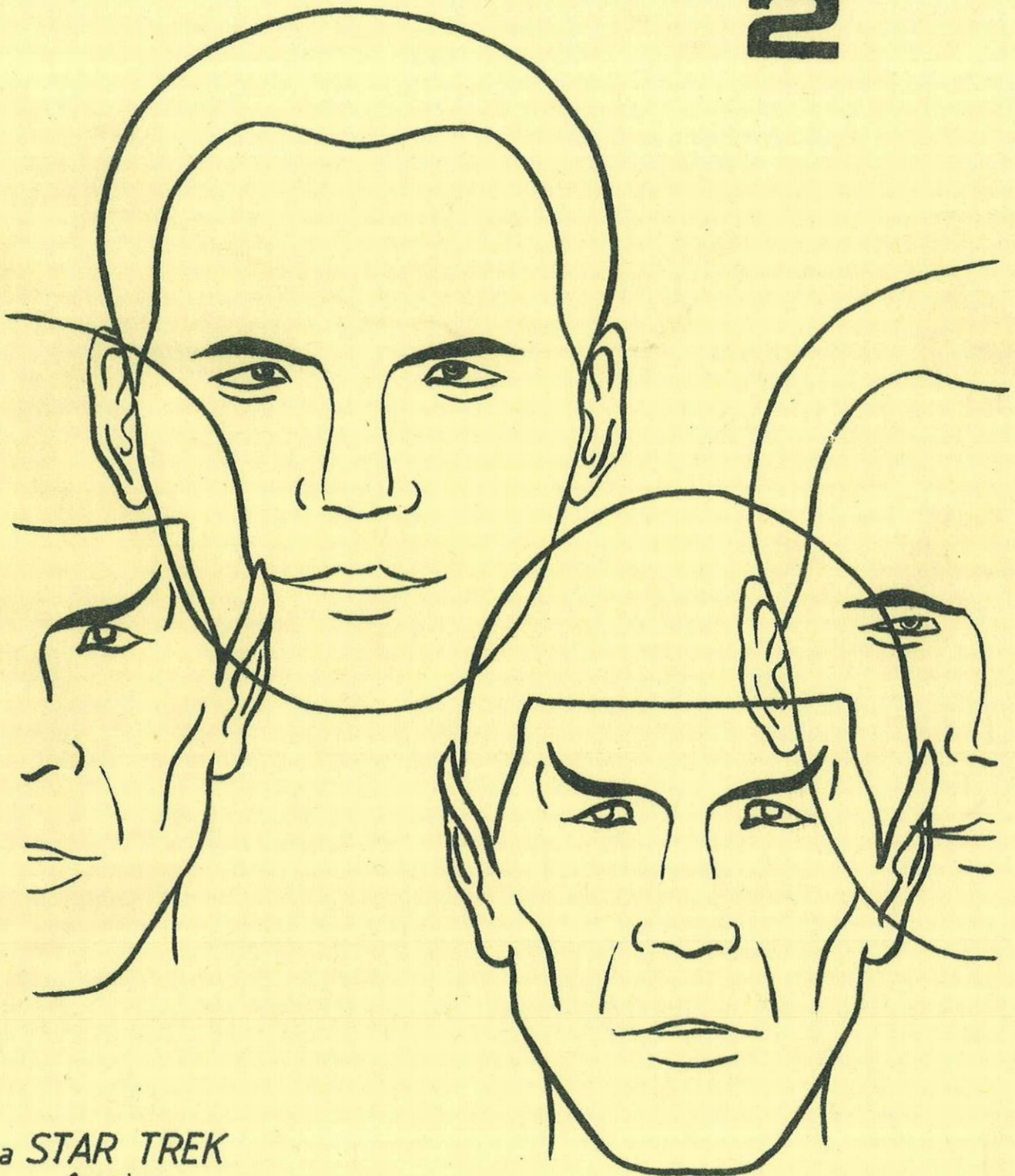


VICE VERSA

an alternate universe story
by Simone Mason

2



a *STAR TREK*
fanzine

VICE VERSA 11

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PART 1 : HUMAN CRIME.

Commander James T. Kirk of the Starship Enterprise returned to his quarters in high spirits after a chess game with his Captain. He had actually won for the first time! The Captain had been even more pleased than he was, the First Officer was sure of it. And why not? Logically, it was a great compliment to Spock's teaching. Kirk smiled at the thought. He was by now becoming used to logic.

He had hardly settled on the bed for his rest period when he was called through the intercom and told to report to the Captain's quarters. The First Officer complied hurriedly, worried by the summons so soon after leaving his commanding officer. They were still in orbit of Earth, with part of the Human crew on leave. Had some trouble occurred as a result? The possibility that a fanatical member of the Party might have succeeded in coming aboard, and had attempted to kill Spock, filled him with apprehension.

It was with a sigh of relief that he found his fear unjustified. The Captain was not hurt, and his sharp eyes noticed Kirk's concern.

"Anything wrong, Jim?"

"No, no! You wanted to see me, Captain?"

"There is no need for formality, you are still off duty."

Kirk smiled and relaxed. If he was not recalled on duty, it could not be very bad news. The Captain's words altered his mood.

"I have received a formal request, through the proper channels, asking permission for your brother to come aboard to see you. I naturally agreed, and wanted to tell you the good news... Jim, why do you look dismayed?"

"Whatever he wants to see me for can't be for my own good! I haven't seen him in years."

"That hardly matters. He is still your brother."

"Which doesn't mean I have to like him. I'd recommend maximum security precautions during his visit, just in case."

"I do not understand," said Spock, letting his amazement show in his tone of voice for once. "I remember that you said you did not 'get on' with your brother, to use your own words. I assumed that you meant that the family tie did not prevent a few disagreements."

"A few! If it was only that!"

Kirk stopped abruptly, remembering what he had read about the Vulcan way of life. There was a sense of family unity, almost a clan feeling there, which was very strong. The worst crime was when one member of a family was disloyal, or hurt another. The disloyalty or hurt applied to the whole family. Therefore Spock would not understand, quite apart from the fact that he had wanted a brother, and had none.

Although his silence had lasted a full minute, the Captain had respected it, and Kirk smiled gratefully.

"I won't bother you with family matters, Spock. Human ways can be very different from... However, I still recommend security precautions."

"May I ask why? Your brother could take them as an insult."

"Too bad. I've not seen or heard from him for so long that he could be a member of the Party for all I know, sent here to kill you."

"That is illogical, Jim. He asked to see you."

"Maybe I'm wrong, but at least take some measures."

"Very well, I will have a discreet watch kept by Security. Go to the transporter room, Jim - he should beam aboard shortly. I have not put any

restriction on the length of his visit. Let me know if you need extra time off duty."

Kirk thanked him and left his Captain's quarters in a disturbed frame of mind. Spock was granting privileges to his brother because Kirk was his friend, but the First Officer doubted very much that Sam would prove anyone's friend.

However, it's illogical to prejudge a situation, as Spock would say, reflected Kirk wryly, so I'll try to forget past quarrels in case Sam has changed for the better.

While standing in the transporter room waiting, the First Officer could not help remembering the bitter jealousy Sam had shown when he, Kirk, had passed the entrance examination to the Space Academy where his brother had failed. Sam had done all he could to stop Kirk from going on with his chosen career, and had nearly succeeded by using vile means. The final rift had occurred then, and Kirk wondered if his brother could have changed much during the intervening years. His reverie was interrupted by the familiar hum of the transporter, and Sam Kirk appeared on one of the pads.

The two brothers, who had a strong family resemblance, eyed each other cautiously and exchanged a formal greeting, although they used first names. Kirk could sense the hidden astonishment of the Vulcan in charge of the transporter - after hearing so much about Human emotions, he was seeing two brothers exchange a cold greeting worthy of two Vulcans.

"I'd like to talk to you in private," said Sam.

"Come to my cabin," replied Kirk, a little relieved that his brother had not asked to see the Captain. Perhaps he had been wrong, and Spock was in no danger. He was glad, however, to notice the presence of security guards in the corridor serving the senior officers' quarters.

His brother had also noticed. "Your Captain doesn't trust me!" Sam said with a sneer as the door of Kirk's cabin shut behind them.

The First Officer did not bother to specify who was distrustful, and asked politely, "Why did you want to see me?"

Sam looked surprised by the question. "Surely you must have guessed?"

"No. Why?"

"My own brother is declared a traitor to his race and condemned to death, and you wonder why I want to see you?"

So that's it! thought Kirk, his fear confirmed. Aloud, he said firmly, "The Earth Government didn't declare me a traitor, and no Court of Justice has condemned me to death. I do not recognise the authority of a minority of fanatics shouting very loudly to make up for their small numbers."

"Not such small numbers, and many people believe what we say," Sam protested. "You did once."

"Because I didn't know any better. The people who listen to the Party would change their minds if they knew the truth."

"The truth being that Aliens are wonderful people?" sneered Sam.

"No. There's good and bad in any race, and I'm only familiar with Vulcans."

"And they're marvellous?"

"No, they are different - and their ways are not a law they try to impose on others, as the Party is doing."

"They command you, and their word is not law?"

"One Vulcan commands me, the others obey me," stated Kirk, his

patience starting to run out. "Vulcans may seem cold and obsessed by logic to us, but they have qualities, as most races have - loyalty and honesty, for instance."

"Don't talk to me about loyalty when you don't know the meaning of the word!" said Sam, his voice full of contempt. "You betrayed your own people - I find it hard to believe that my brother could stoop that low!"

"What is the point of discussing something you don't understand?" asked Kirk shortly.

"I understand perfectly. That Vulcan Lord who reigns supreme aboard this ship has taken your mind over. You're in an ideal position as First Officer to act against him, and yet you do nothing!"

Kirk tried to stop the tirade, but soon gave up. Whatever he said, his brother would not believe or understand any more now than he had done in the past. It was to be expected that Sam would support the Party, resenting as he did the aliens who had succeeded in Starfleet where he had failed.

Sam seemed to realise that Kirk was hardly listening, because his tone of voice changed abruptly.

"All right, Jim. I had to make sure that your attitude was determined. It is, and I respect it, whatever my private opinions. Now I will try to see your point of view. May I visit the ship?"

"In order to spread wild rumours among the Human crew?"

"No, not at all," smiled Sam, a smile Kirk didn't like one bit. "You can accompany me and see for yourself. I'd like to meet the Captain, too."

"Oh, you would, would you? In order to kill him?"

Sam laughed, and again Kirk hated that laugh. "I can assure you that I'll be on my best behaviour and my most charming self. Look, I realise I made a mistake by ranting at you, and I apologise. Perhaps a meeting with a Vulcan will help me to see your point of view."

Kirk stared dumbfounded, unable to remember the last time Sam had apologised to anyone. Was there some sinister plan behind this, or was his brother not as bad as he had thought? After all, many years had passed, and people could change...

Unable to decide, Kirk was however aware that Sam knew nothing about Starships. Therefore it was unlikely that he could understand any of the equipment, and so there was little harm in the visit. He would keep an eye on him, and have Security watch also.

"Still suspicious? It doesn't matter - I'll ask the Captain," said Sam.

Before Kirk could stop him his brother had stepped out and buzzed the next door cabin. The First Officer reacted fast and entered Spock's quarters with Sam, so intent on watching him that he nearly forgot to salute, and rectified this hastily. Then he had to introduce his brother.

Spock got up and welcomed Sam Kirk aboard his ship with his innate and elegant politeness. Sam looked a little taken aback by the appearance and manner of the distinguished and courteous alien. Kirk smiled inwardly, remembering the impact the first meeting with Spock had had on him.

His brother soon recovered and offered him his hand; Kirk, cursing himself for not having warned Sam, acted fast and seized the hand, pushing it down forcefully.

"Vulcans don't shake hands," he stated.

Sam, far from being upset, apologised profusely to the Captain.

Again, Kirk did not believe his ears. Could his brother have learnt to apologise?

"Please, Mr. Kirk," said Spock, interrupting the apologies, "there is no reason why you should be aware of Vulcan customs, so apologies are illogical."

"Thank you, Captain," said Sam politely. "May I have your permission to visit the Enterprise?"

"By all means. Commander Kirk will be your guide."

"I would be grateful if... Forgive me, Captain, you must be very busy... Should you have the time to spare, however, I'd be pleased if you could accompany us. She is your ship, and you know her as no-one else does."

"I will be honoured to be your guide," replied Spock with his usual courtesy.

Kirk, more and more baffled and worried, asked quickly, "May I come too, Captain?"

"Of course, Jim," answered Spock, with one of his rare half-smiles. "To deprive you of your brother's company is unthinkable."

Kirk saw how his brother noticed the smile, but showed no reaction. Sam continued to be polite and charming as the tour of the ship started.

The First Officer had given orders to Security to keep an eye on the visitor wherever he went, but if Sam noticed the unobtrusive watch he did not show it. Never once did his brother make a denigrating comment or try to talk to the Human crew. His attitude to Spock was amiable and friendly, and it earned him a few black looks from some Humans. These too, the visitor did not appear to notice.

When the tour ended Spock invited Sam to a meal in the dining area. Again this passed pleasantly and without incident. The Captain was asking questions about Earth and its customs, and Kirk's brother replied, never once making any allusion to controversial matters. As the end of the meal approached, Sam asked questions about the Enterprise's next assignment, showing great interest. Kirk nearly intervened to stop his Captain from answering, then reflected that Sam, having a brother aboard, could get the information easily enough anyway, unless the assignment was classified. The authorities would assume that his brother wanted to contact him.

The meal finished, Sam went to the transporter room to leave, and Spock discreetly allowed the two brothers to go alone. Kirk was astonished again when Sam confessed to enjoying both the tour of the ship, and his meeting with the Captain - his brother was right, Vulcans were not that bad after all. After wishing Kirk good luck Sam stepped onto the transporter pad and waved heartily before disappearing.

On his way back to his quarters, the First Officer could not decide whether Sam's attitude had been genuine. It bothered him very much, although he was not quite sure why. Could his brother be vile enough to have played a role, for some obscure and sinister plan? Was he that good an actor? Or was Kirk misjudging him, and Sam was not that bad after all?

If Sam was part of a plot of some sort, Kirk was unable to see how his visit could help in any way, therefore he was seeing evil where there was none. Yet a dark premonition would not leave the back of his mind. This sudden reappearance of his brother could only be a bad omen.

The Captain was coming out of his quarters as Kirk arrived at his own. Spock noticed his First Officer's sombre mood.

"Jim, you are troubled. May I be of assistance?"

"No, thank you, Captain," replied Kirk rather shortly, thinking that Spock would not understand.

"I never meant to intrude into a private matter, and I apologise," said Spock in a very formal tone.

I've hurt him! thought Kirk, dismayed, aware that his reply had been far more abrupt than he had intended. "I didn't mean that the way it sounded, Spock, and I'm sorry..."

"We cannot discuss anything here. Come into my cabin if you wish to talk."

Kirk followed him, not sure that he would be able to explain what bothered him, and cursing his brother for causing this embarrassment between his Captain and himself.

"What did you think of my brother?" he asked lamely as he sat down, facing Spock across the desk.

"I cannot make an accurate judgement after such a short acquaintance, Jim. He seemed friendly, and his behaviour was polite and agreeable."

Kirk nodded, and tried to explain. "Humans do not always have honesty as a character trait, Spock. I wouldn't put much value on appearances."

"I agree that they can be deceptive, but your brother was not hostile in any way. How long is it since you last saw him?"

"About eight or nine years at least."

"No-one remains exactly the same in that length of time, Jim. Whatever disagreement you had in the past with your brother should no longer apply."

"You may be right," conceded Kirk, with obvious reluctance.

"Jim, I find your attitude strange... However, as you said, Human ways are not the same as ours, and I accept it. You probably care more for your brother than you are aware of, or show."

Do I? wondered Kirk. I would never have chosen Sam for a brother...

"I cannot imagine a brotherly relationship not being a close one," added Spock, "but I have no experience on this matter. You should go and have some rest now, Jim - you are on duty in an hour."

Kirk left feeling rather miserable, and cursing his brother more than ever. He had sensed the wistful note in his Captain's voice when talking of a brotherly relationship, and though how unfair it was - Spock had no brother when he wanted one, while he had a brother he wished he hadn't!

The First Officer tried to discuss Sam's visit with McCoy, but soon realised how difficult it was for the doctor to help him to see the truth when Bones had never met Sam. McCoy had been ashore at the time of the visit; he was inclined to think that Kirk was exaggerating his fears, and the First Officer hoped that he was right.

By the time the Enterprise had left Earth and completed her first two assignments, however, Kirk had nearly forgotten the brief encounter with Sam. His relationship with Spock was the same as before, so his brother had not spoilt anything, and Kirk had enough work to stop him from wondering about someone he had never cared for.

The recently appointed First Officer of the Enterprise was only too aware of the task ahead, and that his Captain needed all the help he could give. They had to prove that a Vulcan/Human team could be a most efficient one - if the Enterprise became the best ship in Starfleet, then her commanding team would be proved to be the best also. Such proof would impress both Humans and aliens, and be of considerable assistance in demonstrating to the Federation that Humans could be trusted in high

positions, while at the same time it would prove to Humans that collaboration with aliens was perfectly possible.

But such a goal could only be achieved if the crew was also well integrated. This was presenting problems, and the Captain and First Officer were aware of them. Now that Kirk had broken all his ties with the Party and never bothered to hide his liking for Spock's company in preference to any other, the Human crew resented his command, and he was even thought of as a traitor by some. The Commander had been condemned to death by the Party and could not return to Earth, for he had chosen aliens in preference to his own people.

The adventure when Spock had saved Human lives and nearly died in the process had made Kirk perhaps over-optimistic about the crew's reactions. McCoy had been won over, and was now a firm friend again. Scotty, while still a little shy of Vulcans, admitted that he could share interests with them, and work in harmony. Chekov was half-and-half, maintaining for the moment a neutral attitude which was at least better than a hostile one. Sulu was not happy about his suspension from the Party for having failed his mission. After having paid what he called his debt by warning Kirk of his danger on Earth, he had reverted to a hostile attitude, blaming others rather than himself for his failure. He was ready to admit that Captain Spock was not so bad, but only because he was half-Human; a full Vulcan was still an enemy, an alien barring the way to Humans getting high positions in the Federation.

The rest of the Human crew had been told of the Captain's heroic act, and some proved sceptical or unbelieving; the Humans had imagined the whole thing, it had been implanted into their minds by Vulcan powers. Others, though they accepted the truth, were afraid to speak out - they were still a minority among the Humans aboard.

The ship was running smoothly, though. The Captain was feared, and no Human relished one of his icy glances; it could make your knees turn to jelly, as Chekov had described it once. Kirk was just as strict with discipline and duties. What the Captain missed - which was very little - never escaped the First Officer. This so perfect alliance made the Humans resent Kirk's orders even more than Spock's, although they feared both officers too much to show their feelings. No-one cared to face court-martial for insubordination or lack of respect to senior officers.

Between two minorities, those who could not like either Kirk or Spock, and those who recognised their value and liked their work, stood a number of Humans who could not make up their minds yet and remained undecided, following one faction one day, the other the next.

Kirk was surprised, and McCoy even more so, when Spock proved that he had not forgotten the doctor's recommendation for a more relaxed discipline and less saluting aboard. The Captain assembled his senior officers in the briefing room and asked for any comment on his proposed application to Starfleet for a relaxation of discipline. The Vulcans were surprised - they did not find the discipline too strict. When it was pointed out that it was for the Human crew's benefit, they agreed that it might be worth trying, although they hoped that it would not entail any disrespect to the Captain. This made Kirk smile, and he assured them that he doubted that it would; Spock would command the same respect regardless of any saluting.

Spock duly sent his application to Starfleet, then the ship concentrated on the third mission of the tour. This involved a planet landing which demanded the use of the shuttlecraft, due to the special conditions in this particular area of space. The Captain had to call on the planet leaders to finalise the entry of their world into the Federation. It was a matter of routine, as no difficulty had arisen during the preliminary talks.

"I will go with the Security Chief, Mr. Kirk," stated Spock, "and should return within four hours at the most. Should it take longer, I will let you know."

"Yes, Captain. Are you sure a larger escort isn't necessary?"

"This is a peaceful world, and the natives are friendly. There should be no danger."

Kirk had to agree, but he wished he was going with his Captain. However, there had been a nasty incident between this world and Earth, and although the tension had eased somewhat, it was logical to avoid perhaps endangering the talks by including a Human in the party.

Spock duly left with the Security Chief. He contacted the ship to say that he had landed safely and had been well received, which reassured Kirk after he had checked his Captain's voice-print to make sure that it was indeed him speaking.

At the end of four hours no call came through from the Captain. Kirk, who was off duty trying to sleep, had a nightmare where he heard Spock calling. It woke him, and he ran to the bridge just as Mr. Salyk, the Science Officer he had left in charge, was about to call him about the absence of any message from their commanding officer.

Kirk hid his fear well as he called the President of the Planetary Council.

"This is Commander Kirk, at present in command of the Enterprise. I apologise for taking up your valuable time, Mr. President, when this may be merely a routine check. Is Captain Spock still with you?"

The native looked surprised. "No, Commander. He left two hours ago to return to his ship."

Kirk's heart nearly stopped beating through sheer fear. "He's not aboard," he stated, his voice calm, "and we've had no communication from him apart from his initial report."

"This is terrible!" exclaimed the President, looking genuinely upset. "Do you mean to say that something has happened to him?"

"It's a possibility. The craft could have met with an accident and be stranded somewhere on your world."

"I'll organise a search immediately."

"May I be of assistance?" asked Kirk, wishing he could rush down and find his Captain.

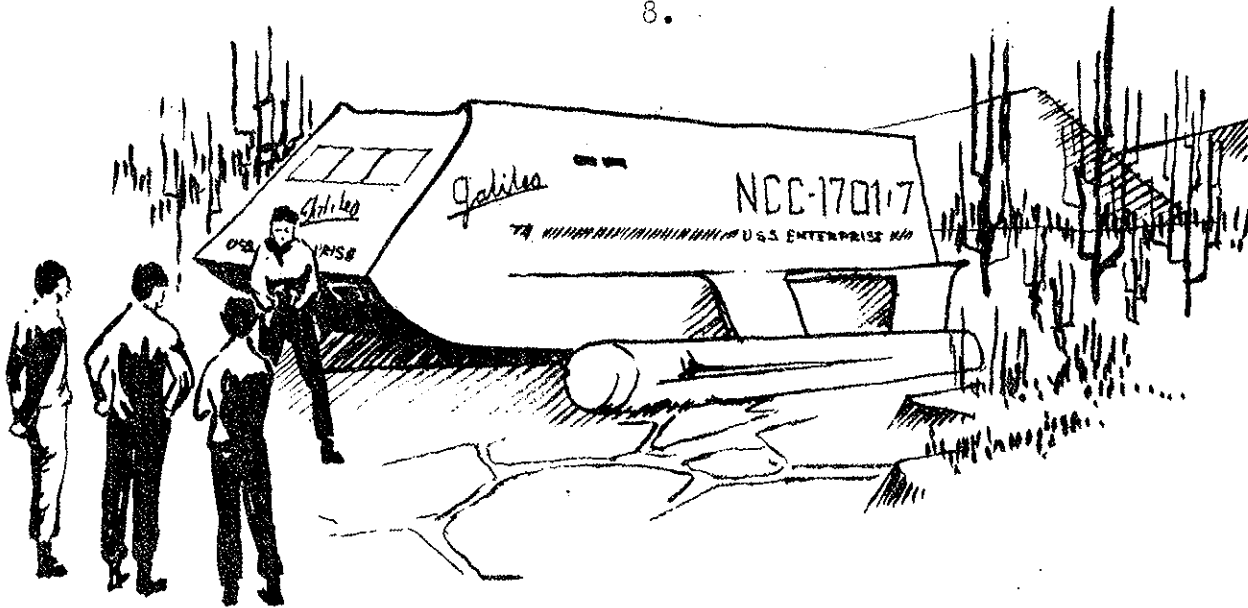
"Do you doubt my sincerity?" asked the President stiffly. "I can assure you that we do want to find Captain Spock. It might compromise our joining the Federation should anything have happened to him by our fault!"

The screen went dark, and Kirk had to admit that the native was right; his people had no reason to hurt Spock, in fact, quite the contrary. That left an accident... But much as he wanted to, he could not go down without permission and upset the natives.

"There is a large area of desert land not far from the capital city, Mr. Kirk," reported Mr. Salyk. "It is a possibility that the shuttlecraft was forced by some malfunction to land in that area. If communications were affected, no call could reach us."

Kirk nodded, hoping that the Science Officer had found the explanation for the mystery.

"I have been attempting to raise the shuttlecraft for the last twenty minutes, sir," reported Somek from his post at Communications. "There is no answer."



"Keep trying, Mr. Somek, just in case any malfunction is temporary."

"This planet's history is a peaceful one, Mr. Kirk," said Salyk, "therefore we have no grounds for suspicion of foul play."

"I do hope you are right, Mr. Salyk," murmured Kirk, wanting to believe it.

The President called the ship about an hour later, looking most upset.

"Commander, I'm afraid I have bad news. It could hardly be worse!"

"Is the Captain dead?" Kirk asked in a choked voice.

"No... at least... we don't know! The police found the shuttlecraft and the Security Chief near a deserted weather station approximately one hundred miles from the city. The craft is intact, but the Captain is missing, and the Security Chief has been injured. Please send medical help at once - we have no knowledge of Vulcan physiology. Please hurry."

Kirk took the other shuttlecraft immediately with Mr. Salyk, Mr. Senak the Chief Engineer, with Doctors Syvik and McCoy, plus two Security Guards. He made the journey down in record time.

They landed near the Captain's craft, and while the doctors saw to the patient, Kirk ordered Mr. Salyk and Mr. Senak to check the vehicle in case of sabotage.

Dr. Syvik made his report shortly after. "He will live, Mr. Kirk. I would say - and Dr. McCoy agrees with me - that he was meant to be killed by someone who did not know Vulcan physiology, and thought the heart was on the left side."

"As in Humans!" exclaimed Kirk.

"Exactly, Jim," said McCoy, who had approached looking upset. "There's a strong possibility that Humans are involved."

"Can he be questioned?"

"For a very short while," said Dr. Syvik, "and I only agree because the Captain's life is clearly at stake."

After an injection the Security Chief came to and his eyes fastened on Kirk.

"Commander, the Captain... I failed to protect him..."

"Hardly your fault," soothed Kirk. "Who attacked you?"

"I do not know... They were hidden... Came out wearing masks... fired a gas... It was so quick..."

"Why did you land here?"

"Distress call... Captain tried to communicate with the city... Too much static..."

"In other words, a well-laid trap!" said Kirk, his fear increasing tenfold.

"Find the Captain quickly... before he... kills him..."

Kirk wondered why the Vulcan suddenly said 'he' not 'they', but he could not ask any more questions. The patient had become unconscious again.

Salyk and Senak reported that no sabotage had occurred, and the shuttlecraft was fully operational. The First Officer ordered it back to the Enterprise to take the Security Chief aboard. He also ordered its return with a full-strength security team, after which he called the President and reported his findings.

"A deliberate kidnapping?" exclaimed the native, his voice full of horror. "We are a peaceful race, Commander. I can't imagine any one of us..."

"I make no accusations yet, Mr. President. Are there Humans on your planet?"

"Humans? Why, yes. Our quarrel with Earth was settled peacefully only a very short time ago, and as part of the reconciliation a team of civil engineers arrived about two months ago to assist us in building a road through the desert."

"May I have their names, please?" asked Kirk, with a sinking feeling; his brother was a civil engineer.

"The Chief of Police will come over himself and bring them. Needless to say, our collaboration in finding the culprits is assured."

"I would advise an interrogation of the members of the road building project, Mr. President."

"It will be done."

Kirk felt pretty sure that the President was telling the truth, and had no hand in the ghastly event. Perhaps the natives did not, either. It was more probable that Humans were at the heart of it.

The Chief of Police arrived in a matter of minutes, at the head of a team of hovercars.

"There's the list of names, Commander," he reported briskly. "I've orders from the President - my force and I are at your disposal. I can assure you that we do want to rescue your Captain."

"Thank you, sir," replied Kirk, scanning the list quickly. The name he was looking for was not there, but his brother could have taken a false identity... or other members of the Party could be involved...

"I have sent a team of my men after the Humans," the Chief of Police added, "and given the order to question them when they are found. They have left their settlement, so we don't know how long that will take."

"We can't afford to wait. The first thing is to find the Captain."

The shuttlecraft had returned from the Enterprise by then with the Security guards, so Kirk had a respectable team for the search.

"Chief, we know that a trap was laid and the Captain kidnapped, probably by some Humans from the road building project. Where could they have taken him?"

"Not to any town, Commander, or my men would have seen them. The only place I can think of is the underground city."

The Chief of Police went on to explain how such a city had been discovered not all that long ago. It was very large, a maze of passages someone could easily get lost in. No-one knew its exact size, and it was still being explored. "We might never find him if Captain Spock is held prisoner there," finished the Police Chief gloomily.

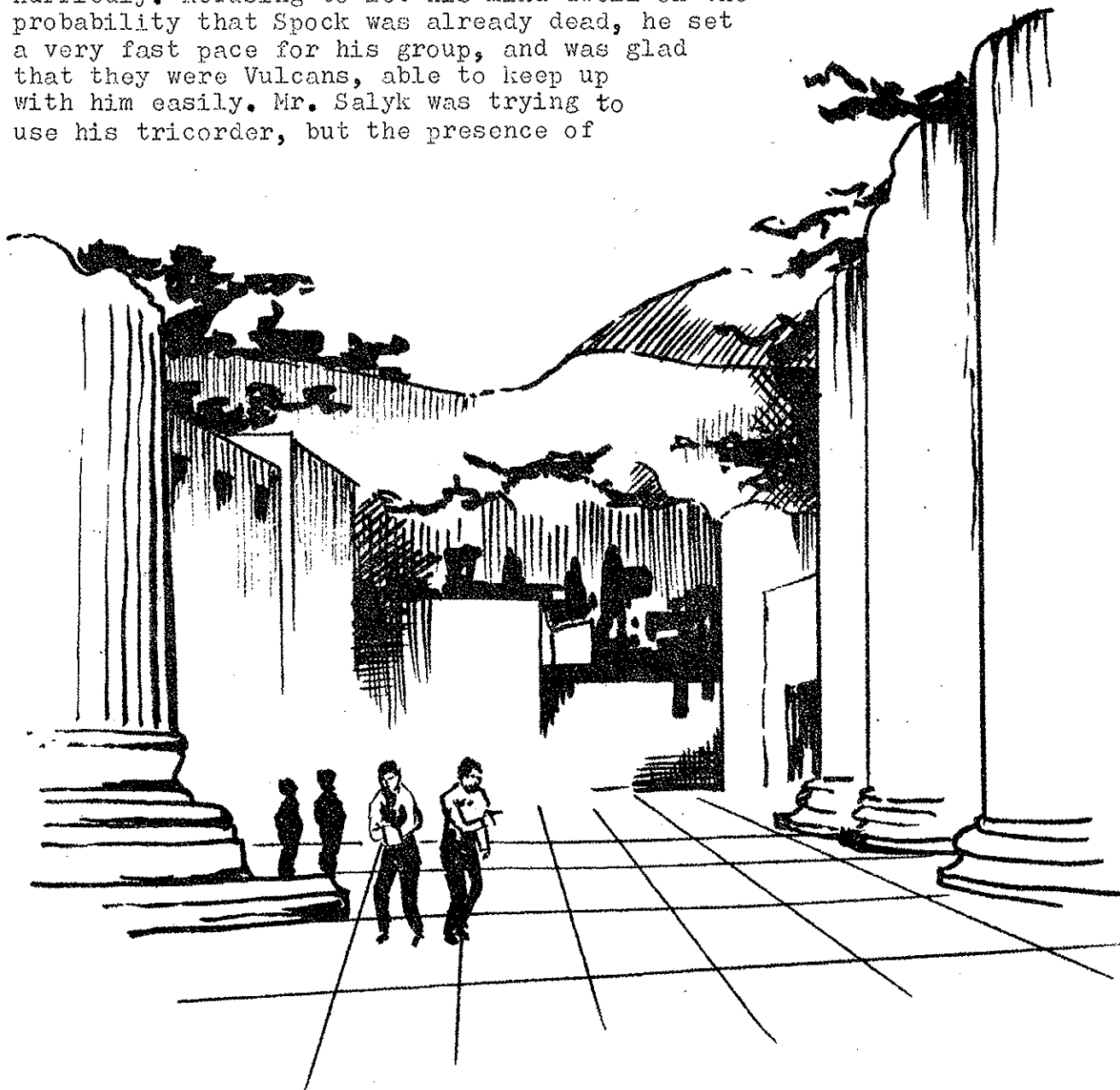
"Then it's about time we started looking," ordered Kirk. "Have you a map, or anyone familiar with the city?"

The Police Chief called two of his men who had visited the underground city, then extracted a rough map from his hovercar. They went to work tracing a search pattern, then copies of the map were handed out, and everyone was equipped with a communicator. After a warning that the map was not necessarily accurate, and that there was a danger of getting lost, all the craft took off for the entrance to the underground city.

Once there, Kirk selected a search party of Vulcans to accompany him, leaving the doctors standing by ready to join the successful team if necessary.

"Good luck, Jim. I hope you find the Captain alive," McCoy said with obvious sincerity.

Kirk tried to smile, could not, and left hurriedly. Refusing to let his mind dwell on the probability that Spock was already dead, he set a very fast pace for his group, and was glad that they were Vulcans, able to keep up with him easily. Mr. Salyk was trying to use his tricorder, but the presence of



the other search parties made it difficult.

After three hours in the maze of sometimes very narrow passages, no trace of Spock had been found. Kirk refused to give up, and gave orders for the search to continue. He would find his Captain if it was the last thing he did!

His group was now at the end of the rough map, the rest of the city was unknown. This did not stop the First Officer from continuing the search, and the Police Chief contacted him by communicator to say that everyone else was also going on.

A while later Mr. Salyk stated that he had faint readings on his tricorder, indicating the presence of only one or two people; the search party was at that moment standing at a very narrow passage where it joined a much wider corridor.

"Both seem to lead in the same direction, towards the origin of my readings," reported the Science Officer.

"Right," said Kirk. "I'll take the narrow passage, the rest of you take the other in case mine leads nowhere. If you meet a dead end, come after me."

The Vulcans obeyed promptly. Kirk, wondering why he had chosen the narrow passage - perhaps it was instinct - started his difficult journey, some of it crawling on the rough ground. He maintained a fast pace, heedless of bruises and scratches, somehow sure that he was getting nearer to Spock. He prayed that he would be in time.

Suddenly there was light ahead, and Kirk increased his pace. The narrow passage widened, and he was able to stand up. A sound reached his ears and he stopped to listen, horror chilling him as he recognised the sound of whipping. Mingled with his horror was a certain relief; perhaps he was in time... no-one would flog a dead man... Setting his phaser to stun he hurried onwards, until the passage widened into a large chamber.

Cautiously he peered in; the room was well lit by a wide shaft to the surface, and equipped specifically for torture - a real chamber of horrors from Earth's Middle Ages. There were only two occupants. In the centre Spock was stretched out on a kind of rack, and Sam Kirk was lashing at him with a vicious-looking whip.

"Scream, you damned Vulcan!" he shouted, his face contorted with rage. "You will when I kill you... or better still, leave you as a helpless, crippled wreck, a mutilated object of pity and revulsion, a warning to the rest of your people."

There was no response. Spock's body seemed already lifeless, the only movement the slow dripping of green blood spreading into a pool under the rack.

Sickness, rage and horror fought in Kirk's mind for a second, to be replaced by a murderous anger at the thought that Sam was the one responsible for this. It was too much to bear - his own brother might have killed Spock!

Kirk ran wildly into the room, setting his phaser to kill, deaf to the frantic appeal.

"Jim, I did it for you! You can't kill me... I'm your brother...!" The voice ceased abruptly as Kirk fired, and Sam fell.

The Vulcans were just then entering the chamber by the other passage, and could not help hearing Kirk's voice, full of a still furious rage towards the torturer.

"I refuse to think of you as my brother! Death is too good for a monster like you!"

The outburst over, Kirk dropped the phaser and ran to Spock, cutting the bonds from the painfully-stretched hands and feet. As though through a haze he heard Mr. Salyk calling the doctors urgently, while a Security officer was reporting to the Police Chief that the search was over.

Grateful for their efficient help, Kirk could concentrate on his Captain, but there was little he could do in view of the extent of the injuries. Seeing Spock's yellow shirt, which had been ripped from him, he picked it up and used it to wipe the blend of perspiration and blood from the Captain's face. Mercifully, his eyes were untouched.

"Spock!" he murmured brokenly, his hand smoothing the black hair as he fought renewed nausea at the knowledge that his own brother was responsible for his Captain's ordeal.

"Jim..." Spock's eyes opened with a visible effort. "I regret..."

"Don't talk - the doctors are on the way," interrupted Kirk.

"I regret..." Spock insisted.

"None of this is your fault, Spock!"

"I came... between you... and your brother..." The Captain tried to say more but could not as he lost consciousness. Kirk's hand fastened on Spock's, and through blurred eyes he watched himself mechanically sponge the blood from the Captain's wrist where the bonds had bitten into the flesh.

Feeling eyes on him, Kirk looked up. "Is there anything we can do?"

Mr. Salyk shook his head, and his voice was not quite as even as usual.

"No, Mr. Kirk. Only the doctor can tell us whether it is safe to move the Captain."

"What's keeping him?"

"The distance, sir," replied a security guard.

"I stated clearly that this is an emergency," added Salyk. "I am sure that Dr. Syvik will arrive shortly. The Police Chief is bringing him here by a shorter route."

Kirk nodded, thankful once more for Vulcan efficiency. It was only a few minutes later that the Police Chief arrived with Syvik and McCoy, plus two policemen carrying equipment.

Kirk backed away to allow the doctors to take over. As he moved he whispered to McCoy, "Don't let him die, Bones."

"Do your job, and let us do ours," replied McCoy, not unkindly.

The First Officer, reminded of his duties, went to the Police Chief to thank him for his assistance.

"I understand that this was your brother," said the native, pointing to Sam's body. "What do you want done with him?"

Kirk looked away, and a delayed reaction of shock, horror and nausea made him sway.

"Commander, are you all right?" asked the Chief, steadying him.

"Yes," replied Kirk in a firm voice, once more in control. "The body - do what you like with it. Feed it to the vultures if you have any - that would be the best solution."

Ignoring the astonishment his words provoked, he saw Dr. Syvik beckon to him, and approached hurriedly.

"The Captain's condition is critical, Mr. Kirk," reported the doctor. "He must be taken aboard the ship, but the journey through these passages could be fatal."

"We've done all we can here, Jim," added McCoy. "If we get him to sick bay, there's a chance we can save him."

"With your permission, Commander?" One of the security guards stepped forward, followed by another. "We can carry the Captain."

Kirk nearly protested that he would not permit anyone else the task, but Mr. Salyk forestalled him.

"They are the two most able-bodied Vulcans aboard, Mr. Kirk. They have the necessary strength to avoid any harm to the Captain."

Kirk nodded reluctantly; the Vulcan was right, the guards were more able, and he had to accept it - for Spock's sake.

With great care the two doctors placed a small bed with handles under the Captain's body, and the guards took charge. The whole group followed the Chief of Police along the shortest route.

Once at the shuttlecraft, Kirk left to no-one the task of pilot. There he was the best qualified, and the journey back to the ship was smooth and without a single jolt in spite of some atmospheric interference near the planet's surface.

Sickbay had been alerted, and everything was ready to give the Captain the best medical assistance possible. Kirk watched Spock being carried away, aware that he had to leave it to the doctors from now on.

"Jim," said McCoy, his eyes full of compassion, "you know we'll do all we possibly can for the Captain. Find some work to do, or the waiting for news will drive you mad."

McCoy was right. Kirk went to the bridge and gave the order to inform Starfleet of events, after which he was told that the President was calling.

"We have found the Humans involved in the road building project, Mr. Kirk, and they are under arrest," said the native. "As we do not want another incident with Earth, I'd be grateful if you would take them away to be tried by your own courts."

"Why did they run away?"

"They claim they did not, that they had received instructions to survey an area far away from their settlement. Whether it is the truth, I have no idea."

"How many are there?"

"Twelve."

"Our brig can accomodate that number. I'll have them picked up shortly."

"Thank you, Commander," said the President, clearly relieved. "I do hope that your report to Starfleet will emphasise our complete innocence in this plot against Captain Spock."

"Yes, Mr. President. Are you sure no native was involved?"

"Absolutely sure. The Chief of Police was very thorough, and a copy of his report will be sent to you. I can assure you that had any of my people taken part, I would never try to shield them from punishment for such a dreadful and barbaric crime."

"That tallies with the planet's history, Mr. Kirk," said Mr. Salyk as the communication ended. "The natives are peaceful, and kidnapping is unknown."

"They are civilised," agreed Kirk in a bitter voice. "Please see to

the collection and reception of the prisoners, Mr. Salyk. I'll be in my quarters composing a report to Starfleet."

"Yes, sir. There was a communication from sickbay while you were talking to the President - the Security Chief has recovered."

"Let's hope we soon hear the same news about the Captain."

In his quarters Kirk refrained from calling sickbay. He would be told as soon as there was any news. McCoy was right, it helped to have his report to occupy his mind, although it brought back the ghastly memory of Sam. Trying to be as emotionless as possible he composed his report and had it sent, then gave the order to leave orbit for their next destination. The prisoners were safely aboard.

By then the First Officer could wait no longer, and went to sickbay.

"I was about to give you my report, Mr. Kirk," said Dr. Syvik, inviting him into his office. "I am afraid I cannot take the Captain off the danger list, but he is young and strong. There is a 50% chance that he will recover."

"I see." Kirk's face reflected his dejection. "May I visit him, if only for a minute?"

"Yes, if you wish."

The doctor led him to the bed, where McCoy and a Vulcan orderly kept watch. Kirk looked at the pale and drawn features of his Captain, listened to the scarcely-detectable breathing, and was able only to stare at the alien who meant so much to him, wishing with all his heart that he could do something - anything - to restore life to the inert body. He had been able to help and save his Captain's life in the past, but now he knew that Spock was in good hands, and he had to leave it to the doctors. His inability to help was, however, hard to bear.

Unknown to him, the two doctors were observing his strained features, nearly haggard from the stress.

"Try to rest, Jim," advised McCoy, taking his arm gently.

"No, Bones, I couldn't!" protested Kirk, with an instinctive fear of the trend his thoughts would take, towards his brother. "I'd much prefer to work."

"My report to Starfleet is ready," said Dr. Syvik. "I will hand it over in my office."

After a last glance at Spock Kirk followed him and took the tape in silence - a very depressed silence.

"Please sit down, Mr. Kirk," said the doctor. "I regret having to mention a painful matter..."

"Spock is going to die!" exclaimed Kirk, coming to life as though stung and clutching at the doctor's desk for support.

"Illogical," said the doctor in a stern voice which restored some of Kirk's sanity. "My report is truthful. The matter I was referring to is the question of your brother."

"What about him?" asked Kirk, all interest lost.

"His body is aboard..."

"No! I won't have it! Not aboard my Captain's ship..."

"Please calm down, Commander. If you think logically for one second, you will understand that it was necessary for the Court of Enquiry."

"I suppose you're right, doctor," agreed Kirk, his voice flat. Would he never be free of his brother's evil shadow?

Dr. Syvik was hesitating to speak further, an unusual thing for a Vulcan. "I regret having to mention such a painful subject, believe me, Mr. Kirk, but Dr. McCoy assured me it would be better to get it over with now."

"Please continue, Doctor."

"You have my report. I had to list the injuries sustained by the Captain, and I would recommend that you do not read that section of the report."

"That bad, is it?" said Kirk, his fists clenched as though he longed to hit out.

"If the Captain does recover he will be restored to complete health and will suffer no permanent physical disability. Therefore to torture yourself now would serve no purpose, and could endanger your efficiency as commanding officer."

Kirk nodded, subdued, as Dr. Syvik got up. "I would advise you to concentrate on the coming Court of Enquiry, Mr. Kirk. I believe Dr. McCoy wants a word with you - I will take over from him."

McCoy came in a few seconds later, and after one look at Kirk ordered in his medical voice, "Come to my quarters."

Kirk followed, sat down, and swallowed the glass of brandy put in front of him.

"For medical purposes," stated McCoy. "Now try to relax - cry, if you want to - but for God's sake, let go, Jim!"

"I can't, Bones," sighed Kirk, some colour slowly returning to his cheeks. "Not while my Captain might die at any minute."

"On the other hand, he might live," protested McCoy, "and that's logical. Try logic, Jim - it sometimes works."

Kirk smiled, a wan smile that made McCoy look away for a second.

"You must take care of the ship while the Captain is injured, Jim," continued the doctor, "and you must prepare for the Court of Enquiry. For both, you need all your faculties."

"Of course I'll take care of the Enterprise for Spock," protested Kirk, "in the hope that he'll sit in the command chair again soon. As for the other... why should I bother much?"

McCoy hesitated, and Kirk's eyes widened. "You don't mean that Starfleet is so retarded as to think my brother's crime reflects on me?"

"No, no of course not. That wouldn't be logical, to coin a phrase. But don't you realise, Jim - you have committed murder."

"Yes, I suppose I have - and I'd do it again..."

"Don't say that to the Court. It will be an alien Court of Enquiry, not a Human one."

"Yes, but I'm Human. I can't help that, any more than they can help being alien. I'll face that problem when it comes. For now, Spock's life is what matters."

"Your career also matters, Jim."

"Don't tell me the party used my brother to kill Spock in order to make me Captain! If that's the case, I'll refuse command..."

"Calm down Jim! I've no idea whether the Party was involved. What

I mean is that Dr. Syvik received this message from Starfleet and allowed me to show it to you if I deemed it necessary."

Kirk seized the tape, inserted it, and heard the harsh voice of a Tellerite Comadore.

"Should Commander Kirk prove unreliable in these circumstances, replace him immediately. He will be suspended as soon as the Enterprise returns here after its last routine assignment. A Court of Enquiry will then investigate the whole barbaric incident."

The words 'barbaric incident' rang in Kirk's ears with painful clarity.

"Now you see why you should take care" said McCoy. "Dr. Syvik wondered if he should suspend you anyway because of the trauma of killing your brother, and he asked my advice. I recommended work as the best therapy for a Human - but perhaps I was mistaken if you can't relax, or concentrate on anything but your Captain."

"I'll look after the Enterprise for him, have no fear on that score, Bones. As for the other..." Kirk shrugged. "Please let me know as soon as you have any news - no matter what it is."

McCoy nodded, and watched him go with a very worried frown; there were limits to the amount of stress a man could stand.

"God, Spock's got to live!" McCoy exclaimed aloud. "If he dies, the way I see it, a part of Jim will die too."

Yet at the back of his mind the doctor was aware that he wanted Spock to live not only for Jim's sake. There was something about that particular Vulcan that he could not help liking, no matter how unbearable his logic was at times.

Kirk returned to the bridge to see to their next assignment, a routine call at Planet Walz to collect data and reports from the scientific team there. They were already approaching the planet, and Kirk gave orders for the necessary orbit.

"May I ask news of the Captain's condition?" asked Mr. Sirak, addressing the First Officer.

Kirk replied briefly, giving the facts, then made a general announcement to the crew so that everyone knew.

The Science Officer had left his station and looked at Kirk a little uncertainly. The First Officer, aware that Salyk, being senior officer after himself, was usually the chosen spokesman for the bridge crew, asked politely, "Did you wish to speak, Mr. Salyk?"

"Mr. Kirk, I am not familiar with many Human customs... However, I believe it is in order to offer condolences for the death of your brother."

"Even though I killed him?" asked Kirk with irony. "You saw me do it, didn't you?"

"I saw you fire your phaser at him," agreed Salyk, "and have to assume that it was set to kill as your brother was found dead immediately after."

"Which makes me a criminal, a murderer in the eyes of the Vulcan crew."

"Illogical, Mr. Kirk," stated Salyk calmly. "No Court of Enquiry has yet passed judgement on you. Until then, it is not incumbent on any of us to act as your judges."

"In my place, you wouldn't have killed, would you?"

"No, not unless it was absolutely necessary. I would, however, have taken steps to end the Captain's ordeal with all speed."

For the first time since the horrible event Kirk became vaguely aware that an alien court might condemn him. He refused to dwell on that, however, considering it a very minor matter compared to Spock's life. The Vulcan crew maintained the same attitude towards him, and if any disapproved of his action, no-one showed any sign of it.

Very mixed reactions occurred among the Human crew. Scotty, who had caught sight of Spock's body as he was brought aboard, declared loudly that he would never have any further commerce with a Party who could use such methods. Chekov and even Sulu looked badly shaken, but many others found it unacceptable that Kirk should have killed his own brother for a Vulcan's sake.

The last assignment completed, the expected orders to report to Starbase 1 for the Court of Enquiry arrived, and the Enterprise set course at top speed.

News came that Spock's condition had deteriorated, and Dr. Syvik had sent a message to Admiral Sarek to inform him of his son's critical condition. Kirk felt as though he was living through a nightmare - and if Spock died, he knew he would never see the end of it.

"The Captain is fighting for his life as much as he possibly can," reported Dr. Syvik, looking tired even for a Vulcan. "We have given all the assistance at our disposal."

"Is there anything - anything at all - I could do?" Kirk asked pleadingly.

The Vulcan doctor seemed thoughtful for a few seconds. "Perhaps there is," he said at last. "Your presence and encouragement could be beneficial. The Captain, though far too weak to speak or show signs of life, is not unconscious all the time. He would be aware of your presence at his side."

Kirk did not need to be told twice. He sat by Spock's bed, and holding his hand tight, willed the Vulcan to live. He thought that a faint pressure gripped his hand in response, and the deterioration slowed, then reversed. Was it enough, however?

"Can't you help him telepathically?" Kirk asked Syvik.

"I have done so, Mr. Kirk," assured the doctor. "There is little else I can do."

McCoy came in to relieve the Vulcan doctor, and said to Kirk, "From what I have observed, Jim, the Captain wants desperately to live. He knows that if he dies you'll blame yourself because your brother's hand killed him. We all know how remarkable his will power is, but I have the feeling he can do with all the help he can get."

After such words nothing could have moved Kirk from Spock's side, except for absolutely necessary ship's business; only taking time to eat or sleep on doctor's orders, the First Officer kept vigil beside his Captain with unflinching care.

Signs of amelioration were becoming more obvious until the day when Spock entered the healing trance. On that day Dr. Syvik, his voice not quite steady for once, turned to Kirk.

"The Captain will live, Mr. Kirk. He is off the danger list."

Kirk wanted both to laugh and to cry. After the strain of the last few weeks, the relief was too much. The First Officer had to give way, and collapsed by his Captain's bed, shaken by uncontrollable sobs of reaction. The nightmare had ended.

Or... had it?

It was about a day out from Starbase 1 that Spock came out of the healing trance, and Kirk did not envy the doctors, who had the task of hitting the still-weak Captain. At last the dark eyes opened, and sought at once for Kirk.

"Welcome back among the living, Captain." Kirk kept his voice firm with an effort.

The dark eyes fastened on him, and the First Officer was taken aback to see hesitation, even fear, before the usual impassivity took over.

"I appreciated your help, Jim," murmured Spock in a very weak voice. Turning to the doctors the Captain added his thanks and tried to get up, only to fall back, so dizzy that he nearly lost consciousness.

"Captain," Dr. Syvik remonstrated sternly, "your place is in bed at the moment, nowhere else."

"How long?" asked Spock, hiding dismay with difficulty.

"Depending on progress, you need at least one more week in sickbay, followed by home leave for complete recovery."

"Then it is gratifying to know that my ship will be in good hands," said Spock, his eyes on Kirk as though asking.

"I promise to take care of the Enterprise to the best of my ability, Captain," Kirk promised, wondering why he had had to say it.

Leaving Spock to rest, Kirk made his way back to his cabin. The doctors had agreed with him that the Vulcan should not be told of the coming Court of Enquiry, as he was not yet strong enough for anything to do with work.

As he walked along the corridor Kirk began to think seriously about the Enquiry for the first time, his mind free from worry about his Captain at last.

This also involved recalling past events, and the death of his brother. As he settled on his bed Kirk felt anything but restful. The fact that he was a murderer, and the murderer of his brother, suddenly came home to him. He had not been forced to kill, yet he had, deliberately. Vulcans were right, emotions were dangerous!

Remembering Vulcan belief in very close family ties, the First Officer wondered if his Captain would still think him worthy of friendship. To a Vulcan, a man who had killed his own brother must be particularly repellent. No wonder Spock had shown hesitation and fear on seeing him when he came to! Kirk also understood now the new reserve he had noticed among the Vulcan crew, as though they were no longer sure of him. Clearly they also felt that a man who had killed his brother might not be worthy of trust and loyalty, when the need to kill had not even existed. The phaser could have been used on stun just as effectively, and Spock would still have been freed. Fortunately, Kirk did not have much time to dwell on such dismal thoughts; the Enterprise arrived at Starbase 1 shortly after.

Once orbit was established Kirk received orders to report to Commodore Lufev, an Andorian officer he had met before. Andorians also had a strong sense of family honour, if perhaps less than Vulcans, and the First Officer understood by now that an alien court might condemn his actions and recommend sanctions. No wonder Dr. Syvik and McCoy had warned him! He beamed down as ordered and faced the Andorian, giving a perfect salute.

"At ease. Sit down, Mr. Kirk. You know why you are here. First, I have to tell you that your rank of Commander, and your appointment as First Officer of the Enterprise, have been temporarily suspended pending the result of the Court of Enquiry."

Kirk knew, but it hurt to hear it made official just the same.

"You may choose an advisor for your defence, and call whoever you wish to testify. The enquiry is scheduled to start tomorrow. Any objection?"

"No, sir. The sooner the better."

"Very well. Now report to the Head of Security."

Wondering how many officials he would have to face, Kirk complied with the order and found two officers expecting him, one Vulcan and one Terran. The Vulcan was the Starfleet Head of Security, and he introduced the Earthman as Colonel Raldan, Head of Earth Intelligence. It was the Human who wanted to ask questions, and the Vulcan sat discreetly in the background, but he was openly listening.

"First let me show you this piece of news, Mr. Kirk," said the Colonel, handing over a report. Kirk scanned it quickly. It was an official statement by the Party to the effect that the kidnapping and torture of a Vulcan Starship Captain was not in any way connected to them. It was a purely private affair they had no hand in; Sam Kirk had left the Party a couple of years ago, and had not joined again.

"I don't believe it!" exclaimed Kirk.

"Which is no help at all," said the Colonel in a very cold voice. "My officers are interrogating your prisoners, but with little hope. From preliminary reports, they are innocent."

"My brother must have had accomplices for the kidnapping at least!"

"Of course, but the whole affair was presented as a joke to be played on aliens."

Kirk listened to the clever way his brother had enlisted the help of his colleagues for getting the torture room ready, telling them it was meant to shock the peaceful natives by the discovery of such a thing in their newly discovered city. Then the kidnapping had been presented as a lark, a light-hearted revenge on an alien, meant just to give him a fright for a short while. No-one had seen the Security Chief being wounded - Sam must have managed that himself. The helpers had left Sam and the unconscious Spock at the entrance to the underground city, and had been handed fake orders to do a survey a long way from camp. They had been safely out of the way by the time the search had started.

"There is no reason to suspect they are not telling the truth," added the Colonel. "A lie detector has been used. This leaves the Party as white as the driven snow - a situation the Earth Government and I deplore whole-heartedly. If your brother was still alive we could have made him tell the truth and perhaps discredited the Party in the eyes of many people. Why did you kill him, Mr. Kirk?"

"I was shocked and very upset. I couldn't help it, sir," replied Kirk, hoping that an Earthman would understand how he had felt.

"Would you be prepared to repeat that statement under a lie detector?"

"Yes, certainly," Kirk said indignantly. "What are you driving at, sir?"

"You could have killed your brother to stop him from talking."

"Illogical," said a Vulcan voice before Kirk had time to protest with all the anger he felt. "Captain Spock is alive, and will recover," explained the Head of Starfleet Security. "Had Mr. Kirk killed his brother to silence him, and to gain the Captaincy as per the Party's original plan, he would have made sure first that the Captain was dead, or would die."

"The best laid plans do go astray the Colonel urged, "and Captain Spock's recovery was very uncertain for a long time."

"True," admitted the Vulcan, whose name was Commodore Sanyk.

"You'll be saying next that I'm responsible for the whole thing!" exclaimed Kirk, angry and upset. "I foiled the Party's plan once - why should I go along with an even worse one?"

"You could have foiled one plan to gain the Vulcans' confidence," the Colonel pointed out, "and gone along with the second to gain Captaincy. That was the reason why you joined the Party."

"The Party condemned me to death!"

"Officially. It could have been a ruse."

It makes some sense, for someone who doesn't know me, thought Kirk, nauseated at the idea that anyone could think him so vile.

"The brother of a sadistic torturer could be a devious and treacherous officer," added the Colonel. "You didn't have to kill, yet you did."

This was far worse than Kirk had feared. He was actually in danger of losing his career, being dishonoured and subject to severe sanctions. If this occurred Sam would have won, he would have succeeded in wrecking his career and separating him from Spock. The thought made Kirk react with determination; he had to fight his brother's shadow to the end.

"We found this carefully hidden in your brother's house on Earth," the Colonel continued before he could speak. "Please listen." Raldan inserted a tape into the player on the desk.

What now? Kirk wondered. Even dead, Sam can't leave me alone.

The tape began.

"If you hear this, Jim, it means that everything went wrong, and I am dead. Yet I planned it all so well! And I did it all alone - I don't need the Party to help my brother, my brilliant brother who wanted so much to be a Starship Captain... Yes, I know, I tried to stop you long ago, and I regret it. I came to realise how badly I had behaved, and what better way to make amends than to help you get what you want most. That Vulcan Captain is in your way - more, he has cleverly taken over your mind, made you think you only want to be First Officer. He took you away from your family, your race, your friends, your beliefs; he made you into a man who is no longer my brother. I'll make him pay for his crime, and you'll be free of him. Even if I die he'll be dead too, and you'll have his Starship. Best of luck, Jim."

The tape ended. Kirk had listened, incredulous at first, then sickened by the hatred in Sam's voice when he mentioned Spock. Had his brother really wanted to save him? Or had it been merely an excuse to kill a hated alien? A stratagem to exonerate the Party? He would never know.

"Well, Commander, you must be pleased that the tape tends to confirm your innocence," said the Colonel. "However, the word of a man like your brother can easily be doubted. Have you anything to say?"

"Can my word be doubted, sir?" asked Kirk. "On my honour as a Starfleet officer, I'm innocent of any part in my brother's crime, and I cannot find it in me to regret having killed him - although I'm sorry in that he was more valuable alive than dead... he could have implicated the Party."

"Does that satisfy you?" asked Commodore Sanyk.

"I must admit it has the ring of truth, although I will expect Commander Kirk to repeat his statement under a lie detector. Humans have not Vulcan honesty. It is, however, most unfortunate that the Party has once again wriggled out of one of its most dastardly crimes."

"Then the Party was responsible!" Kirk exclaimed.

"We have no doubt of it, Mr. Kirk," assured the Earthman, "and your brother was used for its own ends. We cannot prove it, however, and many people will believe the Party's denial."

"Some won't," replied Kirk. "But I can see now why you hoped I was also involved. You could have got at the Party through me."

"That was my intention when I came to the Starbase," the Colonel admitted. "My hope was badly shaken when I began my investigation, but I had to see for myself."

Before Kirk had time to ask about that remark the Colonel turned to the Vulcan, apologised for using his office for so long, and left after instructing Kirk to report to the interrogation room in an hour to tape his statement.

"Do you know what he meant, sir?" Kirk asked Commodore Sanyk.

"Yes, Mr. Kirk, and there is no reason why you should not be told. Colonel Raldan saw Admiral Sarek on his arrival, to convey a message from the Earth Government deploring the attack on his son. He also explained his theory about your involvement. The Admiral stated in no uncertain terms that his idea was illogical. His son was a Vulcan, and could not be deceived by someone with whom he had melded, and whom he considered a friend."

"Then you believe I'm innocent," said Kirk, moved.

"No, Mr. Kirk, you are guilty - of murder."

The emotionless statement had the effect of a cold shower, and Kirk shuddered inwardly. Would his brother never leave him alone, even now he was dead?

"Does that mean the end of my career, sir? Please answer me honestly - sorry, you would anyway," he added hastily.

"It is not up to me to decide, or to pass judgement," was the non-committal reply.

That's the trouble with Vulcans, thought Kirk. You can never be sure of what they feel - or if they feel anything at all.

"I understand that I'm considered a murderer, and see why the Vulcan crew might feel they can no longer trust me."

"I would suggest that your judgement is at fault there. No Vulcan officer would feel at liberty to pass judgement either. I believe that what you sensed was not lack of trust, but puzzlement that a man to whom they owed loyalty could be the murderer of his own brother."

"Yes, I can understand that. Thank you, sir."

"Extreme Human emotions are often difficult for aliens to understand, Mr. Kirk. Remember that at the Court of Enquiry."

Kirk reported to the interrogation room to make his statement as ordered, and found Colonel Raldan looking not at all happy.

"I'm not sure that there's any point in your statement under a lie detector, Mr. Kirk."

"Sir?"

"I've just received a report from Earth to the effect that the Party may have discovered a drug which nullifies the lie detector. That's all I needed to make my work impossible!"

"The drug could be discovered by doctors, sir."

"Maybe. The Government Research Lab is working on it."

"That means the other Humans who helped my brother could be Party members, sir."

"No, I don't think so. The Party wouldn't have risked the chance of being accused - they were probably innocent dupes. It's always the same, dead ends everywhere! But there's no reason for you to share my problems. Get on with the statement."

Kirk complied, after which he asked the Colonel, "Does this mean I'm under suspicion again, sir?"

Raldan sighed. "Quite frankly, at this moment I'm ready to suspect anyone. And perhaps there will always be a doubt about you."

"Sir, I've been condemned to death by the Party," Kirk protested, "and Admiral Sarek told you that I couldn't have deceived his son."

"The first could have been a blind. As for the second... I've no idea how telepathy works - the Party could have discovered a defence against it, for all I know. However, the Earth Government will abide by whatever ruling the Court of Enquiry gives."

Kirk beamed back aboard the Enterprise feeling very unhappy. That was all he needed - a permanent suspicion that he was working for the Party on the one hand, while the Party had condemned him to death on the other!

Mr. Salyk, who was now acting commanding officer, informed him that Admiral Sarek was on board to visit his son; Kirk went to McCoy's small office and described his interviews.

"You'll need all the help you can get, Jim," McCoy said morosely. "Not all aliens and not all Earthmen will believe that you were not to blame one way or the other."

"I know! I'm a murderer, thanks to my brother - he's always been the curse of my life," Kirk said bitterly.

"There's no such thing as a curse," protested McCoy in a severe tone. "Your brother is dead, and you're free of him now."

"I wonder!"

The intercom bleeped. Commander Kirk was asked to see Admiral Sarek in Dr. Syvik's office. Only Spock's father was present, and Kirk thanked him for his statement to the Chief of Earth Intelligence.

"I only told the truth, Mr. Kirk. I am gratified that you kept the news of the enquiry from my son - he is far from recovered."

Kirk agreed. He had seen Spock only that morning before beaming down, and had been worried by the Vulcan's listlessness, and the difficulty his Captain had shown in simply recognising him. Dr. Syvik had explained that the struggle for survival had been very hard, and after-effects of extreme tiredness and low vitality were to be expected.

"I am concerned about the enquiry, Mr. Kirk," continued Sarek. "I am naturally disqualified from being a member of the Court, but I am free to act in any other capacity. Should my testimony be of any assistance, do not hesitate to ask."

"Thank you, sir. I'm very grateful."

"My son would wish it. It is perfectly logical to want to retain the services of a good Starfleet officer."

Kirk hesitated, but felt he had to ask. "Sir, do you personally understand that I could not avoid killing my brother?"

"Not entirely, Commander," replied Sarek with typical Vulcan honesty. "Alive, your brother might have been very useful in discrediting the Party."

"I know that now, and I regret it, sir."

"However, I am familiar with extreme Human emotions. My marriage to an Earthwoman exposed me to quite a variety."

"I can understand what kind!"

"My wife nearly killed my would-be assassin during our first public appearance as husband and wife," explained the Admiral. "I had to try to understand then, or our marriage would have been a hopeless failure."

Kirk could guess at the stresses both partners had had to contend with.

"There was also disapproval on Vulcan," added Sarek. "I had broken with Tradition to an unprecedented extent. However, problems of the past are irrelevant. I believe the correct thing to say, in Earth terms, is : Good luck tomorrow, Commander."

"Thank you, sir. One last question : Does or will my Captain understand?"

"I regret that I cannot answer for my son, Mr. Kirk. He is in no state to discuss anything, and Dr. Syvik has advised that his home leave should be spent in the family circle only, with as little reference as possible to his ordeal."

"Yes, of course. Sorry I asked, sir."

Kirk went to his quarters in a sombre mood. Dr. Syvik's advice meant no reference to Sam, and perhaps no mention of Kirk himself. That was perfectly understandable - it could not have been pleasant for Spock to be faced with a sadistic torturer who so closely resembled his First Officer! The fact that Admiral Sarek seemed to be on his side helped, however. Perhaps Spock would understand too. But he wished he knew what his Captain was thinking.

The Captain left that same day for Vulcan accompanied by his mother on a special flight arranged by Starfleet; Admiral Sarek was to join them as soon as possible. Kirk was glad to see him go, for it meant that Spock could not possibly be bothered by the enquiry, for he would know nothing of it.

Dr. McCoy beamed down with Kirk to the enquiry, though he would be allowed into court only to give his evidence. The doctor was relieved that his friend was determined to defend himself, and fight for his rank and position. The Court consisted of one Andorian Admiral and two Tellerite Commodores, which made Kirk wonder if the Vulcans had purposely kept away.

Having decided not to have an adviser, Kirk stood alone facing his judges. Anyone could be called, or offer, to give testimony.

The Andorian opened the trial by stating Starfleet's pleasure at Captain Spock's escape from a horrible death; in view of events, however, it was perhaps to be reconsidered whether a close Human/alien alliance was desirable. Regardless of Kirk's real part in the affair, he was - though indirectly - responsible for it.

They'll condemn me for being the Captain's friend next! thought Kirk, understanding that the Admiral had probably been against the experiment to prove Humans trustworthy.

The trial soon hinged on whether the alien court could accept that Kirk had killed because of his extreme emotion at his Captain's ordeal, and for no other reason. McCoy's testimony, being from a Human doctor, helped. Dr. Syvik and the senior Vulcan officers stated that Kirk's loyalty to Spock had never been doubted since his promotion, although they admitted that they could not understand what had made Kirk kill when there was no

necessity for it, and when a live Sam would have been far more useful than a dead one.

Sarek's testimony had the most impact, being from the father of the victim, and Kirk was convinced that it influenced the court in his favour. His brilliant career was also invoked, as well as his rapid promotion, proof of his Captain's trust.

Finally the Court decided that to deprive Starfleet of Kirk's services would be a mistake. While they could not understand extreme Human emotion, they had to admit its existence, and to accept that it could cause murder.

However, the Court was not happy at the way Captain Spock's life had been endangered by his close contact with Humans, and recommended that the Enterprise experiment be followed closely so that it could be halted should it be deemed necessary.

"In other words," Kirk said bitterly to McCoy in the privacy of his quarters after the hearing, "all that has happened in the past has been erased. Spock and I have to prove all over again that a Vulcan/Human association can work. Sam has won a victory after all."

"Then it's up to you and Spock to be the next victors, Jim. What you did once, you can do again," assured McCoy.

Could they? Could Sam's shadow ever disappear completely, and the two officers go back to a close understanding?

Kirk hoped so, but he could not be sure. Perhaps his brother could hurt him even more now that he was dead. Kirk did not know how or why, but he had the feeling that Sam wasn't finished with him yet - and he could not be sure who would finally win.

PART 11 : BREACH.

One good effect of Sam's crime was that it horrified the Earth Government into stating openly that they did not believe the Party's denial of involvement, and condemned whole-heartedly men prepared to go to such lengths to achieve their objectives. It was made clear from then on that the Party was outside the law, which led some people to question the validity of their beliefs at last.

Before leaving Colonel Raldan had called Kirk and warned him not to set foot on Earth. He had explained that while the government accepted the verdict of the Court of Enquiry, they could not be absolutely sure of his innocence; the future would show if their suspicions were justified or not. In the meantime Kirk was officially condemned to death by the Party, and the Earth Police did not want the job of having to protect him at all times, particularly since the need for protection might be a blind.

"Now that I have met you, Commander," the Colonel had added, "I am reluctant to believe that you are playing some vile game. However, my superiors do not know you, and they consider you still suspect. In any case, for your own safety you are better off away from Earth - even Police protection is no guarantee against a determined assassin."

Kirk had been forced to agree, but the conversation had left a bitter taste in his mouth. The knowledge that he might never be free to return to Earth was unpleasant, and made him feel like a renegade. Would he ever see his home world again? With his usual courage, however, Kirk reacted against the temporary depression. He had kept his rank and position - that was the main thing for now.

Aboard the Enterprise, which was undergoing a complete overhaul while Spock recovered, Kirk was aware that while some Humans, like Scotty and Chekov, had been won over, others remained indecisive, and many condemned the murder of a brother for the sake of an alien. No-one could say that the crew was united yet by any means.

The Vulcans had accepted Kirk's reinstatement with equanimity, but the First Officer was sure that they also condemned him, though they were too polite to show it. The main factor, however, would be Spock's attitude when he returned to duty, and the kind of relationship he would have with his First Officer.

Now that the enquiry was over Kirk was able to think about this freely, and could not help wondering if his Captain would find his crime so horrible that he would not want to continue their friendship. It made Kirk very bitter, and he was aware that for the first time since the beginning of their friendship he was apprehensive about meeting Spock.

McCoy guessed a little of what was going on, but was not sure how he could help. On the day before the Captain's return, he went to see Kirk.

"Jim, if things are different... I mean, if the Captain seems different... you'll have to be patient."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"Look, this is strictly between us..."

"Yes, yes - go on!"

"Dr. Syvik is worried about the Captain. He didn't tell me anything, you understand, but... I know he contacted Starfleet, and made them assure him that the Captain was fully fit. He's also scheduled him for more frequent medical checks."

"Why? He told me that Spock would recover completely."

"Physically, yes. Psychologically may be another matter. Imagine for a minute what he must have gone through. Your brother must have said things about you..."

"I'm sure he did! Spock wouldn't believe them!"

"No, he wouldn't; but he had to accept that your brother was an evil person - and of course he had to accept the fact that you killed. Also, the ordeal he went through must have weakened his Vulcan control for a while, and he may over-react as a consequence, be even more Vulcan."

"Yes, that makes sense," Kirk admitted, not adding that what he feared most was the possibility of Spock's rejection of any ties with a murderer.

"You've been affected too, Jim. You've become insecure, worried, unsure of the future. You let your brother overshadow you - and now that he's dead he's still doing so."

"I can't wipe out the past yet, Bones. It's too recent."

"I know. Both you and the Captain need time and patience. Remember that, and make allowances."

Kirk nodded uncertainly, even more worried. He had the sudden feeling that he was going to meet a stranger, not his Captain.

The next day the First Officer made a thorough inspection of the ship to make sure it would satisfy even Spock's critical eye. Afterwards, it was time to go to the hangar deck to welcome the Captain, who was coming aboard in Sarek's shuttlecraft.

When the Admiral stepped down first Kirk saluted and apologised for the

lack of honours, explaining that no-one had known he was coming. The apology was brushed aside.

"I am not here in an official capacity, Commander, but simply as Spock's father. She who is my wife is also here. We wish to see Dr. Syvik for a short time."

Amanda stepped forward to join her husband, and Kirk noticed her drawn features. She was clearly worried about something - or someone. Her son? Mr. Salyk took charge of the couple to lead them to sickbay as the Captain stepped down in turn.

Quite unconsciously, Kirk had adopted a very reserved attitude. He had no intention of embarrassing Spock if he did not wish to renew his friendship with a murderer. He was a little reassured, however, to see that the Captain seemed perfectly fit, and his usual impassive self.

It was when his gaze met Kirk's that the First Officer knew. Without being conscious of it before, Kirk had become used to seeing a slight softening of the cold attitude when his Captain looked at him. Now, the gaze remained cold and expressionless, as though facing a stranger.

"I trust that everything is in order aboard, Mr. Kirk?"

"Yes, Captain," replied Kirk with an impeccable salute. "If you would care to see for yourself...?"

"Later. Please ask the senior officers to assemble in the briefing room."

Kirk transmitted the order and followed Spock out of the hangar deck; it was natural for them to go to the briefing room together. Spock remained silent, making the First Officer feel uncomfortable and sure that his fear had been correct - Spock despised him. Or was he still unwell? Sarek's visit...

"Captain," he asked hesitantly, "I trust that you are recovered? Your parents' visit to Dr. Syvik..."

"Purely to humour my mother, an over-emotional Earthwoman," replied Spock in a cold voice. "I am perfectly fit, or I would not have been allowed to return to duty."

That made sense; a Starship Captain had to be 100% fit. The tone of voice had not encouraged further conversation, so Kirk remained silent, aware of a lack of rapport with the alien who had meant so much to him. In the lift the First Officer was able to observe how the Vulcan stood very straight, tall and distinguished, the stern features frozen into a mask of complete impassivity which reached even the eyes, making their gaze particularly chilling.

Kirk felt miserable, and had to make an effort to appear normal when they entered the briefing room. The Vulcan officers got up and saluted the Captain with their usual impeccable style.

"At ease. Sit down, Gentlemen."

They complied as Mr. Salyk said respectfully, "May I say how gratified we all are to have you in command again, Captain."

"Thank you, Mr. Salyk. I shall want a report from each of you as to the crew's present frame of mind - and I mean the whole crew."

"It will be on your desk by tomorrow, Captain," Kirk promised.

"Thank you, Mr. Kirk. Now to the aim of this meeting. As you all know, I made a request to Starfleet for a relaxation of some of the discipline aboard, such as the continual saluting of the Captain. I urged that it could contribute to the success of the experiment."

"It was agreed that it was worth a try," said Kirk.

"Correct, Mr. Kirk. However, in view of recent events, Starfleet has refused the dispensation. I have also been advised to reinforce discipline and increase the Security force aboard."

"Advised or ordered, sir?" asked Mr. Sirak.

"Starfleet expects advice to be followed, as you know," replied Spock. "However, the extent to which I do so is left to my discretion in accordance with the privileges granted to Starship Captains. Any comment?"

"It may be wise to have closer security around yourself, Captain," said Mr. Senak, the Chief Engineer. "We nearly lost you twice, and other attempts could be made."

"I refuse to circulate aboard my own ship with a security escort," stated Spock with calm authority, "and I also refuse to increase the Security team. Such measures are dictatorial, and unlikely to lead to better relations. Any other comment, particularly about the discipline?"

"We have no objection to a stricter discipline, Captain," said Mr. Sirak, "and for my part I never saw anything too extreme in having to salute a man I respect."

"Agreed," said Mr. Salyk shortly.

"Thank you, Gentlemen. Mr. Kirk, what about the Human crew?"

"As they resent the discipline anyway, it won't matter if it is reinforced, Captain," replied Kirk.

"In that case I will be able to follow at least half of Starfleet's advice, which might satisfy them for the present."

Spock signalled the end of the meeting, and the officers left as Sarek and Amanda came in to say goodbye. Kirk was the last to leave, and heard Amanda's plea.

"Take care, Spock."

"Mother, I am no longer a child."

"A child? You were never a child, Spock," answered Amanda, with a catch in her voice.

Kirk left hurriedly. He had no right to hear any more, but the words lingered in his mind as he went to the bridge. How could a child never be a child? Spock was half-Human - how did he manage? At what cost? Kirk could not guess, but it reminded him again that his Captain was an alien.

As the Enterprise left Starbase 1 for her next mission, no-one could think of Spock as being anything but Vulcan.

And who can blame him, thought Kirk bitterly, when being Human means you can kill your brother?

His Captain was far too polite to show any open contempt or dislike for him, but his attitude to Kirk was now the same as towards his other officer: remote, aloof, strictly formal. Their friendship might never have existed. Time had gone backwards.

So Sam has won! reflected Kirk miserably, taking refuge in his quarters after a chilling game of chess. It had taken place in the recreation area, the first game since Spock's return - and perhaps the last. Not one word had been exchanged, and the Captain had won with an ease that had humiliated the First Officer. The Vulcan was not bothered by any emotional upset as Kirk was, that was clear.

Without his being aware of it, Kirk's attitude to Spock had become even more formal and reserved than at the start. The First Officer felt sure that the Vulcan condemned a murderer, and perhaps even doubted his

loyalty, when he had shown no sense of loyalty towards his own family. The Vulcan sense of family unity would never allow him to understand.

McCoy had remonstrated with Kirk. "He let you help him in sickbay, Jim."

"He wasn't well then, Bones." And the doctor had to admit that it could be so, which didn't help.

Now Spock's extreme Vulcan attitude widened the gap between them, a gap Kirk could not cross, although he tried once, in a feeble attempt that met with a very abrupt answer.

"I have no wish to discuss the past, Mr. Kirk, and I am sure that you have not, either."

The First Officer had not persisted, hurt by the rejection, and more and more conscious of his brother's victory. Sam had killed his friendship with Spock - he had won, even in death. Kirk felt desperately alone, a loneliness all the more bitter because it came after the rewarding companionship he had so recently enjoyed.

Right! thought Kirk, influenced by his wretchedness. If Spock doesn't care, I'll show him that I don't care either! I'll be as emotionless as he is.

The other Vulcans maintained their usual attitude, but the First Officer thought he could sense a new reserve and coldness in them. This pleased Kirk's enemies among the Human crew - it served the First Officer right for choosing aliens.

The result was that Kirk, isolated and miserable, had no compunction in enforcing the hard discipline recommended by Starfleet. The Vulcans were right, emotions only led to misery.

McCoy watched, and could not think how to help. He suggested leave, suspecting that his friend had been under too much stress and needed a rest. Kirk refused with such vehemence that the doctor did not like to insist - and besides, even on leave, in the mood he was in Kirk would only continue to brood.

So, though he could see, and disliked, the change in his friend, there was little McCoy could do. The First Officer had become insecure, unhappy, bitter, cynical, and hard on the Human crew, compensating for his insecurity by over-severity. He was in a particularly dejected mood when he caught sight of Chekov finishing a check in auxiliary control.

"Mr. Chekov, shouldn't you have finished this at least ten minutes ago?"

"Yes, sir, but I stopped to help an engineer with the removal of..."

"Was that part of your duty?"

"No, sir, but it saved calling someone up from Engineering to assist..."

"The Captain wanted you on the bridge ten minutes ago. You will report to him there now, and confine yourself to quarters at the end of your spell of duty."

"But sir..."

"No arguments, or I'll increase the sanction..."

Kirk stopped, aware that Chekov was staring over his shoulder at something. He whirled round and saw Spock standing by the door watching and listening. Unaware of how long the Vulcan had been there, Kirk saluted a second after Chekov did, which did not help his mood, but he remained silent.

"Ensign, report to the bridge," ordered Spock. "Mr. Kirk, please follow me to my quarters."

"Captain, please," said Chekov, "I did ask..."

"I know, Ensign. You will use your confinement to quarters to further your studies."

"Thank you, sir." The Ensign saluted smartly and left. Kirk followed Spock in silence.

Once inside his cabin Spock reprimanded Kirk in no uncertain terms for excessive severity. Chekov had asked the Captain's permission first. However, Spock had waited until they were alone to reprimand his First Officer, something Kirk could not appreciate in his mood.

"I'm only following orders, Captain, and enforcing discipline. Chekov did not tell me that you gave permission."

"Because you did not let him speak, Mr. Kirk."

"Humans are good at giving excuses, most of which have no value."

Spock had sat down and was watching him attentively. "What are you trying to prove, Mr. Kirk?"

"I don't understand, Captain."

"What are you trying to prove by your excessive severity? Do you not think it might upset the Human crew?"

"Humans are easily upset, not having any emotional control. It might interest you to know that I've come to agree with the Vulcans - emotions are dangerous, and should be eliminated."

"You are sick, Mr. Kirk. Report to sickbay," ordered Spock.

"What? You've said often enough how bad emotions are, and you'd be horrified if a Vulcan showed any."

"A Vulcan showing emotion, unless under unbearable stress, would be a sick Vulcan. Humans, however, do not seem to be able to live without emotion. Consequently, a Human without emotions is a sick Human. Report to sickbay - that is an order."

Kirk obeyed, although he disliked medicals. As he had expected, Dr. Syvik pronounced him physically fit.

"Thank you, Doctor. I'll tell the Captain and return to duty."

"Not yet, Mr. Kirk. Please see Dr. McCoy. I will make my own report to the Captain."

Kirk found McCoy in his office and sat down. "Well, Bones?"

"You should have leave, Jim, as I told you before."

"That's a joke! I can't go to Earth, remember?"

"There are other worlds besides Earth. Think about it. Dr. Syvik will recommend to the Captain that you go on leave."

"I don't want to go on leave!"

"Jim, be reasonable! After what's happened it's perfectly natural to need a break, if only a short one."

"I suppose so," agreed Kirk without enthusiasm. I'll make it as short as possible, he reflected. I won't miss much, it's only routine assignments at the moment. I'd be back in time for the space exploration mission.

That evening the Captain asked him to his quarters and gave him the expected order to take leave.

"I regret that you cannot go to Earth," Spock added. "You will leave the ship at Space Station V-10 and get transport to whatever world you choose."

"Captain, it will take too long!"

"Two months will give you plenty of time..."

"Two months! Who said anything about two months?" asked Kirk, appalled.

"It was the length of time recommended by Dr. Syvik, and I agree."

"Captain, I do not want such a long leave. One month maximum is all I'll take."

"I could make it an order based on medical evidence, Mr. Kirk."

"Just because I was too hard on Chekov?"

"Mr. Chekov is not the only one you have been too hard on. Your excessive severity is endangering the efficiency of the crew."

"You gave the order for severe discipline, Captain."

"Excess in anything can be dangerous, Mr. Kirk. I will not have my ship endangered."

Kirk, believing that Spock was referring to excessive emotions leading to murder, clenched his fists and fought a sick feeling in his stomach. He had been right, Spock would never renew a friendship with a murderer.

"Captain," he said calmly enough, "I'll ask for a transfer on my return from leave."

"Illogical, Mr. Kirk. Any application for transfer will be refused."

"Why?" asked Kirk, hope leaping inside him.

"The success of the Enterprise experiment requires our collaboration, Commander. We owe it not only to my ship, but to Starfleet and the Federation. I know where my duty lies, and never thought I would see the day when I had to remind you of yours. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir," replied Kirk dully, his face white.

"You will take one month's leave. I do know that doctors tend to exaggerate in that direction. I expect you to think about what I have said while you are on leave, and to return to duty determined to make this vessel the finest Starship in the Fleet. There will be no further mention of transfer. Dismissed."

Kirk left the cabin mechanically and went to his own like an automaton. Just as well he was off duty!

McCoy was waiting for him. "Jim, I've come to tell you that I've put in a request for leave... What's wrong? Sit down! Here, drink this! Now tell me what happened?"

"Not much, Bones," replied Kirk, taking a deep breath. "I knew really that Sam had won... Now I know there's no hope..."

"Explain."

Kirk reported the interview with Spock quite calmly. "In a way, it's a relief to know. I realise too, that I do need leave, it will give me time to get used to the idea. The Captain is right - I have my duty, and I took an oath. I'll help him all I can... Only..."

"Only what?"

"I wish it hadn't been his only reason for refusing the transfer," Kirk murmured, his voice tired and barely audible.

"Come on, Jim - bed is the place for you."

The First Officer was so exhausted that he fell asleep immediately. McCoy made sure he was comfortable, then turned to the door and said aloud, "Now, Captain, let's see what logic lies behind all this, if any!"

The doctor buzzed the next-door cabin and entered at Spock's invitation. He saluted perfectly and waited for permission to speak. The Captain looked up from his work, and his eyebrow rose.

"Are you sure you should say anything, Dr. McCoy? It is clear from your facial expression that little logic will pass your lips at this moment. There are limits to the allowances I can make for Human emotions."

Although the words were not intended to calm him, McCoy managed to speak coherently, if heatedly, about the logic of being hard on officers who had been under severe stress for a long time, and who were badly in need of leave. He also pointed out that Kirk had had to face an enquiry alone, and keep the ship in shape all the time the Captain was away.

"For all the thanks he got, he might as well not have bothered, sir," finished McCoy, out of breath at last.

Spock had listened very calmly, watching the doctor over steepled fingers.

"To expect thanks for doing one's duty is illogical, Doctor. However, your emotional outburst seems to have helped you. You look much better, an illogical process which is beyond comprehension."

"Can't you forget logic for one second, for Jim's sake, Captain?"

"A Vulcan who forgets logic is not sane, Doctor. I fail to see how insanity on my part would help Commander Kirk. I have considered your application for leave to coincide with Mr. Kirk's. The leave is granted. Dismissed."

McCoy saluted and left, biting his lip not to explode with anger. Once he had cooled down, however, the doctor understood that his application for leave could easily have been refused - he had had leave not long ago on Earth. Yet the Captain had granted it. To help Jim? Or because he could not think of a logical reason to refuse?

"I wish I understood your logic, you pointed eared freak of a Captain!" McCoy muttered aloud as he prepared for bed. "You're an infuriating alien, and I wish you weren't quite so dignified while you're being infuriating!"

Kirk duly went on leave with Dr. McCoy to a small world within easy reach of Space Station V-10. They swam, ate, drank, participated in the local boat-race, and had a generally relaxing time. The Enterprise and her Vulcan Captain seemed far away, and Kirk did not mention the ship during their stay. McCoy wasn't sure whether that was good or bad, but did not like to mention anything first. His friend was often thoughtful, but never volunteered any information as to what - or who - he was thinking about.

On their last day McCoy was relieved to see Kirk in high spirits.

"I told you that all you needed was leave, Jim."

"You were right, Bones, but I couldn't go on leave until the Captain returned anyway, and settled back in. It's a nice feeling, to go back to such a lovely ship."

"Hmm...glad to hear it."

"You like her too - and you love your work, Bones."

"Yes, of course I do. Dr. Syvik is a damned good doctor, and easy to work with - easier than His Lordship, I should think."

"What made you call him that again?"

"I don't know..."

"In a way you're right. Time has gone back, although some of the Human crew are now able to understand and work with Vulcans."

"Yes, that's an improvement."

"I'm determined to start from scratch again, and try to forget Sam and his victory."

"Good for you! Besides - he did only win one battle."

Kirk and McCoy rejoined the Enterprise before the space exploration started. The First Officer settled back into his duties in a relaxed and eager frame of mind, and it made him realise how right the doctors and the Captain had been to send him on leave. His previous troubled and unhappy thoughts had been due to the stress and aftermath of Sam's crime.

He found that the Vulcan crew was the same as before, and cooperated fully with him. The Captain, of course, was still remote and aloof, and very much a Vulcan. Now that Kirk had accepted it, he discovered that he could collaborate and work in harmony with his superior officer, as he had done in the past.

The First Officer also began to wonder just what had caused Spock's extreme Vulcan attitude. McCoy's suggestion that the ordeal was responsible was a possibility, but Kirk had the feeling that there was more to it than that to cause Spock's retreat back into his shell, and his avoidance of friendship.

Had Sam said anything? No, Spock would hardly have believed him. Had his Captain been too hurt? Vulcans were able to control some physical pain. The more he thought about it, the more Kirk was convinced that there was something he could not guess at behind Spock's Vulcan coldness. The feeling that it might be due to excessive hurt was not a nice thought. All the First Officer could do was to collaborate and help his Captain to the best of his ability, and hope that one day the mask might slip.

The Enterprise was on her way towards uncharted space when there was a call from Starfleet. A distress signal had been received from an Earth ship manned by miners intent on finding a rich world outside the limits of charted space. In spite of a warning from Starfleet about the dangers, the vessel had proceeded into the quadrant assigned to the Enterprise for exploration, and had found the rich planet they sought, the approximate coordinates of which would be transmitted.

"Their garbled message was most odd," added Commodore Lufev. "They said they were attacked by Vulcans."

"That is not possible, sir," said Spock.

"Agreed, Captain, so it may be a case of collective insanity. However, the fact that they stopped transmitting soon after is not a good omen. We hope you will be able to clear up the mystery. Take care, Captain - whoever attacked them could attack you."

The Enterprise hurried towards her destination at full speed, but once at the boundary of charted space the Captain ordered a much-reduced speed. The coordinates given were not far out, and they found the planet, around which orbited a gutted Earth ship.

There were no life readings either from the ship or from the settlement on the planet. A party led by the Captain explored the dead hulk and found the log, which stated clearly that the miners were being attacked by Vulcans. Spock beamed down to the planet with a landing party and found the settlement more or less intact, but the Earth miners were dead, each and every single one of them.

"Toxic gas, Captain," reported Dr. Syvik. "Death was quick and painless."

"They were killed just the same," said Scotty. "We must find the murderers, Captain. Could they have been Klingons, disguised as Vulcans?"

"No, Mr. Scott. This method of killing is not the Klingon way. We are in uncharted space - this world may have belonged to someone. Further investigation is necessary."

Little was discovered, though a thorough search was made of the settlement. Spock, raking a dead fire, found an emblem which represented a large bird.

"Does this mean anything on Earth, Mr. Kirk?"

"No, Captain. Not as far as I know."

"We'll take it aboard. Please give the order to beam back."

"Yes, Captain. Those buildings are not standard Earth design, you know."

"They are made of standard materials, all available on Earth," reported Mr. Salyk.

"Then it must be a very new design."

The landing party beamed back aboard safely and the Enterprise left orbit to proceed cautiously with the exploration.

The Science Officer was investigating the bird emblem, and came up with an unexpected answer.

"Captain, a similar design was used approximately 5,000 years ago by a Vulcan tribe."

"Do you mean to say that Vulcans killed Earth people?" exclaimed Kirk. "I can't believe it!"

"It is possible that an offshoot of the Vulcan race settled somewhere and developed differently from us, Mr. Kirk," said the Captain. "By now, they would hardly be Vulcans, and have probably adopted another name."

"Yes, that may be it," agreed Kirk worriedly. "Could I have a word with you, Captain?"

In the privacy of the briefing room the First Officer continued, "I'd suggest that we keep this from the Human crew, Captain. It could create difficulties."

"Yes, it could. However, I am reluctant to hide facts from my crew, even when the evidence is apparently against us. I agree that it could create a difficult situation, as you say, Mr. Kirk, and a real challenge to our abilities. We shall have to prove that we can handle it."

Kirk was pleased that his Captain had said 'we'. It showed that Spock had noticed his full collaboration, and appreciated it.

As Kirk had predicted, the rumours about Vulcans having killed the Earth miners did not help the situation aboard. Although it had been explained by Spock himself that even if Vulcans were involved they were not from his home world, it made little difference to some. A small number of Humans, led by McCoy and Scotty, believed the Captain's assurance, but feeling was strong among the Human crew. They wanted the miners avenged, and the Enterprise to look for the killers. A deputation led by Sulu came to demand this of the Captain. Kirk, who had been warned by Scotty, and who in turn had warned Spock, was present to support his commanding officer. The fact was noted by the Humans.

Spock stated clearly that he was not engaged on a witch-hunt, and no-one knew why the miners had been killed. Until all the facts were known, he would proceed with caution and not act in any way which could involve the Federation in a war.

The Humans grumbled, though not openly to the Captain. If it had been Vulcans killed things would have been otherwise, was the trend of the rumours. McCoy and Scotty did what they could to curb tempers and reason with the malcontents, who fortunately did not dare go beyond talking, for the moment. It made Kirk hope that they would never meet up with the culprits, or an unpleasant situation could develop.

A few days later three vessels were sighted, of unknown design, but one of them was in the shape of a bird of prey. This vessel was in difficulty, as the other two ships were firing at her, but no retaliation was seen.

The arrival of the Enterprise changed the situation. Without any warning the two ships left their target and fired at the intruder. Their range proved too short, and Spock ordered a warning shot to be fired just off target, which proved the Enterprise's range to be better. The aliens, once aware of that, turned tail and fled.

"Do we pursue them, Captain?" asked Kirk.

"There is no need to do so, Mr. Kirk. We have no quarrel with them. The remaining vessel has not taken the opportunity to escape, therefore it cannot. Full report on her condition, Mr. Salyk."

The Science Officer complied, and confirmed that the alien was in bad shape. There was life aboard, but it was obvious that she could not go anywhere without assistance.

"Attempt contact, Mr. Somek," ordered Spock. "Maintain shields and remain at a safe distance, Mr. Sirak."

It was a wise precaution, because the disabled ship fired at them.

"There's gratitude for you!" exclaimed Kirk. "We make their enemies run and they attack us."

"Most illogical, Mr. Kirk," agreed Spock, "particularly when they need help."

"I have the alien Captain, sir," called Mr. Somek. "On audio now."

The screen showed the other ship's bridge, and the alien facing them had slanting eyebrows and pointed ears. If the Vulcans were surprised, the alien was even more so.

"Who are you?" he exclaimed. "You are not Romulans!"

"No, sir," replied Spock. "I am Captain Spock, from Vulcan. This is the Federation Starship Enterprise, on a peaceful space exploration of this quadrant."

"You are in Romulan space, Captain. Such an invasion cannot be peaceful."

"One ship can hardly be called an invasion, sir. It seems that other races do not consider this space as yours either."

"You mean those Orion pirates who disabled my ship? They won because they were two to one, and I was waiting for them to board before I destroyed my vessel."

"That does not explain why you fired at us when we put your enemies to flight."

"I thought you were a scavenger ship, picking up wrecks. I had to show you I was no such thing. Captain - who is that standing next to you?"

"My First Officer, Commander Kirk," replied Spock.

"So you Vulcans are friends of those killers! There can be no peace between us..."



"Sir," interrupted Spock sharply, "the evidence we have points to your race being the killers. You attacked an Earth settlement and destroyed their ship."

"Because they killed our colonists, Captain. Every single man, woman and child on that planet was slain. The Earth people, as you call them, wanted the planet's riches. We received a distress call, but arrived too late. So we executed the murderers."

"There's no way we can check your story, sir," said Kirk, aware however that the alien's words tallied with what they had discovered.

"There is, Commander. We had left a hidden recorder on the planet, and the whole thing is on tape."

"I do not doubt your word, sir," said Spock, "but I would be grateful for a copy of that tape for my superiors."

"You want to see if it is faked? I don't blame you, Captain. A copy will be transmitted to your ship. If you don't believe it, you'll destroy my ship to avenge the Earth people."

"No, sir. If your tape proves genuine it will be transmitted to the Federation Council, who will decide accordingly. In the meantime, do you need assistance?"

The Romulan Commander looked incredulous. "Are you insane, Captain? Do you always help your enemies?"

"I do not understand, sir. I was not aware that we are enemies."

"You come to claim this quadrant of space which belongs to us, and we are not enemies?"

"I claim nothing," explained Spock patiently, "and the Federation respects rightful ownership. Let us help you, after which I will report to my superiors."

"You'd give up without a fight? That Federation of yours must be easy to conquer! We might try it."

"I would not advise it, sir. Far more can often be accomplished without force. However, you have not answered my question. Do you need assistance?"

"You know we do. Then you'll follow us, to discover our home world."

"You might do the same, sir," said Kirk.

"The Earthman knows how fighting people think! Unfortunately, we could not possibly follow you. We need extensive repairs, and help to make them because of heavy casualties. What is your price for your assistance, Captain?"

"I do not ask payment for a rescue operation," replied Spock. "Please indicate your needs."

"What a soft man you are!" said the Romulan with contempt. "Yet you don't look it. I'd have asked... No matter. My Science Officer will transmit details of necessary repairs, but we are not stupid. We will only allow one of your men aboard. That is my final word."

"Very well, sir. After verification of your tape I will come aboard your ship."

"You, Captain? I'd advise you to send the Earthman, but it's up to you."

"I will contact you again in approximately two hours to arrange the details."

The communication ended, and the senior officers assembled in the

briefing room to see the tape and discuss the situation.

Mr. Salyk declared the tape genuine according to their tests, and it confirmed the Romulan Commander's statement. While the bridge crew agreed that the alien ship should be helped, fear for the Captain's safety was voiced by Kirk and by the Vulcans. Spock refused to allow anyone else to do the job, and gave strict orders that no-one else was to transport to the Romulan ship, no matter what happened.

"Captain," protested Kirk, "you might be kept there as a hostage."

"I agree it is a possibility, Mr. Kirk," replied Spock calmly. He had been doing a quick computation, and now turned to the Science Officer and the Chief Engineer, handing them a small tape.

"Mr. Salyk, Mr. Senak, will you look at this and see if it can be done. Then organise the equipment to be transported to the Romulan vessel. I will join you shortly."

As the two officers left an angry group of Human crew members erupted into the briefing room; led by Sulu, they were protesting at the intention to help the men they thought of as the murderers of the Earth miners. The First Officer was taking no chances, and pressed the alarm button which brought Security guards at once.

"Silence!" ordered Spock, hardly raising his voice; but the protesters became quiet. In a few words the Captain explained about the Romulan tape, then turned to his First Officer.

"May I leave you to deal with this, Mr. Kirk? I have a few things to see to before beaming to the Romulan vessel."

"Yes, Captain - and take care."

The Humans did not attempt to stop the Captain from leaving, and Kirk followed him to the door.

"Mr. Kirk," Spock said quietly, "I regret leaving you with a possibly dangerous situation."

"Don't worry, Captain - I'll handle it. At least I know what to expect. Be careful with the Romulans."

Spock nodded, and Kirk could have sworn there was a softening in his gaze for a moment, but he could have imagined it.

Coming back into the middle of the room to face Sulu and his followers, the First Officer remembered McCoy's and Scotty's warnings that someone unknown, probably an agent for the Party, was trying to stir up trouble. This was a unique opportunity, and the Party could not be expected to give up easily.

"Sit down, Mr. Sulu, and the rest of you," Kirk ordered. "You will see the tape for yourselves."

"That tape could be faked, and you know it, Mr. Kirk," protested Sulu.

"The Science Lab says it was not," replied Kirk.

"How could they know, when the tape is alien?" asked an engineer.

"It is true that a remote possibility of error exists," agreed Mr. Salyk, who had just come in and now stood beside Kirk. "The tape will be further examined at the Research Centre on Starbase 1, where a new method of testing alien tapes is being devised. In the meantime, we have to assume that it is genuine."

"Exactly!" agreed Kirk, glad of the Vulcan's support. "And now that's enough. You will see the tape for yourselves, then return to your duties."

"And if we don't?" Sulu asked with a hint of a sneer.

Kirk's voice was like the crack of a whip when he answered. "I would advise you not to initiate a mutiny, Mr. Sulu. We have a large brig, and it would accomodate all of you."

"You wouldn't dare!" said Sulu rather uncertainly.

"Try me!"

The two men faced each other, tense and determined for a second. It was Sulu who looked away first, although faint mutterings about a Human taking sides against his own race could be heard from his supporters.

"Mr. Solek," added Kirk, turning to the Security Chief, "you will see to it that these gentlemen watch that tape, then return to duty. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir. I am sure there will be no trouble," replied the Vulcan. "Would you like assistance to sit down, Mr. Sulu?"

"No, no," replied Sulu hastily as he took a seat, and everyone else followed suit.

The First Officer, reassured by the healthy respect Humans felt when confronted with Vulcan strength, left the room hurriedly with Mr. Salyk to go to the bridge; he wanted to follow his Captain's progress aboard the Romulan ship.

"The Captain is transporting now, sir," reported the Chief Engineer.

"Thank you, Mr. Senak," said Kirk, taking the command chair. "Mr. Somek, maintain contact and communications whatever happens. Mr. Salyk, try to keep a fix on the Captain at all times."

The screen lit up as Spock materialised in the other ship's transporter room. The equipment had been beamed over beforehand, and two aliens were examining it. The Captain stepped down from the pad, to be immediately surrounded by Romulans, two of whom pressed long, pistol-like weapons to his side. Spock took a step backwards and reached for their necks with lightning speed; the Romulans collapsed, and the Captain picked up one of their weapons with an air of interest. The Romulan Commander and his aides slowly raised their arms in the air - the weapon seemed aimed at them.

"I see I was right not to trust you," said the alien Commander. "Now you'll take my ship, of course."

Spock threw the weapon down and walked up to the Romulan. "Commander, I find your behaviour totally illogical. I came here unarmed, to give assistance you badly need, yet you receive me as an enemy. Why?"

The Romulan Commander was staring at him, clearly dumbfounded. "Illogical? You are the illogical one, Captain! You had me at your mercy, and you threw away the chance. Why?"

"Because I came specifically to repair your vessel. I am a Vulcan, Commander, and honour my word."

"He's unarmed, as he says, sir," said a Romulan aide, who had been aiming a scanner at Spock.

"I don't like it!" muttered the alien Commander, half to himself.

"May I suggest that you forget your own standards?" said Spock. "I am an alien, therefore unlikely to behave as you would."

"All right, Captain, we'll play it your way - for the moment."

The repair work started, closely watched by the Commander. Romulan technology being very similar to that of the Federation, most spare parts could be easily adapted.

On the bridge of the Enterprise, Kirk was becoming nervous, although he did not show it. The danger to his Captain would come when the repairs were finished.

"Mr. Salyk, do you still have a fix on the Captain?" he asked.

"No, Mr. Kirk. He is practically identical to the Romulans. I am attempting to pinpoint the difference."

Aboard the alien ship Spock was addressing the Romulan Commander.

"Your vessel is now operative, sir. You no longer need my assistance. I will therefore return to my ship."

"Captain!" exclaimed the Romulan with amazement. "Did you really think we would let you go? You are our hostage, our guarantee that the Enterprise does not follow us to discover the coordinates of our home planet. If she follows, you die."

"Commander," stated Spock, "I give you my word of honour as a Vulcan, and as a Starfleet officer, that my ship will not follow you."

The Romulan was clearly impressed by the dignity of this strange alien whose race of origin was the same as his - and he did not like being impressed.

"What would your ship do if we kept you hostage?" he asked.

"Nothing. I gave orders that no-one was to transport here."

"What will you do if you get back to your vessel?"

"Return to Federation space in order to report to my superiors. I will suggest that envoys from your government and mine meet at an appointed time in orbit of the mining planet, in order to discuss conditions acceptable to both side for peaceful co-existence."

"It might work," admitted the Romulan. "I wish I did not believe you, Captain! I always thought that a peaceful man would be a spineless specimen, yet you came here unarmed. I could never have done such a thing!"

A call came through for the Commander and he listened with attention, then a sly smile appeared on his features. He erased it quickly.

"May I leave now, Commander?" asked Spock.

"Yes, Captain. I too will report to my superiors."

It was at that moment that Mr. Salyk managed to pinpoint Spock, but it was no longer necessary; the transporter chief was already beaming the Captain aboard.

"Well done, Captain!" smiled Kirk as he got up from the command chair when Spock arrived on the bridge. "Now we follow the Romulans to discover their home world."

"No, Mr. Kirk. We return to Federation space."

"Captain! Starfleet will want to know..."

"I gave my word, Mr. Kirk."

"To an alien? The Romulan Commander would never honour such a promise."

"We do not know that, but the matter is irrelevant. You will order a course for Federation space, Mr. Kirk."

"Captain, please! If your decision is not approved by Starfleet..."

"I am well aware of the risk, Mr. Kirk. Proceed."

Kirk complied with a sigh, wondering what he would have done. Spock must have had a valid point, to prove that the Federation could be trusted, but wouldn't it be better to know where a potential enemy lived? How could his Captain trust an alien?

"I do not trust the Romulans, Mr. Kirk," Spock said quietly, startling him; the Captain had sensed his thoughts, as in the days when they were still friends. Even estranged, there was affinity between them.

"Mr. Somek," Spock was saying, "open a channel to the Romulan Commander."

"I was just going to call you, Captain," smiled the Romulan as his image formed. "Did you know that our warp drive is now operational? This means that we can follow you."

"I assumed that your engineers would make the attempt, Commander, and before I left your vessel I was certain that they had succeeded."

As the alien gaped in amazement the Captain continued, "I have one recommendation to make, sir. Please do not follow us, for your own safety."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Should you attempt to turn your ship around, or to follow us in reverse, your navigation computer will explode."

A few seconds elapsed before the Romulan could speak through clenched teeth. "We'll find and correct your sabotage..."

"No doubt, sir. But by then it will be too late. Live long and prosper, Commander."

The screen went dark as the Enterprise got under way, leaving the alien ship far behind.

"That was brilliant, Captain!" exclaimed Kirk with a smile.

"The credit is due to Mr. Salyk and Mr. Senak, who manufactured the device."

"The idea was yours, Captain," said Mr. Senak. "Sir, do you believe that peace will be possible with the Romulans?"

"Yes; provided that they do not think of everyone else as Romulans."

"I believe they've noticed the difference already, Captain," said Kirk with another smile.

To his disappointment no answering sign came from Spock, no half-smile, no slight softening of the eyes; yet Kirk could have sworn that earlier... And the Captain had guessed his thoughts... Why this barrier? An impenetrable barrier his Captain would not allow him to cross?

I WILL get through to him one day! Kirk vowed, with an effort at hope.

PART III : VULCAN CRIME.

On their way to Starbase 1 Spock listened to his First Officer's report on the Human crew members, who had seemed to quieten down after the incident in the briefing room. It was Kirk's opinion, though, supported by McCoy and Scotty, that one or more unknown Party agents were again trying to disrupt and influence the Humans. So far, it had been impossible to identify the culprit.

"It could be a special agent, Captain," Kirk finished, "and it looks as though Sulu has fallen under his influence and is being used by him."

"Through belief or fear, Mr. Kirk?" asked Spock.

"Who knows, Captain? Maybe both. There's reason to hope, however - the number of Humans willing to listen to wild talk has fallen, and we can now count on the support of quite a few sane men."

"That is good news, Mr. Kirk. Thank you for your clear and concise report. Dismissed."

Kirk stood up, but did not leave. "Captain, may I mention another matter?"

"Proceed."

"We reach Starbase 1 soon. Should you need my support or testimony about the Romulans, I'll be pleased to oblige."

"Although you disagree with my decision not to pursue the alien vessel?"

"Sir," replied Kirk stiffly, "I will support whatever decision my Captain makes."

"Thank you for your loyalty, Mr. Kirk. I will remember your offer, should it prove necessary."

Kirk saluted and left, hiding his disappointment. Spock had remained the cold, detached Vulcan throughout the interview. The First Officer fought the dismal thought that perhaps Sam had won a permanent victory. He would not let his brother's shadow kill all hope; he had to be patient, no matter how hard he found the waiting, and no matter how hard it became to deny Sam's victory as time passed.

Kirk often sought McCoy's company now, as the only close friend he had aboard. The doctor was not deceived - he knew that the First Officer was waiting, waiting with a patience he had not thought Kirk possessed.

McCoy did try a few times to get through Spock's shield himself, without success; of course, he had to take care not to upset his superior officer, which occasionally taxed his will power to the limit, when he would serve Kirk with a long tirade against logic and stubborn Vulcans instead.

When the Enterprise established orbit around Starbase 1, Spock was ordered to report to a special committee of top officers from Starfleet and Federation Council members.

As he waited in the transporter room, thankful that he did not have to face such high officials, Kirk wished his Captain luck with his usual smile.

"I do not believe in luck, Mr. Kirk."

"I do, Captain. Perhaps that's enough."

Spock's eyebrow rose, but he made no comment as he was beamed down to Starbase 1.

The Federation Council and Starfleet approved Spock's handling of the Romulans. They would send envoys to open negotiations, and perhaps achieve peaceful co-existence. The Romulan tape had been conclusively proved genuine, and the Federation Council proposed to offer compensation to the Romulans for the crime. This produced a further outcry from the Party - the Federation took the word of aliens, and even expected Earth to crawl to them.

None of this affected the Enterprise, whose next mission was the routine but urgent task of delivering vaccine to an Earth colony before an epidemic spread. The Captain ordered maximum speed, and had the supplies and a landing party well organised by the time they established orbit. In view of recent events it was considered best that a Human landing party beam down.

"You will take charge, Mr. Kirk," ordered the Captain. "Take Dr. McCoy, and keep in contact. Let me know if you need any other assistance."

"Yes, Captain. At least we're in time to stop an epidemic."

They were in time, and McCoy efficiently organised the administration

of the vaccine to everyone. The colony was not large yet, and the job was soon done.

"It's a beautiful world, Jim" sighed the doctor as they relaxed after reporting the completion of the assignment. "Ideal for some leave."

"That's not a bad idea, Bones - the crew could do with it. I'll ask the Captain."

Spock agreed, and half the Human crew beamed down. He also gave permission for Kirk and McCoy to have leave.

After a couple of days, though, McCoy became restless. There was experimental work going on in the lab, and he was anxious to assist Dr. Syvik, so he left Kirk to enjoy himself, and beamed back to the ship.

The First Officer did not mind. The countryside was beautifully unspoilt, and he borrowed a small boat for a trip across the lake. He had been told by the colonists that some fascinating caves could be visited there.

As he landed he was met by a crewman headed in the same direction. He was a hard-working man named Rodeck, whose behavior had always been irreproachable - Kirk was pleased to think he might have found a companion, or perhaps even a guide. Rodeck had visited the caves before; he was most enthusiastic, and willingly led the way for the First Officer.

Kirk was not disappointed. The cave glittered and sparkled under their light, a fairyland of enchantment it was possible to study for hours.

When the First Officer eventually realised he was alone, he felt only concern for his companion. Was he lost? He thought he heard a faint cry for help, and followed the sound.

Kirk never knew how, but suddenly there was no ground under his feet, and he pitched forward into the darkness.

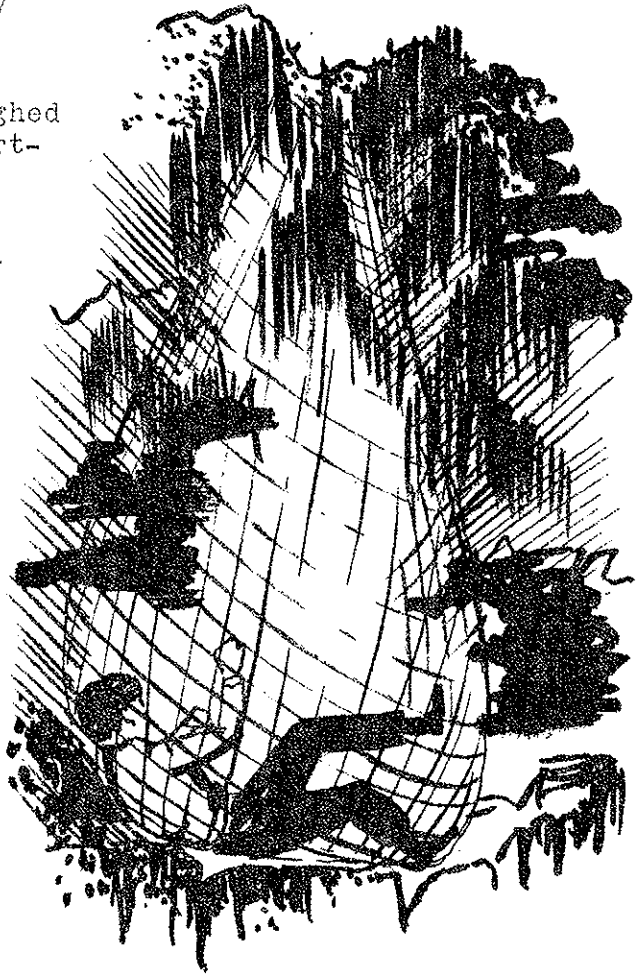
Bracing himself for the fall, he landed on something hard and stringy, which wrapped itself around him in a tight embrace. A net! Glaring light filled the cave, and he saw that he was indeed in a net, suspended in mid-air from the rocky ceiling. On a ledge Rodeck stood watching him, and Kirk recoiled from the cruel anticipation on the man's face. This was no longer the man he had known aboard, but some evil being whose existence he had never suspected.

"Well, Mr. Kirk, the time has come at last to settle accounts," Rodeck sneered.

"Who are you?" Kirk asked, though he guessed the answer.

"I am a special agent of the Party, recently given the mission of carrying out your execution, Commander James T. Kirk - or had you forgotten that you were condemned to death?"

Kirk did not answer, sickened by the hate and the fanaticism he could read in the man's expression. There was no point in reasoning with the assassin, there was no compassion there.



"About time the Vulcans were deprived of their best ally!" continued Rodeck, "and about time you stopped thwarting the Party's plans, Mr. Kirk. You are going to die at last, and I promise you it won't be pleasant!"

Kirk could not help struggling with the net, in a desperate attempt to free himself. The agent laughed, and reached for the fastening of the supporting rope.

"I'll put you down now, Commander, so that I can get to work on you. The method of execution was left entirely up to me."

The sudden fall, and the knowledge of what awaited him, produced an instinctive response in Kirk. He cried out, "Spock!", then violent pain, followed by darkness claimed him. Rodeck had miscalculated, and the First Officer had fallen unexpectedly far, striking his head heavily.

Aboard the Enterprise the work in the medical lab was suddenly interrupted by the Captain bursting in. McCoy stared in disbelief as the wild, distraught Vulcan grabbed hold of him.

"Where is Jim?"

"On leave, sir. Are you ill?" stammered the doctor, shaken by such unusual behaviour.

Thankful that no-one else was present, Dr. Syvik turned the Captain round and slapped him hard. "Stop making a spectacle of yourself, sir, and tell me what happened," he ordered sternly.

"I don't know!" replied Spock through clenched teeth, clearly trying to regain control. "I was asleep in my quarters, and I heard him... call to me..."

"Another nightmare I expect, Captain," soothed Dr. Syvik.

"I have not had any... nightmares recently."

"They could recur, Captain."

"There's no danger to Jim on that planet," added McCoy.

"There is always the possibility of an accident. I... I must go!" He ran out, and Dr. Syvik called Security.

"Mr. Solek, join me in the transporter room with at least two security guards. If you get there before the Captain, do not let him beam down. Dr. McCoy, come with me, please."

They hastened to the transporter room, where they met the Security Chief.

"We were too late, Doctor," reported Solek. "The Captain is already down on the planet."

"Then we beam down after him. He may be ill."

"Doctor," said McCoy worriedly, "he may also be right. Something may have happened to Commander Kirk."

"I agree that the possibility exists, Dr. McCoy. That is why our assistance may be needed. Let us go."

By asking the colonists they were able to follow Spock's trail, who in turn was following Kirk's. They did not manage to overtake the Captain, though, and as they landed near the cave Dr. Syvik's communicator bleeped.

"Emergency call from the Captain. Doctor," reported Mr. Somek. "Commander Kirk is hurt. He is in a cave near your present position. Follow the Captain's communicator signal."

"We'll be there in a few minutes, Mr. Somek. Thank you."

They hurried inside the cave, and soon arrived at the scene of what should have been Kirk's execution. The first thing that struck McCoy was that no-one seemed alive. Even the Captain, though he stood erect, appeared lifeless. His eyes, fixed on Kirk's still form, were very much alive, though, and the doctor looked away from the strange expression in them. Haunted? Desperate? Perhaps both.

McCoy and Dr. Syvik knelt by Kirk and heard the Security Chief's concise report.

"Crewman Rodeck is dead. Broken neck. Tal Shaya."

"I killed him," said Spock quietly, coming to life. "How is the Commander, Doctor?"

"Concussion at least, Captain," replied Dr. Syvik. "We'll beam up immediately."

"Yes, Doctor, do so with Dr. McCoy. I will follow shortly. Mr. Solek, you will take charge of the enquiry into the death of the crewman. I am disqualified."

As he saw to Kirk with Dr. Syvik, McCoy had the feeling of reliving a nightmare; only the first time in had been Spock in that bed, with Kirk haggard with worry. Was the Captain equally distressed? And if he was, would it be possible to tell? Although... the mask had slipped a little... for a while.

Spock came in an hour later, and waited for the verdict on Kirk.

"He suffered concussion and needs special care for a few days, Captain," said Dr. Syvik. "Providing that no complication sets in, his life is in no danger."

The mask was back in place. McCoy saw no reaction on the stern Vulcan features.

"Doctor McCoy, stay with the Commander," continued Dr. Syvik. "Captain, I can do the necessary medical examination now. Please follow me."

McCoy wondered for a moment about the coincidence of the Captain's medical being due, but was distracted by his patient, who had become restless, though still unconscious. The doctor administered a sedative and watched the panel - the next few days were a critical period, when complications could set in.

A full report about the affair was sent to Starfleet, and the Captain added Mr. Solek's and Dr. Syvik's reports to his own. As expected, the Enterprise was instructed to return to the nearest Starbase, in this case Starbase 10, for the regulation enquiry.

No complication set in, and McCoy was relieved when Kirk was pronounced out of danger, although he remained unconscious. Now that he had more free time out of sickbay, the doctor became aware of two things. First, Dr. Syvik was worried, and second, the Vulcan crew was uneasy about something, or someone. As for Spock, he was more the cold Vulcan than ever, so cold and detached that he gave the impression of being only half alive.

What on Earth is going on? wondered McCoy. Worry about the enquiry? Surely not!

The Enterprise established orbit around Starbase 10 soon after, and Spock beamed down in full dress uniform to face the Court of Enquiry. As McCoy had expected no blame was attached to the Captain for having killed the would-be assassin of his First Officer - a special agent never talked, so would never have given any information. The Earth Government, when informed, replied that the loss of one assassin was a benefit to mankind. Free of all charges, Spock duly beamed back aboard.

Thinking the whole thing settled, McCoy was amazed to hear that Spock had relieved himself of duty and had handed over command to Mr. Salyk. The Enterprise was on her way to Vulcan, where the Captain would stand trial.

"Has everyone gone crazy?" asked McCoy, bursting into Dr. Syvik's office with his usual impetuosity. "What is this about a trial? What has the Captain done?"

"He committed murder, Dr. McCoy," replied Dr. Syvik in his usual calm voice.

"I might have done the same in his place!"

"Perhaps, doctor; but you are Human - he is a Vulcan. Vulcans do not kill deliberately without a logical reason."

"He had a reason!"

"No, Doctor. He had no need to kill at all. The Captain has admitted his guilt. He has also admitted that emotion motivated him, not logic."

"It happens to all of us! There was great provocation!"

"The Vulcan Court of Justice will decide the degree of his guilt and apply the necessary sanctions. It has nothing to do with you, Doctor."

"You mean they'll punish..." McCoy choked on the words. In his mind sprang the picture of Spock facing a Vulcan court and admitting to Human emotion after the achievement of being accepted as a Vulcan.

"You people are barbarians!" McCoy shouted in blind fury. "You can't do that to him - it's worse than torture."

"Control yourself, Dr. McCoy," ordered Dr. Syvik severely. "It is Vulcan law, and neither you nor I can do anything about it. I believe that the Captain has the necessary courage to face the ordeal with the calm dignity and stoicism he has shown in the past."

McCoy swallowed hard. As Dr. Syvik had said, against Vulcan law... He changed the subject.

"Commander Kirk should come round in a few days, probably by the time we reach Vulcan. What do I tell him?"

"It would be best to tell him nothing. He will be very weak at first."

McCoy nodded and left with the renewed feeling of recurring nightmare, a nightmare which this time was reversed. Jim had had him to turn to, Spock had no-one. Unless his family stood by him? But when McCoy heard that T'Pol, Spock's own grandmother, was to preside over the Court of Justice, he took refuge in his quarters to swear profusely. So much for family support!

McCoy felt utterly frustrated. He wanted to help the Captain, but knew he could not. He shared his worries with Scotty and Chekov, both of whom were indignant about Vulcan law. The two officers reported that the Human crew could not believe it, which gave McCoy the idea of having the entire crew, Humans as well as Vulcans, watch the trial. Sulu kept saying that Kirk always supported Spock and got nothing in return - about time he saw the truth for himself. The temporary commanding officer Mr. Salyk was reluctant to give permission, saying that it concerned the Vulcans only, but agreed when McCoy pointed out that Spock was Captain of the Humans, too.

The Enterprise duly established orbit around Vulcan, and McCoy went to the transporter room to give Spock the latest news about Kirk before he left.

"He should come round soon now, Captain," assured McCoy, admiring the brilliant Vulcan costume Spock wore.

"I am gratified to hear it, Dr. McCoy. Do not worry him with current events - it would be illogical, when there is nothing he can do."

"I'll do my best, Captain, and... good luck," he finished lamely, wishing he could say what he wanted to say.

"Thank you, Dr. McCoy."

He didn't say he doesn't believe in it, reflected McCoy with a lump in his throat as he stood by and watched Spock disappear in the familiar humming of the transporter.

The doctor returned to sickbay in a sombre mood, and met Dr. Syvik at the door.

"Aren't you supposed to beam down too, Doctor? Or are you letting the Captain face the wolves alone?"

"Wolves? What wolves?"

"The judges, Doctor."

"The trial begins tomorrow. The Captain will spend the day with his parents."

"Oh? Are they on his side?"

"No Vulcan is against the Captain, Doctor, but every Vulcan is against murder. I do not believe there has been a murder trial on my world in the last 1,000 years, so this one is of great interest, and will be watched by the whole planet."

This is becoming worse and worse! sighed McCoy as he returned to sickbay. He checked Kirk's condition, then settled to his paperwork with a heavy frown. If anyone had told him that one day he would be so concerned about a Vulcan....!

It was shortly after that that Kirk regained consciousness, and McCoy hurried to his side, grinning broadly.

"Welcome back among the living, Jim!"

"Bones!" Kirk tried to smile, but his gaze was still unfocussed. "Spock... I saw... a dream..."

"What did you see?"

"There was pain, darkness... then a red haze... vicious words, so full of hate... The Captain running... like an avenging angel..."

"Angel? Not with pointed ears!" smiled McCoy.

Kirk returned the smile and continued, his voice stronger, "The crewman laughed at him, said that he knew the Captain could not kill, so he'd be able to kill me sooner or later. It was his mission in life to kill me, no matter how long it took... Then Spock said something... I don't remember... What happened after that, Bones?"

"Well, you've been ill for quite a while. It's lucky you don't have at least partial amnesia."

"Is the Captain all right?"

"Yes, he's fine, Jim. Why shouldn't he be?"

"I don't know - but I know you, Bones. You're hiding something. Out with it!"

The doctor hesitated, then decided on part of the truth. "There was some bother at Starfleet, but not much."

"Why?"

"The Captain killed Rodeck, Jim."

"So what? Who cared?"

"No-one. The Earth Government, when informed, replied that it was good riddance to bad rubbish, or words to that effect."

"Of course. Special agents never talk, so Rodeck wouldn't have been of any use anyway."

"Your brother - wasn't he a special agent?"

"Sam? Never! He was a tool used by the Party, but he didn't have the guts to be a special agent. One look at his life history was enough to show that."

"Well, anyway - Starfleet didn't blame the Captain over Rodeck."

"I should hope not! What else happened?"

"Not much. I'll let Dr. Syvik know that you're conscious, and I'll bring you a meal."

"Good! I'm famished."

"Stay in bed, mind!"

"Don't worry, Bones, I don't feel like going anywhere."

When McCoy returned Kirk enthusiastically tucked into the food he brought as the doctor said, "Dr. Syvik will check you over soon."

"Maybe he'll be more informative than you, although knowing Vulcans..."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Where is the Captain?" countered Kirk.

"On leave."

"Oh! Where?"

"Vulcan. Where else?"

"And where are we?"

"In orbit of Vulcan," McCoy admitted reluctantly, unwilling to tell a direct lie.

"I see. Isn't it unusual for a Starship to wait around while the Captain is on leave?"

"It's only a short leave, Jim. He'll be back..."

"That's enough, Bones! Just tell me what's going on!" Kirk tried to shout as he attempted to get up.

"Lie down, Mr. Kirk!" Dr. Syvik ordered as he came in, "and keep still while I check the readings."

Kirk complied while McCoy heaved a sigh of relief at the arrival of an ally.

"Quite a good recovery, Commander," said Dr. Syvik. "You should be fit in three or four days. I am sure Dr. McCoy will see to that."

"May I get up, Doctor?"

"Certainly not!"

"I swear that if I'm not told what's going on, I'll get up and find out for myself!"

"It might be best to tell him," McCoy whispered to Syvik, "or he'll worry himself sick."

Dr. Syvik frowned, doubtful. "There is nothing to be gained by telling you, Mr. Kirk - there is nothing you can do."

"Let me be the judge of that!"

The Vulcan doctor capitulated, and informed Kirk of the impending trial under Vulcan law. The First Officer looked too shocked to speak for a second, then he exploded.

"Do you mean to say that the Captain is going to be tried for killing a low specimen who was not even fit to lick his boots?"

"Who would want to lick boots?" was the question to be expected from a Vulcan.

"I meant that the Captain is worth more than ten men like Rodeck!"

"Irrelevant. He committed murder."

Before either doctor had time to stop him, Kirk had got up. The fact that he nearly fell did not prevent him from struggling with McCoy, who was trying to make him lie down again.

"Bones!" Kirk appealed. "You can't mean me to stay here while his own people are crucifying my Captain!"

"You would not be allowed on Vulcan during the trial, Commander," stated Dr. Syvik, "so I would suggest that you concentrate your energies on becoming fit again. After the trial you will be allowed to see him."

"I understand," Kirk murmured in a dead voice, his face the picture of utter dejection. Seeing that he had quietened down, Dr. Syvik left him in McCoy's care.

"After all, Jim," said the doctor, "Spock did not help you when..."

"Hardly his fault! He was very ill."

"What I meant was, that because you had to go through it all alone, he might prefer to do the same."

"You may be right. All I know is that I can't help... I'll watch the trial, though."

"No, Jim! You'll only torture yourself."

"If you deny me that, Bones, you'll be the one torturing me."

"All right, all right, I give in! There are times when I wonder who is the more stubborn, you or the Captain! What's the matter now? You look odd."

"I've just remembered, Bones."

"Remembered what?"

"What Spock said, after he came to my rescue. He said - and I quote - 'Whatever price I have to pay for my actions, I am going to kill you... for his sake.' "

"He knew what would happen to him!" murmured McCoy, awed.

"He knew!" echoed Kirk, turning away to hide his emotion.

The next day, the day of the trial, an eerie silence fell on the Enterprise as every member of the crew, Humans and Vulcans alike, settled to watch.

In sickbay, McCoy adjusted Kirk's bed so that he could sit up comfortably.

"You're lucky Dr. Syvik has beamed down, Jim, or he might have had something to say about your watching."

"Has he gone down to help the Captain?"

"He did a full medical on him after the incident, so I presume he has to state whether the Captain was sane."

"That's a big help!"

"Now, Jim, I'm switching the viewer on. Any agitation, and you get sedated. Understood?"

"Yes, yes. Go on."

The huge size of the Court of Justice awed them from the first. It was filling up rapidly with Vulcans in ceremonial costume, which made the occasion appear a celebration at first, until the severe expressions on all faces betrayed the fact that it could not be. The knowledge that the eyes of all Vulcan were focused on that room added to the austere solemnity of the assembly.

The room was now full, and at a signal everyone rose. The judges entered, ten High Elders presided over by T'Pol. The Vulcan woman, whose bearing and authority betrayed her high position, started the proceedings.

"This Court has been assembled to consider a very serious crime : murder. Because I have blood ties with the accused, I offered to resign this position. However it was pointed out to me that, logically, I should be the best judge of someone I know. Consequently, all the judges have known Spock at some time in his life. We shall all assess his guilt in relation to his past life, and to his status as a member of one of the highest families on Vulcan." There was a slight pause, then she added, "Sarek, go and fetch your son."

The Admiral, whom Kirk and McCoy had not recognised in his full Vulcan costume, went to a side door and led Spock in; he also wore Vulcan dress.

A wide space in the centre of the room was clear and Spock went and stood there, in front of a small metal rail. No-one would have believed he could be the accused by his attitude - not that it was defiant, but the tall, elegant figure facing the court with a calm dignity worthy of any Vulcan brought a lump to Kirk's throat.

One of the Elders came forward and read a concise and factual report on the circumstances of the crime. Then Dr. Syvik replaced him, and stated that Spock was in full possession of all his faculties, and responsible for his actions.

The preliminaries over, one of the High Elders now took over.

"Spock, you are here to answer for your crime: murder. Do you consider yourself guilty?"

"I am guilty," was the clear and calm answer.

"Did you have a logical reason to kill?"

"There may have been one, but it did not motivate the killing."

"Specify."

"When I found my First Officer and his assassin in the cave, I had no way of knowing whether Commander Kirk would live or die. He was badly hurt. If he died the assassin had accomplished his mission, if he lived the man would try again."

"Logical," agreed the Elder. "Did you therefore kill the assassin in order to protect your First Officer, should he recover?"

"No, sir. I killed him because he had hurt, perhaps killed, Commander Kirk."

(Aboard the Enterprise McCoy shouted, "For God's sake, Captain, do you have to be so honest?"

"He has to be, Bones - he's a Vulcan," Kirk murmured, his voice unsteady.)

The Elder was frowning at Spock's words. "Do you realise the implication of your statement, Spock?"

"I am fully aware of it, sir. Whatever the implication, it is the truth."

"The truth is, therefore, that motivated purely by emotion, you killed a man."

"Yes, sir."

"Will you please state that in your own words."

"I committed murder under the influence of violent emotion."

"We are all aware that you are half-Human, Spock. You chose to be a Vulcan at the age of seven. Do you now consider yourself Human?"

"No, sir, I do not."

"A murderer does not belong among Vulcans. Where do you belong?"

"The logical answer is that I do not belong anywhere, sir."

"Have you any statement to make which might diminish your responsibility for this crime?"

"None, sir."

"Do you now regret your act?"

Spock thought for a moment, considering, then replied, "No, sir."

"As Commander Kirk recovered, your action removed the threat to his life. Is that why you have no regrets?"

"No, sir. Had Commander Kirk died, I do not believe I could have found any regret in myself for the murder of his assassin."

(Aboard the Enterprise McCoy exploded again. "What is he trying to do? This is no trial - it's self-condemnation!")

Kirk did not answer - he could not. His hands were clenched together so tightly that the nails dug into the palm, and drew blood. The First Officer did not notice.)

The Elder continued, "From your statement, the logical deduction to make is that Commander Kirk is a friend of yours. This would be a mitigating circumstance."

"No, sir, the situation is not so. A tie of friendship existed in the past, but not recently."

"Spock, do you realise that you are condemning yourself with your own statements?"

"It is the truth, sir. If only for telling the absolute truth, I can still think of myself as a Vulcan."

The Elder sat down, and another took over to begin the debate on the degree of culpability involved. This meant referring to Spock's life history and his accomplishments, in order to see if at any time he had failed to prove himself a Vulcan.

The conclusion reached was that he had never failed as a Vulcan. It made this lapse the first, but it was a **very** grave one.

The debate about the precise degree of culpability to be assessed now started.

Being Vulcans, no breaks were needed for meals or sleep - the proceedings continued regardless of time passing. Throughout, Spock stood alone in the middle of the room without flinching once.

(Aboard the Enterprise McCoy tried vainly to make Kirk sleep, and had to give up when the First Officer asked him if he wanted to sleep. The doctor only managed to make him eat by feeding him while Kirk's eyes remained fixed on the viewscreen.

"How does it help if you suffer with the Captain, Jim?"

"It may not help, but I have to share it with him, even if he doesn't know. You're on his side too, Bones."

"If only someone would stop him from talking any more! I've heard of helping the course of justice, but this is ridiculous!"

"I don't think he has to say any more. His interrogation is over. Let's see.")

One Elder raised the question of whether prolonged contact with Humans aboard the Enterprise had affected the Vulcan Captain. Spock asked for permission to speak, and stated, "I do not accept that contact with the Humans aboard my ship has affected me. I will not have any liability for my actions fall on my crew - I am fully responsible."

("Can't someone shut him up?" shouted McCoy aboard the Enterprise.)

In spite of Spock's self-condemnation the Vulcans explored all aspects of the crime logically and without any effort to condemn or excuse. All they aimed at was the truth. They even considered the past friendship with Kirk as a mitigating circumstance, and the fact that the First Officer had survived made the removal of any further threat to his life a logical act, though it had not been intended as such. The half-Humanity of the criminal was also taken into account, but Spock refuted this.

"I chose Vulcan, and stand by my choice. I therefore ask the privilege of being judged as a Vulcan."

("Can't someone down there give him the neck pinch?" growled McCoy.)

In spite of the thoroughness of their discussions, the only logical verdict the judges could reach was inevitable: guilty of wilful murder, motivated by emotion.

T'Pau announced that the only thing left to consider was the sanction to apply. Any barbaric punishment such as death or imprisonment was naturally out of the question, exile remained. The court deliberated for a few moments among themselves, then T'Pau rose.

"Spock, you have heard that you have been found guilty of murder. The fact that you belong to one of the highest families on Vulcan makes your crime worse. In order that no dishonour attach to the family, you will renounce all claim as a member for the period of your exile, and hand over now all the appropriate signs."

Silently Spock took off the rich chain around his neck, the high golden collar, and the brilliant tunic he wore, and handed them over.

"And your IDIC," ordered T'Pau.

Spock's hand tightened on the disc for a second, then he handed it over too. The very simple dark costume he was now wearing contrasted sharply with the richness around him, yet the lithe dark figure remained dignified, and showed no sign of being affected by the proceedings.'

"The length of your exile remains to be determined," T'Pau stated. "At the end of that time, if your life has conformed to Vulcan standards, you will be re-admitted to your home world, and possibly to your rank in the family."

It was then that Sarek rose and asked permission to speak. "Spock's was a Human crime, and for his partly Human birth I am responsible. I therefore claim a half-share in the sentence, whatever the length of exile may be."

Spock was visibly going to protest, but T'Pau forestalled him and said in a harsh voice, "Sarek, your request cannot be granted. You suffered the sanction of exile when you broke with Tradition and married a Human. You have paid your debt."

"I may have paid my debt in regard to my marriage," countered Sarek, "but it could not have applied to my son's actions, as he was not then born."

"Your son chose Vulcan, and therefore cannot be granted exemption on the grounds of being half-Human."

"No-one is claiming exemption," said Sarek, clearly determined. "The sentence will be served, but only if I share in it will it be just. Spock is half-Human, the fact exists, and that fact is entirely my responsibility, not his."

"Sarek, you cannot wish for exile again..."

"I do not wish it, but it would be illogical to punish my son for my action in giving him a Human mother."

The clash between T'Pau and Sarek continued for a few minutes, and Sarek did not give way to any pressure from his mother. It was clear to see where Spock had inherited his stubbornness!

Finally, after renewed deliberation, it was decided that Sarek's request would be refused, but Spock's sentence was reduced from a projected ten years to six, in view of the fact that his half-Humanity could not be blamed on him.

There was also another reason, as T'Pau explained. "Spock, although your crime was a Human one, your conduct throughout this trial has been in accordance with the highest Vulcan standards. You have kept to the ideals of honesty and courage, and have never tried to diminish your responsibility, whatever the cost to yourself. In view of this, you are allowed to call yourself a Vulcan during your exile. You may go now to your home to make the necessary preparations for your departure. You must leave Vulcan at dawn tomorrow."

The trial was over, so the transmission ended. McCoy turned off the blank viewer and looked at Kirk with concern.

"Jim, you must rest. It's all over." To prove that he meant it he seized a hypo to put his patient to sleep.

"No, Bones, you can't! I'll be allowed on Vulcan now - I must go to him."

"In the state of exhaustion you're in, a fat lot of help you'll be! Look, Jim, the Captain must have some things to see to before leaving Vulcan for six years. Sleep for a few hours, then I'll let you go, I promise."

Admitting the truth of that, Kirk let himself be sedated. Once he was asleep, McCoy had to use force to separate the clenched hands, and he dressed the small wounds with a sigh.

Would the Captain accept Jim's help? he wondered. Would he renew the friendship? Who could tell with a Vulcan - Humans were bad enough!

PART 111 : OUTCOME.

In spite of the sedation Kirk woke at least an hour before he was due to, and McCoy grumbled when reminded of his promise to let him go.

"Jim, you're not fully recovered yet. You'll get a headache."

"So, I'll get a headache. Don't try to stop me, Bones."

"All right, have it your own way - but be careful."

"What do you mean? Vulcan isn't a hostile world."

"I meant take care with the Captain. He's an alien, remember that, and it's anybody's guess what effect the trial had on him. Remember, too, that he's refused to acknowledge his friendship for you since his recovery - an alien reaction if ever there was one!"

"I hope to clear up that mystery. But thanks for the advice, Bones - I will take care."

"While you're gone I'll watch the reactions of the crew. Scotty and I hope that Sulu for one will have seen the light."

It was late afternoon when Kirk materialised in front of Sarek's house. The door was opened by Amanda.

"Come in, Commander," she invited listlessly

Kirk looked at her white face and red-rimmed eyes; what could he say?

"No-one is at home, I'm afraid," Amanda added. "I'm alone."

"Do you mean to say that your husband and your son left you alone after all this?"

"I preferred it, Commander, and so did they. I do not like to inflict my tears on them, and I know that both of them need to meditate on past events, and face the future. Sarek has retired to a friend's house. I don't know where Spock is."

"I see," said Kirk, disappointed but determined to find the Vulcan sooner or later. "May I say how sorry I am about... what happened?"

Amanda was watching him with a strange expression. "Do you know, Commander, there was a time when I was glad my son had found a Human friend. Now I can't help wondering if it did not cost him far too much."

"I can't blame you for thinking that," replied Kirk softly. "The trial was an undeserved ordeal."

"I was thinking of the past. I don't suppose you guessed, as I did, what Spock went through when he recovered from your brother's torture. The guilt... the awful nightmares..."

"Please explain," Kirk pressed.

"Finally Spock went off by himself to face the facts and decide what to do," Amanda continued as though she had not heard Kirk's words.

"He came back aboard the ship a stranger to me. Why?" Kirk asked.

"Because he felt responsible for the killing of your brother. He had come between you, and was the cause of the murder, of the enquiry, and of your official exile from Earth - and he was not even at your side to help."

It was not his fault!" protested Kirk.

"Spock saw it differently. By giving way to Human emotion and forming ties of friendship with you, he had brought you hurt, misery and

heartbreak. So he decided that he had no right to Human friendship, was not worthy of it, when he could make a brother kill a brother. For your sake, he buried whatever he felt for you in his most secret self, completely hidden by Vulcan control. You had to be free of him."

"I should have known," murmured Kirk, his voice shaking.

Amanda shrugged with a hint of despair. "Perhaps you should, Commander. Or perhaps you simply did not know Spock well enough. A Vulcan is not easy to know, and Spock, whatever happens, chose to be, and is, a Vulcan."

Her voice broke on the word, and she continued in a faraway tone, "There were times when I wished he was not! Because of being a Vulcan, he was never a child. He grew up without friends, someone apart, different... and never let anyone guess what it cost him. Only Sarek and I guessed... Then you came, and reached him. I don't know how you did it, but Spock became alive. I saw it when I first met you on the ship. Only... it could not last, not after the tragedy. He chose to let you go free rather than be the cause of any further harm."

"I'm grateful for what you've told me," Kirk said in a low voice. "Perhaps I'll be able to guess now, and learn to know Spock better."

"Don't be too sure of that, Commander. There are still things... I'm his mother, yet I don't know if Spock can cry."

Kirk swallowed hard. The picture of a child who never cried was alien and frightening... but perhaps Spock simply hid... a child who took refuge in loneliness to cry... He had to find the Vulcan!

"Have you any idea where he could have gone?" he asked.

"No, Commander. Can you blame him for wanting to hide after the ordeal of his trial?"

"No. Loneliness seems to have been Spock's refuge for a long time. I'll go and look for him."

"Wait! There was a place... Let me think... On the edge of the desert, there is a small hill with a camping hut on top, isolated. He may be there. Take Sarek's aircar - it will be dark soon." She also gave him a small adaptor to compensate for Vulcan's thin atmosphere. Kirk thanked her, and Amanda added, "Take care, Commander. Remember that he's a Vulcan."

The craft flew in the direction indicated, and the hill soon came into sight. The First Officer thought he saw the flicker of a fire on top, so he landed his vehicle at the bottom and climbed up rapidly.

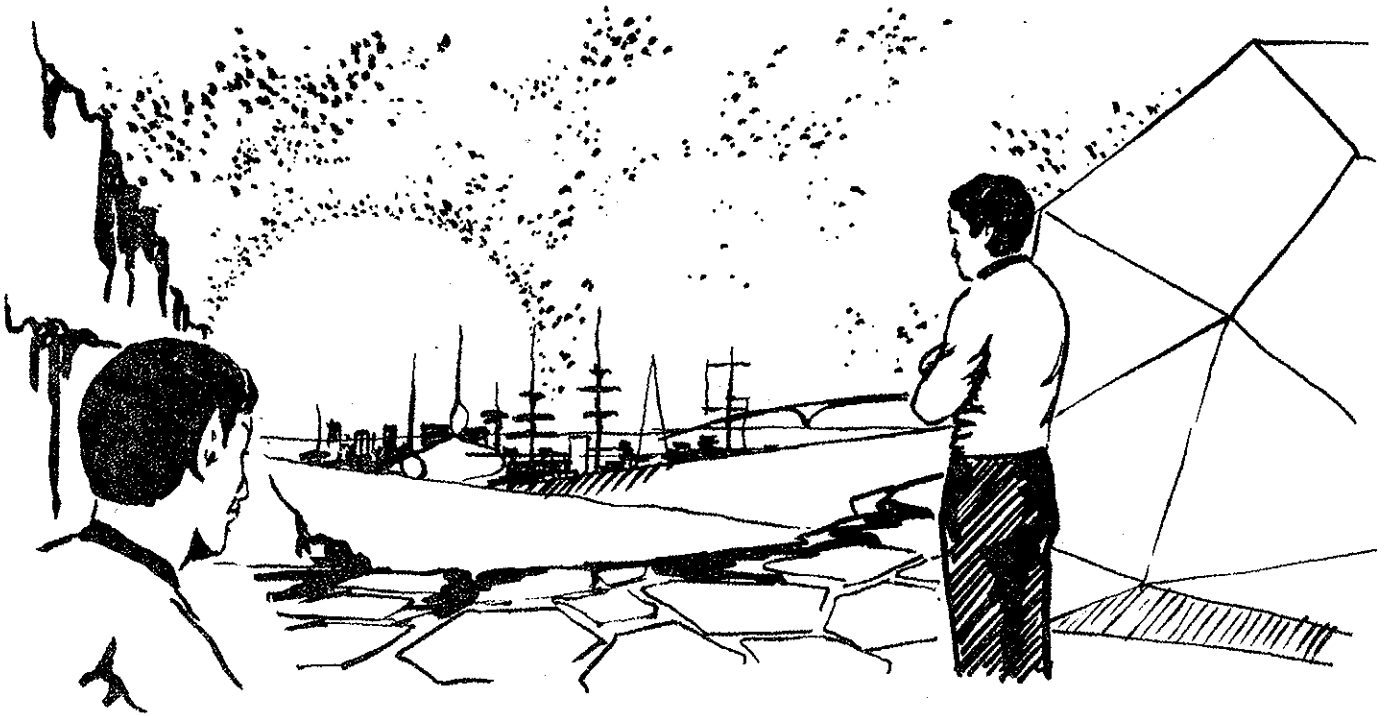
Once at the top he could see the hut and the fire, as well as a silhouette sitting against the small structure watching the red sunset.

He was sure it was his Captain, but instead of hurrying forward he felt fear and worry assail him. McCoy and Amanda were right, he had to take care. Spock had been hurt enough - through clumsiness or inattention Kirk could hurt him even more. The idea filled his mind with dread, and brought home fully the alien-ness of the Vulcan. In spite of this, no-one had ever drawn him as Spock did. He had to go to him, and try...

Approaching slowly and without noise, Kirk sat down on the other side of the fire, leaning against the hut and remaining silent. He would leave it to Spock to talk if he wished, and prayed that he would not say the wrong thing.

After a short while the Vulcan said, without detaching his gaze from the sunset, "I know you are here, Jim. Why did you come?"

"To watch the sunset?"



"Why should that inspire fear in you? Or is it I who cause the fear?"

"No, it's not you, Spock. The fear you sense is fear of what I might say or do. I am only Human."

"And what am I?"

"You are my Captain," replied Kirk softly.

"Did you come here because you thought it was your duty?"

"I swear that duty never entered into it."

"Then was it out of pity?"

"Pity? Spock, I think I can safely say that the last emotion you would inspire in anyone is pity!"

"Then why did you come?" insisted Spock.

"I... had to," stammered Kirk, trying desperately to think of the right words. "I would have come sooner, in spite of the doctors, only it wasn't allowed."

"Did you watch the trial?"

"The whole crew did. For me, it was the only way I could share your ordeal."

"Yet I did not share yours at all."

"That's not what your mother said."

For the first time Spock turned and looked straight at him, a piercing gaze Kirk met and held.

"My mother had no right to tell you."

"I'm glad she did. Spock, about the past... all I wish to say is this: your basic assumption was illogical."

"Which basic assumption?"

"That you came between Sam and me. It was not so. Sam came between you and me."

This visibly startled Spock. "He was your brother, Jim!"

"So? There was nothing I could do about that. But I never chose him - I chose you."

Kirk saw the implication hit Spock, and the Vulcan looked away swiftly. I reached him! Kirk thought hopefully.

"In that case," said Spock after a short silence, his voice less assured, "I must have hurt you by my rejection."

"Yes, you did." Kirk admitted with complete honesty. "You gave no explanation, no reason - and I didn't understand."

"I did not understand either," murmured Spock. "And I regret..."

"No need to say any more, Spock," interrupted Kirk, seeing the Vulcan's struggle for words. "I think we both understand now."

The dark eyes fixed on his softened, and Kirk's heart leapt with joy inside him. He did not let it show, however, except through his eyes. Sam had lost, completely and definitely lost in the end!

The last rays of the dying sun filled the sky, and Spock's gaze was fixed on them again.

"I do not think I ever noticed before how beautiful the sunset is," he murmured in a low voice.

"It is very beautiful," Kirk agreed, "and perhaps you notice it more because you won't see it again for a long time."

"That is true, Jim. I had not thought of it that way."

"T'Pol was rather hard to take away your family rank!"

"You must not blame my grandmother, Jim. She had to forget, to a certain extent, that I was her grandson. But she did not forget completely."

Spock opened the collar of his dark shirt and the IDIC gleamed in the light from the fire.

"She gave it back to me, provided that I wear it always against my skin, never to be seen."

"It is beautiful. May I touch it?"

"If you wish."

Kirk handled the revered symbol with care, aware that Spock would probably let no-one else touch it.

"I do not believe I shall ever be able to take my place back on Vulcan," murmured Spock. "After being branded as Human when a child, it took me all those years to prove I was a Vulcan. This has now been disproven once and for all."

"No!" Kirk protested, guessing at the bitterness behind the words, and how the Vulcan must ache at the condemnation of the people he had chosen. "What you did once, you can do again."

"Logical, I suppose," agreed Spock. "However, I do not think that I regret it very much because..."

"Because of what, Spock?" Kirk asked gently, encouraging the Vulcan to talk and so share his burden.

"Because my one Human act brought you back to me," whispered Spock in such a low voice that Kirk barely heard him. The admission filled him with joy, though he understood that Spock must be very tired to be able to say so much, and let barriers fall to such an extent. According to McCoy talking helped, though...

Impulsively Kirk put his hand on Spock's shoulder, and saw the vulnerability he had seen before in the dark eyes, at the beginning of their friendship.

"I regret having hurt you, Jim," continued Spock, letting his eyes and expression be read for once, "because I did think that I had found in you the nearest I could ever have to a brother."

Kirk nodded, unable to speak for a moment at the thought of what it must have cost the Vulcan to give that friendship up for his sake. The return to the complete loneliness of the past must have been even harder for the Captain that it had been for his First Officer, yet he had accepted it.

"I also thought of you as the brother I would have chosen," said Kirk at last. "Now that we both know, we can start again and forget the past." He gave the Captain's shoulder a squeeze and let go, adding with a warm smile, "I don't resent my exile from Earth, not now. I like to think of your ship as my home."

"I am glad that you understand, Jim. I believe it was the one hope that sustained me throughout my trial."

Kirk smiled again, moved by the admission of how much Spock needed him; the Vulcan had lost so much, yet he seemed to think it was worth it.

Don't let me fail him! Kirk prayed inwardly. He has been so hurt...

"We both have, Jim," said Spock, revealing again the strength of the affinity between them.

"Yes, we have, Spock - but the worst hurt was the breach between us."

"Agreed. We must not let it happen again."

Kirk nodded, aware that for his part, he would do his utmost not to...

"Jim, do not worry now about the future. Why spoil the present with fears which may prove unfounded?"

"You're right, Spock; the present should not be spoilt. We are together."

The sun had now completely disappeared, and it was getting dark and chilly. Spock added some wood to the fire and went into the hut, returning with two blankets. He offered one to Kirk, who accepted it, pleased that Spock should want his company for this last night on his home planet.

Lying down one on each side of the fire, they watched the stars in companionable silence. Both knew and shared the joy of renewed affinity, of renewed friendship, yet neither felt the need to talk about it. To know and be aware of it was enough.

I must remember, reflected Kirk, that words don't count with Spock. Words can be lies - it's thoughts and deeds he will judge. We both have a lot to learn.

"The Enterprise is up there waiting, Spock," he said aloud. "You haven't lost her."

"No, but I may have lost the crew."

"What do you mean?"

"I am pleased that the Human crew saw the trial. It was agreed with Starfleet that afterwards I would give the crew, Human and Vulcan, liberty to transfer if they wish. I am a condemned criminal by Vulcan standards."

"Hmm...I'll have a few home truths to say to anyone who asks for a transfer!"

"You must not prevent anyone from leaving, Jim."

"I won't. Anyone low enough to leave, we're better off without."

"You are prejudiced, Jim," said Spock with a half-smile which delighted Kirk - he had not seen it for so long.

"If we have a new crew we'll have to start from scratch," reflected Kirk aloud.

"Yes, it will be hard. The original plan was, if the experiment succeeded and the crew became united, to replace a quarter of the men at a time."

"In order to have the rest to help us. A sound idea, Spock."

"My father's. However, if the majority of the crew does leave, the first experiment will have failed, for the wrong reasons. Because of that we might get a second chance, with another crew."

"Let's see what happens first, Spock. Why worry about a problem that hasn't arisen yet?"

"Jim, your logic has improved considerably."

"It should have, with you as a teacher!"

The rest of the night passed pleasantly for both. Neither slept, this time of companionship and relaxation was too precious to waste. They talked, but to share the silences was just as good.

McCoy called in the middle of the night, to Kirk's annoyance.

"I'm perfectly all right, Bones."

"Any headache?"

"I never noticed, so it can't have been that bad. See you in the morning."

The doctor hoped that the words meant what he thought they meant - no more breach.

When the first rays of the sun appeared on the horizon Kirk and Spock got up and shared the primitive facilities of the hut. Then Spock changed into his uniform, and Kirk offered,

"Shall I beam up while you take the aircar and say goodbye to your family, Spock?"

"I have already said goodbye, Jim. I will beam up with you."

"What about the aircar?"

"Mother knows that it is here. Father will arrange to have it collected. Come, it is time."

In the red glow of the rising sun they beamed aboard the ship.

The Science Officer was in the transporter room to welcome the Captain and hand over command of the Enterprise. McCoy was also there, and pounced on Kirk.

"Sickbay, Jim!"

"I'm fine, Bones! Stop mothering me!" protested Kirk.

"I'm not the one who wants to mother you," replied McCoy triumphantly. "Dr. Syvik wants to run a final check on you. You've not been officially pronounced fit yet."

"Go, Jim," said Spock. "I will go to the bridge to make the announcement we spoke of."

Kirk no longer protested, and followed McCoy. The doctor tried to ask questions, but got no answers, though as it was clear that the breach had been healed, he did not worry unduly.

As expected Dr. Syvik pronounced the First Officer fit to return to duty. Kirk was still in sickbay when they heard the Captain's announcement to the ship's crew: in view of the Vulcan trial, anyone wishing to transfer to another vessel would have the application approved by the Captain.

In the privacy of McCoy's office Kirk asked for news of the Human crew's reaction to the Captain's trial.

"I don't think you need worry, Jim," replied the doctor. "Even Sulu has come round and become a strong ally of the Captain's - swears by him, in fact."

"That's good news!"

"Scotty, Chekov and I made sure that they all understood what had happened, but I think the Captain did a pretty good job himself. His courage at the trial impressed everyone, as did the fact that he was going through it because of his friendship for a Human."

"Now the Vulcans. Reaction?"

"That I can't tell you, I'm afraid. Secretive as hell, these people are! Even Dr. Syvik refused to discuss it with an 'outworlder', saying it was up to each person to decide in the privacy of his thoughts."

"That sounds like a Vulcan, all right! I'd better see what I can find out, then."

Having heard that the senior officers had assembled in the briefing room to discuss the Captain's announcement, Kirk decided to join them. He was the First Officer, he had the right.

On his way there he met Scotty, who did not look happy.

"Anything wrong?"

"Well, sir, it's just that I don't like what I overheard. I wasn't spying, you understand..."

Kirk cut short his excuses and listened to what the engineer had heard. It was a conversation between Senak and Somok, to the effect that both men thought the trial fair and the verdict justified. That was all Scotty had heard, but it was enough to fill Kirk with foreboding. Maybe it was logical for Vulcans to follow the line adopted by their Court of Justice, but the First Officer did not have to like it!

When he entered the briefing room all conversation stopped, and he did not like that, either.

"Well, how many rats are leaving the ship?" he asked, containing his anger.

"I was not aware that we were infested by rodents, Mr. Kirk," said Mr. Salyk.

"There are many kinds of rodents. However, no time to explain. What I want to know is, how many of you are deserting the Captain and the ship?"

The officers looked at each other, and Dr. Syvik said, "We were wondering how to inform the Captain, Mr. Kirk..."

"You mean you're all leaving?" exclaimed Kirk. "Because he killed a man who wasn't fit to lick his boots?"

"A very odd thing, this licking of boots," said Dr. Syvik thoughtfully. "I must learn more about it."

"This is no time to be funny, Doctor! As I was saying, you want to leave because the Captain killed someone whose name is not even worth

mentioning. I killed too, but you didn't leave then! I never thought I would see the day when I would have to remind Vulcans that there is such a thing as loyalty to a commander you should be honoured to serve under."

Kirk stopped, out of breath, and wondered at the strange expressions on the faces around him.

"Mr. Kirk," asked Dr. Syvik, "what made you believe that we were going to leave the Captain?"

"Well... someone accidentally overheard that you approved the trial and the verdict..."

"The word 'approve' is wrong, Mr. Kirk. The verdict was inevitable and the sanction expected. None of it affects the Captain's value as a Captain, and his conduct throughout the trial was above reproach."

"You mean... you're not leaving?" Kirk stammered. "Why didn't you say so?"

"You would not let anyone speak!" said Mr. Sirak.

The First Officer felt awful. He had branded them all as disloyal when...

"All I can say is, I'm sorry," he said at last. "I was upset because it would have hurt my Captain. I should have known better, and I ask your forgiveness."

"We are becoming used to the Human habit of reaching the wrong conclusion," said Dr. Syvik, without any hint of sarcasm. "What I was saying when you interrupted, Mr. Kirk, was that we were wondering how to inform the Captain that none of us intend to leave."

"We have consulted the Vulcans in our departments," added Salyk. "No-one wishes to leave."

"Dr. McCoy informs me that no Human wishes to leave, either," said Kirk with a smile. "Therefore for once Humans and Vulcans have reached the same decision. Now, this is how we'll tell the Captain..."

About half an hour later Spock left his quarters to give the order to leave orbit - he had been given the instructions for their next mission. He found the bridge rather crowded. Everyone stood and saluted when he walked to the command chair Kirk vacated for him.

"I see that all the Heads of Department are present, Mr. Kirk. Why?" asked the Captain.

"It was my duty as First Officer to prepare the list of those wishing to transfer from the Enterprise, Captain," replied Kirk. "I asked all the officers to consult their staffs and give the answers now."

Kirk called each section in turn, and each answer was the same: unanimous decision to remain aboard the Enterprise.

To the First Officer's surprise the Captain was frowning at him rather severely.

"Mr. Kirk, have you been wandering through the ship threatening anyone who said they wanted a transfer?"

"No, sir, I have not!" protested Kirk. "And I hardly think that a Vulcan would worry about threats from a Human!"

"True," agreed Spock, "but the Humans could be influenced."

"Captain," said Sulu, speaking with a respect no-one had heard from him before, "I give you my word that not a single Human wishes to leave. From now on, you may be assured that you can count on our respect and loyalty."

"Aye," agreed Scotty. "It's about time we showed that Humans can be loyal too."

"And about time that Humans realised that they can trust Vulcans," added Chekov.

Kirk smiled when Spock had to clear his throat before thanking everyone for their support.

Indeed, the whole atmosphere of the ship had changed. Everyone collaborated regardless of the race of the others, and not a single Human resented saluting the Captain any longer. This did not mean that clashes and misunderstandings did not occur, but unlike in the past, both races now tried to understand each other's point of view; and if they could not they accepted the differences as a Human or Vulcan trait neither could help. The efforts were not always successful, and logic was still a sore point, but at least everyone tried his best.

When Spock arrived in the dining room a few days later he was about to join Kirk when he noticed McCoy at the same table.

"Do join us, Captain," invited Kirk, seeing his hesitation.

"Yes, do," agreed McCoy, "or you'll make me feel that I should leave."

This decided the Captain, who sat down.

"Not that plomik soup again!" exclaimed McCoy. "What you Vulcans see in that..."

"Bones!" interrupted Kirk sharply.

"It does not matter, Jim," said Spock. "There is no reason why Dr. McCoy should like plomik soup."

The doctor gave Kirk a triumphant grin, and changed the subject.

"Well, Captain, you've done it! I was just telling Jim..."

"What have I done, Doctor?"

"Achieved Vulcan/Human collaboration, of course! There was a time when I never thought to see it among this crew."

Spock glanced at Kirk, who shook his head to indicate that McCoy did not know of the experiment, and was just talking in the dark.

"Tell me, doctor," asked Spock, "has this been achieved because I am an exiled criminal?"

"No, sir," protested McCoy. "Don't let that worry you. The best people are exiled these days. Look at Jim, here - he's an exile, too."

"Then has it been achieved because the Humans think I am no longer a Vulcan?" persisted Spock.

"Not a Vulcan? You? Captain, you must be joking! You're a Vulcan all right, complete with logic and computerlike..."

"Bones! That's enough!" interrupted Kirk angrily.

"Thank you, Doctor," said Spock.

"Any time you get to thinking you're not a Vulcan, just come to me," grinned McCoy.

"I'll remember that, Doctor."

"Only, Captain..." McCoy hesitated, and Kirk's glare did not help. "I get carried away sometimes," he continued bravely, "and if our discussions were for the record... I might finish up in the brig!"

Kirk could not help laughing, and he saw that Spock was secretly amused.

"Very well, Doctor," said the Captain. "You have my word that any private discussions will be off the record."

"You shouldn't encourage him, Captain!" protested Kirk.

"Keep out of this, Jim," McCoy said grandly. "I believe I may have a mission, you know."

"What is that?" asked Kirk, suspicious.

"Take the Captain here - he's a decent sort - and that's meant as a compliment, Captain - but he's far too obsessed by logic. I might show him the error of his ways."

"I doubt that, Doctor," replied Spock, "but your efforts should prove fascinating."

"Oh? Why?"

"Because one thing I will learn a lot about with you is illogicality."

"Bones, don't say anything!" begged Kirk, seeing the doctor ready to explode.

The doctor swallowed hard, and his glare no longer could have killed the Captain.

"I'd better go. My self-control has its limits - and don't say they were soon reached, Captain!"

"I did not say it, doctor, you did," said Spock blandly.

McCoy looked at him, uncertain, then at Kirk, and saw the amused smile on the First Officer's face. He smiled at both of them and left, not without having saluted the Captain most correctly.

"I will have to make another attempt to eliminate all this saluting," said Spock.

"Why, Captain?" asked Kirk. "No-one resents it, or the discipline, any longer."

"I would prefer it if Starfleet knew that the improvement aboard is not due to fear."

"Any visiting member of the top brass would soon see that was not the case!"

Their meal finished, Spock asked Kirk to his quarters, and the First Officer guessed that his Captain was worried about something.

"Sit down, Jim, this is a private interview," said Spock, indicating freedom from formality.

"It's not Bones, is it?" asked Kirk. "I'll keep him in check..."

"No, Jim, I do not mind the doctor's remarks. In fact, they are often entertaining."

"Yes, I noticed you thought that," smiled Kirk, "but don't let him go too far, especially when I'm not there to curb his quick temper. Now, what's worrying you?"

"The future."

"The future? Why?"

"I shall have to tell my father, and Starfleet, after a few missions to test the Vulcan/Human relationship in action, that the experiment is a success. This will mean that 25% of the original crew will be replaced. Among the new members there could be another assassin for you."

"I see. It's possible, of course - unless the assassin is for you, Spock."

"I had not thought of that."

"You wouldn't! However, perhaps the Party has given up on us by now! Who knows? Anyway, don't forget that a special agent would have to be very, very clever to escape detection. He would have to hide not only from us and the Vulcans, but from three-quarters of the Human crew."

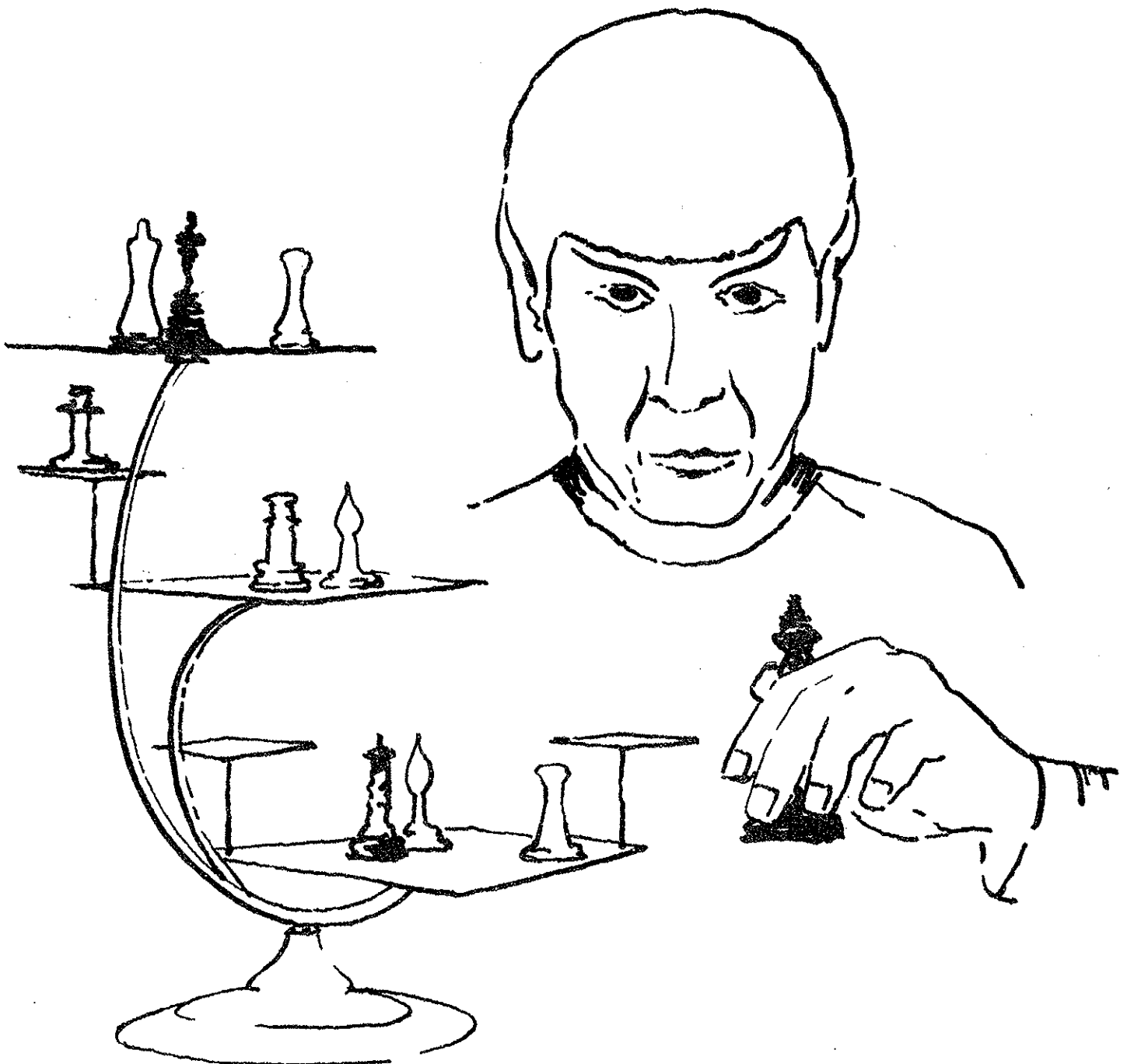
"True; it would make his task nearly impossible."

"So the Party may give up on us once the experiment is a success." Vengeance is all very well, but it may not be worth their while."

"I hope you are right, Jim. I would not wish to relive... past events."

"Neither would I!" agreed Kirk with an inward shudder. To go through all that again, and lose the rapport with Spock...

"It could happen again, Jim," said Spock, guessing his thoughts.



"Surely not!"

Spock hesitated. "I... I am a Vulcan, I cannot say things...as you Humans can... Neither can I show much..."

"We did pretty well in the past," smiled Kirk, "and as we get to know each other even better, we can only come to understand each other even more."

"Logical, Jim," agreed Spock with his half-smile. "Besides, my concern about any crew replacement may be premature."

"Why?"

"Knowing the attitude of some of Starfleet's top officers, I doubt that anything less than the Enterprise becoming the best Starship in the fleet will satisfy them that the experiment is a success."

"Then you'll have to make her the best, Spock. You can do it."

"Not 'I', Jim. We."

Kirk smiled. He would have to be careful that Spock did not give too much of the credit to his First Officer.

"It is rather a paradox that the first success of the Human/Vulcan experiment should be led by two exiles from their worlds," remarked the Captain.

"It makes the Enterprise our home, Spock."

"Yes, a beautiful home. Game of chess, Jim?"

"Glad to," agreed Kirk, relaxing in his chair and watching the Vulcan set up the pieces.

We can make the ship the best, he reflected inwardly, a task we'll both enjoy. It is our home now. I hope we have no repetition of recent events, though! Our Human/Vulcan relationship is not usual. It is a frail bond which can be broken, as was proved in the past. Will it prove stronger now? It is not possible to tell, but whatever the future brings, we will face it together!

"Jim," said Spock, interrupting the thoughts he sensed, "the present is safe. As for the future, we can but hope that we have learned from past mistakes."

Kirk nodded in agreement and saw that the chess pieces were set.

[illegible]