

WHEN TWO

Scotpress

WORLDS COLLIDE



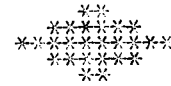
a
STAR TREK
fanzine

by
Janice Pitkethley



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JANICE PITKETHLEY



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ScoTpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona.

I turn to take a last look at Earth,
As the shuttle bears me away,
- To Vulcan, a place I have never seen,
Where I am coming home to stay.

I must adapt to your world,
Where logic rules supreme,
Its fiery skies and burning heat,
- Cool Earth is a fading dream.

I can't control my fears of the unknown,
And the different life I'll lead;
Vulcan sounds so strange to me,
Far removed from Earth indeed.

You sense my doubts and fears,
And extend your hand to me;
As our fingers cross
You touch my mind,
And calm the raging sea.....

I am aware of all your thoughts and fears,
From me you cannot hide;
My world is in contrast to yours,
And so much more besides.

Vulcan...my home, and yours now too,
My wife.
It offers total security,
No crime, no wars, no strife.

The shuttle is descending now,
After we have come so far.
Amanda, that is Vulcan below you;
We are flying over the Sas-a-Shar.

You recoil from the heat as we disembark,
And leave the spaceport dome.
Vulcan honours you, my wife.
- Amanda, WELCOME HOME.....





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Amanda's hands instinctively clenched as the shuttle came lower and she received her first glimpse of Vulcan, her new home. Her fears rushed back as she surveyed the alien landscape below. Would Sarek's family accept her? Would they...?

The voice she loved so much broke into her troubled mind. "My family welcome and honour you as my wife, Amanda." Obviously, Sarek had been aware of her thoughts.

"I can't help being a little bit frightened." Amanda met his steady gaze. "It is not logical, I know, but I'm only Human."

One eyebrow lifted slightly. "Vulcan is in complete contrast to the way of life on Earth. I...understand your apprehension," Sarek said, extending his right hand to her.

Her fears vanished with the contact as she touched his hand, the calming influence transferring to her through the bond which linked their minds. "Thank you," she whispered, tranquil once more as the shuttle came in to land.

A blast of heat rushed in as soon as the doors were opened, the thinness of the atmosphere making Amanda gasp for breath in the thick, overpowering blanket of heat which seemed to cling to the red sands of the planet. 'As hot as Vulcan' - she had heard that expression many times; now she knew what it meant! Even the slightest breeze scorched her face and exposed arms as she followed Sarek to the parked aircar. The walk was very short, but her light travelling dress clung wetly to her body.

I am getting burned, she thought, looking at her reddened shoulders. And I was only in that sun for two or three minutes!

Sarek did not speak, busy with the controls of the aircar. Amanda watched and marvelled at the passing scenery. Shikahr was beautiful...

The aircar descended and stopped. As Sarek assisted her down from the craft, Amanda could not resist the temptation and slid one arm round his neck.

"This is our home." Sarek pronounced the traditional Vulcan welcome.

"It's beautiful..." Amanda gazed spellbound at the new surroundings. The house was white, with a red roof, the ground floor windows interspersed with archways. The design reminded Amanda of the architecture of the Middle Eastern countries of Earth. The grounds were spacious, and flowers of all colours bloomed in profusion. A high wall hid the house and its grounds from the street.

Sarek made no comment during Amanda's examination of the surroundings; he knew she was pleased with her new home.

"Do you not wish to enter our home?" he asked as Amanda shielded her eyes against the glare of the sun.

"I can't wait..." Amanda passed a hand across her hot face. She followed Sarek towards the house, then began to giggle just as she reached the doorway.

Sarek raised one eyebrow questioningly as she struggled to control her emotions. without much success.

"I... It is the custom on Earth for the groom to carry his new bride across the threshold," Amanda giggled.

"Indeed?" Sarek's eyebrows threatened to disappear into his hairline. "This is Vulcan, not Earth. I will not comply with your illogical customs." He took her arm and propelled her through the doorway.

The interior of the house was shady and cool, shutters keeping out the harsh

sun.

Amanda settled in very quickly in her new home, adding some little Human touches to the Vulcan starkness. She had brought her precious collection of books with her, and several recesses in the main lounge she filled with flowers. She found it very hard to adapt to the climate, virtually a prisoner in the house during the greatest heat of the day. The thin atmosphere made her very short of breath after the slightest exertion. Many time she had to stop on the stairway until her harsh breathing returned to normal.

Amanda woke in the darkness. The wall chronometer read 0300. Most nights she woke at some ungodly hour, panic gripping her with the overwhelming sensation of choking. She drew several deep breaths, trying to force some air into her oxygen-starved lungs. The feeling slowly died away, her heart ceasing its hammering as her breathing returned to normal.

She turned, careful not to waken Sarek. He looked so innocent and vulnerable in sleep, the rigid features relaxed. Smiling, she touched his face and snuggled against his shoulder.

Sarek stirred slightly, murmuring her name, then the change in his breathing told Amanda he was awake.

"You are unable to sleep?" he asked, looking into her eyes.

"No...I woke up and couldn't breathe."

"In time, you will become acclimatised. I can help you," he said, stroking her hair.

Amanda felt his fingers move to her face, then her mind was flooded by a great sense of peace and well-being. Gradually a feeling of drowsiness began to creep over her. "Sleep now..." the gentle voice said in her mind as she descended into darkness.

Apprehension returned in full force as Amanda opened her eyes to bright sunlight pouring through the half-opened shutters. Today was her wedding day - the second one. The brief Earth ceremony had no meaning on Vulcan. She shivered at the thought of the official Vulcan ceremony ahead of her.

With thoughts in chaos, she set about preparing breakfast. She was becoming accustomed to the Vulcan dishes by now, but this morning the very thought of food revolted her.

"You are not eating." It was more of a statement than a question.

"I can't, Sarek." Amanda's hand trembled as she tried to force down some tea, the cup rattling in the saucer. "Call it pre-wedding nerves..."

Sarek raised an eyebrow, but did not comment.

Amanda's heart sank even further when T'Pau, her mother-in-law, and another 'aide' arrived a short time later. Their task was to ensure the bride was attired correctly, ignorant as she was of Vulcan customs.

They helped Amanda to get ready, bringing with them the traditional Vulcan wedding gown of flowing silver. That done, they set about dressing her hair, sweeping it up on the top of her head. Amanda submitted to their ministrations in silence, not daring to speak.

They had almost finished when she heard the departing aircar. Sarek had gone, and she would follow in a short time.

Left alone now, Amanda concentrated her thoughts on Sarek. The room began to blur in front of her eyes as a picture formed. She saw Sarek - where, she did not know. He stood in some kind of arena; in the centre, a firepit burned, and she could hear the tinkle of wind-chimes.

"I await you." Sarek inclined his head. The picture faded...

"Come. It is time." T'Pau entered the room. Amanda rose to her feet and followed the stern figure to the waiting aircar.

They flew over Vulcan's Forge after leaving ShiKahr far behind, Amanda too occupied even to notice its rugged beauty. At last the aircar slowed and hovered before descending among the foothills of the I-langdon Mountain Range. Several other aircars were parked at a discreet distance from the arena of the Ancient Stones. T'Pau and her aide smoothed Amanda's gown and tucked away a stray wisp of hair which was threatening to escape from the blonde curls.

Footsteps made Amanda turn. Advancing towards her were several Vulcan males, each masked and carrying a formidable weapon. They fell into step behind her as T'Pau led the procession out into the arena.

The hot breeze blew sand into Amanda's face as she followed T'Pau. Her heart lurched at the sight of Sarek. He wore a black and gold tunic, the like of which she had never seen before. He looked so tall and handsome as he raised a stone mallet and struck the gong which hung over the firepit, the hollow notes echoing around the arena.

T'Pau led Amanda to Sarek's side and left her there. To her right sat a tall imposing Vulcan, and when he rose and came towards them, Amanda saw by his robes that he was a high dignitary of Vulcan.

"Greetings." He held up his hand, fingers parted in the Vulcan salute, and inclined his head to Sarek and Amanda. He spoke some words in Vulcan and touched Sarek and Amanda to feel their thoughts.

"Thee both wish for this bonding to take place. Sarek of Vulcan, as it was handed down from the time of the beginning, thee may commence the ritual of bonding with the female Amanda Grayson."

Sarek replied in Vulcan, then placed his hands on Amanda's face. Brilliant light flooded her mind as she felt his presence within; she felt their two minds being drawn closer and closer, finally locking together in a bond which even death could not sever. Gradually the bright light faded and she became aware of her surroundings once more. She felt strangely light-headed and dizzy for a moment; the feeling vanished with the contact as Sarek touched her hand, their first two fingers crossed in the Vulcan ritual embrace. They maintained the contact as the Vulcan Elder spoke the words of the Kal-if-fee, honouring their bonding. Amanda experienced a strange tugging at her mind as the Elder spoke the finalising words; Sarek's hand trembled for a moment then he regained his composure.

"Live long and prosper, Bondmates," the Vulcan Elder saluted them. "May your lives be filled with peace and logic."

Sarek and Amanda returned the hand greeting and left the arena, Amanda taking care to walk to the right and several paces behind Sarek. They did not speak much in the aircar on the way home - there was no need, the slightest contact allowing their thoughts to pass between them.

Amanda was glad when they reached home. The Vulcan ceremony had been a nerve-wracking experience for her and she felt better when the door closed behind them, shutting out the world beyond.

"Amanda...my bondmate..." Sarek looked at her, then bent his head and kissed her, drawing her into his strong arms. Amanda had taught him this strange art, and he still found it most unusual... He sensed the pleasure it brought to Amanda, and admitted to himself that it brought a most strange sensation to him as well...

"Sarek..." Amanda revelled in his nearness. He did not normally allow her to get so close to him. Her cheeks flamed as she tried to close her mind so he would not read her thoughts!

"Amanda. Do not close your mind to me." He still held her in his arms. "We are bonded, and it is my right to know your every thought."

Amanda knew she could not resist. He would force his way into her mind if she tried to deter him. She sensed his presence within her mind, recoiling at the idea of his knowing all her secret feelings and desires which were kept deep in her mind.

So far their marriage had been meaningless, in name only; Sarek was Vulcan and Amanda knew she could not expect anything further from him. As the days passed, it had become more and more difficult to hide her feelings from him. At night she had moved away, not daring to touch him lest her thoughts transfer to him through the contact.

"You have been most patient." Sarek removed his fingers from her face. "Why didn't you tell me, Amanda?"

"But you are Vulcan - "

" - and you are not," Sarek reprimanded gently. "However, today's ceremony plus the establishment of the bond has triggered pon farr."

"When, Sarek?"

"Soon. A few days now."

Sarek resumed his duties at the Vulcan Embassy and Amanda was left on her own during the day. Time passed very quickly for her; she spent a lot of time in the garden, trying to grow delicate Earth plants and flowers in the alien soil. They needed tending every day in order to survive.

The second day, she made a friend. She was kneeling at the side of the newly-dug garden, carefully planting a tea-rose, when a movement caught her eye. There, watching her from a distance, was a white parakeet-like bird.

Amanda laid down her small hand-spade very slowly so as not to frighten the bird. "Hello, there," she spoke out loud. The bird cocked its head to the side at the sound of her voice, its eyes bright and alert. "You are a cheeky one!" Amanda laughed as the bird hopped nearer. She threw it some of her precious seeds and laughed softly as it greedily ate them.

Every day it waited for her, becoming bolder each time until it would accept food from her hand. If she was late, it would fly onto the ledge and tap the window with its beak, reminding her of the time. Amanda named it Cheeky, an apt title! She was grateful for the bird's company as she did not know who her neighbours were.

"Hello, Cheeky." She threw some food to the bird and almost collapsed with shock when it mimicked her voice. "Hello, Cheeky." "You can speak..." She realised the bird must be similar to the parrot variety of Earth in habit as well as appearance.

"Hello, Cheeky," it repeated, fastening one beady eye on Amanda. She kept very still as it hopped nearer and nearer and flew up to sit on her lap. She did not mention the bird to Sarek, not sure of his reaction.

He returned from the Embassy that night looking tired and drawn and admitted to feeling fatigue when Amanda questioned him as to why he was not eating. Dusk was almost falling as Sarek rose from the table.

"I am going to the Garden of Thought. You may accompany me if you wish."

Amanda nodded in agreement and followed Sarek out into the garden. They stood in the soft twilight, faced upturned to the night sky as one by one the stars came out.

"It is beautiful..." Amanda gazed up at the black velvety sky with its millions of diamonds.

"Yes." Sarek's arm encircled her waist and she leaned against him, her head

resting on his shoulder. Silence fell between them, speech not needed as the bond drew them closer. Sarek was still very tense despite the peace and tranquillity of the gardens, and the heavy scent of the night flowers as the air cooled.

"I love you," Amanda said softly.

"It is not logical." Sarek's arm tightened around her waist.

"I don't care. I do love you." Amanda looked up into his face.

Sarek raised one eyebrow and opened his mouth to say something. The words died away as they heard a squawk and a ghostly shape flitted from the trees and landed on his shoulder. Sarek did not start with fright as a Human would have done; only his upraised eyebrows displayed his surprise. He shivered as the bird investigated one pointed ear, almost dislodging its grip on his shoulder. Amanda dissolved into helpless laughter as the bird craned its neck, looking straight into Sarek's face. "Hello, Cheeky!" It cocked a beady eye at him.

"I presume you are responsible for this creature?" he asked as the bird transferred its attentions to Amanda.

"Yes." She desperately tried to stop giggling. "One day I was working in the garden and it made friends with me."

Cheeky followed them as they walked towards the house. It tapped incessantly on the window pane until Amanda relented and put out some food.

"You seem to attract all sorts of creature," Sarek said, remembering the dogs and cats and other pets in the Grayson household.

"I love animals. Maybe that is why they all come to me." Amanda looked up at Sarek. "Even when I was a little girl - What's wrong?" she broke off. "You're so tense - "

"I had a - most trying day at the Embassy," Sarek confessed at last.

He left her and went to his study to spend some time in private meditation. Amanda read until she felt her eyes growing tired, the print blurring on the pages. She glanced at the still-closed study door and climbed the stairs alone.

She did not know when Sarek retired; it could have been hours. She woke in the darkness hearing his soft breathing. She sighed and closed her eyes again, preparing for sleep, and jerked awake instantly as Sarek spoke her name. She answered, and received a flood of Vulcan in return. Reaching over, she switched on the light. Sarek was still asleep and muttering feverishly in Vulcan.

Sleep came intermittantly to Amanda that dark and long night. She remembered half waking from sleep and yelling to Sarek to 'Shut up!' Due to his restlessness she was never so glad to see the sun rise on a new day.

Yawning and sleepy-eyed she began to prepare breakfast, looking anxiously at Sarek when he came down at last. He seemed paler than usual and averted his eyes from her, refusing to meet her gaze. There was no mind-touch as their hands met when she passed him a plate.

Even his mind is closed, she thought, taking her place at the table.

Sarek ate very sparingly. He did not normally eat very much in the morning, and this morning was no exception. He knew Amanda was watching him, and felt her concern in the waves of emotion radiating from her. The food seemed tasteless... Sarek dropped his fork with a clatter as he turned hot, then cold, beads of perspiration appearing on his brow. Amanda stared in astonishment as his hands clenched on the tablecloth, the material giving way with a ripping sound.

"Sarek - " Her voice died away as he rose from the table, thrust the chair away from him and ran from the room. "What the - ?!" Amanda stared after the fleeing figure. A Vulcan running? Most unusual! She followed him, already

knowing the direction he had taken, concern making her disregard all the Vulcan rules about respecting another's privacy. After all, she was his wife, and judging from the sounds she could hear, her husband was being very ill indeed. She slammed the release and almost fell over Sarek as the door swished open. He had only made it this far before losing his breakfast.

"Sarek!" Amanda knelt down beside him and gingerly touched his shoulder. Seeing there was no resistance, she cradled his head on her lap until the attack began to ease.

Sarek struggled to regain his usual composure as Amanda helped him to sit up. He said nothing as she left him propped up against the door.

"This is most undignified..." he complained weakly as Amanda knelt beside him again, wiping his face with a wet towel.

"Shh," she admonished, busy with her ministrations. "It was the least I could do. What's wrong, Sarek? Will I get a Healer to come and see you?"

"He can do nothing." Sarek rose unsteadily to his feet. "I am well now. Leave me, my wife."

"But - "

"Go!" Sarek commanded.

Amanda obeyed, but remained in the immediate vicinity for a few moments, listening intently. She left as she heard the hiss of the shower spray.

"Amanda." Sarek entered the main lounge some time later, immaculately groomed as usual. "I must go to the Embassy. It is important."

Amanda knew not to offer any opposition to his wishes. She watched concerned as he walked towards the parked aircar. He was still too pale...and yet, he was burning hot whenever she touched him or even came near him, the waves of heat seeming to radiate from him. He must be running a temperature or something, Amanda thought to herself as she stood at the window until the aircar rose above the house and was lost to sight.

The morning dragged on to early afternoon. Amanda could not settle and prowled around the house looking for something to do which would occupy her mind. She could not banish the strong feeling of unease which had haunted her since the morning. Already she had gone to investigate the scene of the morning's incident and found the floor spotless and shining, the tiles scrubbed. Sarek had cleaned up himself, not wishing her to have the task. Then she tried some flower arranging and had smashed the vase. A wave of homesickness engulfed her and she sank to her knees on the floor, allowing the hot tears to come. What have I got myself into? She wiped her eyes. No friends...no one to talk to... I don't even know who my neighbours are! Blast this heat!! The effort of crying made her gasp for breath in the thin air.

//Do not be sad...// She heard Sarek's voice inside her head. Even apart from her, he knew her thoughts through the bond.

//I'll try,// she thought back to him, drying her tears. The mind touch brought her peace and her thoughts turned longingly to home.

Crossing to the videophone, she imagined the cool blue skies of Earth as she recorded a message to her parents, trying to keep the sound of the homesickness from her voice as she described her new home, even telling her parents about Cheeky. She added her love and quickly signed off as the whine of a descending aircar reached her ears. "He's back!" She flew to the window.

This wasn't Sarek's aircar, the design and colour were different. Then she noticed the IDIC on the side as it touched down. What was the Vulcan Embassy's official aircar doing here? An aide from the Embassy staff stepped out, followed by Sarek; they exchanged hand signs, then the aide took off in the official aircar.

"Sarek!" The words of welcome died away from Amanda's lips as he stood in the doorway.

"They brought me home from the Embassy. I was...incapable of piloting the aircar with safety," he said harshly.

Amanda could not break away from his intense gaze; his eyes burned, feline-like as they seemed to blaze their way into her very soul... She cowered back, trying to lift her hands to her face. He caught her and crushed her to him with such force that it drove the breath from her body. She struggled and fought for air as his mouth came down hard on hers; she was no match for the strength of a Vulcan!

"You fear me." He released her just as quickly.

"Sarek - I - you were hurting me."

"I...must try to remember you are not Vulcan." Sarek took her into his arms again, more gently this time. "I may hurt you, Amanda, but it is not intentional. The pon farr brings a madness we cannot control. Do you understand?"

"The pon farr?" Amanda couldn't help a wave of fear sweep over her. This was what she had waited for since their marriage on Earth all those weeks ago; it meant she could now belong to Sarek completely - but now the time was here, she could not stop trembling with fear.

"Look at me."

Amanda obeyed the command, raising her eyes to his. The tension slowly drained from her under the dark hypnotic gaze; no words were spoken as Sarek turned and walked towards the doorway, Amanda following.

"Kah-shula...bondmate." Sarek spoke some other words in Vulcan as he placed his hands on Amanda's face, beginning to merge their minds in the full meld. Amanda was not prepared for the savage violence of their first encounter; Sarek's strength seemed to have trebled. She could not stop herself from crying out as he hurt her, the world dissolving in a pain-filled mist.

"Amanda...." She heard his voice, filled with concern, and felt his hands wiping the tears from her cheeks. She opened her eyes, looking into his dark ones. "I hurt you. I am...sorry." He continued to wipe the tears from her eyes.

Amanda managed to smile weakly, trying to control the tears which still threatened to fill her eyes. She knew she was hurting Sarek by showing emotion in this way; but could not help herself. The tears finally dried on her cheeks and stopped altogether.

"It was not my intention to cause you distress and pain," Sarek continued, touching her face and tracing the outline of her rounded brows.

"You did warn me, but I was unprepared for the Vulcan strength. I know you did not mean to harm me, Sarek." She kissed the tip of his nose.

Silence fell between them, Amanda resting her head on his shoulder, all fears and apprehension gone now as she looked into the alien face she loved. Her mind was at peace as the bond strengthened, drawing them closer. "Kah-shula." Sarek looked down at her. The sound of the Vulcan word so strange to her ears, the nearest a Vulcan could get to saying, "I love you." "Kah-shula. Bondmate," she repeated, stumbling over the unfamiliar pronunciation. The ghost of a smile appeared on Sarek's lips and was gone before she was really sure if it had been there or not.

She watched his eyes change as the smouldering fires within blazed into life only more.

"I will not hurt you. Open your mind to me," he instructed, touching her forehead.

Amanda tried to comply, leaving the mind link with no barriers. She gave up her mind completely, surrendering her whole being to him as a Vulcan would... She lost her own identity through the full meld, knowing Sarek's every thought

and feeling and he, hers. Time passed unnoticed, day merging into night; light came again and changed into darkness. Three days had gone before the pon farr reached its height and the fever began to die away.

Amanda was exhausted after Sarek's incessant demands; all she wanted to do was sleep and sleep... They were still mind-linked and she could feel Sarek's tiredness too, his eyes dark and cloudy.

"Go to sleep," Amanda smiled, laying her head on his shoulder.

"Thank you..." Sarek murmured, still talking through the waves of drowsiness threatening to engulf him. His eyes slowly closed and he was asleep within seconds.

Amanda was the first to waken. Day had come again and bright sunlight poured through the half open shutters. She glanced at the wall chronometer, to discover she had slept the clock round. Yawning, she carefully got up, being sure not to waken Sarek.

"Hey, watch it!" she reprimanded herself as she almost stumbled and fell, not realising how stiff and sore she was. The thought of a shower sounded like heaven, and she turned the controls to 'hot' and stood under the soothing spray for over half an hour, the water helping to ease her aching muscles. On examination, she found several large bruise-marks on her body.

Feeling refreshed after the shower, she sat down in front of the mirror to brush her hair. It hung almost to her waist, a mass of blonde curls. Many times she had been tempted to have it cut short, being cumbersome in the heat. Sarek forbade it, saying the women of Vulcan did not go around with cropped hair.

She started with fright as Sarek suddenly appeared in the mirror behind her. Vulcans could move so silently that she never heard his footsteps. She blushed, not knowing what to say to him. He sensed her confusion and did not speak, but taking the brush from her proceeded to brush her hair. Amanda stared at him in astonishment. There were many sides to his nature that still had to be seen and discovered.

In spite of the past four days, her cheeks flamed when Sarek removed his robe and adjusted the shower controls to the Vulcan setting. Secretly, she peered into the mirror, admiring his profile - tall, broad-shouldered and undeniably male. Clouds of steam billowing from the shower unit forced her to move. She shuddered at the high temperature of the water - it would scald a Human... A mischievous smile came to her lips and as she passed the unit, she adjusted the controls to 'cold' - fleeing when she heard Sarek's hissing, indrawn breath as the temperature plunged to below freezing - well, it felt that cold to a Vulcan!

Amanda headed for the kitchen and breakfast, realising she was ravenously hungry. When did I eat last? She counted the days on her fingers, and discovered to her horror that it had been - no, that couldn't be right! Yes - almost five days ago! She went to the storeroom and brought out some of her precious store of coffee. Her family had promised to send her a regular supply from Earth. Sarek shuddered at the smell of percolating coffee and she could never get him even to try some. She switched on the air extractor at the same time, removing the offending aroma of coffee before Sarek put in an appearance.

His very appearance made Amanda burst into a fit of the giggles. He was wearing a bright red sweater with the immortal words 'Minneapolis Meteors' emblazoned on the front. The little boy next door to the Graysons had given it to him before they left for Vulcan and Sarek did not wish to give offence by refusing the illogical gift. Now it had come in useful. He shivered at the coolness of the morning air after his mysterious cold shower.

"Do you feel cold, Sarek?" Amanda enquired innocently.

"Affirmative. My shower control suddenly malfunctioned, turning the

temperature to cold." He raised one eyebrow at her.

Amanda had the grace to blush, which was also her 'giveaway'. "Here, this will warm you." She tried to hide her confusion by pouring out tea and setting hot food before him. Neither spoke during the meal, following Vulcan custom. It's a good thing I made plenty, she thought as they both ate ravenously, the dishes disappearing one by one. No wonder he's hungry, she thought to herself. He has to replace all that lost energy.

"Amanda. Cease your illogical thought!" Sarek was looking at her with up-raised eyebrows and a faint greenish tinge on his cheeks. He had known all she was thinking! Now it was Amanda's turn to blush.

"I...er...I did not mean to offend..."

"Your thoughts were correct, though illogical," Sarek admitted. "I do require rest - you also, my wife. I have no duties at the Embassy for another fourteen days."

"Will you take me out to the Forge before you have to go back to your duties? I would like to see some of Vulcan," Amanda asked, her eyes shining at the thought of Sarek being home for another two weeks.

"If you wish it." Sarek's eyes followed her as she rose to make more tea for him and coffee for herself.

Sarek spent some time in his study that day, no doubt putting himself in some sort of 'recuperative trance'. It certainly looked that way to Amanda when she peeked in the door; Sarek sat at the desk, fingers steepled and eyes closed. He did not hear her and she crept away lest she disturb him.

Amanda, too, could not stop her eyes from closing; the heat seemed overpowering, almost the Vulcan equivalent of midday. She lay down on the couch in the basement, the coolest part of the house, and fell asleep from the combination of tiredness and heat. She dreamed of home, her parents and friends; she felt the cool Earth breezes on her face as she walked with her dog, looking up at the clear blue sky and the green of the open parkways. Her mother seemed to be calling her name...calling... Amanda woke with a start, her heart hammering. The dream had been so clear, she felt as if she could still hear her mother's voice. Guiltily she remembered she had sent off a recording to her parents just before Sarek arrived home from the Embassy that day, and she had had no chance to play the tape to see if there were any messages for her.

There were several messages on the videophone, some from Sarek and one from her parents in reply to the message she had sent to them. She depressed the switch and sat down to look and listen to her parents' message. They appeared on the screen, smiling, and gave her the usual greetings. Charles Grayson talked for a short time then said his farewells with the phrase, "I'll let your mother take over, Amanda. She's itching to give you all the latest news and gossip. Take care of yourself, love." Amanda's cheeks reddened at his words. It was almost as if he knew... No, that was impossible! She sat back to listen to all the news from home, her mother's voice making her feel more homesick than ever. The message ended with Elizabeth Grayson in tears. Amanda sat there, looking at the blank screen, crying softly. She quickly dried her tears as she heard Sarek moving around in the study. He would only begin to question her if he saw that she had been crying.

They went into the gardens as the sun slipped towards the horizon, the air cooling enough for the temperature to be bearable for Amanda. They sat on one of the stone benches beside her little plot where she tried to grow the Earth flowers. The delicate plants had dried up and withered in the fierce heat without her to care for them; every one of them lay brown and dead.

"I'll have to plant some more." She surveyed the devastation. "Sarek, I - " She broke off, unable to continue her question.

"What is it you wish to ask? I will answer if I can."

"Sarek...do you think we made a baby?" Amanda blurted out at last.

"I do not know," came Sarek's startled reply.

"Not that we didn't try!" Amanda's eyes twinkled mischievously, the laughter erupting at Sarek's scandalised expression and his upraised eyebrows.

The following few days they rested and relaxed, Sarek spent quite some time in his study and Amanda pottered about in the garden, replacing the dead plants with new ones. She also dabbled in artwork and read a lot.

Sarek had not forgotten his promise to take her out to the Forge; one night he suggested that they leave early next morning before it got too hot. Amanda offered to help load the aircar which had been returned by a member of the Embassy staff, and realised Sarek meant to spend some considerable time in the Forge; the equipment he loaded into the aircar would have suited a safari. She did not mind, and welcomed the idea of a camping trip. Little did she know...

It was still dark when he wakened her next morning. He stood there dressed in a desert soft-suit and boots, holding a similar outfit over one arm. Amanda sat down and burst into laughter as she tried on the desert suit. It was one of Sarek's, and did not exactly fit... She rolled up the sleeves - there, that didn't look too bad - "I look like a clown!" she giggled, indicating the yards of excess material round her feet. She turned up the too-long pants of the suit and tucked them into the tops of her boots. At least they fitted.

"How do I look?" She pirouetted in front of Sarek.

"The suit is designed for safety and comfort in the terrain we will be travelling through. It is not meant to be fashionable." Sarek failed to understand her amusement.

Dawn was breaking as they left the city of ShiKahr far behind and flew out over the Forge. In the distance towered the L-langdon Mountains, the black peaks seeming to claw at the sky. The scenery never changed - mile upon mile of desolation followed, no vegetation, no water, nothing but red and brown sands and strewn rocks.

"What a place!" Amanda shuddered at the isolation. "The desert areas of Earth can't even compare with this!"

She looked down at the alien landscape as the aircar began to hover, getting ready for descent. They were among the foothills of the L-langdon Mountains, and Sarek brought the aircar to a halt on a sheltered plateau. The temperature seemed to have risen much higher than at ShiKahr, the hot breeze burned Amanda's face as she stepped out onto the rocky ledge, the harsh glare of the sun forcing her to shield her eyes.

"Amanda, assist me." Sarek's voice brought her from her reverie. He was checking the contents of two large rucsacs as she entered the aircar. "This is yours - " He indicated the smaller one. "I shall carry the heavier items of equipment."

"But... I thought you were going to show me most of the Forge by aircar..."

"Indeed? This is the best way to visit Vulcan's Forge." Sarek checked and locked the aircar, the precaution necessary. No Vulcan would interfere with the craft, but if it were left open, then animals could take up residence while they were gone.

Wondering what was in store for her, Amanda followed Sarek down the steep slope. The unfamiliar weight of the carrier on her back held her back a little, the straps cutting into her shoulders. She stumbled on as best she could, trying to match Sarek's long strides and failing miserably most of the time. He had to stop and wait for her to catch up with him.

He set a slower pace when Amanda pointed out to him that it was almost

impossible for her to keep up with him in the fierce heat. She was well protected against the sun's burning rays - the desert suit had long sleeves and she wore a head covering and a pair of specially tinted eye protectors. Her only exposed skin was her hands and face.

They travelled on more slowly now, Sarek halting for frequent rests to suit Amanda.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked on one occasion.

"I will take you to the place of T'Kha'Iyta, the Valley of Shining Light. It is considered to be the most beautiful in all of Vulcan. You will understand the reason for its name when we arrive there." He would not say any more on the subject, setting Amanda's curiosity afire.

They stopped for the night at a small oasis, one of the very few in this desert area. Sarek knew his way here - he had taken this route many times since the first occasion - his Kahswan, the maturity test when he was only seven. The oasis had saved his life...

He set up their tent-like shelter and soon had a fire going, Amanda cooking their meal from the provisions they had brought with them. The fire blazed up as he threw on more fuel; tired but content, they sat by its warmth as the sun touched the horizon, fading into a soft twilight. Amanda sighed, leaning against him. Somehow it seemed logical for him to put his arm round her. She smiled, moving closer.

"Tell me about the time you were here before..." She looked into his dark eyes.

Sarek proceeded to tell her about the Kahswan, the test for seven-year-old Vulcan boys, how they were left to fend for themselves for seven days without food, water or weapons on Vulcan's Forge. He had followed the tracks of a lematya, one of the most dangerous animals of Vulcan, knowing it would eventually lead him to water. He had been in the last stages of dehydration and the animal had saved his life by showing him this place.

"Imagine throwing young boys out in a place like this!" Amanda shuddered with horror at the thought. "It's barbaric!"

"It is the way of Vulcan, Amanda. The male had to show his endurance and will to survive. Vulcan boys are more advanced than Human boys of the same age."

"Will I ever get used to Vulcan? There are so many new things to learn... and your customs are so strange!"

"You will soon become used to our ways. I am your guide and counsellor," Sarek assured her.

"Yes sir, Mr. Teacher!" Amanda teased, pulling his head down to hers and giving him a quick kiss. "Come on - that water looks inviting. I'm going for a swim."

"But..." It was his turn to object.

"Come on. We are...how many miles from nowhere? What are the chances of any passers-by?" Amanda had already begun to take off the dusty desert suit.

"I would estimate the odds at 3725.01. Also we are 45.1672 miles from Shi-Kahr." He broke off as Amanda removed the desert suit and kicked off the dusty boots.

"Last in is a monkey!" Amanda laughed, tugging at the zipper of his suit.

The coldness of the water came as quite a shock after the heat of the desert day. Amanda swam out to the middle of the pool, her long hair streaming behind her. The sight gave Sarek illogical thoughts; somewhere he had read a book on Earth legends and mythical beings called mermaids. Somehow Amanda reminded him of the illustration he had seen in the book. She laughed and splashed him; he returned the gesture, and soon they were playing in the water like a couple of

Earth children. Sarek knew his actions were not logical but they seemed to please Amanda. Whatever she did, he copied her actions. Both were powerful swimmers - Amanda had begun almost before she could walk, and Sarek's own father had taught him the art, a very strange one on Vulcan where most of the people could not swim, the opportunity never arising on the arid planet with its very little surface water. Sarek's father had his own ideas on the subject and taught his young son at an early age. It was as if Sarek's father had had a glimpse of the future where his son would go offworld, to many 'watery' planets with mighty oceans.

They sat by the warmth of the leaping flames, dressed in fresh clothing, refreshed after the swim, Sarek watching Amanda as she shook out her long hair to dry in the fire's warm glow. Darkness had fallen now and the stars seemed even more clear at this altitude.

"You're cold." Amanda noticed Sarek beginning to shiver. Maybe she had been foolish asking him to swim - that water had been cool, too cool for a Vulcan. She threw some more fuel on the fire and placed one of the thermo blankets around his shoulders before setting water on the fire to boil. She found some cubes which would dissolve into a drink, then poured the boiling water onto them; she replaced the remainder in the pack and passed the mug to Sarek, taking one herself. The shivering stopped soon after he had drunk the hot liquid; what it was Amanda didn't know, but the taste was pleasant enough. She could not stop yawning, the day's travel and the night air making her sleepy. She readily agreed when Sarek suggested they retire.

She watched as he made up the fire and switched on the white sound beam to deter any predators. The interior of the shelter looked warm and cosy with the flickering of the firelight outside.

"Goodnight, Kah-shula." Sarek was grateful for the warmth radiating from Amanda. She curled up in his arms as they slept under the stars.

Amanda awoke as Sarek got up and left the shelter, pink streaks of the coming dawn beginning to light the sky. I suppose I should get up, she thought, reluctant to leave the warm blankets. It was cold outside, the sun still had to rise above the horizon, and the chill of the desert night was still making itself felt. She soon had a fire going and began to prepare breakfast, the water boiling very quickly in the rarified atmosphere.

Amanda frowned slightly as she took the pot from the fire so its contents would not burn. Where was Sarek? It was unlike him to go wandering off like that... I'll give him a few more minutes, she thought, kneeling at the edge of the pool and splashing cold water on her face, the shock banishing any remaining traces of sleep.

By now their breakfast was in danger of becoming a burned offering. "Sarek!" Amanda yelled, then started with fright at the force of the echo. What a noise! she thought as the last echoes died away. He can't fail to hear that!

Sure enough, she spotted the tall lean figure coming towards her from the other side of the oasis.

"Were you in danger?" he asked when he reached her side.

"No, but our breakfast was in danger of burning! Where have you been? Why did you go off and leave me on my own? I thought I heard something prowling round." Amanda's voice gave the indication that she was close to tears. "What if any of those wild animals had come near?"

Sarek did not reply and Amanda busied herself setting out the food. He was sitting before her and as she raised her eyes to pass his plate, she noticed the stun-weapon attached to the belt on his desert suit. She was lost for words as their eyes met and she saw the green flush creeping up Sarek's neck towards his pointed ears.

"Sarek - what's wrong?"

"I...cannot eat." He set the plate down firmly. "Amanda, show me what you made the drinks from last night."

"Here." She produced the cubes from the provisions.

"No..." He shook his head. "And the food you cooked?"

Amanda showed him all the things she had used. "What is this?" He picked up a small container.

"That's just a herb flavouring. It contains onion and - oh, no!" Her hands flew to her face. "But it's harmless!"

"To a Human, perhaps. It made me extremely ill." He examined the container and then looked at Amanda. "You must not use anything brought from Earth without checking first with me. Do you understand? Why do you think I have arranged to buy all our provisions? I know that there are many Vulcanfoods that you cannot eat."

"Sarek, I...I'm sorry!" Amanda burst into tears.

"Do not cry." Sarek dried her face. "I should have made sure you understood about that. I did not think that you might have brought anything other than coffee with you."

He insisted on travelling on despite Amanda's pleas to stay where they were until he felt better. The sun was already high in the sky by the time they broke camp. The pace was slow as they travelled on, the path becoming steeper as they climbed upwards. Amanda shuddered at the height, feeling slightly dizzy as the air grew even thinner with the altitude, the sun now directly overhead.

"Sarek, I can't go on." She sank down, gasping for breath in the heat.

"We shall rest here." Sarek took off the heavy rucksack and sat down as well.

An overhang of rock provided some welcome shade and Amanda could feel her eyes becoming heavy in the heat. Through half closed eyes she saw Sarek touch his forehead and steeple his fingers. His eyes were closing too...

Amanda awoke to find herself alone. Sarek had switched on the white sound beam to keep her safe during his absence. She stood, shielding her eyes against the harsh glare of the sun, hating the isolation and the fear of being alone in this barren place. Remorse filled her at the thought of the blunder with the herb flavouring. She had known there were certain Earth foods a Vulcan could not eat, but she hadn't considered that a pinch of herbs would have any ill-effect... And Sarek was still too pale. She knew he had attempted some kind of control or healing, recalling how he had touched his forehead and bent his head over steepled fingers. Obviously it had failed...

A low growl interrupted Amanda's thoughts. She turned, to see a thin wolf-like creature prowling around the perimeter of the forcefield. It snarled at her, exposing wicked fangs. Amanda bit back a scream, hands pressed to her mouth, her eyes wide with terror.

//What is it, Amanda?// Suddenly Sarek's voice was inside her head.

//Sarek, there's a...a thing, a creature...//

//The white sound beam will keep it at bay. Do not fear, it cannot harm you.// The voice inside her head was reassuring.

The creature stopped its prowling and stood still as if listening, head turned away from Amanda. It loped away at a fast pace.

//It's gone...// Amanda breathed a sigh of relief. //Sarek, where are you? That thing looked as if it might be dangerous!//

//Do not fear...// The mind contact faded.

Amanda found herself still trembling with fright, her legs felt like jelly. She sat down and drank sparingly from the water container and wiped her hot face.

//Sarek?//

She felt a fleeting touch, then caught some words in Vulcan. She jumped to her feet, almost spilling the precious water container as the shrill whine of the stun-weapon reached her ears.

"Sarek! Oh, thank God you're safe!" She ran to meet him. "That thing - I was so worried!"

Sarek nodded, shouldering the rucksack once more. "I suggest we vacate the immediate area. The V-khrass is only stunned."

They travelled on for some time before Sarek was satisfied with the distance between them and the stunned creature. The climb had become even steeper; even Sarek had to slow down, helping Amanda over the huge rocks which barred their path. At last they crossed the mountain ridge and descended into a sheltered valley.

"We will remain here for the night." Sarek began to unpack their tent-shelter and other essential equipment. He felt much better now, the sharp pains and the feeling of nausea completely gone. He even admitted to a sense of hunger! Amanda was relieved to see him eating again.

They talked for a while, watching the spectacular sunset. Amanda felt tired but secure beside Sarek, whose face looked even more alien in the fading light. She teased him, touching one pointed ear and laughing softly when he shivered and turned his head away.

Both were very tired after the day's events and so did not sit out too long after darkness had fallen. "Don't leave me..." Amanda sighed, almost half asleep.

"It was unavoidable." Sarek raised one eyebrow in the darkness.

"Sorry about today..." Amanda snuggled closer. There was no reply, the slow breathing telling her he had already fallen asleep.

Travelling next day was much easier, both of them being rested and refreshed by a good night's sleep. By now they were high in the L-langdon Mountains, Sarek leading the way towards the T'Kha'Lyta. The path took a downward slope for a while, twisting among the jagged peaks.

"Oh!" Amanda gasped in admiration and wonder as she caught her first glimpse of the T'Kha'Lyta valley. The very mountains seemed to be ablaze with streaks of red as the shafts of sunlight came through the peaks. The valley floor, too, blazed with a carpet of red...

"What is it?" Amanda asked, awed by the sight.

"The phenomenon occurs nowhere else on Vulcan," Sarek replied. "The rocks are rich in a mineral similar to the black opal of Earth."

"I've never seen anything like it. It is so beautiful..." Amanda shielded her eyes against the brilliant spears of red.

"Remain here," Sarek instructed, the slope being far too steep for Amanda to negotiate with safety. She watched with some anxiety as he carefully descended to the valley floor, disappearing from sight.

Amanda let her gaze wander around the area, carefully avoiding looking directly into the fierce Vulcan sun. The highest of the mountain peaks were tinged faintly pink at the summit; she stared at them for a while before realising what the colour was...

"It's ice!" she exclaimed, realising how cold it must be at that altitude. She, too, would be glad to descend from the heights, the altitude and the thin air giving her a headache which would not go away. She puzzled for a moment as her eyes rested on a dark area low in the sky on the far horizon. It looked like a cloud, but the Vulcan sky was usually clear. She decided to ask Sarek when he returned.

Drowsiness was beginning to creep over her by the time Sarek reappeared. He hoisted himself up and sat down beside her to rest for a moment after the climb.

"You may keep this." He reached into the pouch on his desert suit and brought out one of the black stones. It was oval-shaped with streaks of fiery red radiating from the centre as the light caught it.

"Oh - thank you! I will treasure it always..." Amanda flung her arms round his neck.

"No Outworlder knows of this place," Sarek told her after he had freed himself from the clinging arms. "The T'Kha'Lyta is known only to Vulcan."

"Then...I am the first non-Vulcan to see it?"

"You are," Sarek nodded.

"I won't tell anyone!" Amanda smiled, then remembered the dark area of the sky which had puzzled her earlier. "Sarek, what is that?"

At once Sarek's face grew grave. "We must find shelter. It is the Sh-mar, a fierce sandstorm from the Sas-a-Shar. The mountains only add to the velocity of the wind."

He helped Amanda along the steep rocky path. It narrowed to a ledge barely wide enough to take one person. Amanda clung tightly to Sarek's hands as she inched her way along, not daring to look down. On one side was the sheer face of the mountain, and the other dropped straight down for thousands of feet... By now the wind was rising, shrieking through the high passes and blowing stinging particles of sand into their faces. Amanda felt as if the wind would hurl her from the narrow ledge at any moment; she was sobbing with fear by the time Sarek led her to the safety and shelter of a deep cave hidden by an overhang of rock.

"You are safe now." He held her close until the trembling stopped, calming her with the mind-touch. Outside, the wind rose to a shrieking howl, the mountains now hidden by the red particles of sand brought with it. Amanda shuddered at the fury, knowing that a traveller caught in the open could not survive for long.

"How long does this last?" She looked at Sarek.

"On average, two days. I have known a storm to last for seven," came his answer.

They set about making themselves comfortable, laying out the bedding to take away the hardness of the cave floor. Sarek placed a small glow light on one of the ledges to give some illumination and switched on the white sound beam to deter any predators from seeking shelter in the cave. He also brought out a foil-wrapped package from a special pouch in the side of the rucksack. It contained a white stone-like substance and Amanda watched in astonishment as he lit it. It gave off a fierce heat but no smoke, ideal for these conditions.

"You think of everything!" she laughed.

"No Vulcan would travel on Vulcan's Forge without a survival kit. I suggest you prepare food, Amanda."

Usually Sarek would not admit to feeling hungry. It must be all this travelling and fresh air, Amanda smiled to herself. The cave looked quite cosy in the dim glowlight and the flickering fire.

She woke with a start at the sound of a screaming roar. "Sarek! What's that?" She clutched at him in the darkness, burying her head under the blankets.

"It is a le-matya, the most dangerous of all Vulcan animals. It seeks shelter but cannot cross the white sound beam. Do not fear." Sarek tried to calm the trembling figure curled up tightly against him.

"It's horrible!" Amanda listened to the creature's growls and roars as it tried to find a way through the barrier. Finally it gave up the struggle and left, the growls becoming fainter and fading away altogether.

The storm still raged when they woke in the morning; all they could do was wait until it had blown itself out. They passed the time by talking, Sarek telling Amanda more about Vulcan and she in turn describing her upbringing on Earth. Sarek asked many questions, curious about her upbringing which was in complete contrast to his own. Then Amanda asked him to describe the le-matya. She shuddered as he made a rough sketch of a scaly long-necked thing, something like a dragon with wicked claws. It was enough to give anyone nightmares for a week!

"That thing was trying to get in here last night? It...it's like something out of a horror movie!"

"What is a 'horror movie'?" Sarek asked. He could not understand why Humans liked scaring themselves half to death in the way of entertainment! The whole concept was totally illogical.

They discussed several other subjects then Amanda taught him a word game quite popular on Earth.

Later that evening Sarek informed her that the wind force was dropping a little but it would be many hours yet before they could venture out in safety. Amanda busied herself making their evening meal; she took the container of boiling water from the fire and it slipped, the scalding liquid pouring over her forearm. Her scream brought Sarek to her side in an instant. He gently applied a healing spray and a dressing to the already reddened and blistered skin. Amanda was unable to control her tears, the pain and shock causing her eyes to fill. What would Sarek think of her? She always seemed to be showing her emotions these days.

"Amanda, look at me," Sarek instructed and she raised her tear-stained eyes to his dark ones. "I am going to take away your pain." He placed his fingers on her forehead. Amanda knew he was feeling her pain, his face distorted for a moment with the sting of the burns, then became calm once more. Her arm felt good, all the pain had gone...

"How did you do that?" she asked in astonishment.

"I took your pain into myself. It will not return," he assured her.

During the night the wind had dropped to a sullen murmur and the sun rose in the clear sky. Sand lay everywhere, swept up into heaps by the wind. It made the going treacherous when Sarek and Amanda left their sanctuary. Slipping and sliding, they made their way back to where they had left the aircar.

The rocky plateau was no more - completely buried in the rubble of a landslide. Underneath was what was left of the aircar.

"The storm has caused the landslide." Sarek surveyed the devastation.

"What are we going to do?" Amanda asked in despair.

"We walk. That is the logical solution. It will take us three days to reach ShiKahr from our present position." Sarek began to examine their provisions and equipment, throwing away the least essential items. Everything could fit into the large rucksack now.

"I will carry this. You will require all your strength for the journey," he informed Amanda.

They set out, resting during the greatest heat of the day and travelling when it was cooler. The journey over the endless barren sands exhausted Amanda, even making her too tired to drink from the water container when they stopped for the rest periods. She struggled bravely on as the sun went down, following Sarek as he strode across the desert. Her thoughts ranged from one theme to another, a pleasant way of passing the time. What Sarek thought of them, she did not know. Right now she was reciting all the silly little rhymes and songs from her childhood as she automatically placed one foot in front of the other. So engrossed, she kept going and bumped into Sarek when he stopped suddenly.

"What - ?" she began before he motioned for her to be silent, his sharp sense of hearing having picked up a squeaky mewling sound before it had become audible

to Amanda. She peered round him, making out the shape of a large bulk in the darkness. Sarek cautioned her, then moved forward. The dark shape was a sehlat, a common animal of Vulcan's Forge. It lay on its side and Sarek knew by its extreme stillness that it was dead, probably killed by the storm. The mewling sound came again; nestling into the fur of its dead mother was a tiny cub, its eyes newly opened. It caught the unfamiliar scent and snarled, showing tiny white teeth.

Amanda came forward, curious to see what Sarek held in his arms.

"Oh - he's just a baby." She looked at the tiny bundle of fur. "What are we going to do with him? We can't just leave him here to die!"

"That was not my intention." Sarek opened the desert suit and tucked the little sehlat cub inside. It squirmed, making itself comfortable, then fell asleep against his shoulder.

They encountered the first of the problems when they stopped for the rest-period (or siesta, as Amanda called it.) The sehlat cub just sat and cried when Sarek set it down.

"He's hungry," Amanda said as the cub tried to suck her fingers. "I think we still have some of that dried milk left among the provisions. That will have to do."

Sarek watched as she mixed a little with water; his eyebrows rose into his hairline as she tore a piece of material from the pocket of her desert suit, filled it with the mixture and forced it into the cub's mouth. "Where did you learn to do that?" he asked incredulously as the cub sucked greedily, looking for more.

"I have stayed up all night feeding puppies with a tiny dropper." Amanda laughed at his astonished expression. "This little fellow is too young to feed himself, so I had to improvise!"

Full now, the cub crawled over to Sarek and curled itself into a ball, falling asleep in his shadow. Soon, Amanda had dropped off to sleep as well as the sun rose even higher in the sky and waves of scorching heat shimmered from the desert sands, distorting the landscape. Sarek could feel the drowsiness creeping over him, then he heard no more...

He dreamed he was at home, in Amanda's little studio in the basement of their house. He watched as she painted an Earth landscape, she turned, laughing, and dabbed the paintbrush on the end of his nose. "Hold still, I am going to paint you," she laughed, passing the brush over his face...

Sarek woke with a start to find a pair of eyes only a few inches from his own; the sehlat cub was sitting on his chest busily licking his chin! He touched its head and the cub pushed its nose into his hand. He would never admit it to Amanda, but the little sehlat had stolen his heart!

They took turns to carry it on the long journey back to ShiKahr. How good it felt to be home again after the long trip through the roughest terrain of all Vulcan! The cub was allowed to sleep in the house that first night until Sarek could construct a shelter for it in the enclosed grounds.

Darkness was falling as they sat in the main lounge. Dinner was over and Sarek rose to turn on one or two lamps, their dim light casting a warm glow around the room. This was Amanda's favourite time, especially now when she was back in her own home. The sehlat cub lay asleep in its box. Under the blanket Amanda had concealed an old clock, an antique which belonged to her four-times great grandmother; when asked for an explanation, she told Sarek that the clock's ticking would sound like the mother's heartbeat to the cub. Sarek had named it I-Chaya, which meant 'fearsome one'. Amanda giggled at the name; the cub was only a little ball of fur.

"Wait till he grows up," Sarek told her.

"What were your impressions of the Forge?" Sarek asked a little while later.

"Well, it was beautiful, especially the valley of the stones." Amanda began to giggle. "What a honeymoon trip! They'll never believe it at home. ('What??? You went to a desert???!')...then you got sick, then came the sandstorm and I had to go and burn my arm...but I wouldn't have missed it for the world!" She laughed at Sarek's bewildered expression.

"Cease your actions!" He caught hold of her wrists. Somehow, Amanda always seemed to find his ears a source of fascination, forever touching them. She knew he disliked this... He also picked up some of her thoughts through the contact.

Amanda got the shock of her life when Sarek bent his head and kissed her, hard! Usually she had to make the first move - not this time! She realised he was becoming an apt pupil of the 'strange art' she had taught him.

"Amanda - " The dark eyes looked into her clear blue ones, one slanted eyebrow taking an upward path. "I am Vulcan, you must accept the fact. I cannot comply with your wishes."

"I...oh...I'm sorry," Amanda stammered, her face crimson, forgetting he could read her thoughts. "You must think I am the Mary Sue of ShiKahr!"

"I fail to understand the meaning of what you have just said. Who is 'Mary Sue'? Indeed?" His eyebrows rose even higher after her explanation.

Silence fell between them for a moment, Sarek sensing Amanda's confusion, giving her time to collect her scattered thoughts. "Amanda - " he began. "I know there are...vast differences between us. As a Vulcan, I must adapt to your thoughts and feelings..."

Amanda listened with a sense of dread, wondering what was coming next. She already regretted her 'sinful thoughts', knowing she could not help them. She had to banish them every time she looked at Sarek!

"I have acquired some information on Human characteristics," he continued. "The facts gained have - "

"You - you mean - you asked someone?" Amanda interrupted, unable to believe her ears.

"Affirmative. I talked to physicians from Earth and Vulcan; we discussed the difficulties of marriage between a Vulcan and a Human, and reached a solution."

"What are you talking about? You can't - I mean, it's too soon after - " she shrank away from him, suddenly afraid.

"You are frightened of me." The dark eyes caught her gaze and held it.

"Of course I'm not! You know that!" Amanda protested, moving closer.

Sarek touched both hands to her temples and Amanda did the same without knowing why. As she touched him, she felt their minds locking together in a bond far deeper than the full meld.

"Trust me," Sarek's voice said as he knew her apprehension. He had full control, guiding their merged minds backwards in time. Amanda had a few fleeting glimpses of their trip out to the Forge - in reverse. The images blurred, then came a moment of complete blankness. The scene moved forwards now, changing to the time of the pon farr.

Through the meld they relived the experience, one of the happier moments when the first savage fury had abated. Amanda did not want to leave as the scene faded, taking them back to the present time. The effects were shattering. Amanda found herself trembling as Sarek removed his fingers from her face. She couldn't speak, only able to look into the dark eyes so close to her own.

"You are a Vulcan of many surprises," she smiled, finally finding her voice again.

"Yes." Sarek's expression was unchanged. "I am...pleased to be able to help

you. I am always aware of your thoughts and feelings, Amanda."

"I know. I can't hide anything from you. Also my behaviour was illogical; I asked for something you could not give."

"I could not ask you to wait another seven years; you are Human, not Vulcan. I...understand the differences between us and can regress our minds through the meld whenever you wish. That is the most I can do for you, Amanda."

"Thank you, Sarek," Amanda said, sliding her arms around his neck. Being married to a Vulcan did not seem so terrible a prospect now as for a day or two she had been fearing.

Sarek returned to his duties at the Vulcan Embassy and Amanda settled down to a daily routine. She had her pets for company - Cheeky and I-Chaya soon made friends with each other, the bird often flying down to sit on the cub's back. There was plenty to occupy her time. She sent messages to her parents and friends back home, and took refuge in the basement of the house during the greatest heat of the day. She was working on an oil-painting of the Forge with the L-langdon Mountains in the background; she wanted to surprise Sarek with it and so kept it secret. The garden also took a lot of her time; replacement seeds had come from Earth and she tended them with the greatest of care, watering then several times a day in the fierce heat.

She was kneeling at the side of the plot, dirt smudged on her nose and cheeks where she wiped a hot and dirty hand across her face. I-Chaya bared his teeth and Cheeky rose into the air with a squawk of alarm. Their strange behaviour made her turn to see what was wrong...there stood T'Pau!

"I...er..." Amanda was lost for words, conscious of her dirt-streaked face and very brief shorts. She returned T'Pau's hand greeting. "Come into the house." She made a face behind T'Pau's back. "If you will excuse me for a moment, I must change." Amanda indicated her 'gardening' clothes. What does she want?? she thought, hurriedly washing and changing into a Vulcan garment.

T'Pau's expression never changed as her gaze swept over Amanda from head to foot. Amanda felt her cheeks beginning to burn under the close scrutiny. She knows Sarek was in pon farr! The thought made her blush all the more furiously.

"Your skin-tone is extremely highlighted. Is this due to the sun?" One slim eyebrow arched skywards.

"Er...yes," Amanda could only stammer, lost for words.

T'Pau's searching glance swept round the room, missing nothing. The flowers and books caught her attention as well as some other little Human touches Amanda had added to relieve the Vulcan starkness.

"Who did this?" She indicated a picture of a seascape.

"I painted it," Amanda informed her. "It is the Atlantic Ocean. I like to look at the cool sea when the heat becomes unbearable."

"Indeed? You still have to adapt to our climate. But this - you have talent."

"Thank you," Amanda acknowledged, a little surprised at the words of praise. "I...would you like to see the other one I am working on? It is only half-finished."

T'Pau nodded and followed Amanda down to the basement and the small studio, wrinkling her nose at the sharp smell of oil paint and varnish. "You have captured the colours of Vulcan." She stood before the easel.

"It is for Sarek. He can put it in his study or something," Amanda explained, faltering again in her attempts to find something to say to T'Pau. Trying to carry on a polite conversation with the stern Vulcan woman was next to impossible! She found herself rambling, telling T'Pau about her artwork and the classes she had attended at home. T'Pau did not make any comments, her aloof silence unnerving Amanda even further.

She's doing this on purpose! Amanda racked her brains for something new to say as they made their way back to the main lounge.

"You were absent from home for some days," T'Pau said a little while later, breaking the awkward silence.

"Yes, Sarek took me to the Forge... Oh, no!" Amanda broke off in horror as Cheeky flew in, closely followed by the sehlat cub. She had forgotten to close the outside door.

Cheeky landed on her shoulder, squawking his name and other phrases Amanda had taught him, his eyes bright with mischief. He cocked his head at the stranger, regarding her with some curiosity for a while. Amanda bit her lip to stop herself from smiling as he launched himself forward, landing on T'Pau's shoulder.

T'Pau made no move as the bird squawked into her left ear; only her eyebrows rose upwards.

Cheeky hopped from one foot to the other, demanding the attention he usually got from Amanda, but no gentle fingers rubbed his head or caressed his chest feathers. Amanda burst into helpless laughter as he gave a loud wolf-whistle, closely followed by the immortal words, "Give us a kiss, darlin'."

Meanwhile, I-Chaya had not been idle; he was busily chewing at the hem of T'Pau's dress; pieces of material lay on the floor, and the garment now looked distinctly moth-eaten.

"Kindly remove these creatures!" T'Pau said with more than a touch of disdain in her voice.

Amanda obeyed, shooing Cheeky and I-Chaya out of the house. That's done it! she thought. She'll never accept me now... Oh, who cares! She never approved of me anyway. The door closed with a slam.

Sure enough, T'Pau took her leave immediately, head high and her back rigid with disapproval.

Don't put your nose any higher or you'll get it badly sunburned! Amanda thought as she watched the retreating figure.

T'Pau turned at the gateway and stared at Amanda for a moment before disappearing from sight.

"She probably knew what I was thinking!... Thanks, fellers, you got rid of her double quick!" Amanda greeted her pets, beginning to laugh again as she thought of T'Pau being invited to 'Give us a kiss, darlin''. Her laughter faded when she realised T'Pau was certain to tell Sarek about his wife's illogical behaviour.

Too true... Sarek questioned her about the incident that night, but did not reprove her in any way, knowing she still had a lot to learn. He gave her further instructions on Vulcan customs and etiquette, finishing with the words, "I advise you to keep the entrance to the house firmly closed."

"I will, Sarek - and I'm sorry. It will not happen again."

"T'Pau understands you are inexperienced and unused to the ways of Vulcan. I..." He broke off for a moment. "T'Pau informed me the bird spoke to her."

"And how!" Amanda laughed, explaining what Cheeky had said.

"Indeed?" The corner of Sarek's mouth twitched for a second in what looked very suspiciously like a smile. "Somehow I cannot imagine T'Pau indulging in your Earth custom..."

"Sarek, did anyone ever tell you that you have a sense of humour? That sounded very like a joke!" Amanda teased.

"Illogical. Vulcans never joke. I was merely stating the facts."

"You will have to be patient with me. Some day I will learn to be a Vulcan," Amanda smiled as they touched hands.

A few days later, Amanda met her neighbour for the first time - in fact, they almost bumped into each other! Amanda was returning home, daydreaming as usual, and failed to notice the Vulcan woman coming towards her. Only a quick sidestep on Amanda's part avoided a collision.

"I - forgive me." Amanda raised her hand in the traditional greeting. "You live here? Then we must be neighbours. I am Amanda."

"I am called T'Lann. Welcome, Amanda. My home is yours."

Not understanding the Vulcan greeting, Amanda could only follow as T'Lann led the way through the gateway and into the enclosed grounds. The design of the house was very similar to her own, although more severe, in the Vulcan style.

"This is T'Ven, my daughter," T'Lann said as a little girl entered the room. She was around three years old, very small and dainty with huge dark eyes and sleek hair which hung over her shoulders.

"Greetings." She held up her hand to her mother and the strange-looking visitor.

"Greetings, T'Ven." Amanda returned the hand sign. "My name is Amanda, and I live in the house next to yours."

"Why are your ears like that?" The little girl asked after scrutinising Amanda for a while, her question obviously displeasing her mother, who uttered one sharp word in Vulcan. At once the girl lowered her eyes. "I ask forgiveness."

"I am an outworlder," Amanda smiled. "From Earth. That is why I am different from you."

Amanda accepted the tall glass of some unknown liquid, the custom of Vulcan being to offer guests a cool drink after the burning heat outside. She had to do most of the talking, telling them about herself and her old home on Earth. Vulcans considered it improper, and so did not ask questions.

The girl seemed fascinated at Amanda's description of Cheeky and I-Chaya; she looked at her mother, then at Amanda, repeating the gesture several times, gathering courage to speak. "May I come and see them?" she asked at last.

"Yes, any time you wish," Amanda nodded.

At least I know who my neighbours are now, she thought as she made her way back to her own home.

A few days later she happened to look out of the window and saw her neighbour's little girl walking across the grounds towards the house.

"I have come to see your animals," she announced as Amanda opened the door.

"Welcome, T'Ven." Amanda remembered to address her in the Vulcan fashion, even although she was just a child.

She followed Amanda, her dark eyes widening as Amanda produced a strange clicking whistle and I-Chaya came lumbering from the shady trees where he liked to sleep. He was almost half-grown now, a deep rumble of pleasure coming from his throat as he advanced towards them.

"He will not harm you," Amanda reassured as T'Ven drew back in apprehension.

The little Vulcan girl stood still as I-Chaya came closer, his nose twitching as he examined the scent of the stranger, towering over her with his huge bulk.

"He wants to make friends," Amanda explained as I-Chaya nudged the slight figure with his nose. "May I?" She remembered the Vulcan aversion to touching before she took T'Ven's hand and guided it to the sehlat's velvety muzzle. I-Chaya shivered in delight at the touch and lay down in complete abandon.

Then Cheeky appeared, flying down from the treetops with squawks of delight, gliding down in a graceful curve to land on Amanda's shoulder. T'Ven stared wide-eyed at the bird's tameness as he playfully pulled strands of Amanda's hair from the pinned curls and tweaked the lobe of her ear, all the time chattering away to her as if he was holding a conversation with her.

"Amanda loves Sarek!" he announced to T'Ven as Amanda placed him on the girl's arm.

T'Ven seemed fascinated by the two creatures and Amanda left her playing with them and returned to her household tasks, knowing the little Vulcan girl would be safe with her two 'protectors'.

Some time later, she called T'Ven into the house, setting before her some iced fruit juice and bringing out a box of sweet biscuits, passed as harmless to Vulcans by Sarek, from Earth.

"What are there?" T'Ven eyed the plate with some suspicion.

"They are something similar to your shasti. My parents sent them from my homeworld. Would you like to try some?"

T'Ven gingerly accepted, and Amanda had to wait until she had finished before encouraging the little visitor to talk about herself. Starting was easy; T'Ven asking about Cheeky and I-Chaya.

"Have you any brothers or sisters?" Amanda threw Vulcan custom to the four winds and asked a direct question - but then this child was young enough to consider asking questions the most logical way to learn what one wanted to know.

"I - have a brother. He is ten years old, and he is at school," T'Ven answered slowly. "I will go to school when I am four," she volunteered.

"I was a teacher on Earth," Amanda informed her, using her skill at handling children to get the little girl to talk, encouraging her to ask all the questions she wanted. Once Amanda had broken through the Vulcan barriers there was no stopping T'Ven, the questions pouring forth in a flood as she yielded to her natural curiosity. She asked Amanda all about her homeworld and her family there, puzzling over the photo album with its strange pictures of people, creatures and scenery, the like of which she had never seen before.

Neither of them heard Sarek as he entered on silent feet. He stood in the doorway taking in the scene, Amanda with a little Vulcan girl, their heads bent in study of a book.

"That is my dog Girlie - " Amanda broke off as she became aware of Sarek's presence. "Oh, I didn't hear you come in."

At once, T'Ven stood up and gave the hand salute to the adult Vulcan. "Live long and prosper, sir. I am T'Ven, daughter of Sassak and T'Lann."

"My home is yours, T'Ven," Sarek gravely returned the greeting.

Amanda continued her explanation about the photograph and the dog, then stopped as she saw the blank expression on T'Ven's face.

T'Ven touched a small hand to her forehead. "My mother calls me. I must go."

"I will take you to your own gateway." Amanda closed her photo album. She found herself admiring the little girl as they walked towards the gateway. T'Ven was so small and dainty, the tips of her delicately pointed ears peeking through her hair, and those huge dark eyes...

"You may come to my house any time you wish," Amanda told her as they reached the gateway.

"I will. Farewell." T'Ven stepped through the entrance, the high gate closing with a soft click.

I would love a little girl like that, Amanda found herself thinking as she made her way back to her own home.

Time passed. The painting of the Forge now hung on the wall of Sarek's study. He had been most appreciative when she presented it to him. Slowly Amanda began to adapt to Vulcan, the thin atmosphere did not trouble her so much although she was still plagued by the heat.

As the weeks passed, a strange sense of restlessness and homesickness grew in her. Sarek commented on the number of messages she was sending home.

Nothing held her interest for long. She lost count of how many canvasses she had ruined in the last few days.

This place is getting me down! she thought after yet another mishap. I'll have to be more careful - that is the third plate I have broken today.

But the trail of disasters continued; she spilled things on the table cover, put soap into the freezer and placed Sarek's tunics into the waste disposal instead of the recycler!

Later on it did seem funny, and she laughed as she told Sarek about it, calling it 'her day of disasters'. "I must be getting absent-minded..."

"Is there anything wrong? Are your thoughts normally as distracted?" Sarek asked.

"Nothing I know of. I have been feeling a bit homesick lately, that's all. Would you play the lyrette for me?" Amanda smiled.

"If you wish." Sarek reached for the ancient Vulcan instrument.

The haunting notes filled the room, the music almost eerie in its strangeness, the alien sound conjuring up visions of the Forge and other mysteries of Vulcan. Amanda could almost feel the searing heat of the Sas-a-Shar, the sensation so real that she rose to open a window and let in the cooling night air. The window seemed to be further and further away, slipping beyond her reach as the room darkened and the haunting notes of the lyrette faded away into nothing...

Amanda woke to find Sarek gazing anxiously down at her, one strong arm pillowing her head.

"What happened?" she asked groggily, passing a hand across her eyes.

"You fainted. No, do not move." He firmly pushed her back down. "Drink this - "

The liquid in the cup was dark and bitter, almost making Amanda throw up. She guessed it must be some Vulcan medicine and managed to swallow a little.

"How do you feel now?" He took the cup away.

"A little dizzy. Sarek, did I give you a fright by passing out like that?"

"It was...unexpected," Sarek said slowly. "You require rest, the hour is late now."

He raised Amanda as if she had no weight at all and carried her upstairs, impervious to her pleas to 'put me down'. Too surprised to resist, she was put to bed like a child. Once, she woke up to meet Sarek's gaze; he had not slept at all, keeping a watch over her. She closed her eyes again as he said something in Vulcan, then his fingers touched her forehead and she knew no more...

She opened her eyes to a bright new day, all feeling of faintness gone now. Careully she got up and dressed, then made her way downstairs. Sarek put in an appearance as she was preparing breakfast; he took his place at the table after enquiring about her health.

"I'm fine now..." Amanda broke off, her eyes drawn to the plate in front of her. She quickly excused herself and left the room as she felt her stomach heave. Once outside the doorway, she ran blindly along the hallway, not really paying any attention to where she was going. The nearest doorway led to the garden and she stumbled through it and into the fresh air before being violently sick.

At least Sarek didn't come after me, she thought gratefully when she felt a little better.

I look a mess! She surveyed her pale face in the mirror a few moments later, trying to restore her looks by splashing cold water on her face and tidying her hair. Then as a sudden thought came into her mind, the comb fell from nerveless fingers...

Trying to be her normal self, Amanda made her way back to the kitchen where she had left Sarek. He raised an eyebrow as she entered and asked where she had gone.

"I - er - remembered I had left my hairbrush switched on. It could have overheated. I'm careless, I know..." Amanda turned away to hide her blushes.

"Are you sure you have recovered sufficiently to be left alone?" Sarek looked sharply at her.

"Yes, I'm perfectly well now. I'll call you at the Embassy if I need you," she assured him.

It seemed like hours instead of the few minutes it took Sarek to get ready and leave the house. Amanda breathed a sigh of relief as she heard the departing aircar. Now she could do what she wanted...

She invaded that most sacred of places, Sarek's study, and switched on the computer. Her knowledge was basic - Sarek had taught her only the rudiments of the subject. The screen began to flash, indicating that the computer awaited her instructions.

Date/time calculations between Earth and Vulcan were very complicated; Earth followed the lunar calendar but Vulcan had no moon and the days were far longer. The computer gave the answer instantly; the Vulcan weeks were the equivalent of almost three Earth months.

Amanda stared at the screen, eyes wide. Stunned, she reached for the nearest chair and sat down behind Sarek's desk. She had been too occupied lately, what with the trip out to the Forge and painting and just trying to adjust to Vulcan in general to keep a check on the lunar calendar which affected her life as a Human female -- even although she had also been warned that the change of conditions could affect her cycle too.

"I could be pregnant." She spoke out loud.

Trembling, she crossed to the videophone and pressed the code for the doctor, making an appointment to see him that afternoon. That done, another thought came into her mind. Should I call the Embassy and tell Sarek? No - I'll wait till after I have seen the doctor. It could be a false alarm.

The hours seemed to drag by on leaden feet until it was time to leave. Fortunately the doctor lived within walking distance. Amanda kept to the shady side of the walkways, crossing her fingers behind her back as she reached the doctor's house and pressed the door-call.

"Welcome. I am Dr. Steval," the tall Vulcan greeted her, ushering her into his office.

"I am Amanda, wife of Sarek," Amanda introduced herself.

"Please be seated. You wish to consult me on a medical matter?" Dr. Steval brought out the file on Human anatomy and physiology.

"Yes. I have reason to suspect I may be...pregnant," Amanda told him.

"Your husband was in pon farr recently, I presume?"

"Yes." Amanda blushed scarlet at the doctor's question.

He asked her several more questions then instructed her to lie down on the examination bed. He noted the readings on the panel and passed a scanner over

her. "You may rise." He assisted her from the couch. "The readings are positive. You are with child."

"I can't believe it!" Amanda broke into smiles, not caring about her emotions at a time like this. It was hard to stop herself from flinging her arms around the doctor's neck!

"I wish to see you both one week from today." Dr. Steval's voice broke into her illogical thoughts. "Your husband should have been present at this consultation."

"Er - yes. I'll tell him." Amanda floated in a dream world. She felt as if her feet never touched the pavement all the way home.

I'm going to have a baby... She did a little dance of joy as soon as she entered the house. How would Sarek react to the news? She would have to wait and see...he wouldn't be home for two hours yet.

Amanda wandered around the house in a daze of happiness. She had already picked out the room which would serve as a nursery for the baby, imagining all the furnishings and decor... The cot will be here, and I'll have plenty of container space over by that wall, maybe Mum will send me some materials and wall-stickers and...oh-oh...

Amanda came back to reality with a bang when she realised where she was. Sarek would not approve of 'these illogical trimmings', as he called everything not strictly necessary.

Then she went and stood in front of the mirror, carefully examining her figure for the slightest sign of her condition. Of course there was nothing. Now I'm being silly, she thought to herself as she made her way downstairs and out to the grounds to await the arrival of Sarek's aircar. He was due home from the Embassy at any time now.

Amanda's thoughts were in chaos as she scanned the sky. Sarek would know there was something wrong as soon as he saw her...

Sarek could see the figure standing by the house as the aircar came down. It caused him some moments of thought as Amanda did not usually wait in the hot sun for the arrival of his aircar. He knew there was something different about Amanda as he descended from the craft; Amanda's cheeks glowed a soft pink and her eyes sparkled. She was radiant.

She remained silent as they walked towards the house; the door swished open to admit them and closed softly.

"Sarek..." Amanda turned and buried her face in his tunic and began weeping.

Wondering what was the reason for this outburst of emotion, Sarek made no attempt to free himself from the clinging arms. He did not resist and stood there until Amanda had control of herself once more.

"What is the reason for your sadness?" he asked as Amanda wiped her eyes.

"It's not sadness. I'm crying because I'm so happy..."

Sarek raised one eyebrow at the illogic of this statement. "Explain."

"I...I'm going to have a child," Amanda blurted out.

Sarek's eyebrows almost shot off his forehead. Then, as the startling news registered, his eyes shone and the ghost of a smile appeared. "Are you certain?"

"I'm certain!" Amanda laughed, reaching up to touch the face she loved.

Sarek did not pull away or resist; instead he took both of her hands in his. "I admit to feeling emotion on this occasion. I am pleased, and proud of you, my wife. Come." He led her into the main lounge.

I have never seen him so happy before, Amanda thought as she looked into the shining eyes.

Sarek began to discuss the direction the future would now take...

Next morning, after Sarek had departed for the Embassy, Amanda composed a long message to her parents, telling them the good news.

Many hours later, Elizabeth Grayson looked up as she heard the thin warbling sound from the videophone that meant a message was coming through. It seemed like an eternity before the screen began to flash, telling her she could now go ahead and play back the message.

"Mum, I'm going to have a baby - " were Amanda's first words.

Elizabeth sat stunned, the rest of the message unheard. Charles Grayson heard the voice from the videophone and knew it was Amanda; he left what he was doing and went to hear what she had to say.

"Elizabeth! What's wrong?" He rushed to his wife's side as he entered the room. "What are you crying for? Is everything all right with Amanda?"

"Yes... Charles - she's pregnant!"

"That's great news! Play the tape again and we'll hear it together." Charles rose to send the message back to the beginning.

Charles and Elizabeth Grayson listened to every word this time, sensing the happiness coming from so far away. Charles put a comforting arm around his wife's shoulders, knowing she was close to tears once more. Silence fell after the message ended, then Elizabeth wiped her eyes.

"It is so soon. I thought she would have taken more time to adapt to her new home."

"You don't know very much about Vulcans!" Charles had a twinkle in his eye. "Amanda would have to go through a second marriage ceremony on Vulcan, and the bonding would trigger pain. I've been waiting for a message like this for some time now."

"What do you mean?" Elizabeth sounded bewildered.

Charles explained the little he knew about Vulcan biology, watching his wife's eyes grow wider and wider...

"Oh, my god! You mean our Amanda... Did you let her go to Vulcan unprepared?"

"No. I tried to talk to her before they left, but she said Sarek had already told her everything. Elizabeth - we are going to be grandparents!" Charles smiled.

"Yes, to a Vulcan! The baby will look like them!" Elizabeth sniffed.

"Vulcan or not, you will love him - or her. Imagine, me a grandpa!"

They sent a return message with their congratulations, then the videophone was in danger of overheating as they called everyone to tell them the good news.

On Vulcan the events were similar. Sarek informed the rest of the family and his colleagues at the Embassy, word spread and messages from other Ambassadors Sarek had to deal with began to arrive from all sections of the Federation.

Sarek's parents, Suval and T'Pau, came to see them and to offer their congratulations. It wasn't so bad this time - they visited when Sarek was present. Amanda liked Suval - there was something about the tall, broadshouldered Vulcan that she could almost call attractive, his dark eyes showing his long years of knowledge and wisdom. She shuddered under T'Pau's penetrating gaze; family was important on Vulcan, even if the new addition would be half Human.

Amanda also disliked the weekly visits to the hospital where the doctors monitored her progress very carefully in case of any complications. All seemed to be going well and as the weeks passed she noticed her thickening waistline.

She enjoyed perfect health, only sending a message to her parents to keep her supplied with a certain type of chocolate cookie. Several boxes arrived at a time, and she had to explain to Sarek about her craving for the sweet things. He found this hard to understand at first - apparently this symptom was unheard of in Vulcan mothers-to-be!

Then packages began to arrive from relatives and friends on Earth; the shelves of the wall cabinet in the room chosen for the nursery began to fill up with clothes and other items. Amanda loved to go through them, looking at all the tiny garments and dreaming about the baby who would wear them. Even Sarek seemed to change during this time; he was less formal towards her, asking about everything he did not understand. He accompanied her to the hospital on every occasion, looking on while the doctors carried out their tests.

Evenings were still Amanda's favourite time. Sarek examined some papers from the Embassy while she embroidered a coverlet, laying it aside when Sarek put his papers away. They talked for a while, Amanda resisting the urge to giggle at her strange appearance. Nothing would fit her any more, and she had 'borrowed' one of Sarek's tunics.

"How do I look as Vulcan's Ambassador?" she giggled, unable to control her laughter any longer.

"Indeed, you would make a most unusual representative." Sarek eyed her swollen figure.

"Look what arrived from Earth today." She held up a tiny jacket for his inspection. "My Aunt Anne sent it. She lives in - oh!" Amanda's hands flew to her abdomen.

Immediately Sarek was at her side. "Are you in pain?" he asked, concern showing in his voice.

"No - I felt the baby kicking for the first time. It was so strong... There it is again!"

She guided Sarek's hand to the exact place on her stomach, his eyes widening as the strong movement could be felt under his fingers.

This one is a footballer! Amanda thought as she received another thump. Ouch! With outsize boots on!

"Amanda, what is a 'footballer'?" Sarek asked, raising one eyebrow.

"Huh? How did you?" Then she realised he still had his hand on the place where the baby was doing all its furious kicking and had picked up her thoughts through the contact. "I - er - I was only comparing the baby's strength to that of Earth sportsmen." She went on to tell him what a footballer was.

"Illogical - " Sarek began before she stopped him from giving her a lecture on Vulcan logic by touching one pointed ear. "Amanda, cease!"

"I don't want to hear about Vulcan philosophy. I would rather talk about us." She searched for his hand, imprisoning it between her own. "Are you happy about our baby?"

"Happy? It is illogical to admit to emotions - but, yes, I am. The new life within you is the result of our marriage, the first Vulcan/Human child to be born." Sarek crossed his hand against hers in the Vulcan ritual embrace, then carried out the Human custom to please Amanda.

She could not get too close to him now, but her arms tightened around his neck as she returned his kiss. Then he felt a violent kick from her swollen body and pulled away in surprise.

"The little one does not wish us to embrace in Human fashion." He raised an eyebrow at Amanda.

"You are impossible!" She burst out laughing. "Don't ever try to tell me that Vulcans lack a sense of humour!"

Amanda would not admit it to Sarek, but the baby's movements had really hurt her. She had heard the feeling being described as 'the fluttering of a tiny bird' but that was on Earth. A tiny bird? she thought. This is more like an elephant doing a tap dance!

She decided to tell Dr. Steval about it at the next visit.

He explained to her that the child was certain to be more Vulcan than Human, and that accounted for its strength. The only medication he gave her was a mild tranquilliser to calm the baby's movements at night so she could get some sleep.

Dr. Steval switched on the monitor screen, then called Sarek to his side. "Do you wish to see your child?" he asked.

Sarek looked at Amanda and answered in the affirmative after seeing her shining eyes.

Dr. Steval turned the screen and they gazed spellbound at the tiny, shadowy form. No features could be seen but the tiny limbs were clearly visible as the baby moved.

"Your child is - "

"Stop! I don't want to know!" Amanda cut him off, jamming her fingers in her ears.

Surprised, Dr. Steval raised an eyebrow at Sarek and switched off the monitor screen.

"I'm sorry - I...I don't want to know the sex of my baby. I prefer to wait," Amanda explained.

The doctor made no comment, realising his patient's reaction was probably a Human trait. "You will come and see me next week," he informed them as they got ready to leave.

Amanda now had plenty to occupy her time; the room they had prepared as a nursery was almost ready now. The cot and a carrier had arrived from the supply centre of ShiKahr, and Amanda placed them where she wanted them. Several other items were unavailable (or unheard of) on Vulcan and she sent home for them.

Time began to drag on now, the weeks of waiting seemed endless. Amanda was tired of looking like a stranded whale, longing to return to normal once more.

It was early afternoon and she sat down in the main lounge with her workbox, bringing out the pillowcase she was embroidering. Sarek would be home in a couple of hours - he always returned home early these days and had refused to leave Vulcan on any diplomatic missions, sending another assistant from the Embassy staff instead.

"Ouch!" Amanda started and jabbed the needle into her finger as the door-call sounded. "Who can that be?" Leaving her work aside she went to see. Her heart sank as the door swished and T'Pau entered...

Amanda took a quick look to see that the other doors were closed, barred and keeping out any intruders - namely Cheeky and I-Chaya. She breathed a sigh of relief and rose to greet her visitor.

"Thee are well?" T'Pau's glance swept over her.

"As well as can be expected." Amanda looked down at her non-existent waistline, the slightly sarcastic tone in her voice completely lost on the Vulcan woman.

T'Pau remained silent as Amanda prepared the jug of iced tea. She filled her cup, then began to speak. "Thee are about to enter motherhood. The ways of Vulcan are not those of Earth; it is my duty to inform you of these matters."

Wondering what was coming next, Amanda hid her confusion by refilling the cups. That done, she sat down rather awkwardly, trying to make herself as comfortable as she could.

"Your child will be raised to follow the Vulcan heritage. If it is a girl, then you must have a boy in years to come. Our family is foremost on Vulcan and Sarek must have a son and heir."

"I...er...no-one told me..." Amanda was lost for words.

"I have observed your Earth customs in child care," T'Pau continued, looking sternly at Amanda. "The Human mother always seems to be touching her child - that is not our way."

Resentment began to simmer in Amanda at T'Pau's patronising tone and at being told she must do this and not do that. Remembering the last disastrous visit, she kept silent for the time being.

The lecture continued, T'Pau telling Amanda about the differences between a Vulcan and a Human baby. Amanda learned that the Vulcan did not take in half as much liquid and therefore the feeding arrangements were completely different.

The nurse will tell me all that! It isn't old Nosey-parker's job! Amanda thought, beginning to get tired of it all.

"Show me the room you have prepared for the child," T'Pau ordered.

Amanda's heart sank as she led the way. The stern Vulcan woman would be sure to disapprove of all the little Human touches she had added to relieve the Vulcan starkness.

T'Pau stood in the doorway, her searching glance sweeping around the room, taking in its brightness, the walls pale lemon and the window shutters a dazzling white. She crossed over to the cot, inspecting both it and the carrier, turning away satisfied when she saw they were from Vulcan. Next she turned her attention to the contents of the wall cabinets, looking at the clothes and gifts from Earth. Someone had sent a baby-care set containing bath utensils and other items. T'Pau had never seen anything like this before, and Amanda could not stop herself from shaking with laughter as the Vulcan woman took a certain item from the box, regarding it curiously...

"What is this? Is it some strange headpiece?"

"Well...no..." Amanda couldn't explain any further for the laughter bubbling up inside her. T'Pau watched with upraised brows as she sat down in the nearest chair and laughed and laughed...

"Forgive me," she apologised at last, wiping her eyes. "I cannot seem to control my emotions lately. Perhaps it is due to my condition."

"I...understand - but what is this?" T'Pau still held the offending item, which almost set Amanda off again. "Indeed?" She seemed somewhat astonished at the explanation. "Such strange Earth customs have no place in your child's life. He...or she...will be trained as a Vulcan."

"So you have already told me." Amanda's laughter was rapidly being replaced by irritation.

T'Pau was still there when Sarek arrived home. She declined his invitation to stay to dinner, saying she had not realised how late the hour was.

"She does not trust my cooking!" Amanda laughed after T'Pau had left. She had to wait until the meal was over to tell Sarek about the afternoon's events; he couldn't understand what she had found so amusing about the whole business and she had some explaining to do, interrupted now and then by an occasional giggle.

"Something tells me I am going to have 'interfering mother-in-law' trouble," she finished her story.

That night she was very restless, unable to settle to anything. It got so bad that Sarek finally told her to sit down.

"I can't - I must have a cup of coffee." Amanda disappeared in the direction

of the kitchen, returning a little while later with a tray. "Would you like to try some - please?" she coaxed.

"Very well." Sarek accepted the cup and gingerly took a very small sip of the hot liquid. Surprisingly, it was quite pleasant, tasting better than it smelled.

"You like it?" Amanda rested her own cup on her stomach, laughing at the idea. "I don't need a table."

Sarek almost dropped his own cup as his eyes followed Amanda's as the cup flew into the air in a curve, smashing into the far wall.

"Ow! I felt that one! Did you see how the baby kicked the cup and saucer? Okay, little footballer, you have already scored a goal!" Amanda patted her side where the furious movements still continued.

Sarek cleared up the pieces of the broken cup and the spilled coffee as Amanda could not bend down properly. "The little one is also restless tonight," he commented after he had finished.

"I know. Oh, I wish it was all over. Sarek, I...I'm scared!"

"I am aware of your apprehension." Sarek knew the rest of Amanda's thoughts and drew her into his strong arms. "Do you feel better now?" he asked when her trembling stopped.

"Yes..." Amanda felt safe and secure with arms around her.

"When the time comes, I will be with you," he said softly, his dark eyes looking into hers.

Some time in the early hours of the morning, a searing pain woke Amanda from a deep sleep. "Maybe it's nothing..." She waited, noting the time. Back it came exactly twenty minutes later; this time there could be no doubt. She touched Sarek's shoulder and he came awake instantly. "Sarek, it's the baby..."

She almost laughed out loud as Sarek flung off his sleeping robe and dressed in seconds. The aircar stood ready and waiting outside - as it had done for weeks now. Amanda could hear Sarek speaking in rapid Vulcan, obviously alerting the hospital that they were on their way. He assisted her out to the aircar, Amanda having to hold on as it took off, engine screaming in protest. She felt another pain coming on and could not stop herself from crying out. Sarek heard this and pushed the aircar controls forward even more, taking the craft to its limit. The speed was frightening as the buildings flashed past in a blur.

The doctors were waiting for their arrival and as soon as the aircar touched down they transferred Amanda to a medical trolley and rushed her into the special room which had been ready for this patient for some time now.

Dr. Steval was in charge; he had taken care of Amanda from the very beginning and knew all her case history. She was glad to see him there instead of a complete stranger. He asked some questions then pressed a hypo to her arm. Amanda felt the tension draining from her as the drug entered her bloodstream, her fears vanishing like magic.

"My colleagues have been following your progress with interest, and wish to be present at the birth of the first Vulcan/Human child. However, if you have any objections..."

"I don't object." Amanda smiled at the Vulcan. "I must be making history..."

"You are." Dr. Steval flicked a switch on the panel and spoke in rapid Vulcan. Soon the outer door swished and a doctor entered the special room. He was followed by another and another...

Every doctor in the hospital must have been present! They stood in a semi-circle, talking quietly among themselves and glancing up at the monitoring panel from time to time.

Amanda forgot their presence as time passed, only hearing the deep voice of Steval as he gave her instructions.

"Not long now." He glanced up at the wall chronometer as the minutes slowly ticked away.

"Sarek..." Amanda's voice broke the tense silence.

"I am here, Amanda," he answered.

"Give me your hand...please..." she begged.

Sarek did not hesitate, even although the Vulcan Doctors were present. He extended his hand to Amanda. She took it and held on. Immediately, Sarek flinched for a second as he touched her mind, experiencing everything that was happening to her. He managed to keep his features impassive and regained his control once more.

Amanda knew she was hurting him, her nails digging into his hand as she held on tighter and tighter. She also knew he was in mind contact, feeling the touch as soon as he took her hand. He spoke to her, giving her encouragement and comfort, speaking in both Vulcan and Terran. Amanda only heard his voice, not knowing what he was saying.

"Amanda!" Sarek returned her grip on his hand, touching her forehead to deepen the meld in the last few moments. Both experienced a great surge of happiness as they heard the first faint cry from the new life.

"You have a son," Dr. Steval announced.

"A boy..." Amanda sighed in delight, still keeping a tight hold of Sarek's hand. "Is he all right?"

"He is perfect," Steval replied, then spoke to Sarek in Vulcan. "Translate, please - I do not know the correct words in your wife's language."

Sarek translated his instructions to Amanda then tried to pull his hand away, but no, Amanda refused to let go of him.

Then a nurse came forward and placed the baby in Amanda's arms. Sarek looked up as she left and realised they were alone; even Dr. Steval had gone. Amanda gazed spellbound at the tiny face, noticing the upswept brows; she gently took the covering away from his head, exposing the tiny pointed ears.

"He's beautiful..." Her eyes filled with tears as she looked up at Sarek.

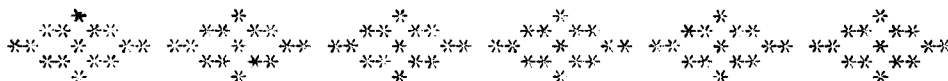
"Yes..." Sarek's voice sounded very strange as he looked at his son.

"Sarek?" Amanda's eyes met his.

"Amanda. I..." His voice broke as he fought to speak. "...I...love you."

I can't believe it! Amanda thought she had taken leave of her senses as Sarek's lips brushed hers. And to think it took your arrival finally to get him to say those three words...

She looked down as they touched hands across the tiny baby...



THE LONG AWAITED EVENT

The long months of waiting were over. A feeling of great joy overwhelmed Amanda as she heard the first faint cry from the new life she had just brought into the world.

"You have a fine healthy son." The doctor's voice sounded hollow and echoing as if coming from the far end of a long tunnel. Amanda was only half aware of the nurse leaving with the precious bundle in her arms.

Amanda was drifting, floating in a blissful world where time had no meaning, oblivious of the doctors and medical staff around her. It was almost impossible to keep her eyes from closing. At last she yielded and descended into a most welcome sleep.

The surroundings she woke to were completely different. Amanda opened her eyes to a bright but shaded room, the blinds drawn to keep out the harsh glare of the Vulcan sun. The wall chronometer read 1450 - that meant she had slept for over three hours. She turned her head and her glance fell on the cot at the side of the bed...

Amanda struggled to sit up, and, leaning over, she gazed at the tiny form it contained. Looking wasn't enough; she very carefully took the infant from the cot, fearful that she could accidentally hurt him or something, he was so tiny and fragile. With trembling hands, she loosened the blanket in which he was wrapped...

She couldn't help the cry that escaped her as she saw the baby's Vulcan features. She knew all along that he would look like Sarek, but all the same the initial shock was still there. A traitorous tear dropped from her cheek on to her son's head; no sooner had she wiped it away than it was followed by another. Whether they were tears of happiness or sadness, Amanda could not be sure.

The baby stirred, maybe due to all the moisture falling on his head. He opened sleepy dark eyes and seemed to gaze up into Amanda's face although she knew this was not possible at the present time. She touched his hand and the tiny fingers closed around her finger, the grip making her realise her son was more Vulcan than Human - that part was buried deep inside, somewhere.

Voices heard outside the door made her hastily wipe the tears from her eyes. No-one must know she had been crying. A nurse opened the door to admit Sarek. Amanda watched the tall figure approach, his face impassive as usual, but she knew that under the cold exterior he glowed with pride and happiness.

They touched hands in greeting.

"You slept long, my wife. They would not allow me to enter until you wakened."

Amanda smiled and held tight to Sarek's hand. "Thank you for all the help you gave me, and for allowing me to hold your hand with all the Vulcan doctors present. Look; Sarek - our son...isn't he beautiful?"

"Yes." Sarek's voice was strangely low as he looked at the baby, a faint smile coming to his lips. "He will be called Spock, as agreed with the Family Council, in honour of my own grandfather."

"Spock..." Amanda sounded the name, trying to get used to its Vulcaness. "It seems to suit him."

"It is an honourable family name."

Sarek did not say anything else, he just stood there looking at his son until the nurse entered and informed him that it was time to leave. Once Sarek was out of the way, the nurse gave Amanda her first instructions in child care. She looked on as the nurse carried out her duties, explaining everything in a brisk professional manner. Amanda watched in amusement as the nurse prepared a

feeder, telling her the correct amount and temperature. She went on and on, almost blinding Amanda with facts and figures. The nurse took complete charge as this was the first time Spock had been fed. Amanda laughed softly as her son greedily finished off the specially prepared food compound - or whatever it was.

Only when the first instruction ended did another nurse enter with Amanda's lunch tray.

"Next time, you will be in charge."

Amanda stared at the retreating back of the nurse. That sounded more like a threat! she thought to herself as she turned her attention to the lunch tray.

Some hours later, Amanda woke from a light sleep at the sound of the opening door. Again it was the nurse with her equipment tray.

Oh-oh! thought Amanda as she realised the time she had been dreading had come. I suppose I will have to learn some time.

Hesitantly, and very unsure of herself, Amanda carried out her duties under the watchful eye of the nurse. The fact that the nurse was Vulcan and expected a very high standard made Amanda all the more nervous, even to the point of being clumsy. After yet another mistake, the nurse gave her a look of extreme disapproval. "Lift him up, Amanda, he will not break!"

Thinking some thoughts that were not very nice, Amanda struggled on, bravely trying to cope. She was plainly terrified of touching Spock in case she would be too rough with him. Awkward or not, she felt really pleased with herself when he fell asleep straight away.

"You coped - adequately," the nurse permitted herself to say. "But you have much to learn."

Amanda began another fit of suppressed giggles when she was alone again. It seemed so funny, the nurse with her stiff face looking on disapprovingly while Amanda made one blunder after another.

Every day the teaching sessions continued and Amanda soon lost all her fears, learning to cope very well. The time began to drag now, every hour seeming like days; she couldn't wait to be released and go home.

Sarek visited every night; he showed every sign of the proud father, even although he did not realise the fact. The stern features relaxed as soon as he entered the room, the dark eyes softening as he looked at his wife and son.

"I can go home tomorrow," Amanda smiled. "The doctors told me today."

"That is good. What...?" Sarek stopped and turned his head as a faint sound reached his ears. It came from the side of the bed. "What...?" he began again, a puzzled look on his face.

"You will have to get used to this," Amanda laughed. "It is his only way of telling me he wants my attention. Sarek, could you lift him out for me?"

Sarek hesitated. No doubt he was somewhat wary of touching Spock. Very carefully he took the tiny form from the cot and placed him in Amanda's arms.

"That wasn't so bad, now."

"No...but...I..."

"I know. You do not like to touch him when he is so tiny. I was too, at first," Amanda chuckled.

Sarek said something almost to himself; Amanda caught the word 'illogical'.

"You and your logic!" she teased. "You can't fool me. Okay, little guy, you wanted Mom?"

"Illogical. He cannot tell you - " Sarek listened in disbelief as Amanda asked Spock if he was hungry. He shook his head in silent disbelief at these illogical Human traits his wife displayed. He looked on in fascination as Amanda

coped expertly with the little Vulcan. She was no longer awkward - instinct and the nurses' instruction had paid off.

"Your Mum is better than any of those old nurses!...Hey, Sarek, your feelings are showing..."

"Indeed? I was merely observing - "

"Yes." Amanda grinned. "And your eyes are as wide as saucers. It must be parenthood that is doing this to you."

Sarek made no further comment as the nurse entered. She looked disapprovingly at Amanda with Spock in her arms. The nurse firmly took him from Amanda and placed him back in his cot. "That is his place, and he should stay there. You must not constantly take him out."

Anger began to simmer in Amanda at the coldness of the nurse's voice and the way she had almost snatched Spock from her.

"You are a...cold, unfeeling monster!" she exploded. "I had to lift him out, if you would only use your eyes - and anyway, it is an instinct we have, to hold our children. A baby feels more secure in his mother's arms instead of lying in a cot all the time. I will do what I want, and there is nothing you or anyone else can do to stop me."

"Your son is Vulcan." The nurse did not know how to cope with this illogical woman.

"Yes, he is, but his training in the Vulcan way will begin as soon as he is old enough to understand. Until then I will raise him my way and - "

"My wife, be silent!" Sarek commanded.

"I will not!" Amanda's eyes flashed with fire. Anger made her speak back to Sarek, a thing unheard-of on Vulcan. She again took Spock directly from the cot into her arms, staring at the nurse, challenging her to dare say anything. Somewhat confused at this illogical woman, the nurse turned and left.

"You must control your emotions." Sarek's voice was stern. "You embarrassed me. Not even a wife may do that."

"I'm sorry. It's the atmosphere in this place. Those nurses seem to be waiting and watching all the time for me to make a mistake. They don't understand how strong the maternal instinct is in a Human. I do not expect you to understand either. I will not speak back to you again like that. Do you forgive me?"

Sarek touched the offered hand, his expression relaxing. "You are forgiven. I think I understand how in some life forms the maternal instinct is very strong. In the animal world many creatures will even kill in defence of their young."

Sarek stayed a while longer until he saw that Amanda was beginning to tire. "I will come for you tomorrow."

"And I will be counting the hours," Amanda smiled.

Sarek turned in the doorway, taking a last look at his wife in the hospital room, her baby fast asleep in her arms. "It will be good to have both of you home. Farewell until tomorrow."

The nurses did not try to interfere any more with Amanda's 'strange ways'. They let her do whatever she wanted for the rest of her stay.

The long night dragged on towards morning. Most of the time Amanda lay awake, her mind far too active to sleep. I am going home...she kept thinking.

Millions of miles warping across the distances of space, a message began to appear on the videophone of Charles and Elizabeth Grayson in the continent of the United States, Terra.

"Charles! It's from Central Control, Vulcan..." Elizabeth Grayson could

not stop trembling and held on to her husband for support.

Sarek appeared on the screen. "Greetings. I am honoured to inform you of the birth of our son. Amanda and the little one are both well. Live long, and prosper." He held up his hand, fingers parted in the Vulcan salute. The image faded.

The Graysons sat, stunned, for a few moments, staring at the blank screen. Then Charles let out a whoop of joy; he whirled his wife round the room, lifting her off her feet. "A boy! I'm a Grandpa!"

After he let her go, Elizabeth Grayson sat down in the chair and cried. He expected this - women were so sentimental! He rushed over to the drinks cabinet and opened a bottle of very expensive champagne. "I've been saving this for the day we got the news. Here, drink up, Grandma! All the best to our little grandson." They clinked glasses.

"If only the distance wasn't so far," Elizabeth sniffed, still trying to hold back the tears. "Any girl needs her mother at a time like this."

"Why not go, love? I could have a passage booked for you."

"Oh Charles! That would be wonderful!"

Leaving his wife to collect her scattered thoughts, Charles set the wheels in action by calling the travel agent. He returned, smiling. "There is a ship leaving in three days' time, and you will be on it." Elizabeth threw her arms round her husband's neck and started crying again.

That day, the Grayson's video was red hot as they called all their relatives and friends with the news.

On Vulcan it was morning. Amanda was up and dressed very early; she had hardly slept all night, she was so excited. She must have looked out of the window a dozen times in the past half hour, waiting for Sarek's aircar.

Without waiting for the nurse, she opened the travelling case and dressed Spock in outdoor clothes. He went back into the cot for a minute while she packed the rest of the baggage. The wall chronometer seemed to have stopped; the waiting was terrible.

Five minutes crawled by, then Amanda rushed to the window at the sound of a descending aircar. "Your dad has come to take us home!"

As if in reply, the little Vulcan cried, faintly at first, then louder. "What is it?" Amanda picked up the tiny form. The noise from the aircar was loud, almost a scream as the engines changed for landing. "It's all right, the noise will stop in a minute."

The noise stopped, but Spock did not, although Amanda did her best to comfort him. She was still inexperienced and it took her a while to realise why...

"Vulcans!" Amanda said to herself as she opened the packed case again. "Who said they can't be awkward the same as us?"

When Sarek walked in, he stopped, and the look on his face seemed to be close to amusement. "You are busy, my wife."

In reply, Amanda threw the pillow from Spock's carrier at him. One slanted eyebrow began to drawl upwards, and his astonished expression made Amanda dissolve into helpless laughter. Once more she packed the travelling case and Sarek took Spock's carrier.

"Come. We are going home."

Only the doctor who had taken care of Amanda for all the long months came to say goodbye; none of the nurses would come near. Dr. Steval escorted them to the aircar. "You have a fine son, the first ever Vulcan/Human hybrid to be born. May he live long and prosper."

"All I can say is thank you," Amanda replied. "Without your skill and dedication, none of this would have been possible."

"I am honoured." He raised his hand in the Vulcan salute as the aircar began to lift. Amanda waved back until the tall figure was out of sight.

The aircar flew over ShiKahr, heading away from the city with its official buildings, out towards the suburbs. Far in the distance Amanda could see the black mountains of the Forge. She looked into the carrier. The noise and motion of the aircar did not seem to trouble Spock - he was fast asleep.

They were descending now. Sarek brought the aircar to a halt right outside their home. Proudly, he took the carrier into the house, followed closely by Amanda. He set the carrier down and very carefully lifted out the tiny form. He held Spock in his arms, saying something in Vulcan.

"What did you say?" Amanda asked.

"Welcome home, Spock, my son," Sarek translated.

Amanda looked at the familiar surroundings. It was good to be home...



Amanda could not believe she was home again, back in her own home with her new baby.

The room they had prepared stood ready and waiting for its occupant. Amanda had worked hard; the decor had some little Human touches added to relieve the Vulcan starkness. Sarek installed a water supply and a small heating unit so that Amanda did not have to go to the kitchen or elsewhere - everything was at hand when she needed it.

Sarek still held Spock and Amanda took him from her husband and carried him through to the room. It was cool and shady here, the shutters closed against the harsh Vulcan sun. She put a feeder into the heating unit and while waiting for it to warm, changed Spock out of the travelling things and into something more comfortable. Clothes were cotton and lightweight here because of the heat.

By now the feeder had reached the correct temperature and Amanda sat down in the chair with Spock. This was a task she liked, holding the little Vulcan close and secure while the feeding session progressed. Sarek entered and stood silently looking on. He firmly declined when Amanda asked him if he would like to try! He made himself useful, though, bringing whatever Amanda required.

This won't last, she thought to herself. In a couple of weeks I will be left to cope on my own. She rose from the chair. "Come on, little guy. You are sleepy."

Sarek and Amanda left a few minutes later, leaving the door wide open so that any sound could be heard. Amanda headed for the kitchen. "I think it is about time we were fed too!"

She set to work, preparing Sarek's favourite dishes; after all, it was a special occasion. When everything was ready and the table set to perfection, she called Sarek through from the study. His eyes widened in appreciation as he saw the table fit for a king.

Dusk was falling by the time they had finished the meal, the open windows letting in the heavy scent of flowers as the air cooled. Amanda relaxed, drinking in the peace and quiet of her own home after the busy hospital. How much she enjoyed the special dinner; she felt very pleased as Sarek complimented her on the meal - this was rare, as Vulcans usually didn't praise anything.

"I'm glad you enjoyed it. I did, too."

To finish off, Amanda brewed some of her precious store of coffee, specially imported from Earth. Sarek did not particularly care for it at first, but now he was growing to like it. Amanda sat in a daze of happiness, the rays from the setting sun casting bands of colour into the darkening room. Sarek rose and turned a lamp on, its light just enough to see by.

Silence fell. For a while, Amanda gazed at Sarek sitting opposite. He was aware of this, the bond between them allowing him to read her thoughts - most of them illogical! Suddenly Amanda spoke, breaking the silence. "I love you."

Sarek looked away, slightly embarrassed when Amanda came out with statements like this one.

"I know. It is not logical - but I do." She leaned over to touch his hand. "I only wish you could say those three words."

"I cannot, Amanda." Sarek realised his wife's display of emotion was probably due to the reaction from the birth of her son and coming home a proud mother. He could be forgiven for being unable to express the affection she so desperately craved. Some things Amanda did, he could not understand. Sometimes she would sneak up behind him, especially when he was working, and touch his ears...she said she only 'did it to tease him' when he asked for an explanation. Most illogical!

Sarek looked at the expression of sadness on Amanda's face. He could only express his regard for her in one way.

"Come here, Amanda."

The sadness left her face as she smiled and moved closer, her blue eyes staring into his dark ones as Sarek's fingers sought her temples. The mind-meld - Sarek almost broke it as he felt the surge of love and emotion rushing to meet him. Through their merged minds he told Amanda how he loved her in his own way, and how he felt about Spock; things he could never express in spoken words. Amanda knew his every thought, and he, hers.

"Thank you," she said after the meld. "I keep asking for something you cannot give. Humans are illogical, aren't we?"

"Yes - but worth the trouble," Sarek permitted himself to say, the ghost of a smile appearing for a moment.

They talked for a long time, mostly about Spock and their plans. Sarek did not realise how late it was until Amanda tried to stifle a yawn.

"You are tired. It has been a long day."

"Yes, and it's not over yet," Amanda agreed. "I have to see to that little guy in there. Then I have to get up at three, and again at six. I will try to be as quiet as possible."

Amanda's room adjoined Spock's, with the connecting door between. With all the interruptions, it was a tired Amanda who faced the new day; sleepy-eyed, she placed the feeder in the heating unit at six. Attending to Spock took about an hour; by now it was after seven. She put Spock down to sleep and went to make breakfast as she could hear Sarek moving around.

All that day, visitors arrived. Sarek was well known as Vulcan's Ambassador; relatives, friends and people from the Embassy, the Science Academy and other places came to see the new baby. The relatives were the worst; all of Sarek's family arrived at the house, led by T'Pau, a stern, imposing woman in whose presence Amanda always felt uncomfortable.

The others made polite statements and gave the usual greetings when they saw Spock - but not T'Pau. She examined him critically, obviously searching for signs of his Human half.

Poor Amanda was kept busy serving refreshments to her guests. On Vulcan, it

was the hostess' task to do this, no-one else offered to help. She felt left out anyway as the family all spoke in the Vulcan language, too fast for her to understand - not that that worried her unduly.

Baby Spock would be immortal and a millionaire with all the greetings he received to 'live long and prosper'. Amanda had a quiet smile to herself as she prepared yet another tray of refreshments. Sarek entered the room.

"I'm working as fast as I can." Amanda poured fruit juice into iced glasses. "How many more have arrived?"

"I did not come for that reason, Amanda. Spock is...crying."

"Oh, God! I forgot the time with all those people being there. The trays are all ready... Oh, who cares? Let them wait!"

The visitors, T'Pau included, were all gathered round the carrier. Amanda excused herself and retired into another room with her son. "Maybe we'll get some peace now. Ssh - I know, your stupid mum forgot the time."

The peace did not last long. Amanda thought, Oh, no! as the door opened and T'Pau walked in. I must not let her upset me! Amanda stared at the rigid features as the questioning began.

"He cried. I suppose that is a Human trait."

"In the hospital, they all did, Vulcan or not." Amanda tried to stem her rising anger. "My son was hungry, and told me in the only way he knows at the present time."

T'Pau's searching glance seemed to sweep around the room, missing nothing. Between questions, she kept a close eye on what Amanda was doing.

You are as bad as those nurses! Amanda thought. Please don't let me make a mistake - that would be all I need, in front of her... She laid the empty feeder down. T'Pau's eyes never left her for a second. She even followed Amanda over to the clothes closet, peering inside at its contents.

Amanda made her selection from the cabinet, thinking, There is nothing more nosey than a mother-in-law! Trying hard to ignore the imposing figure, Amanda began to change her son's clothes. She felt as if both of them were specimens under a microscope. T'Pau ordered and criticised, telling her that she did not do this correctly, and that was not the Vulcan way, until Amanda could take no more.

"Here - let's see if you can do any better!" Amanda handed Spock to T'Pau. "You are doing all the talking. I would appreciate some instruction from an expert!"

Amanda was really being sarcastic, which the Vulcan woman could not understand anyway. She could not back down in front of her Human daughter-in-law, but her own family were all grown and it had been years since she had last touched a child this size.

Amanda tried hard to keep her laughter from becoming obvious as she pretended to be amazed at the lesson, making polite comments like, "Oh yes, Vulcans are always more efficient" and "Sure, I understand".

Spock did not like being handled by this stranger; although only days old, he knew that this was not his mother. He would not stop moving around on T'Pau's knee...she was forced to hold him down.

"Thank you," Amanda said as T'Pau gave him back to her. "You really showed me how a Vulcan mother would cope."

T'Pau looked pleased at Amanda's comment - little did she know! You old witch, Amanda thought to herself. I showed her; she will not try to interfere again!

T'Pau and the family finally took their leave. It was a relief to see them go. Amanda couldn't hold back the laughter any longer. She collapsed into the

nearest chair, the tears spilling down her face. It had been a long time since she had last laughed so hard. A slightly astonished Sarek wondered what the reason was for his wife's emotional outburst, but she could hardly speak, let alone tell him.

At last the fit of laughter began to subside. Amanda tried to explain to Sarek, the story interrupted now and then by an occasional giggle. Of course, Sarek could not see the humour of the situation.

"You gave Spock to T'Pau, and told her you needed her advice? I fail to understand the cause for amusement."

"Oh, never mind." Amanda gave up trying to explain. "Come on, the best way is to show you." She led the way into the room and took Spock from the cot. A fresh attack of laughter overcame her as she let Sarek see how T'Pau had tried to cope with the little Vulcan. "She couldn't even dress him properly," Amanda chuckled. "Look at her handiwork."

"I...see what you mean," Sarek admitted.

"C'mon, little guy, your Vulcan grandma was hopeless! No wonder you couldn't sleep." Amanda rectified T'Pau's errors, then they left, closing the door firmly. "If anyone else arrives they will just have to wait a while. He needs to sleep."

No sooner had she said that than the door-call sounded. Sarek answered and returned with a message tape. "This is from Earth."

The smiling faces of Charles and Elizabeth Grayson appeared on the screen. "We are thrilled with the news. Congratulations to you both. Elizabeth arrives on Vulcan in three days' time - when you receive this, she will be on her way." Elizabeth waved and gave a big smile. "See you soon. I can't wait to see my little grandson. Bye."

"My mother is coming here!" Amanda yelled in delight, throwing her arms around Sarek. He gently but firmly removed the clinging arms from around his neck.

"I am...pleased. Your mother has not been to Vulcan before."

"This will be her first visit. It will be great to have someone Human to talk to, especially now. I miss her."

Time flew by almost too quickly. Amanda had a lot to do between looking after Spock and preparing for her mother's visit.

Sarek departed for the spaceport alone as Amanda did not want to take Spock on the journey. Also, the spaceport was very noisy, with screaming engines from the landing and taking off shuttles. It was no place for a young baby.

Elizabeth Grayson stared out of the window at this alien landscape below. How strange and weird it looked, the colouring all wrong. She shuddered at the red sky. How different it looked from the soft blue of Earth!

The shuttle screeched to a halt on the runway. Elizabeth felt as if she was being slowly grilled in front of a roaring furnace as she walked the short distance to the terminal building. Sarek waited to meet her.

"Greetings, Mrs. Grayson. I trust you had a pleasant journey?"

Elizabeth let her half-raised hand fall to her side. Embarrassed, she remembered that Vulcans did not shake hands. "I...er...yes, I had a pleasant journey. Where is Amanda?"

"She stayed at home. Come." Sarek led her towards the aircar.

He did not speak much on the journey. Elizabeth was too engrossed in looking out of the window to notice. She expected the buildings to be coldly functional and logical; the beauty of design came as a great surprise. She looked down on landscaped gardens and walkways where flowers of all colours bloomed in profusion.

The aircar descended, stopping in front of a gateway, the house partially hidden by a high wall. "This is our home. Welcome." Sarek helped her from the aircar.

Amanda came running out of the doorway when she heard the arriving aircar. Mother and daughter met in a tearful embrace. Sarek silently watched, thankful for the privacy afforded by the wall, which hid the emotional scene from any passers-by.

The interior of the house was shady and cool, a welcome relief from the blazing heat. Elizabeth sank into the nearest chair, wiping the perspiration from her forehead.

"Where is he?"

"First things first." Amanda pressed a glass of iced fruit juice into her hand. "Drink it, Mum - we don't want you passing out from the heat or anything."

Amanda forced her mother to sit and rest for a while to get used to the temperature and thin air. Elizabeth was impatient to see her little grandson; she laid down the empty glass. "I have recovered. Please, Amanda, I can't wait any longer. Take me to see him."

"All right, Mum. This way."

Elizabeth went straight to the cot as soon as they entered the room. "He's sleeping." She gazed at the tiny form. "Amanda, what have you called him?"

"Spock."

"Sp - what? Amanda, what kind of name is that?"

"Well, I could hardly call him Charles. He is Vulcan."

"What? Oh, Amanda!" Elizabeth's eyes filled with tears. "You mean he looks like them?"

"Yes, Mum. I know, it must be a shock to you, but he is very precious to me and I love him."

"I don't doubt it for a minute." Elizabeth wiped the tears from her eyes. Amanda reached over and lifted him out. "C'mon, little sleepy-head! Your grandma has come all the way from Earth to see you. Here, grandma." She placed Spock in her mother's arms.

"Oh, he is so tiny...can I take his covers off?"

"Go ahead, Mum. I just put a cover over him when he is sleeping."

Elizabeth felt her eyes beginning to blur again as she held her little grandson. Vulcan or not, she already adored him. Amanda smiled as her mother could not resist touching one tiny pointed ear. Spock wriggled and turned his head.

"You don't like that," she laughed.

"Just like his father," Amanda commented, her face growing slightly pink after she realised what she had said. Her mother pretended not to notice.

"Who's still sleepy?" she asked as Spock yawned.

"We'll leave him for a while. I'll get dinner ready - you must be hungry."

"I am."

Elizabeth went to her room to unpack, then took a quick shower and changed into a lighter dress. She wandered downstairs again; there was no sign of Sarek so she joined Amanda in the kitchen.

"Look at this place..." Elizabeth stared round at all the unfamiliar things. "Do you know how to operate all this stuff? It looks more like a computer room than a kitchen." She opened cupboards and looked inside, then noticed the massive freezer which filled one whole side of the kitchen.

"That is essential because of the heat." Amanda answered her mother's unspoken question.

"How do you manage to cope? Everything looks so strange, especially the food."

"I made some real disasters at first," Amanda admitted. "Once I almost poisoned Sarek. I put in a wrong ingredient and he took one mouthful and left the room in a hurry. That is the first time I ever saw a Vulcan running!"

Elizabeth watched as Amanda prepared all the strange-looking dishes, most of them cold. She was delighted (and very surprised) to find everything delicious when they sat down to dinner later. She gave up asking what the dishes were, the names far beyond her understanding.

Sarek disappeared into his study after dinner and Elizabeth watched as Amanda attended to Spock. She left her mother holding him and went to make a big pot of coffee from her precious store.

"The first ingredient for a good old chat!" Amanda laughed, balancing Spock on one arm and a cup of coffee in the other hand. She proceeded to tell her mother everything, the long months of waiting, her hopes and fears and the birth itself, plus all about the stay in hospital. She started to deliver a sermon to Elizabeth, imitating the stern tone of the Vulcan nurse. The laughing increased even more as she told her mother about the incident with T'Pau. Both mother and daughter roared with laughter, so much that Sarek looked in to see what all the noise was about. He left, shaking his head at 'those illogical Human females'.

"Oh, you shouldn't have told me," Elizabeth confessed. "I'll start laughing again the moment I see T'Pau - I suppose I have to meet her?"

"I'm afraid so. There is just something about her - she is all Vulcan, and makes me feel about two inches high."

"When do we have to meet Sarek's family?"

"Tomorrow. We'll have to go to their house. I'll be sure to keep Spock away from T'Pau - he doesn't like her, somehow... I've never seen him do anything like that before, he moved around so much when she was trying to cope with him that she almost let him fall."

"Don't, Amanda!" Elizabeth burst out laughing again. "I'll disgrace you, showing 'illogical' emotions while we're there if you keep laughing about it!"

They talked for a while longer, finishing all the coffee. Amanda tidied up and paused to look out of the window on the way back to the living room. "Let's go for a little walk. Come on, Mum - I'll show you around. It's cooler in the evenings."

"Yes - cools down to around a hundred degrees! It still feels very hot out there. What about Spock?"

"We'll take him with us - we won't be going far anyway."

The size of the garden amazed Elizabeth, as did many of the plants - especially the fruit trees, their branches heavy with a strange looking purple fruit.

"What is that...?" Elizabeth started in fright as a large shaggy creature appeared from the trees, lumbering towards them. She prepared herself to run, when Amanda put a restraining hand on her arm.

"It's all right, Mum, it's only I-Chaya, our pet sehlat. We found him as a cub and brought him home."

"A pet? That thing? It's a monster! Look at the teeth it has!"

The sehlat stood regarding them for a moment, sniffing the air. Deciding that this Human wasn't hostile, he came right up to Elizabeth; almost reaching to her shoulders, he nudged her with his nose.

"He likes you." Amanda patted the huge furry head. "Touch him, Mum - he

wants to make friends."

Gingerly, Elizabeth touched the sehlat's head then drew back as the animal made a sound halfway between a croon and a growl. He caught sight of the baby in Amanda's arms and sniffed, obviously wanting to investigate further. She allowed him to come closer; I-Chaya lowered his head, his nose twitching.

"Oh no you don't." Amanda firmly pushed him away as his tongue came out to try and lick Spock's face.

The sehlat followed them as far as the gateway and then turned back. The heat still seemed overpowering to Elizabeth; she was forced to walk slowly, the thin air making her gasp for breath. She looked around with interest at the landscaped gardens. Every now and then an aircar flashed past overhead.

"Isn't that beautiful?" She pointed to a fountain sending up sprays of blue water. "Amanda, why do all the houses have high walls around them?"

"Vulcans like privacy in their homes."

On their walk they met several Vulcans. There was no staring or head turning as Humans would have done on meeting aliens. Elizabeth was surprised when each one stopped to speak to them, giving the hand greeting. They greeted Spock too with 'Live long and prosper, little one' and wished Elizabeth 'A pleasant stay. Vulcan welcomes you.'

"I never would have believed it." Elizabeth sounded astonished as they went on their way. "I always thought Vulcans were so reserved and formal."

"No, they will not pass you in the street without giving you a greeting of some kind, even if it's only a nod of the head."

"You live and learn. Can we turn back now, Amanda?"

"Yes, I think we have gone far enough down the street for your first time."

Elizabeth retired early that night, tired out after the journey and the new surroundings. Her room was on the top floor, far away from the downstairs connecting rooms which Spock and Amanda shared.

"You won't be disturbed by my moving around at all hours," Amanda explained.

Bright sunlight poured into the room when Elizabeth awoke to someone knocking on the door. "It's me, Mum." Amanda entered with a breakfast tray. "I let you sleep as long as possible. Remember we have to visit Sarek's family today?"

"Look at the time! 1020...Why didn't you waken me earlier?"

"You were exhausted, Mum. Did I disturb you during the night?"

"No, I never heard a thing. How long have you been up?"

"Since six. I'll leave you to take your breakfast in peace - I still have to get Spock ready."

Elizabeth ate and dressed in a hurry. She did not like to keep Sarek and Amanda waiting. When she went downstairs, Sarek was out at the aircar and Amanda looked up from the carry-bag she was packing. Spock lay in his carrier, all ready to travel.

"Oh, hi, Mum. I don't know how long we'll be away, so this has got to go as well."

Ten minutes later, they were in the aircar and on their way. The journey was a short one, but too far to walk in the increasing heat.

"Well, here goes!" Amanda and her mother exchanged glances as the aircar stopped. Sarek took the carrier and led the small procession up the long walkway.

"Welcome. Our home is yours," T'Pau greeted them, staring at Elizabeth. The formal greetings took place when they entered the house. T'Pau introduced the family, beginning with the males and ending with a little girl who looked to be about ten years old. She was Spock's cousin.

"...and thee are called?" T'Pau looked at Elizabeth.

Amanda answered for her, carefully remembering the Vulcan formal manner of speech. "I introduce Elizabeth Grayson, she who is my mother."

"Welcome. Vulcan honours you."

The formalities over, they were served some kind of iced tea, the custom on Vulcan being to offer guests a cool drink. Elizabeth Grayson was too much 'on edge' to relax; she tried to make polite conversation, carefully choosing her words and trying desperately to keep any emotion from showing on her face. How difficult it was to stop herself from smiling every time she spoke or answered a question.

"The resemblance is great between she who is your wife and the mother," T'Pau addressed Sarek.

Elizabeth did not know how she got through the main meal which followed; fortunately, Amanda had taught her the correct way of using the different pieces of cutlery and she got through it with only one mistake. T'Pau looked pleased when Elizabeth complimented her on the meal.

"I am honoured."

The conversation resumed. No-one showed any sign of leaving the table. After a while, Amanda asked permission to be excused, following Vulcan custom.

"Most certainly," T'Pau replied, making a sign to T'kel. Amanda grabbed the carrier and followed the Vulcan woman.

To her horror, laughter began to bubble up in Elizabeth. I must not! she thought, biting her lip until it almost bled. I cannot disgrace myself! Wildly, she racked her brains for a solution.

"I...ah...Would you mind if I saw your garden? At home I am a keen gardner, and I would find it interesting."

"A strange request, but I will honour it. Sarek will conduct you." T'Pau nodded assent.

Once out of sight and hearing, Elizabeth buried her face in her hands and gave way to silent laughter. Sarek guessed her reason for leaving the Vulcan company; he stood by until Elizabeth had control of herself once more.

"My apologies, Sarek." She wiped her eyes. "But I could not disgrace myself in front of your family. I had to get out somehow..."

"I do not understand why, but for a Human it was a most logical thing to do. We shall return now."

The table had been cleared away when they entered the house. Elizabeth remembered to make some suitable comments about the garden. When Amanda returned, Sarek stated it was time for their departure.

"Perhaps we will meet again. Farewell, Elizabeth Grayson." T'Pau gave the Vulcan salute.

Once safely in the aircar, Elizabeth began to laugh again.

"What's so funny, Mum?"

"I was so embarrassed in there! When you left with Spock, I knew I was going to laugh, so I asked to see the garden as an excuse to get out." Amanda chuckled too; Sarek's eyebrows went up, but he remained silent, no doubt thinking his own thoughts about these illogical females.

The days flew by, going far too fast for Elizabeth's liking, and the day of her departure grew nearer. Vulcan gave her a typical send-off - the day dawned blazing hot, by eight the temperature had already reached one hundred and fifty degrees. Amanda did not want to take Spock out in the heat to the noisy spaceport

so mother and daughter said their farewells in his room.

"I will miss you." Elizabeth held her little grandson for the last time. "Take care of him, Amanda, and come to see us soon."

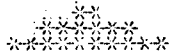
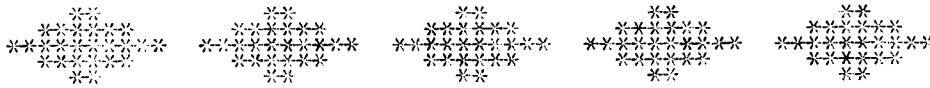
She was still crying as the aircar lifted and shot off out of sight. Amanda stood there staring into the empty sky. Slowly she turned and entered the house.

Spock's room looked even more Earth-like with the things Elizabeth had left behind. On top of his clothes cabinet sat a huge teddy-bear and a large furry dog lay on guard at the foot of the cot. Above the window a windchime made of famous Terran story-book characters tinkled in the hot Vulcan breeze.

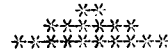
Amanda gazed sadly at the furry toys, a constant reminder of her mother's visit.

"They will be for decoration only," she said quietly, looking down at the little sleeping Vulcan. "You will never play with them - you won't be allowed to."

She closed the door and went out to meet Sarek's aircar when it returned.



FATHER IN A FIX



How empty and silent the house seemed now that Amanda's mother had gone home. Already she missed her presence. Sighing, Amanda looked at the tiny sleeping form in the cot, then left, softly closing the door behind her as she heard the sound of the approaching aircar.

"Did Mum get away on time?" she asked Sarek as he alighted from the vehicle.

"Affirmative. The shuttle departed at the appointed hour."

"I miss her... What are you doing?" Amanda asked as he strode towards Spock's room.

Sarek stood in the doorway looking around for some moments, a puzzled Amanda beside him.

"Remove these illogical objects." He indicated the toys and things that Elizabeth Grayson had brought from Earth. "They serve no purpose."

Amanda obeyed his instructions, removing the furry dog, the giant teddy bear and the tinkling wind-chimes above the window.

I knew this would happen, she thought as she stowed the toys and things away in a cupboard. They have no place here. He will not be allowed to see them, let alone touch them.

"I have done what you wished," she informed Sarek when the task was complete.

Sarek nodded gravely. "Spock is Vulcan and will be trained to his Vulcan heritage."

"But...he is only weeks old..."

"That is irrelevant. Do not interfere with my teachings, Amanda."

"I understand." Amanda's eyes were downcast, her heart heavy. She wondered just what was in store for Spock. Growing up would be a harsh experience, his Vulcan training hard and rigorous. She found herself wishing that he could stay the way he was, helpless and dependent on her for everything. The thought was illogical and degrading to her young son. She dismissed it before Sarek could sense it.

The days passed. Amanda was careful not to say or do anything which would

seem illogical to Sarek. When he was present, she attended to Spock with the cool manner of a Vulcan mother. The atmosphere changed abruptly when Sarek was not present, rather more so when he departed for the Embassy and his official duties. Amanda could hold her son in her arms as much as she wanted to; most of the time she carried him around with her as she went about her household tasks.

Late afternoon was Amanda's favourite time. Every day at 1500 hours she would sit down and devote all her attention to Spock, calling this the 'Human hour'. Half forgotten stories and songs came into her mind, things that her own mother had taught her. She sang them softly, now and then stumbling over forgotten words, but Spock did not seem to mind.

A little rhyme was her favourite, something about a family of rabbits; her fingers did the actions. She smiled as the dark eyes followed the movements.

"You like that! All right, I'll do it again."

The song was repeated. Again Spock's eyes followed the movement of Amanda's fingers. She laughed softly, placing one finger on his chin, just below the mouth. "Come on, smile for Mum," she coaxed. "I know you can do it."

She smiled herself a few times; his eyes fixed on her face. Then the corners of the tiny mouth drew upwards, the smile lasted for a few seconds and was gone...

Amanda found that her cheeks were wet with tears. "I knew you could!" she cried, holding the tiny form against her.

A day or so later, Amanda was so busy singing the 'rabbit song' and laughing at Spock's reactions that she failed to hear the arriving aircar...

"What are you doing?" The deep voice made her stop immediately. She turned to see Sarek standing in the doorway. He was home early!

"I...I...was..." Amanda stammered, her face crimson.

"I saw you performing some sort of illogical hand signals and you were singing. What purpose does this serve?" One eyebrow climbed upwards.

"My actions were logical," Amanda replied. "The hand movement helps his eyes to focus and...well, the song was an old one from Earth."

For once Sarek could not say that his wife's actions were illogical - even if he thought so himself.

Sarek did not go to the Embassy the following day. Spock was one month old and they had to report to the medical centre. The idea filled Amanda with a sense of dread; she knew it was foolish, but she did not like doctors very much - especially Vulcan ones! But they had to go.

Sarek brought the aircar to a halt outside the main entrance. A nurse met them and escorted them through the maze of corridors. Sarek sat down to wait as she ushered Amanda into the medical room.

The doctor rose and came forward. Dr. Steval - at least here was a familiar face; Dr. Steval had taken care of Amanda from the very beginning. He greeted her formally and indicated for her to take a seat.

"How is the little one?" he asked, taking Spock from her.

Amanda watched as he laid Spock on the special examination bed. At once the panel began to give readings which the doctor noted.

"Very good...weight satisfactory...what about feeding?" he asked Amanda.

"No problems. He always finishes it." Amanda smiled, forgetting her manners.

"Yes." Dr. Steval looked sharply at her then asked some more questions. Amanda answered then went over to the examination bed as instructed.

The panel began to give out a high-pitched whine at the unusual Human readings. The doctor adjusted it and the loud noise ceased.

"You are both in excellent health," he said when the examination was complete. "You will both return in four weeks' time."

Thankful it was all over, Amanda left the medical room. Sarek did not speak until they were in the aircar, then asked Amanda what had taken place.

"He was pleased with both of us," Amanda replied. "Spock's readings were normal. Mine, too."

"That is good," Sarek answered as the aircar sped towards home.

During the following days, a strange sensation of restlessness began to grow in Amanda. It grew stronger and stronger with each passing day until she felt as if she just had to get away and be alone for a while. Spock was asleep and she gathered her sketchbook and paints, calling to Sarek that she was going out.

Amanda found herself taking the path towards the edge of the Forge. The sun blazed down over the barren sands, causing the landscape to distort slightly in the heat shimmer. Amanda walked until she found some sparse shade then sat down, opened the book and began to sketch. All her problems vanished as she concentrated on capturing the beautiful colours of a butterfly before it flew off. Time stood still...

At home, Sarek fed some diplomatic tapes into the computer. In a few days' time, there was to be an important meeting with the Ambassadors from three different planets. Everything had to be ready by then.

Something broke his concentration from the voice of the computer. He switched off the tape and listened...silence. Frowning slightly, he depressed the switch and the voice began again. The tapes and diplomatic papers mounted on the desk as the work progressed.

Once more Sarek's mind was wrenched away from the computer. Swiftly crossing the study he opened the door as the cries reached him.

He entered Spock's toom and stood there looking down at his son for a moment, then turned and glanced at the wall chronometer. Amanda had been gone for over three hours now. It was unlike her to stay away so long.

Obviously something was wrong as Spock had tried to communicate in the only way he knew. Sarek had only held his son once and he strove to banish the illogical feeling of apprehension as he very carefully took the tiny form from the cot. At once Spock became quiet, and Sarek stood there holding him very awkwardly, now knowing what to do.

"What is it you require?" He spoke out loud, looking into the dark eyes.

Gently he placed his fingers on the tiny forehead. The mindtouch was light and at once Sarek was overwhelmed by the sensation of hunger.

"I understand." One slanted eyebrow began to crawl upwards as he discontinued the mindtouch. What was he to do? On Vulcan it was the duty of the mother to attend to her child; Sarek had only been present once, then left Amanda to her own devices. He thought of contacting T'Pol, his cousin who lived in the neighbourhood, then dismissed the thought as illogical. It would be a disgrace to ask another for assistance. If Vulcans could swear, Sarek would probably have done so. Vulcan diplomat or not - for once, he felt completely at a loss...

Spock's requirements could not be ignored. Sarek looked at the wall cupboards and pressed the first release. The panel swished open to reveal clothes stacked on the shelves. Wrong one... At the third attempt he finally found the one he sought. He looked at the array of feeding equipment with something very close to dismay before taking the necessary items from the shelf.

What do I do with this? he thought. I have no knowledge of the correct amount or temperature.

Still carrying Spock, he turned and strode towards the study. There stood

the computer, the answer to all his problems!

Armed with the information, he returned to the nursery and began to carry out the computer's instructions. The red light winked on the heating unit and he removed the feeder. Offering it to Spock, he was relieved when the little Vulcan accepted it and Sarek looked on with something close to wonderment as Spock finished every drop of the food compound.

Sarek placed him back in the cot and stood looking down at him for a moment or so before leaving for the study. This time he left the door open.

The work resumed. Once more he began to feed the diplomatic tapes into the computer. It seemed a slow and laborious task now; Sarek found his concentration wavering. Several times he switched off and listened for any sounds from the other room. None came, but he snapped off the computer as his mind received a strong impression from the young life. Although Spock was only weeks old, his feelings were strong enough to be received by another Vulcan.

What now? Sarek thought as he left his study once more.

Still no sign of Amanda... Sarek found himself wishing she was at home. Her absence made him realise just how inadequate his knowledge was to be able to cope with this situation. Amanda always knew what Spock was trying to tell her, but he had to resort to the mind touch.

Again he took his son into his arms and placed his fingers on the tiny forehead. Sarek's eyebrows almost shot off his forehead as he felt the impressions flooding into his mind.

"Indeed?" He spoke out loud as he withdrew the mindtouch. "It is illogical to feel emotion but I am in apprehension of touching you...should I happen to hurt you..."

Dismissing the illogical thought he pressed the release on the wall cupboard...

Amanda laid down her pencil and looked up from the sketchbook. "Oh, no!" she exclaimed in horror, jumping to her feet as she realised how low the sun had fallen in the sky, the L-langdon mountains now in deep shadow. "I must have stayed out here for hours and I have left Spock with Sarek!"

In her haste to get home, Amanda left her artist's materials behind. She ran part of the way, then slowed to a walk as she approached the first streets. On Vulcan it would never do to be seen running. Even so, by the time she reached home the breath rasped in her throat from the effort of hurrying in the thin atmosphere.

Amanda rushed towards Spock's room as soon as she entered the house, noticing as she passed that Sarek's study door was open and tapes were scattered over the floor. Most unusual for a tidy Vulcan.

Her heart sank even lower as she heard Sarek's voice coming from Spock's room. She paused in the doorway, still struggling for breath. It was driven from her in a gasp of astonishment as she took in the scene before her. An empty feeder lay on the floor along with several other items, while Sarek - the staid and unemotional Vulcan - was busily coping with Spock, and by the look of it, succeeding very well!

Amanda knew she could not conceal the astonishment on her face as Sarek walked over and placed Spock in her arms. His chin lifted as well as an eyebrow and she knew this meant trouble.

"Your son, whom you abandoned." Sarek's voice sounded stern and cold. "Explain your illogical actions."

"I - er - I felt I needed to be alone for a while and...I forgot the time," Amanda faltered.

"Spock required your attention."

"I can see that." Amanda glanced around. "I'm sorry, Sarek - it will not happen again. But...how did you know?"

"I heard him, and used the mind touch."

Amanda picked up the empty feeder and looked at it. "How did you know what to do with this? I mean, you only watched me preparing it once."

"I asked the computer for the necessary information," was Sarek's reply.

Amanda dissolved into helpless laughter at the thought of the computer giving Sarek the information and telling him what to do. He stood there, looking at her with upraised eyebrows until she had control of herself once more.

"I fail to comprehend what you are finding so amusing."

"Imagine a computer...? Sorry. Please continue." Amanda tried hard to stifle the giggles.

Sarek carried on in his logical manner. "I placed Spock back in the cot and returned to my work in the study -" He broke off as Amanda struggled to keep from laughing. "As I was saying -" he gave her a stern look. "My work was interrupted a second time when I received a mental impression that he was trying to call me."

"Did you ask the computer again?" Amanda managed to keep a straight face.

"No." Sarek shook his head. "I used the mind touch."

Amanda bit her lip until it almost bled; she did not want to laugh as Sarek kept on describing how he had managed to cope with the little Vulcan. The effort became harder and harder; she clenched her fists, trying vainly to keep her laughter from breaking out as she listened to Sarek's grave voice and imagining his actions.

It was no use. Amanda gave way to her feelings when Sarek told her of how he had tried to keep Spock from falling.

"..I could not hold him still, he kept struggling and kicking..." Amanda laughed till the tears ran down her face.

"It seems I am always apologising for showing my emotions." She wiped her eyes. "Spock would probably be thinking, 'Who is this ham-fisted guy?'"

She set about clearing up the room, retrieving all the things Sarek had dropped on the floor.

"There." She straightened up. "You coped excellently and I would like to say thank you. It will not happen again."

She reached up and planted a swift kiss on the astonished Sarek's cheek. He hastily retreated, saying something in Vulcan.

"I think I know what that means." Amanda looked down at Spock. "I had better not go away again. What do you think of the idea?"

The dark eyes solemnly gazed up into her face as she laughed...

