

Mind Shadow [042 5.0]

by M J dillard.

Synopsis:

To James Kirk, the planet seemed like a

pastoral paradise when he and

Spock first beamed down. But when space

pirates begin ravaging and

Spock is gravely injured -- his mind

seemingly destroyed -- Kirk

realizes that things are not as they seem. The

planet hides a deadly

secret, and the key to that secret is locked in

Spock's brain -- if only

Spock can remember the secret and communicate

it to his Captain!

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ISBN: 0-671-70420-6

First Pocket Books printing January 1986

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Printed in the U.s.a.

Chapter One

IT WAS LATE afternoon. The sun slid below the
mountain

peaks that surrounded the mesas on all sides and
the sky faded slowly to a dustier shade of blue.

Kirk

raised a hand to shield his eyes, not from the fiery
glow

of the setting sun, but from colors so vivid and
intense

that his optic nerves perceived them as almost painful,

like dazzling light: the purple of the mountains, the

brilliant blue of the sky, the incandescent

golden-red

of the vines, which crept up the sharp sides

of the

mountains and tumbled onto the plateaus below.

Kirk stood with his men on the tallest plateau in

the

valley, between the towering mountains and the terrain-four

hundred feet below, a tidy patchwork of

fastidiously tilled fields and trellised

vines stretching

almost to the horizon.

Spock motioned silently with the tricorder, and the

group crossed a thick blue-green carpet of

vegetation,

the humans with their heads tilted back to better

drink

in their surroundings, the Vulcan with his eyes on the

tricorder. They had not gone far at all when

Kirk

stopped to fill his lungs with cool damp air.

"Smell

that, Doctor."

McCoy obeyed the order and turned to smile.

"Well, I'll be... smells like the summer

jasmine we

had back home his

"When's the last time you had the chance

to smell

wildflowers, Bones?"

McCoy rolled his eyes even further

heavenward.

"I'd rather not think about it, if it's all the same

to you his

"Too long," sighed Scott, his tone

approaching reverence.

He shook his head willy. "I can't believe

that anybody would want to destroy this . . . ach,

if

this place inna a sight for sore eyes his
Spock looked up at last from the tricorder;
he had
been studying the readout with such a detached air
that it seemed doubtful he was aware of the breathtaking
landscape surrounding him. "Atmosphere
oxygen-rich,
Captain, slightly more than Terran standard."
He
hesitated for an instant. "Are your eyes
troubling you,
Mr. Scott?" he asked blandly.
Kirk grimaced. It was impossible to tell if
his first
officer was taking Scott's remark with typical
Vulcan literalness, or merely enjoying some odd
private joke.
McCoy responded with disgust before the groaning
engineer could reply. "He's just trying to say that
it's
pretty here, Spock. Of course, I'm sure
that's something
you wouldn't understand. I'm sure you find that
tricorder readout infinitely more exciting."
"I am not incapable of aesthetic appreciation,
Doctor,"

Spock replied mildly, apparently not in the least bit insulted. "However, I must admit to finding certain data in the readout quite fascinating, particularly the concentration of mineral elements in the soil--"

"Later, Spock." Kirk silenced him with an absent-

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minded wave of his hand, afraid the spell cast

by the

planet's beauty might be broken. "How long

has it

been since I've been on solid land like this,

near

flowers, animals... his

"Exactly four-point-seven months since our

last

shore leave," Spock volunteered.

"Too long," McCoy muttered to himself.

Scott's voice was plaintive. "We will be

taking

shore leave after we complete this mission, won't

we,

sir?"

"If Star Fleet can't come up with any more last minute distress calls." Kirk's weak smile was unconvincing.

"Let's hope for the best, gentlemen."

As the light dimmed, the four came upon a small well-kept vineyard. Spock reactivated the tricorder.

"Life form reading ahead, Captain.

Humanoid."

Beyond the field of trellised golden vines stood

a

small hut, nothing more than a mound of dried

gray

twigs, homely and awkward compared to its

glorious

surroundings. But the to one being who stood in front

of

the hut was as striking and deeply colorful as her

planet. Her skin was golden, her eyes as

purple as the

nearby mountains and her brows as sharply

upswept.

Silver hair spilled down her back onto a

cloak the color

of the sky. She was very, very old, and her demeanor

was that of one whose age has brought her to expect a

good deal of respect from her juniors.

As the aliens approached, she rose to her full

height

of four feet and studied them with hooded eyes.

She

spoke slowly, neither smiling nor making any form

of

obeisance. "I am Natahia, the

representative of the

growers of the Aritani."

Kirk inclined his head slightly in what he

hoped

suggested respect. "I am Captain Kirk,

representative

of the United Federation of Planets. First

Officer,

Commander Spock. Chief Medical Officer,

Dr.

Leonard McCoy. Chief Engineer,

Lieutenant Commander

Montgomery Scott."

She did not acknowledge the polite nods

directed

toward her. "What protection does the Federation

offer us? We do not welcome the intervention of outsiders, but too many of our people have died."

Kirk matched her directness. "We can show you how to shield your planet using a protective device

that the raiders' ships cannot penetrate. Mr.

Spock

and Mr. Scott will install it for you and instruct you

in

its operation, and Dr. McCoy is here to help

your

wounded."

Natahia considered this information silently for a

moment; when she spoke again, her eyes were full of

Pride and sorrow. "We are a people who revere the

simplicity of life, Captain. We despise

technology and

its resultant complications, for our ancestors

once

worshipped it, as you do, and so destroyed themselves.

We have learned to let the land provide all we

need. But now we are forced to make use of your

technology to save our people and our land in order to

provide. Please understand that we welcome you with

reluctance." She looked sternly at Kirk.

"What price

does the Federation demand for this service?"

"The Federation asks for nothing. If you wish, Aritani may ally itself with us."

She lifted an arched brow suspiciously.

"What benefit

is it to us to join you?"

"The Federation represents many planets, with no

favor shown to its stronger members. All

planets are

given a voice. We have banded together because together

we are strong. If Aritani joins, it

would have a

say in Federation matters and would receive the

protection

of the Federation."

"The affairs of the Federation are of little concern to

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us," she said coldly. "What is the penalty if

we accept

your protection, but do not join the Federation?"

"There is no penalty. Our protection is

freely offered,

regardless of your decision."

"Aritani then accepts the protection of the

Federation,

Captain Kirk. Talk to us about the glories of
your
Federation when the attacks on my people have
ceased."

Kirk privately congratulated himself for not
matching
her coldness. "Very well," he answered
politely.

"We'll beam down the necessary equipment for
con-structing
the shields. Mr. Scott and Mr.
Spock will
stay here to assemble it for you and show you its
operation."

"And if you can show me to your wounded,
ma'am," McCoy suggested, stepping forward
slightly.

"Only one still survives hhis morning's
attack. The
ships appear so quickly in the sky, as if from
nowhere,
that there is no time for those working in the fields to
hide. Five died this morning, and their fields
are
scorched, useless." She lowered her eyes. "A
terrible

thing, to see land destroyed."

Kirk and McCoy exchanged dark glances.

Spock,

however, appeared not to notice her seemingly greater concern for her land than for her people.

"Cloaking devices, Captain," he said. "It

would

explain why we detected no vessels in the

immediate

area."

Kirk nodded. "Spock, can you compute the

maximum

amount of time that a small pirate vessel could

operate a cloaking device without refueling?"

"Certainly, Captain. Of course, it

requires an enormous

amount of fuel to operate such a device.

Depending

on the type of ship, I would say no more than

seven-point-four-two hours. That is, of

course, a

rough estimate, based on the types of vessels

currently

used for surface attacks and known to Star

Fleet

Intelligence,--"

"Thank you," Kirk silenced him. "That is sufficient for our purposes."

"Sir... do you propose to trap some of the pirate vessels beneath the shield?"

Kirk smiled. "That is exactly what I propose to do, Mr. Spock."

"What exactly is this shield?" Natchia demanded.

Spock turned to her. "An electromagnetic force that repels any physical object coming in contact with it.

The pirate ships will be unable to penetrate it and will therefore be unable to attack the populace on the planet surface. It will also prevent those remaining on the surface after the installation of the shield from escaping."

"And of course," Kirk added, "if we can succeed in capturing one of the pirates, we can locate their

base.

No doubt it's on a nearby planet or larger vessel."

"Natahia," asked Spock, "do you have any idea

why the pirates have chosen to attack your people?"

She tilted her face up at him in a small gesture of

uncertainty. "The land is full of many

things which are

not important to us. Perhaps the pirates value some of

these things."

Spock's left eyebrow arched almost imperceptibly.

"Perhaps."

Natahia looked with concern at the fading sun.

"It

will become dark quickly now. Soon it will be unsafe

to be outside. Please come inside, gentlemen, while

Dr. McCoy attends to the injured grower."

She

stretched a short arm toward the hut, the regal

coldness

in her voice melting slightly. "Accept my
hospitality."

There was something about the woman Kirk liked in
spite of himself. He smiled. "Thank you."

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Spock turned to him before they crouched down to
enter the low-ceilinged hut. "Captain, I
wonder if I
might examine the mountains for a moment before I
join you. I have found some interesting indications
that I would like to verify." His hand touched the
tricorder.

Kirk turned to Natahia. "Is that
permitted?"

"Provided he does not stay long. When the sun
has
set, the night animals come out--then it is
extremely
dangerous to be alone outside."

"My night vision and my hearing are well
developed
and will alert me to the presence of predators,"

Spock

responded. "And I will not be long."

"Five minutes," Kirk said.

"That should be adequate, Captain." The

Vulcan

turned to leave.

"Don't stay out past your bedtime," McCoy

remarked

with exaggerated paternalism.

Kirk and Scott found themselves unable to repress

grins. Spock frowned and began

to reply, then stopped

himself as though suddenly realizing that the doctor's

statement fell under the context of what humans

labeled

humor and was therefore unworthy of recognition.

"With your permission, Captain." He walked

stiffly toward the now charcoal-colored mountains

along the edge of the plateau.

The sky was indeed darkening rapidly and the

brilliant

colors had faded to shades of gray, but inside

Natahia's hut a large fire fed off the

abundant supply of

oxygen and illuminated the interior with dancing

orange-red

light. Neat, orderly, primitive. The

furnishings

were handmade and crude. Natahia motioned

Kirk and Scott to sit on the floor before the

fire while

she led McCoy behind a loosely woven

tapestry to

examine the wounded man.

Kirk relished the silence as one who never hears

noise he has lived with all his life until

one day it finally

stops. The internal hum of the Enterprise's

engines,

the whine of the turbolift, the flat mechanical

voice of

the computer . . . he'd never noticed how loud his

technologically superior world was, until now,

sitting

in this very quiet place, listening to the crackle and

hiss of Natahia's fire.

Perhaps her people had a point.

"A bloody shame," Scott said into the fire,

his face

glowing from the heat. He too seemed half

hypnotized

by the quiet inside the hut.

"What's that?"

"It's just a bloody shame for anyone to think of
attackin' these people. They mean no one any harm,
and it's such a lovely place."

"I can't remember when I was in a place that was
more beautiful."

Scott sighed. "Being here almost makes
up for shore
leave."

"Almost," Kirk agreed. "Tell you what,
Scotty. If
you and Spock get those shields up and we can be
sure

we've cleaned up all the pirates caught under
it, maybe

I can convince Star Fleet to let us kill two
birds with
one stone and send our people down."

"I'd be all for that, Captain. I just hope that
Natahia

person wouldn't object. She doesn't seem
to be too

keen on outsiders--" He broke off as

Natahia emerged
from behind the curtain.

She gestured toward Kirk. "Your Doctor

McCoy

says that you may ask Grower Mahali some questions

now if you like." She held the tapestry aside for

Kirk

and followed him into the room, where she watched

silently from a corner.

Definitely not one to trust outsiders.

The only light in the room came from a torch that

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flickered on the wall. The small form that

McCoy

hovered over was nearly obscured by the shadows;

Kirk could hardly see its wounds, but he

realized with

horror the overpowering smell which filled the room

came from burned flesh, not the wood from the fire.

"Burning phasers," McCoy hissed

furiously.

"I thought those had been outlawed by just about

everybody."

"They have. Renegades must have done this. I

don't even think the Klingons would stoop so low."

McCoy's hypospray hissed, and he

straightened over

the small figure stretched out on a blanket

on the floor.

"He's coming to now, Jim. He's badly burned

and in

shock, but he can answer a few easy questions.

Natahia

says his name is Mahali."

The golden man stirred painfully. Kirk

knelt on the

floor next to him, swallowing his revulsion as the

smell

of charred flesh intensified. "Mahali . . .

when you

were attacked this morning, what did you see?"

Mahali's thin high-pitched voice was cracked

and

tearful. "In the sky, silver triangles . .

. light poured

from them, and heat. It burned our crops."

"How many ships?"

"Two. No time to run..." His voice became

a sob.

"My sons... my sons..."

"Surface fighters," Kirk murmured.

"What are they?" Natahia spoke suddenly from

the

dark corner.

"A type of vessel used by certain of the Federation's enemies, and also by some renegade pirate groups."

Natahia turned to McCoy. "Can you help him, Doctor?"

"He'll live, Natahia. But it will be some time before he's completely recovered."

She nodded almost gratefully and led Kirk outside to Scott and the fire. He was relieved to get away from the smell of the Aritanian's burns.

"Grower Mahali had five sons this morning," she said softly. "Now he has none."

Scott stood up in his place in front of the fire. "It's a terrible thing that these raiders have done to your people, ma'am. This is a lovely place and I kinna understand why they would want to harm ye or your land .

But you can believe Captain Kirk when he says
that we'll put an end to it."

"I hope that you are right. I cannot understand them
myself. They take nothing from us that I can see. They
kill the growers, then destroy the crops
and the
land. They do not even eat the food. It is a
horrible
waste."

"Have you done anything to try to protect yourselves,
such as banding together?"

"Growers do not band together, Captain, for battle
or any other purpose. Each family takes
care of its
own needs; we value our autonomy. We have
no
weapons, and so we are helpless against the
pirates."

"There is something here, Natahia, which is very
valuable to the pirates, or they would not be
attacking
your people. Even renegades must have a reason for
staying and killing in one area for so long. When
Mr.

Spock returns, perhaps he can tell us what the

pirates

are looking for."

She moved toward the door of the hut and peered out into what was now inky darkness. "He should have returned by now. It's very dangerous for one

alone in the darkness near the mountains. The animals

prowl, and one can easily lose one's step along the

edge of the plateau."

Kirk looked beyond her at the moonless night, but could see nothing. "It's been more than five minutes,

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hasn't it? Spock is very punctual . . .

maybe we'd

better go look for him."

"You must wait until morning. It isn't safe

--"

"We have weapons and light. I'm sure that

Spock

can protect himself, but he's been gone longer than

he

said he would, and that isn't like him. Scotty!"

"Coming, sir."

"Natahia, if we're not back in fifteen

minutes, have

Dr. McCoy call the ship."

Her expression was anxious. "I hope

that you find

your friend, Captain."

"We will," Kirk said confidently.

They found him.

They had searched the area near the mountains

where the plateau broke off abruptly, beginning

again

after a drop of some four hundred feet. Scott

put off suggesting that they turn the handlight on the

plateau

below until they had searched everywhere else.

Reluctantly,

Scott peered down, careful of his own steps

along the edge of the drop. Kirk searched a short

distance away; the height was beginning to make him

dizzy, and his eyes were refusing to focus on the

slender beam of light so far below.

He was calling the Enterprise to tell Chekhov

to

search with the scanners when-he saw Scott stiffen

and

draw his head up quickly, and he knew with
heartsickening
certainty what the engineer saw. He ran
to Scott's side, and, clutching his arm, was
compelled to
look down at what he could not bear to see.

"Dear

God, Spock!"

Spock lay on his left side on a bed of the
tangling red
vines.

McCoy's face was gray as he leaned against the
wall
in sick bay. "He'll make it, Jim."

Kirk closed his eyes and let his body go limp
with
relief. They had not expected Spock
to survive.

"I've reconstructed the damaged part of his
skull,
set the broken bones. One lung was punctured,
but
that'll mend." McCoy paused.

"But?" Kirk stiffened. He knew that tone; it
meant

that the doctor was saving the worst for last.

"There's been a significant amount of damage

to the

left hemisphere of the brain."

Kirk drew a weary hand across his forehead and

stared dully at McCoy. "What are you trying

to tell

me? What will that do to Spock?"

"There are a lot of variables involved, Jim.

We

won't know exactly for a little while yet. I'll

have to do some testing."

Kirk's tone became indignant. "You can do

something

for him, can't you?"

McCoy sighed deeply, and when he spoke again

there was a slightly sharp edge to his words.

"I've

done what I can for him, Captain. We're

treating him

with alpha-dextran for ischemia in those brain

cells that

survived but were cut off from the blood flow--but I

can't reconstruct brain tissue that was

completely

obliterated, and it's too specialized to clone.

It's likely

that at least a few functions have been

impaired--comwh

ones permanently, I don't know yet. What

we

have to hope for is that Spock will retrain the

undamaged

brain cells to take over the functions of those that

were lost.

"And some functions have definitely been affected.

He hasn't gone into the Vulcan healing mode and

he

isn't controlling the pain. I've got him on

medication

for that. From the location of the damage, he probably

has some speech impairment... but then, I'm

guessing.

You see, Vulcans don't have lateralization of

function as we humans do. that is, the left

side of the

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brain controlling certain functions and the right others.

The Vulcan brain has an area controlling

speech on

each side of the brain. If one hemisphere is damaged, the other can take over. It's sort of an auxiliary backup system. They're also ambidextrous. Since neither hemisphere is dominant, neither side of the body is either."

"But Spock's right-handed," Kirk protested.

"That's right. Comes from his mother's side Of the family. That indicates that certain functions are probably

located on one side of his brain, just as they are in

humans. And if he has experienced some damage to a

function that is not lateralized in both hemispheres, he

will need some type of therapy so that he can relearn the function. But he is a unique case. If

he were all

Vulcan or all human, I'd be able to use the standardized

tests on him and I'd know a little bit more right now."

"Look, Bones... I didn't mean to sound

hostile for a minute there..."

McCoy nodded, his lips curving slightly in

something

less than a tired smile. "It's all right,

Jim. I'm

just sorry I can't tell you more right now, but I'm

going to have to watch and wait myself. I've already

put in a request for a Vulcan neurologist."

"I wouldn't hold my breath," Kirk said. Star

Fleet

was notoriously slow about such matters.

"I won't. And Jim . . ." His face

darkened again.

"Don't hold yours, either. He'll pull through,

but it'll

be a long time before he's the old Spock again."

He did

not say, if ever.

Kirk looked beyond McCoy into the dimness of the

intensive care unit in sick bay. The light

of the life-function

monitor softly illuminated the figure on the

bed below. Spock lay on his back now, his face

as

peaceful as it had been when Jim and Scott had

first

found him; but this time his damaged left side was

visible. Kirk repressed a shudder. He and

McCoy had

waited by Spock's side in the darkness for the

transporter

to beam them aboard, McCoy insisting that

Spock not be moved except by the medical team

waiting in the transporter room. The real

horror came

in the brightness of the transporter room, where Kirk

could see the extent of Spock's injuries

clearly, when

McCoy and a medic gently turned Spock over

to place

him on the stretcher, revealing for the first time his

crushed left side.

Kirk could not remember ever having been so

terrified

by the sight of anything before.

McCoy had done an excellent job of

reconstructing

the Vulcan's damaged left temple, but in

spite of the

surgery, Spock's pale face was mottled with

dark

green bruises. His left eye was nearly swollen shut.

"Jim," McCoy said softly, reading the pain in

his

friend's face. "I think you're overdue for some rest.

When's the last time you got some sleep?"

Kirk murmured something unintelligible.

"Look, let me give you something to help you sleep--"

"No thanks, Doctor. I'd just as soon

keep busy for a

little while longer..." He looked at McCoy

sharply. "One might ask you the same question."

"I... uh, I'm going to keep an eye on

Spock for just

a little while longer his

Kirk closed his eyes and pushed the image of

Spock

in the transporter room firmly from his mind.

"Bones,

call me when he comes to. I'll be on the

bridge. I have

some questions that need to be answered."

Kirk avoided all eyes on the

bridge and headed

straight for the con, his gaze fixed straight ahead

on

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the viewscreen where Aritani rotated slowly on

its

axis.

"Captain, Mr. Scott is calling from the

planet surface,"

Uhura said, but there was a hesitation, a kind of

catch in her voice, as though she wanted to ask a

question but did not dare. Kirk turned toward her in

irritation, not understanding until he saw the concern

in her eyes. He did not need to look behind him

to

know the others were watching him with the same

expression. Of course they had heard what

happened

on Aritani below, and after seeing the grim

expression

on their captain's face, they probably

expected the

worst.

"Mr. Spock will be . . . will live," he said

shortly.

Uhura's shoulders relaxed visibly; Kirk

could hear

Chekhov release a sigh behind him.

"On audio, sir," she smiled.

Kirk sat in his chair. "How's it going, Mr.

Scott?"

"The shield is up, Captain, and workin' just

fine. I'd

like to give Ensign Lanz some credit for the fine

job

she did helpin' me."

"Noted."

"How's Mr. Spock?"

"He'll live," Kirk repeated dully.

"Thank God, that was a horrible fall he took

--"

"Did you get a complete tricorder readout

yet on

those mountains?"

"Aye, Captain, and Mr. Spock was right

to suspect

something. The land's full of uritanium and

dilithium,

not to mention other precious metals."

Kirk put a weary hand to his forehead.

"Uritanium

and dilithium--no wonder these people have visitors."

"Aye, sir, anyone with mining equipment could make more than a credit or two on this planet."

"Good work, Scotty. We'll start beaming personnel

down for shore leave in eight hours. In the meantime,

we'll see if that shield of yours---

--and Ensign Lanz..".

---and Ensign Lanz catches us some pirates."

"Well, sir, if you ask me, it seems terribly quiet and peaceful down here, nary a peep of trouble.

Ensign

Lanz and I could take a little shore leave right now." Scott wheedled.

"I'm not asking you, Engineer. No one will be taking shore leave for another eight hours.

Spock said

their fuel could only keep them shielded for seven

a half hours at most, and I'm willing to give

them a
little leeway. In the meantime, I won't risk
having
crewmembers down there if any trapped
pirates decide
on another surprise attack."

Scott sighed tiredly. "Aye, Captain.

We'll be
beamin' up, then."

Captain's Log, Stardate 7003.4:

After being called to Aritani to investigate
pirate
attacks upon the population, we have discovered
that the planet is a veritable storehouse of
precious metals and fuel sources. My
guess is that
the attackers wish to subdue the population in
order to set up some permanent mining operation.

Unfortunately, we have not yet located the
pirate base nor any ships, and we assume
they are

using cloaking devices. Engineer Scott and

Ensign

Lanz have installed a protective

shield

around the planet, which will prevent other ships

from entering Aritani's atmosphere and which will trap any ships in the atmosphere at the time the shield was erected. According to Mr. Spock, the fuel for the type of ship used by the pirates could last no more than seven and a half hours, assuming they are using a standard type of cloaking

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device. At that time, their shields will no longer be operable and our scanners will pick them up. I expect we will be able to capture and question at least one of the attackers.

Once the planet surface has been secured, we will begin beaming down our personnel for shore leave.

Commander Spock was seriously injured during the performance of his duty on the planet surface; I am hereby submitting his name for commendation.

Kirk yawned and ran a hand across his face as if to clear away the gathering cobwebs; it'd been some time since he'd last pulled a double shift, and his

body was

no longer accustomed to it. There was still no point in

going to his quarters yet, however; he would be

unable

to slow his mind enough to sleep.

The bridge had been too quiet over the past

several

hours, the only disturbance being a shift change of

personnel. On the viewscreen, Aritani still

turned

lazily, revealing no sign of the destruction that

had

occurred on its surface. But it was the silence from

sick bay that Kirk found the most unbearable.

He snapped a toggle on the arm of the con

decisively.

"Kirk to sick bay."

McCoy's voice sounded as haggard as Kirk

felt.

"McCoy here. What is it, Jim?"

"How's Spock? Any change?"

"Not really..."

The hesitation in McCoy's voice

made Kirk sit up

straight in his chair. "Define "not really,"

Doctor. Is he

conscious?"

"Well, uh, yes and no. He's very groggy from
the
medication---"

"He's conscious, and you didn't call me?"

Kirk's

voice betrayed his anger. "That was an order,
Doctor,
whether you realized it or not."

It was McCoy's turn to sound insulted.

"Wait just a
minute, there, Captain---"

"No, you wait a minute, Doctor, because I'm
on my
way. Kirk out."

He cut off the communication before McCoy could
protest.

McCoy was waiting outside the intensive care
section
of sick bay, his arms folded tightly against his
chest and his chin jutting out in his best defiant
pose.

He began to speak before Kirk had a chance.

"I admit," he said, struggling to keep the
irritability

from his voice, "that neither one of us has had much sleep and we're walking around like a couple of exposed raw nerves. But I am not going to let you walk in there before you listen to what I have to say, not for the sake of my professional pride, but for the sake of that patient in there. In my medical judgment, there was no point in calling you. Spock is only semiconscious and unable to respond---"

"My order did not include any leeway for medical judgment," Kirk interrupted coldly. "Is he still awake?"

"Yes, dammit, but you won't be able to get any information from him right now--"

"We'll see." Kirk brushed past him; McCoy followed, seething.

At the sight of Spock, the coldness left Kirk's features instantly. The Vulcan lay in the shadows of the dimly lit room, his breathing irregular,

labored as Kirk

had never seen it, for Spock was in pain. His dark

eyes

fastened on Jim's face, but they were clouded,

unseeing.

Kirk felt a chill of fear.

MINDSHADOW

"What happened down there, Spock?"

Spock closed his eyes slowly, but when he

opened

them again at Kirk, there was no recognition in

them.

"He can't speak, Captain." McCoy's words

stung.

"And I doubt he even knows you. There's no

point in

agitating him."

Kirk ignored him. "Spock, can you hear me?"

Blink

if you can hear me."

Spock hesitated for an awful moment,

then lowered

his eyelids and raised them again.

Kirk shot a triumphant I-told-you-so

glance at McCoy.

"Spock, blink if you know who I am."

There was a long silence filled only with the sound of tortured breathing as Spock fought the effects of his injuries and McCoy's painkillers and struggled to remember.

"Don't you know me, Spock?"

"Stop it, Jim! That's enough." McCoy moved toward Kirk as if to pull him from Spock's side, but the look on the captain's face stopped him.

You must know me, Kirk directed the thought toward the Vulcan desperately. You know me better than anyone else; you've touched my mind a hundred times. How can I touch yours now?

But it was useless; he was no telepath, and even if he could touch Spock's mind, he doubted that the Vulcan would be able to respond. He began to turn away.

And then Spock blinked once, slowly, and closed his eyes as though the effort had exhausted him.

Kirk

felt a sense of absolute victory.

"When he makes any improvement, or if he

says

anything, contact me," he said to McCoy, but his

eyes

were still on Spock. As he walked toward the door

to

leave, something made him turn and face

McCoy.

"And that's an order."

He left McCoy turning behind him.

Kirk stepped off the turbolift to the sight of

Aritani

on the screen, a sight that was rapidly becoming more

of an affront than a pleasure.

Sulu rose from the con. "Any change?"

Kirk asked.

The helmsman watched as his captain

attempted

unsuccessfully to stifle a yawn. At present

the captain

had been on duty for close to twenty-four

hours, and

Sulu seriously doubted his ability to stay awake in the comfortable command chair. He toyed with the idea of suggesting that the captain repair to his quarters for some rest, but in light of Kirk's recent mood, decided it would be best not to mention it. Sulu did not need to call sick bay to find out Mr. Spock's condition; the look on Kirk's face when he'd first come back from sick bay had told Sulu just how serious the first officer's injuries were.

"No, sir," he replied simply. "All quiet. We haven't picked up the first sign of pirates, or any other vessels, for that matter. Apparently this is usually a very quiet neighborhood."

Kirk seemed keenly disappointed. "No pirate vessels?"

"Captain," Uhura called from her station,

"Mr.

Scott just called to let you know it's been eight hours."

"Eight hours..." Kirk was momentarily lost.

"Oh,

yes. Already? Let me talk to him."

"Yes, sir." Scott's voice came from the

engineering

deck.

"Scotty, what are the chances that one of the pirate

vessels could go longer than eight hours with their

cloaks up?"

"Impossible, sir. Of course, I'm not the

expert.

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Spock would be the one to ask--except I guess

he's

not up to answering questions right now."

Kirk did not answer.

"Of course, he did say

seven-point-four-two hours,

sir, and I'm sure his answer would be just

the same

now. You've allowed more than another half hour

to

be on the safe side. There's no ship I've

ever heard of

that could keep a cloakin' device operating that

long."

Kirk sighed. "I'd hoped to catch at least one of the ships beneath our shield. It would have made it a lot easier to locate their base."

"Aye, that it would."

"Guess I'll have to tell the transporter room to start beaming down shore parties."

The sound of a muffled hoot came from the other end of the intercom. Kirk frowned.

"What was that, Engineer?"

"Nothing, sir," Scott replied meekly.

"One of the men down here overheard you mentioning shore leave."

Kirk's expression softened. "It has been a long time, hasn't it? The crew has certainly earned a little R and R."

"You have, too, sir."

Kirk could not disagree with Scott's statement, but his reaction to being selected by the computer to be in the first shore party of one hundred to go down to the surface was something less than gleeful. He

offered to

let Scott take his place, a proposition that

Scott accepted

rather quickly, as Ensign Lanz happened to be
in the first beamdown group.

The door to McCoy's cabin opened quickly in
response

to the buzzer; Kirk had guessed that the doctor,
too, would not be sleeping. Instead, McCoy was
sitting at his desk with a bottle of bourbon and a
shot

glass, pouring himself a drink--and not the first one,
by the looks of things.

His bleary red-rimmed eyes did not look up from
the

glass. "I suppose you came here for an
update on

Spock."

Kirk stood uncertainly in the doorway.

"I've already

checked with sick bay. That's how I knew to
find you here."

McCoy scowled. "I told them I was going on
shore

leave---"

"Christine said you'd probably be here . . . either sleeping or drinking."

"Remind me to have that woman fired. She's getting

to know me too damn well. If you've been to sick bay,

then you've also discovered that Spock is in the capable

hands of Dr. M'Benga, who has sworn to me that

he will contact you the instant Spock utters a peep."

"Bones," Kirk said suddenly. "Bones, I'm sorry."

McCoy tried at first to shrug off the apology, but he

sighed and shook his head. "It's not your fault, Jim.

Do you realize that neither of us has slept for more than two shifts now? It's no wonder we're a little

temperamental. Especially after what happened to Spock--" He lowered his head for an instant;

when he

raised it again, his voice was tinged with exasperation.

"But Jim, you've got to realize that there may be

some

things I just can't fix. I'm a surgeon, damn

it, not a

magician.. 2'

"I know," Kirk soothed. "And I was out of line

today. I'm sorry. You did a fine job on

Spock. Thank

you for saving his life."

"Well," McCoy said, more than mollified.

"You're

under a little stress, Captain. Apology

accepted." He

nodded at the bottle tucked under Kirk's arm.

"I can

see you're using the same prescription I am.

Have a

seat and I'll get you a glass."

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Kirk sat gratefully. "Now, Doctor,

tell me how I can

get some sleep."

"What's that you brought--some of that Saurian

stuff?. Drink a sizable portion of that, Jim

boy, and

your old country doctor promises you'll get

to sleep

tonight. In fact, why don't you try some of my

brand?

Kentucky bourbon, aged in the cask and twelve

years

old if it's a day--"

"I'll stick with my usual poison, thanks."

"It's your liver." McCoy handed the glass

to him.

"Look, Jim, when was the last time you took

shore

leave?"

"I dunno. Same time you did."

"Then it's definitely been too damn long.

And with

everything else that's been happening around here

lately, it's no wonder you've felt like blowing

off some

steam. So cheers. Doctor's orders."

McCoy raised his

glass.

"Thanks." Kirk lifted the glass to his

lips and

stopped. "I'm not sure I can remember my

last shore

leave."

McCoy grinned devilishly and leaned across the desk in his best dirty old man imitation. "I can. Rigley's planet, remember? That little bar where they do the most outrageous form of dancing. The kind that could knock your eyes right out of your head..."

Kirk snickered, "I remember, of course..."

a native

dance, based on an ancient religion--"

McCoy rolled his eyes. "They don't make religious

dances like that back home. Seems to me you also succeeded in getting rather friendly with their dancer, too--what was her name?"

Kirk's teeth were showing. "Lolama.

Lolama.

can't remember her last name."

"Wasn't important anyway. You were doing fine I recall, until that boyfriend of hers showedffment

"Thank God for transporters." Kirk

swallowed

more of the brandy and was almost beginning to feel good. "I'm afraid though, that this time I'll be

spending

my shore leave here."

"As your personal physician, I'd advise

you to

reconsider. You said it yourself. you need to be

someplace

where you can be near animals, trees, birds...

After a while, the insides of this ship can begin

to get

to you."

Kirk's lips tightened. "I'd rather stay here.

Come to

think of it, I don't see you rushing off to enjoy

your

liberty."

McCoy's lascivious grin faded

entirely. "I thought I

might be needed here."

"You mean you don't want to leave Spock.

Maybe

he's why I don't particularly feel like taking

shore

leave down there."

"Because he was injured down there?" McCoy

asked quietly.

Kirk didn't answer.

"That's why we're so angry," McCoy

continued.

"Because it was such a stupid accident... so

unfair,

especially to someone like Spock."

"Explain." Kirk felt the knot in his stomach

beginning

to tighten again.

"To have such an incredibly logical mind... and

to

receive damage to the left hemisphere."

Kirk looked at him vacantly.

"You do remember from your academy days which

functions are controlled by the left hemisphere

of the

brain?"

Anatomy had not been Kirk's favorite

subject.

"Language?"

"Yes, and some memory, mathematics,

analysis...

and logic."

MINDSHADOW

Kirk sat forward quickly. "What exactly are

you

trying to say, Doctor? That he's lost all of that?"

"I'm saying that he could experience some degree of impairment in any one of those areas. The left hemisphere sustained a significant trauma.

The alpha-dextran

can only restore those brain cells that were not physically destroyed and only starved from lack of oxygen. Spock will probably recover certain functions,

but it'll be another day or so before we know the extent of the permanent damage."

"Then you're telling me that you don't know yet."

"That's one reason I sent for a specialist."

"God knows how long that could take. What do we do in the meantime?"

"Wait," said McCoy.

Pain. Helpless pain along his entire left

side, a

hideous nonpain in his head and a dizzying nausea

that

seemed to snatch the bed from under him and send him

falling into the dark void They must have given

him something for the pain, something so strong that

he could not think clearly, could not summon the mind

rules to silence the fierce ache in his side. But

why?

Surely they knew how nauseous the medication

made

him

Again he struggled to retrieve the mind rules,

looking

deep into his clouded consciousness, searching,

concentrating, and for a moment he felt he might find

them; but they eluded him again, like a cruel parent

who teases a child with a toy, pulling it farther and

farther away as the child moves closer. He sighed

frustration and turned his head to one side; it was a

mistake. He held onto the bed with his right hand

as

another wave of dizziness clutched at him.

And the mind rules were not all that was lost to him;

there were other things hidden in him which he could

not retrieve, words of great consequence which must

be spoken, and quickly, but he could not remember

what he should say nor to whom he should say it.

Someone bent over him, fuzzy, out of focus.

He

closed his eyes gingerly, to avoid offending his
swollen

left eye, and opened them again. It was a man,
wearing

a blue tunic, a man that Spock knew, but
he could not

remember his name.

"Feeling any better?" the man asked
soothingly.

"Sorry that we had to medicate you; you won't be
able to control the pain yourself for a while. Try to
rest."

Spock saw no other alternative at the
moment. He

studied the man in the muted light; dark-skinned,
humanoid. Probably Terran, by the accent.

The blue

tunic had significance. it reminded him of the
other,

the one who had been with him earlier: a doctor.

Then

this one was also a doctor. His urgent message was
not

for them, but for another man rather man in the gold

tunic, the man who had asked the questions. He

grimaced with the strain of remembering, determined

to speak the man's name or to die.

When the name at last came forth, Spock was flooded with a sense of relief and accomplishment stronger than any he had ever known.

"Jim," he whispered.

M'Benga was as good as his word. Within minutes, Kirk and McCoy had arrived in sick bay.

"Sorry to have to wake you both," M'Benga apologized.

"He's still heavily sedated, but he's fighting it.

Apparently he feels it's quite urgent that he speak with you, Captain."

Kirk felt as though he were fighting the effects of

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heavy sedation himself, after being roused from the few hours' dreamless sleep induced by the brandy.

"You did the right thing, Doctor, thank you."

Spock appeared to be sleeping, but when the Captain entered, his eyes opened and fastened on Kirk with clear recognition.

"Spock, what did you want to tell me?"

Spock shuddered with the effort to speak, his voice
no more than a halting whisper. "I... must tell
what I
.. saw." He stopped abruptly, his face
clouded with
confusion.

"Take your time," Kirk soothed. "Try
to remember."

Spock gritted his teeth with frustration. "I .
.
can't."

The three humans looked over Spock's head
at each
other. "We've given you some strong
painkillers,"

McCoy said. "You're going to have a little trouble
remembering things for a while."

"Important." Spock grimaced in a sudden
spasm of
pain. Kirk was forced to look away.

"It's all right, Spock. We know what you
saw:

uritanium, dilithium, just for starters. We
completed

the tricorder analysis. So you see, everything's
taken

care of. You can rest now."

Spock stared at the captain dully, considering

if that

was indeed what he had wanted to tell him. But the

effort of speaking had exhausted him; he closed his

eyes.

Kirk followed McCoy outside and leaned

warily

against the bulkhead. "He doesn't remember,

Bones.

Is it really the medication?"

McCoy studied the tops of his boots

for a moment

before squaring his shoulders and looking his friend

directly in the eye. "No. No, Jim, it

isn't."

The intercom on the bulkhead next to Kirk

whistled.

He answered it without taking his eyes off

McCoy.

"Kirk here."

Uhura sounded unusually agitated. "An

urgent message

from Mr. Scott on the surface, Captain.

The

pirates have gotten through the shields--they're
attacking
our people!"

Chapter Two

"MY GOD! CRIED McCoy. "There's
over a hundred
crewmen down there Kirk did not answer him, but
his eyes showed how
well aware he was of the fact. "On my way."

A casual observer on the bridge might not have
guessed that an emergency situation

existed; bridge

personnel were too well trained not to function
smoothly under pressure. But Kirk could tell

by the

subtle tautness of their movements, by the way all

eyes fastened on his, awaiting orders, the

moment he

stepped from the turbolift.

Sulu vacated the con and seated himself at the

helm

with graceful swiftness as Kirk approached.

"Uhura,

see if you can raise Mr. Scott for me again.

Mr.

Chekhov, status on the protective shield."

Chekhov moved to Spock's station and peered down into the viewer, his solemn face bathed in the pale blue glow. "No change, sir."

Kirk turned his head toward him sharply.

"They're still up?"

Chekhov made no attempt to hide his surprise.

"Yes, sir. Completely functional. There is no indication of any malfunction. We'll have to lower them if we want to beam our personnel aboard."

"That's what I intend to do, Ensign. In the meantime,

I want you to scan the surface and get a fix on a pirate vessel. They always lower their cloaks

before the attack. Sulu, stand by with the tractor

Uhura interrupted. "I have Mr. Scott for you, Captain.

On audio."

McCoy blessed her silently for having the tact not to

put Scott on the screen; the sounds of screams

and

blasts of flame that filled the bridge were

terrifying

enough without the picture.

Scott spoke in a hoarse shout. "Scott

here, Captain.

The pirates are right nearby--I'm afraid this

inna very

safe place at the moment."

"Scotty, can you get to the controls for the

shield?

We have to lower it to get you out of there."

"Aye, Captain, I'm not far from the hut. I

think I

can make it."

"Is there any way the shields might have been

lowered, even for an instant?"

"Sir, do ye think I'm completely daft?

I'd never let a

thing like that happen. I checked 'em myself not half

an hour ago. I dinna ken how those divvils

got past

'em." The sound of the flame blasts grew

closer,

drowning out Scott's voice. Kirk could hear the

crackle of the fire.

"Speak up, Scotty, I'm having trouble

reading

yOU."

"Captain, I'd best go now. I doubt as

it'll be safe to

stay here much longer. I'll get to the controls."

A thundering roar caused Kirk to put his hands over

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his ears; when the noise cleared, there was silence.

"Scotty?" Kirk's voice rose. "Are you

there? Can

you read me?"

For a moment, no one on the bridge dared breathe.

"Aye, Captain, but tell McCoy to have some

medics

waitin" in the transporter room. We've

got some casualties

here."

Kirk was numb. "I'll tell him. Good

luck, Scotty,."

The muscles in Chekhov's back tensed as he

looked

up from the viewer. "Keptin, I've got one of the

ships!"

"Tractor beam, Mr. Sulu..."

Sulu was apologetic. "The shield isn't

down yet,

Captain. I can't hold onto him."

"Stay with him, Mr. Chekhov..."

"With him, sir."

"Shield still up, Captain," Sulu reported.

Chekhov swore softly under his breath. "Lost

him,

sir. He has his cloak up again. It's almost as

if he knew

we were trying to get a tractor on him.."

"Shield down, Captain," Sulu said.

Kirk's jaw twitched. "Don't leave that

spot, Ensign.

I want you to stay there until you get another

fix on

one of those ships. Sulu, stand by with the tractor

beam and make sure whoever is in it gets beamed

up to

this ship. We are going to catch a pirate. Do

I make

myself clear?"

"Aye, sir," the two replied meekly.

"Sulu, you have the con. Get someone up here to

mind the helm. I'll be in sick bay if you
need me."

Chekhov waited for the turbolift doors
to close over
the captain's stern visage.

"I am so stupid," he said sorrowfully. "I
could have
computed his trajectory. I shouldn't have lost him

that."

Sulu comforted him. "You did what you could.

We'll get one next time, Pavel. You'll
see."

The evacuation had proceeded in a calm and
orderly
fashion. One hundred and three crew members
had
been beamed in groups with no one panicking, the
most critically wounded coming up first, the dead last.

Miraculously, only six had been killed and
thirty-eight
wounded.

To Kirk it felt like something less than a
miracle.

The area from the transporter room to sick bay was

a

chamber of horrors; he could smell the burns the moment the doors to the turbolift opened. Those who could still stand were crowded together outside sick bay while medics administered first aid.

McCoy and

M'Benga were already in surgery with the critical cases.

Scott was one of the lucky ones waiting for a medic.

He held up his arms like an old-time surgeon awaiting

sterile gloves; the sleeves of his tunic had been almost

completely scared away from pulling the red-hot switch that neutralized the protective shield --under-neath,

the skin was mottled red and gray. Kirk forced himself to watch as the medic dressed Scott's wounds,

first with a coolant spray to stop more cells from dying, then with a temporary sealant to provide air-permeable

protection until McCoy had the time to

make more skin synthetic. Kirk looked at the faces of

the crewmen around them, some of them dazed and
unable to grasp the horror of what had happened
to
them on what was supposed to have been a relaxing
interlude, a brief vacation

"Did you get a good look at them, Scotty?"

The pain on Scott's face eased as the

medic's hypo

spray hissed. "Aye, Captain. Romulan

surface

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fighters, all right. Maybe six or seven of

"em, but none

of us cared to get close enough to see who was inside.

Did you manage to get hold of one?"

"No. Chekhov's still scanning. And we still

haven't

located their base."

"It can't be too far, sir. They don't have much

fuel

storage capacity."

"Agreed. But what I want to know is what the

hell

they were doing under our shield."

"Like I said, a fighter doesn't have the fuel

capacity

to sit under the shields that long, especially not with a cloakin" device in operation. If you ask me,

the only

thing that accounts for it is a shield neutralizer."

"Come on, Scotty, the Romulans have been

trying

to develop one for years, but they've never

been

successful."

"Can you be so sure, sir?" Scott seemed to be

swaying slightly.

"It's just as likely they developed a cloaking

device

which doesn't require as much fuel." Kirk

frowned at

him; the Scot was definitely turning paler.

"You know,

you're still officially on leave, Mr. Scott.

I suggest you

go take it easy in your quarters."

Scott began to speak, but Kirk cut him off.

"That's

an order. We'll talk more about this later."

"Then, sir... could you do me a wee favor?"

"Name it."

"Could you find out about Ensign Lanz for me?"

He

nodded toward sick bay. "She's in there, and they

tell

me she was pretty badly hurt. She's an

awfully young lass... this is her first

assignment."

Kirk smiled in spite of the sinking feeling

Scott's

words caused. "I'll find out, Scotty. I'm

sure McCoy's

taking good care of her. Go on."

"I'll just wait out here for a minute--"

"No, I'll come tell you. Now go." He

shooed Scott

with a playful gesture, but the moment the engineer

turned to shuffle off to his quarters, the smile

fled from

Kirk's face.

The smell inside sick bay was as bad as he

had

imagined; Kirk tried not to look at the wounded

lying

on the makeshift cots that lined the walls. He

was

waiting until he was sure he could no longer

bear the

stench when the door to surgery opened.

McCoy sank shakily into the nearest chair and

wiped the perspiration from his brow. "I'd like to give

those responsible for this a taste of their own

medicine.

What kind of being could do this to innocent

people? I bet you can smell it all the way up to the

bridge." He slumped lower in the chair and

closed his

eyes. "I haven't even had time to have a

hangover."

"How many did we lose, Bones?"

"Eight. Six on the planet, two in

surgery. The burns

were so severe, their bodies just shut down in spite

of

everything we could do. Damn those bastards his

A muscle in Kirk's jaw twitched. "I

shouldn't have

let them go down there."

McCoy opened one eye. "Don't do it to yourself,

Jim. And if I had gotten to those two in time,

maybe

they wouldn't have died There's nothing to be gained by playing the if-I-had-only game. You couldn't have known."

"I could have at least waited longer--at least a few more hours, before I started risking my people--"

"Please explain to me how you could have anticipated the impossible? Because it was impossible for any ships to be down there. Scotty told you that--hell, even Spock told you that. How could you have known?"

"I don't know," Kirk said darkly, but his eyes did not surrender their guilt. "Let's change the subject."

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I'm supposed to ask about Ensign Lanz for Scotty.

How is she?"

The change in McCoy's expression was so quick and subtle that anyone else might have missed its meaning, but Kirk had seen the look on the

doctor's

face enough times to know what McCoy was going to say.

"I'm sorry, Jim. She was one of the two who didn't make it."

Scott did not respond to the buzzer, but the door

was unlocked. It was pitch-black inside the engineer's quarters.

"Scotty?"

Kirk heard someone move heavily.

"Captain?" Scott's voice was thick. "I musta fallen asleep. They gave me a hypo for the pain . . ."

Kirk heard the Scot struggle to a sitting position on the bed.

"Ye've come about Ensign Lanz, haven't ye, sir?"

"Yes," Kirk said softly.

There was a silence. "Is she dead, Captain?"

Kirk was grateful for the darkness. "Yes. I'm sorry, Scotty."

For a moment the only sound was Scott's labored breathing. When at last he spoke, his voice was rich with sorrow. "She was a damn good engineer. She was barely twenty-five years old." He made a choking noise. "If I get my hands on one of those pirates...

...sir, I swear I'll kill 'em! I'll kill 'em!"

"It won't change things," Kirk said in a low voice.

"Why would anyone want to hurt her? How can such people exist?"

"I don't know," Kirk said, "but we're going to stop them."

He left Scott alone in the darkness.

A slight smell of scorched skin clung to the bulkheads in the corridors outside sick bay and refused to be deodorized completely by the ship's air filtration system. Many of the personnel who had had occasion

to walk through the corridors by sick bay had complained about the nauseating odor, but thanks to the concentrated efforts of the maintenance crew, it was now almost completely gone--almost--but its lingering trace was still enough to disconcert anyone visiting sick bay.

Anyone, that is, except X. Nyota

Uhura. A person of strong will, once she set her mind to do something it was as good as accomplished. She squared her shoulders as she entered sick bay, and although the smell grew stronger, she had already predetermined that it would not bother her in the slightest.

The sight of the wounded, however, was another matter altogether. It was the first time she had actually seen the cruel burns inflicted by the pirates' phasers, and she lowered her eyes so that her revulsion would not be seen.

But Leonard McCoy must have seen it, for he pounced on her with an exaggerated cheerfulness she was certain could not be genuine. McCoy looked worse than Uhura had ever seen him, and she was

tempted to tell him he belonged in one of the beds
himself.

"Well, Miss Uhura," he called in his
best Southern
gentleman's drawl, "have you come to cast a ray of
sunshine in our den of gloom?"

"How did you know, Doctor?" she replied
sweetly.

"Who's the lucky devil you've come to visit?"

Me, I

hope."

"Well, I was coming to see one of the patients, but
you look like you could use a visitor far worse."

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"Someone noticed," McCoy beamed wryly.

"Someone cares."

"Actually, I've come to say hello to everyone,

and

to one person in particular. That man over there."

Mohamed Jahma grinned as widely as the

injury to

the side of his face and neck would permit; the dark

olive skin was speckled shiny pink and red under a

thick coat of clear, glossy sealant.

Uhura sat on ,the

side where his burns were less visible.

"Some people get all the breaks," McCoy pouted.

He went back to his rounds.

"Kefhalik? How are you?" Uhura asked in

Arabic.

She and Mohammed were just friends, but their relationship

was marked by a light, teasing humor with more than a

hint of flirtation. She was unsure if Mohamed

meant

for it to evolve into something more serious, but she

enjoyed his friendship too much to worry about it.

They shared the same continent as their birthplace--

Mohammed

was North African--and they were beginning to

share their respective languages with each other.

Uhura had always felt slightly embarrassed that

she

had never learned Arabic, the second most

important

language in the United States of Africa,

and Moh had

never bothered to learn Swahili, since Arabic

was

widely spoken in the north.

"Not too bad, beautiful," he responded in

Swahili,

then switched to English. "Better than most.

I'm just

waiting my turn for a little cosmetic touch-up and

I'll

be good as new. I'm afraid we've really

overworked

these doctors."

"When will you be getting out?"

"Tomorrow, if I stay on good behavior."

"That should be just about impossible for you." She

turned her head for a moment to survey the main

ward, and some acquaintances who were not too weak

or sedated smiled in her direction; she waved

back.

"It's terrible," she said in a low voice. "I

must know

half the people in this room."

"There's two more in intensive care--really

critical

cases."

"Worse than this?" Uhura was aghast; she could

not imagine wounds more terrible than the ones she saw

now.

"I wish my injury was the worst one."

Mohamed's

expression darkened. "We lost two from engineering

--Giorgo

Mikahlis and Rachel Lanz."

"Oh, Moh, not Rachel. She was so young

his

They were silent for a moment until Moh nodded

toward intensive care. "They say Commander

Spock's still in there, too."

"How is he? The captain doesn't say

anything about

it."

"No one says much here either. M'Benga and

McCoy

go in there all the time, and they always look

pretty grim when they come out. It doesn't sound

too

good

"I wonder if he's able to have visitors."

"I doubt it. I haven't seen anyone go in there

except

the doctors and the captain."

"Well, I'm going to ask Dr. McCoy about

it. After

all, even Mr. Spock needs cheering up when

he's

sick." She paused. "But first, since I came to see you, tell me what I can do for you. Within reason, of course."

Mohamed smiled again. "Sing me a song. I've been dreaming about your singing the whole time I've been in sick bay."

"Moh, I can't sing here--it'll disturb the others."

"Doctor," Mohamed called, "can Uhura sing us a song?"

McCoy, two beds down, looked up from the knee he

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was patching together with skin synthetic. "As long as she sings loud enough for the rest of us to hear it. A song is exactly what these people need. Not to mention the medical staff. What's good for growing flowers has got to be good for mending people, in my medical opinion."

"At least he didn't call us his vegetable garden," said Moh.

Uhura grimaced. "Any special requests?"

"Something African, of course."

Uhura thought for a moment, then began to sing a lullaby she'd learned as a child.

Christine Chapel was checking on Spock when Uhura began to sing. Spock's broken bones were mending rapidly, but otherwise, his condition remained

essentially unchanged; he had not spoken a word since he first talked to the captain. Christine leaned over to check the monitor, then paused to gaze

down at his face, which still bore the mottled dark green marks on the left side.

Impulsively, she reached a hand toward his face and let it hover above the bruises as though she longed to smooth them away with a touch.

His eyes snapped open so quickly that she gasped as she pulled her hand away, embarrassed.

"Hello, Mr.

Spock," she said, recovering quickly. "How are you feeling?"

It was a rhetorical question. Even if a patient

could

not respond, Chapel knew it was good therapy to assume he understood and to speak to him accordingly. She did not expect a reply.

"Uhura," he said clearly.

She hesitated for an instant, at first thinking that

he

had mistaken her for the communications officer. The door to intensive care was shut, but it was not soundproofed so that a doctor outside could hear the

monitor panel signal a patient in trouble;

Christine

could faintly hear Uhura's voice floating in the strains of an ancient melody.

"Why yes," she said, "that is Uhura singing.

She's

out in the main ward. Would you like her to come in here?"

Spock blinked once.

"I'll get her." Chapel fought to contain her excitement.

Unlike the main ward, intensive care was quiet and

dark. Of the three crew members who lay
inside, two
had been badly burned and were molded together with
so much skin synthetic that Uhura did not
recognize
them. The third, Spock, was the only one
conscious.

Externally, his wounds were not nearly as terrible as
his roommates', but there was a look of such searching
loss in his dark eyes that Uhura thought they must
belong to someone else, not to the Spock she knew.

"Hello, sir," she said, uncertain whether he
understood her. "We've all missed you on the
bridge."

"Where my heart is," Spock said suddenly.

Chapel seemed embarrassed for him at the
maudlin

sentiment. "Of course you want to get back to the
bridge, Mr. Spock--"

Uhura almost giggled. "No, Christine... I
understand.

He's asking for a song."

""Beyond Antares," "said Spock.

"Oh," Chapel said stiffly. "Of course."

"It's a song we used to do together. Would you like
me to sing it for you, Mr. Spock?"

Spock blinked once.

"That means "yes," "said Christine.

Spock's eyes closed as Uhura began the

haunting

tune; McCoy heard it out in the main ward and

came

inside to enjoy. "It's a lovely song,

Uhura."

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"Thank you. Spock and I used to play it together;

he played the harp and I sang. Right, Spock?"

The Vulcan did not answer; he appeared to be

sleeping.

"We have him on medication," McCoy said. "Of course, you could soothe anyone to sleep with that

beautiful voice of yours his

"I appreciate the compliment, Doctor, but I

don't

understand why Spock could say some of the song

lyrics, but had to blink instead of saying

"yes.""

"The left side of his brain, which controls

speech,

was damaged. It's the right side that

controls memory

of music, poetry, and so on."

"Yes, Doctor," Chapel said, "but he also

asked for

Uhura by name when he heard her singing out in the

main ward. His speech was very clear, not at all

garbled, the way it was before."

McCoy sighed. "Well, thank God for

small improvements.

Maybe the alpha-dextran's beginning to take

effect ."

"Will he get his speech back?" Uhura asked.

"We hope so, Uhura." Even in the dim

light, McCoy

looked painfully haggard. "Just keep singing

those pretty songs for him. It'll encourage

him."

Uhura smiled. "I think I just thought of something

even better."

Kirk lay on his bunk in the semidarkness. The

reading lamp in the outer office was still lit, but

he'd

been unable to read and now, fidgeting

uncomfortably

on his bed, was unable to sleep. The one thing

he had

been able to do with any success was think, and his thoughts now were anything but re/l: Ensign Lanz and seven others.. Spock.. the charred fields on the planet below

And the ships, the ships below the protective shield where they could not possibly be. Kirk's mind rolled

over the only two possible explanations for the millionth

time that night and rejected both of them. Not even the Vulcans or the Romulans, for all of their

superlative skill and inventiveness in the field of electromagnetic

physics, had yet developed Scotty's theorized

shield neutralizer; and if they had, Star Fleet

Intelligence would know about it, just as they would know of any design improvements in the cloaking device.

Kirk sighed and threw an arm across his open eyes.

Try as he might, he could not shake the conviction

that

Spock knew something, something locked away within his damaged memory, that could explain the appearance of the ships. Of course, Spock's urgent but forgotten message could easily be explained: the tricorder had shown the uritanium and dilithium deposits in the mountains, and Spock had realized that Aritani was politically valuable real estate.

Kirk could not make himself believe that was all there was to it.

He had just gotten up to do some unproductive pacing when the intercom whistled. X. Krelidze peered, fair-haired and moon-faced, on the screen.

"Communication from Admiral Komack in response to your message, sir." Her watery blue eyes widened slightly. "In code."

"Relay it here, Lieutenant."

Coded. It meant that Star Fleet suspected that more than a group of renegades were involved in the attacks on Aritani. Kirk wondered if he should kick

himself for

not coding his own message.

The content of Komack's response, however, was

less than enlightening:

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Intelligence reports no information available on

shield neutralizer. Romulans using

improved

cloaking device, but fuel uptake

relatively unchanged.

Enterprise hereby ordered to remain in area and

offer Aritani all possible protection.

Situation currently

under intelligence investigation. You will

be updated as facts are uncovered.

James H. Komack, Admiral.

Kirk's expression hardened as he read the

decoded

message. All possible protection--in other

words,

next to none! He signaled Krelidze on the

bridge.

"Get me the Aritanian representative."

Natahia's face, once stern and regal, was

now forbidding
and cold with anger. Kirk recognized the
scene behind her: what had been her fields, her
warm
quiet home, was now a gaping black wound in the
midst of Aritani's colorful splendor. The
cool breezes
no longer carried the perfume of wildflowers, but
the
stench of things burned that were not meant to burn--
huts,
trellised vines, clothing, hair, and flesh

....

She glared at him, her golden face pale, her
violet
eyes rimmed with red, and Kirk thought she
trembled;

whether with rage or grief, he could not tell.

"Natahia, I wish to express my sorrow at
what has
happened."

Her words were spoken with icy politeness, and
Kirk knew at once that he had lost
her. "We regret that
your people were also harmed, Captain."

"Representative, you must know how impossible it

was for the pirates to have penetrated the shield--"

"It is obvious that you felt so, else you would not have sent your people down."

"Up to now, the technology has not existed for such an attack to be possible. Star Fleet is

investigating. In

the meantime, the Enterprise will stay in orbit around

your planet and attempt to capture one of the

pirates

for questioning. They can't remain cloaked forever

and when they lower their shields, we will catch

them."

"No, Captain. There is nothing to be gained by further intervention from the Federation. There is no point in your people dying as well."

"If we can capture one of the pirates, we can

find

their base. We can find out who's attacking you, and

why. Don't you want that, Natahia?"

"You will use your devices to try to capture one

of

them. Who can say that you will be successful?

Can

you be sure that more of your people will not die?

"We are a people of strong beliefs, Captain.

Technology

almost destroyed our race; we have chosen a

simpler life. In spite of your weapons and

devices, you

have not saved a single life, and you and the pirates

are

engaged in a battle of wits to see what new

mechanisms

of war you can develop. Who is to say who is

the more civilized?

"It was our decision that brought you here, Captain

Kirk, and on behalf of the growers, I thank you

for

your services. We are sorry it resulted in the

loss of

life. We cannot let you stay and further risk

yourselves.

Your technology has failed us. It is time for

us

to return to the old beliefs. We will protect

ourselves

as best we can without depending on the

devices of

others."

"And if all of your people are killed and your planet

becomes unfit to support life?" Desperation

made Kirk blunt.

She looked at him sharply. "it seems that the

same

might happen if your ship remains. It is the will

of the

growers... it will be as I have said. I will no longer

communicate with you on this device."

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The sad, proud image shimmered for a moment

before the screen went black.

Kirk watched for a moment before he called the

bridge. Scott answered.

"Scotty, what the devil are you doing there?"

"Well, sir, seein" as how I'm the senior

command

officer on duty, I--"

"Why aren't you resting in your quarters?"

He could almost hear the indignant look Scott

gave

him over the intercom. "Captain--sir--

I'm feelin' just

fine, thank you. I've been by sick bay and

they've put

some skin on my hands so they're good as new.

Dr.

McCoy has certified me fit for duty.

Sir."

"All right, Scotty," Kirk relented

gently. "Let me

talk to Chekhov."

"He's not here, sir."

"Not there... to was Kirk's voice rose half

an octave.

"I told him not to leave his station."

"He went off shift hours ago, sir. But

Ensign O'Connor

took his place, Captain. Mr. Chekhov

explained to

her that she mustn't leave her station. She knows what

to do, sir."

"Yes, of course," Kirk said quickly. "Just be

sure

that when she goes off duty, she's replaced

instantly. I

don't want that station uncovered for even

a second."

"Understood, sir. And believe me," a

strange, dangerous

undercurrent crept into Scott's tone, "I

want to

get my hands on those pirates as much as you do.

We'll get one, Captain, if it's the last

thing I do. Scott out."

Kirk sat down at his desk and laid his head

on his

arms; he wondered what the first officer's reaction

would be to his decision to stay.

"Captain, you are failing to respect the decision

of

the growers. Are you forgetting the right of a culture

to

self-determination ?"

Yes, he thought, he was failing to respect the

growers' decision. He couldn't bring himself

to respect

the decision to commit cultural suicide. Once

the

Aritanians no longer existed as a race, their

right to

self-determination would be a moot question.

If anyone

was guilty of interference, it was the pirates, not

he, and he would not let them destroy that beautiful

planet, will of the growers be damned.

Kirk lifted his head. Sleep would not come of its

own accord again tonight, and he needed it before he
lost his wits completely. He was beginning to lose
all
sense of time, and could not afford to slip up with
another crew member.

Nor could he afford to let the pirates win again.

He rose and went to find McCoy.

Uhura looked furtively about her; the lights

in sick

bay were dimmed to simulate night, and the patients

in

the main ward all appeared to be sleeping. There was

a

light on in the lab, but no one came out to see

who had

entered. She walked stealthily toward the intensive

care ward.

The door slid open to reveal Commander Spock,

awake and propped up in a half-sitting

position on his

bed. Apparently he was not in sync with sick

bay's

circadian rhythm. Uhura pulled back,

startled and a

little embarrassed that he should be awake now to see

her; she had wanted this to be an anonymous

visit. But

it was too late; his unsettled eyes had

focused on her

and then on the instrument in her arms. She smiled

apologetically and held it out to him.

"Forgive me for taking the liberty, sir," she

whispered,

"but your quarters were unlocked and I

thought you might like to have this."

He took the harp from her with his right hand and

propped it against his stomach. He looked up from the

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instrument and the unsettled look had been replaced

by one of gratefulness.

Haltingly, he said, "There is no need

to apologize,

Lieutenant. I appreciate your thoughtfulness."

Slowly, softly, so as not to disturb the others, he

sounded each string with the fingers of his right hand.

He was merely testing to see if the harp was still in

tune, but to the two of them it was beautiful music.

McCoy's eyes closed. On the computer

screen before

him was a list of articles that pertained

to left-hemisphere

brain damage in humans, and in Vulcans;
but nowhere had he been able to find any medical
studies done on Vulcan-human hybrids.
Given the
rarity of romantic relations between the two races,
it
was not surprising that no one had been able
to collect
a large enough sample for a study. You could
probably
count the number of Vulcan-human hybrids in
the
universe on your fingers, and of those there was
probably only one suffering from brain damage.
His eyes snapped open with the happy realization
that he'd almost fallen asleep. No doubt the
aridity of
the reading matter had been responsible; at times,
an
article from one of the medical journals worked
better
than a pill. It was time to take advantage of the
soporific effects of the reading matter; he
hated taking
a pill, although insomnia had sorely tempted
him to do

so. Too many people in his profession found it too easy to prescribe for themselves plus and keep on prescribing.

He stood up and was just about to turn off the reading lamp when the door buzzed--Jim, no doubt,

desperate at the prospect of another near-sleepless

night. "Looking for a good night's sleep, eh?"

McCoy

said as the door opened.

"Maybe," said the girl... or was she a

woman? Her

small frame was at first glance misleading as to her age; she was scarcely five feet tall.

"Dr. McCoy? Emma Saenz." She

extended a warm

delicate hand to him. Somewhat taken aback, he took

it. Her grip was surprisingly strong.

"Yes?" he asked. Her voice was startling

too, bold

and arresting, not at all congruous with her physical appearance. It was a far better indicator of her

age

than her stature.

"Star Fleet sent me," she said, as though it

completely

explained her appearance at his door at this late

hour.

"That is obvious," said McCoy, looking at

her blue

medical uniform. She had to be newly assigned

personnel,

but he'd received no notification and the name

was completely unfamiliar. Although he had

to admit

that she certainly filled out the uniform well; he

wondered

how he'd ever mistaken her for a young girl.

She cleared her throat, and he looked up with such

guilty expression that the luminous black eyes

danced.

She tried again. "Doctor Emma Saenz, the

neuropsychologist?

You sent in a request." The eyes narrowed

slightly. "They did inform you I was coming,

didn't

they?"

"Can't say that they did."

She sighed. "Typical."

"Actually," McCoy said gently, certain that

personnel

had made a mistake, "I requested a

Vulcan neurologist."

"Yes?" Her eyes widened, making her look like

a

child again.

"Well, uh . . . how shall I put this

tactfully? I'm

afraid your ears are all wrong for the job."

She laughed so delightfully that McCoy laughed

with her, a little uneasily. "Dr. McCoy,

what was your

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request for? A neurologist for

Vulcans or a neurologist

who is a Vulcan?"

"The first, of course," he said, feeling very

foolish

as he realized what she was going to tell him. "I

guess

I just assumed they'd be one and the same."

"I see. Well, I am a Vulcan

neurologist of the first

sort, even if my ears are wrong."

"I guess you got me on that one. Is there

anything I

can do to make it up to you? Help you find your,

quarters or show you to sick bay?"

"No thanks. I'm sorry, I didn't

realize what schedule

you were operating on here; I can see it's late for

you, so I'll take a look at the patient tomorrow.

But

you could tell me where I could find a drink."

"You can get beer or wine in the rec lounge."

She wrinkled her nose. "Nothing better?"

He thought for a moment. "Do you drink bourbon?"

McCoy sat with Emma Saenz in the rec

lounge and

poured shots for the two of them. He knew that he

would regret the loss of sleep the next day, but

there

was something so intriguing about this woman that he

resigned himself to enjoy the situation and catch up

on

his sleep another time.

The universe was in some ways infinitely vast but

at

times could seem amazingly small. McCoy had just discovered that Emma had attended the same medical school as his daughter.

"I was in the class two years ahead of Joanna. I can't really say that I knew her very well, but I did meet her. Of course," she said with exaggerated seriousness,

"I was much older than she."

"Very tactful." McCoy smiled and refilled Emma's glass. "And are you still much older than Jo?"

Emma grinned and took a sip. "I guess that's the way it works. What did she specialize in?"

"Same thing I did--general surgery."

"You must have had a great influence on her."

"Not as much as I would have liked to." McCoy looked down at his glass, his pride tinged with guilt.

"Her mother and I were divorced when she was still quite young. Then I went into the service and I was

unable to share custody. Oh, we visited from time to time, but these days we're both so busy we don't get much of a chance to see each other. Last time was three years ago."

"Even so, you were obviously a very important part of her life. You must be very proud."

"I am."

"And you never remarried?" Her voice seemed more concerned than prying.

McCoy drained his glass. "I've heard that there are some people who have successfully mixed Star Fleet careers with marriage, but I'll be damned if I know how they do it."

"I know what you mean," Emma said darkly.

"Not to try to change a depressing subject, but, would you like to know anything about your patient?"

Emma brightened. "Yes. I've never worked with a Vulcan-human hybrid before. I find the opportunity to study the lateralization of Spock's brain fascinating."

"Funny you should put it that way," McCoy

muttered

under his breath, but continued before she could

ask him to repeat what he had said. "After the

accident

on the planet surface, there was obvious severe

trauma to the left hemisphere of the brain. I

treated it

immediately with alpha-dextran, but the patient still

showed signs of severe aphasia and retrograde

amnesia.

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Earlier this evening, I got a report that the

patient

spoke clearly--a couple of sentences

with his usual

choice of vocabulary. The aphasia seems

to be improving,

but the improvement seems to come and go. I

questioned him and he spoke very little. I'm not sure

what that indicates."

Emma seemed encouraged. "Actually, that's a

fairly good sign that the aphasia will improve

rapidly.

And the amnesia?"

"No improvement."

"Any other sign of functional impairment?"

"I've done some brain scans, but it's very

difficult

to know if the scanner is properly calibrated for

him;

I'm not even certain what the readings are telling

me.

He may have some impairment of mathematical

ability."

The slight constant smile that Emma had worn

throughout the evening swiftly metamorphosed into a

frown. "I've never really trusted those things. Of

course, I realize that having the proper

equipment is

extremely valuable in testing for damage to brain

function, but I don't like depending on them

entirely

for my diagnosis. God knows they're not

infallible.

The slightest loss of calibration can cause an

incorrect

reading."

"Amen," McCoy agreed fervently. "It's

happened

to me more than once. I need them, I admit, but

I don't

trust "em. And with Spock--"

"I can help you calibrate it for Spock, and

I've

brought a Vulcan scanner that can help us map his

brain function. But to be perfectly honest with you,

I'll

put just as much stock in my own physical

examination

of the patient. I have a pretty wicked medical

intuition."

McCoy was beginning to feel relaxed and slightly

tipsy, more from exhaustion than from the bourbon;

the thought made him chuckle. "Just don't

tell Spock,

will you? He wouldn't be able to stand it if he thought

his diagnosis rested on human intuition."

She smiled at him and pushed the hair from her

face

carelessly. It was coal-colored, the same as her

eyes,

and cut sensibly short. She clearly did not have

the

inclination to bother with it, just as she did not bother

with other cosmetic enhancements. She didn't need

them, McCoy decided, not with those eyes and that fearless manner of hers. Perhaps at first glance some would not consider her beautiful, but anyone who took the time to look again would be able to see how attractive she really was.

And McCoy was definitely taking the time.

"Then we won't tell him, Leonard," she

said. "Of

course, I don't mean to say that the tests aren't

important. Some of them are critical--

especially those

which let us know what kind of personality changes

to

expect."

Now it was McCoy's turn to frown.

"Personality

changes? But we're talking about a Vulcan here

--"

She became totally serious. "Funny how the

old

prejudices still exist. The fact that Spock

considers

himself a Vulcan and has received emotional training

does not exempt him from the possibility of a

personality

disorder. Changes in the chemical

neurotransmitters

or damage to certain receptors can cause

personality

changes, or emotional illness, or whatever you

want to call it. It's chemical. It has

nothing whatsoever

to do with one's emotional control. Even the

Vulcans,

as logical a people as they are, find it hard

to admit that

mental disease exists among their own people."

"What kind of changes are you talking about?"

"In the case of traumatic injury

to the brain, in both

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humans and Vulcans, we must be alert to the

possibility

of tendencies toward depression, irritability-

--in

extreme cases, violent psychosis. Look,

I'm upsetting

you. I'm just talking about possibilities,

Leonard. I

haven't even seen Spock yet."

"You haven't upset me. I appreciate being informed."

He forced a weak smile. "You know, you must have driven the Vulcans crazy, with your talk of emotional illnesses and your intuition his

She took it as a compliment. "I must admit I . . .

how shall I put it? . . . perplexed them a little.

They never seemed to appreciate my frankness."

"I'll bet they didn't. But it's something we certainly

appreciate around here." He smiled warmly and leaned closer, but Emma was not listening. Something had distracted her, and she stared at it intently.

McCoy

followed her gaze.

She was watching James Kirk.

McCoy had been right in assuming that Jim was having another one of his sleepless nights, but you wouldn't know it from his charming demeanor as he approached the table.

"Mind if I join you?" he asked.

McCoy felt a surge of irritation. If

Emma hadn't

been here, McCoy would have received little more than a grunt for a greeting. Sometimes Kirk's overly unctuous manners around women got on McCoy's nerves, and he had half a mind to tell Jim about it.

Later, of course.

"We haven't met, have we?" Kirk asked

Emma

with a disarming smile. He almost succeeded in masking

his exhaustion. "I'm Captain

James Kirk."

"Emma Saenz," she said, offering her hand in the

Terran manner.

"Doctor Saenz is here on temporary

assignment

with us," McCoy said coolly. "She's here

to give us

her expert assistance with Mr. Spock. She's

a neuro-psychologist."

"Sit down and have a drink with us, Captain."

Emma returned Jim's smile.

"You mean Star Fleet actually filled your

request?

This soon?" Jim sat next to Emma and fastened his hazel eyes on her in a way that made McCoy fidget.

"I'll sit for just a minute, but I'll skip the drink if that's all right. Doctor, we appreciate anything you can do for Mr. Spock. Perhaps Dr. McCoy has told you how important he is to us."

"Actually, I can probably do very little for Mr. Spock," said Emma.

"What do you mean?" Kirk's charming smile faded.

"I can diagnose him. Dr. McCoy helped him more than anyone else by administering the alpha-dextran in time, but the rest is up to Spock. He'll have to do ninety percent of the work. Motivation is the key to recovery in cases like this, and will be the deciding factor in how complete Spock's recovery will be. But

there is something you can do to help, Captain."

Kirk's expression was intent. "Name it."

"Be his friend. Do everything possible to encourage him in his recovery. Let him know you need him.

Of

course, Leonard tells me he seems to have some trauma-related amnesia. It would be very

frustrating

for him to be questioned about events which he has difficulty remembering."

"I see." Kirk studiously ignored

McCoy's dark

glance. "Have you ever worked with Vulcans before?"

"I spent a year doing research and treating

neurological

and psychological disorders on Vulcan. Before

that, I worked in the same field for six years on

Earth.

I imagine that's why Star Fleet sent me

here."

MINDSHADOW

"Well," said Kirk, "I'm glad Spock

is in such capable

hands." The charming smile crept back. "We

need

him on the bridge and I sorely miss him as

an exercise

partner."

"Captain," McCoy lectured, "if you would just learn to enjoy some individual sports--jogging, swimming, gymnastics."

"I know. I wouldn't have to worry about someone else's schedule and losing weight." Kirk grimaced:

"Thanks, Doctor, but I prefer the martial arts."

Emma sat forward eagerly. "Do you need a partner?"

Kirk hesitated. She was petite, fine-boned

....

"I know what you're thinking, Captain," she said with a sly half-smile. "Let me work out with you tomorrow. I need the exercise and you need to change your opinion of my capabilities."

"All right:" Kirk sounded totally unconvinced.

"What time, then?"

"Oh-seven-hundred?"

"Fine. But before I leave, I'd like some idea of when I can expect my first officer back."

She turned sideways in order to face Kirk

directly.

"You have requested a replacement, haven't you, captain. She looked from the surprise on the captain's face to McCoy, whose eyes were downcast.

"Perhaps you haven't been told the true extent of Spock's injuries."

"Are you telling me that Spock will not return to duty?" Kirk's jaw had tightened so much that it ached.

Her eyes were sympathetic but unyielding in their honesty. "That's one possibility. The best we can

hope for is that it will be months before Spock is

to return to duty again."

Chapter Three

EMMA TURNED SHARPLY to McCoy. "You did tell him

that, didn't you, Leonard.?"

McCoy shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

"I told

him Spock's recovery might take some time."

Kirk had already regained his composure. "I

wasn't

aware... that it would be months, that's all."

"That's if he recovers well enough, Captain.

However,

since I haven't seen Spock yet, I can

only

speculate. But I am experienced in treating this

type of

injury, and recovery is usually quite protracted.

For

the smooth functioning of your crew, I

recommend

getting at least a temporary replacement."

"Yes, of course." Kirk was still expressionless.

"It's the logical thing to do."

Emma leaned back in her chair and took another

sip

of bourbon. "Look, I don't mean to be

insensitive. I'm

just used to speaking my mind freely and I feel

an

obligation to be honest with you about Spock's

condition.

I see no point in trying to soften the truth."

Kirk had found Emma attractive enough at first

MINDSHADOW

glance, but he certainly wouldn't have termed her pretty . . . until she spoke. There was something striking about her directness, her honesty, that was indeed beautiful.

"I appreciate that very much, Doctor," he said.

"I promise I'll take a look at Spock first thing tomorrow and let you know as soon as I've made my diagnosis."

"I trust that will be after the oh-seven-hundred workout."

"Well, yes."

Kirk rose. "If you'll excuse me, I think I'll be retiring to my quarters now if I have to be in the gym that early." He did not ask McCoy for a sleeping pill; not here, in front of a crew member.

"I'll be there." She smiled warmly at him, and they exchanged a look that left McCoy feeling distinctly

uncomfortable.

Emma watched the captain leave. "He's very worried about his first officer, isn't he?"

"Yes. They're very close friends."

She turned and raised an eyebrow at McCoy.

"Close friends? A human and a Vulcan?"

"Does that seem so strange to you after living for a year on Vulcan?"

"Especially after living for a year on Vulcan."

The pained look on her face made McCoy laugh. "I

take it you don't much care for Vulcans."

"It's not that I don't care for them, but that they found me too exasperating. I decided that it would be

kinder to them to relocate elsewhere."

"In that case, you're definitely my kind of person,"

McCoy said warmly. "But it is true--Jim and Spock

are close, in their own special sort of way.

Spock isn't

the type given to emotional display, and I can't

say

that Jim is the type to broadcast his deepest

feelings,

but each has risked his life for the other dozens of

times. There's a deep sense of loyalty between

them.

And while I can't tolerate any of Spock's

insufferable

logic, I like to think of him as my friend."

"I see." Emma drained her glass. "I

certainly can't

afford to mess up on this one, can I?"

The gym was large and airy, and the overhead

lighting simulated a skylight, giving the

impression of

filtered sunlight. To one side was an

Olympic-sized lap

pool, and over on the well-padded deck, a few

crew-members

were already working out, using the graceful

defense moves taught each cadet at the

Academy.

Martial arts was the old Earth term used to refer

to

them, but over the years the intricate moves had

become a combination of many ancient defense disciplines from many different cultures.

Emma was waiting on a far corner of the padded deck, already dressed in a stiff white toga and loose-fitting pants. Her uniform seemed one size too large for her, as though the computer had synthesized it with the idea that she would grow into it. The sash that circled her waist was black.

She looked so small and vulnerable waiting there that Kirk immediately regretted accepting her invitation.

While he did not mind an occasional workout with a partner of lesser strength, today he needed a challenge, a match that demanded his total concentration and made it impossible for his mind to return to the worries awaiting him on the bridge. He felt some resentment at having to worry about hurting her.

She began stretching on the padded floor while he went into one of the cubicles to change. He came out

wearing a similar uniform, down to the color of the
belt around his waist,

MINDSHADOW

"Did you sleep well, Captain?" Emma
asked cheerfully.

She could not have had more sleep than he'd had
last night--three or four hours at
most--but she
seemed quite animated.

"Yes, thank you," he replied without thinking.

"You're a rather bad liar, Captain. You seem quite
tired."

He made a face. "You really believe in
telling the
truth, don't you?"

"I do. I'm not fond of deceit, even in little
things."

"Then I'll attempt to be perfectly frank
with you in
the future, Doctor," he replied
good-naturedly. "And
did you sleep well?"

"Not really. New assignments can be unsettling,
but

I intend to wear myself out so I'll sleep well

tonight. I

suggest you do the same."

Kirk did not ask her how in the hell she

intended to

wear him out.

"Any particular reason you haven't been getting

much sleep lately?" she continued

casually.

"Ah," said Kirk. "The psychologist part of the

neuropsychologist."

"I don't mean to pry, Captain. It's just that

I

thought you might have a lot of things on your mind.

Dr. McCoy told me that you are good friends with

Spock, and I also know that the situation on

Aritani is

critical."

"I appreciate your concern, but there's not much I

have-to say about Spock. And as far as

Aritani's

concerned, the situation is under investigation by Star

Fleet. I'm afraid I can't discuss it with you

until I

know your security clearance." He intended this last

as a joke.

"It might be higher than you think, Captain,"

she

teased. "We'd better start the workout then, if you

don't feel like talking. I have to be on duty in

an hour."

"We both do," he said, and they bowed

to each

other in the traditional manner.

As they began warming up, pacing around each

other slowly, carefully, Kirk knew that he was

indeed

the stronger. But something strange was happening.

True, he threw her twice, easily, and let

her throw him

once out of politeness; but then she threw him again,

and then a third time, without his cooperation. The

second time she threw him, he realized that he was

not

in as complete control of the situation as he had

thought--far from it. She had let him see that he was

in

fact stronger than she was, and then began

to trick him

into making incorrect guesses about what her next

move would be; more often than not, he wound up on

the deck.

The third time she threw him, he felt a sense

of

relief; he no longer had to be polite and

hold back. He

lashed out with the anger that had consumed him for

the past several days. As he reacted with more of his

strength, so she reacted with more of hers, which Kirk

guessed was twice that for a female her size.

She was

small, but she used it to her advantage, throwing

him

again with no more effort than one might exert doing a

lively dance step. Kirk fell on one shoulder

and rolled

to his feet.

"You didn't learn those moves in medical

school,"

he gasped and they sat, sweating, on the deck.

"You're definitely anything but an amateur.

You've

been studying for years."

"Everyone needs an outlet." She shrugged away

his

compliment.

"Well, you have quite an outlet there, Doctor. You

tricked me into quite a few stupid moves."

"I prefer to call it strategy."

MINDSHADOW

"Call it whatever you like. And you're really quite strong."

"For a woman my size," she finished for him good-naturedly.

"Yes, if you insist on total honesty.

Strength like

that is another thing you didn't acquire in

medical

school."

"I lived on Vulcan for a year, Captain.

The heavier

gravity begins to affect muscular size and

strength

after a relatively short time. After I left,

I took care not

to lose my newfound strength."

"You've maintained it very well. Look, I'd like

to

work out with you again sometime, and learn some of

those tricks his

"Strategies," she corrected him. "It's

basically just

the art of luring people into false assumptions and then surprising them."

"You're very good at it."

Her lips curved up slyly at the ends.

"Thank you."

They were dressed in their uniforms and leaving the gym when Emma asked again about the Aritanians.

"The pirates are still attacking the populace.

They've either found a way to get around the shields we installed or they've developed a new cloaking device."

"What will happen to the Aritanians?"

"That's one of the reasons I haven't gotten much sleep lately. They've asked us not to interfere."

Her eyes widened with horror. "Just let the pirates

wipe them out? You aren't going to leave it at that, are you?"

Kirk was relieved to see that someone shared his reaction. "No, I'm not. The Enterprise will stay in the area and do what we can."

"Which is?"

"We'll try to catch one of the pirates. It's

a long

shot, but there's not much else we can do to help."

"Do you think you'll catch any fallout

from Star

Fleet about staying against the Aritanians"

wishes?"

"Star Fleet ordered me to do what I can

to protect

the Aritanians. The way I see it, I'm just

following

orders." He lowered his voice. "I can't just

leave

them his

Emma's expression darkened, and something in the

black eyes burned. "For the sake of the

Aritanians,

Captain, I hope you capture a pirate...

after what the

pirates have done to them, and to your people."

She leaned forward out of conviction for what she

was saying; her black brows were knitted together

over wide eyes whose intensity nearly overpowered

her delicate features. Kirk made up his

mind that she

was beautiful, all the more so because of her complete
unselfconsciousness.

They both realized at the same time that he was
staring at her, and they lowered their eyes.

Kirk

cleared his throat. "Give me a call when your
diagnosis

is ready, Doctor, and I'll come to sick

bay. I prefer

to discuss it with you in person, if that's all right."

"Certainly, Captain," she replied, her

eyes shyly

fastened on a point just beyond his left shoulder.

"I'll

call you as soon as I've discussed the results

with

Dr. McCoy."

"Thank you, Dr. Saenz," he said formally.

"I'll be waiting."

The testing was completed, and Emma Saenz
dimmed the lights in the intensive care ward again.

A

brightly colored printout of Spock's brain

scan covered

with scribbled notes lay on the empty bed next

to

Spock's; both of the critically burned

crewmembers

had improved and had been moved into the

outer 68

MINDSHADOW

ward. The temperature of the room had been

raised

twenty degrees to accommodate Spock; most

humans

would have found it oppressive, but Emma was not

even perspiring. Out in the main ward, Christine

Chapel was making rounds; McCoy hadn't come

on

duty yet.

Emma Saenz was alone with Spock.

He sat on the bed, propped up, watching

wearily

while she sat on the empty bed to scribble more

notes

on the printout in the dim light. This one was not like

the other humans who had been taking care of him;

he

dreaded the others' touch, for he had lost the

ability to

shield himself from the minds of others, and found

himself being invaded by their thoughts and emotions.

This woman was different. She seemed to sense his difficulty, for her touch brought nothing,

no chaotic

thoughts, no swirling emotions. Perfect mental shields, unheard of in humans.

Emma put the printout carefully aside and stood up.

Even in the shadows, her eyes shone with a strange light; they sought out Spock's. She moved toward the

side of his bed with slow, measured steps.

"I ask you to trust me, Spock," she said in a voice

so low it could be discerned only by Vulcan ears.

Spock did not reply, but met her gaze; he could not

have looked away had he wanted to.

She was closer now, bent over the bed with her pale olive face close to his. He watched in

fascination, and

did not flinch; her nearness did not irritate

him, as

other humans' did, for her mental shields were still up.

Then with a slow, steady hand she reached for his

temple. "You must trust me, Spock." Her

voice was

soothing, hypnotic.

His eyes filled suddenly with horror, and he

raised a

weak hand to stop her. But it was too late, for she

had

both hands fastened on his temples now, and her

strength was greater than his.

"No," she ordered sternly, as Spock fought

to pull

himself from her grasp. "Don't fight it. It will be

worse if you fight me."

He shuddered as he felt her mind reaching for his.

She was free to take what she wished, for he had

lost

the power to hide his thoughts from her. But what she

was doing was hideously obscene, an unpardonable

breach of the most basic decency . . . those who

learned the discipline of the mind meld on Vulcan

were

required to take an oath that they would die before

violating the privacy of another's consciousness

against his will.

He could see nothing but her face above him, now,

and huge black eyes fierce with concentration as they
looked deeply into his; opaque
eyes, unreadable and
so black Spock could not distinguish pupil from
iris.

"My mind to yours, Spock..."

She had to lower her own shields to go deeply, and
as she did so, Spock gasped and tried to pull
away.

"No," she said quickly. "Don't think about me.

It's

not important. Think about Aritani. What do you
remember, Spock? You can fool our instruments,
if

you are clever, but you cannot fool me. I must know
what you remember."

The furrows in her forehead smoothed as she found
what she wanted, but she did not relax her grip
on

Spock.

"You know who I am now," she said as he struggled
weakly in her grasp. "But you will forget that as
well."

As she spoke, Spock's eyes dulled and went
blank

like a light suddenly extinguished.

The sound of the door opening made her

pull away

from him abruptly.

"Sorry if I startled you. Whew, it's hotter

than

70

MINDSHADOW

Hades in here. Don't know how you stood it all

this

time. And how can you take notes in this dim

light?"

McCoy turned up the lights. "You haven't

finished

yet, have you?"

"I'm afraid you're out of luck, Leonard."

She

smiled and picked up the printout. "I just

completed

the last test."

"Oh." He did not hide his disappointment. "I

was

sort of hoping to learn a thing or two." An

odd

expression came over his face as his eye caught

Spock. The Vulcan was leaning heavily against the

pillows, breathing rapidly, his eyes
glazed as if he were
in shock. "What in blazes has happened
to Spock? Is
he all right?"
"He's fine. But the verbal tests can be
physically
and emotionally exhausting. I think that the kindest
thing we can do for him right now is let him rest in
privacy."

McCoy looked uncertainly at Spock for a
moment.

"Yes, of course, Doctor."

The lab was empty; McCoy closed the door
behind
them. Emma sat at the counter and spread
Spock's
brain scan out in front of her.

"All right--diagnosis first, Leonard. Take
a look.
right hemisphere, left hemisphere. You can see
the
damage to the left cerebrum. The result is as
you
said--retrograde amnesia and nominal
aphasia. The

intellect is unimpaired, with the exception of a

slight

loss of mathematical ability, which should respond

to

tutoring. The aphasia is improving, no doubt

because

of your prompt treatment with the alpha-dextran.

However, there seems to be no improvement of the

amnesia. And there is an interesting result of the

amnesia--he has lost the Vulcan mind

rules."

"All of them?"

"As far as I can tell."

"How permanent is the damage?"

"Amnesia of this type often improves, but there

is

no way to predict how long recovery will

take."

"It could be months

"Or years." Emma looked up at him. "Or

it might

never improve."

McCoy digested this for a moment, then said

quietly,

"So what is your recommendation,

Doctor?"

"Keep him here for a while until he improves, at least physically. The aphasia will clear up rapidly. We can monitor him to see if the amnesia improves. Even if it doesn't, we can get him a tutor to reteach him the mind rules."

McCoy nodded. "Even if he doesn't ever remember what happened to him on Aritani, he'll still be able to function."

She started to say something and stopped.

"Won't he?" asked McCoy. "There's something else, isn't there?"

"Yes," she said. "The damage also affected certain loci--neuroreceptors--comhere," she pointed, "and here.

When these are damaged in a Vulcan, they may trigger violent psychotic behavior. He is a hybrid and it might be that he won't react in that manner, but the

possibility

exists and you should be aware of it. I recommend someone keep a constant watch on him. You may want to keep him under restraint."

"I'd rather not do that to Spock until absolutely necessary," McCoy said with sudden vehemence.

"Of course, Leonard, I understand. But you should also be aware that as a result of losing the mind rules,

his psionic rating has increased. In humans and in

Spock, telepathy is a right-brain function and

his is

unimpaired. But without the mind rules, Spock

is

unable to shield his own thoughts from other telepaths,

MINDSHADOW

or to block out the thoughts and emotions of those around him."

"You mean--can he can feel the emotions of whoever's around him? And read their thoughts?"

"Without wanting to or trying. It's a very unpleasant

experience for a Vulcan. You should take that into account."

"If Spock--if he does experience behavioral changes, is there anything we can do to help?"

"There is a medication we could try, but it's still experimental. I prefer to wait and see if we need it."

She leaned forward and rested a hand lightly on his arm. "You know, Leonard, I've seen some very bad cases and considering what could have happened to Spock, the prognosis is very hopeful. But there is one more problem."

He tensed. "What else?"

"I don't know how to make the chief medical officer feel better about the situation."

"I do," he answered, surprised at his own response.

"Have dinner with me tonight."

"To discuss the prognosis?" she teased softly.

"Definitely not."

Kirk had almost stepped onto the turbolift in response

to Saenz's call when Chekhov called to him
excitedly from Spock's station.

"Keptin! Two uncloaked pirate wessels
--on the surface
below

Kirk raced back to the con, heart pounding, but
he
did not sit down.

"They're hovering, sir." The Russian bent
over the
hooded computer screen. "Near the same area we
beamed you up from."

The area where Spock fell. "Mr. Chekhov,
compute
the trajectory of those ships if we "borrow"
their pilots
for a while."

"The wessels should crash--cominffthe mountains,
sir." He straightened and looked at Kirk.

"It should
present no danger to the population."

Kirk walked toward the helm. "Get a
tractor beam
on those vessels, Mr. Sulu." He leaned
over the

helmsman's shoulder anxiously as though his presence might somehow help to keep them from getting away this time.

"Tractor beam on, sir."

Kirk had to force himself to sit in his chair to call the transporter room.

"Lyle here, sir."

"Two to beam up from the planet surface, Mr. Lyle.

Chekhov will feed you the coordinates."

"Captain," said Sulu. "One of the ships is tearing up."

"Did you adjust the beam for the size of the vessel?"

Kirk was immediately embarrassed at his own question; Sulu was one of the most competent helmsmen in the Fleet.

"Yes, sir. He's trying to move the ship off course."

Kirk punched a toggle on the console.

"Kirk to Security."

"Tomson here."

"Lieutenant, I need a security team of four to the transporter room on the double. We have two prisoners to escort to the brig."

"Right away, Captain."

Kirk called Lyle back. "Bring them aboard, Mr.

Lyle."

He could hear the whine of the transporter, and the sound of Lyle drawing in his breath sharply.

"What's wrong, Lyle? Are the prisoners aboard?"

"Yes, Captain." Lyle sounded shaken.

"I'm afraid

MINDSHADOW

I'll need to have some medics to pick up one of them.

He was only half-caught by the beam."

"The other?"

"They're taking him to the brig now, sir."

"Keptin," Chekhov interrupted. "The ships have crash-landed near the mountains. One was completely torn apart by the tractor beam; the other is

damaged

but salvageable."

Kirk almost laughed with exhilaration. They had done it at last--they had a pirate, and now his ship. He called Scott.

"Scotty, I've got a pirate ship on the surface we need someone to disassemble and beam up here. Think you can find some volunteers who'll risk it?"

"Aye, that we can," Scott said exuberantly.

"Did we catch a pirate, Captain?"

"That we did, Scotty."

Scott emitted a low rumble in his throat.

"I'm not responsible for what I might do to him, sir.

What kind is he?"

"I'll know soon, Scotty. I'm on my way down to the brig now. How soon can you get some people down there?"

"Yesterday, sir."

The Vulcanoid behind the force field was tall,

lean

and aristocratic of bearing, but there the similarity ended; the expression of open hatred on his face negated the possibility of his being a native of Vulcan.

Romulan, then; but he did not fit Kirk's

idea of what a

Romulan should look like, for he did not wear his hair

in the Romulan style. Thick and wavy, it was

brushed

straight back from the widow's peak on his forehead

and curled onto his shoulders. Nor did he wear

the

sedate Romulan military uniform; his bright

red tunic

fit snugly underneath a long, loose-fitting

vest.

He had apparently not been blessed with the discipline

and courtesy of the Romulan culture, for as

Kirk

approached the brig he spat at him. The

spittle hit the

force field and slid to the floor of the brig without

hitting its target.

It did not surprise Kirk to see a
Romulan dressed as
a pirate. The Praetor's Empire placed
heavy demands
on its subjects; nothing less than excellence
was accepted,
whether one served the Praetor in the military
or as a civilian, and dropouts were not tolerated
within
the society. Those who did not fit into the spartan
way
of life were dispatched, or they escaped to become
outcasts... or pirates.

"Murderous whelp!" The pirate cursed
Kirk.

Kirk answered coolly in his best imitation of his
first
officer. "I've murdered no one. The death of
your
cohort was an accident. You, on the other hand, have
no doubt killed a number of
Aritanians and quite
possibly some of my people as well. What were you
doing under our protective shield?"

The Romulan eyed Kirk as though he were
insane.

"Shield? I encountered no shield."

"Perhaps you used a shield neutralizer." Kirk
watched carefully for a reaction. "Are you working for
the Praetor?"

The Romulan laughed scathingly. "Shield
neutralizer!

You are a stupid human. I work for no one but
myself."

"What were you doing on Aritani?"

"My friend and I were merely flying over the planet
surface when you attacked us--"

"We beamed you aboard," Kirk said calmly.

"Yes, and in your incompetence, you killed my
friend to And you accuse me of killing people--"

Kirk leaned forward, his voice so soft the

Romulan

had to strain to hear it. "I regret that. I would like
to

MINDSHADOW

have two of you, so you could try to corroborate
each other's story. Why wasn't your cloaking
device
on?"

The Romulan's eyes widened. "Such

accusations! I

don't know what you're talking about."

"We'll see. We have your ship."

"I don't believe you." The Romulan's

sneer faded

slightly.

"It really doesn't matter," Kirk continued in

the

same low voice; he clenched his fist as a wave

of

irrational hatred swept over him. The

Romulan

seemed to sense it and pulled back slightly from the

force field. "Why don't you relax now? Our

medical

officer will be down later to talk to you and give you a

little something to help relax you."

"You Federation types are pathetic. What makes

you think you have anything that could make a Romulan

talk? We are impervious to your

interrogation

methods."

Kirk smiled tightly. "You meant to say, the

trained

and disciplined members of the Romulan military

are

impervious . . . to almost anything. But you aren't

Vulcans. We can get information out of you."

"I have nothing to hide." The pirate turned his

face

away.

"We'll see," said Kirk. He left while

he could still

control his impulse to put his hands around the

Romulan's

neck.

Emma and McCoy were in the laboratory looking

at

another brain scan; Emma sat at the counter

with the

printout spread out in front of her while

McCoy leaned

over her shoulder--a little too closely, Kirk

thought,

even for colleagues. They were laughing when

he

came in, but when they saw his face, they stopped

abruptly.

"What's happened, Jim?" McCoy asked.

The captain

was no longer weighed down with fatigue and

concern; his movements were electric, purposeful.

"We got one, Bones," Kirk gloated.

McCoy's face broke into a broad grin.

"What did you catch?" Emma searched Kirk's

face

and then McCoy's until she understood. "A

pirate?"

Kirk nodded. "Romulan."

"Is he really a pirate," asked McCoy,

"or one of the

Praetor's boys?"

"That's what I want to find out. I'm going

to need

you later, Bones. We're bringing up the

wreckage from

one of the ships, and I want to examine it before we

question him, but after that--"

"You'd like me to concoct a little potion to loosen

his tongue."

"Exactly."

Emma looked surprised. "Do you really have a

truth serum effective against Romulans?"

McCoy shrugged. "It sometimes is. A lot

depends

on the individual. With a little perseverance, we can

usually find out what we need to know."

"Would you like to come along with McCoy during the questioning?" Kirk asked. "Your knowledge of Vulcan psychology might be useful."

She wheeled on him with such angry indignance that Kirk drew back, surprised. "Vulcans and

Romulans

are hardly similar when it comes to psychology,

Captain,

although I suppose most humans assume they are

the same since they share a few minor racial

characteristics.

Their cultures and philosophies are

completely

different--"

Kirk held up his hands. "Sorry, Doctor.

I didn't

mean to overgeneralize. It was stupid of me. Still,

have more experience in psychology than either of

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"What time?" she said, suddenly cool.

"Leonard

and I were going to have dinner later."

McCoy did not need to look in a mirror to know

his

cheeks were flaming; and he was even more embarrassed that such a perfectly normal statement would embarrass him. Everyone else had a love life; it was perfectly normal. What did he have to blush about? He waited for the captain to make some taunting remark, to say, "Excuse me, Leonard, I didn't know"" but he did not.

"I don't wish to interfere in Dr. McCoy's social life," Kirk said in clipped tones, "but I am unable to predict when we'll be finished searching the ship. I'll call the minute I know something. But first, Dr. Saenz, I'd like to talk to you about those test results on Spock."

The door to Engineering opened to reveal total chaos. Pieces of metal had been strewn all over the deck; Kirk could recognize pieces of the debris as parts from a surface fighter. One of the pieces was

a
small, streamlined cloaking device, and he
picked it
up, marveling at its size--the one he had stolen
from
the Romulans scarcely three years ago had
been
twenty times the size.
Scott wriggled out from under a large piece of
bulkhead on the floor; nearby, a small
engine had been
completely dismantled. Kirk smiled to himself; at
least
part of Scott's thoroughness was not motivated
by his
desire to find the shield neutralizer as much as
by the
chance to tinker with someone else's engines. Scott
brushed dust and ash from his rumpled tunic and
walked over to Kirk, who knew the moment he
saw
the engineer's expression that they had not found
anything yet.

"I dinna understand, Captain." Scott shook his

head. "Ye kin see the little cloakin' device
there, but
that thing's designed to consume a goodly amount of
fuel. They couldna stayed cloaked more than seven
hours with it. They weren't under the shields to begin
with."

"So Spock was right." Kirk turned the device
over
in his hands. "Scotty, there's got to be something
else
here to explain it."

"But sir, we've just about finished checkin'
everything,
and there's not one piece of equipment here to
explain either how they got past the shield or how
they
stayed cloaked more than seven hours."

"Just about finished." Kirk looked up at
Scott.

"That isn't the same as completely finished, is
it,
Engineer?"

"Well, no, sir, I suppose not, but the
only thing that
remains is to tear apart every bulkhead and see if
the

device is concealed somewhere--but I can't believe

it

could be small enough for that and still work."

"Keep looking, Scotty. I've got to know

something

before I go in to question the prisoner."

Scott's expression was dangerous. "I wish

I could

go with ye, Captain. I have a few things I'd like

to

clear up with that murderous divvil--"

"I know," Kirk said softly. "But I need you

here.

Keep up the good work, Mr. Scott. Give

me a call

when you've found something."

"We will, sir."

The instant the door to Engineering closed behind

the captain, Scott muttered, "But I

guarantee ye we

won't find a bloody thing." He eyed the

wreckage on

the floor and suddenly gave a piece of it a

disgusted

kick.

Emma was waiting for McCoy in front of his
quarters;
he'd stayed on duty a half-hour longer
to make up

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for being late that morning. "Hi," he smiled.

"Hello yourself." She leaned against the wall and
smiled up at him with an expression that could
hardly
be called professional.

"Look, I'm going to be a little late for dinner
tonight.

Why don't you go ahead and we'll take a
raincheck."

"No thanks, I thought I might go
along when the
Romulan is questioned. It sounds fascinating."
McCoy winced. "Did I ever mention that you
remind
me of someone sometimes--no, never mind. I
haven't heard from the captain yet today. It
seems he

has Scotty and half of Engineering going over that
pirate ship with a fine-toothed comb, and he wants
to

wait until they're finished before we question the prisoner."

"Have they found anything?" Her eyes glistened with interest.

"Oh, just the usual Romulan pirate paraphernalia--cloaking devices and whatnot. I take it dinner's after the interrogation, then? Let me give Jim a call and see how it's going."

McCoy knew that something was urgently wrong the instant he heard Kirk's voice on the intercom.

"What is it, Jim?"

"I just got a call from Security, Bones. It looks like I won't be needing your help with that prisoner after all.

He's dead."

Chapter Four

WHEN McCoy and Emma arrived at the brig, the force field which had contained the prisoner was dark; inside, security personnel were searching for evidence.

Kirk stood where he had once faced the
Romulan,
but this time he confronted Security Chief
Tomson.

Lieutenant Ingrid Tomson was a colorless,
lanky
woman who stood a good half a head taller
than Kirk

in spite of her tendency to slump. She came from
an

icy colony planet that rarely saw the sun, and
her skin

and hair were so pale that she seemed lashless and
browless; when she blushed, the capillaries were
clearly outlined in red on her white

cheeks. Normally

serene of manner and countenance almost to the point

of apathy, she spoke to Kirk now with what was for

her an alarming degree of agitation. Her

security team

had just made one of the most serious mistakes a

security team can make: they had lost a

prisoner.

Tomson had not been on the Enterprise long, and

she was keenly aware that her promotion to security

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chief was recent enough for any miscalculation on her part to be interpreted as greenhorn incompetence rather than simple bad luck. She spoke slowly, choosing her words with care so that the captain would understand that the situation had been handled with complete professionalism. The fact that the captain stood listening silently, jaw clenched, with a look of barely controlled fury on his face, did not bolster Tomson's confidence any.

"The facts are, sir, that Ensign a!-Baslama was guarding the entrance to the brig when he was stunned by a phaser blast coming from someplace outside the brig. When he came to, he discovered that the force field was down and the prisoner and his own phaser were missing. At first he assumed that the prisoner had escaped, and he contacted me. We did an internal scan

of the ship, but we couldn't locate a Vulcanoid

on

board, other than Mr. Spock in sick bay."

"Any idea how long all-Baslama was

unconscious?"

"By his condition, I would say the phaser was fired

on light stun. He was probably out three or

four

minutes at most. Then we found his phaser on the

deck

of the brig." Tomson handed it to Kirk for

inspection.

"It has the Romulan's fingerprints on it,

sir. I'm taking

it to forensics to see if it was fired.

"After all-Baslama notified me, I immediately

checked with the transporter room and the shuttle

deck. No one has left this ship, Captain.

So right now

we're checking the air in the room to see if we

can pick

up any random molecules."

Kirk's scowl deepened. "Of what?"

"Of someone who was recently vaporized."

"The pirate," Kirk said, understanding.

"Yes, sir."

"But how did the prisoner get the phaser in the first place?"

"I had trouble figuring that one out myself, sir.

My

best guess is that someone brought it to him."

"Someone on my ship brought it to him," Kirk's irritability was increasing, "so that he could kill himself?."

It doesn't make any sense. If someone was in collusion with him, why wouldn't they help him escape?"

"I don't know, sir. But there was no

way he could

have gotten past the force field to take it from

Ensign

all-Baslama himself. This brig was absolutely secure."

Up to this time Emma and McCoy had been standing

silently nearby; when Emma spoke, Kirk and

Tomson turned quickly to look at her. "If the

pirates

could get through the protective shield on

Aritani, why

should it be impossible for one of them to get past a

small force field?"

"A good question," said Kirk. "But we didn't

find

anything resembling a shield neutralizer on

their

ship."

Tomson took the question as an insult to her

professional

competence. "The prisoner didn't have any

type of device on him when we put him in the

brig,

ma'am. My people are very thorough when it comes to

searching prisoners." Tall and pale,

she stared coldly

down at small, dark Emma; McCoy thought

they

looked for all the worlds like two exact

opposites.

Emma persisted. "But you just said there weren't

any other fingerprints on the phaser except the

guard's

and the prisoner's."

"I don't have to explain to you how easy it is to

avoid getting fingerprints on something, do I,

ma'am?" Tomson's tone was less than

charitable.

Emma almost seemed to enjoy Tomson's
disgruntlement.

"Maybe the prisoner did escape, and planted
the phaser to throw us off."

Tomson's cheeks slowly turned pink. "First
off,

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Ensign all-Baslama swears that he was fired
at from the
corridor, not from the brig. Secondly, we've
already
searched this ship, and there aren't any Romulans
aboard. Thirdly, the prisoner didn't leave
via the
transporter or a hijacked shuttlecraft.

Would you like
to suggest just how he managed to get off this ship?"

Emma raised an eyebrow but remained silent.

One of the security men walked over and displayed
a tricorder reading to Tomson. "That confirms
it," she

said, pleased. "Someone was recently vaporized in
this room. Unless you're missing any crewmen,
Captain,

we'll assume it was the prisoner." She smiled
coldly down at Emma. "I'm afraid your
Romulan
didn't escape, ma'am."

"My Romulan?" Emma muttered so that only
McCoy
could hear. "I didn't realize I owned one."

"I'm aware that suicide is a favorite
pastime of
captured Romulans," McCoy said aloud,
"but who on
this ship would attack a security guard
to bring the
prisoner a suicide weapon?"

"Maybe not to bring a suicide weapon,"
Tomson
answered.

"Murder," Kirk said softly.

Tomson nodded. "It's the only good explanation
I

can come up with to fit the facts. Of course,
I'll know
more when I get the results of all the tests."

"But who---" Kirk began, and stopped
abruptly.

McCoy finished for him. "Who on this ship would

have a-motive?"

Tomson looked down at him grimly. "Are you

forgetting,

Doctor, how many of the crew have suffered

at the hands of the pirates? They all have a

motive."

More than enough, Kirk thought, remembering Ensign

Lanz. "I'll be in my quarters," he told

Tomson.

"Notify me when you get the results."

"Come on," said Uhura, "see if you

can play

along." She had just finished singing a song from the

heartland of Africa. Her forehead glistened with

perspiration,

and she thoughtlessly ran the back of her

hand across it. Spock was sorry that he had not

properly adjusted the temperature in his cabin

to accommodate

her; he had thought it should be tolerable

for humans, since it felt chilly to him.

"Come on," she urged, and Spock joined in with his

harp, the instrument blending with Uhura's voice in

an

eerily beautiful harmony.

Uhura nodded, smiling, and Spock nodded back.

His physical injuries were now almost unnoticeable except for a slight limp. At Saenz's urging, he had moved back into his quarters. His Speech had improved as well, although at times he found himself at a humiliating loss for a word, a situation that caused great awkwardness for himself and his visitor.

Even worse was his almost total loss of recent memory; he was unable to converse about anything save the present and the far-distant past. Kirk, who had at first come the most often, now visited him hardly at all, for there was little else on Kirk's mind these days besides Aritani, a word which held no significance for Spock.

Dr. Saenz, on the other hand, came to see him almost every day, and her visits did not trouble him much, but they always left him with a vague sense of uneasiness and he could never recall the sessions

clearly afterwards. Even so, her controlled thoughts were a relief after being bombarded with the emotions of the others.

Especially those of Christine Chapel; her visits were

most distressing. She came to give him

physical therapy

for his left arm and leg and to encourage him to

speak. The physical contact between them during the

therapy session was almost unbearable for

Spock, a

MIN-DO DSHADOW

touch-telepath. Her emotions were violent and disconcerting;

the overwhelming one was pity for him, which

shamed him. Her pathetic struggle to hide her

emotional

attachment for him made Spock in turn feel

pity

for her. It also reminded him pointedly of his own

pathetic efforts to deal with his own surging emotions:

frustration, anger, self-pity.

Ironically, it was his human side that now

struggled

to control his emotions, guarding them until his

Vulcan

control could be restored; but it was a tenuous

control,

one which could break easily at the first critical

moment.

The only visitor he did not dread was

Uhura, for he

did not have to speak and be reminded of the words

and incidents he could not remember;

instead, he

could let the music flow from him and forget for a

moment that things were not as they had always been.

"That was great, Spock," Uhura said. The beads

of

sweat on her brow had become small rivulets

and she

tried again to inconspicuously wipe them away.

Spock

laid his harp aside and walked stiffly to the

temperature

control. He'd lowered it already to a temperature

he thought a human should find comfortable, but his

memory was not reliable these days; he turned it

down

another ten degrees.

Uhura sighed gratefully. "Bless you."

At the same time as her sigh, Spock heard a

shuffling

sound outside the door to his cabin.

"What's wrong?" Uhura asked. "I didn't

hear anything.

Come on, let me teach you another song."

The sound of Leonard McCoy emitting a

monstrous

sneeze just outside the door was unmistakable.

Spock rose.

"Someone just passing by," Uhura said quickly, her

soft brown eyes wide.

If someone had told Spock that his expression was

one of affectionate exasperation, he would have denied

it. "Uhura," he said disapprovingly. He could

never seem to remember her rank.

She giggled. "Oh, what the hell," she said, and

went

to open the door.

"Surprise," the crowd in the doorway chorused

weakly.

"Not much of a surprise," Uhura said.

"Really,

Doctor."

,I think I may be coming down with something,"
McCoy shuffled. "They can transport a
man's molecules
across space, but they can't prevent the common
cold." Standing beside him was the captain, Dr.
Saenz, M'Benga, and Christine Chapel.
Spock regarded them with curiosity as they
trooped
into his cabin. The conflicting thoughts were
reeling;
he couldn't sort them out to interpret the reason for
the mass visit. They stood nervously around the
captain,
who was holding a small square object in his
hand.
He smiled at Spock. "I have a little something for
you from Star Fleet Command, Mr. Spock." He
held
out the small dark box and opened it.
Neatly arranged within the box, the shiny silver
medallion hung from a dark blue ribbon.
Spock held it
up to the light; it was inscribed on the back with his
name and the date of his injury in Vulcan script;
on the
front was the Federation logo, the Roman letters

UFP enclosed in a shield.

He did not remember what the captain said to him

afterwards; nor did he remember thanking the

captain

or watching everyone leave. But after they were gone,

Spock sat in the traditional posture before the

stone

meditation statue in his room. He could

remember the

posture, and the purpose and symbolism of the

small

stone statue with the throbbing flame in its belly, for

MINDSHADOW

his earlier memories, especially those of

Vulcan, had

not been lost--if anything, they had become

stronger.

Yet he was unable to summon the discipline of

meditation;

a part of him was gone, a part without which he

could not function as Spock.

He drew the silver medal from the box--the Award

of Valor, the Federation's highest decoration for the

wounded--comand turned it over in his hand. The date

meant nothing to him; he could not even vaguely

remember the incident for which he had been decorated.

His hand closed over the medal.

For a long time, he sat before the statue, his eyes wide and unseeing, and in his mind one word pulsed like the flame: Remember.

Kirk was back on the bridge when Tomson called

with the report from forensics.

She sounded quite pleased with herself. "I think you'll find this interesting, Captain. Ensign

all-Basla-ma's

phaser was fired twice--once on stun and once to

kill."

"That's what you expected, isn't it?"

Also-Baslama

was stunned, then the prisoner--"

"Remember, sir, all-Baslama was not stunned

with

his own phaser. He was wearing it at the time he was stunned."

"Of course. So it means---"

"It means that all-Baslama was stunned with someone else's phaser, of course; then that person took

all-Baslama's

phaser and stunned the prisoner with it,
then put the prisoner's fingerprints on it, then-

--"

"Then murdered him." It was not what Kirk had
hoped to hear. "A very good attempt to make it

look

like suicide. Now what?"

"I'm afraid we're going to have to start an

investigation

of our own personnel, sir. I suggest we start

with

those who were wounded down on the planet surface.

Do you have any idea who might have had a

particularly strong motive for killing the

Romulan?"

"No," Kirk lied.

"Well, sir, I'm afraid that leaves me with the

very

unpleasant task of finding out which of our crewmen

is

a murderer."

It was Christine Chapel who found Spock

unconscious

on his bed; his wrists had been slashed with the

ceremonial dagger taken from his wall.

Emma and McCoy hovered over Spock in

sick bay,

but there was nothing more they could do except wait

for Spock's body to heal itself. Slender green

tubing

ran from the crook in Spock's right

elbow to a packet

above his bed; to one side lay Spock's harp--

McCoy

could not remember who had thought to bring it in all

the confusion.

Emma spoke barely above a whisper. "He

seemed

to be doing so well. I should have noticed the warning

symptoms."

"No one can believe it." McCoy's eyes were

fixed

on the life monitor. Spock, as always, would

survive.

That Vulcan had the toughest hide... "I just

don't

understand what prompted him to do it."

"We shouldn't have left him alone in his quarters.

It's my fault. I've seen enough of these cases

to know

better. Rational one moment, psychotic the
next. I

should have insisted he be under constant watch."

McCoy looked at her tenderly. "I thought you
were

a psychologist, Doctor. Are you

really going to try to

take all the blame?"

She smiled at him, a small, unhappy

smile.

"Maybe instead of trying to figure out what we

did

wrong," McCoy said, "we should try to figure

out

what to do right."

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"Okay." She straightened and squared her
shoulders.

"Let's put him on that neurotransmitter and
see

if it helps."

"Sounds like a step in the right direction. What's
the

name of the medication?"

"Neodopazine."

His eyebrows flew upwards. "Neodopazine?"

That's

very experimental stuff."

"I know. I was one of the first to work with it. I've used it very successfully with the violent."

"It's never been tested on Vulcans, has it?"

Emma gazed back down at Spock; the

Vulcan's

breathing was slow and regular. Her voice sounded very far away.

"Would you prefer Spock try to kill himself again?"

"Of course not, Emma, but I want to know what other alternatives we have."

"We can send him away. To a star base hospital if they'd take him--comif he becomes more violent, to Ebla Two."

Ebla II was a maximum security

sanitorium for the

violently insane. McCoy closed his eyes

briefly and

shuddered.

"Let's start the medication, then."

McCoy had not expected to sleep well that

night,

but the last thing he had counted on was a call from

sick bay rousing him from deep slumber. Spock had torn the transfusion tubes from his arms. The medic had replaced them at once, noting that they had not been out long, and gone about his rounds. Now they were out again. Did McCoy want the patient restrained? Reluctantly, McCoy ordered the restraints. But he could not return to sleep after that, and when the Vulcan finally awoke, McCoy was watching by his bedside as he had been for the past several hours. The confusion in Spock's eyes cleared gradually as he came to realize where he was, and turned to irritation at the sight of the tube in his arm and the restraint. "Spock?" McCoy spoke gently. "Do you remember what happened?" Spock frowned.

"Nurse Chapel found you in your quarters.

Spock

.. it seems you tried to kill yourself."

Spock tried to sit up, but the restraints held

him

back. "No," he said. "That's impossible."

It was the answer McCoy most wanted to hear; it was the answer he wanted desperately to believe.

"Then suppose you tell me what happened."

"I don't remember," Spock said

vehemently. "But

it was not I... it was someone else."

"I want to believe, Spock, God knows,

but--"

"Then believe," said Spock, with such conviction

and so much like the old Spock that McCoy

believed.

He leaned over to loosen the Vulcan's

restraints out

of pity. "But who would try to kill you, Spock?"

"Someone's out to get you, Spock?"

McCoy could not recognize the voice--comcold,

Skeptical,

ugly--and turned around to see who spoke.

Emma Saenz stood in the doorway. "He's

generalizing

his paranoia, Doctor," she said loudly.

"He's

managed to convince himself that someone else has done this to him."

McCoy could not believe that Emma was saying these things, nor could he keep from losing his temper.

"For God's sake, if you have something to say, say

it

to him. Don't talk about him as if he can't

understand

you!"

Her anger matched his. "I know he understands me.

And I won't let him deny the truth." She

moved to the

side of Spock's bed. "You attempted

suicide, Spock.

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Face it. You're depressed and it must be dealt

with if

you are to get better. Lying about it won't

help."

Spock's eyes flamed. "No," he said

explosively. "I

do not lie."

Emma leaned toward him fiercely. "If you

didn't do

it, Spock, then tell us who did."

"I... don't remember." Spock turned

away from

her.

"I thought so." Her manner became calm.

"Spock,

if you're going to deny the truth, I can't do

anything to

help you. I suggest you think about that, because your

captain and this ship need you to get better," She

turned abruptly to leave, but paused in the

doorway

without turning around. "I suggest you put the

restraints

back on him, Doctor."

The door closed behind her a split second before

the

harp struck it with an angry twang, Spock

slumped

back in the bed, breathing rapidly.

McCoy picked up the instrument gently and

examined

it. One of the strings had snapped, and there was

a small crack in the body. He returned it
to Spock's
bedside without comment, but the Vulcan did
not look
at it--comSpock was fighting an internal battle
now, and
the enemy was his own rage: rage at Emma
Saenz
because she did not believe, rage at himself because he
could not remember, rage at the unspeakably
irrational,
destructive act he had just committed.

A moment passed before Spock replaced his anger
with the cool expression McCoy knew so well,
an
expression the vehemence of his words belied.

"I can no longer remain here. I must go
to Vulcan."

McCoy could not pretend that he did not understand;
Spock, of course, feared the loss of emotional
control far worse than the other infirmities he
faced.

Still, McCoy tried to soothe him.

"Let me discuss it with Dr. Saenz,
Spock."

For a moment he thought Spock's anger might erupt again, but the Vulcan contained himself and faced the doctor calmly. Vulcans do not beg, McCoy had to remind himself, but the look in Spock's eyes was the closest thing to a plea that McCoy had ever seen. "I must go now." Hoarse with desperation, Spock resorted to a word McCoy could not remember hearing him use before. "Please." McCoy closed the lab door behind him. He was furious with Emma, so furious that he shouted. "You'd better have a damn good excuse for what you did in there. You just called a Vulcan a liar, and you, of all people, should know what an insult that is!" "I know," Emma said quietly. She sat with her elbows on the lab counter, her chin resting on one fist; the ugliness that she had shown to Spock was gone, and the anger, too, as though it had been a role she'd

assumed for a few moments and discarded the instant she left intensive care.

She was once again the person with whom McCoy was falling in love.

He scarcely heard her, though, and went back to venting his anger while she sat patiently and waited for it to subside.

"And how dare you treat him as though he doesn't exist, talking about him in the third person!

Dammit, how can you be so insensitive to all he's gone through?"

"Do you believe it?" Emma asked, watching intently.

"Do you honestly believe that someone tried to kill Spock?"

McCoy faltered, losing some of his steam.

"Well"

"If you had believed it, Leonard, you would have called SecUrity, and reported it. But you didn't."

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"Well, I believe him when he says he

doesn't remember

doing it."

Emma sighed. "I do, too. But that wasn't

all he

said. He's trying to blame someone else for it, and

I

refuse to coddle him by pretending I believe

it."

"Coddle him--" McCoy sputtered. "You were

downright insulting! You called him a liar, the

worst

thing you could call a--"

She lifted up her chin and sat up straight on

the

stool. "Leonard, you are too emotionally

involved

with this patient to do either one of you any good."

"Yes, of course I'm emotionally involved!"

McCoy

exploded. "But that doesn't mean I'm incapable

of

helping Spock. You, on the other hand, seem

to be

totally insensitive to his situation. If you ask

me, you

have something against Vulcans!"

Emma gasped and stood up so quickly that the stool almost tipped over. "That's the most irrational thing I've ever heard you say--"

McCoy thrust out his jaw. "Maybe you'd better

send me to Ebla Two with Spock."

She drew a quick breath as if to reply heatedly, then

suddenly stopped and sat back down on the stool.

She

closed her eyes and seemed to gather herself; when she finally spoke, her tone was infinitely patient.

"Please, Leonard, I can't bear to fight with you on

this. We're both trying to help Spock. It's just that we

have different ideas of how to go about it. Let's not argue."

"Fine." He stood, arms folded tightly, his eyes still

flashing with anger. He was not about to capitulate.

"Let's discuss it calmly, then."

Emma did not let herself hear the sarcasm in his

voice, but leaned heavily against the
polished black
countertop and sighed. GO-DO, she looked
lovely, McCoy
thought in spite of his anger, and so very sad.
She spoke in such a soft murmur that he had
to lean
very close to hear her. "I truly wish that I could
believe Spock's story. I know you feel the
same way.
Spock's subconscious has invented a way out
of accepting
responsibility for his desperate action. If
we go
along with it, he'll begin to truly believe it, and
Spock
will never deal with the problem. I've always believed
that you don't solve problems by pretending they
don't exist. I was trying to shock him,
Leonard--by
being cruel, I was trying to show him that he can't
run
away from what he has done."
McCoy did not pull his hand away when she
reached
for it; her touch was strangely hot, as

though she burned with fever. His anger melted.

"I'm sorry I upset you," Emma continued,

leaning

still closer. "But I've never been very

diplomatic. I

want to help Spock, but I will not encourage his

fantasies."

"I'm sorry I yelled... but I'm very

worried about

him. I still think you were too hard on him."

She smiled up at him, still holding his hand.

"Maybe I was."

McCoy was close enough for the first time to notice

her disperfume, a strangely familiar sweetness

that he

could not place, until he remembered the

wildflowers

on the planet below.

Clearly, the only logical thing to do was to bend

down and kiss her.

Some time later, Kirk stood indecisively in

front of

McCoy's quarters in the dimly lit

corridor. As much as

he hated resorting to McCoy's

concoctions, he hadn't

had much sleep in the last forty-eight hours and had long ago finished the last of his brandy supply.

These

days he was becoming too tired even for his workouts in the gym, and they were his only release of tension.

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And he was looking forward to seeing Emma Saenz again.

Kirk pressed the buzzer with reluctance. It

took

such an uncomfortably long time for McCoy

to respond

that he was convinced the doctor was sleeping

too soundly to hear, and he turned to leave.

He stopped as the door slid open. McCoy

wore a

short robe, and Kirk managed to repress a

sarcastic

whistle as he studied McCoy's pitifully

pale legs ending

in two bare bony feet. He'd never known the

prudish doctor to sleep in the nude before; perhaps

he'd been in the sonic shower. But the

room behind

McCoy was dark.

"Sorry to wake you," Kirk apologized, but

McCoy's

face was not sodden with sleep, nor was his

voice groggy. If anything, he seemed alert

--perhaps

even a little anxious.

"No problem," he said quickly. "What can I do

for

you, Captain?"

"I can't sleep in two days. I give up,

Doctor. Give me

something."

"Okay, Jim--just give me a second.

I'll call sick bay

and tell whoever's on duty what to give you."

He

disappeared into the darkened room, and Kirk began

to follow, but the door slid shut in his face.

He pulled

back, surprised and a little insulted.

He excused the doctor's rude behavior

by deciding

that McCoy was probably suffering from the

cumulative

effects of exhaustion himself when McCoy
appeared
in the doorway again.

"M'Benga's there. He'll give you what you
need,
Jim."

Kirk smiled wanly. "I really appreciate
this, Bones.

You'll never knoww"

A sound emerged from the darkness behind McCoy,
a sound that Kirk recognized as a feminine
yawn. His

first reaction was amusement; his second, as he
placed

the owner of the voice, was a far darker emotion.

It must have shown on his face, for McCoy faced
him with glittering eyes. You have no right, they said.

They were right; Kirk cast his eyes downward.

"Thanks again, Doctor."

"Don't mention it," said McCoy.

Christine Chapel was on duty in the main ward the
next day when McCoy entered, whistling loudly and
tunelessly.

"Whoever told you you could whistle?"

Mercifully, he stopped, but her affectionate
sarcasm

did not dampen his decidedly good spirits. "How are you this morning, beautiful?" McCoy inspected her with paternal solicitousness. "You're looking a little tired."

"I am tired," she answered, immediately suspicious at his unusually complimentary appellation for her. Beautiful was somewhat less than accurate; she'd just

finished an eight-hour shift and knew with bedrock certainty that she resembled something the cat dragged in. "More than a little. I was just on my way out--was

"Have a good rest," McCoy said warmly. "God knows you deserve it after all the double shifts you've pulled these past few weeks."

"We've all pulled double shifts the past few weeks."

Her suspicion deepened; she folded her arms and

assumed a no-nonsense stance. "All right, Doctor, what gives?"

McCoy's watery blue eyes regarded her
innocently.

"Whatever do you mean?"

"Ever since Spock's injury and then the pirate
attack, you've been coming in here with a sour expression
on your face, complaining to the heavens like Job

about the unfairness of it all. Not to mention being so
dead on your feet that you hardly knew which end of
the patient you were working on. Now, today, suddenly,
you are filled with a limitless abundance of joie
de vivre--"

"We released the last burn victim yesterday,
and I

got a good night's sleep," he protested, but
he could

not keep from grinning. Chris knew him too
well. They

were comfortable around each other after so many
years, and had built up a trust--enough for her

to tell

him about her feelings for Spock, enough for him to
scold her into admitting the hopelessness of
them, and

enough for her to scold him for the protective barrier
he had kept between himself and the female sex since

his divorce.

He decided to keep her guessing at least a little

while

longer. That is, if she hadn't figured it all

out already.

"Who is she?" Chris asked.

McCoy attempted and failed to keep his grin from

growing ever wider and stupider. "I really don't

know

what you're talking about, Chris." He tried

to sound

briskly professional. "Is Dr. Saenz

on duty yet?"

Chapel smirked. She knew, all right. "In

there."

She directed a thumb at the door of the lab.

McCoy started toward it, muttering loudly so that

Chris could hear. "Man gets a good night's

sleep, and

suddenly his staff starts accusing him of all

sorts of

things..."

Chris called to him on her way out without turning

around. "Whatever you may have gotten last night,

Doctor, it wasn't a good night's sleep."

She disappeared through the door and he laughed softly, feeling lighter and younger than he had in years.

He walked into the lab just in time to see Emma put two capsules in her mouth and swallow. His grin faded

instantly. "What's that you're taking?"

She turned around, startled. Her hand moved instinctively toward the lone bottle on the counter as if

to hide it. "It's nothing, Leonard. How are you this morning?" Her eyes were very bright.

McCoy picked up the bottle and read it.

"Levirol!

My God, do you have any idea what this stuff does to you?"

"Do you think I'd take it if I didn't?"

"This stuff can dangerously elevate your blood pressure, Emma--"

Her voice was that of a mother's calming an excitable child. "Leonard. I have chronic pathologically low blood pressure, and I have been taking

Levirol for

years. I monitor my blood pressure every

day, but

you're free to check it, if you're concerned."

"I am concerned," he said in a way that made her

smile. "You'd better be taking good care of

yourself."

"I am. Now what is it you've come to see me

about?"

"Spock."

"It's still too early to judge his response to the

neodopazine--"

"That's not what I need to talk to you about."

McCoy hesitated, looking for the right words.

"Spock

has asked me to send him to Vulcan."

"Eventually, perhaps---"

"He wants to go immediately. I can tell he

feels very

strongly about it."

"I hope you told him it was

impossible."

"I promised to send him."

"You didn't!" Emma confronted him, hands on

narrow hips, suddenly all sharp angles.

McCoy was
not surprised at the quick display of temper: he
had
recently come to appreciate the fact that this
woman
possessed a passionately volatile,
aggressive nature,
which her outwardly constant good humor belied.

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"You can't send him away now, in this condition. I
don't even know his reaction to the medication yet--"

"They'll take good care of him on Vulcan,"

McCoy

countered evenly.

"Good care!" Emma's laugh was bitter. "Have you

ever been in a Vulcan hospital, attended

by Vulcan

physicians? If you think I'm

unsympathetic... they'll

have no sympathy for what Spock's going

through

emotionally. He'll be reduced to a series of

numbers

on a diagnostic screen."

"I'm not sending him to a hospital," McCoy

said

quietly. "I'm sending him home."

Emma quieted and listened.

"Physically, Spock doesn't need to be in sick bay.

His parents will keep us informed about his progress on the neodopazine, and they'll take excellent care of

him. His mother is human. I've met her, and I know

that emotionally, she'll be a great source of encouragement to him."

"Leonard, you know they can't monitor him constantly the way we can here--"

"Maybe so. But he's ashamed, Emma, because he's

lost the Vulcan mind rules. He can relearn them on

Vulcan. I think they'll be the greatest help to his recovery."

"You talk about shame--you said I shamed Spock by calling him a liar, but that's nothing compared to

the shame that Spock will experience on Vulcan
because
he is unable to shield his thoughts from other
telepaths."

"How else will he learn to do that? Besides, he'll
be
with his mother most of the time, and she's not a
telepath." McCoy looked at Emma
quizzically. "Why
are you fighting me so hard on this?"

She sighed silently and dropped her hands from her
hips in a conscious attempt to eradicate the
outward
signs of her anger. "I'm angry, because I
can't help
thinking--how will I sleep nights if Spock
hurts himself,
or worse, a member of his family?"

McCoy didn't have a convincing answer for that
one, only a gut feeling that Emma could
not seem to
share. "I just don't think he'll try to hurt
himself
again. I know he would never hurt his family."

"I don't buy that, Leonard. if you send
Spock home

without me to monitor his behavior, then you'd better make sure that someone sees that he takes his medication. Damn sure."

"I will."

Emma stood on tiptoe, trying to put the Levirol back on the shelf; McCoy took it from her and replaced it easily. She pulled away from him, her movements tight with contained anger.

She turned to face him at the lab door. "I can't take responsibility for sending Spock home, Doctor. I won't sanction it. If anything happens--"

"I take all responsibility," McCoy said.

He hoped like hell that he was right.

Chapter Five

EMMA SAENZ SAT pensively at the desk in Spock's cabin and watched intently as the Vulcan gathered the

few things needed for his journey: a desert
softsuit,
boots, cassettes to study and, perhaps, to understand.
His blue science officer's uniform was already
carefully
packed away, and he now wore a
camel-colored
tunic of a lightweight material better suited
for Vulcan's
oppressive heat. It occurred to Emma that he
looked far more like a professor on sabbatical
from the
Vulcan Science Academy than a Star
Fleet officer on
leave. She forced her mind quickly to other thoughts,
but it was too late: the painful wave of
homesickness
was too strong to completely eradicate.
Spock picked it up immediately, of
course, and
straightened from his packing to stare at her with
gentle eyes, unable to comprehend what he had
sensed
her feel. Emma's eyes were wet, glistening
black. She
looked away.

He returned silently to his packing, and was still

attempting to interpret the sensation when the buzzer rang. "Come," he said, before Emma could rise to answer it.

James Kirk entered, and stopped abruptly when he saw her, making no attempt to hide his disappointment.

"Oh. Dr. Saenz. I didn't realize you would be here..."

"Hello, Captain," she said smoothly.

Surely he must realize that Spock could no longer be permitted to remain alone in his quarters after the suicide attempt--perhaps he'd expected to find McCoy here, under the circumstances. But McCoy was on the hangar deck, fussing over the shuttlecraft interior to make certain that his patient's journey would be a comfortable one.

Kirk had wanted to avoid the hangar deck altogether.

"I was hoping to talk to Mr. Spock," he said to

Emma. He did not say alone.

Emma knew it would be cruel to pretend she did not

understand; she pushed herself away from the desk and stood up. "I'll be outside if anyone needs me."

"Thank you," Kirk said gratefully.

When the door closed behind Dr. Saenz,

Spock

closed the dresser drawer and faced his captain.

It was

not a moment to which either of them had looked forward, but one that both knew could not be avoided.

Jim smiled, but his eyes were full of

misery. Spock

permitted himself a small sigh; he had

mind-linked

with the captain many times before, and such a telepathic

bond was not easily broken, especially with this

man, to whom he was closer than any other living

soul.

He steadied himself as Jim's despair washed

over him

with an almost physical force; he felt Jim

struggle with

the fear that his first officer would not return.

Spock knew the feeling well; he also knew it

was a

fear that might very well be realized. It was a

possibil-

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ity he regretted, for he knew the captain

needed him,

needed the solid Vulcan logic to temper

Jim's bursts of

intuitive insight--logic that Spock could no

longer

provide. It was at the same time both

reassuring and

distinctly painful.

Spock had already decided that there was no sense

in prolonging the pain by trying to say anything; each

knew the other's thoughts too well for speech to be

necessary now. Wordlessly, he offered Jim the

Vulcan

salute, fingers parting and uniting again.

The captain returned it awkwardly. Suddenly,
Spock perceived an impulse Jim had stifled,
aware of
the Vulcan's distaste for physical contact.

Spock decided
it would cause no harm to indulge the wish of his
friend; he extended his hand to the captain.

Jim took the hand, aware that Spock was now
forced to feel what he felt himself; he no longer
tried to
smile.

The whistle of the intercom ensured that the contact
would be brief; Lyle in the transporter room
was
looking for the captain.

"Glad I found you, sir. I thought you'd like to know
that Lieutenant Commander Varth has come
aboard."

"Varth." Kirk tried to remember the
significance
of the name.

"The new first officer, sir."

"Yes, of course," Kirk said shortly.

"Kirk out." He
hit the intercom with more force than was necessary to
terminate the conversation; when he turned back to

Spock, the look on his face was almost more than his friend could bear.

"Go," the Vulcan said.

Emma Saenz was waiting outside the door when Kirk came out. He tried to pass her without speaking,

but she stepped in front of him, an unreadable expression on her face.

"He's that important to you," she said slowly.

Her

tone was hesitant, rising, almost a question.

Kirk did not understand what she was talking about; he could not have answered her even if he had.

Angry

at the intrusion, he pulled blindly away.

She stood outside in the corridor for a moment, looking after him.

They were about an hour from Star Base 12 when Mr. Scott first mentioned the slight malfunction in the control panel.

He shook his head. "I checked this vessel out completely before we boarded her. I know for a fact

I

dinna miss anythin'. She was in perfect shape."

"What's wrong?" Chapel asked. She was sitting

behind and to the right of Scott, in the passenger's seat next to Spock. She hadn't wanted to come along,

considering the awkwardness of the situation, but McCoy had insisted. She was the one person he trusted to see that Spock made it to Vulcan in one

piece.

"We're three hours out now," Scott answered, "and the indicator says we haven't used any fuel."

Spock's eyebrow rose sharply. The temptation to

ask the engineer how he had failed to notice the problem much earlier was almost too great; Chapel, however, had no such compunctions.

"Why didn't you tell us sooner? You must have noticed it before---"

"I dinna want to worry ye," Scott shrugged. "I

thought the indicator might just be stuck temporarily."

"Stuck?" Spock's monosyllable managed to convey volumes of insinuation.

Scott became indignant. "Aye, stuck. It happens.

All of the sudden, ye'il see half your fuel gone where it

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indicated full charge not a second before. Or do ye

think I don't know what I'm talkin' about?"

Spock deemed it wisest not to reply.

"Will it cause any problems?" Chapel asked.

"Ach, no, it shouldn't..." Scott began in a soothing tone, swiveling around in his chair to look at her.

"... unless, of course, we run out of fuel."

Spock

qualified the engineer's statement.

Aghast, Christine looked at Scott.

"Don't worry, lass," he said in the same soothing

tone, "I'll notify Star Base Twelve of

our predicament,

and we'll have it fixed when we land."

"You mean if we land," Christine said coldly.

"What if we run out of fuel before we reach Star

Base

Twelve?"

Scott remained determinedly cheerful. "Then

we'll

drift, but we can always radio for help."

"Assuming," Spock began, "we aren't close

enough

to the star base to be affected by its gravitational

pull,

in which case--"

"You don't have to finish," Chapel said firmly.

"I

took physics." She turned away from

Scott, who

looked very much as though he regretted the rapid

improvement in the Vulcan's speech, and pulled

the

medikit from under her seat. "Here, Mr. Spock.

Even

if we are doomed, I don't want it said that

I forgot your

medication." She held out a cupped hand
to Spock.

The capsules resembled small violet ovals
of polished
porcelain. Once in the mouth, they would dissolve
without need of liquid; however, Spock could
not help thinking they looked more like something to
be aesthetically appreciated rather than digested.

He
picked them from Chapel's hand, careful to avoid
physical contact.

While Spock was greatly relieved that McCoy
had
prevented Emma Saenz from
accompanying him, he
had been less than comfortable with the knowledge
that Christine Chapel would be at his side throughout
the entire journey--although he had to admit that thus
far she had comported herself admirably,
exhibiting a
degree of control of which he had not thought her
capable; perhaps Dr. Saenz had warned her of his
increased telepathic vulnerability.

They traveled in silence for a time, the only sound
the soft, hypnotic drone of the Galileo's

engines.

Spock began to feel drowsy, but tried to stay

awake by

focusing his attention on the control panel. If

he were

going to be incinerated in Star Base 12's

atmosphere,

he would prefer to remain conscious for the last hour

of his life.

He started at the sound of Scott radioing for

landing

instructions--comhe had been sleeping, a fact he

found

highly embarrassing; sleep had

previously always been

a conscious act over which he'd had complete

control.

He glanced up to see Chapel studiously not

looking at

him.

Star Base 12 radioed permission for descent.

"How about that." Scott directed a

triumphant grin

at Christine. "Looks like we'll get there in

one piece

after all."

"Why, Mr. Scott," she replied with mock

surprise,

"don't tell me you had any doubts."

"Nooo... of course not."

The planet designated as Star Base 12 was

not

particularly scenic or suitable for shore leave,

although

some Star Fleet unfortunates were compelled

to use it for such. The Federation had claimed the

uninhabited world--since no one else wanted it,

as it

consisted of little more than sterile desert and a

hostile

atmosphere--and built airdomes that contained

hangars, restaurants, and bars, none of which were

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particularly enjoyable places to be, but which were

always crowded to capacity with bleary-eyed space

travelers. Star Base 12's popularity was

due not to the

quality of its eating and drinking establishments, but

rather to the fact that it was the one spaceport in this

rather remote sector that offered connecting shuttles

to more civilized parts of the galaxy: Rigel

IV, Earth,

Vulcan.

The Galileo's descent into the atmosphere was rapid. Relaxed by Scott's good-humored confidence,

Christine leaned forward to watch the viewscreen:

sleek white edifices covered by transparent domes

rose gracefully from the lifeless yellow soil.

From the

rapidity with which the size of the buildings was

increasing, Christine guessed that the

craft was gaining

velocity, and turned to Scott to ask if they

shouldn't be

slowing.

She never asked the question. The engineer's eyes

were fixed on the instrument panel; the red warning

light was flashing, despite the fact that the fuel

indicator

blithely insisted that the Galileo's reserves were

full.

"That's it, then," Scott pronounced quietly.

"Oh, God," Christine said in a very small

voice.

She crouched low in her seat, no longer wanting
to
watch as the city loomed toward them ominously.
. Spock was not sitting that close to her, but he
could
feel the depth of her terror, although she
sat-quietly
with her arms clasped about her knees. As for himself,
he felt nothing other than a mild sensation of
relief.

Death could not have come at a more convenient time.

He was no longer useful to his
shipmates, the Service,
or his family, but a burden to them all.

The loss of Scott and Chapel, on the other
hand, was
something to regret. Spock tried to decide on the
most
logical course of action as he watched Scott
desperately try to maneuver the Galileo as she
approached
the hangar. Incineration was no longer a danger--they
were already too far down in the atmosphere--but
impact would be a problem.

The solution came to Spock in a flash, but in

images,

not words, and the power of speech chose that particularly inopportune moment to desert him once again.

He struggled agonizingly to find the words, to tell Scott...

But the words did not come in time.

Kirk and Emma Saenz stood arguing outside sick

bay, still barefoot and wearing their white togas.

"I don't see why you won't let me take a look at it,"

Emma said, her hands on her hips.

"It could very well be separated."

Kirk winced as he touched his right shoulder. He had no doubt that it was, but was just as determined as Emma about the proper procedure. "It could be just a

strain. I'll be just fine if I get some rest.

There's no need to make such a fuss, Doctor."

"I'm not making a fuss. And, if I get to beat you up off duty, the least you could do is call me Emma."

"Fine, Emma. I'll just be going to my quarters

now." He turned gingerly and began moving away.

"You're really something," she flared behind him.

The sudden heat in her voice made him stop and

face

her. "Quit being so ridiculous. We both know

the

shoulder hurts like hell and it's going to keep you

up

all night. It's my fault it happened and I

refuse to let

you lose any sleep because of it."

"It's not your fault," he protested quickly;

perhaps too quickly, because her anger was replaced by a

grin,

as though he had just said something very amusing.

"Is it, . . . that you don't want to go into sick

bay

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because you're afraid someone might find out that I

hurt you?" The question stung, but she asked it with

such good humor that Kirk could not take offense.

He tried to shrug, forcing himself to grimace again.

"I just fell on it wrong," he said lamely, and

was at

once embarrassed at his answer. Maybe she was
right;

maybe he couldn't admit that she could hurt him.

His

expression became so sheepish that Emma laughed,
and he had to laugh, too.

"Maybe I am embarrassed... a little," he
admitted.

"Even so, I don't like making a big deal out of

such a

little--Ouch!" He shifted the shoulder

awkwardly.

Her smile vanished. "It's not a little deal,

Captain.

If a separated shoulder isn't treated, you could

lose the

use of it. Then you'd have to get the ligaments

regrown

and undergo therapy for a long time. Look, if you

won't go inside sick bay, then at least let

me look at it

in my quarters. Indulge me. I feel very

guilty."

He smiled weakly. "You win, Doctor."

"Emma. Stay right there. Don't move." She

wagged

a commanding finger at him and disappeared into sick bay.

He waited in the corridor, feeling very conspicuous, until Emma reappeared two minutes later with a medikit.

"Was anyone there?"

"Just M'Benga. Don't worry, I just said that my workout partner needed a little emergency treatment.

I didn't say who." Her eyes sparkled with amusement.

"Funny, he laughed, too. I don't understand why people find it so difficult to believe I can be dangerous."

"Believe me," Kirk said, gritting his teeth,

"I no longer find it difficult."

She led him to her cabin and, unlocking the door with a word, gestured him inside. Kirk entered idly, his hand on the offended shoulder, and half-expected to find McCoy lounging on the bed.

The outer office was the same as the other senior

officers' cabins, but when she turned the light on
in the
bedroom, Kirk blinked in surprise.

"disLike it?" Emma motioned him toward the bed.

The entire room--combare walls, ceiling,
floor, and
every piece of furniture was stark white,
reflecting
the light with such glare that Kirk squinted. In her
white toga, Emma blended perfectly
into her surroundings
as though she were an extension of them,
distinguishable only by the slash of black at the
waist,
black hair and eyes, and the one bit of color in
the
comroom--her glowing olive skin.

"Interesting, but hardly regulation," Kirk said
politely
through clenched teeth.

"disIt's really hurting now, isn't it? Sit."

He balanced carefully on the edge of the bed. I
would think you'd get tired of not seeing any
color."

"White is the presence of all colors,
Captain," she

murmured distractedly as she removed his toga with

the skilled, economical movements of an

examining

physician. She stood back to study the shoulder

and

clicked her tongue with disapproval. "Looks like

more

than just a sprain here. Since you wouldn't

cooperate

With me and let me scan you in sick bay, I'm

going to

have to diagnose by touch." She paused. "If it

is a separation, this will hurt like hell."

"I can take it," Kirk said stoically.

He did not see Emma smile behind him. She

reached

with slender, determined fingers and, upon finding the

precise spot between the tip of the shoulder blade and

the collarbone, pressed firmly.

Kirk swore explosively and almost reared up

off the

bed, but she restrained him.

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"I thought so. First degree separation. Lucky for

you, the ligaments are still in place, but we'll need

to

wrap it so the joint is immobilized. Even so,

it's going

to hurt for a couple of days." She opened the

medikit.

Kirk sat on the edge of the bed, still smarting; he

was not feeling particularly lucky at the moment.

"For

a neuropsychologist, you seem to be quite

an authority

on shoulders, Doctor."

"Emma," she corrected him again. "I had four

years of medical school, like every other

physician."

He still could not see her face as she stood behind

him,

but he could hear by her voice that she suddenly

smiled. "Besides, this isn't the first time I've had

to

patch together one Of my workout partners."

"I'll have to remember that the next time I work out

with you, Emma." She had reminded him three times

now to call her by her first name, but still addressed

him by his rank; it was up to Kirk to return the

favor,

but he could not seem to bring himself to. There was

not a female on board with which he was on a first name basis; making an exception was bound to be dangerous.

Without warning, Emma emptied a hypospray into his shoulder.

"What was that for?" Kirk pulled away instinctively as he felt a rush of warmth in his shoulder; the room suddenly felt rather close.

"Cortrazide for the inflammation and an analgesic."

She began to apply the aerosol bandage; it hardened instantly.

"Hey, I can't raise my arm very far," Kirk complained.

"That's because I don't want you to." Emma stood back a bit to scrutinize her work. "Not for a couple of days, anyway, so it can heal properly. Within a week, I promise I'll be injuring other parts of your

anatomy."

Kirk smiled. The ache in the shoulder was receding rapidly, and he was beginning to relax in spite of himself. He looked around the room again, this time with unfeigned interest. "I think I'm beginning to like it. Bold and to the point, like its occupant."

She laughed. "So you've decided it isn't so bad?"

That's particularly revealing of your personality."

"Are you turning psychiatrist on me again, Doctor?"

Excuse me, Emma."

"Don't forget, I'm the one responsible, so it reveals more about me than you."

Kirk's anxiety had evaporated like a forgotten nightmare.

"Then we must have some traits in common. Go ahead, I've been analyzed before."

"You can take it, eh?" She teased, and walked around the bed to face him with a playful expression.

"It means we both like white."

"I'll bet I can guess what a psychiatrist

would say,
even if you won't tell me." Kirk assumed
a mock
clinical air. "White, hmmm... You prefer
life to be
simple, straightforward. You dislike
complications."
"Who doesn't?"
"It's too bad it can't be that way," Kirk
sighed. "What?"
"Life," he intoned dramatically. "Too many
shades
of gray, too many compromises. It'd be
simpler if
everything was black... or white."
"Things never are," she said, taking his statement
with more seriousness than he had meant it. "Sometimes,
one is forced to recruit the forces of evil in
order
to do good." There was still the hint of a smile on her
face, but something about it reminded him of
Natahia,
of his first meeting with the small, sad leader when she
had agreed to use the Federation's weapons to save
her people... "Especially in my business."

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"A doctor?" he asked, surprised. "How

does a

doctor "enlist the forces of evil"?"

She laughed at herself and stood in front of him as

though she were waiting for something; with sudden

embarrassment, Kirk realized that she

must be waiting

for him to leave. He rose unsteadily to his

feet.

"Is it just me, or is it warm in here?" The

lack of

sleep must have finally caught up to him; he felt

almost

drunken as he reeled dizzily toward the door.

Emma

caught his elbow.

"Easy, Captain. That hypo must be relaxing you

a

little bit. It will help you to sleep tonight--you need

rest if that shoulder is to heal, and believe me,

there's

no way you'd be able to find a comfortable enough

position to sleep tonight without a sedative." She

put

an arm gently around his waist to steady him.

"I'll

help you to your quarters."

I don't need help, Kirk was going to say, quite

absurdly, until he noticed how close she

was standing

to him; he breathed in her scent, and was

overwhelmed.

Her eyes were open wide and glittered up at him

like

polished onyx. "Let me help you to your

quarters,

Captain," she repeated softly.

But he knew that he did not want to return

to his

quarters now. Buried in a different part of him,

a part

that seemed to be floating far away, was the memory

of McCoy; Kirk's rational mind knew that his

friend

loved this woman, and he tried to feel guilt for

wanting

to touch her.

But at the moment he could not give a damn about

McCoy.

"My name is Jim," he said.

"Jim," she said shyly, and loosened the arm around
his waist. He turned toward her and she reached,

hesitantly, for his face. He did not pull
away; her hand
was hot against his skin.

"Would you like to go to your quarters now, Jim?"

She was so small, so dark and delicate, he could
not

believe that she had hurt him.

"No," he whispered, "I wouldn't." He bent

down

to kiss her, and let the warm, dizzying waves

sweep

over him.

He closed his eyes and saw nothing but white--

bright,

hot white.

McCoy paced aimlessly in his quarters. He

had

keyed up the latest neurology journals, but the

dry,

cumbersome wording of the texts had nearly numbed

him to sleep, and sleep was the last thing he wanted

at

the moment.

Emma should have finished up in the gym two hours ago.

McCoy argued vehemently with himself; he was acting like a schoolboy--he should go and have dinner without her. He was old, far too old to fall into the typical lover's trap--compensating all his time waiting for her, waiting for fear that she would come by his quarters and he would be gone, and miss the opportunity for a moment alone with her.

He rose, but instead of heading for the door as he had vowed to himself he would, he went to a small cupboard recessed in the wall and poured himself a shot of bourbon. He was still arguing: he was hungry, he'd been off duty almost two hours, he should get himself something to eat. And if Emma missed him --well, too bad.

He sat down at the desk with the glass and the bottle and cursed himself. Acting like a kid, too old for all

this foolishness. They were adults, for God's
sake; he

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had no right to expect her to come rushing
to him the
minute she finished her workout.

Still, he had hoped that she would.

He held up the bourbon so that it caught the
light

and shimmered golden amber in the glass. One thing
he hadn't done much lately was drink. His
features

involuntarily crinkled at the thought; there simply
hadn't been enough time for it. He and Emma had
been spending every free moment together. Most
nights she stayed in his quarters, and they always
requested the same duty schedule. About the only
time they spent apart was when she went to the gym.

Maybe that was it; they'd been spending too much
time together, and she felt smothered. He needed to let
her know that she could have more time to herself if
she wanted—even though he hoped desperately that
she did not.

He threw back his head suddenly and laughed out
loud at the absurd thought. If Emma wanted

time to

herself, she'd be the first one to mention it; tact was

definitely not on her list of virtues. She'd

be the last

person in the universe to let herself be smothered

And he felt anything but smothered himself. The

woman was a breath of fresh air; she made him

feel

young, so young that he'd almost forgotten the age

difference. She made it easy to love her; there was

never the undercurrent of tension that had pervaded

his marriage. If Emma ever had anything on her

mind,

she simply told him so. He was beginning

to remember

why people got married.

It was after almost an hour and the third generous

shot of bourbon that McCoy found himself calling

Emma's quarters without the memory of a conscious

decision to do so.

There was no response.

He called the gym. Sulu answered, sweating,

his

face guard pushed up, a fencing foil still in his

hand.

Yes, Sulu said, Emma had left the gym,

at least two

hours ago with the captain, who appeared to have injured his shoulder.

There, McCoy thought, relieved and a little ashamed at himself for checking up on her. A simple explanation:

she was patching Jim up in sick bay.

M'Benga answered the intercom. "Why yes, she was here... a couple of hours ago, and picked up a

medikit. No, she didn't say where she was going..."

The rational part of McCoy's mind commanded him to stop, but he no longer could. He tried the captain's quarters, the rec room, and then the dining room.

His face was pale when he called Emma's quarters

again, but he knew before he tried that there would be no answer.

He laid his head down on the desk.

Sulu faced his fencing partner once again, but did not push down his face mask. "We've been at it long

enough, don't you think?" He was perspiring

freely,

his almond skin flushed.

"Tired?" came the gentle voice from under the

facemask.

"Well . . ." Sulu smiled and winced at the

same

time. "It's been almost two hours. As much as I

appreciate good parrying, I must admit that's a

little

longer than I'm used to."

His partner pushed up his face mask to reveal a

silver complexion punctuated by a flash of

white teeth.

His brow was covered with a light mist, as though he

had barely begun to break a sweat. Millennia

ago, the

planet Radu had been settled by colonists from

the

Klingon system. Unlike their militant

cousins, how-

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ever, the Radu were a gentle folk who directed

their

intelligence and curiosity to matters other than war.

"Don't tell me you're not tired,"

Sulu said. "I

thought Radu was near Ten'an standard gravity, but you have the stamina of a Vulcan."

"Thanks," said Varth Regev. He lifted the facemask

off to reveal a shock of coppery hair. "I work at it.

Shall we repair to the sauna?"

The sauna was so steamy as to obscure any object

more than a few feet away, but Sulu could make out

Varth's stocky, muscular form; the Radun hadn't been

kidding about working at it.

Varth settled himself gingerly on the hot tile bench

and Sulu did the same. "What was the call about?" the

Radun asked. "Someone looking for the Captain?"

"Not him this time, although that's usually the case," Sulu replied, squeezing his eyes shut and surrendering

to the almost intolerable heat of the steam.

"Dr. McCoy was looking for Dr.

Saenz."

"Business of a medical nature, no doubt,"

Varth

said innocently.

Eyes closed, Sulu smirked, resembling a

Buddha in

meditation. He did not respond.

"For such a small person," Varth continued, "she

seems to have done some real damage."

"She must have had quite a bit of training," Sulu

said without opening his eyes, "to do that to the

captain."

He's pretty good?"

Sulu opened one eye for emphasis and closed it

again. "He usually works out with Mr. Spock--that

is,

he used to. And they weren't that mismatched. Of

course, I understand that Dr. Saenz spent some

time

on Vulcan herself."

"Looks like she learned a few tricks there."

Sulu grunted assent. "From the look on the

captain's face, I think the damage was serious.

I doubt it's

going to do much to improve his mood."

Varth's expression became doleful. "I

guess it

won't."

Sulu squinted at him through the steam and wiped a

rivulet of condensed moisture from his forehead.

"Been riding you pretty hard?"

"He doesn't like me," Varth replied

matter-of-factly.

"I wish I knew why, what I'd done..."

Sulu reached toward him with a reassuring gesture.

"It's not you, Reg, not what you've done. You know
you're good."

"Yes," the Radun agreed, without a trace of

false

modesty.

"It's just that... that the captain was very close to

Mr. Spock. Seeing someone else take

Spock's place is

hard for him. But he's a fair person, Reg.

He'll readjust."

"Let's hope it's soon," Varth said,

sweating.

Kirk rolled slowly from the bed, mumbling

incoherent

curses at the insistent buzzing, and
wincing as the
injured shoulder reminded him of its presence. He
opened his eyes with a start, and relaxed again as he
saw that he was in his own quarters. He shook his
head and tried to remember: the injury in the gym,
Emma wrapping it for him... he flushed because he
remembered kissing her, and because he could not
remember anything more. He certainly did not
remember
returning to his quarters, and the awful
thought occurred to him that she might have carried
him.

The buzzing did not stop until he stumbled to the
door and opened it.

Ingrit Tomson stood, poised with mouth open,
ready

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to speak, but at the sight of the captain, her
complexion

colored to pale pink. She closed her mouth.

"Yes?" Kirk scowled. He knew he must have
been

something to see: bare-chested, bandaged, in his
baggy white trousers, which no doubt had been

interpreted

as antiquated pajama bottoms. He swayed

slightly in the doorway; the effect of the

sedative had

not yet worn off.

Tomson's surprise at the captain's

awkward appearance

lasted but a moment; she was as excited as Kirk

had ever seen her. The mouth opened again. "Sir,

I'm

sorry to wake you, but you said if I ever--"

"Get to the point, Lieutenant," Kirk said

crossly.

"Sir, we have a lead on a murder suspect."

She

actually smiled. "I preferred to contact you

personally,

sir. We haven't made the arrest yet, and I

didn't

want anyone overhearing our conversation."

"Then come in, Lieutenant."

Tomson stepped just inside the door; it closed

behind

her with a swoosh.

"A crewmember?" Kirk asked, interested but

hardly sharing the enthusiasm of the security

chief.

"Yes, sir. It's just circumstantial evidence, but sufficient enough in my opinion for an arrest."

"Who?" Kirk demanded.

"Lieutenant Commander Scott, sir--"

"Scotty? That's impossible, Tomson--"

"Sir, after treatment with truth serum, Ensign

all-Baslama

was able to clearly remember all the incidents surrounding the disappearance of the prisoner. One of the things he remembers is that not half an hour before

he was fired upon, Mr. Scott came down to the brig.

Also-Baslama said it struck him as very odd--

Mr. Scott

just stood there for several minutes staring at the prisoner, then muttered something and left."

"That's not enough to arrest a man, Lieutenant.

Question him, yes--"

"Sir, that's not all. Al-Baslama was also

able to

recall that the force field was lowered at

the exact

instant he was fired upon. Star Fleet

Intelligence informs

me that no one has developed a shield

neutralizer.

So if the pirate didn't neutralize the

field, and all-Baslama

didn't let it down, that leaves only one way

the field could have been lowered."

"Engineering," Kirk said shortly.

"Yes, sir. The emergency override

controls."

"Just because Mr. Scott works in Engineering

doesn't mean that he was the one who sabotaged the

override--"

Tomson shook her head. "Sorry, sir. We

questioned

certain crewmembers in Engineering, and a

Midshipman

Dobson reports that at the approximate time

the

shields went down in the brig, Mr. Scott was

servicing

the manual override controls."

The muscle in Kirk's cheek began

to twitch; he

looked down at the floor and studied it for some time
before he looked up at Tomson again.

"I'm afraid, Lieutenant," he said
slowly, "that
you'll have some difficulty in arresting your
suspect."

Tomson looked at him quizzically.

"Mr. Scott is not on board. He's
piloting a shuttle-craft
to Star Base Twelve. Spock and Chapel are
with
him."

She paled. "Then we'd better put out a
bulletin on
him as soon as possible."

Kirk shook his head firmly. "No. He'll
come back,
Lieutenant."

Tomson gasped in disbelief. "Sir, Mr.
Scott could
very well be a murderer, in which case he's been
given
the perfect opportunity to escape. I have
to issue a
warrant--"

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"Lieutenant," he said, "Mr. Scott is

due to arrive

back in approximately five hours. You can

question

him then."

"And if he doesn't return, Captain?"

"He'll return. If he's even ten minutes

late, you can

issue a bulletin on him and throw me in the

brig."

"Yes, sir," Tomson said coldly. Kirk

had no doubt

that she fully intended to take him up on the offer.

Chapter Six

THE STAR CALLED Eridani 40 slid

slowly up over

Vulcan's horizon, a reddish-pink ghost of the

blazing

fireball it would become by midday. It eased the

moonless darkness, and slowly colored the desert

from black to gray to red, the sky from indigo to soft

orange; the mountains in the distance

remained coal

black.

Nothing was so quiet, so serene as dawn over the
plain. Even the hellishly hot breezes for which
Vulcan's
deserts were notorious would not stir until
Eridani
climbed higher in the sky. The still cool air
carried
the oddly sweet, piercing warble of silver-birds,
teresh-kah, which sang only at dawn to greet the
sun.

A lone traveler, weary from the night's journey
across the desert, closed his eyes and stopped
to listen
to the song of the teresh-kah. He stood transfixed
until
the first warm gust swept across the plain and drowned
out the ancient melody, then resumed his painfully
slow pace toward his destination, the small desert
township of ShiKahr.

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To the east lay the black Arlanga Mountains,
cold
and forbidding in their grandeur. It was there he had
tested himself, at the age of seven, in his own

personal Kahr-wan, the ordeal of maturity. The fear of failure had led him to the mountains months before the formal ritual took place in the Sas-a-shar desert --the mountains were far more dangerous than the desert, and he knew that if he could survive them, he would easily survive the desert. Twice that year he had crossed the plain of ShiKahr on foot, once heading east to the mountains, one west to Sas-a-shar. Now Spock crossed the plain a third time, traversing the fifteen kilometers of desert that lay between the Vulcan capital of ShanaiKahr and the city where he was born. His hometown of ShiKahr was quite small and tourism was nonexistent; therefore, one shuttle ran in the morning to take locals into the capital, and one shuttle ran in the early evening to bring them home again. Spock arrived in ShanaiKahr shortly

after the evening shuttle had left. If he had wanted to wait all night and another day in the capital, he could have caught the next shuttle going into ShiKahr. Conveying this complex information to Chapel would have been tedious and pointless; Spock preferred to cross the desert himself in the cool night, and courtesy forbade his waking his family to have them pick him up in the skimmer. Since Chapel would have refused to allow him to do so, he let her assume that he could easily catch a shuttle so that she could dispense with her responsibility toward him. She had broken her ankle when they had crash-landed in the soft sand dunes of Star Base 12, and had refused to take anything strong for the pain, as she was obliged to keep an alert eye on Spock at all times. The ankle had begun to

throb so that even with a lightweight emergency cast, she was unable to put any weight on it, and it was necessary for Spock to help her off the shuttle when they arrived on Vulcan. When he went to the nearest terminal and purchased a return ticket for the next flight back to Star Base 12, where Scott was repairing the Galileo, Chapel accepted without even a mild protest.

The fierce high-pitched scream of ale matya brought Spock's thoughts back to the desert; he continued grimly, keeping his pace steady. The le matya might catch his scent, in which case he would be in grave danger, but he did not flinch at the thought. He had far worse things to fear than ale matya; that, at least, would be a clean, quick death.

The fearsome predator had still not attacked when Spock arrived at the city border, a carefully sculpted

garden springing out of the desert. He was safe; the sensors hidden in the greenery surrounding the city kept out unwanted beasts but permitted the passage of Vulcanoids, humanoids, and domesticated animals.

The dusty streets of ShiKahr were as sparse and bare as the desert itself; the hot wind stirred up dancing swirls of sand. Spock passed no one as he walked through the town, and at last he arrived at his father's house. He paused before the garden wall; the heavy gate was made from a single massive block of stone inlaid with ebony wood that had been polished to a sheen. A small metal plate hung slightly below Spock's eye level. On it was inscribed a hieroglyph, a symbol of such ancient origin that its pronunciation had been lost millennia ago by all save the clan for whose name it stood. It was not written in the modern

Vulcan script, for it was not permitted for any
stranger

to utter the name of one's ancestors, a custom
dating

from before Vulcan's collective memory, from a
time

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when one's forbears were worshipped as deities rather
than merely esteemed.

Spock held his hand before the timeworn symbol;
the massive gate sighed and opened before him.

The contrast to the bare sand streets outside would
have startled a stranger, for the garden within the
sterile stone walls was as lush and deep green as
a

tropical rainforest. Spock crossed the stone
pathway

to the front entrance of the house. He passed through
the main room, not bothering to glance around him,
and into the long narrow hallway that led to his
bedroom.

He had reached the point of exhaustion; sleep
was at hand.

The sight of his old bedroom was overwhelmingly
comforting; it was as it had always been, comfortably
familiar, everything in its proper place.

With one notable exception.

He had removed his cloak and was nearing the bed

when the figure of a young female, barely a

woman, sat

bolt upright in his bed, clutching the covers

modestly

to her bosom. Her features were Vulcan, but

strangely

enough she made no effort to stifle the wave of

emotion

that assaulted Spock: terror, followed by a

mixture

of anger and shame.

"Why do you trouble me here?" she hissed in

English, her expression only thinly masking her

turmoil.

"I have promised to do as you requested."

Spock could not have responded at that moment

even-if he had known the answer to her question.

She studied him suspiciously for a

moment before

her expression became completely calm. "Who

are

you?" she demanded in Vulcan.

He was too taken aback to have the presence of

mind not to answer her question. "Spock."

Even in the darkness, the striking elegance of her

features was visible; shining black hair fell in

soft,

thick folds to her waist. She blinked at him as

though

trying to decide if she were dreaming.

A horrible, humiliating thought struck Spock:

he

had entered the wrong house, and had been so stupid

as to give her his name. By tomorrow evening, his

awkward intrusion would be known to all in

ShiKahr.

Logic fled in the face of the situation, and he could

think of nothing to say to the young woman save a

phrase taught him by his mother, an English

expression

that had no counterpart in Vulcan.

"Excuse me." Spock backed out of the

room

swiftly, a flurry of archaic Vulcan

curses chattering in

the back of his mind at the cruel trick his

memory had

played on him. Had he mistakenly read the

hieroglyph

on the front door? And if his perceptions could not

be

trusted, how would he ever find his father's house?

He staggered, numbed by confusion, down the hall

and back toward the front door, but the sight of the

main room stopped him. It, too, was as

unarguably

familiar as his bedroom had been. In one corner

sat his

father's harp--in another, his mother's piano. His

eyes

were drawn to something above the piano: an

old-fashioned

family portrait, painted by a well-known

Terran artist.

A woman sat, erect and gracious, her

honey-colored

hair piled on top of her head in the

Vulcan fashion, the

slightest smile playing at the corners of her

mouth.

Behind and to one side of her chair, not quite close

enough to be touching, stiff and solemn, stood a

ten-year-old

boy. He was small for his age; that fact, combined with his mixed parentage, made him the favorite of bullies. Brown-black hair hung in his eyes (it always grew too fast, much to the consternation of his mother) and the ears were ridiculously large for the narrow, fine-featured face.

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Amanda had been right--he had grown into them. It had always been Spock's contention that the boy did not resemble his mother in the slightest. However, studying the portrait now, it seemed that there was something, perhaps in the eyes...

He sat heavily on the comfortable, overstuffed sofa.

The girl-woman had been no more than an illusion, a trick of his overloaded faculties, brought on by exhaustion.

Perhaps the trip had been too much for him. It occurred to him that he should return to his room, to prove to himself that the girl had been an illusion, and to sleep in his own bed, but instead he sank back into

the comfortingly familiar softness of the couch.

"Spock."

He raised his eyelids at the soft, warm sound,

unsure for a moment where he was.

Amanda stood with her back to the large picture

window that overlooked the garden. The rising sun

outlined her in a halo of dazzling white light;

Spock

could not see her face. He pushed against the

yielding

softness of the sofa, struggling to rise, but she sat

down next to him.

She was older than the woman in the portrait,

now;

the golden hair was mostly silver, and the lines about

her eyes were etched more deeply by the harshness of

life on Vulcan. She reached a hand toward him

in the

ritual embrace: index and middle fingers

extended

tightly together, the thumb folded over the remaining

fingers, a symbol that these two were forever tied by

marriage or by blood. Amanda Grayson had for

so

long suppressed the urge to encircle a loved

one with

her arms that the impulse rarely occurred to her
anymore;

it had taken many years.

The small hint of a smile that curved the corners
of

her mouth upward was still exactly the same. What-
ever anxiety she might have felt for her son was

carefully shielded, a skill acquired from years
of living

with Sarek.

"I thought I heard someone come in last night. I
thought it might be your father coming home early.

Please don't tell me you walked from the
capital."

Very well, thought Spock. "Father is not here?" he
asked in English. He and his father always addressed

her in her native tongue; she did

speak Vulcan, after a

fashion, as she put it--but the sibilants were
impossible

for her to produce, in spite of her training as a
linguist.

"He's at an emergency Council meeting in the
capital.

I expect him back sometime tomorrow evening."

Spock's sense of relief was so deep that he was almost ashamed of it. His greatest concern upon arriving home had been the effect that his lack of mental shields would have upon Sarek; surely his father would find the chaos of Spock's mental processes offensive. About Amanda, he did not worry. Not being a telepath, she would never know of his mental infirmities, nor judge his actions against the harsh standards of logic. She would only encourage and try to understand, virtues of which Sarek seemed incapable. Perhaps she was why Spock had never minded working with humans, why he had volunteered for duty on the Enterprise.

"I've been in contact with Dr. McCoy," she continued gently, "and he tells me that you're taking a certain medication... if you could give it to me, I'll see that you receive it on the proper schedule."

Spock's head turned sharply, but not at Amanda's

words.

His peripheral vision caught a glimpse of
movement,
a flash of white and black in the hallway. It
was the

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apparition, the vision that had appeared in his bed the
night before. He'd had no intention of mentioning it
to
Amanda, so convinced was he that her existence was
illusory...

The vision stood hesitantly in the hallway,
apparently
afraid of intruding. She was clothed, now, in a
simple white dress that fell in a straight
line to her
ankles, and the cascading black hair was now
braided
and pinned securely to the crown of her head. Although
her physical features marked her as a
Vulcan,
there was something slightly incongruous about her
demeanor--an openness, a hint of volatility--
some-thing
that a human would never perceive, something

that a Vulcan could not help but notice. The
fleeting
impression that Spock had formed of her during their
brief encounter was quite accurate: she was very
young, perhaps nineteen, and very beautiful.

From the warmth of Amanda's response to her,
Spock assumed she was a relative of whom he
had

been unaware. "T'Pala," Amanda said.

"Please, come
in. I'd like for you to meet Spock."

There was something about Amanda's tone that
made Spock distinctly uncomfortable; he knew
that he
had heard her use that tone before. He searched his
memory.

The first time she had introduced him to his former
fiance, T'Pring. He rose stiffly.

T'Pala carried herself into the room with effortless
grace and stopped below the portrait. "Your
son," she
said, with a solemn nod to Spock, but did not
succeed

in completely concealing her shy eagerness. "I
recognized

you from your picture. I have heard of your many accomplishments." She addressed herself to Amanda. "We have already met--but I did not extend the courtesy of introducing myself."

Amanda's eyes were questioning; Spock sensed a glimmer of amusement from T'Pala. "Last night," he said in a low voice.

Amanda must have imagined the circumstances, for she tactfully did not pursue the subject.

"T'Pala is our house guest," she said to Spock. "She's finishing up her studies at the ShanaiKahr General Academy."

"Your parents have been most kind," T'Pala said.

"By offering me their home, they have made it possible for me to continue my studies without interruption."

Spock harbored no desire to pursue small talk with this young creature, but for Amanda's sake he feigned polite interest. "Your family is not living in ShiKahr,

then?" Obviously not, else she would not be staying here. It was not an uncommon arrangement for students attending faraway academies to live with a family in order to save the cost of staying in the dormitory.

T'Pala lowered her eyes. "My parents are deceased.

If you will excuse me, I must hurry to catch the shuttle. I have two oral exams today at the Academy."

She was gone before Spock could think of a reply.

"Well?" Amanda asked.

Spock raised an eyebrow in the expression his mother knew so well. "I scarcely know her well enough to make an assessment--"

"But?"

Spock frowned. "Her demeanor is somewhat inconsistent with her... physical appearance."

"I knew you'd notice. Her father was an attache to the Terran embassy in ShanaiKahr. He married a

Vulcan while there, and they returned to Earth shortly after the child was born. She grew up there." "Half human," Spock said softly. A rarity, but more likely to occur when a member of the diplomatic

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service was involved, perhaps because interracial marriages required exceptional members of each species to tolerate the strain imposed by cultural differences.

"She's been with us a couple of months, since her father died. I take it you noticed she's been staying in your room." It was not in the form of a question and Spock did not feel the need to respond.

"I hope you don't mind staying in the guest room"

Amanda continued. "We could have asked her to move--"

"It would have been highly improper." That was true; the comfort of house-guests took precedence over that of family, regardless of circumstances.

Amanda rose. "I doubt that the couch was very comfortable last night. Let me help you put your things in the guest room, and you can try to get some more sleep."

He let her lead him to the guest room, but he doubted that he would sleep--he was already thinking of his first encounter with Sarek . . . and of the troubling impressions he had received from the house-guest.

It was early afternoon when Spock emerged again from the guest room. Amanda was in the main room, seated on the sofa, next to her small pupil--a six-year-old

Andorian child, bluish pale and antennaed.

He was looking up at Amanda with childlike adoration, and speaking very quickly. Something he said must have been quite amusing, for Amanda let forth with a burst of laughter that startled and embarrassed Spock, who stood unnoticed in the hallway. He had never heard his mother make such a sound. The Andorian child, however, seemed pleased by it; he chimed in with a shy, feeble chuckle.

Amanda had been teaching at home ever since her arrival on Vulcan. Possessing a doctorate in English literature and a master's degree in linguistics, she tutored both adults and children in English grammar and literature. It was for this precise reason that she had frequented the Vulcan embassy on Earth, where she met Sarek. On Vulcan, however, very few natives were problem students, and most of Amanda's tutorials were children of embassy workers in ShanaiKahr, some of them from Terra, sent to study their own culture and literature.

Amanda's love for her profession had led her to acquire one of the finest collections of Old Earth literature in the civilized galaxy. Spock faced the shelves of books that lined the hallway; the unmistakable smell of old paper brought back pleasant memories.

He picked out a childhood favorite, a priceless volume over four hundred years old, and opened it to the frontispiece, a lithograph. The paper pages had yellowed long before the preservative with which they were now treated had been developed, and the leather cover (a barbaric, but valued material in those times) was cracked and mended in several places. Spock closed the book silently and stole to the safety of the garden, to await Sarek's return.

Amanda did not notice; she continued with her lesson, an affectionate hand laid lightly on the Andorian's shoulder. -

Eridani was setting when Sarek returned home from the capital. Spock was still in the garden, watching the sunset, but he sensed his father's presence even before Sarek came out to greet him.

The meeting was uneventful; Sarek was kind, but distant. Perhaps the distance was intended to protect

both of them.

"It has been too long since your mother and I

last

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saw you. Perhaps you will visit again under more pleasant circumstances."

"Perhaps," Spock said.

"I have arranged for a tutor... Tela'at

Stalik will

come tomorrow for the first lesson."

Spock did not ask the subject; Stalik was

well

known, a follower of Kohlinahr, the

discipline of total

nonemotion. He had achieved the title of

Tela'at, Elder, and that, along with his greatly

advanced age,

entitled him to much respect. Sarek could have

scarcely chosen a more qualified instructor

to teach

Spock the mind rules. Spock bowed his head

to indicate

his acceptance and appreciation of his father's

choice.

The evening meal proceeded without too much discomfort,

and afterward, as was the custom, the family

sat in the main room. Spock noticed the

conspicuous

absence of the house guest, but restrained his

curiosity.

He sat on the sofa next to Amanda and fingered

Sarek's harp softly. The instrument Was well

over three hundred years old, older than a

Vulcan lifetime,

and its sound was richer and more resonant than that

of Spock's harp. It had belonged to Sarek's

father, and

the wood from which it was hewn was no longer

widely available. Spock thought of his own harp

with

shame, and wondered if the damage could ever be

repaired.

There was the sound of a door opening and closing,

and T'Pala appeared, wearing a black cape

with the

hood thrown back. She spoke breathlessly, as

though

she had been running.

"Forgive me," she said to the three of them. "The

Tela'at's lesson took longer than

anticipated."

Sarek studied her calmly. "Apologies
serve no useful
purpose. They cannot negate the fact that you are
late."

T'Pala bowed her head in submission, quite
clearly
deflated; Spock found the scene a painfully
familiar
one. He shifted uncomfortably on the sofa. In
all the
years that Spock had lived in his father's
house, he had
never seen Sarek correct a guest; quite
obviously, this
girl was something more. There was an awkward
silence.

Amanda was the first to break it. "There's still
some food in the kitchen, T'Pala, if you
haven't eaten
yet."

"Thank you," T'Pala said. She nodded to them and
went to her room; when she reemerged, she had shed
the black cloak to reveal the long white dress
underneath.

Sarek seated himself at the three-dimensional

chessboard,
and when T'Pala smoothly took the seat across
from him, Spock realized that he was watching what
had become an evening ritual.

At one time, he had been a participant himself.

He continued to play quietly on Sarek's
harp, but he
kept one eye on the game. It was immediately
apparent

that T'Pala was a novice, since she applied
no
coherent strategy, and that the purpose of this game
was instructional rather than recreational.

"How did you fare on your test?" Sarek asked
her.

"Well, I think." T'Pala studied the board
and made
a move. "Did your Council meeting go
well?"

Sarek sighed. "I am having some difficulty
convincing
the Council of my position. I must admit that
I do
not understand the reasons for it. To deny protection
in this case violates all precedent."

"What do you think the ultimate outcome of the
vote will be?"

"I cannot predict it yet. At present, the
vote is
split--half favor Aritani's protection,
half do not."

Spock stopped playing.

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"I am especially interested in the subject,"

T'Pala

said, "as one of my examination questions requested
me to state my position on the matter and to defend
it."

"And what position did you take?" Sarek

smoothly

captured T'Pala's bishop with a knight.

She looked at the board with dismay, displeased by

her error, eager to please Sarek with her

defense. "I

said I was against protection in this particular case,

as

it violates the doctrine of noninterference, one

of the

key principles of the Federation. A culture must

be

free to determine its own path. Also, a
military attack
on the raiders contradicts the Vulcan
principle of
nonviolence. Check." She looked up at him
to gauge
his reaction.

Sarek was expressionless as he studied the threat
posed to his king. "The noninterference directive
refers
to the development of a culture. If a culture
unwittingly follows a path which will lead to its
annihilation
rather than its normal course of development,
are we bound to assist that culture in committing
genocide? If we have the means to protect that
culture,
are we not bound to do so in order that they may live
in
peace and continue their development? Federation
history abounds with precedent favoring protection
and rescue of undeveloped planets from
external
threats--Yonada, Betelgeuse Two,
Halcyon, Capella,

Soyuz Vtoroi. the examples are numerous.

You

forget, T'Pala, or you were not informed, that the

reason Aritani now resists the aid of the

Federation is

that we were incapable of actually protecting them

from the attacks, and they now consider us impotent.

I

believe we should comply with their original request

and supply the aid they so desperately

need."

T'Pala turned to look at Spock. "You were

on

Aritani, Spock. Do you also favor

protection?"

There was a long silence. "I am not qualified

to

comment," he replied stonily.

"But you were there," she persisted.

"I have no memory of it."

He felt rather than saw her flush with

embarrassment

as she turned her eyes back to the board to find

that her opponent had moved.

"Checkmate," said Sarek.

"She's very young," Amanda said after T'Pala

exCused

herself. "She'll be nineteen next month. Her mother died when she was very young, and when her father died a few months ago, she came to stay with us. Her mother's family are distant relatives of Sarek's, and Sarek knew her father many years ago. If she's accepted into the diplomatic program, she'll continue to stay with us."

"The Vulcan Diplomatic Corps?"

Spock asked. He thought he had succeeded in masking his surprise, but Sarek looked at him sharply.

"She retained her Vulcan citizenship during her long stay on Terra," his father said coldly. "Although she has acquired some Terran mannerisms as a result, she wishes to serve in the VDC. Her background makes her an excellent candidate as an attach to the Vulcan

embassy on Terra."

Spock noted that Sarek had not said T'Pala

would

make an excellent ambassador, merely an

attache; it

was a highly sought after position available only

to the

most elite in the VDC. Sarek had held the

post for

many years, and had groomed his son carefully for

it,

naming him Spock, meaning the Uniter, the one who

might someday unite Vulcan and Terra into one

great

civilization, to bring together all that was best of the

two worlds.

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So this girl was to be Sarek's new protge.

"I have recommended that she be admitted into the

VDC," Sarek continued, "but that is no

guarantee that

she will be accepted. Her grades are good, but not

outstanding." He looked pointedly at Spock.

"She is

not as gifted as some others."

Spock remained silent.

"Of course," Sarek amended, "her strengths are

in

the social sciences, and she has a natural

inclination

toward politics. Thus, it is logical for her

to pursue a

diplomatic career. If her talents

were elsewhere--for

example, the natural sciences--perhaps another

profession

would be more suitable."

"Logical," Spock nodded in serene

agreement.

"Of course, she has other marks against her besides

her grades," Amanda said softly. "Her father was

Gerald Carstairs."

Sarek fixed his disapproving gaze upon her.

"The name is unfamiliar to me," Spock said.

"You

said he was a friend of Father's?"

"An acquaintance," Sarek corrected. "There

is no

point in discussing what is no longer

important, my

wife."

Amanda bowed her head slightly in acquiescence.

Spock knew better than to try to pursue the subject.

"if you will excuse me, then," Spock said as he rose.

"Sleep well," said Amanda.

Husband and wife sat alone quietly for a moment.

"Thank you," Amanda said suddenly.

Sarek lifted an eyebrow at her as if she had just said

something completely insane.

"For what you said to Spock... about choosing a profession. And drop that expression. You're as transparent as glass."

He let free a small, exasperated sigh,

and for once

did not pretend that he had no idea what she was talking about.

McCoy responded to the buzzer in spite of his promises to himself; but it was not Emma who had pressed it, as he had hoped and feared. Kirk stood

nervously in the corridor with a

suspicious-looking

bundle under his arm.

"Yes, Captain?" McCoy's tone was cold,

and the

look in his eyes could have turned the Vulcan

desert to

icy tundra. Kirk had already had

occasion to speak to

him earlier on the bridge, and McCoy had

dropped

more than a few hints that he was mad. Damn

mad.

Now here was the captain standing in front of the

door to his quarters with a peace offering, an act

that

served only to confirm the doctor's

suspicious.

"Mind if I come in?" Kirk asked meekly.

McCoy shrugged and retreated into his study. The

captain followed and set the bundle on

McCoy's desk,

pulling the wrapping away.

The unmarked decanter contained a clear liquid

that

could have been water--but it was bootleg ethanol,

fresh from the Enterprise's own still hidden in the depths of Engineering. White lightning, moonshine, McCoy called it. It was as close to pure ethanol as its makers could come without igniting Engineering--198 proof. One good shot and you felt no pain; two, and you'd never remember the fun you were having. The captain, of course, was not supposed to be aware of the still's existence, as it was decidedly nonregulation. Kirk had had a hell of a time just trying to find someone who would admit its existence, much less procure some of its output for him. Former Security Chief O'Shay had been his supplier, but Tomson had seemed genuinely shocked at the captain's sugges-

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tion: she'd probably never touched the stuff and would no doubt turn in any of her subordinates who did.

Even Tersarkisov, the rowdiest engineer on board, had professed total ignorance until Kirk had convinced him that the liquor really was for the captain's personal consumption and that no court-martials would ensue.

Kirk pushed the bottle toward McCoy. "The drinks are on me."

McCoy silently produced two glasses and set them on the table. Kirk took it as a hopeful sign and filled them; usually the moonshine was mixed with something to lessen its effect and kill the taste, but this was no time for formalities. Kirk handed a glass to the sulking doctor and sat down across from him. "I think we need to talk."

"Suit yourself." McCoy played with his glass and did not look at him.

Kirk took a sip of his drink and shuddered at the

taste. "Why are you angry at me, Doctor?"

"You tell me."

"Bones.. Kirk spread his hands helplessly.

"How's the shoulder this morning, Captain?"

McCoy

said suddenly.

Kirk colored slightly. "Who told you?"

"You mean, besides the fact that you're moving

with all the agility and grace of a

ninety-year-old

arthritic?" McCoy said sarcastically.

"Maybe I'm just

good at putting two and two together."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

He could hold his rage no longer. "You can drop

the

innocent act, Jim! I saw her leaving your

quarters

early this morning."

"I see," Kirk said quietly.

"And you've got the gall to come here, as though

you can make everything right by bringing me a bottle-was

For a moment, McCoy seemed to be deciding

whether or not to smash his glass against the bulkhead.

"Doctor," Kirk said in the same calm

voice, "I

realize what it looks like. But I went to her
quarters so

she could treat the shoulder--"

"Get your story straight. She left your
quarters,"

McCoy said from between clenched teeth.

"She gave me a sedative so I could sleep.

I fell

asleep in her quarters. This morning I woke

up in my

own. You figure it out."

McCoy folded his arms tightly and considered the

Captain's words; with a sigh, he closed his eyes

and

tilted his head back. "You're telling me that

nothing

happened between you--"

"I'm not saying that I don't find her

attractive. I

won't lie to you, Bones. I do. And I can't

remember

everything that happened last night, after the medication."

McCoy flailed his arms. "Oh, that makes me

feel

just great. Thanks for the honesty, Jim. Now, am

I

supposed to feel better, knowing that you find her attractive and you don't remember what happened?"

Kirk stiffened. "If you can't trust either one of us,

Doctor, you had better reexamine your personal relationships.

Would you rather I lied?"

McCoy's anger flared. "I'd rather you left her the hell alone."

Kirk stood up so quickly that he spilled some of the volatile liquid down the front of his tunic and now reeked of the stuff but was too angered to care.

"She's not anybody's property, Bones. You don't have the right to say that."

"So now you're concerned about her personal rights, eh, you, who treats every single female who MINDSHADOW

comes aboard this ship like they're fair game--comy think you have to play ladies' man with them all!

Emma deserves better than that to was

"That's not true! I keep my distance from every female officer on board this ship! You should talk!

going after a woman half your age. She could be your daughter!"

"She's older than Joanna," McCoy defended himself pathetically. "But it seems to me you've changed your hands-off policy toward women crewmembers. You've been flirting with Emma since she set foot on this ship."

Kirk thought for a moment and set his glass down on the desk. "Then I'll stop."

His words stole the momentum from McCoy's rage.

"Well . . . what am I supposed to think,

Jim?" The

doctor shrugged helplessly. "You're younger than

I

am, handsomer--maybe you felt you needed to prove that--"

"If you don't believe me," Kirk said

softly, "then

ask Emma--that is, if you trust her any more

than you

do me."

McCoy put his head in his hands. "You don't

know

how I feel about her, Jim. I'm an

old-fashioned Earth

boy. This isn't just some convenient affair--I

love

her."

"I know. That's why I'll stop the workouts in the

gym if you like. I'll avoid all contact with

her..."

"No, there's no point in doing that..."

McCoy's

eyes glittered with pain and alcohol. "She's

attracted

to you, isn't she?"

"You'll have to ask the lady that, Bones. I

don't

speak for her."

"I thought so." McCoy looked at a distant

spot on

the wall. "I guess I'll have to take this up with

her."

"I guess so," said Kirk.

He left the bottle with McCoy.

Kirk was on the bridge, coming to all sorts of conclusions, none of them pleasant, about what had happened to his chief engineering officer. When the intercom finally buzzed, he nearly jumped out of his chair. He prayed it was news of Scott; he knew it was, of course, Lieutenant Tomson.

"I don't think I need to remind you of the time, sir.

Shall I put the bulletin out on Mr. Scott?"

Tomson had been more than patient, from her point of view-- Scott was now more than two hours overdue.

"Lieutenant, I'm sure that there's a very good reason why he's been held up--"

"Even if he does have a good reason, sir, I still need to question him. And he could be trying to escape. Remember our agreement," Tomson said firmly.

Kirk listened to himself give the command as though it were someone else speaking. "I have no intention of backing down on my promise,

Lieutenant. Go ahead

and issue the bulletin on my authority."

He wondered if she would insist that he put himself in the brig.

Kirk stood outside the atmosphereless hangar deck

and watched from behind the protective glass shield as

the Galileo sailed through the open portal, leaving behind it the stars and the two Federation police shuttles that had escorted it back. The portal closed

silently behind the small craft; Kirk heard the hiss of

the airlock as pressurization began. The protective

glass shield slid aside, and Kirk,

Tomson, and Ensign

all-Baslama walked to the door of the shuttlecraft and

waited.

It seemed to Kirk like a very long time before the

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door opened. Scott helped Chapel
out carefully, his
left arm around her waist, her right arm draped
across
his shoulder. She was limping painfully, and neither
one seemed much amused by their present
circumstances.

Scott scowled up at them. "Who can help
Nurse Chapel to sick bay? Her ankle's
broken."

"Also-Baslamah," Kirk nodded to the security
guard.

The tall, formidable-looking male scooped
Christine
up into his muscular arms.

"Well," Chapel said, surprised but not at
all struggling,

"I can certainly think of worse ways
to travel."

Scott waited for the guard to carry her off before he
confronted the captain angrily. "Beggin' your
pardon,

sir, but just what the divvil is going' on?

We'd scarcely

left the star base when those jokers put a tractor beam on us and told us we were bein' carried back to the ship. I told them we were headed this way anyway, but they just laughed."

Tomson stepped forward. "You're wanted in connection with the murder of the Romulan prisoner, Mr. Scott."

Scott gazed at her with disbelief, then directed a hurt look at the Captain. "Sir--is it true? Did ye give the order?"

Kirk tried to meet Scott's eyes, but did not succeed for long. He looked down. "I gave the order. Mr.

Scott, you're six hours late."

"Aye, we're late, all right. We were all almost killed when the Galileo crashlanded on Star Base Twelve. It took me that long to repair her."

"Is everyone all right?" Kirk thought immediately

of Spock.

"All but Nurse Chapel's ankle.

Captain, someone

deliberately tampered with the fuel indicator. his

"The way you tampered with the brig's force field

using the override control in Engineering?"

Scott looked at Tomson as though she had

lost her

mind. "Are ye jokin', Lieutenant? The

maintenance

panel indicated a problem with the override

controls--that's

why I went to check it out---but the problem had

corrected itself by the time I got there. Just

exactly

what are ye sayin'?"

Tomson's gaze was cool. "That you set the

manual

control so that it would lower the force field at the

precise time you went down to the brig to murder the

prisoner."

Stiff with anger and pride, Scott looked

Tomson

squarely in the eye and took a step toward her.

"I

dinna do it, Lieutenant. Go ahead and

question me.

I've got nothin' to hide. It so happens that

right after I

checked on the override controls I went back

to work

on the lower engineering deck, sortin' through

wreckage

from the pirate ship. At least three other

crew-members

were workin' with me. I can give you their

names."

"And would you be willing to submit to a questioning

under the influence of truth drug?"

"With pleasure, Miss Tomson."

"Then come with me, Mr. Scott."

Before he followed Tomson, Scott turned

to Kirk.

"Ye told them about Ensign Lanz, didn't

ye, Captain?"

His voice was soft and wounded.

Kirk tried to speak, but the engineer would not give

him a chance to reply. Scott shook his head.

wouldna thought ye capable, sir. I wouldna thought ye

capable..."

Head held high, shoulders back, he

walked with

Tomson to the brig.

Chapter Seven

Spock's knowledge was unblatant to identify what was

happening to

him.

His lessons with the white-haired Tela't

Stalik were

at best unenlightening exercises in futility.

While Spock-like

was accomplished in the practice of Kohlinahr,

and

in addition had reached the revered age of 265

Terran

standard years, he nevertheless seemed to lack

patience

for Spock's slowness at relearning the mind

disciplines, and did not hesitate to make his

displeasure

known. For Spock, the lessons were frustrating,

and eventually he became convinced that Stalik was

deliberately trying to be enigmatic, unclear,

and to

rush the lessons. Many times Spock

came close to

saying so, but courtesy and the esteemed position a tela'at held in Vulcan society forbade it.

His powers of concentration seemed to be worsening rather than improving, his memory becoming more clouded instead of clearing. His lack of progress

keenly embarrassed him, and he became

increasingly

seclusive, eventually avoiding contact with his

family

as much as possible. He spent his days in

lessons with

Stalik, scouring the bookshelves, and sitting

alone in the garden, unable to meditate.

Spock found himself losing patience with everyone:

with Stalik, with Amanda, with the overeager

T'Pala.

He told himself that no one noticed his increasing

irritability--until one day Amanda increased

his medication

to two capsules a day. She had noticed his

worsening condition and, without telling him, had

consulted McCoy. Inexplicably furious,

Spock had

turned on his heel and sought the serenity

of the

garden to gather himself.

He stepped outside into the soothing arid heat and

went to his favorite spot--a stone bench

half-hidden

beneath a hanging arbor of thick foliage, its

blooms

rustling in the hot afternoon breeze.

He stopped abruptly. T'Pala sat hidden

in the

shadows, eyes closed, face in the perfectly

bland

expression of Vulcan meditation, an expression

of

which Spock lately had been incapable.

He backed away quietly, not wishing to disturb

her,

more for his own sake than for hers. But it was too

late; before he could retreat to the safety of the

house,

she called out to him.

He faced her reluctantly.

She spoke uncertainly, her face still hidden in

the

shadows. "There's something I would like

to discuss

with you. It's something that I would not feel at ease discussing with anyone else."

She motioned for him to sit next to her, but he remained standing. She shifted nervously.

"What do you know of my background?" T'Pala asked.

Spock's manner was brusque; he wanted only to return to the serenity of the guest room and Amanda's books. "I know that you are half-human, and that you grew up on Terra. Nothing more."

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She nodded to indicate that his information was correct. "As I say, this is a subject too sensitive to discuss with anyone else. I... I wanted to tell you that I admire your emotional control. I wanted to ask you how you accomplished it."

If she had not seemed so ingenuously earnest, he would have thought she had chosen this particularly inopportune moment to make fun of him.

He decided that she was sincere. "I was raised on Vulcan.

I spent
years learning emotional discipline and the Vulcan
mind control techniques."

"I did not," T'Pala replied sadly.

"My mother was

Vulcan, but she died when I was three. I

learned of

Vulcan culture and language at school and

from my

father. There was no one who could teach me all the

ancient disciplines." She leaned forward and he

caught sight of her face, intense, almost...

begging.

"Would you be willing to help me?"

He almost left, sure now that she was making fun

of

him, but something in her voice made him remain.

Perhaps she did not know... perhaps his parents had

not told her of his condition... perhaps even after her

question to him about Aritani, she had not thought it

proper to ask. "You receive lessons from the

Tela'at

Stalik, do you not?"

"Yes, but my progress is very slow. It could

take

years...

"He is far better qualified to teach Vulcan
discipline

than I. I. he almost faltered, then continued
evenly, "I have lost the mind rules. I was
injured in an
accident on Aritani."

"I know," she answered.

His temper flared. "Then why do you make such a
ridiculous request?"

"It's not ridiculous," she responded

swiftly. "You've

lost the mind rules, yet your control is better
than

mine. Being half-human, as I am, you must be
relying

on human methods of control, yet after years of
living

on Vulcan, you know how to act like a Vulcan,
something I don't know. If you could just show me
how..."

"For what purpose?"

"To be accepted. I am a Vulcan

citizen. I want to be

worthy of my heritage. And I want to join the

Vulcan

Diplomatic Corps."

"I see," Spock said stiffly. "Why not the

Terran

diplomatic service?"

The insult failed to register. "I'm no longer

a citizen

of Terra."

"And you believe that learning how to behave as a

Vulcan will increase your chances of entering the

VDC?"

She frowned. "You make it sound as though I'm

doing this for entirely selfish reasons."

"You may reach your own conclusions." He spoke

vehemently. "If you feel yourself to be a

Vulcan,

T'Pala, then you must embrace the Vulcan

path completely.

You cannot choose those aspects of Vulcan life

which appeal to you. Learning emotional control may

indeed take years, but if you truly desire it,

it must

come from inner discipline, not from outer

playacting.

Any Vulcan you meet will know the difference. To

follow the path merely for furthering your own

political

ambitions would be no less than an obscenity."

T'Pol jumped to her feet, her chin quivering.

"I

wish to follow the Vulcan path, and my reasons

are

valid. And you sound like all the others, insisting that

the Vulcan path is the only way, and there is but

one

way to follow it. I see no logic in your blind

loyalty."

"Vulcan loyalty is not blind," Spock

replied hotly.

"Quite the opposite. But I have not come to debate

that with you. As to your question of whether I can

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help you enter the VDC, I cannot. What vestige

of

control I now possess is the direct result

of years of

habit."

"I was not asking you to help me get into the

VDC,"

she said. "I have very deep personal reasons for

wanting to join, reasons which I do not care to discuss

with anyone, not even you. But I resent your
implication

that my reasons are not honorable."

"You will get in. My father has recommended you."

He did not say it kindly.

"Even that may not be enough."

"Because you are half-human?"

Her lips twisted bitterly. "That, among other
reasons."

"If you believe that your human behavior
patterns

have cost you admission into the Corps, then clearly,

my help is of no use to you. I believe that on

Terra you

have an expression: too little, too late."

Her face hardened and became perfectly
expressionless.

"Then you will not help me."

"That is correct," he answered coldly, and
went

into the house.

Emma was waiting for McCoy when he got off

duty. She stood outside the door to his cabin and

smiled at him as though nothing had changed, as

though he had not pointedly avoided her for the past

two days.

He moved past her without acknowledgment, but she followed him inside.

"I think we need to talk, Leonard. You're angry at me."

He went to the cabinet and poured himself three fingers of moonshine. "Funny, a lot of people seem to be saying that to me these days," he muttered.

"What?"

"Nothing. I merely said, how observant of you to notice. Drink?"

"No. Please tell me why you're so angry."

"It hasn't seemed to bother you for the past couple of days. In fact, I was beginning to think you hadn't noticed at all. Why don't you see if you can figure it out all by yourself?. Cheers.". McCoy held up his glass for an instant and looked at Emma through the volatile liquid before taking the largest gulp physically possible.

"Please don't play games with me."

"I'm afraid you have it backwards, my dear.

I'm not

the one who's playing the games. Why do I always have to tell everyone on this ship things they already know?"

"But I don't know." Her exasperation seemed

genuine

enough. "All I know is that you've been avoiding me for the past two days. You wouldn't even speak to

me in sick bay. At first I thought you were

depressed

or in a bad mood, but I can see now it's more

than

that."

"We!," he said softly. "At least you're

capable of

making some deductions." He hated himself for the

sarcasm in his voice, but most of all he

hated her--for

the position she had put him in, for the innocence she

feigned so well--hated her, because he still loved

her

and would believe absolutely anything she told

him,

even if she told him Jim had lied and that he,

McCoy,

had jumped to conclusions, had been a fool, a

jealous

old fool

But she did not. Emma planted herself firmly in

the

same chair Jim had sat in the night before and

held him

with those clear, guileless eyes. "I'm not leaving

until

you tell me what I've done to offend you."

McCoy sank shakily into the chair opposite

her and

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tried to guess what her reaction to his accusation

would be. Denial, most likely, proving her

to be a liar,

she who prided herself so on her honesty. He let

go a

sigh that seemed to come straight from his heart. "The

captain told me that he spent the night in your

cabin

night before last."

"Yes," she said, waiting.

"Are you telling me that nothing happened between you?"

He watched the subtle changes in her facial muscles

as she finally understood his implication. There was surprise first--the lifted brow, widened eyes,

lips

slightly parted-, but following quickly came something very much like fury. The lips closed and tightened, the jaw tensed; she contained her anger, but her eyes blazed.

"For God's sake, Emma," McCoy said

plaintively,

"do you really expect me to react casually to that?"

Do

you really expect me not to be jealous?"

Emma took a deep breath and sat back in the chair.

The anger glimmered for a moment more, then was extinguished as rapidly as it had first appeared.

"No,"

she said calmly. "No, I don't expect you

not to be

jealous." She knitted her hands together in her lap

and

looked down at them.

"But my reaction is two questions for you. First--is that what you think of me, Leonard?"

"Emma, are you so naive to think that if a man sleeps over in your cabin, it's absurd for anyone to

think he might have made love with you?"

"If you're suspicious, then your first reaction should be to come to me and ask me what happened, not to pout for two days, and not to jump to whatever you may think is a logical conclusion."

"All right," McCoy conceded icily. "What's the

second question?"

"What the hell business is it of yours anyway?"

We

haven't come to any sort of understanding about other relationships."

McCoy rose and turned away from her, clasping

his

hands behind him as he stared into the darkness of the inner room. "Maybe it's none of my business at all,"

he said, the anger in his voice replaced by sadness. "I

know I have no right to be jealous. But I am.

I'm

jealous because I felt our relationship was

special, I'm

jealous because I have feelings for you that I haven't

felt in a very long time, and I don't want

anyone to

take you away from me."

"No one's going to take me away. If I

leave, it will

be because it's time for me to leave." Emma rose from

her chair and placed a hand lightly on

McCoy's back,

but he did not turn around. "I asked you if that was

what you thought of me because I thought you understood something

about me--I am a loyal person. I

would never do something to hurt you, Leonard, not

unless it absolutely couldn't be

helped. Even if I were

physically attracted to Jim Kirk, I would not

act on

it."

McCoy turned halfway toward her in the

darkness. "Are you attracted to him, Emma?"

Her gaze was steady and sought no pardon. "If

I

said I didn't find him attractive, I would
be a liar."

He turned away instinctively, to hide his

hurt, but

she placed a hand on his face and drew it gently

toward

her. "But I love you. I gave him a hypo and

it put him

to sleep before I could get him out of my cabin.

That's

all there was to it."

"All?" McCoy's eyes searched hers so

hopefully

that she felt pity for him. She took a deep

breath.

"No, not all. He got a little relaxed . . .

and he

kissed me. That was all."

McCoy sighed with relief. So she was telling the

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truth, she and Jim... "As you pointed out, we

don't

have an understanding about other relationships.

Would you like to?"

She smiled at the realization that he believed her.

"Of what sort?"

"How does marriage strike you?"

Her smile vanished, replaced by something very close to panic. "Leonard . . . no, that wouldn't, be possible."

"Why not? I admit it's an old-fashioned idea, but still a popular one--"

"It's not that I think it's a bad idea--I love you very much--but you will remain on the Enterprise and I will be reassigned somewhere else."

"Well then, just request a permanent assignment here. You don't have to be reassigned--"

"I do. It's the nature of my job."

"What the devil are you talking about?"

Medical personnel can request permanent assignments, especially married medical personnel." His tone became heated again.

"Please try to understand--comt's the agreement I have with Star Fleet."

"Well you could change the agreement, then.

Certainly

someone---" he almost said, the captain "---can pull some strings so you could be assigned here. If you'd just rather not marry me, please say so."

"It's not that." She closed her eyes at the hopelessness

of explaining it to him. "Please, there's no point in talking about it any more. I'll have to be reassigned

somewhere else soon, and that's the way it is."

He panicked. "How soon?"

"I wish I knew," she said, with a misery that broke

his heart. "I'd prefer to spend what time I have with

you, if you'll let me. I do care about you."

He pulled her close to him and kissed the top of her

head. "I'm going to do everything in my power to keep you on this ship. In the meantime, I'd like to ask one favor."

"Anything," she murmured.

A smile played at the corners of his mouth.

"Call

me next time you're going to be two days late for

dinner."

"Your concentration is imperative, Spock,"

Tela'at

Stalik admonished sternly, "if you are to make

any

progress."

Spock directed his gaze away from the window and

back toward the flame statue. Outside, a

light rain fell

upon the water-starved desert, one of those rare gray

days on Vulcan when the sun did not scorch the

sky

orange.

Spock repressed a sigh and attempted once

again to

concentrate. He sat cross-legged beside

the Tela'at as

both regarded the flame statue and Stal'ik

explained the

process of meditation for the twentieth time.

Spock's

mental agitation was increasing daily, along with his

forgetfulness. The lessons with Stalik had become

cruel parodies of the lessons Spock had

taken as a

child; but then, he had retained the information, and had understood. Now it seemed impossible.

As Stalik droned on in monotone, Spock

became

drowsy staring at the flickering flame. With each

passing

second, his irritation at Stalik increased--the

lessons

all seemed interminably long, and he wanted

more than anything for Stalik to finish and leave.

"Spock," Stalik snapped.

Spock started; he hadn't heard a word Stalik

had

been saying.

The Tela'at's regal serenity seemed

incongruous

with his words. "You are a dreadful student,

Spock.

After weeks of daily lessons, you have not mastered

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even the first level of meditation. I am beginning

to

form the opinion that you will never do so."

The muscles in Spock's body tensed, although his

expression did not change and his eyes remained

fixed on the flame. "Perhaps you are right,

Tela'at." He

turned his eyes on his teacher. "Then why do you
continue to instruct me?"

Stalik's tone, unlike his words, was not
insulting,

"It is difficult to believe that an adult

Vulcan could not

master such elementary concepts."

The temptation was great to defend himself by explaining

the extent of his difficulties, but Spock held

his peace; he would not further shame himself by

excusing his weaknesses. Instead he said, "Why

does

the Tela'at waste his time with me?"

"Out of respect for your father."

Stalik's response

was calculated to inspire remorse, but in

Spock's case

it merely served as fuel for his anger.

For the father, not the son. "If the Tela'at does

not

expect me to progress, is not such a waste of

his time

illogical?"

Spock knew full well that his question contained the

ultimate insult to one who had passed through the rigors of Kohlinahr--the intimation of illogical, ill-considered action. Stalik had no trouble interpreting Spock's intent: he rose stiffly to his feet.

"This will be the end of my instruction, Spock," he said. "You are correct. There is no logic in continuing the lessons."

Spock remained seated before the statue; he did not watch as the Tela'at left.

But Amanda had seen Stalik leave, and went to tap lightly on Spock's door. She was not at all prepared for the angry stranger who answered.

"Spock is everything all right? Stalik was scarcely here ten minutes..."

Spock stared stonily down at her. "I insulted the Tela'at. I indicated that further lessons were illogical."

"Illogical? Spock, I don't understand."

"The lessons were a waste of time, Mother. I do not wish to discuss it further." He began to retreat back inside the room.

She caught him gently by the elbow. "What do you want me to tell your father, then? How can I tell him that?"

The mention of Sarek seemed to infuriate Spock; he practically shouted at her. "That is none of my concern.

You may tell him whatever you wish."

She drew back and dropped the elbow, mouth open.

"Spock, what's wrong?"

"You know. Must you shame me into saying it?"

"Please... I don't understand."

He turned his face away from her, miserable.

"The mind rules. I cannot relearn them. I can no longer function as a Vulcan--comI apparently cannot even control

my temper as well as a human. And my
memory is
getting worse."

"Spock." Amanda's voice was soothing.

"You'll
learn, I promise you... it's just that it will take
more
time. You were used to learning so quickly. You must
be patient. It will all come back."

"No." Spock fought despair with anger.

"No. Mother, can't you see... I'm not improving
slowly.

Each day, I'm getting worse, forgetting more and
more . . .

"Then let me call Dr. McCoy. Perhaps we
should
increase the medication."

"The medication hasn't helped," he said dully.

"I
am going to get worse, and that is why I shall leave
here as quickly as possible, before I bring further
shame to my family."

"But where will you go?"

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"A star base hospital. Perhaps Star Base

Twelve."

Hot tears gathered behind Amanda's eyes; she wanted to stamp her foot, to scream, but she had lived

with Vulcans for too long. "No," she commanded with a mother's determination. "You will not go there. You will stay here with us, where you belong."

He shook his head. "I don't belong here, Mother.

You and father have been shamed enough, especially after the trouble I have caused with the Tela'at."

"I don't give a damn about Stalik,"

Amanda said,

losing her own temper at last. "I don't care if he tells

everybody in ShiKahr. And don't you ever, ever say

that we're ashamed of you. How could you even think such a thing?"

His jaw twitched in a scarcely visible spasm.

"Are

you forgetting, Mother, that I am a telepath?"

Amanda quickly clapped a hand over her open mouth, but did not succeed in stifling the first sob.

Perhaps she wept from surprise as much as from

paint Spock had never said anything cruel to her before, nor accused her of anything untrue. Now he was doing both. She disappeared to the safety of her room before she embarrassed them both any further. Spock stood frozen with horror at what he had just done. Amanda was probably the last person in the universe whom he would choose to cause pain. But even though Amanda was hidden in her room on the other side of the house, Spock could detect the faint sound of her weeping. A human would not have heard it.

.. An ugly, muffled sound. Spock had heard it only once before, when he was four years old, standing outside the door to Amanda's room; it had taken him some time to realize that his mother was responsible for the wrenching, faraway sound. Spock, the child, had been terrified. Sarek had come out of the room, and for an instant the noise had stopped. "Go and comfort your mother," his father had said, in a voice gentler than Spock had ever heard before. "You are

her only child."

He had not understood, but he had gone inside.

He could not go to her now.

Instead, he went to the cabinet in the kitchen where
Amanda kept the medication and poured the capsules
into his hand. They really were rather pretty--n
intensely brilliant shade of purple--and quite
useless.

SP-OCK'S hand closed over them in a tight
fist.

Perhaps... not totally useless

Chapter Eight Captain's Log,

Stardate 7006.4:

Under orders of Star Fleet Command, the
Enterprise
has left Aritani in order to deliver
delegates
to an emergency meeting of the Federation
Council which is being held on the planet
Vulcan.

The Fidelity, a patrol vessel currently
assigned to
the area, will take the Enterprise's place as
watchdog,
although I frankly doubt that the presence of

any ship will serve as a deterrent to the raiders.

The meeting's purpose is to determine whether the Federation should continue its involvement with Aritani given the growers' refusal to accept further Federation protection. While a case can be made for abiding by the Aritanians' wishes, the fact that the planet's mineral wealth makes it an attractive target for exploitation by unfriendly powers has led the Federation to consider continuing protection. Intelligence sources indicate the Romulan government may already be eyeing the planet for use as a mining colony.

The murder of the Romulan prisoner is still unsolved. The murder charges pending against Lieutenant Commander Montgomery Scott have been dropped on the ground of insufficient evidence; three witnesses verified his presence on the engineering deck at the time of the murder. Lieutenant Tomson informs me that she has uncovered no further evidence in the case.

He awoke with a gasp, heart pounding so hard he

could scarcely catch his breath. He looked about to reassure himself that he was in the garden, under the hanging arbor, and that he had been dreaming--a nightmare of something intensely purple, something that filled him with a sense of terror.

Spock straightened and intentionally slowed his breathing. He had dreamed of the pills, no doubt, because he had held them in his hand and studied them for some time, contemplating what might happen if he swallowed them all. Some lingering shred of logic had saved him, had reminded him that he was uncertain of the effects of an overdose, had dictated that the intentional ending of his life could not be the result of an emotional decision. He had thrown them with disgust into the garbage slot on the kitchen wall, knowing that they would immediately be incinerated.

The hanging vines shielded Spock's eyes from the intense light of the midday sun; the gray misting rain of the day before had at last been burned away.

Spock

had been sitting in the garden for a full day. He
rose
and stretched stiffly, his tunic still damp from the rain
and smelling slightly mildewed, and went to his
room.

The flame in the belly of the statue was still burning,
as he and Stalik had left it the day before. As he
stood
with his eyes fixed on the pulsating red light,
Stalik's
instructions came to his mind with sudden
clarity.

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Spock sat in the cross-legged position before it,
his
muscles complaining with their need to be stretched,
but he ignored the discomfort and kept his eyes on
the
flame.

Logic. One must formulate the question first, before
one can arrive at the answer. And Spock had
questions;
he would begin to sift them now, one by one.
Today he would answer at least one of them.
Stalik had said that there were always answers.

It was late afternoon when Spock emerged from his

room into the hallway.

The Andorian child had just completed his lesson; it must have been his last, for Amanda was presenting him with a gift: one of the rare paper books, this one bound in red cloth. It was typical of her,

loaning--sometimes

giving--the priceless volumes to those she

felt would profit from them most. Spock squinted,

but

he could not make out the title.

The Andorian, child though he was, seemed to

appreciate the worth of the gift and the intent of the

giver, for he reverently set the book aside and with

youthful impulse hugged his teacher.

Spock knew he should allow them some privacy,

but

the enormity of his curiosity compelled him to stay.

He wanted to know how his mother would respond.

Amanda was almost knocked off balance by the

child's momentum, but her expression quickly became

one of pleasure; her arms enfolded the child and

drew

him to her with honest affection.

Spock drew back so that they would not see him as

they walked to the door. When the Andorian had

departed, Spock walked up silently behind
Amanda.

She almost ran into him when she turned around and
drew back, startled. "Spock, you look
terrible. were
you out in the garden all night? In the rain?"

She did not mention the hurt he had caused her the
day before; there was no recrimination in her face,
only concern. Spock permitted himself a
moment's
envy for the Andorian boy.

"Mother, I wish to apologize for the unkind and
untrue remark I made yesterday--"

"Don't." She dismissed his offense with a wave of
her hand. Both she and Spock knew that
Vulcans did
not apologize.

"Let me continue. For whatever reason, I was not
in control of my temper earlier, and my behavior
toward you and toward Tela'at Stalik was
inexcusable.

I regret it deeply. If I could reclaim
the remark--"

"You weren't yourself. I can't hold anything you
might have said against you."

"My thought patterns were most confused and illogical.

However, I seem to have regained control of them. I shall go to Stalik's house to apologize and ask

him to return, although I doubt he will do so."

Amanda's face was hopeful. "Then you think it is useful to continue the lessons. And you'll stay with US."

"For the moment, yes."

She studied his face. "You are yourself again, aren't you? I'm glad. We've been so worried. But

I must ask

you--your medication isn't where I left it. Did

you

take it?"

Spock nodded.

"Good," she said, relieved. "I trust you

to take it,

then. I'm just very grateful for the sudden

improvement...

perhaps the effects are cumulative.

Spock's expression was bland, even agreeable;

there was no reason to alarm her by revealing the fate

of the neodopazine. If his condition worsened, he

would contact McCoy himself.

But his mother's statement about the effects of the

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drug aroused a strange emotion in him, one that for some odd reason was connected in his subconscious

with his accident He tried to identify it before

it

passed as quickly as it had descended.

Fear... a feeling of imminent danger.

That night it visited him again as he dreamed of

purple . . . not the porcelain capsules this

time, but

steep purple mountains.

Kirk sat miserably in his command chair, fingering

the stiff collar of the dress uniform. It was no

secret to

the crew that their captain had been in a less than

perfect mood for the last few weeks. Maybe his

dress

uniform was getting too tight and making him

cranky,

Sulu suggested in a low voice to Chekhov. The

helmsman's

eyes darted sideways at the captain, who was

distracted by a yeoman's report requiring his

signature.

The low rumble of laughter quickly faded to silence as Kirk glared up from the yeoman's clipboard, sensing that he was somehow responsible for the merriment.

"Coming into orbit around Tellar, Captain,"

Sulu

said glibly.

"Visual of the Tellarite delegation," Kirk

said without

enthusiasm.

Uhura's fingers were poised over her console;

she'd

been waiting for the command. "On visual,

Captain."

Stocky, bristle-haired, heavy-browed, the

Tellarite

ambassador was impossible to describe in

Terran

terms as anything other than porcine; certainly,

his

manners served little to disabuse anyone of the

comparison.

He glared at Kirk with small, bilious eyes

set

over a nasal appendage best described as a
snout.

Kirk affected a weak smile of dubious
sincerity.

"This is Captain James T. Kirk of the
starship Enterprise. Is your party ready to beam
aboard?"

"Ambassador Zev. It's about time," the
Tellarite

boomed in a low, hoarse voice, quite unlike the
squeal

one expected from looking at him. "We've been
waiting

almost an hour!"

Kirk's lips tightened. It was a lie, and

Ambassador

Zev knew it. The Enterprise had arrived at

the promised

moment. But a Tellarite never passed up the

opportunity for an argument--tell one that the

Terran

sky was blue, and they would insist it was as orange

as

Vulcan's, and then throw in a few insults at

your

mother for good measure. It was a characteristic of Tellarite culture for which Kirk was in no mood.

"Please stand by to beam up." Kirk cut off the communication abruptly and wondered whose bright idea it was to let Tellar into the Federation.

Zev's piggish snout was the last object to fade from the viewscreen. "Mr. Varth."

The first officer, his expression gracious and alert, turned from Spock's console to face the captain.

Like Kirk, he wore his full-dress uniform, but his was science officer's blue, a color that complemented his copper hair. "Sir," he replied in his soft tenor voice.

"Accompany me to the transporter room."

"Yes, sir."

Kirk left, taking his foul mood with him, while Varth followed at a polite distance.

Sulu took the con and when the doors to the lift

had

closed, sighed.

"What's been eating him?" Uhura asked in a

low

voice.

Sulu just shook his head.

Kirk maintained a sullen silence

until the lift deposited

them on the level of the transporter room. "Ever

dealt with Tellarites before, Mr. Varth?" he

asked with

the supremely confident voice of experience.

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"Yes, sir," Varth replied eagerly. "I

roomed with

one at the Academy."

Kirk looked at him sharply, wanting to ask

what the

hell one had been doing at the Academy, but he

bit his

tongue and held the lecture on how not to lose

one's

temper with Tellarites.

Scott and McCoy were already waiting in the

transporter

room, both in their dress uniforms; they had
been talking but when the captain entered, an
awkward
silence descended. Kirk was certain Scott still
thought he had mentioned Ensign Lanz to Tomson,
thus precipitating Scott's arrest;
he had no idea if
McCoy still blamed him for the incident with Emma.
McCoy cleared his throat and tugged at the
collar of
his uniform. "How many more of these delegations do
we have to pick up? This thing is killing me. They
can
transport a man's atoms through space and
back, but
they can't dress him up and let him be comfortable at
the same time."
"This is the last delegation," Kirk said.
"Thank God," Scott sighed. i'll be glad
when
we're finished with all this pomp and circumstance."
He turned to the young Radun andwitha paternal
air,
said, "Now tell me, Mr. Varth, have ye ever
had the

misfortune to have dealings with Tellarites before?"

"Yes," Kirk said shortly, before Varth could

open

his mouth. "He has."

Varth nodded politely in Kirk's direction and

waited

to be sure the captain was finished speaking. "I was

friends with a Tellarite back at the Academy."

"Friends? With a Tellarite?" Scott's eyes

widened

with horror at the thought. "I dinna think that's

possible.

Ye must have some special diplomatic gift

to make

friends with those piggish little---

"Mr. Scott," Kirk warned.

"robcastles," Scott finished. "Are ye

sure your

people are related to the Klingons? I can't think of a

more unlikely combination, a Klingon and a

Tellarite."

Varth smiled. "Raduns have a special knack

for

getting along with almost anyone. I've never met

someone I couldn't be friends with." He looked

hesitantly at the captain.

Kirk scowled. "I suppose we have no choice

but to

beam them aboard, Mr. Scott."

"Aye," Scott sighed, "I suppose not."

He went behind the transporter control

console.

Three squat forms shimmered and materialized

into

reality on the transporter pads. The tallest

one spoke.

"I am Ambassador Zev." It sounded more like

a hysterical accusation than an introduction.

"And I am, of course, Captain Kirk. This

is my first

officer, Mr. Varth, Chief Engineer Scott,

and Chief

Medical Officer McCoy."

Zev flared his already wide nostrils. "Is this

why

you made us wait so long before you beamed us up? So

that you could assemble half your crew in this useless

display of pomp?"

Kirk smiled at the thought of the immense pleasure

involved in poking Zev in his oversized snout.

"This is hardly half the crew, Ambassador.

There are over four hundred personnel aboard this ship. It is our custom to honor important diplomats such as yourself by having our senior officers greet you--"

"A ridiculous waste of time!" Zev waved a stubby arm imperiously. "Take us to our quarters now."

"Sir," Varth said in a low voice to Kirk, "if I may--"

"He's all yours," Kirk said, his smile faded.

"What do you mean, we made you wait so long?" Varth shouted so loud that McCoy jumped. "That's an outright lie! You know we were right on time. And

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speaking of useless displays of pomp, I notice you came with an entourage yourself. They're here just for show, as we are."

Kirk, Scott and McCoy stared at the first officer as if

he had gone mad, but Varth ignored them, glaring defiantly at the Tellarites.

Zev made a rasping sound that Kirk was finally

to identify as laughter. "I don't need

to explain my

attaches to you, son of a Klingon."

"And we don't have to explain ourselves to you."

"Maybe not," Zev said with gusto. "But quit

wasting

my time with all this talk. Take us to our

quarters.

And I hope that they're suitable. You humans

always

put us in rooms which suit your ridiculously

oversized

bodies--"

"It's not our fault you're so short," Varth

sneered.

"Mr. Varth--" Kirk broke in, "I'm

sorry to interrupt

the mutual admiration society, but if you would

take them to their quarters..."

"Certainly, sir," the Radun replied

politely. He

gestured to the Tellarites to follow.

Zev chuckled as he and his diminutive entourage

waddled past Kirk. "Captain, I was with former
Ambassador

Gav's delegation when he was on your ship
several years before, and I must say that I
find your
new first officer a vast improvement over the old
one.

This one, at least, has a little personality."

Kirk did not smile at the remark.

The Tellarites fell in behind Varth like baby
ducks

behind their mother; as the door slid closed behind
them, they could hear Varth in the corridor: "I
always
thought that the terms Tellarite and diplomat were
mutually exclusive."

"Did you ever see anything like that before?" McCoy
said with awe.

"I'd "a thought he'd hit Mr Varth for saying
things

were' 69

like that, but it didn't seem to make him any
madder. I

think he liked it," Scott puzzled.

McCoy nodded. "That Varth really knows what
he's

doing."

"Maybe," Kirk said without conviction.

McCoy turned on him. "Give the

man a little credit,

for God's sake, Captain. It's not his fault

he's not

Spock." He brushed past Kirk. "Come

on,. Scotty.

This is the last of the diplomats, and I've got

some

white lightning in my quarters."

"Could I talk to you for a moment first, Mr.

Scott?"

Scott stopped. "I'll be there in a minute,"

he told

McCoy.

Kirk waited for McCoy to leave before he began

to

speak.

Scott stopped him. "Captain, I think I

know what

you want to talk about... and it's all right. You were

just tryin" to do your duty."

"Scotty... I want you to know that I didn't

tell

anyone about Ensign Lanz. I never for a moment
thought you could have done it. Tomson wanted to put
a bulletin out on you immediately, but I
wouldn't, not
until you were late. I'm sorry, Scotty."

Scott lowered his eyes. "I appreciate what
ye tried
to do for me, sir. And I'm sorry for what I
said. No
hard feelings?"

"No hard feelings."

He smiled and straightened his shoulders. "Then,
sir, why don't ye join me and the doctor for a
little
tippie? Ye look like you could use some cheerin'
"Thanks. Maybe later, Scotty."

But Kirk had no intention of going to the doctor's
quarters. He seriously doubted he would be
welcome
there for quite some time.

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It was not the most comfortable situation James
Kirk had ever been in, but then it was not the most
uncomfortable either. The reception for the delegates
was in full swing in the rec lounge, and from the

looks

of things, at least half the crew was

present. Kirk

headed toward his first officer, who was having an

earnest discussion with the Radun ambassador;

Varth

had been seriously embarrassed to learn that the

Radun

delegation opposed protection for Aritani. It

looked as if Varth was engaging in a little

diplomacy

himself.

On the other side of the room the Saurian

ambassador

was calling and waving to Kirk so loudly that Kirk

could no longer pretend he did not notice.

Reluctantly,

Kirk went to join his group.

Next to the Saurian stood Emma Saenz and

Leonard McCoy, both wearing identical

medical dress

uniforms of pale blue, although Kirk could not

help

thinking that Emma did hers infinitely more

justice.

The Saurian and Emma were grinning broadly,
oblivious
to anyone's discomfort; Kirk and McCoy nodded,
unsmiling, at each other.

Kirk addressed himself to the Saurian; he had
to
raise his voice to be heard above the rumble of the
crowd. "By the sound of things, Ambassador
Taureng,
everyone here has already enjoyed a substantial
amount of your contribution to our reception."

"Glad to be of service, Captain," Taureng
boomed
gleefully, obviously having also indulged in a
fair

portion of his planet's most lucrative
export. He was
nearly seven feet tall, black-skinned, and
exuding
charm, a welcome contrast to the pygmyish

Tellarite
who stood nearby, arguing quite obnoxiously with the
ambassador from Cygnus V. "Permit me
to get you a
glass."

Kirk started to protest about the impropriety of

ambassadors waiting on the hired
help, but Taureng
did not seem to hear; after all, his own glass was
again
empty and needed filling.

Jim turned back awkwardly to face Emma and
McCoy;
the doctor was studying his Saurian brandy with
furious intensity, apparently in an attempt
to appreciate
the visual and olfactory attributes of the
fiery
amber liquid. Emma leaned forward. She
seemed to be
the only sober person in the room.

"How divided are these delegates on the
Aritanian
question, Captain?" she asked, nodding at the group
next to them, which consisted of Ambassador Zev,
the
Cygnusian with whom he was arguing, and an
Andorian
who was quietly watching the exchange.

"As far as I can tell," Kirk said, loud enough for
Emma and McCoy to hear, but not so loud that he

could be heard over the growl of the
Tellarite or the
silken response of the Cygnusian, "about half
the
diplomats favor protection. The
Tellarites and the
Raduns are against it. The Andorians haven't
committed
themselves, and the Cygnusians are one of the
strongest supporters. that's why the Tellarite's
arguing
with her."

The native of Cygnus V sat on a large
sofa next to
the Andorian ambassador. Indeed, she found it
quite
taxing to stand for long periods of time, since
Cygnus
V's gravity was some ten percent less than
Terran
standard, but there had been no time to arrange more
comfortable travel accommodations and still arrive on
Vulcan in time for the vote. McCoy was giving
her
injections to ease the strain, but even the slightest
movement was tiring. Next to the

Andorian, she
looked like a graceful giantess; she was taller
than a
Saurian, and even seated, was taller than the
Tellarite
who stood before her. Her skin was translucent
white,
and her frail bones were so thin and elongated that a

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human child could snap them easily. In fact, she
avoided any quick movements and often went to the
antigrav compartment in the gym, so that she could
move about and exercise without fear of breaking a
fragile limb. She responded to the shouted
accusations
of the Tellarite with a voice that was breathless and
feathery.

"Don't you realize," Zev yelled, "that you
,are
violating one of the Federation's most revered
precepts?"

We have no right to interfere when they've
made it clear they want no help. I can't
believe the

Federation is even calling this conference!"

The Cygnusian craned her long neck forward and directed a sharply angled chin at the

Tellarite. "That is

a common misconception among those who do not truly understand Federation Code."

Zev sputtered. "What kind of insult--"

"The noninterference directive states that no representative

of the Federation may interfere with the sociological or technological development

of a culture,

either by hindering or helping it. By giving Aritani a second chance to accept our help, we are in no

way

interfering with their cultural development. Quite the opposite--we are protecting them from interference,

from those who would hinder their development. We are upholding the noninterference directive, not

violating

it."

"But we are defying their own government's decision,"

Zev roared.

"We do not defy it." The Cygnusian

shook her

elongated head slowly, carefully. "We are giving them the opportunity to reconsider their position. They would have no such chance if we permitted the pirates to destroy them."

"They have the right to choose genocide, if they want to. The whole point of this so-called second chance is that the Federation can't bear to see all those fuel sources go to the Romulans."

"Romulans?" Emma whispered in Kirk's ear.

"The latest rumor."

"If the Romulans take the planet, then the Aritanians have certainly chosen genocide," said the Cygnusian, "for the Romulans would destroy the inhabitants and strip what they wanted from the planet without concern for its ecosystem. They would effectively destroy it. That is their way."

"I still say that's the Aritanians' decision to make," Zev persisted.

She frowned. "Perhaps, Zev, you don't realize that when the Aritanians told us to leave, they felt we couldn't help them. If we could show them that we can stop the attacks, they might change their minds."

"And how, pray tell, will we do that now?"

"I'll leave that up to Federation Intelligence."

She sipped her brandy delicately.

"There's no way we can protect them against a shield neutralizer!"

The Cygnusian dismissed his remark with a tinkling laugh; frustrated, Zev turned his attention to the An-dorian.

"I still say we mustn't interfere! What do you say, Thelev?"

The Andorian was as delicate and wrinkled as an old woman; he pursed his lips at the Tellarite.

"I can say nothing at this point, Zev. Surely even you can respect the fact that my government has ordered me to hold my tongue until I cast the vote at the

conference on

Vulcan."

"I can respect the fact that your government is just too namby-pamby to make up its mind until it hears what the other delegates think!"

"Tellarites are most unpleasant when they are

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drunk," the gentle Thelev lisped to the Cygnusian, completely ignoring Zev's sputters.

"I agree, although I must add that they are almost as unpleasant when sober," she replied sweetly, angling her head from side to side. "This one, though, makes me a little homesick."

"How so?"

"He reminds me of a Cygnusian drelu."

Zev bellowed loudly and jumped toward the Cygnusian's tender neck with both arms outstretched.

Emma

was closest and got there first, pinning the

Tellarite's

pudgy arms with ease. Zev struggled and roared with anger.

"How dare you let this woman touch me,

Captain!

If

I am injured, my government will exact revenge"

Taureng reappeared in the midst of the commotion

with two glasses and a decanter. "What in the names

of the gods--"

Kirk glared angrily at Zev, who was struggling pathetically

to break free from Emma's grasp.

"Ambassador

Zev, you will have to leave this reception

if you can't keep from fighting with the other delegates."

"First get this she-devil off me to was

Varth appeared at Kirk's side. "I think

I can help,

Captain."

Kirk was grateful for once to see his first

officer. He motioned graciously toward the

Tellarite. "Be my

guest, Mister Varth."

Emma released her grip, and Zev padded out of the room with Varth on his heels, berating him.

Zev stopped in the entrance way and called to the Cygnusian. "You haven't heard the last of this!

I will

have my revenge!"

The Cygnusian laughed sweetly and waved.

"I don't understand," Emma said. "What's a drelu?"

The Cygnusian giggled. "A drelu is a scavenger

animal. It subsists on the excrement of other animals."

Kirk addressed himself with relief to the glass of brandy the Saurian proffered him. "I brought a bottle

of my own private stock," said Taureng.

"One hundred

twenty Saurian years in the cask. You won't

believe the difference between this and what the others are drinking."

"Drelu, huh?" McCoy murmured

thoughtfully. "I'll

have to remember that one."

"Thank God Varth was here to take Zev off our hands," Emma sighed. "Is it always this difficult, dealing with diplomats?"

The question was addressed to Kirk, but Taureng answered first. "Only when the diplomats involved are Tellarites."

Kirk nursed his brandy for a good while before he spoke.

"Let's hope," he said, "that this is as difficult as it gets."

It wasn't. Kirk was awakened in the middle of the night by a call from Tomson. They had found the Cygnusian ambassador stuffed into a stairwell, the bones in her delicate body snapped like matchsticks.

Chapter Nine

T'PALA SAT UNDER the arbor in the darkness of the garden. She did not speak or stir as Spock approached.

He was glad that his mental shields now afforded him some protection against the anguish that she could

not hide, even in the moonless night.

"My parents are concerned," Spock said, drawing his cloak closer against the chill of the night air.

"You

absented the evening meal and have spoken to no one all day. We did not know if you had returned from

ShanaiKahr. Are you unwell?"

She turned her face away. "You know what I

went

to the capital to find out today. Are you incapable of making deductions?"

"You were not accepted into the diplomatic program."

T'Pala faced him in the blackness, eyes glittering.

For a moment Spock feared she had been crying, but her cheeks were dry. "I was not."

Spock thought for a moment before he spoke. "You

are very young, T'Pala. It might be that after

another

year of study, the regents would find you mature

enough to enter the program."

She shook her head bitterly. "Maturity has

nothing

to do with the reason I was not accepted. It has to do with something you can't possibly understand."

"I can't if you don't tell me the reason,"

Spock

countered gently.

She struggled to say it. "My background--"

"T'Pol," he said, "I believe I understand perfectly."

"Then surely you know the prejudice I face here,"

she said, unable to completely master her anger.

"Even if they had accepted me, I'm not sure

that I

would be happy here. I don't belong. You were

wise to

leave."

Spock tried to say something, but she stopped him.

"But you were raised on Vulcan. I was not.

I did

not acquire all the disciplines as a child. I even

speak

Vulcan like a Terran."

"T'Pol, I cannot accept that those were the things that prevented your admittance."

"I know. I know that you were accepted and turned it down--"

Spock looked at her sharply.

"--s I know that being half-human, although it did present some difficulty, did not keep me out.

It was

more than that." She looked down at her hands,

folded

together in her lap, and sighed. "I wish Sarek were

my

father."

Spock stiffened. "The reason for my acceptance

was not the fact that Sarek was my father. And he did

endorse you to the committee."

She looked up at him, quick to explain. "I

didn't

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mean that it was. I meant that I did not wish

to be the

daughter of Gerald Carstairs. Even Sarek's

endorsement

of me could not change that fact."

Spock lifted an eyebrow questioningly.

"No one told you?"

"I have heard the name. Is the fact somehow

significant?"

"Significant enough to require our family

to leave

Terra, to make no Vulcan male want

to bond with

"I can think of nothing that would cause you to be

an unsuitable mate."

She looked at him gratefully and closed her

eyes.

"My father had access to certain classified

research

information because of the nature of his work. The Vulcans

accused him of selling that information to the

Romulans."

"Did he?"

"The Vulcans never pressed charges, but they

made

him leave. Of course, that was the end of his

diplomatic

career. When he died last year, I returned

to

Vulcan. I feared that I would not be accepted because

of what my father did. Now my fear has been

realized."

Spock sat next to her on the stone bench

to emphasize

the sincerity of what he said. "T'Pala, I still

maintain that although Vulcans, like all sentient beings, are not totally immune to prejudice, the committee would not reject you on the basis that Gerald

Carstairs was your father."

She pulled away from him, back into the shadows.

"Think what you like, it makes no difference. I will not

shame myself by offering my loyalty to those who reject it. I shall be leaving soon."

"Do not leave," Spock said. "Go to the admissions

committee, and ask them why you were not accepted.

They will tell you. Perhaps it is a flaw that can be improved."

But she left him in the garden and would not listen.

It was not a good night. Kirk spent the first half of it

questioning the Tellarite delegation and The Icy, the Andorian, who had been the last one to see the Cygnusian

alive. Kirk had managed to exact a small measure

of revenge: he confined the Tellarites, under

Zev's

very loud protest, to their quarters. Maybe that would keep them out of trouble for a while--but he doubted it.

Kirk had just lain down on his bunk and closed his eyes when the intercom whistled; he swore loudly as

he hit the control.

At least it was Uhura on the bridge, and not

Tomson

telling him another diplomat had bit the dust.

She smiled at him apologetically. "Sorry

to bother, Captain, but I assumed you would still be up after all

the excitement his

Kirk grunted. "What's the problem,

Lieutenant?"

"Since the murder of the ambassador, sir,

I've been

monitoring all channels--alert standby

procedure. I

just happened to listen in on a very low frequency

band, and... well, it's hard to explain, but I

picked up

something that could either be a shadow or a carefully

hidden signal. I'm not really sure, but it's

definitely

some kind of disturbance. Maybe I'm being

overcautious..."

"I hardly think that's possible, Lieutenant,

considering

our cargo." Kirk remembered the last time he'd

had a ship full of diplomats and wound up being

tailed

by an Orion spy ship. "What's the source?"

"This ship, sir." She did not hide her

surprise. "Dr.

McCoy's quarters."

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At first Kirk thought he had heard her wrong.

"Did

you say McCoy's quarters?"

"Yes, sir. No mistake."

"I'll check it out, Uhura. Thank you for

notifying

me."

"Thank you, sir."

Kirk adjusted the sonic pick to the correct

frequency

and stepped back as the door to McCoy's

cabin opened.

Inside, the only light in the cabin came from the

small lamp on the desk, where Emma sat

looking up at

him in silent amazement. Kirk was not surprised

to

find her there, but he had not expected to see what

she

held cupped in her hand.

Sickened, he pointed his phaser at her.

"I'll take

that."

She handed the transmitter to him without a word.

"Bones?" Kirk called hoarsely.

No answer came from the darkened bedroom.

He pushed the phaser at her, forcing back the

panic

that rose in his chest. "By God, if

you've done anything

to himMore"

"I gave him something to put him to sleep. You

won't be able to wake him up," Emma said. Her

voice

betrayed no guilt, no hostility, no anger;

it was flat and

calm. "What were your people doing monitoring this

frequency?"

Kirk's voice shook with rage; he fought

to steady it,

to be as cool as she. "What the hell were you doing

with this on my ship?"

"I need it for my work," she said urgently, and

stood up. Kirk waved the phaser at her.

"Sit down."

Emma sat down. "Captain, before you call

Security-was

"Be quiet." He could not bear to listen to her

speak,

not with that honest, unafraid expression--she was

going to say something sincere, and Kirk did not

trust

himself to disbelieve her. He found it hard enough to

believe what he had just seen.

"Go ahead and fire, but I'm not going to shut up.

Please call Admiral Komack first, and

tell him what's

happened. Please. Before you call Security."

Keeping his phaser leveled at her, Kirk went

to the

intercom.

"I'm on your side," Emma said.

Perhaps because he wanted to believe, he did not call Security. "Uhura, I'm sending a message to Admiral Komack from McCoy's quarters. It will be top priority. When the reply comes through, I want you to relay it here the instant it comes in."

"Thank you," Emma said.

Kirk settled into the chair across from her and pointed the phaser at her chest. "At this distance, we should get a reply before McCoy wakes up.

I've got plenty of time to wait."

SAENZ, EMMA MARIA. SECURITY CLEARANCE CONFIDENTIAL. POSSESSION OF TRANSMITTER CLEARED ON MY AUTHORITY. ADMIRAL KOMACK, YOU.

Kirk put down the phaser and closed his eyes with grateful relief. Emma was slumped forward in the chair with her head on the desk; he reached forward and put a hand on her shoulder. When she raised her head to look at him, he smiled at her.

"Komack?" she yawned.

Kirk nodded. "Sorry. I didn't know."

She sat up straight in the chair and stretched her

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arms above her head. "Thank you for not calling

Security. No one must know, not even

Leonard." She

looked at him with somber eyes. "My life

depends on

it."

"No one will know." Kirk rose to leave, but

something

made him hesitate.

"Emma... about what happened between us..."

She raised an eyebrow in an

expression of curiosity

that strikingly resembled Spock's. "Nothing

happened

between us, Captain."

"Uh, huh," he said slowly. "Of course.

Nothing

happened." He moved toward the door and stopped.

"And as far as I'm concerned, nothing ever will."

"If that's the way you want it."

"That's the way I want it." He felt slightly exasperated with her; she was not helping him out of this very gracefully; she almost seemed to be having fun with him, the way Spock sometimes used to pretend not to understand Terran figurative speech.

Until she leaned forward and quite seriously said, "I don't want to do anything that would hurt either one of you. I care very much about you both."

When Kirk saw the look in her eyes, he left hurriedly before he kissed her again.

"What the hell--" Kirk was nearly thrown from the command console as the ship lurched forward.

"Captain!" Sulu called urgently, "we've lost warp drive."

"Manual override, Mr. Sulu"

"Not responding, sir."

"Captain to was

The agitation in Uhura's voice made Kirk swivel around to face her.

"Engineering reports an explosion, sir . . .

in the

main engine room."

"Get me Scott."

"Captain--" Kirk could hear coughing and confusion

in the background "--th is Scott." The engineer

was struggling to speak.

"What's going on down there, Scotty? Any

casualties?"

"No, sir, but somebody's blasted the warp

drive.

We can't see right now for the smoke to judge the

extent of the damage, but I think manual

override was

also affected. No danger of coolant leakage,

and the

anti-matter pods are undamaged. Nothing

permanent-but

whoever set that blast knew right where to

put it to slow us down." He broke off,

overcome by a

spasm of coughing.

Kirk waited for him to finish. "Estimated

repair

time?"

"All the damage reports aren't in yet, but

my guess

is at least a solar day's work."

"Get your men to sick bay, Mr. Scott.

Sounds like

you're all suffering from smoke inhalation. And that includes you."

"Aye, sir."

"As soon as McCoy gives you a clean bill of health,

I want a full report on the damage."

He had scarcely made up his mind to call

Security

next when Tomson came on the intercom.

"Lieutenant Tomson, I was just calling you.

As

soon as the smoke is cleared out of Engineering,

I

want you to get some people down there to investigate.

Scott says the explosion was no accident."

"An explosion in Engineering, too, sir?"

"What do you mean, too, Lieutenant?" Kirk

sat

forward with an angry, sick certainty in the pit

of his

stomach.

The explosion in Taureng's room had sent the

Sau-

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rian hurtling outside into the corridor, where he impacted

with the bulkhead. His aide, who was closer to the site of the blast, was killed instantly. The ambassador

had been taken to surgery, condition critical.

Kirk snapped off the intercom, for the second time faced with the unpleasant task of informing a government

that their delegation had been the target of a murderer aboard his ship.

"Someone on this ship," he said to no one in particular on the bridge, "does not want us to get to Vulcan."

Captain's Log, Stardate 7006.9:

Lieutenant Tomson informs me that the blasts set in Engineering and in Ambassador

Taureng's

quarters were set by someone who is not only an explosives expert (since no clue, not even a trace

of the material used, was ever found) but who is

intimately familiar with the ship's layout.

Security has done a thorough check and found that none of the personnel on board have any training in the use of explosives. Tomson therefore suggests only one possible conclusion.

One of my crewmembers is working for the other side.

Emma Saenz and Kirk faced each other on the padded floor of the gym.

- "How's the shoulder?"

Kirk shrugged to show the extent of the improvement.

"Hasn't bothered me at all today. Although I must say," he added lightly, "it certainly caused enough trouble at first."

Emma cast a knowing smile at him as they bowed ceremonially.

Instead of the slow-paced dance around her to size her up, Kirk lunged immediately, grasping at his opponent.

Emma moved directly into the attack, into his arms,

with enough force to throw him off balance.

It was exactly what he'd hoped. He pulled

her down

to the floor with him, and rolled swiftly so that she

was

pinned beneath him. Emma fought, and almost succeeded

in breaking away, but this time brute strength

triumphed over cleverness. It was one of the few

times

she had to concede.

"You learn fast," she gasped up at him.

"I have an excellent teacher. You're not the only

one good at fooling people."

She' learned fast, too. His initial

surprise attack had

taught her to anticipate similar tricks from

him; the

rest of the match was a draw.

They were on their way to the sauna when Kirk

stopped. There might be others in the sauna, and he

wanted only Emma to hear what he had to say.

He

turned to her, and she looked up at him

expectantly;

she was still glowing from the workout, and the flush

of color in her cheeks and lips had made her

truly

beautiful. So fragile, and so strong...

Kirk instinctively stiffened and assumed a more formal air. "Doctor, I need your help."

"Of course," she said softly. "Name it."

He swallowed. "I must find the person who planted

the explosives on my ship. I assume it would also be

the same person who killed the Romulan and the Cygnusian ambassador."

She took an indignant step back as though he had

insulted her. "Aren't you capable of making any deductions,

Captain?" Her hands flew to her hips. "Did you think Komack sent me here just to take care of Spock?"

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"No..."

"Anything that happens to those delegates is more my failure than yours. Rest assured, I'm working on it."

If there were any words that could make him feel better about the current situation, Emma had just said

them. He sighed and relaxed his posture. "Any

leads

yet?"

"I'd rather not discuss it. For this part of my job,

I

take orders only from Komack."

He flinched internally at that, but aloud said, "I

understand. But certainly you can understand that I

wanted to find out what was going on."

"Certainly you realize that you have a spy on

board," she said. Then as an afterthought she added in

a voice so low he could scarcely hear,

"All right, tWO."

He nodded, sick at the thought.

"When I find out who it is, you'll know," she

said,

and went to change before he could ask her any more

questions.

Lavender deepening to purple deepening to darkest

violet, fading to gray and then black--moving up

and

down, undulating, rolling, rolling into hills,

into mountains.

Gray, black mountains, and he was rolling down

them, gathering speed, faster and faster until he

spun

like a top and the dizziness made him cry out for it

to

stop

Spock sat up with a start. The dream came often now, repeating itself, but each time changing ever so

slightly. Soon, he told himself, soon the

image of the

mountains would no longer be shrouded in mystery.

He glanced up at the chronometer on the ceiling

and

rose to dress himself for the evening meal. His

body

was no longer as thin and fragile as it had been;

for the

past week, he had indulged Amanda's desire

to fatten

him up. He had even begun taking afternoon naps.

He

needed the strength now, for he had a purpose: to

return as quickly as possible to the Enterprise.

Spock was confident that he was once again fit for

duty. His memory had completely returned,

with the

exception of the incident on Aritani, and as the

dreams

grew more vivid, he knew that memory would soon

return as well. Even the mind rules were now

his;

indeed, that very morning he had received his last

instruction from the Tela'at.

"I marvel at the change, Spock," Stalik

had told

him. "In all my years, I have never seen

anyone

master the rules more quickly. This is the

final lesson.

And this time, it is because you no longer have need of

my instruction."

Spock had bowed low to him. "I have indeed been

fortunate to have the Tela'at as a teacher. Your

willingness

to return after my indiscreet behavior speaks

highly of your character. I will not forget this time

what I have learned." He raised his hand in the

Vulcan

greeting. "Live long and prosper, Tela'at

Stalik."

Stalik returned the salute with fingers that

trembled

with age. "I have done both, Spock. May you
also do
likewise."

Spock helped his teacher to the door and watched as
the Tela'at disappeared down the dusty path.

Stalik

had reached an age attained by few Vulcans;
surely he

would soon die, and the wealth of knowledge he had
accumulated during his lifetime would be lost,

except

for that which he had imparted to his students. Spock

had not been merely polite when he had said he was
fortunate to have Stalik as a teacher.

He was still thinking of Stalik as he finished

dressing

and walked from his room into the hallway. A flash

of

black and white startled him.

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"T'Pala." He spoke her name almost without

meaning

to; he had not seen her since their meeting in the
garden.

With the exception of her pale face, T'Pala was

completely enshrouded by her black cloak. She jumped back nervously, as though she had meant to slip into her room undetected.

"T'Pala," Spock repeated. "My parents have been most concerned about you. They did not know whether to be alarmed by your disappearance. Will you be joining us for the evening meal?"

Her eyes, though defiant, could not meet his. "No. I am preparing to leave Vulcan."

Spock considered this silently for a moment.

"Where will you go?"

"Terra, I suppose. I haven't decided yet. But there is nothing for me here."

"Did you speak to the admission committee about their decision--"

"There is no point," she said vehemently, cutting

him off. "The Vulcan path is not for me. The Vulcans

feel no loyalty toward me, therefore, it is illogical for

me to feel loyalty toward them."

"T'Pala--"

She held up her hand to silence him. "I will be

gone

before you rise tomorrow. You will not see me again."

Spock sighed; there was clearly no point in

pursuing

the discussion. She had made her decision, just as

he

had once made a decision many, many

years ago, to

leave--comand even Amanda had been unable to dissuade

him. "I, too, will be leaving Vulcan

shortly," Spock

said.

T'Pala's expression changed abruptly; she

looked at

him with concern. "Are you certain you are well

enough?"

Spock nodded. "My father informs me that the

Enterprise will arrive with the delegates to the

Aritanian

conference in approximately

thirty-four-point-seven

standard hours."

T'Pala's eyes had become unreadable. "So

the medication

is working?"

Spock paused. "Actually, I am no longer

taking

She could not restrain herself and interrupted him.

"Spock, do you think that is wise? Have you

consulted

with the doctors about this?"

He continued calmly. "--nevertheless, I

seem to be

improving. The medication was apparently quite

useless."

She persisted. "Not all medications work immediately.

Sometimes it takes time for a medication to

accumulate to a therapeutic level; and if that

is the

case, the positive effects may soon begin

to wear off.

Promise me you will consult the physicians."

She seemed so genuinely distressed that Spock

saw

no reason to refuse. "Very well. Perhaps it would

be

wise to consult Dr. McCoy. You are certain

you will

not join us for the evening meal?" Perhaps Sarek would find some way to make her reconsider her decision.

T'Pala shook her head and backed toward the door to her room.

"In that case," Spock said in Vulcan, "live long, and prosper, T'Pala."

"Good-bye," she whispered in English.

He dreamed again that night of purple, and of the deepest shades of red, blue and orange. The colors shimmered, melted together, and then slowly sorted themselves into their proper places. Spock could see the purple mountains, the deep blue sky, the scarlet sun, which was setting and fading the sky to gray.

HeMIN

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looked about, absorbed by the planet's beauty and the heady fragrance of blooming flowers...

"Smell that," Jim Kirk said. Spock was

glad to see

him again, and called the captain's name, but Jim did

not turn around, did not seem to hear him at all.

He

stood on the plateau and breathed in the scent of the
wildflowers.

Spock looked and saw Montgomery Scott,

and

Leonard McCoy; the four of them were together,

walking in a very beautiful garden--very

beautiful,

and very dangerous. Spock decided to warn them, but

the words that came out were not the ones he intended.

"Are you having trouble with your eyes, Mr.

Scott?" He wanted to tell them to leave,

to return to

the ship, but once again, he could not control his

speech; the old frustration washed over him.

Scott did not appreciate what Spock said;

it was a

beautiful place, he argued, beautiful, and

Spock had to

agree. A beautiful place, Aritani.

Aritani.

The word filled him with joy--comat last, he could

speak

of Aritani, and know where it was that he had been.

His joy turned quickly to terror as he realized that his friends had disappeared, and that he was alone in the near-total darkness. He had nothing to fear, he reminded himself. His eyes would adjust quickly to the darkness, his hearing would warn him... The sun had disappeared and taken with it the brilliant colors, leaving behind only black and gray. The tricorder led him across the plateau to its edge, to the side of the charcoal-colored mountain; his night vision guided him safely, his footing was sure.

He would not fall.

Spock crouched by the side of the mountain, and in the glow of the transporter beam, he saw and knew that he had been seen. He also knew he had a choice to make: a sure, quick death, or an uncertain fate three hundred feet below.

He jumped.

Spock woke with the sudden start of one who dreams he is falling. Shaking, he rose from his bed.

He remembered now what he had wanted to tell the captain, and was determined to contact the Enterprise

before they tried again to kill him. He went to the subspace radio provided in the room for offworld guests; the Enterprise should be close enough by now for almost immediate reception.

Spock had no trouble remembering the proper frequency.

"Enterprise, come in. This is Commander Spock on the planet Vulcan. Enterprise, do you read?"

There was no time to listen for a response--a sound came from the living room, the sound of a struggle, and of his father's voice, muffled, calling his name--a plea for help, or perhaps a warning Spock followed the sound into the main room and saw the glint of hard polished metal in the darkness, and two bodies of apparently evenly matched strength struggling; one was hidden in the loose folds of a desert softsuit.

The other was his father.

Spock rushed to his aid, but not before the assassin's dagger slashed out. Sarek slumped backward into Spock's arms, and as Spock's hands closed

on his
father's chest, he felt something hot, and wet.
He left Sarek on the floor as the assassin
lunged at
him with the dagger. Spock recognized the weapon;
it
had adorned the wall of his old room,
the room that
was T'Pala's now. He leaned back to avoid
the swipe
of the blade, and at the same time grasped the
assailant's
wrist. The assailant fought Spock's hold with
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Vulcan strength, pulling back until he
freed himself,
but he was forced to drop the dagger.
Both lunged for it; the assassin reached it first and
managed to nick Spock's wrist with it before he
could
leap back. Spock cursed himself for his
clumsiness--the
assassin had taken perfect advantage of the
situation,
for the small nick had perforated a vein, which
was bleeding profusely. Spock would now have to

disarm his opponent quickly before the loss of blood
affected his coordination.

He sprang at the intruder, tangling his legs
to try to
force him down, but to no avail. The intruder forced
Spock back, back until he
stumbled over the unconscious
form of Sarek, and fell.

Dizzy, his strength fading, Spock struggled
against
his attacker as he held Spock's wrist
firmly and with
medical precision began to cut. Spock looked
on with
helpless fury--disonce again, they would try to make
it
look like a ritual suicide. His vision began
to dim and
he ceased struggling; it was a useless waste of his
ebbing energy.

Suddenly, the attacker was engulfed by radiant
light
that intensified until his entire form glowed with
energy
and dissolved into the darkness. The dagger

clattered helplessly to the floor.

In his place stood T'Pala. She clutched a

phaser in

her right hand, her cheeks streaming with tears, but

her face calm, composed--Vulcan.

She knelt down beside Spock and spoke

in a voice

that was measured, steady. "I have summoned aid."

Spock tried to turn his head to determine

Sarek's

condition, but movement was impossible. He heard

his own labored breathing as though it were very far

away.

T'Pala, too, seemed to be moving farther and

farther

away; he strained to hear what she was saying.

"Forgive me. They said I would never be accepted

here. They promised me a glorious career in the

service

of the Praetor, whether I worked for them here in

the Vulcan Diplomatic Corps or

elsewhere. I would

not commit their violence for them, but I told them

when you stopped taking the neodopazine, and I

told

them about your dreams. Don't take it any more--you

will understand when you read the article by Silak.

"Then they asked me to neutralize the security scanner and the alarm, and I agreed. But when I saw the assassin wield his dagger..."

She bowed her head. "I knew I could never follow their path. I was foolish. Now I have made a complete commitment to the path I was meant to follow."

T'Pala fingered the phaser and cradled it next to her bosom. Spock struggled to speak, but could not.

T'Pala spoke to him in Vulcan. "I have brought further shame to my mother's family, and to my father's as well. Logically, there is only one course to take.

"Live long, and prosper, Spock."

For a millisecond, Spock's eyes were dazzled by the form of T'Pala, blazing more brilliantly than the Vulcan sun.

And then there was darkness.

Chapter Ten

Captain's Log, Stardate 7007.3:

Commendations to Mr. Scott, who worked around the clock to repair the warp drive as quickly as possible. As it is, the damage will cost us less than twenty-four hours' delay. We

anticipate

arriving at our destination in approximately--was

The intercom whistled and Kirk turned off the recorder.

"Kirk here."

"Tomson here, sir."

"Good news this time, I hope?"

Tomson flushed at the slight hint of sarcasm

she

thought she detected in the captain's tone--she was

hardly pleased herself at the total lack of

evidence

Security had turned up in their investigation.

"I'm not

sure if it's good or bad, sir. But it's

something you'd

definitely better take a look at."

"What is it, Lieutenant?"

She hesitated. "I think it'd be better if

we discussed

it in Security, sir."

"On my way." Kirk snapped off the

intercom. "Mr.

Varth, you have the con."

Tomson held up the small black object for

Kirk to

see.

"What is it?" Kirk asked. Its smooth,

polished

surface gave no clue as to its function; in

fact, it looked

capable of doing precisely nothing.

"We don't exactly know yet, Captain. It

seems to be

some type of subspace radio device, although it

isn't

receiving a signal and we can't figure out how to

transmit on it. Whatever it is, it's

definitely not Star

Fleet issue."

"Ah," said Kirk. "I think I know where you

found

this, Tomson."

Her brows knitted together in puzzlement. "You do, sir?"

"Yes, and I'd appreciate it if you'd just forget about finding it." He was going to have to remind Emma to be more careful.

"If you want me to, Captain." Tomson was confused.

"Then I suppose you'll want me to cancel the surveillance on Varth--"

"Varth?" He looked at her, thunderstruck.

"Wait a minute, where did you find this thing?"

"Varth's quarters, sir. We were conducting a very thorough search of the ship, sir, and we found it among the personal effects in his closet--"

"You've been searching crewmembers' cabins without my permission, Lieutenant?"

She colored scarlet. "It's the closest thing to a lead we've found, sir. I'll discontinue the search."

"By all means, Tomson. In the meantime--"

Kirk

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said gruffly, "--i'll take this." He picked

up the

device.

"Sir, that's the only evidence we've uncovered

--"

Tomson began in dismay.

Kirk ignored her. "And have a couple of people

escort Mr. Varth to the brig for questioning. You'll

find

him in command of this ship."

Emma Saenz was in sick bay, running scans

on a

crewman. Kirk took her by the arm and led her,

protesting, into the laboratory. She was incensed.

"You'd better have a damn good excuse,

Captain,

for interrupting me when I'm with a patient--"

"Later," said Kirk. He held the device in

front of

Emma's nose. She reached for it, but he pulled

it

away.

"Where'd you get that?"

"First tell me what it does."

"It probably deflects subspace radio

waves. It could

also be a transmitter."

"What good is deflecting radio waves?"

"A lot of good, if you want to keep someone from receiving a message that could blow your cover. Now tell me where you found it."

"Varth's quarters," Kirk replied softly.

She did not seem very surprised. "Yes . . .

it

makes sense. Radu opposes protection for

Aritani. It

might back the murders of the Cygnusian and the Saurian."

"Come on, Doctor. The Raduns are

dyed-in-the-wool

Federation. Varth's family has served in Star

Fleet for generations."

She was skeptical. "It makes no difference,

Captain.

There are a lot of people in this business who

would think nothing of betraying all that. Now, if

you'll excuse me, I have to tend a patient."

By the time Kirk finally made it back to the

bridge,

Uhura was breathless. "Sir, I've been trying

to locate

you--"

"I was questioning Varth in the brig." Kirk tried

to

ignore the look of questioning disbelief on Sulu's

face.

"What is it, Uhura?"

"It's Mr. Spock, sir. He just contacted the

ship---"

Kirk fought to contain his excitement. "Are we

close enough to Vulcan for visual contact,

Lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir, but Mr. Spock is no longer

transmitting."

"He's not? Was there a message?"

"No message. It was very strange--he had just

established contact when the transmission

stopped.

"Interference?" Kirk immediately thought of the

device found in Varth's cabin.

"No, sir. The channel's still open, as though he

simply walked away from the transmitter."

"Have you tried hailing him again?"

"Several times, Captain. No response."

Her dark

eyes shone with concern.

Kirk acknowledged that concern and shared it with the lightest touch of his hand on her shoulder.

"Keep the channel open, Lieutenant, and

keep trying

until you get in touch with someone. Just find

him

She smiled gratefully. "Aye, sir."

"Captain?"

Kirk turned to look at Sulu. "Yes?"

"Sir, you said that Mr. Varth was in the brig.

May I

ask what the charges were?"

"Any particular reason you're interested, Mr

Sulu?"

Sulu swallowed. "We're friends, sir."

The expression on the captain's face was

absolutely

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enigmatic. "Mr. Varth is now confined

to quarters

under guard. I may or may not decide

to release him

shortly. And no, you may not ask what the charges

are."

"Yes, sir." Stone-faced, Sulu
swiveled in his chair
to once again face the viewscreen. The captain
had to
have his reasons--Sulu himself had told Varth that
Kirk was a fair person, that the captain would not
persecute a person, regardless of how much he
disliked
him

But he was left with a very uncomfortable feeling.

"Top priority message from Admiral

Komack, Captain,"

Uhura said. "Scrambled and coded."

"Relay it to my quarters," Kirk said.

"I'll take it

there."

When he returned to the bridge, it was with a rather

smug-looking first officer. But the instant he

stepped

from the turbolift, Kirk knew that something was

wrong. All eyes were fastened on his;

Uhura's eyes

were full of sympathy.

Varth immediately went to his station, but Kirk

remained standing in front of Uhura.

"You've located Mr. Spock,

haven't you, Lieutenant?"

he asked softly. Dear God, don't let her

tell me

he's dead...

"Yes, sir." Her voice was barely audible.

"I kept

the hailing frequency open and finally a Vulcan

Security

officer responded. He said that Mr. Spock

is in

ShanaiKahr Hospital."

"What happened?"

"I contacted the hospital. They say Spock

is in

serious condition, but is expected to recover."

Uhura

paused, unable for a moment to continue or to meet

the captain's gaze.

"Uhura," Kirk pleaded.

She drew a breath and looked up at him. "They

also

say that circumstances indicate he attacked his

father

and then attempted suicide."

Emma Saenz sat on the stool and

shook her head

sadly. "I was afraid something like this would

happen,"

she said, in a voice that conveyed no recrimination,

only regret.

McCoy's jaw was stubbornly set. "Whatever

Spock

has been charged with, I'm sure he's innocent.

I'm

going to try to see him."

"No!" Emma's fist struck the lab counter with

such

force that both Kirk and McCoy jumped.

"Spock

won't want to see you now. The shame would be too

great for him. I know from experience--"

"Doctor Saenz," Kirk said in an

aggrieved tone,

"we are all well aware by this time of your

experience

with Vulcans."

"You may know Vulcans, Emma," McCoy

said with

the old fire, "but I know Spock, and have for many

years, and right now I happen to think that

Spock

needs our help."

Emma shook her head vehemently.

"I know Spock better than anyone here,"

Kirk said,

"and I know that he could never hurt anyone. That's

why I'm going down there to do what I can to clear

him of the charges,"

Emma sprang from her seat, her body tensed with

anger. "I fail to see, gentlemen, why no one

here

seems to give a damn about my medical

opinion. Why

did you request a medical specialist,

Doctor, if you

had no intention of listening to her?"

"Take it easy." McCoy motioned for her

to sit back

down. "I have listened to your medical opinion. I

gave

Spock the neopazine on your recommendation and

I

sent him to his quarters earlier than I would have

liked

to, again on your recommendation. But here

I draw

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the line. Spock is our friend, and we know him

better

than you do."

She sat back down and folded her arms

tightly.

"How can I make you understand that damage to the

brain can change a person, can even make a

person

like Spock violent, regardless of how well you

think

you know him? If you are his friends, don't make it

any more difficult for him than it has to be. Just

let him

Kirk stiffened. "What do you mean, let him go?"

"Spock is not responding to the medication. He's

dangerous to himself, and to others. I'm going to

recommend he be sent to Ebla Two."

McCoy was livid. "You'll never get me

to sign the

papers to send Spock to an asylum for the

criminally

insane!"

"You haven't seen him in over a month," Kirk

pointed out, leaning over her. "Aren't you even interested

in looking at him before you diagnose him as incurable and ship him off?."

"I've been in contact with his family," Emma said

coldly. "As you may recall, I suspected Spock might

become violent before McCoy sent him to Vulcan, and

he went there under my protest.

"Gentlemen, if you go to him now, you will accomplish two things--you will shame Spock, and you will break your own hearts, seeing him in such a condition."

Kirk and McCoy looked at each other in silence for

a moment, each one contemplating the possibility that

Emma might be right.

"We're still going," Jim told her.

McCoy entered Emma's quarters without knocking,

and got the briefest impression of a

Vulcan face before

she could snap the viewscreen off.

"Checking up on Spock, are you?" He asked

it

gently, almost teasingly; he had seen her bursts

of

temper before, but they usually blew over quickly.

This was the first time she had ever remained angry

about something, and he was not quite sure how to

approach her. "How is he?"

She did not answer. She did not look up from the

viewscreen.

McCoy shifted uneasily. "I just came

to say that

we're in orbit around Vulcan and we're beaming

down. You're welcome to come with us if you change

your mind."

She turned in the chair to face him, and he could

see

that her eyes were troubled, clouded, an expression

far different from their usual clarity. "I won't

change

my mind."

"Look, Emma, I didn't mean to insult your

medical

judgment. It's just that we have to try to help

Spock if

we can. Please try to understand."

"I think I do." She looked blankly at the

viewscreen

in front of her, but it was clear to McCoy that she

was

thinking, thinking very hard about something. She

continued to stare at the screen as she spoke

thoughtfully.

"You three . . . you care about each other very

much, don't you?"

"Which three?" McCoy was not following her.

"You, Spock, the captain. Spock is very

important

to both of you."

"I told you that the day I met you."

She smiled an odd, tight little smile.

"Yes, you did,

didn't you? I suppose that was before I cared about

. . . anyone here"

McCoy walked over to the chair and put his hand

on

her shoulder. "Come with us," he said gently.

"Spock

might need you."

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She rose from the chair, but the woman who stood

before him seemed nothing like the Emma he knew.

She was still smiling tightly, but her lower lip

trembled

almost imperceptibly. With a sudden urgent

tenderness,

McCoy realized that she was trying not to cry,

and he took her in his arms.

She pulled away apologetically, speaking with

an

irony that he did not understand. "Of all people,

Spock needs me least. Besides, I couldn't go with

you if I wanted to."

"Why not?"

"I'm leaving, Leonard. I've been

reassigned. When

you get back, I won't be here."

This time, she let him hold her.

"I am required to search you for weapons." The

Vulcan guard pointed his hand-held scanner at

Kirk.

Kirk scowled, Vulcan Security had already

verified

his and McCoy's identities; he had not

expected to be

submitted to a body search.

"I will take your communicator," the guard said.

"Now wait a minute--" Kirk said hotly.

The guard waited a minute, staring down

humorlessly

at Kirk from his six-foot-five-inch height,

every inch of it lean muscle mass.

"Never mind." Kirk handed him the communicator,

but not without a twinge of exasperation. While he

knew that the Vulcans could not risk Spock's

sudden

transportation from his hospital room to the

Enterprise,

he resented the implication that they did not trust a

starship captain to refrain from doing so.

Although they were probably right not to.

McCoy submitted to the scan without so much as an

insult, handing over his communicator before it was

even asked for. Kirk could not help feeling

disappointed;

he had counted on the doctor's outspoken

disregard for all things Vulcan to add a bit of

humor to

this otherwise unbearably somber occasion. But

McCoy

had not spoken since they beamed down; something

was troubling him, something other than the

prospect of seeing Spock.

The guard was apparently satisfied with the

disresults

of the scan, for he led them to the door of Spock's

room. Beyond the shimmering force field, Spock

lay

pale and barely breathing. Tubes of dark green

led

from his arm to above the bed. Another Vulcan,

apparently the attending physician, was watching

Spock's vital signs on the monitor with

keen interest.

"Your conversation will be monitored," the guard

said. He moved a massive arm and the field

evaporated

just long enough for Kirk and McCoy to cross

the threshold.

The Vulcan doctor did not bother to turn around

when they entered; she seemed to be timing something

critical.

"How does he look to you, Bones?"

Kirk whispered.

"Pretty good, except he's lost a lot of

blood."

McCoy cleared his throat and addressed the

Vulcan.

"Excuse me, ma'am."

The Vulcan turned her head just enough to fix him with a cold look.

McCoy turned on the charm. "We're friends of Mr.

Spock, ma'am, and we're very concerned. That security

guard out there won't tell us a thing about how he got here. Can you tell us how it happened?"

She looked back at the monitor. "The patient's

wrists were slit. He suffered critical blood loss. He will recover."

"Why was he arrested?" Kirk asked.

In spite of remaining totally expressionless, the Vulcan physician managed somehow to convey the

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fact that she found the presence of both men to be terribly annoying. "From the

circumstantial evidence

that was found, it appears that the patient first attacked

his father with an ahn-vahr and then turned the weapon on himself."

"Ahn-what?"

"A ceremonial dagger. In ancient times, it was

used

in a ritual form of suicide when the victim

believed he

had brought shame to his family. Vulcan

Security' is

waiting for the patient's father to regain consciousness

to verify if this was what actually happened before the

suspect is actually placed under arrest."

"Then Sarek is expected to recover?" Kirk

asked.

She raised her left eyebrow in an expression

that

made Kirk very homesick for his first officer.

"I believe

that can easily be inferred from what I just

said."

She bent down suddenly to look at Spock, then

peered up again at the monitor. As if

by magic, the

indicator needles rose slightly. It was what

she had

been waiting for; she turned her back to the two

humans, and hoisting a long, thin arm back,

swung it

forward with a force that would have knocked a human
to the floor.

It hit Spock squarely on the jaw.

Kirk lunged at her with a short cry, but

McCoy

grabbed his arms and held him.

"Jim, you fool! That's the nicest thing I've

seen

anyone do in a long time."

Kirk looked at the doctor as though he had

gone

mad.

"Jim," said McCoy, grinning from ear to ear,

"she's

bringing him out of the Vulcan healing mode."

The physician drew her arm back to administer

a

second blow, but Spock's hand reached out and

firmly

grabbed her wrist. "That will be sufficient."

She nodded silently at Spock, and giving the

humans

a final glance that indicated what simpletons

she considered

them to be, she signaled the guard to let her exit.

Spock propped himself up to a sitting position.

"Spock!" McCoy could contain himself no longer.

"You know the mind rules!"

A familiar eyebrow rose. "Obviously,

Doctor McCoy."

The two humans looked at each other and laughed

with delight. "You've got a hell of a nerve,"

said

McCoy, "getting logical on me at a time

like this.

Admit it, you overgrown elf, you're glad

to see us."

There was a brightness in Spock's eyes that belied

his cool manner. "I believe that "getting

logical" was

what you sent me here for, Doctor, although I do not

deny that I am, as you put it,

"glad" to see you." His

expression became more serious. "Captain, I have

something rather urgent to tell you..."

"Yes, Uhura said you were signaling the ship when

you were cut off."

"As you can see, I was... interrupted."

"What happened?"

"I went to the aid of my father, who was being attacked." He searched their faces. "Do you know his condition?"

"He'll be all right," McCoy volunteered.

Kirk nodded. "They're waiting for him to regain consciousness so he can tell them what happened."

Spock frowned slightly. "I'm conscious. I am able to supply the information."

Kirk and McCoy exchanged embarrassed glances.

"I think they'd rather hear it from Sarek. You're being held on suspicion of attempted murder,"

Kirk said gently. "It looked like you attacked your father and then tried to kill yourself."

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"T'Pala," Spock whispered. A shadow crossed his face, and disappeared as quickly as it had come.

"Who?" Kirk asked.

"No one. How convenient. I assure you that is not

the case."

"I believe you, Spock," McCoy

volunteered gallantly.

"I appreciate your vote of confidence, Dr.

McCoy. I

only wish Vulcan Security were as easily

convinced."

"It's a lucky thing both of you survived the

attack,"

Kirk said. "Whoever tried to kill you seemed

to botch

the job. Did you see who it was?"

"I did not know the individual, but I do not

doubt

that he was a Romulan. Vulcans do not, as a

rule,

engage in murder. And the fact that my father and I

survived at all was due to something other

than luck.

We were rescued by a friend."

"Someone else was there? Where is he? He could

clear you."

Spock studied a point in the far distance. "She

was

killed in the incident--vaporized. She and the

attacker."

"Oh. I'm sorry."

Spock was silent for a short time before continuing.

"The message I have for you, Captain, is one that

I

have wanted to remember for some time, but was

unable to."

"Which is?"

,After I left you, Dr. McCoy and Mr.

Scott with the

Aritanian representative, I followed my

tricorder signal

out to the edge of the plateau, near the mountain. It

seems, Captain, that the mountains are quite rich in

uritanium--"

"We already know that, Spock."

"Of course. That, however, is not my message.

As I

was scanning the mountains, two surface fighters

materialized almost directly in front of me.

They were so

close that I could clearly see the pilots

inside, even in

the darkness. They were Romulans."

"But where could they have beamed down from?"

Kirk asked. "There weren't any ships in the

area--if

they had beamed down from a cloaked vessel, they would have had to let down their cloak to beam the fighters down, and we would have detected them."

"Captain," said Spock, "you are assuming that

they

beamed down. At the same time the ships

materialized,

my tricorder detected a slight power surge

merely a kilometer beneath the planet surface.

Although the cloaking device currently in use by the

Federation does not permit the simultaneous use of

transporters, there have been reports that the

Romulans

are working on a design which currently affords a

rather imperfect degree of protection during

transporter

use. If the Enterprise scanned the surface,

it

would probably interpret the mild power surge as

a

minor seismic disturbance."

"What are you getting at, Spock?" asked

McCoy.

"I submit, Doctor, that the ships were not beaming

down--rather, they were beaming up."

"That would explain it!" Kirk was exultant.

"Spock, we erected the protective shield,

but the

pirates apparently penetrated it."

"There was no need for them to penetrate the shield. They were already beneath it, able to come and go as they pleased to the surface."

"So it wasn't an accident," McCoy said grimly.

"They pushed you off the edge for what you saw."

"Not at all, Doctor. I jumped."

"You what?"

"It was a choice between rolling off the edge of the plateau or facing the pirates' burning phasers."

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"You made the right decision." Kirk shuddered, remembering the smell of singed flesh.

McCoy changed the subject. "I must say,

Spock,

that your recovery is quite impressive. I'm going

to

recommend neodopazine to all my

cortex-damaged

Vulcan patients from now on."

"Doctor," Spock asked hesitantly, "just

how familiar

are you with the effects of neodopazine on

Vulcans?"

McCoy shrugged. "Hardly at all. It's very

new, so

I've never used it myself. Dr. Saenz has,

though, and

she recommended it very highly."

"Is there a reader in this room?" Spock craned

his

neck.

"Over here. What do you want to know?"

"A friend suggested I look at a recent

article by

Silak. I wonder if you could key it up for

me."

"Sure." McCoy entered the name, got the

cross

index, and retrieved the article. "It's

recent, all right,

published less than two weeks ago . . ."

His face

registered surprise, and then he smiled.

"Well, how
about that--coma study by Silak, Wreen... and
Saenz."

"Emma?" Kirk asked.

"One and the same. She wasn't kidding about having
worked with the drug. I thought she said it hadn't
been tested on Vulcans, though..." McCoy
furrowed
his brow as he scanned the article.

"Read the conclusion," Spock suggested.

McCoy moved his finger down the reader to the
conclusion of the article and stiffened.

"What is it, Bones?"

He read aloud, unable to believe what he saw
on the
terminal before him. "Our study
indicates that the use
of neodopazine on Vulcans is definitely
contraindicated..."

He skipped over a sentence, "... notable
side
effects include paranoia, loss of concentration,
impairment
of memory, mental confusion, irritability, and
depression . . . The effects of neodopazine
can be

more devastating than the traumatic brain damage

it is

used to treat." His voice broke off as he

looked at the

captain.

"But why?" Kirk could not understand. "Why

would she knowingly use it to treat Spock?"

Spock's tone was gentle but resolute.

"Gentlemen,

several attempts have been made to stop me from

divulging the information I have just given you. To list

a few: the so-called suicide attempt while

I was on the Enterprise, the sabotage of the fuel

indicator on the Galileo, Dr. Saenz's

use of neodopazine to prolong my

amnesia and to trigger psychological disturbances

which conveniently provided an explanation for my

last so-called suicide attempt and attempted

murder of

my father, who I should like to point out is one of the

most outspoken proponents of protection for

Aritani.

It would have been a convenient way for the Romulans

to be rid of both of us."

"He's not the only diplomat the Romulans have

tried to kill," Kirk said darkly.

McCoy was still in shock, but anger began to creep into his voice. "Are you trying to tell me that

Emma is

the one who's been trying to kill you?"

"She is definitely a suspect, Doctor."

"You're wrong," McCoy lashed out. "You

don't

know Emma--she's not capable of murder. And

she's

a very loyal person who would never sell out to the

Romulans."

Spock was unmoved by McCoy's vehement

denial;

he folded his arms calmly. "It's not

always possible to

predict people or circumstances. Perhaps there might

be some situation in which Dr. Saenz would find it

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logical to join forces with the Romulans. However,

I

do not expect you to take my word alone. I

suggest

you consult Dr. Saenz on the matter."

"That's exactly what I intend to do," McCoy

said

hotly, "because I don't believe you."

"Doctor, you read the article yourself. Aren't you the least bit curious to hear her explanation?"

"Yes, but I'm sure it's not that she's a

Romulan

spy."

"She couldn't be," Kirk said slowly. "She

works

for Admiral Komack."

McCoy and Spock regarded him with disbelief.

"It's true," Kirk insisted. "I heard it from

Komack

himself."

Spock sighed. "Then I suggest,

Captain, that you

notify the Admiral of the possibility that he

has a

double agent working for him. In the meantime, I also

suggest you try to locate Dr. Saenz before she

has a

chance to escape."

"You don't really think she'd try to---"

Kirk began.

"Captain, if she is working for the Romulans,

then

she knows that my memory is close to returning and
that I quit taking the neodopazine a week
ago. I am
sure she did everything in her power to discourage
both of you from coming here, for she cannot risk my
discovering the effects of the medication she prescribed
and divulging that information to you."

"She said she was leaving," McCoy mumbled
inaudibly.

"What?" Kirk asked.

"She said I wouldn't see her when I got
back,
because she was being reassigned." McCoy looked
at
the captain helplessly, his anger replaced
by numbness.

"But I still can't--"

"Captain," Spock interrupted, "in that
case, haste

is essential. It may already be too late
to find her."

"Let me go," McCoy said swiftly. "I
could stop
her."

Spock lifted a skeptical brow.

"Doctor, if it is true
that the lady is a Romulan spy, I doubt that
even your
powers of persuasions"

"Go ahead," Kirk told him. "I'll call
Security."

"If you call Security now," Spock pointed
out, "she
will certainly know that she is being pursued, assuming
she is monitoring ship-to-surface
communication."

Kirk's expression was somber. "Take a
phaser with
you, Bones. That's an order."

"Yes, yes, of course, Captain," McCoy
lied. "And
I'll give Scotty a good excuse for beaming
up, in case
she's listening."

"All I want you to do, Doctor, is
to distract her for a
few minutes, so I can notify Security without
her being
aware of it. After you beam up, I'll give you
ten

minutes to find her before I call them."

"Right, Captain." McCoy anxiously

signaled the

guard to let him out.

When he had gone, Spock looked at his

captain with

eyes Kirk tried to avoid. "Captain, I

hope that you

have not made a mistake in sending Dr. McCoy

to find

her."

"Don't you trust McCoy to turn her in?"

"I trust the good doctor, but I dare

not presume

what his relationship with Dr. Saenz

"He loves her."

"I thought as much. Even so, I trust Dr.

McCoy. Dr.

Saenz, however, is another matter. She has

killed,

Captain, and I do not trust her even in this

circumstance

not to kill again."

Emma was waiting by the transporter console when

McCoy stepped from the platform. My God, he

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thought, it's true; she was listening when I asked

to

beam aboard.

But she looked at him, puzzled, and frowned.

"What are you doing here?"

McCoy sighed with silent relief. "I was

hoping to

catch you--before you left, that is. I need to talk

to

you..." He shot a glance at Lyle, who stood

behind

the transporter control, awkwardly pretending not

to

listen.

She shook her head. "This is a mistake,

Leonard.

There's nothing you can say that will convince me to

stay. Please, I'll miss my shuttle--"

"Emma, please."

The desperation in his words must have convinced

her, for she turned to Lyle. "This won't take

long."

McCoy led her down the hall to a nearby

conference

room and they went inside.

"All right, Leonard, what's this all about?"

"Emma, there's something I have to ask you . . .

there's something I must know before you leave." He

took her gently by the shoulders.

"We've been through this before, Leonard--"

"I'm not talking about marriage. This is something

else entirely. Please, answer me

honestly."

Her eyes narrowed. "Do you expect me to do

otherwise?"

McCoy took a deep breath and

searched her eyes;

they were as clear and genuine as they had always

been.. Right now they regarded him with honest

puzzlement.

"In this case, maybe. But I want you to know

that if you answer me truthfully, regardless of

what the

answer is, I won't try to stop you from leaving.

That's

a promise."

"Fair enough," she said. "What's the question?"

"The neodopazine. Emma, why?"

"I can't tell you that, Leonard. Ask me

anything

else." She began to pull away, but he

tightened his grip

on her.

"I'm the chief medical officer on board this

ship.

You work for me, remember? I'm asking you a question.

Why can't you tell me?"

"I don't answer to you in this instance. I don't

have

to explain my actions to you." She pulled harder

to

break free.

A sudden rage kindled within him, and he squeezed

her arms so tightly that she cried out in

surprise. "You

were sent here to kill Spock, weren't you? And you

had to get on good terms with the chief medical

officer,

so that you could manipulate him to do what you

wanted with Spock. That's it, isn't it?" He

shook her. "Isn't it?"

She pushed free with a gasp. When McCoy

approached

her again, he saw the small phaser directed

at his chest.

Her eyes flashed with the heat of her own anger.

"I

don't have to tell you anything, Leonard. I'm not responsible to you or to anyone else on board this ship. Who I am or what I am is not important. I have a job to do, and no one, not even you, will interfere with it."

"You used me," McCoy whispered miserably.

"I don't have to tell you anything, but I will tell

this: I love whom I please, not whom I am

ordered to.

Understand?"

"No," said McCoy.

For a moment, he thought she looked at him with something very much like affection.

"Fool," she murmured. "I have risked myself for your friend because you loved him. Now everything may be lost. What more do you want from me?"

McCoy did not have a chance to answer; she aimed the phaser at him and fired.

Chapter Eleven

EMMA SAENZ SMILED sweetly at

Ensign Lyle. "Sorry

to keep you waiting, Mr. Lyle. A last

minute medical

problem..."

Somewhat abashed, Lyle returned the smile.

He

was not the sort to stick his nose into other people's

business, making it a point to ignore any

rumors

circulated about senior officers, but it would have

been

impossible not to have heard the gossip about the

heated affair between the chief medical officer and the

new specialist.

He was convinced now that it was more than just

gossip. "No problem at all, Doctor."

She stepped onto the transporter pad and

positioned

a small suitcase by her feet. "Ready to beam

down,

Mr. Lyle."

What followed next took place so quickly that

Lyle

was never quite sure what happened.

The door opened and Second Lieutenant

Reems of

Security stood in the doorway, phaser drawn. When he saw Dr. Saenz on the platform, he aimed his weapon at her and started to speak. He did not have time to say anything. Emma, still calm and smiling, produced a phaser of her own and fired it at Reems. It surprised Lyle; he shouted at her and she turned smoothly toward him and fired again. Emma ran over to the transporter console and pushed the slumped form of Lyle aside so that she could reach the automatic control. He slid to the floor with a heavy thud.

"Stop. That's as far as you're going."

Emma stopped and looked over her shoulder. Ingrit Tomson stood over Reems in the doorway, her phaser pointed at Emma's back. "Drop it."

Emma laid her phaser carefully on the console.

Tomson motioned toward the door. "Now move."

Obediently, Emma approached Tomson, but as

she

came upon the body of Reems lying in the

doorway,

she stumbled.

Tomson moved in closer with the phaser, and Emma

succeeded in knocking it across the room. Tomson

watched it sail past with a look of dull

surprise.

"Now let's see how far I get,"

Emma said.

They faced each other for battle; Tomson,

tall and

pale, towered over Emma's dark intensity.

"I'm almost

twice your size," Tomson sneered. "You

couldn't hurt me if you wanted to."

Emma's voice was soft and low. "Want to make

a

bet?"

Kirk strode up and down the hospital

corridor,

swearing at his communicator and ignoring the

disapproving

stares of the Vulcans who passed.

"What the hell is going on up there, Mr.

Scott?"

"Mr. Lyle was unconscious, Captain, but
we've got
someone in the transporter room now, and--"

"Unconscious? How long? Never mind, don't
an-

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swer that. Have Uhura notify Vulcan
Security Central immediately and tell them that Emma
Saenz is probably on the planet surface."

"Aye, sir."

"Have you found McCoy?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Let me talk to Tomson."

Scott hesitated. "I'm afraid she's
incapacitated,
sir."

"What happened?"

"She and Reems and Lyle were all found
unconscious
in the transporter room. Stunned, it looks
like.

They should be coming to shortly."

"Then tell Tomson's second-in-command---
was

"That would be Reems, sir."

Kirk gritted his teeth. "Dammit, find

someone in

Security who was not incapacitated by Dr.

Saenz and

tell them to cancel the search for Saenz. I want

them to

find McCoy."

"Anything else, Captain?"

"Yes. Get me the hell out of here."

Emma wouldn't hurt McCoy, Kirk kept

repeating to

himself as the hospital hallway shimmered into

nothingness. She wouldn't hurt him, especially if

she

had been merciful enough to only stun Tomson and

Lyle. Still, for a split second he imagined

himself

ordering Security to scan the internal

atmosphere of

the Enterprise for any free-floating

molecules of what

remained of his friend

Kirk stepped off the transporter platform

to find

Tomson, Reems and Lyle sitting on the
floor being
examined by a medic. He scowled down at them.

"I take it that you all encountered Emma
Saenz.

Are you going to tell me that the three of you couldn't
stop her?"

Lyle rubbed his head and grimaced.

"She stunned
Reems and me before either of us knew that she had a
phaser, Captain."

Of the three, Tomson seemed to be in the worst
shape; she stared down at the floor
disconsolately,
unable to meet Kirk's gaze. "I disarmed her,
sir, but

she managed to knock my phaser away."

Tomson tried
to touch her left shoulder, but the pain made her
stop
and suck in air between her teeth. "In hand-to-hand
combat, she's excellent. I think my shoulder's
separated."

Kirk's expression became wry; at first

Tomson
thought the captain simply found it amusing that she

could be done in by someone of Saenz's height; but

then he said, "Believe me, I understand,

Lieutenant.

My shoulder and I have also had firsthand experience

with Dr. Saenz's combat abilities."

Tomson leaned painfully against the bulkhead.

"Thank you, sir."

Kirk straightened and went over to the intercom.

"Kirk to Security."

"Security. Kazan here."

"Any word on McCoy?"

"No, sir. We're still looking."

Kirk hit the intercom in frustration, and went in

search of McCoy himself. He had not gotten far

down

the corridor, however, when the door to one of the

conference rooms opened and McCoy leaned out,

staggering.

Kirk managed to catch him before he fell and

supported

him against the wall in a half-sitting position.

"Bones, thank God... are you all right?"

McCoy moaned and cradled his head in his hands.

"She's gone, Jim. God, what a first-class

headache."

"Did she stun you?"

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"With more than just the phaser. Spock was right, Jim... dear God, he was right. Did you catch her?"

"Not yet. We think she's on Vulcan." Kirk paused. "I'm sorry, Bones."

"That makes two of us." McCoy closed his eyes and let his head roll back against the bulkhead. "But the damn thing is..." his voice faded.

"The... what?" Kirk leaned forward to hear. "I can't say I'm sorry she hasn't been caught."

That makes two of us, Kirk wanted to say, but instead he put his arm under the doctor's shoulders and helped him to sick bay.

The room was a hybrid of the best of Vulcan and Earth, much like the solemn, slightly forlorn child who stared down at Kirk from the portrait above the piano.

The Vulcan influence was clearly the stronger,

reflected
in the stark, powerful lines of the architecture,
the furniture, and the artifacts that decorated the
walls--comthe a
hn-vahr, sabers, and weapons whose
function Kirk dared not guess, the
reminders of long-forsaken
wars. While the Terran influence was subtler,
it was unmistakable: the piano, the portrait of
mother
and son, and most of all the books, shelves upon
shelves of old paper books that lined the far
wall of the
main room and extended into the hallway, and with
them that distinct aroma that reminded Kirk of the last
pleasurable time that he had been in the rare book
section of a library.

Kirk was drawn to the shelves immediately, and
knelt down to peer at the authors' names on the
bindings. The collection was marvelously
eclectic:

Roth, Twain, Zelazny, Dickens,
Dostoevsky, Wisen,
Mcintyre, Oates . . . and that was simply part
of the

small corner representing the nineteenth and
twentieth
centuries. His fingers hovered above the volumes
until
they found what they wanted, and withdrew it from
the shelf.

Behind him, McCoy cleared his throat nervously.

Kirk looked up over his shoulder at him. The

doctor

was still pale, so pale that the chronic dark

circles

under his eyes stood out with greater than usual

emphasis;

McCoy was troubled by more than just the

aftereffects of a phaser stun.

"Come take a look at this, Bones. This is

without a

doubt the most incredible collection of rare books

You'll ever see outside of an archive."

"Uh, huh." McCoy's voice was flat and

faraway,

politely bored. "What's that you're looking

at?"

"An old favorite of mine when I was a kid.

Horatio

Hornblower."

McCoy squinted. "Who?"

Kirk reshelved the book and stood up quickly as

Sarek entered the room. "Tell you later."

Sarek seemed none the worse for the assassin's

attack; in fact, he looked to be in

far better shape than

McCoy. Spock flanked him, dressed once

again in his

blue science officer's uniform. Shoulder

to shoulder,

the resemblance between father and son was unmistakable-

--Spock

was a taller, leaner version of his

father. But there was a slight difference in the face,

some feature that Spock no doubt owed to Amanda's

side of the family, although Kirk could not determine

exactly what it was

Sarek gestured for them to sit. "Captain

Kirk, I

appreciate your promptness in responding to my

invitation.

However, I must admit that my motive includes

more than simple hospitality."

Kirk sat on the couch next to McCoy;

Spock sat

across from them, in the chair next to Sarek. Kirk could not shake the feeling that he was sitting in on a

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Vulcan Council meeting. "Would I be correct in assuming that this has something to do with Aritani, Ambassador?"

"You would. As you know, the delegates meet tomorrow for the vote. In spite of the Romulans' efforts, it appears that the vote will be in favor of sending a delegation."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Kirk. "However, I am concerned about the safety of the other diplomats after the attack on you. And perhaps Spock told you that two ambassadors were attacked on board the Enterprise. One was killed."

Sarek nodded. "Vulcan Security has been alerted.

The ambassadors are under its protection."

"But they have as yet found no trace of Dr. Saenz,"

Spock added. "Apparently she managed to leave ShanaiKahr, and no doubt the planet, without detection."

"How can we be so sure that the Romulan
government

is involved?" McCoy asked suddenly. "All
we've seen so far are pirates who
happen to be Romulan."

Sarek looked coolly at him. "True. But
pirates generally
do not engage in concerted intrigue. Intelligence
reports have indicated the involvement of the
Praetor.

Also, my attacker was definitely a
Romulan."

"You're certain he was not a Vulcan?"

"Beside the obvious fact that Vulcans do not commit
murder, the position of the stab wound he inflicted
--one

centimeter above my heart--indicates he
was definitely a Romulan."

"The Romulan heart," Spock said, "sits
two centimeters
higher than the Vulcan."

"You don't need to give me an anatomy
lesson,"

McCoy said huffily. "I remember."

Spock ignored him and quietly addressed the

captain. "The family friend who was killed in the
attack
informed me shortly before her death that the Romulans
had approached her and offered her "a
glorious
career in the service of the Praetor," as she
put it,
should she agree to kill Sarek and myself."
Kirk leaned forward. "What did she tell
them?"
Spock's eyes became hooded. "She
refused, of
course. She was a Vulcan."
"To use one of your expressions, Captain,"
Sarek
said, "the arm of the Romulans is very long. The
young woman in question was studying to enter the
Vulcan diplomatic service. The
Romulans obviously
wanted an informant within the VDC. They are quite
skilled at espionage, and I fear their
influence reaches
as far as the Federation Council.
"But back to the matter at hand. The delegation
sent
to Aritani would consist of the Terran ambassador

and

myself. However, no matter how skilled either of us

are at diplomacy, asking the

Aritanians to consider

joining the Federation under the present circumstances

would be absurd, since there would be absolutely

no benefit to them from so doing. The Federation

must first prove to the Aritanians that it is capable

of stopping the Romulans. Before we can do that, of

course, we will need transportation to Aritani-

--"

"The Enterprise, naturally," Kirk said.

"Naturally, Captain. Star Fleet has already

agreed

that your vessel is the logical choice, but that is

not the

only thing I wish to discuss with you. We need more

than transportation to Aritani. we need a

plan for

stopping the Romulans. Spock and I have such a

plan."

Kirk suddenly felt uncomfortable. "Do you think

it's wise to discuss that here? If the Romulans

were

able to enter your home and attack you, then

certainly-was

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"You hardly need worry about the possibility of

our

conversation being monitored here, Captain."

Spock explained. "Because of the sensitive

nature of information discussed in the home of an

ambassador,

this house is equipped with a transmission

scrambling

device. Only authorized transmissions are

not

scrambled. Even if the Romulans had succeeded

in

planting a transmitter here, they would not understand

the messages they received."

"All right, then. My ship is at your disposal.

Now

tell me your plan."

Sarek did not smile, but his eyes brightened. "It

requires your assistance, Captain, and yours,

too,

Doctor, if you are willing his

"Scotty, how's the cloaking device working?"

"Like a charm, sir, but it's dra*' the

be-jesus out

o' my poor engines. God help us

all if we have to make

it out of here at warp speed anytime soon."

"Just keep the cloaking device working, Scotty,

and

I personally promise you we won't need the

warp

drive or divine intervention. Kirk out."

Kirk looked up to see Aritani on the

bridge

viewscreen, a swirling globe of blue and

purple, dotted

with occasional wisps of white. He stared for a

moment,

mesmerized.

Sulu broke the spell. "Standard orbit,

Captain?"

"Very good, Lieutenant." Kirk glanced over

at his

first officer.

Spock was watching it, too.

"Beautiful, isn't it, Spock?"

The Vulcan's eyes met Kirk's; he nodded

softly,

then bent over his scanner. "Significant
pirate activity
on the surface below, Captain." He
straightened and
faced Kirk. "They are no longer bothering
to cloak
their vessels."
"Since the Fidelity has left, they think
nobody's
watching." Kirk snapped a toggle on the arm of
his
chair as the intercom whistled.
McCoy's voice was filled with a sense of
urgency.
"Captain, I've got an emergency down here.
I need
you in sick bay immediately."
Uhura and Sulu could not help turning to look
at the
captain. Why in the galaxy should the doctor be
calling
the captain about a medical emergency?
It seemed to make perfect sense to Kirk.
"I'll be
right there, Doctor." He jerked his head at
Spock, who

moved smoothly to take his captain's

place in the

command chair.

As the doors to the turbolift opened, Kirk

narrowly

missed colliding with Varth, who stepped off the

turbolift

as the captain stepped on. Sulu was watching as

Kirk smiled and winked at the Radun; he

turned back

to the navigation console and pinched himself to be

sure he wasn't dreaming.

It was not time for a shift change, and Sulu knew

for

a fact that Kirk had not summoned Varth to the

bridge,

but the Radun went directly to Spock's station

as

though drawn there by some sort of telepathic

instinct.

Sulu was dying to ask him how he knew he was

needed

on the bridge, but dared not as long as Spock was

there.

Sulu was therefore not that surprised when McCoy

called Spock less than an hour

later.

"Dare I presume, Doctor McCoy,"

Spock asked

him, "that this is in regards to another medical emergency?"

"Spock, get your Vulcan posterior down here nOW."

Spock raised his eyebrows mildly and

terminated

the communication. "Mr. Varth," he said, "you are

in

command."

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Sulu waited until the Vulcan left the

bridge and

Varth had settled down in the captain's chair.

He turned halfway toward Varth. "All right.

What's

going on?"

Varth regarded him coldly. "Is there a

problem,

Lieutenant Sulu?"

"You know what I mean, sir." He hadn't

talked to

Varth since the Radun's brief but unexplained
stay in
the brig. "Something's up--between you and the captain
and Mr. Spock." He decided not to ask why
Varth
and the captain were suddenly buddy-buddy--not
here, on the bridge, since Varth was, after
all, a senior
officer; but Sulu was far too curious not to mention
the
recent events on the bridge. "It's very
unusual for Dr.
McCoy to call the captain and Mr. Spock
to sick bay
like that."
"Yes, it is," Varth agreed. "Anything
else, Mister?"
"No, sir." Sulu sighed and turned back
to his panel,
resigned. Varth was letting him know that he had
overstepped his bounds; maybe they would explain it
to him when it was all over.
He could not see Varth grinning behind him.
Spock hovered outside the door to sick bay.
"How

is he, Doctor?"

McCoy gestured him inside. "Why don't you
come

judge for yourself, Mr. Spock? Your opinion just
might

be useful for once."

Kirk sat on the bed, studying his reflection in
a hand

mirror. When Spock came in, he swung his
legs over

the side and attempted to stand up.

"Not so fast," said McCoy, pushing him back

into a

sitting position. "Give the anesthesia a few

more

seconds to wear off." He stepped back and

viewed his

handiwork with almost paternal pride. "Well,

Spock,

what do you think?"

Spock leaned closer to Kirk and, putting his hand

to

his chin, grunted and slowly circled the bed as he

studied the new alterations to his captain. He

stopped

and remained silent until McCoy could stand it

no

longer.

"Well?"

"Adequate," Spock replied.

"Adequate?" McCoy was highly insulted.

"That's

not adequate, that's a masterpiece."

Kirk smiled, then winced suddenly and gingerly

touched his fingers to the new tips on his ears.

"Hey,

Bones, they pull when I smile. Shouldn't you

fix

that?"

"Where you're going," McCoy said tartly, "you

won't need to smile."

Kirk looked up at Spock and almost smiled

again,

but caught himself in time. "Is that why you Vulcans

avoid smiling, Spock? Because it pulls your

ears?"

Spock was not the least bit intrigued by the thought.

"I really wouldn't know, Captain."

McCoy was still smarting from Spock's remark.

"Spock, how can you call this

adequate? Last time I

did this, it was good enough to fool the Romulans, and

I think I did an even better job this time."

"I did not say that your work would not fool the

Romulans, Doctor, I merely stated that it

was adequate

for its purpose. That is what you wanted to

know, isn't it?"

"Yes, but--"

"However, as far as aesthetics are concerned, I

must admit that there is something rather... that is to

say, the captain does not seem well

suited..."

"I make a lousy Vulcanoid." Kirk

pushed the fretting

McCoy aside and finally stood up. "Is that

what

you're saying, Spock?"

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"A colorful term, but rather accurate. Perhaps it's

your coloring..." Spock suggested.

McCoy sniffed. "That can be fixed with a little

makeup. But I think those ears are some of my

finest

work."

"I must agree," Spock said. "They are,

therefore, adequate . . ."

"Why, what's that supposed to mean--" McCoy

began hotly.

"It doesn't matter." Kirk waved his hand

to signal

an end to the discussion. "All that matters is, they

fooled the Romulans once, and they'll

certainly fool

them again."

Scott and McCoy were waiting when Kirk

arrived in

the transporter room, and neither one looked

particularly

pleased. McCoy stood scowling with his arms

folded resolutely; Kirk knew the lecture

would be

forthcoming shortly.

"Where's Spock?" he asked, hoping to forestall

McCoy.

"Probably trying to find a costume that

coordinates

with yours," the doctor replied. "I must say, you

look

rather dashing."

"What, this old thing?" Kirk spread his arms and

looked down at his costume; the computer had
designed

it along the same lines as the one the Romulan
prisoner had worn. "I thought the color of the
vest

was a little loud."

"It's perfect," McCoy answered. "Brings
out the
green in your complexion."

Kirk grimaced wryly and turned to Scott.

"Scotty,

Varth will be calling any minute with those
coordinates."

"Aye, sir," Scott sighed, shaking his head.

"All right, Scotty, out with it."

"Well... Captain, I wish I felt a little
better about

this. I can't help rememberin' what happened to that
last poor divvil we beamed up from his ship--"

"Amen," McCoy nodded. "I had to do the
autopsy,

Jim'."

Kirk assumed his best authoritarian

air. "Gentlemen,

there is nothing more to discuss. That pirate
moved his ship on purpose from its projected

course.

It won't happen this time."

"You mean, you hope it won't happen this time,"

McCoy muttered.

Scott did not seem at all reassured.

"It's a very

delicate operation, puttin' two men

into fast-moving surface vessels."

Kirk put a confident hand on the engineer's

shoulder.

"And I trust you to do it, Mr. Scott. You're

the

best. Subject closed."

The door opened and Spock entered, dressed in pirate clothes.

"Spock, you certainly look convincing."

"Thank you, Doctor McCoy."

"But I don't understand why you wouldn't let me

pierce one ear. Then you'd really look

authentic."

Spock was not amused. "It is enough that the captain

was forced to submit to your scalpel,

Doctor."

"Which reminds me, what did Sarek think about the

captain's new ears?"

"He said nothing to me about them."

"Nothing?" McCoy was obviously deflated.

Spock kept his expression bland. "My father is

a

diplomat, Doctor. He avoids comment if

he fears it

will offend others."

McCoy was about to respond acidly to Spock's

remark when a beep emanated from the transporter

console. "Ye'd best get on the pads,

gentlemen,"

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Scott said. "This is going' to take a fine bit

of timin'."

Kirk felt a sudden rush of exhilaration.

"Ready,

Spock?"

"Ready, Captain."

"For God's sake," McCoy said, "be

careful down

there."

The last thing Kirk saw as he was caught in the

transporter beam was the look of worry on

McCoy's

face.

The ship felt as light as a feather, with controls
as
sensitive as a high-strung thoroughbred. Varth
had
been right--these were not the antique jerry-rigged
fighters used by pirate bands, but the newest,
sleekest
surface fighters outfitted with every device
possible,
compliments no doubt of the Romulan Empire.

The
ship seated one, and it hugged Kirk's body so that
he
could move his arms freely, but not stretch his
legs. He studied the control panel and found the
radio next
to the control for firing the burning phaser.

"Remus, do you read?"

"Affirmative, Romulus. We are not far from
the
beamdown site. If you would follow me,
please."

They flew together in close formation, Spock's
vessel
leading. Kirk looked out and could see that the land

below was scarred and blackened where the pirates
had discharged their phasers, and that the dark brown
soil was turned up in the areas where mining had
begun on the surface. The sight was sickening,
even

more so because he could recognize the area from the
configuration of the plateau. it was the place where
Natahia's fields and hut had once stood,
but its beauty
had been completely stripped away.

Then he saw it.

A plateau edged by a jagged mountain, and the next
plateau down a clean four-hundred-foot
drop, softened
by tangling red and blue vines--the place where they
had found Spock.

Kirk looked gratefully at the reassuring
presence in
the other vessel.

Spock hovered near the edge of the plateau for an
instant, then smoothly set his vessel
down. Kirk
brought his alongside. He knew that Spock would
now

contact the pirates in flawless Romulan with the
beam-down

code supplied by Varth. Within seconds, the
interior of the fighter began to blink and glimmer
until

it disappeared, taking Kirk along with it.

Kirk opened his eyes to absolute darkness, and for
an instant felt panic--they had beamed down
into solid

rock; in less than a second their molecules
would be

crushed out of existence by the tons of sheer
pressure

exerted on their bodies

But death did not come. Kirk's lungs filled
easily

with recirculated air, thin but breathable, and his
eyes

adjusted slowly to the blackness. "Remus?"

"Here." Spock swung gracefully from the
belly of

the fighter as though he had been doing it
all his life.

When his feet touched the floor, the cavern filled
with

harsh Pinkish light. Kirk fumbled with the
tophatch

and crawled out stiffly.

The hangar had been carved from rock, and held at least another hundred of the gleaming silver fighters.

Kirk and Spock walked past them, their steps echoing against the cold stone floor.

A small exit in the far corner of the hangar led them to an equally small passageway. Had Kirk ever entertained doubts that the Praetor was involved, they were now completely erased, for the guard who sat staring at a monitor wore the uniform of a Romulan centurion.

He looked up just long enough to frown at Kirk and Spock before turning back to the screen.

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They continued down the narrow stone corridor.

"That was too easy." Kirk's hand unconsciously groped for the communicator hidden under his long tunic.

"Easier than anticipated," Spock agreed.

"Perhaps

the beamdown code is the only security measure

required

to achieve this level of access. Or perhaps the

Federation has friends here."

dis" ...Or maybe someone ought to put that centurion on

report."

"Spoken like a true disciplinarian, sir."

Kirk glanced at Spock sharply, but there was no

time to answer. They had come to the end of the

passage; in front of them, a massive stone

wall shuddered

and rose.

The surfaces of the vast interior were not stone, but

slick white metal, and the wide corridors

broken by

hundreds of entranceways seemed to stretch

into infinity.

Dozens of Romulans--some in

military uniforms,

others dressed as pirates--comstrode through the

corridors,

far too involved in the performance of their

duties to be concerned about the two pirates who

hung

back by the entrance, watching.

"Remind you of someplace you've been before?"

Kirk whispered with awe.

"Indeed... the interior of a Romulan

battleship. If

Varth is correct, those should be the officers'

quarters.

I believe we should proceed in . . . that

direction."

Spock inclined his head.

"Lead the way, Remus. You're the one who

memorized

the map."

Kirk was becoming more exhilarated by the success

of their masquerade as each moment that they remained

unnoticed passed. They had taken the

turbolift

down two levels and were proceeding along the

corridor

that Spock assured him would take them to the

cloaking device--and Kirk was just beginning to feel

secure--when Spock suddenly stopped.

The corridor in front of them forked in two

directions.

"What is it, Spock?"

"Sir, the plan of the base that I studied did not

include that." Spock pointed to the corridor that branched off to the left. It was blocked by a rather large centurion and a force field. "The plan showed only one path to the cloaking device, the hallway which is now unguarded."

"Which way do you think we should go?"

Spock looked at him directly. "Which one would you put a cloaking device behind, sir?"

Kirk sighed. "I was afraid you'd say that."

They directed their steps toward the force field.

"As

we approach the centurion, Captain,"

Spock said in a

low voice, "I would appreciate it if you would

--"

"--shut up?"

Spock nodded.

"No lo contendere, Remus. My Romulan

is a little

rusty."

Square of jaw and build, the centurion

regarded

them with small, untrusting eyes. Clearly, this

one

would not be as careless as his comrade. Spock gave the Romulan salute as he approached, bringing

one fist

to his chest, and then extending the arm.

He spoke rapidly to the centurion in what

Kirk

perceived to be an extremely convincing imitation of

Romulan military style. "Centurion, let

us pass."

The Romulan shook his head and produced a

hand-held

scanner. "You know the rules. Scan first."

"Of course," Spock agreed, and stood still as the

centurion scanned him. The device beeped.

"How stupid of me," Spock said. "My

communica-

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tions device, of course." He handed it to the

Romulan,

who did a double take.

"Where'd you get this?"

"One of the corpses on the planet surface.

A souvenir.

Here, let me show you." He bent over to assist

the

centurion, who was trying unsuccessfully to open

a

hailing frequency. "The frequency band is

here."

Spock reached over the Romulan's shoulder

to point.

He finished by easing the Romulan to the floor with

a strategically placed hand on his trapezius.

"That was great, Spock," Kirk said

approvingly.

"But how did you explain the communicator?"

"It's hardly important, Captain..."

"Well, whatever you told him, he bought it. I

never

knew you were such a skillful liar, Mr.

Spock. Good

work."

Spock dragged the centurion to one side and

propped him gently against the bulkhead while

Kirk

found the control to deactivate the force field.

"This is

hardly the time for either insults or compliments,

Captain. I suggest we continue our search as

quickly

as possible."

"I couldn't agree with you more."

Spock read the inscription on the bulkhead above

the force field. "This is designated as a

weapons

area."

"But Varth said that the Romulans hadn't completed

the base--that they didn't have attack capacity

yet."

Spock's tone was grim. "Apparently Varth's

information

is somewhat outdated. If it is true that the

Romulans have completed construction of their

weapons,"

Kirk finished for him. "Then we'll have to find a

way to stop them down here. The

Enterprise can't

obliterate the planet surface with photon

torpedoes in

an attempt to destroy an underground base."

"Agreed, sir. Therefore, it is logical that I

remain

behind and--"

Kirk held up his hand. "We'll discuss it when

it

happens, Spock. In any case you won't be

staying

behind."

"Sir--"

"End of discussion, Mister." Kirk looked down

the

seemingly endless row of doors. "I'll take the

ones on

the left, you take the ones on the right, and whoever

locates the cloaking device or the main

weapons room,

contacts the other."

"Yes, sir."

Kirk could not find the cloaking device, but he

located the weapons room on the third try.

Clearly,

Varth was right: the Romulans wanted far more than

Aritani. One wall was lined with defense

computers;

the console was manned for what Kirk assumed were

photon torpedoes and phasers capable of blowing

a

starship from its orbit.

He was reaching for his communicator when the

door slid open. He dropped his hand quickly.

Kirk recognized the uniform of a Romulan subcommander and saluted quickly, but the small female did not return the courtesy. Next to her stood a discouraging-looking centurion who held a phaser that was not quite pointed at Kirk; but it was neither the phaser nor the subcommander's failure to salute that made Kirk distinctly uncomfortable.

"Subcommander Tanirius," she said, with a voice as cold as her opaque black eyes.

The upswept eyebrows and delicately pointed ears added an exotic beauty to features Kirk had once thought of as almost plain. They suited her, as nature

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had intended, but the cloaked eyes and cold manner hid what had been most beautiful about her--her openness, her warmth.

Emma, Kirk mouthed, but he did not say it

aloud.

She appeared not to notice. "A centurion was

injured

outside the high security area. I would like to see

your clearance."

"I don't have it with me."

She motioned to the centurion, who directed the

phaser at Kirk's head. "Then you will come with me

for questioning."

"It doesn't look as though I have a choice."

She did not smile. "You don't."

Chapter Twelve

TANIR-IUS ENTERED THE detention cell

alone, holding a

phaser tightly at chest level. When

the door closed

behind her, she lowered her arm and hung the phaser

on her belt. She looked up at Kirk again,

and face,

voice, and posture underwent a subtle

transformation

from cool to warm, from Romulan to human.

She gestured at Kirk's ears.

"Dr. McCoy's work?"

Kirk did not try to disguise the hatred in his

voice.

"And yours, Subcommander?"

He half expected her to tell him to call her

Emma,

but she did not. Her eyes smiled with controlled

amusement. "These are mine. Tell Leonard he

did a

good job."

"I don't see how I can do that,

Subcommander."

The muscle in Kirk's jaw twitched. "It's

my understanding

that I will shortly be executed for espionage.

That is what you Romulans do to spies, isn't

it?"

She answered by holding something out to him--his

communicator, but he stood back from her, stiff

with

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anger, and would not touch it. "Things are not always

as they appear, Captain. I told you that I was

on your

side."

"You'd like me to open up a channel to the

Enterprise here, wouldn't you?" He smiled

bitterly. "So
you could trace the transmission and destroy her with
your new weapons. I was gullible to fall for your
charms the first time, but you can't expect me to do it,
again."

She moved toward him, her face taut and
desperate,

Emma and not-Emma. "They are not monitoring us
now. I will try to explain, but there is not much time.

I
ask only that you listen."

Kirk leaned against the bare wall and folded his
arms. "Go ahead. The longer you talk, the longer

I
live. But don't expect me to believe anything
you
say."

"Very well." She lifted her head proudly.

"I am a
Romulan, Captain Kirk, but I do not serve
the Praetor."

"A pirate, then--"

"Let me speak!" Her urgency forced him
to silence;

he closed his mouth and listened. "Not a pirate.

I will

not tell you by what name we call ourselves, lest the

secret somehow reach the Praetor's ears. We

are a

group more than two hundred years old, who

despise

the atrocities of both the pirates and our

Praetor. Our

hope is to throw off the yoke of our military

government

and coexist peacefully with the Federation. Like

our Vulcan brothers, we are weary of constant

warring

and its toll upon our population. We

seek peace.

"Many of us have risen to high positions within the

military. We profess allegiance to the

Praetor, but

serve our group as best we can within our position.

I

was chosen as a young girl to serve in Intelligence.

They sent me away to Earth, to receive medical

training and to infiltrate Star Fleet

Intelligence. Their plan worked so well that, as you

saw, I was trusted by and

took my orders directly from Admiral

Komack. And

the Praetor, of course.

"But my true aim was to serve my brothers and sisters in the underground . . . by destroying this military outpost. The government has been working on this project for years, Captain, and now it has the capability to dissolve the Enterprise and any other Federation vessel to atoms and spread the Praetor's tyranny to every populated planet in this sector.

That

has always been its purpose."

"You speak of peace," Kirk said hotly, "but you tried to kill Spock--not once, but several times, just as you killed the Cygnusian and the pirate, and tried to kill the Saurian ambassador. What kind of people talk of peace while using murder to achieve their goals?"

He stopped at the sight of the pain on her face.

"An unhappy people, Captain," Tanirius

answered.

"Do you think I welcome the Praetor's assignments?

But if I do not carry any of them out, I endanger my position and the help I can give my people. I am forced to do what I despise."

"You gave Spock the neodopazine--you lied to McCoy, convinced him it would help--"

"It did. It bought Spock time. The Empire wanted him killed immediately. I was here, at the base, when they sent me to the Enterprise. I wanted to remain, to find a way to stop construction of the base, but I had the medical credentials, the appropriate cover. When I realized what Spock meant to Leonard... and to you ..." she lowered her eyes, "I did what I could. The medication was the only way to appease the Empire.

If

Spock were incapacitated, could not remember what he had seen, then that was as good as death." She

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looked up again. "Do you think I enjoyed what I had to do?"

"Enlisting the forces of evil," Kirk said slowly, remembering, "... in order to do good." He shook his head. "If it is true, then why didn't you stay on the Enterprise... explain who and what you are"

"No, No one could know. The Romulans had to believe I came back because I had been uncovered, not because I feared they had completed their base and would soon make their move. If they had thought otherwise--"

"Then it was you." Kirk understood suddenly.

"You were the one who gave Varth the beamdown code--"

"And the description of the fighter controls and the layout of the base. I left the scrambling

device in his
cabin so that I could tell the Romulans I
framed a Star
Fleet Intelligence officer. Once the vote
on Vulcan had
been taken, Varth would have told you of the military
base, but Spock recovered his memory sooner
than we
anticipated--"

"But Varth didn't tell us you would be here."

"The arm of the Romulans is very long," she said,
and Kirk started. She smiled, but her
expression darkened
as she continued. "If you had known, and been
caught and questioned--if there had been any hint of
complicity with Star Fleet on my part, I would have
been killed immediately. We couldn't risk it."

"What of McCoy?" Kirk asked softly.

"Were you
merely following orders with him?"

She winced visibly and turned away. "Would you
believe me, Captain, if I said I was not?"

And that I was
not following orders when I tried to seduce you, as
well?"

Kirk remained silent.

Tanirius reached for her phaser and motioned with it toward the door. "Enough. Whether you believe me

or

not doesn't matter. I'm still going to help you."

"Where are you taking me?"

"To the cloaking device."

"It doesn't look like I have a choice."

Tanirius grinned, and looked so much like Emma

that Kirk drew in his breath. "You don't."

Spock stood next to the cloaking device and was

preparing to signal the Enterprise when the

door

opened; he froze at the sight of the phaser

Tanirius

held at the captain's back. Kirk could not

see Tanirius's

face, but the look on the Vulcan's was one of

cold recognition.

Tanirius put the phaser on the console and

moved to

Kirk's side. Spock still did not move.

"She tells an interesting story, Mr.

Spock. She

keeps insisting she's on our side."

Spock was unconvinced. "Captain, I

respectfully

submit that the subcommander not be trusted, considering her actions..."

"Gentlemen," Tanirius said, "the time for explanations

has passed. I would like to warn Mr. Spock that the instant he removes the cloaking device from the console, an alarm will sound."

"I see. And what do you propose we do?"

Spock

asked with as much sarcasm as Kirk had ever heard

him muster.

Kirk made a sudden move to grab

Tanirius; surprised,

she moved instinctively to defend herself. The phaser was already in Spock's hand when she turned toward him.

"Then shoot me, Spock," she said quietly.

"But

then one of you will have to stay behind to see the base destroyed. Which one of you knows how to do it?"

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Spock was silent.

"Your cloaking device is inferior to ours,"

Tanirius

said. "You'll have to lower it in order to beam up. And when you do, the sensors on this base will locate your ship and lock in the automatic phasers.

Blanket

beams, wide range--and they won't stop firing until they're manually overridden or the sensors pick up debris."

She handed Kirk his communicator. "G."

He caught her arm. "You could come with us."

She shook her head. "Someone has to stay and stop the phasers before the Enterprise is destroyed--and it's time I completed my mission and destroyed this base."

Kirk fought to keep the concern from showing in his voice. "With you on it?"

She almost smiled. "That is most certainly not my intention." She went to the door and paused. "One thingm"

Kirk looked at her.

She bit her lip. "Tell Leonard I love him."

And she was gone.

"Captain," Spock said as Kirk flipped
open his
communicator, "I am not at all sure it's
wise to trust
her."
Kirk looked pointedly at the cloaking device
and
back at his first officer. "Would you prefer I go
back to
the detention cell, Mr. Spock?"

They materialized on the transporter platform
just
in time for the first blast, which swept them off the
platform and against the console. Tanirius had been
telling the truth about the phasers, at least.

Kirk dragged himself to the nearest intercom and
called Engineering. "Scotty, get the
deflector shields
up!"

"I'll do what I can, Captain, but they won't
hold
long," Scott lamented. "That bleedin' cloakin'
device
has just about taken all our power. There's barely
anythin' left for the shields."

"Any chance you could get us out of here?"

"A wee bit of impulse power is all we've got left, sir, but nothin' fast enough to pull us out of range of those phasers before the shields buckle."

"Sorry, Scotty. I guess I was wrong when I said we wouldn't be needing the warp drive--or divine intervention.

Just get those deflectors up. Kirk out."

The fact that Kirk and Spock appeared on the bridge in full pirate regalia, including Kirk's new ears, failed to produce even mildly curious stares from the bridge crew; under conditions other than red alert, there might have been more time for double takes. McCoy moved to the side of Kirk's chair.

"I take it the ears fooled 'em."

Kirk knew there was no time for polite exchanges.

"Bones, I saw her."

"WhO?"

"Emma. She helped us escape. She might be

on our

side--comMr. Varth!"

Varth had already vacated the con to assist Spock

in

scanning the newly revealed Romulan base.

"Sir," the

Radun said excitedly, "beside the network of mining

tunnels beneath the main continent, the military base

itself houses more than five hundred

personnel."

"There isn't time, Varth. I have to know about

her--"

Varth straightened from the scanner abruptly.

"Tanirius."

"Then what she said was true?"

"I'm fairly sure we can trust her to help

us, sir."

"Fairly sure?"

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"Nothing's sure, Captain, until those phaser

blasts

stop."

As if on cue, there was the rumbling thunder of an

explosion as the bridge pitched forward and crewmen

went flying. Kirk slid from the con and bounced

off the back of Sulu's chair; the helmsman's

forehead

struck the navigation console with a resounding

thud.

The room slowly righted itself to the background

chatter of damage reports coming from Uhura's

station.

Scott's voice came from the arm of

Kirk's chair;

it had taken on the darkness of a Gaelic

prophet of

doom.

"That's it for the shields, Captain. We nae

kinna

stand another direct hit."

Kirk knew the answer to his question before he

asked it. "Can you get us out of here, Scotty?"

"All we've got is impulse power, sir.

We can't

outrun those phasers."

"In other words," Kirk said grimly, "we're

sitting

ducks."

Spock looked up from his scanner. "I fail

to see how

our situation is comparable to that of an aquatic
waterfowls"

"Oh, shut up," said McCoy.

Spock raised a surprised eyebrow and
returned to
his scanner.

Kirk paid them no attention. "Divert all power
to

the deflectors, Mr. Scott."

"The cloakin" device too, sir?"

"And all the impulse power you've got."

"Sir." Scott was deeply offended by the thought of
his engines motionless, powerless.

"Do it, Scotty. Now."

"The blasts are occurring at approximately
one

minute intervals," Spock offered helpfully.

"I estimate
the next one will arrive in twenty seconds."

"She'll stop it, Jim," McCoy said. "I

know she'll do

everything she can to stop it."

"Let's hope you're right, Bones."

"Fifteen seconds," said Spock.

"She's really a Romulan," Kirk said.

"I'll be damned," McCoy whispered. "That

explains something... the to evirol."

"The what?"

"Eleven seconds," Spock chanted.

"Levirol. It's a drug that elevates

blood pressure

and slows the pulse. Emma was taking it . . .

no

wonder our sensors never showed an extra

Romulan

on board ship."

"She wanted me to give you a message."

Kirk

lowered his voice so that only McCoy could hear.

"She says she loves you."

"Six seconds."

"Damn it, Spock," McCoy yelled, "if

we must all

be blown to kingdom come in the next few seconds,

I

do not want your countdown to be the last thing I

hear."

Spock regarded the doctor with mild

surprise.

"He's right, Spock," Kirk said quietly;

but internally,

he continued the countdown. Four seconds...

Scott came back on the intercom. "I'm

sorry, Captain...

I can't raise enough power to get the deflectors
back up."

There was no point in bracing for the explosion.

They would be vaporized by a direct

hit, or in the case

of an indirect hit, struck by flying debris as

the bridge

shattered, or asphyxiated when the inner hull

tore. But

Kirk braced for the shock in spite of himself, and

prayed that Tanirius had made it to the weapons

room

before she changed her mind...

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Spock rose so suddenly from his scanner that

Kirk

almost jumped out of his chair. "Explosion,

Captain,

beneath the planet surface. I believe in the area

of..."

he squinted back at the viewer, "... the

weapons

room. The Romulans have lost attack

capability."

McCoy grabbed the captain's wrist, his face

splitting

with a grin. "She did it, Jim! She did it!"

Kirk released his breath slowly and

smiled weakly

up at McCoy as he reached toward the intercom.

"Scotty."

"Aye, Captain?"

"Forget those deflector shields. Just give us

enough

impulse power to nudge her back into orbit."

"With pleasure, sir."

"Standard orbit, Mr. Sulu. Uhura, open

a hailing

frequency to the Romulans. I want to speak

to whoever's

in charge."

"Captain," Spock interrupted, "six fighter

vessels

beaming up from the hangar area to the surface---

"Let them go for now."

"Captain," said Uhura, "I have the Romulan

sub-commander."

Kirk caught his breath silently. "Put her
on the
screen, Lieutenant."

The Romulan male was young for his rank, the
equivalent of a starship captain. Tears streamed
down
his soot-smudged face, more from the sting of the thick
smoke than from grief or pain. From behind him
came
the death-cries of his fellows; he glared at
Kirk with
undisguised hatred.

"Captain," Spock said.

"Not now, Spock."

Spock persisted. "An explosion, sir, in the
hangar
area. The vessels that remained have been
destroyed."

Kirk studied the face on the screen for a moment
before speaking. "This is Captain James T.

Kirk of the Enterprise. Are you the commander of the
base?"

"Subcommander Tardus. My superiors are
dead. I
now command."

"Subcommander, we know that you have lost your

cloaking device, your weapons and your vessels.

I

suggest you cooperate with us."

The young Romulan regarded him haughtily.

"In

what manner, Captain?"

"We will assist your surviving personnel

to evacuate."

"To become your prisoners," Tardus said with

utter

disgust.

"To be processed and then released to your

government."

Tardus struggled unsuccessfully to suppress a

cough. "To be used as prisoners to bargain with the

Empire. This is totally unacceptable to us,

Captain.

Surely you know that we will never surrender ourselves."

A painful spasm of coughing overtook him;

afterwards, he glared at Kirk through dull eyes.

"This

is the work of Federation spies, but we shall take them

with us. You shall learn no more about our installation,

Captain Kirk."

"We already know everything about your installation,"

Kirk said quickly. "No purpose would be served by your death--"

"Captain," Uhura's voice was gentle,

"he's no

longer transmitting."

The flash that lit up the bridge was blinding, forcing

those present to shield their eyes until the screen

faded

to blackness. Slowly, the familiar sight of

Aritani

reappeared.

"The entire operation has been destroyed,"

Spock

reported from his viewer, "with the exception of a few

mining tunnels. Shock waves on the surface

reaching

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six-point-three on the Richter scale." He

looked

steadily at Kirk. "No survivors beneath the

surface,

Captain."

Kirk's gaze was fierce and directed straight

ahead at

the quietly rotating planet. He could not meet

McCoy's

eyes; he knew the horror in them matched his own.

The grass no longer grew as high as

Kirk's hip; in

most places the soil had been bared by the pirates'

phasers, leaving black, evil-smelling scars.

The neat

rows of golden vines had disappeared entirely from the

landscape, burned from existence, but the grass

persisted. Already it crept back in timid

blue-green

clumps to cover the blackened earth.

Kirk called out.

There was a rustling sound near the side of the

mountain, and the sound of small footsteps.

Natahia

appeared from behind the charred stump of what was

once a great tree. Around her stood three

male

growers who carried handmade spears.

"The pirates are gone," Kirk called. "The

earthquake

resulted from the destruction of their ships and weapons."

They stopped several feet from Kirk.

Natahia's

beautiful blue robe was torn and heavy with mud;

her

streaming hair was wild and unkempt. But her

manner

was as regal as it had always been.

She eyed Kirk distrustfully. "Six of my people

died

in that earthquake."

"I'm sorry," Kirk said gently. "But there will

be no

more earthquakes, and no more attacks on your people.

Our enemies were using your planet as a military

base. Their weapons were hidden beneath the ground.

They wanted control of Aritani because of its

minerals

and so that they could control other nearby planets

from it as well. When we discovered their base, they

killed themselves and destroyed the base rather than

be taken prisoner."

Natahia closed her eyes. "So we stand at

last on the

bones of our enemies. And what does the Federation

want with us now?"

"We only want to offer our assistance to help you rebuild what the pirates have destroyed."

"We require no assistance in rebuilding our huts--"

"I was speaking of the land, Natahia. To restore it to what it was."

Her eyes widened slightly. The growers with her whispered among themselves with hopeful excitement, but she silenced them with a quick motion of her hand. "You have methods for doing so?"

"Yes. We can make your land fertile again. We can help you to produce crops quickly so that your people can be fed."

Natahia's voice suddenly sounded very old and feeble. "We have been eating the small animals and birds--it was repugnant, but necessary for survival."

"Our offer is unconditional. However, the offer to join the Federation remains open."

Natahia bowed her head for a moment; when she raised it again, her eyes had lost some of their proudness.

"I have learned many things since the pirates forced us to flee to the caves in the mountains. If we had not banded together, we would certainly have starved. We have learned to be dependent."

"And is it such a bad thing?" Kirk asked.

"I cannot say that it is always bad, nor can I say that it is always good, for it often forces one to compromise one's belief. I would call it a necessary evil."

Kirk looked down at the scarred earth and thought of those who lay beneath it. "Sometimes, Natahia, we

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must do things we despise, in order to achieve a greater good."

"I must agree with you, Captain Kirk. I speak now for all the growers who have survived. We do not value technology or the weapons it has produced, but we do value our way of life, so much so that we will

not permit other invaders to destroy it again. And so we shall compromise our beliefs to some extent in order to preserve them. We welcome the assistance of the Federation and wish to ally ourselves with it."

Captain's Log, Stardate 7008.4:

The Enterprise is leaving Aritani with two extra passengers: the Aritanian delegation to the Federation.

Following the delivery of all diplomats to their appropriate destinations, we will proceed to Star Base Two for some long overdue shore leave.

Kirk turned off the recorder and turned to look at

McCoy. The doctor stood watching Aritani turn slowly on the viewscreen.

"Slow day at the office, Bones?"

"Not much to do in sick bay these days," McCoy replied, keeping his eyes on the screen.

"A lovely place, wasn't it?" Kirk said softly.

"What? Oh... yes, I suppose it was."

Kirk gave up his attempt at

conversation. McCoy

had for once come to the bridge for something else...

she was there, somewhere far below the surface, and

this was the only way he had to say good-bye.

When Spock stepped off the turbolift, the

captain

and the doctor were too entranced by the viewscreen

to notice. He walked over to Kirk's side and

cleared

his throat delicately.

Kirk glanced up. "What is it, Spock?"

"The Aritanian delegation has been properly

welcomed

aboard and escorted to their quarters, Captain."

"Good." Kirk sat up straight in his chair.

"I have

the feeling that this time the return trip from Aritani

will be a little less eventful."

"I sincerely hope so, Captain." Spock

turned to

regard McCoy's faraway stare. "You have been

un-characteristically

reticent as of late, Doctor."

Kirk winced. Surely Spock was aware of McCoy's feelings for Emma, and was capable of greater tact...

McCoy tore his gaze from the screen at last.

"I suppose

I have, Spock," he said with unusual seriousness.

"I think Spock misses his daily argument,"

Kirk

said in an attempt to lighten the situation.

Spock did not acknowledge the captain's remark. "I

can surmise the cause of your depression, Doctor, and

while I am not insensitive to it, I feel that condolences

are somewhat premature."

McCoy suddenly became alert. "What are you talking

about, Spock?"

"Six fighter vessels are still unaccounted for, Doctor.

I submit that Tanirius, or Dr. Saenz if you wish,

was on one of them."

"How would you know?" McCoy struggled angrily against hope.

"It is a perfectly logical assumption,

Doctor. The

most likely candidates to evacuate the hangar

in the

seconds preceding its destruction would be those who

knew it was going to explode."

McCoy sounded bitterly tired. "Or maybe

just rats

deserting what they figured was a sinking ship after the

weapons room was destroyed. Do you think I

haven't

thought about it, Spock? But she would have let me

know she was alive--"

Spock seemed to think for a moment before he

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spoke again. "I rather doubt that they were rats, as you

call them, Doctor, considering the fact that shortly

before he left for his new assignment, Mr. Varth

informed me that precisely six Federation

sympathizers

were working at the Romulan installation, including

Tanirius."

A small spark of hope entered McCoy and slowly

warmed. "Is that true, Spock?"

Spock gave a slight nod.

"But why wouldn't she tell me? why would she leave me to think that she was dead?"

"Perhaps it is necessary for her to be presumed dead, to protect her from the wrath of the Praetor."

The spark dimmed. "Then even if she is alive... she couldn't risk seeing me again."

"Not as Tanirius," said Spock, "or as Emma Saenz, but perhaps..."

McCoy actually smiled weakly at the Vulcan. "It'll

never happen, Spock, but it's nice to think about." He

squared his shoulders. "Guess I'd better get back to sick bay."

"I thought you didn't have any work," Kirk protested.

"Did I say that? I can't imagine what I must have

been thinking of." McCoy walked with a slightly
brisker step to the turbolift and did not look
back at the
viewscreen again.

Kirk waited for the lift to close before turning to
face his first officer. "Thank you."

Spock frowned in puzzlement. "For what,
Captain?"

"For letting McCoy think she might still be
alive.

We Earthers have a word for it-compassion."

"Call it what you will," Spock replied
stiffly, "considering
the doctor's current mental state, I thought
he
should be made aware of the possibility--"

"Then what you said about Varth and the six
sympathizers--comt
was true?"

Without changing his expression, Spock managed
to
convey the fact that he had been highly insulted.

"I
would not intentionally attempt to mislead the good
doctor..."

Kirk sighed. "And every woman he meets,

he'll be

wondering if it could be her. You know, Emma

Saenz

was under orders to kill you, Spock, but she

didn't,

because she came to realize how much McCoy cared

about you. And after what you just did for McCoy, I

might almost be tempted to think that the affection was

mutual."

Spock rose to his full height. "Captain,

I scarcely

think that the bridge is an appropriate place

for such

insulting accusations." He moved with cool

dignity

back to his station.

Kirk smiled and leaned forward to address the

helmsman. "Take us out of orbit, Mr.

Sulu."

And the blue orb on the screen grew smaller and

smaller, until at last it faded from view.

