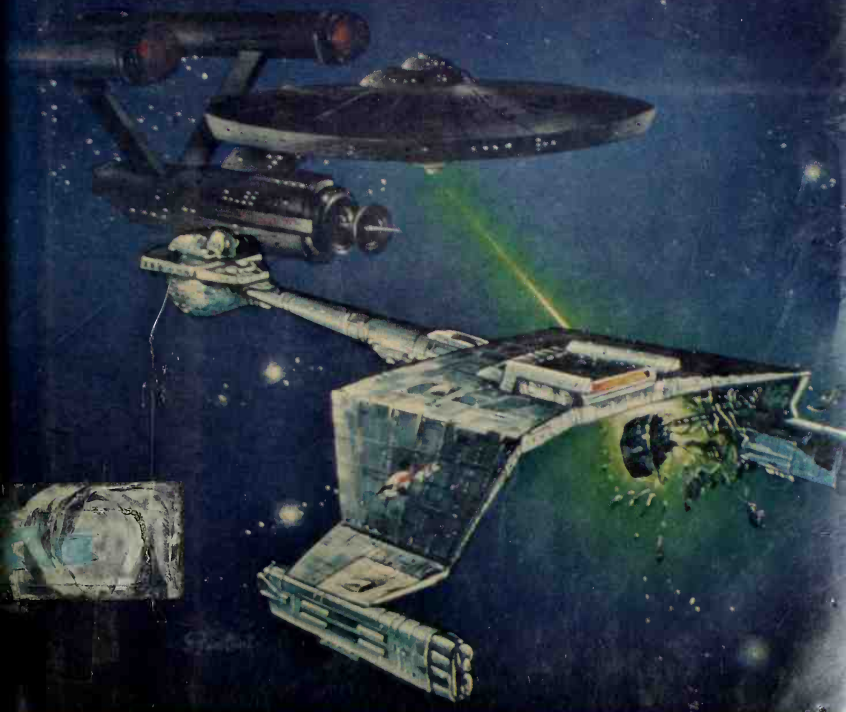


James Blish

THE STAR TREK READER IV

**Twelve More Novelized Episodes
and Spock Must Die!
Based on the Exciting Television Series
Created by
Gene Roddenberry**



James Blish

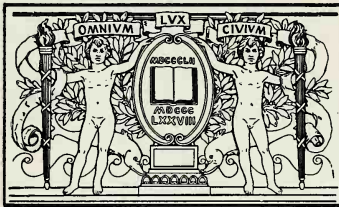
THE STAR TREK READER IV

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adapted by
James Blish

Based on the Television Series
Created by
Gene Roddenberry

E. P. DUTTON
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PREFACE

You've given me a surprise. I put no prefaces to *Star Trek* 7 and 8, simply because I had no news to report, no questions I hadn't answered before, and nothing that I felt needed further explanation. As the mail response to those books came in, I found quite a few of you asking to have the prefaces back, because they contributed an added "personal touch." I didn't have those letters when I wrote the preface to *Star Trek* 9, where in fact I did simply have a few new things to say. Up to that point, I'd regarded my role as nothing but that of a pipeline between the scripts and all the rest of you who can't forget the series. After all, neither the main concept of *Star Trek* nor a single one of its episodes came from me—instead, I was doing the equivalent of transposing some works of other composers to a different key, or at best making a piano version of works originally written for orchestra. I've written other books which were—and are—wholly mine, and where I haven't hesitated to inflict my own feelings on the readers, but in this series it was obviously my duty to the originals to keep myself *out* of them as much as possible.

Well, I really have nothing to report again this time, but I do want to thank you for asking me to go back to peeking around the corner, as it were. I'm still keeping myself out of the *Star Trek* stories as much as I can—in fact, more and more as I've gained practice at it—but it is nice to know that you also like my cameo bits at the front. Vanity is one of the main drives of every author except the greatest, as I've seen not only in myself but in the fifty or more I've talked to and/or had as friends over more decades than I care to count. For those of you who want more than a peek back, and in answer

to another question which pops up often in your letters, there are those other books, a couple of dozen, which you could find rather easily; they're almost all still in print. That's an order, Mr. Spock.

James Blish
July, 1973

THE ALTERNATIVE FACTOR

(Don Ingalls)

The planet offered such routine readings to the *Enterprise* sensors that Kirk ordered a course laid in for the nearest Star Base. "We can be on our way," he was telling the helmsman when Spock lifted his head from his computer. He said, "Captain, there is—"

He never completed his sentence. The *Enterprise* heaved in a gigantic lurch. A deafening grinding sound hammered at its hull—and the ship went transparent. From where he'd been flung, Kirk could see the stars shining through it. Then static crashed insanely as though the universe itself were wrenching in torment. Abruptly, stillness came. The ship steadied. The vast convulsion was over.

Bruised people, sprawled on the deck, began to edge cautiously back to their bridge stations. Kirk hauled himself back to his feet. "What in the name of— Mr. Spock!"

Spock was already back at his computer. "Captain, this is incredible! I read—"

Again the mighty paroxysm interrupted him. There came the ship's headlong plunge, the grinding roar, its appalling transparency. Kirk struggled once more to his feet and ran, ashen-faced, to Spock's station. "What is it?" he shouted.

"What my readings say is totally unbelievable, sir. Twice—for a split second each time—everything within range of our instruments seemed on the verge of winking out!"

Still shaken, Kirk said, "Mr. Spock! I want facts! Not poetry!"

"I have given you facts, Captain. The entire magnetic field in this solar system simply blinked. That planet be-

low us, whose mass I was measuring, attained zero gravity."

Kirk stared at him. "But that's impossible! What you are describing is . . . why, it's—"

"Nonexistence, Captain," Spock said.

Mingled horror and awe chilled Kirk. He heard Uhura speak. "There's a standard general-alert signal from Star Fleet Command, Captain!"

He raced for his mike. "This is the Captain speaking. All stations to immediate alert status. Stand by . . ."

Spock looked over at him. "Scanners now report a life object on the planet surface, sir."

"But only five minutes ago you made a complete life survey of it! What's changed?"

"This life reading only began to appear at approximately the same moment that the shock phenomena subsided."

And this was the routine planet that concealed no surprises! Kirk drew a deep breath. "What is its physical make-up?"

"A living being. Body temperature, 98.1 Fahrenheit. Mass . . . electrical impulses . . . it is apparently human, Captain."

"And its appearance coincided with your cosmic 'wink-out'?"

"Almost to the second."

"Explanation?"

"None, Captain."

"Could this being present a danger to the ship?"

"Possible . . . quite possible, sir."

Kirk was at the elevator. "Lieutenant Uhura, notify Security to have a detachment, armed and ready, to beam down with us. Stay hooked on to us. Let's go, Mr. Spock. If any word from Star Fleet Command comes through, pipe it down at once. Communications priority one."

"Aye, sir."

For a planet capable of such violent mood changes, it was extraordinarily Earth-like. It was arid, hot and dry, the terrain where the landing group materialized resembling one of Earth's desert expanses. When Spock, studying his tricorder, pointed to the left, they moved off. Almost at once they met up with huge, tumbled boulders of

granite, the passageways among them littered with rocky debris. They were edging through one of the defiles when they saw it.

At the base of a cliff lay a cone-shaped craft. It was like no spaceship any of them had ever seen. Its hull was studded with buttons connected to a mesh of coiling electronic circuits. Nothing moved around it. Its wedge-like door was open. Spock stood to one side as Kirk peered inside it. Its interior was a mass of complex instrumentation, shining wirings, tubes of unrecognizable purple metal, parabolic reflectors. There was what appeared to be a control panel. A chair.

Kirk emerged, his face puzzled. "I've never seen anything like it. Have a look, Mr. Spock. . . ."

Spock was stepping through the door when the voice spoke. "You came! Thank God! There's still time!"

Everyone whirled, phasers out. Kirk looked up. On the cliff above them stood a man. He wore a ripped and disheveled jumper suit. He was a big man, but his face had been badly battered. A dark bruise had swollen his jaw. A husky man, but his broad shoulders sagged with an unutterable weariness. "It's not too late!" he cried down to them. "We can still stop him!" He extended his hands in appeal. "But I . . . I need your help . . . please . . . help me . . ."

He reeled, clutching at his throat. Then his knees buckled—and he tumbled, headlong, from the cliff.

Kirk and Spock ran to him. His body lay unmoving but massive physical power was still latent in it. Who was he? What were he and his spacecraft doing on this "routine" planet?

But McCoy would permit no questions. He shook his head over the bed in Sickbay, where the injured castaway had been placed. "It's going to be touch and go, Jim. Heartbeat practically nonexistent. What happened down there?"

"I don't know. He fell from a cliff. He'd been saying something about needing our help . . . and he just crumpled."

McCoy looked up from his diagnostic tricorder. "No wonder. After the beating he's taken."

"He was beaten?"

"I don't know what else could have caused his injuries."

"Bones," Kirk said, "that is a dead, lifeless, arid planet down there . . . no sign of living beings. Who could have attacked him?"

McCoy was frowning at his tricorder. "He's the only one who can answer that—if he lives. . . ."

They both turned at the sound of Uhura's voice on the intercom. "Captain. Standby notice just in from Star Fleet Command. Red Two message about to come in."

"I'm on my way." At the door he said, "Keep me posted, Bones."

Chemist Charlene Masters met him at the bridge elevator door. "Here's my report on the di-lithium crystals, sir. Whatever that phenomenon was, it drained almost all of our crystals' power. It could mean trouble."

"You have a talent for understatement, Lieutenant. Without full crystal power, our orbit will begin to decay in ten hours. Reamplify immediately."

"Aye, sir."

He handed the report back to her and crossed to Spock's station. "Any further magnetic disturbance, Mr. Spock?"

"Negative, Captain. Scanners indicate situation normal."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing, sir. And most illogical . . . an effect of that proportion incapable of explanation by any established physical laws I'm aware of." He paused. "I *have* ascertained one fact. Though the effect, whatever it was, was unquestionably widespread, it was strongest on the planet below us."

"Keep checking."

"Yes, Captain."

Uhura spoke. "Captain. Message coming in from Star Fleet Command. And the code, sir, it's Code Factor One."

The anxiety in her face reflected Kirk's sense of personal shock. Very seldom indeed did Star Fleet resort to Code Factor One to transmit a message. "Repeat," he told Uhura.

She said heavily, "It is Code Factor One, sir."

"Combat status!" Kirk shouted to Spock. He hit his communicator button. "All hands! This is the Captain. Battle stations! This is not a drill! Lieutenant Uhura, the main screen!"

"Aye, sir."

Sirens were shrieking as Kirk rushed to his command position. Over the noise his communicator beeped. It was McCoy. "About our patient, Jim—"

"Quickly, Bones!"

"He'll make it. He'll be flat on his back for at least a month. He's weak as a kitten but he'll pull through."

"Thank you, Bones. I'll be down to talk to him later. The message, Lieutenant Uhura . . ."

The strong face of Commodore Barstow came into focus on the screen.

"Kirk here, sir. *Enterprise* standing by."

The official voice spoke. "You're aware, Captain, of that effect that occurred an hour ago?"

"Yes, sir."

"You may not be aware of its scope. It was felt in every quadrant of the galaxy . . . and far beyond. Complete disruption of normal magnetic and gravimetric fields. Time warp distortion. Impossible radiation variations—and all of them centering in the area you are now patrolling. The question is . . . are they natural phenomena—or are they mechanically created? And if they are . . . by whom? For what purpose? Your guess, Captain . . ."

"My best guess, sir, is . . . because of the severity of the phenomena . . . they could be a prelude to an extra-universe invasion."

"Exactly our consensus. It's your job to make the finding specific."

"Aye, sir. Can you assign me other Starships as a reserve force?"

"Negative. I am evacuating all Star Fleet units and personnel within a hundred parsecs of your position. It's tough on you and the *Enterprise*—but that's the card you've drawn. You're on your own, Captain."

Kirk spoke slowly. "I see. You mean . . . we're the bait."

"Yes."

"I understand, sir. Received and recorded."

"Remember, you're the eyes and ears and muscle of the entire Federation. Good luck, Captain."

"Thank you, sir."

The screen's image faded. Kirk looked at the blankness for a long moment. Then he rose and crossed to Spock. "From the top, Mr. Spock. First, we know that the phenomena came from the planet below us. Second, that the danger is real and imminent."

"A closer examination of the surface would seem to be in order," Spock said. "My job, Captain?"

"Yes. And in the meantime I'll have a talk with our unexpected guest. Maybe he can provide some answers."

He certainly seemed able to provide them. In Sickbay, Kirk found McCoy staring dazedly at his patient. The man who'd been nearly pushed through the door of death was out of bed, doing deep knee bends while he inhaled great hearty gulps of air. Kirk stopped in mid-stride. "Bones! I thought you said—"

McCoy struggled to come out of his daze. "I know what I said and I was going to call you back . . . but Lazarus—"

"Aye!" shouted the patient. "Lazarus! Up and out of the grave! Hale, hearty and drunk with the wine of victory!"

If the man was mentally sick, he was surely in great physical shape. He had swiftly noted the dubious look on Kirk's face. "You want to know how I came to be down there, Captain? I'll tell you! I was pursuing the devil's own spawn—the thing I have chased across the universe! Oh, he's a humanoid, all right, outside—but on the inside, he's a ravening, murderous monster! But I'll get him yet! I've sworn it!"

"Why?" Kirk said.

The eyes under the heavy brows flamed. "The beast destroyed my entire civilization! To the last man, woman and child! Builders, educators, scientists—all my people! But he missed me. And I will bring him down! Yes, despite his weapons!"

Kirk said, "How did you escape?"

"I was inspecting our magnetic communication satellites, a thousand miles out."

"And he destroyed your whole civilization?" Kirk was openly incredulous.

"Oh, he's capable of it!" Lazarus assured him. "He's intelligent—I give him his due! But he is death! Anti-life! He lives to destroy! You believe me, don't you, Captain?"

"Just before we found you," Kirk said, "this ship sustained a number of dangerous and incredible effects. Could this humanoid of yours have been responsible?"

"Of course! It's what I've been telling you!"

He'd wanted an answer. Now he'd gotten one. If it wasn't too satisfying, it was the only one yet available. Lazarus seized on his hesitation. "Then you're with me!" he cried triumphantly. "You'll join my holy cause! You'll help me visit justice upon him—vengeance!"

"My sole cause is the security of my ship," Kirk said. "That and the mission it has undertaken. Bloodshed is not our cause. Remember that." He paused. "Now I want you to beam down to the surface with me. We shall check out your story."

They found Spock examining the conical craft's interior. Two crewmen were busy surveying its hull with tricorders.

"Find anything, Mr. Spock?" Kirk asked.

"Negative, Captain." Spock gestured toward Lazarus. "Did you?"

"According to our unexpected guest there's a creature of some sort down here—a humanoid."

Spock nodded. "Lieutenant Uhura communicated that information. I ordered reconfirmation on our sensors. They indicate no living creature on this planet. I suggest, Captain, that you have been lied to."

Kirk shot a hard look at Lazarus. Then he said, "Let's hear the rest of it, Mr. Spock."

"Lieutenant Uhura added his statement about some unusual weapon system at the humanoid's disposal."

"Aye!" yelled Lazarus. "He has that—and more! Enough to destroy a vessel as great as your *Enterprise*!"

"Does he?" Spock said mildly.

Lazarus was visibly irritated. "Yes," he said shortly.

Spock spoke to Kirk. "There are no weapons of any kind on the planet, Captain. Not in his craft. Nor on the surface. They do not exist."

"You must not believe him, Captain! This one of the pointed ears is just trying to disguise his own incompetence!"

Spock raised an eyebrow. "I don't understand your indignation, sir. I merely made the logical deduction that you are a liar."

Kirk wheeled sharply on Lazarus. "All right, let's have it! The truth this time. I—" He stopped. The air around them suddenly broke into shimmering sparkle. There came a sound like the buzzing of an angry bee. As though to ward it off, Lazarus lifted a hand. Then he fisted it, shaking it wildly at the sky. "You've come back then, is that it?" he shouted. "Well, don't stop! Here I am! Come at me again! We'll finish it!"

Ignoring him, Kirk spoke to Spock. "Can your tricorder identify that atmospheric effect?"

"It's—" Spock was saying when Lazarus bolted off to where the glitter sparkled most strongly. "Run! Run!" he screamed. "It will do you no good! I'll chase you into the very jaws of hell!"

"Lazarus!" Kirk cried. He raced after the man, calling back over his shoulder, "Remain there! All personnel on Security Red!"

He brought up in a rock-walled gully. Ahead of him Lazarus was clambering over its jagged debris. He was moving slowly when the shimmering sparkle engulfed him. At the same moment, Kirk saw that the sky, the rocks and the gully itself were trembling, shifting into indistinctness, their colors, their shapes, their masses liquefying and interflowing. They came into focus again. But Lazarus had staggered backward—and once more the liquefying shimmer had swallowed up the sight of him.

Flailing helplessly, he had tumbled into a peculiar tunnel. It was filled with a ghastly milky whiteness into which walls, roof and floor were constantly dissolving, leaving no solid point of reference required by humankind to determine its place in the universe. Unheard by Kirk, he shrieked, "*You!*" Then the manlike thing was on him. In deadly combat, they writhed, twisted together, hands grip-

ing for each other's throats. Lazarus was on his back, choking, when he made a supreme effort, muscles cracking with strain. His assailant was thrown backward. And disappeared into the drifting whiteness.

Reeling drunkenly, Lazarus staggered out of the tunnel into Kirk's sight. Before Kirk could reach him, he fell, striking his head against a boulder. He struggled up to his hands and knees, his face streaked with blood and sweat. Kirk ran to him.

"Lazarus! Where were you? What happened?"

Horror moved in the dazed eyes. "I . . . saw it again! The Thing! It attacked me. . . ."

"I'll take you back. Hold on to me."

As he was hefting the man to his feet, Spock came through the gully. He hurried to them but Lazarus pushed away his supporting arm. Stepping aside, Spock said, "That effect occurred again, Captain. And it centered right here . . . almost where we are standing."

Lazarus lifted his head. "I told you! It was the Thing! All whiteness . . . emptiness . . ."

Kirk wiped his face clear of its blood and sweat. "There's nothing you can do about it here. We're beaming back to the ship."

The man tried to wrench himself free of Kirk's grasp. "We must kill him first! He tried to kill me! Don't you understand? If we don't stop him, he will kill us all!"

As Kirk watched McCoy apply a dressing to the deep cut on his guest's forehead, doubt of the humanoid's existence continued to trouble him. He had not seen the humanoid. He had not seen the fight. Both had been invisible to him. All he had to go on was the word of Lazarus. He felt a sudden need to confer with Spock. There was a climate of controlled tension in the bridge as he entered it. At Spock's station he lowered his voice.

"Any luck, Mr. Spock?"

"Negative, Captain. I can no more explain the second phenomenon than I can the first."

"If there's a shred of truth in what Lazarus said—"

"That a humanoid—a single creature—could be responsible for an effect of such magnitude?"

"Hard to credit," Kirk said.

"Indeed, sir."

"But the rest of his tale seems to fit. His wounds testify to an apparent confrontation with *something*."

"Affirmative, sir."

Kirk took three restless paces and came back. "Then, assuming there is a humanoid, *how* does he cause the effects? He has no weapons, no power system . . ."

"I'm sorry, Captain. All I know for certain is that the occurrence of the phenomena seems to coincide exactly with the moments Lazarus has one of his alleged confrontations."

Uhura interrupted them. "Doctor McCoy, Captain, asking for you in Sickbay. He says it's urgent."

McCoy was troubled too. He was at his desk, drumming it impatiently with his fingers. "Jim, maybe I'm suffering from delusions; maybe I'm not. You tell me."

"No, Bones. You tell me. That's why I'm here."

McCoy swung around. "Thirty minutes ago you brought Lazarus here and I treated a deep abrasion on his forehead. Right?"

"Right."

"I treated that wound, bandaged it, then stepped in here for a moment."

"The point, Bones."

"Say he's got a constitution like a dinosaur. Recuperative powers ditto—and as we both know, I'm a bright young medic with a miraculous touch. But tell me this. Why, when I returned to my patient, wasn't there a trace of that wound on his forehead? Not even a bruise, Jim. It was as though he'd never been injured!"

Kirk was silent for a long moment. Then he said, "Where is he?"

"I'm just a country doctor, not a private detective. Maybe he stepped out for a cup of coffee. . . ."

But his goal was the *Enterprise* Recreation Room. Spock found him sitting at a table, quietly enjoying himself as he watched two crewmen playing a game. There was no bandage on his forehead. Spock moved to him. "May I sit down?"

He seemed to have recovered from his antagonism. "Yes, of course," he said.

"Earlier," Spock said, "I referred to you as a liar."

"Do you still think I am?"

"About some matters, yes."

Lazarus smiled. "You're very direct. I like that. If it will help make up your mind about me, ask your questions."

"I am curious about this civilization of yours . . . the one that was destroyed."

"It was much like that of Earth. Green, soft landscapes, blue seas, great cities, science, education. . . ."

"And the people?"

"Like any of us. Good, bad, beautiful, ugly, magnificent . . . terrible. Human. Satisfied?"

"The story you have told us is most strange and unlikely, as you yourself. You are hardly the same man I spoke to earlier."

"Don't blame me if I'm not consistent, Mr. Spock. Not even the universe is that."

"I prefer to think it is," Spock said.

He got a sharp stare. "Yes. Of course you would."

The wall communicator beeped. Spock got up and went to it. "Yes, Lieutenant Uhura?"

"You told me to notify you when the impulse readings reached the critical stage. They've done so."

"Thank you, Lieutenant." He returned to Lazarus. "If you will excuse me, I have an experiment in progress—one that may help me evaluate the facts."

"When you are certain of your facts, will you believe me then?"

"I always believe in facts, sir." He eyed the unbandaged forehead. "I must congratulate you on your remarkable recuperative powers. If time permitted, I would like to discuss them with you." He bowed. "Thank you for your company."

Lazarus was watching him leave when the shimmer suddenly sparkled again. He half-rose from the table, went pallid and almost fell from his chair. The sparkle subsided; and controlling his shaking knees, he moved out into the corridor. The effect came again. The corridor walls faded, dissolving. Then they were back, solid, real. Staring about, Lazarus hauled himself up from where he

had fallen. On his forehead was the white tape marking the wound he had received on the planet. He heard Kirk call, "Lazarus!"

McCoy saw him first. They rushed to him, Kirk taking his arm. "Are you all right?"

"What? Oh, yes, Captain. All right! But impatient! Have you decided to help me yet?"

McCoy was staring at him. He stepped forward, seized the edge of the tape and pulled it off. There was a red, neatly sliced cut in the bruised forehead.

"Well . . ." McCoy said.

Kirk, too, had his eyes fixed on the deep cut.

"Something wrong, Captain?" Lazarus asked.

Kirk glanced at McCoy. "No. Except that I have a ship's physician with a strange sense of humor."

McCoy wheeled. "Jim, this is no joke! I know what I saw!"

The wall communicator beeped. "Bridge. Calling the Captain."

Kirk hit the switch. "Kirk here."

Spock said, "Request you come up, sir."

"Find something?"

"Something quite extraordinary, Captain."

"On my way." He turned a cold eye on Lazarus. "You will come with me. I have some questions still to be answered."

Spock had ordered activation of the main viewing screen. It showed the planet flaring with a single needle point of blinking light. Spock joined Kirk. "A source of radiation, Captain."

"Why didn't our scanners pick it up before?"

"Because it isn't there," Spock said.

Kirk could feel the tension hardening in his midriff. "A riddle, Mr. Spock? First Bones, now you."

"What I meant, sir—is, according to usual scanning procedure, there is nothing there that could be causing the phenomenon."

"But the radiation point *is* there."

"Affirmative, sir." Spock hesitated. "I confess I am somewhat at a loss for words. It may be best described, though loosely and inaccurately . . . as a—" He paused

again, his embarrassment to be read only in the particular impassivity of his face. "As . . . a 'rip' in our universe."

"A *what?*"

"A peculiar physical warp, Captain, in which none of our established physical laws seem to apply with regularity. It was only with our di-lithium crystals that I was able to localize it."

Lazarus burst into speech. "Of course! The di-lithium crystals! Their power—that could do it!" He whirled to Kirk with a wild shout. "We've got him now, Captain! We've got him!"

"You refer to the humanoid?" Spock inquired.

"Yes! By the gods, *yes!* Now we have him!"

"What have the crystals got to do with it? All they show is a point of radiation," Kirk said.

"But that's it! That's the key—the solution! That's how we can trap him! I implore you . . . I beg you . . . I demand—*give me those crystals!*"

Kirk shook his head. "Out of the question. The crystals are the very heart of my ship's power."

The eyes that glared at him were congested with blood. "Fool, don't you understand? There'll *be* no ship unless this monster is killed! He'll destroy all of you!"

Kirk gritted his teeth. "How, Lazarus? *How?* All I've heard from you is doubletalk—lies—threats that never materialize—explanations that don't hold a drop of water! Now you tell me—*how is my ship in danger? How?*"

The face tightened into hard determination. Lazarus turned and started toward the elevator.

Kirk shouted his name. The man whirled around, fury distorting his heavy features. "I warn you, Captain—you will give me the crystals!"

Kirk spoke very quietly. "Don't threaten me."

"I'm not threatening you. I am telling you I will have my vengeance!" The elevator whirred open and he was gone.

Kirk's tension had broken into open rage. He turned to a guard. "Security! From now on he's your job—your *only* job! If he does anything, tries to—anything at all unusual—notify me at once!"

The guard was already moving toward the elevator.

In the Engineering section Charlene Masters was directing the procedure required to recharge the di-lithium crystals. She had opened one of the bins when her assistant turned from the intercom. "Lieutenant Masters," he said, "the Captain is calling."

She moved off to the far wall. As she turned her back, a figure edged from the shadow behind the bins toward the assistant. A powerful arm encircled the man's neck, applying hard pressure to the throat. Then quietly, almost tenderly, it eased him to the ground.

The oblivious Charlene was listening to Kirk say, "Can you prepare an experimentation chamber in ten minutes? All di-lithium crystals full power, Lieutenant."

"I'll check, sir." She returned to the bins for readings and went back to the intercom. "Captain? Chamber will be ready in ten minutes. My assistant and I—"

A hand clamped over her mouth. Kirk heard her choking gurgle. "Lieutenant Masters? Masters, what's wrong?"

She managed to wrench her head free for a brief instant. "Captain. . . .!" Her eyes were glazing as she was dropped to the deck.

The Lazarus of the powerful arm bore no sign of a cut on his forehead.

It was a furious Kirk who called the meeting in the Briefing Room. Lazarus, the red wound back on his forehead, sat at the head of the table. Kirk paced up and down behind his chair, his eyes on the blackening finger marks on Charlene Masters' throat. He waited for Spock to enter before he spoke.

"Two of my crewmen have been attacked—and two of our di-lithium crystals are missing! Without them this ship cannot operate at full power. They must be found!"

He seized the back of the chair Lazarus sat in. Wheeling around, he shouted, "Fact! You said you needed those crystals! Fact! Within an hour after telling me you must have them, *they are missing!*"

Lazarus half-rose from the chair. "And fact!" he cried. "*I didn't take the crystals!*"

His head drooped. "I'm not the one, Captain," he said

quietly. "In me the *Enterprise* found only an orphan. . . . Find my enemy. Find the beast—and you'll find your crystals!"

"And just how did your beast get aboard my ship?"

"He has ways! There's no end to his evil!"

Kirk looked at Spock. "If the creature transported up—"

"Lazarus laughed. "Transport *up*? I tell you, we are dealing with a Thing capable of destroying worlds! He has your crystals!"

"But why, sir?" Spock asked mildly. "Again we must put the question to you. For what purposes?"

Lazarus leaped from his chair. "The same as mine! Why don't you listen to me? He's humanoid! He can operate a ship! Compute formulas to exterminate a race! Strangle a man with his bare hands! Or steal an energy source for his vehicle in order to escape me! Are you deaf as well as blind?"

There was something wrong. Trust of this man was impossible to come by. The frustration piled up in Kirk until his fists clenched. "Mr. Spock, the crystals certainly aren't here. There is an unexplained source of radiation on the planet. There is clearly some connection. We'll check it out. Prepare a search party at once. Mr. Lazarus will beam down with us."

Lazarus smiled. "Thank you, Captain."

Kirk's voice was harsh. "You may not have reason to thank me. That will depend on what we find."

The cone-shaped craft still lay at the base of the cliff. As Kirk opened its door, Lazarus went to him. "Now what do you believe, Captain?"

"I believe the missing crystals are not in your ship. Mr. Spock?"

"Unable to locate the radiation source, sir."

"Why not? You had it spotted from the ship."

"It simply seems to have disappeared."

Kirk spoke to the guards. "I want every inch of this terrain checked. Look for footprints, movement, anything. If you spot something, call out. And don't be afraid to use your weapons."

The party fanned out over the terrain, each man at once becoming aware of its empty loneliness. No trees, no vegetation—just the unfolding vista of rock in its multiple formations. Lazarus climbed to a craggy ridge, spined like an emaciated dinosaur petrified by the eons. Along its left slope glacial boulders balanced precariously over a steepness that dropped to a long defile. It ran parallel to the ridge; and Kirk, his tricorder out, was exploring it. Lazarus, lost to sight between two jutting rocks, clutched at one as the space around him began to shimmer. In the hideous sparkle, the rocks, the sky, the very ground under his feet seemed to fade and melt. He spun around, peering for his enemy. But there was only the shimmering nothingness. He found that his movement was slowed down. Stumbling forward, he lurched into a milky-white cocoon place—and a blow struck him to his knees. Vaporlike stuff was in his eyes, his nose, his throat. The vague shape of his assailant leaped on him. They wrestled blindly, bits of the stuff drifting over them. Lazarus kicked the thing. It fell back and vanished as though it had dropped into eternity.

Then the world was solid again. Lazarus careened wildly, still fighting off the absent enemy. He tripped against a rock at the edge of the ridge. It teetered. Lunging forward, he shouted, "*Captain! Look out!*"

Kirk leaped aside. And the massive rock crashed into the defile where he'd been moving the moment before. Then the edge of the ridge crumbled. Lazarus fell at Kirk's feet.

When Spock found them, dust was still drifting down on both men.

McCoy had a stretcher waiting in the Transporter Room. Lazarus was still unconscious. In Sickbay his recovery came hard. Kirk saw the horror twist his face as he struggled back into awareness. He tried to leap from the examining table.

"The Thing!" he cried hoarsely.

"You're on the *Enterprise* now," Kirk said. "Doctor McCoy says you'll be all right."

"How's your head?" McCoy asked.

A hand touched the cut forehead. "It aches."

"You saved my life down there," Kirk said. "I thank

you for that." He paused. "But I have to ask you some questions."

"Jim! A possible concussion—"

"It's necessary!" Kirk flared.

"Go ahead, Captain," Lazarus said.

"I am holding," Kirk said, "a computer report on the information you gave us during your initial screening. It calls you a liar, Lazarus. For one thing, there is no planet at the location you claimed to have come from. There never has been."

Lazarus sat up, his eyes on Kirk's face. "You wouldn't believe the truth if I told it to you," he said slowly.

"Try us," Kirk said.

"About my home planet . . . I distorted a fact in the interest of self-preservation and my sacred cause. You, too, are a stranger to me, Captain—an unknown factor." He swung his legs from the table, making a tentative effort to stand.

"I needed help, not censure," he said. "Freedom, not confinement as a madman. If I told you the truth, I feared that was what you'd call me."

"The truth now, if you please," Kirk said.

Lazarus looked at him, his deep passion thickening his voice. "All right, sir! My planet, my home—or what's left of it—is down there below us!"

Kirk stared at him, dumbfounded. "What are you saying?"

"That my space ship is more than a space ship. It is also a time chamber . . . a time ship. And I, if you will, am a time traveler."

Kirk frowned. This man was a compounder of mysteries. All he had told were lies . . . and yet that vessel of his, like nothing before seen on heaven or earth, its unrecognizable complexities. . . . He spoke tonelessly. "And this thing you search for? Is it a time traveler, too?"

The eyes went wild. "Yes! He's fled me across all the years, all the empty years! To a dead future on the dead planet he murdered!" He was feverish now, staggering to his feet. "Help me, man! You have more crystals! Give me the tools I need to kill him!" He tottered and McCoy grabbed him. He wrenched free of the supporting arm,

"The crystals! What are they to the abomination I hunt? What is anything compared to its supernal evil? Do you want him to get away?"

"Lazarus, there are a lot of things going on that we know nothing about. But *you* know. Now tell me—*where are our crystals?*"

"I told you!" Lazarus shouted. "He has them! He took them!"

They had to ease him back on the table or he would have fallen. He lay there, prone, his eyes glassy, face streaming with sweat. McCoy said, "He's got to rest, Jim. And would you mind getting that muscle man out of my Sickbay?"

Nodding, Kirk dismissed the guard. Uneasy, he watched McCoy cover Lazarus with a sheet. There was a deep sigh and the eyes closed. "He's in a lot of pain, Jim."

"Pain," Kirk said. "Sometimes it can drive a man harder than pleasure." He looked at the face on the table. It was whiter than the sheet. "But I guess he won't be going anywhere for a while—not this time."

As the door closed behind them, the sheeted form moved. The eyes opened. Grasping the table, Lazarus hauled himself to his feet. He faltered, shaking his head to clear it. Then, cautiously, stealthily, motored by his inexorable determination, he moved to the door.

Kirk chose the Briefing Room to put the Big Questions to Spock. He turned from his restless pacing to cry, "But just what have we got? A magnetic effect which produces your 'wink-out' phenomenon. And a mysterious, unidentifiable source of radiation on the planet. Lazarus, a walking powder-keg. Your 'rip' in the universe. That murdering humanoid none of us have seen . . ."

Spock looked up from his computer tie-in. "True, Captain. But what is significant to me is the fact that our ship's instruments are specifically designed to locate and identify any physical object in the universe, whether it be matter or energy."

"But using them you were unable to identify that source of radiation on the planet!"

"Correct, sir."

"Are the instruments in order?"

"In perfect operating condition."

"Then what you say leaves only one conclusion. The source of that radiation is not of our universe."

"Nor in it, Captain. It came from outside."

Kirk resumed his pacing. "Yes—outside of it. That would explain a lot! Another universe . . . perhaps in another dimension . . . but occupying the same space at the same time."

"The possibility of the existence of a parallel universe has been scientifically conceded, Captain."

"All right. What would happen if another universe, say a minus universe, came into contact with a positive one such as ours?"

"Unquestionably a warp, Captain. A distortion of physical laws on an immense scale."

"That's what we have been experiencing! The point where they touch—couldn't it be described as a hole?"

Their two minds seemed to meet and meld. Spock nodded vigorously. "Indeed, Captain. I also point out that a hole in the universe—or in a simple container—can either allow the contents to escape or—"

"What is outside to enter it!" Kirk shouted. "Mr. Spock, the invasion that Commodore Barstow suspected!"

"There is no evidence of any large-scale invasion, sir."

"But a small-scale invasion! Spock! What's your evaluation of the mental state of Lazarus?"

"At one moment, paranoid. But the next, calm, rational, mild. Almost as if he were—" Spock paused on the edge of light. "Almost as if he were two men."

"Exactly! Two men—different but identical. And a hole in the universe! No! Not a hole! A door, Spock, a door!"

"You *are* hypothesizing a parallel universe, Captain!"

"And why not? It's theoretically possible! Look at Lazarus! One minute he's at the point of death . . . but the next alive and well, strong as a bull. That cut on his forehead. First he has it, then it's gone—and then he has it again! For one man it's all physically impossible!"

"I agree, Captain. There are unquestionably two of him."

"But . . . what's going on? This leaping from one uni-

verse to the other? The wild rant about a murdering thing that destroys civilizations! What's the purpose?"

"Captain, madness has no purpose. No reason. But—it could have a goal!" Spock's face was stony as his Vulcan blood triumphed over his human agitation. "He must be stopped, Captain! Destroyed, if necessary."

"Spock, I'm not following you now."

"Two universes, sir! Project this! One positive, one negative. Or, more specifically, one of them matter—and the other one, antimatter!"

Kirk regarded him for a tense moment. "But matter and antimatter—they cancel one another out . . . violently."

"Precisely . . . under certain conditions. When identical particles of matter and antimatter meet—identical, Captain, like—"

"Like Lazarus—like the two of them. Identical, except that one is matter and the other antimatter. And if they meet . . ."

Kirk had never heard Spock's voice so somber. "Annihilation, Captain. Total, complete, annihilation . . ."

"And of everything that exists . . . everywhere. . ."

It was a moment for failure in speech. They stared at each other as the fate of worlds, known and unknown, dropped itself into their laps.

Lazarus found the corridor deserted. He turned the corner that led to Engineering; and sidling through its door, went swiftly to an electrical relay panel. Its maze of wires struck him as primitive. It took him barely a moment to remove a tool from his jumper suit, detach a connection and affix the wire to a different terminal. Closing the panel, he waited, a shadow in the darker shadow behind a throbbing dynamo.

Far to his left, Charlene Masters was studying the effect of recharge on her di-lithium crystals. Above the bins the needle of a thermometerlike device had wavered up toward a red mark. It climbed above it—and a wisp of smoke drifted up from one of the lower dials. She looked away from the installation to examine the chart held by her assistant. They smelled the smoke at the same time. "The energizer! It's shorted!" she cried.

There was a flashing spray of sparks. A great, billowing cloud of smoke engulfed them. "Get out of here, Ensign! Sound the alarm!" She was coughing.

"You, too, Lieutenant!"

"No! I've got to—"

"You've got to get out of here!" he shouted. "The whole bank might blow!" He seized her arm, dragging her through the still-thickening smoke. Half-blinded, choking, they staggered out into the corridor. As they passed him, Lazarus, a piece of torn sheet held over his nose and mouth, shut the door quietly behind them.

Charlene was at the wall communicator. "Engineering! Fire! Energizing circuits!"

Uhura whirled from her board. "Fire, Captain! Engineering! Situation critical!"

"All available hands, Lieutenant! On the double! Spock! On me!"

The Ensign, still coughing, his face black-streaked, met them at the door to Engineering. "Under control, sir. But it couldn't have— Captain, that fire did not start by itself!"

Spock said, "Lazarus, Captain? A ruse? To get at the di-lithium crystals?"

"Way ahead of you, Mr. Spock."

They both plunged into the smoky room. Coughing, Kirk groped his way to the bins. "He's got them all right. And he's beaming down right now. I'm going after him. Get together a Security detail. Follow me as soon as you can."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Lazarus had tied the crystals in the torn sheet. Materialized, he hurried directly to his craft. In its working area, he unwrapped them exultantly. Shaking his fist at his invisible foe, he yelled, "Now I'll do it. I have a threshold! Run! Run! I've got you now!"

Bending to his labor, he selected certain rods and wires that soon assumed the shape of a protective frame before the ship's entrance. He worked quickly, arranging what were obviously premade units. In them he carefully placed the di-lithium crystals. When the last one was safely in-

stalled, he raised his fists skyward, howling like a wolf, "It's done! It's finished! Finished!"

Kirk, nearing the ship, heard him. Phaser extended, he said, "Wrong, Lazarus. *You're* finished. Through. Back up!" He stepped through the door.

"No!" Lazarus shrieked.

The warning came too late. The shimmering sparkles flared. Kirk vanished.

Lazarus, head huddled in his arms, cried, "No! Not you! *Not you!*"

For Kirk, banished into the tunnel of negative magnetism, time and space died. He was spinning in a kind of slow motion where familiar time was boundless and empty space stuff that broke off against his face in fluffy hunks. He was falling but he was also rising. He was twisting while at the same time he lay still. The nightmare of an absolute disorientation was crawling over him. The shimmer shimmered. It faded—and he found himself on his hands and knees, fighting nausea.

Vaguely, with disinterest, he saw rocks, gullies, the old dry desolation, the cliff that sheltered the time craft. The ship was gone. There was no sign of it—no sign of anything or anybody. He got slowly to his feet, staring at the cliff base where the craft should have been. After a moment, he hefted the phaser in his hand, unsure that it was real. It was—solid, real against his palm. He looked around again before he called, "Hello!"

The word echoed back from the rocks. Then only the silence spoke.

He took off at a run up a slope. It gave on to a plateau. The time craft was there, set in a little open space, but no sign of life about it. Then the Lazarus of the uncut forehead rose from his stooping position. He, too, was rigging some kind of framework before the ship's entrance. He smiled at the aimed phaser. "Welcome, Captain. I wasn't expecting you."

"No," Kirk said. "*Him.*"

"You understand then?"

"Not completely. This is clearly a parallel universe."

"Of course."

"Antimatter?"

"Here, yes."

"And if identical particles meet . . ."

"The end of everything, Captain. Of creation. Of existence. All gone." He squared his broad shoulders. "I'm trying to stop him. It's why I took your di-lithium crystals."

"He has two more."

Lazarus searched Kirk's face. "That's very bad, Captain. If he can come through, at a time of his own choosing. But I think, if we hurry . . . and you will help me, he can yet be stopped. But we have little time."

It was Spock who materialized before the other time ship, still at the foot of the cliff. The matter Lazarus, the wound on his forehead, stood at its door, violently waving his arms. "Back! Back!" he screamed. "If you ever want to see your Captain alive again, get back!"

"Do what he says," Spock told his Security guards.

Up on the plateau, the second Lazarus had his threshold frame almost completed. He pointed to a tool; and as Kirk handed it to him, he said, "He meant to come through this but when you accidentally contacted it, it drained his crystals. It will take him at least ten minutes to re-energize with the equipment on board his craft. That should give us time enough. . . ."

"Just exactly what did I contact?" Kirk said.

"I call it the alternative warp, Captain. It's the negative magnetic corridor where the parallel universes come together. It's . . . the safety valve. It keeps eternity from blowing up."

"This corridor," Kirk said. "Is it what caused the magnetic effect—that sort of 'wink-out' phenomenon?"

"Precisely, Captain. But not because of its existence. Only because *he* entered it. The corridor is like a jail with explosives attached to its door. Open the door—and the explosives may detonate. Stay inside the corridor—"

"And the universe is safe," Kirk said.

"Your universe and mine, Captain. Both of them."

"Surely he must know what would happen if he ever does meet you face to face outside that corridor."

"Of course he knows. But he is mad, Captain. You've heard him. His mind is gone. When our people found the way to slip through the warp . . . when they proved the existence of another identical universe, it was too much

for him. He could not live, knowing that I lived. He became obsessed with passion to destroy me. The fact that my death would also destroy him—and everything else—cannot matter to him.”

Kirk spoke slowly. “So you’re the terrible Thing . . . the murdering monster . . . the creature of evil. . . .”

“Yes. Or he is. It depends on the point of view, doesn’t it?”

He made a final adjustment. “It’s ready, Captain. If we can force him into the corridor while I’m there waiting for him, we can put an end to this. But if he comes through the warp at a time of his own choosing—and breaks into this universe to find me”

“I understand,” Kirk said. “What do you want me to do?”

“Find him. Force him through his threshold frame and into the corridor. I’ll be waiting. I’ll hold him there.”

Kirk’s face had fallen into very sober lines. “You can’t hold him forever.”

“Can’t I, Captain? You are to destroy his ship.”

“But if I do that—won’t this one also be destroyed?”

“It will.”

“And that door—that warp—will be closed to you.”

“Yes. But it will be closed to him, too.”

“You’ll be trapped with him,” Kirk said. “You’ll be trapped with him in that corridor forever . . . at each other’s throats . . . throughout the rest of time.”

“Is it such a large price to pay for the safety of two universes?”

Lazarus reached out and placed Kirk within the frame of his threshold. “The safety of two universes.” Kirk looked at the brave man. “Are you sure you want me to do this?”

“You must do it, Captain. We have no choice. Are you ready?”

Kirk’s voice was steady. “I’m ready.”

“Send him to me. I’ll be waiting in the corridor.”

He threw a switch. The shimmering sparkles tingled over Kirk’s body—and he was back on the plateau, the other space craft before him. Spock ran toward him. He shook his head, waving him back.

The first Lazarus was busy at his threshold frame, his

back to Kirk. He moved a lever. The structure glowed, then flashed into glitter. "You're done!" he told it exultantly.

Kirk jumped him. But he whirled in time to block the tackle with his heavy body. Then they closed, wrestling, Kirk, silent, intent, boring in as he fought to back the man into the frame. His aim became clear to Lazarus. "No!" he yelled. "You can't! I'm not ready! Not now! Not yet!" He seized a thick metal tool for bludgeon. Kirk ducked the blow, rising fast to connect a hard fist to his jaw. Lazarus wavered; and Kirk held him, pushing, pushing him backward until he stumbled, toppling over into the frame. The sparkle caught him. There was a blinding glare of whiteness—and he was gone.

Kirk pulled in a deep lungful of breath. Spock took over. Turning to his men, he said, "Get those di-lithium crystals back to the ship. Hurry!" Then he spoke to Kirk. "Captain, am I right in guessing that this craft must be completely destroyed?"

"To the last particle."

"And what of Lazarus, sir?"

"Yes," Kirk said. "What of Lazarus, Mr. Spock?"

There was no out. And Kirk, back in his command chair, knew it. He'd chosen the Service; and if he'd been unaware of what would be required of a Starship Captain back in those long-ago Academy days, the choice was still his. Nor could any human being expect to foresee the consequences of any decision. Met up with them, all you could do was deal with them as responsibly as you could. He'd had to remind himself of this truth a thousand times—but this time . . .

He spoke into his intercom. "Activate phaser banks."

Somebody said, "Phaser banks activated, sir."

"Stand by to fire."

Under the words Kirk was seeing that corridor of negative magnetism. A man of solid Earth, he was remembering its frightful unearthliness, its chilling paradoxes—and he saw two men, two humans locked into it, embattled, each of them winning and losing, rising and falling, eternally victorious and eternally vanquished throughout an unbroken Forever.

He licked dry lips.

"Phasers standing by, sir."

His lips felt rough. He licked them. "Fire phasers," he said.

The beams struck the ship on the plateau. It disintegrated. Then they switched to the one at the cliff's base. It burst into flame and vanished. On the screen only the desolate landscape remained.

Solution—simple.

"Let's get out of here," Kirk said. He turned to the helmsman. "Warp one, Mr. Leslie."

"Warp one, sir."

Spock was beside him. "Everything all right, Captain?"

"It is for us, Mr. Spock."

Spock nodded. "There is, of course, no escape for them."

"No, Mr. Spock. No escape at all. How would it be to be trapped with that raging madman at your throat . . . at your throat throughout Time everlasting? How would it be?"

"But the universe is safe, Captain."

"Yes . . . for you and me. But what of Lazarus?" He paused as though posing the question to that universe Lazarus had saved.

The stars slid by the *Enterprise*. They didn't answer its Captain.

THE EMPATH

(Joyce Muskat)

The second star in the Minarian system was entering a critical period of its approaching nova phase. Accordingly, the *Enterprise* had been ordered to evacuate personnel of the research station which was established on the star to study the phenomena of its coming death. But all the Starship's attempts to contact the scientists had failed. Kirk, his urgent mission in mind, decided to beam down to the surface to try to locate their whereabouts.

He, Spock and McCoy materialized on a bleak landscape, grim and forbidding under a sky already red with the light of the imminent nova. A gust of harsh wind blew dirt in their faces. It also rattled the door of a metal hut a few yards to their right. "It's the research station," Kirk said. He led the way to it. Its door gave way under a push. The hut was deserted, but its interior, a combination of living quarters and laboratory, was neatly arranged. In a corner, Kirk spotted a video-tape recorder.

Spock ran his hand over a table. "Dust," he said. "Apparently, their instruments have not been recently in use."

The recorder still held a tape card. Kirk was about to insert it when his communicator beeped. Handing the tape to Spock, he flipped it open. It said, "*Enterprise* to Captain Kirk. Come in, please."

"Kirk here. Go ahead, *Enterprise*."

"Scott here, Captain. Our instruments have picked up a gigantic solar flare with very high levels of cosmic rays."

"How bad?" Kirk said.

"Sensors indicate cosmic-ray concentration measures 3.51 on the Van Allen scale. It'll play the devil with the crew as well as the ship, sir."

Spock spoke. "On that basis it will take exactly 74.1 solar hours for the storm to pass, Captain."

"Warp her out of orbit right now! Mr. Scott, stay at the minimum distance for *absolute* safety!"

"Aye, aye, sir. We'll beam you up in—"

Kirk interrupted, "Negative. We're staying here. The atmosphere of the planet will protect us. Now get my ship out of danger, Mr. Scott!"

"Very well, Captain. Scott out."

"Kirk out." Closing his communicator, he turned to Spock. "Mr. Spock . . . how about that tape?"

Spock had been examining it. As he inserted it into the recorder, he said, "Whatever we see and hear, Captain, happened approximately two weeks ago."

Activated, the device's viewing screen lit up. It showed two men checking equipment against the hut's background. "The one on the left is Dr. Linke," Kirk said. "The other is Dr. Ozaba. Does the speaker work, Spock?"

It worked. Linke was saying, ". . . another week in this godforsaken place . . ."

He lurched to the shaking of a brief earthquake. Ozaba grinned. "*In His hand are the deep places of the earth. Psalm 95, Verse 4. I wish He'd calm them down. . .*"

Abruptly, sound and picture ended. The recorder emitted a deep organlike chord. It grew louder—and the picture returned to image the scientists searching for the source of the sound. Their lips moved but their voices were overwhelmed by the rising chord's reverberation. Suddenly Ozaba clutched his head, staggering in pain. As Linke rushed forward to help him, Ozaba winked out. Terrified, Linke stared around the hut. Then he too began to stagger. He disappeared. The sound faded and the screen went blank.

Appalled, McCoy cried, "Jim, what happened to them?"

As though in answer the strange sound came again, gathering around the *Enterprise* men. Spock swiftly unlimbered his tricorder while Kirk and McCoy frantically searched for some clue to the noise.

"Where's it coming from?" Kirk shouted. "Spock, can you pin it down?"

"Negative, Captain! This 'sound' doesn't register on my tricorder!" He bent his head to check the instrument when his eyes glazed. His hands went to his head as though the

increasing sound were crushing it. He reeled drunkenly. Kirk, rushing to him, put out an arm to steady him. Then Spock winked out.

Kirk stared around him in horror. The sound intensified. "Bones!" Kirk yelled. "Spock—he's gone!"

But McCoy was gripping his head. Then, he too staggered. Even as Kirk raced to him, he vanished. Stunned, Kirk stood still. The hammer of sound beat at him. He began to struggle forward like a man fighting the pull of a monstrous magnet. He stumbled against a metal staircase and fell, cutting his head. As he hauled himself back to his feet, he winked out.

The triumphant sound rose higher in the empty hut.

Time passed. How much, they never knew. But something had transported them into the center of an arenalike place. When a blinding, overhead, circular light came on, they found themselves able to move. Kirk groped up to his knees. Beyond the circle of light, the arena's boundaries were lost in total darkness. The cut on his head throbbed.

"Bones . . . Spock. Spock, where are we?"

McCoy had seen the cut. He reached for his medikit and, struggling to his feet, dealt with the injury. Spock was checking his tricorder. "We are exactly 121.32 meters below the planet's surface, Captain."

"How did we get here?"

"Residual energy readings indicate that we were beamed here by a matter-energy scrambler not dissimilar to our own Transporter mechanism."

"Is that cut very painful, Jim?"

Kirk nodded, shrugging; and Spock, his eyes still on his tricorder, said, "Captain, I'm picking up a life form . . . bearing 42 mark seven."

"Could it be one of the missing scientists?"

"Negative, sir. Although humanoid, it is definitely not *Homo sapiens*."

"Identification?"

"Impossible. I can make no exact identification other than that it is humanoid."

"Then let's find out what it is. Phasers on stun!"

It was the tricorder that guided them through the dimness ahead. The brilliant light which had illuminated the

arena's center didn't reach to its outer space. But, stumbling along it, they could finally discern what seemed to be a narrow, circular platform—a platform or a couch. On it lay a figure. It was very still.

Spock extended the tricorder. "The life form, Captain."
"What is it?" Kirk said.

The creature stirred. As it sat up, lights blazed in a sharply outlined circle over the couch. The being stood up. It had the body of a girl and it was clothed in a gossamer stuff that glittered with the sparkle of diamonds. Her skin was dead white. Dark hair clustered around her temples. But it was her eyes that riveted Kirk's. They were large, shining—the most expressive eyes he'd ever seen in his life.

McCoy started forward.

"Careful!" Kirk said sharply.

"She seems to be harmless enough, Jim."

"The sand-bats of Manark-4," Spock said, "appear to be inanimate rock crystals before they attack."

Kirk moved cautiously toward her. "I am James Kirk, Captain of the USS *Enterprise*." He gestured back to the others. "This is my Science Officer, Mr. Spock, and Doctor McCoy, Ship's Surgeon. We are not going to hurt you." He paused, still fascinated by the eyes. "Do you live here? Is this . . . your home?"

She didn't answer.

"Spock, analysis?"

"From what we know of gravity and other environmental conditions on this planet, a life form such as hers could not evolve here," McCoy said.

"Agreed, Doctor," Spock said. "She is obviously not of this planet."

"Why are you here?" Kirk asked her.

She shrugged. He persisted. "Are you responsible for bringing us here?" Despite her eyes, he was beginning to feel exasperated. "At least you must know how you got here!"

She shrank back. Aware that he had frightened her, Kirk relaxed. "Don't be afraid," he said gently. "You must not fear me." His reassurance didn't seem to reassure her. How should he approach this sensitive creature with the remarkable eyes? He turned to McCoy. "What about it, Bones? What's wrong with her?"

McCoy looked up from his readings. "She's mute . . . no vocal cords, not even vestigials. And it doesn't look like a pathological condition."

"Explain."

"As far as I can tell, she's perfectly healthy. As for the other, my guess is that the lack of vocal cords is physiologically normal for her species, whatever that is."

"A whole race of mutes . . . like the Gamma Vertis-4 civilization?"

"That's my opinion, for what it's worth."

"Without speech, how's she able to understand us? Unless she's a telepath. Could telepathic power have been used to bring us here?"

Spock said, "An unlikely possibility, Captain. Over ninety-eight percent of the known telepathic species send thoughts as well as receive them. She has made no attempt to contact our thoughts."

Kirk looked at her intently for a long moment. Then his hand went to his forehead, pressing tightly against its pulsing ache. As he sank down on the couch, something in the girl's white face moved McCoy to say, "We can't keep calling her 'she' as though she weren't here!"

"You have any suggestions?" Kirk said.

"I don't know about you two, but I'm going to call her 'Gem.'" Conscious of Spock's raised eyebrow, he added a defiant, "At least it's better than 'hey you!'"

Kirk got to his feet. "I want to know why we're here—what's going on. The girl may know. Spock, try the Vulcan mind meld."

Nodding, Spock went to the couch, hands extended to make contact with her. But she had watched his approach with panic. Spock, touching her arm, recoiled.

"Spock, what is it!"

"Her mind doesn't function like ours, Captain. I felt it trying to draw on *my* consciousness. Like a magnet. I could gain nothing from her."

High above their heads, like a theater's mezzanine, was a semicircular construction. And like a theater director and stage manager, placed for a different viewpoint of the actors below them, two figures were observing the little drama being enacted on the platform-stage beneath them. An organ chord sounded.

Kirk, Spock and McCoy whirled as one man.

Slowly the figures descended from their eminence. Tall, clad in floor-length robes, their bodies were muscular and agile but their faces were old, their heads bald. Among the wrinkles of great age, their eyes blazed with a purpose that was barren of all warmth or emotion. Each bore a curious silver object in his right hand. It had the shape of a T. Ignoring the men, they advanced on the cowering Gem. Again, as one man, the *Enterprise* trio moved forward protectively in front of her.

Kirk spoke. "I am—"

He was interrupted. The figure on the left said, "We are aware of your identity, Captain."

"Who are you? Why have you brought us here?"

The voice was as cold as death. "We are Vians. My name is Lal. This is Thann." A finger pointed to Gem. "Do not interfere!"

"What do you intend to do to her?"

"Delay us no longer!"

It was Thann who spoke. As he started forward, Kirk moved swiftly to block his way to the girl. Lal raised his silver T-bar and Kirk was hurled up and over her couch. The crashdown reopened the cut on his forehead. It began to bleed. Wiping blood from his eyes, he hauled himself back to his feet and, pulling out his phaser, called "Phasers on stun!" Then he circled the couch to confront the Vians. "Since you already know who we are, you must also know that we come in peace. Our prime directive specifically prohibits us from interfering with any. . . ."

The Vians directed their T-bars at the three *Enterprise* men. Their phasers, flying out of their hands, dissolved into air. They tried to reach Gem—and a pulsing, multicolored force field enveloped them.

Thann was stooping over the girl, touching his T-bar to her head. It emitted a chilling whine. They all saw that her white face was transfixed with terror. With a concerted effort, they gathered all their strength to strain against the force field. McCoy was the first to weaken. Then it was Kirk's turn. His head swam, blurring his vision so that everything—the place, Gem, the Vians, his friends' faces, spun wildly in a vertiginous mist.

"Bones . . . I . . . can't seem to stand up. . . ."

"Stand still!" McCoy said sharply. "You too, Spock! Don't fight it, don't move! Somehow this field upsets the body metabolism. . . ."

Lai's cold eyes focused on McCoy. "Not quite, Doctor. The field draws its energy *from* your bodies. The more you resist it, the stronger it becomes."

He nodded to Thann, who moved away from Gem. When he lifted his T-bar, the chord sounded. Both Vians disappeared—and the force field collapsed so suddenly that its prisoners fell to the floor.

Kirk gritted his teeth against the pain in his head. "Mr. Spock, there must be an exit from this place. See if you can find it."

"Yes, Captain." Tricorder out, Spock moved off to quarter the arena.

"Jim that's a nasty cut," McCoy said. "Let me have another look at it."

"Don't fuss over me, Bones. They may have hurt the girl." He went to Gem on the couch. "Did they hurt you?" he asked her.

She shook her head. Then, timidly, she touched Kirk's hands. At once pain twisted her face. She drew back; but after a moment, she raised her arm to lay a finger on his throbbing head. To his amazement he saw a cut, identical in size to his own, appear on her forehead. Marveling, he looked at the deep gash. Extending a hand, he touched it gently. It was wet with blood. She took the hand, holding it quietly. And he knew that his wound was gone. At the same instant, hers vanished. Kirk stood up feeling fully refreshed and whole.

McCoy was staring. Kirk nodded. "Yes. The pain is gone. Soon after she touched my head it went."

"And the wound is completely healed! What's more, it fits in, Jim. She must be an *empath*! Her nervous system is so highly responsive, so sensitive that she can actually *feel* others' emotional and physical reactions. They become part of her."

Kirk smiled at Gem. "What does one say for what you've done? My thanks."

"Captain . . ." It was Spock returning. He pointed to the left. "In that direction my tricorder picked up a sub-

stantial collection of objects—electronically sophisticated devices. I fail to understand why the tricorder gave no previous indication of anything out there.”

“It’s there now, Mr. Spock. Let’s check it out.” They were turning to leave when Kirk looked back at Gem. “Wait a minute.” He went to her. “If they find you alone here, it could be dangerous. Will you come with us?”

She nodded, rising from the couch.

Because of the dimness the going was slow. They had to edge past large, contorted rock formations that reared up out of sight. Then, ahead of them, Kirk saw a glimmer of light. As they approached it, the rocks ended and the light grew brilliantly dazzling. It shone down from the ceiling of what seemed to be an enormous laboratory. An odd laboratory. All its complex instrumentation hung in midair.

They spread out to examine it. McCoy, Gem beside him, puzzled over an octagonal, bulb-studded object. Spock had gone straight to the viewing screens; but Kirk, after a cursory glance at a blank panel, was peering into blackness that lay beyond the light’s reach. Suddenly glare struck him in the face. It illuminated the lab’s dark corner. He backed away, disbelief and horror struggling in his face. “Spock, Bones. *Look!*”

Two large test tubes were suspended from the ceiling. Stuffed into them were the bodies of Linke and Ozaba, their features twisted with agony. The test tubes were labeled. One read “SUBJECT: LINKE.” The other said, “SUBJECT: OZABA.”

McCoy’s voice roused Kirk from his daze. Bones was calling, “Jim! Spock!”

They crossed to him at a run. Wordless, he was pointing to three empty test tubes. The labels they bore read: “McCOY—SPOCK—KIRK.”

The chord sounded hollowly in the big room. The *Enterprise* men wheeled. T-bar in hand, Lal was facing them. He eyed their shocked faces disinterestedly. “We are on schedule,” he said. “But some further simple tests are necessary.”

“We’ve just seen the results of some of your . . . tests!” McCoy shouted.

“And I have found our missing men dead.” Kirk’s voice shook. “Another of your experiments?”

"You are wrong," Lal said. "Their own imperfections killed them. They were not fit subjects. Come, time is short."

"Your time has just about run out!" Kirk cried. "This planet is about to nova. When it does, it will finish itself, you and your whole insane torture chamber along with it! As for your experiments . . ."

The three exchanged a fast glance. Kirk and McCoy strode toward the Vian. He backed away. As the two circled him, Spock closed in with his Vulcan "neck pinch." Lal collapsed. Spock removed his T-bar control. As he rose from his stoop, the bar in his hand, his tricorder beeped. Lifting it, he said, "Readings indicate passage to the surface lies in that direction, Captain." He gestured to their right.

When the party had left the lab, Lal got to his feet. Thann appeared beside him. They stood silent, their cold eyes fixed on the passageway where the group had vanished.

Spock had found his exit to the surface. Twenty minutes of clambering over rocks had brought them into the open. The red sky was overcast and the stiff wind was blowing harder. Kirk took out his communicator. "Kirk to *Enterprise*. Come in, *Enterprise*!" There was no answer. The Starship was still out of range. Belting the communicator, Kirk saw that Spock was pouring over his tricorder.

"Report, Mr. Spock?"

Spock looked up. "The research station is six kilometers from here, Captain. Straight ahead."

"Let's get there as fast as we can. If the ship has a search party looking for us, it will be there." He took Gem's hand; but a blast of wind struck her and she halted, blinded by the whip of sand in her eyes. He made to pick her up in his arms. She shook her head, smiling; and hooking her arm under his, struggled forward again. Fiercely blowing sand became a hazard to them all. Its hard grit hit McCoy's eyes so that he stumbled over a rock that tumbled him head over heels. Spock was hauling him to his feet when Gem rushed from Kirk to help McCoy. He grinned at her re-

assuringly. "I'm all right," he told her. "Don't worry about me, Gem."

Kirk, shading his eyes, peered ahead through the driving sand. "How much farther?" he asked Spock.

"Just ahead, sir."

McCoy gave a shout. "Jim! Look . . . Scotty and a search party!"

Before the metal hut, Scott and two Security guards were waving to them. The howl of wind drowned their voices.

"Scotty! Scotty!" Kirk yelled.

He was racing forward when he suddenly realized that Gem had fallen behind. He turned to help—and saw the Vians standing on a rock observing them.

Gem was down, her white face wet with sweat and effort. He picked her up, pushing her after Spock and McCoy. "Keep going!" he cried.

He watched her stumble on. Then, to cover the others' retreat, he ran toward the Vians.

Lal spoke to Thann. "Their will to survive is great."

"They love life greatly to struggle so."

Lal nodded. "The prime ingredient." He pointed a T-bar at the onrushing Kirk; and at once the *Enterprise* Captain felt his strength begin to ebb. Gravity became the enemy—a monstrous leech sucking, sucking at his vitality. Weaving, he reached the foot of the rock where the Vians waited—and fell.

He opened his eyes to see Spock bending over him. Fighting the fatigue that still drained his power, he sat up, crying, "What are you doing here? What happened to Scotty?"

"Mr. Scott and the guards were a mirage, Captain."

The Vians' resources seemed as infinite as their will was inexorable. He heard Thann speak his name. He looked up.

"We have decided that one specimen will be sufficient. You will come with us, Captain Kirk."

Kirk got to his feet. "And the others?"

"We have no interest in them," Lal said. "They may go."

McCoy had joined Spock. At the look of relief in

Kirk's face, he burst into protest. "You can't go back there! You'll end up like the other two!"

Spock spoke. "Captain, I request permission to be allowed to remain. . . ."

"Denied," Kirk said.

"But, Jim. . . ."

"You have your orders!"

Without a backward look, Kirk started to climb the hillock topped by the rock. Spock, McCoy and Gem moved after him.

The rock was flat as a table. As Kirk walked up to the Vians, Lal said, "You are prepared?"

"Let's get on with it!" Kirk looked into the frigid Vian eyes—and a suspicion chilled him. He turned to check on the others' whereabouts. Spock and McCoy had disappeared. For a moment a hot rage choked him so that he was unable to speak. Then he said, "Where are my friends?"

"They are safe."

"Where are they? You said they'd be released! You said you needed one specimen! *One specimen!* You have it—me! Let the others go!"

Thann nodded to Lal. "Indeed the prime ingredient."

Kirk was shaking. "Never mind the ingredients! Where are my men? Tell me!" The rage broke free. He leaped at Thann. The control bar was lifted. In mid-leap Kirk winked out.

The *Enterprise* was having its troubles. The solar flares had not diminished. A worried Sulu, turning to Scott in Kirk's command chair, said, "Cosmic ray concentration is still above acceptable levels for orbiting the planet, sir."

Scott went to him. "I don't like it, Mr. Sulu. Constant exposure to this much radiation could raise the hob with Life Support and our other vital systems."

"Shall I change course to compensate, sir?"

"Not yet." Scott punched the intercom. "Bridge to all sections. We will continue to maintain our present position outside the Minarian star system. Report any sudden increase in radiation levels to the bridge immediately. Medical sections and Life Support will remain on standby alert." Swinging his chair to the helm station, he said,

"Mr. Sulu, estimate how much longer we have until those solar flares subside."

Eyeing his viewer, Sulu moved buttons on his console. "Readings now indicate 2.721 on the Van Allen scale, sir. At the present rate of decrease, we'll have to wait at least seventeen more hours before we can even attempt entering orbit."

Scott nodded glumly. "Aye. Well, as long as we're stuck out here, we might just as well relax and wait till the storm has passed."

"It has already lasted four more hours than we anticipated, sir. Do you think our landing party could be in any danger?"

"Not likely, Mr. Sulu. The planet's atmosphere will give them ample protection. If I know Captain Kirk, he's more worried about us than we are about him. . . ."

Kirk had been stripped to the waist. His arms were stretched wide, held in their spread-eagled position by two shackles. He was drenched with sweat. Gem, clinging to a laboratory table, was trembling, her eyes closed.

"All right," he said wearily. "What is it you want to know?"

"We seek no 'information,' as you understand the word. Your civilization is yet too immature to possess knowledge of value to us," Lal said.

Kirk raised his heavy head. "Our knowledge has no value but you're willing to kill to get it! Is that what happened to Linke and Ozaba?"

Thann took a step toward him. "*We* did not kill them! Their own fears did it!"

"Just exactly what did you expect from them? What is it you want from me?"

"We have already observed the intensity of your passions, Captain. We have gauged your capacity to love others. Now we want you to reveal your courage and strength of will."

Kirk's shoulders were going numb. "Why?" he said, his head drooping. He forced it up. "Why, Lal? What do you hope to prove?" The shackles were too tight. It was their bite into the flesh of his arms that was keeping him conscious. He was glad of the shackles—but tired. Very

tired. "If . . . if my death is going to have any meaning, at least tell me what I am dying for."

Lal lifted his control bar. A flicker of light played over Kirk's swaying body. At the table Gem staggered.

The Vians' transporter had conveyed Spock and McCoy back to the arena. McCoy followed Spock as the Vulcan used his tricorder. "The passage out was there before, Spock! It's got to be there now!"

"I am unable to lock in on the previous readings, Doctor. I can find no exit from here."

A circle of light flared before the couch. It widened, materializing into the forms of Kirk and Gem. His wrists were torn and bleeding; and the swollen veins on his neck were blue. When Spock and McCoy rushed to him, the force field flung them back.

"Jim! What have they done to you?"

Inside the field, Gem had taken Kirk's bleeding hands in hers. Her face and body writhed with his agony. Then red stigmata, identical to his wounds, appeared on her wrists. She backed away and the marks faded. She hesitated, looking at Spock and McCoy.

McCoy stopped straining to reach Kirk. "Help him, Gem. Don't be afraid to help him."

She kept her eyes on them as though the sight of them gave her strength. Again she took Kirk's bleeding wrists—and again her own began to bleed. But this time she ignored both her pain and her wounds. She knelt down on the floor and, cradling Kirk's head on her lap, began to massage his neck and shoulders. Once more there was the strange effect of her touch. His pain visibly eased. Their injuries vanished at the same moment. Gently she laid his head on the floor. Then she slid away from him, too weakened to get to her feet. Kirk reached out a hand to her.

The force field dissolved. Spock and McCoy hurried to them. Still dazed, Kirk struggled to rise. "Gem?" he whispered.

"Lie still!" McCoy said. "I'll check her out right now."

He had to carry her to her couch. Her eyes were closed. McCoy was staring at his medical tricorder, incredulous. The body he'd laid on the couch had been almost transparent, as though entirely drained of life. Now, before his

eyes, it was recovering its solidity. Smiling, Gem looked up at McCoy. He smoothed the soft hair back from her forehead and left her to go to Kirk.

He was sitting up. "Is she all right?"

"She seems fine again."

"Bones, can you explain what happened?"

McCoy spoke excitedly. "Complete empathy—that's what it was! She must be a totally functional Empath! Her nervous system actually connected to yours to counteract the worst of your symptoms. With her strength she virtually sustained your physiological reactions."

"It weakened her," Kirk said. "I could feel it. Does this ability endanger her life?"

"It's impossible to say yet. Supplying life support to you *did* drain her."

Spock said, "She was afraid to approach the Captain after the first sharp impact of his pain. It was only your urgent plea, Doctor, that caused her to continue."

"Fear would naturally be the first reaction, Spock." McCoy went to the couch and took Gem's hands. Smiling at her, he said, "She doesn't know our Captain well enough—not yet—to offer up her life for him."

"Could the strain really have killed her?" Kirk persisted.

"I would assume that her instinct for self-preservation would take over to prevent that, Jim." He returned to Kirk. "How do you feel?"

"Tired . . . just tired."

"Captain, can you recall what happened?"

Kirk spoke slowly. "I'm not sure. I remember the laboratory . . . there was something they wanted to know. What it was I can't remember." His voice rose. "I wish I could! I can't!"

"Easy does it, Jim. Take it easy."

"What's wrong with me, Bones?"

McCoy studied his tricorder, frowning. "You have all the symptoms of the 'bends.' Nitrogen bubbles in your blood caused the pain. But how did you get the bends down here?"

"You'll have to ask the Vians." Vigor was returning to his voice. "Will I live?"

"You could still use some time in a decompression

chamber. Otherwise your recovery is just about miraculous. I wish that I could take the credit for it, but Gem did most of the work."

Spock was examining the control bar he'd taken from Thann. "Captain," he said, "I noted that a circle of light preceded you at the moment you were returned here from the Vians' laboratory."

"Spock, do you have to get so analytical? At a time like this?"

"Bones, Spock is right. Continue, Mr. Spock."

"I conclude that such a light is an energy transfer point linking this device to the power source."

"Can you tap into it?"

"If I can determine the frequency at which this device operates I could cause it to function for us."

"And get us out of here the same way they brought us here."

"I would say so, Captain."

"Then get started, Mr. Spock."

But the organ chord that invariably heralded some new Vian mischief sounded once more. The two long-robed creatures stood just outside the circle of light that still shone down before Gem's couch.

Lal addressed Kirk. "You are called 'Captain.' You are responsible for the lives of your crew. Is this correct?"

"It is correct," Kirk said.

Thann stepped forward. "We find it necessary to have the cooperation of one of your men in our efforts."

"We will not cooperate," Kirk said.

Lal continued as though he hadn't spoken. "When we resume our interrogations, you will decide which of your men we shall use. There is an 87 percent possibility that the Doctor will die. And though Commander Spock's life is in no danger, the large probability is that he will suffer brain damage resulting in permanent insanity."

They vanished.

Still weakened by his ordeals, Kirk had centered his hopes on Thann's T-bar. He crossed to where Spock was working on it to discover its operating frequency. "How's it coming, Spock?"

"I do not know, Captain. I begin to understand the principles by which it functions—but that is all."

Responsible for the lives of his crew. Lal's definition of *his* function. How to fulfill it? For Bones—probable death in that laboratory. For Spock—derangement of that exquisitely precise organ of his: his mind.

McCoy joined them. "Spock, it won't be too long before those Vians come back. You'd better find out how that thing works—and soon!"

Kirk gave his own words back to him. "Easy does it, Bones. Take it easy."

"Men weren't intended to be this far underground! It's not natural!"

"And space travel is?" Kirk asked.

Without looking up from his task, Spock said, "I must disagree, Doctor. Witness the men who pass a majority of their lives in mines beneath the surface."

"I'm a doctor, not a coalminer!"

Now Spock looked up from the T-bar. "Doctor, I have recorded my theories and procedures on the tricorder. Should the Vians return, there is sufficient data for you and the Captain to complete the adjustments."

McCoy's anxiety, exploded in irritation. "I'm no mechanic! I couldn't get that thing to work no matter how many notes you left!"

"Possibly not. But you and the Captain *together* are capable of doing so."

"In any case, you, Spock, are the *logical* choice to leave with the Captain. I am the man who should go with the Vians."

Kirk intervened. "The decision is mine! If there are any decisions to be made, *I'll* make them!" He paused. "If and when it becomes necessary."

Gem had been listening intently. Wearily Kirk sat down on the couch beside her. The combinations of mental and physical strains had exhausted his last reserves of strength. He rested his head in his hands, shutting his eyes. A hypo hissed against his shoulder. He didn't move. "What is it, Bones? I don't need any—"

"I'm still Chief Medical Officer of the *Enterprise*. Would you rather have the bends? . . . Still dizzy?"

"A little."

"Lie down until the hypo takes effect. Gem, sit beside him. Watch him."

Kirk lay down, too tired to argue. As his breathing assumed the quiet regularity of sleep, McCoy nodded his satisfaction and Spock, looking up again from the control bar, said, "How long will he be asleep?"

"Between the emotional drains and that attack of the bends, he's in pretty bad shape, Spock."

"I am not criticizing your action, Doctor. On the contrary, I am grateful for it. The Captain will not be additionally strained by making so difficult a decision. You have simplified the situation considerably."

McCoy looked at him warily. "How?"

"While the Captain is asleep, it is I who am in command. When the Vians return, I shall go with them."

The appalled McCoy looked down at his hypo. "You mean if I hadn't given him that shot . . . ?"

"Precisely. The choice would have been the Captain's. Now it is mine." He bent over the control bar, his face expressionless as ever. McCoy stared at him a moment. Then, returning to Kirk, he checked him over. Satisfied, he replaced the hypo in his medikit. Cursing under his breath, he gave Spock a savage glance. It was noted by Gem, who'd been taking in the argument. She rose now to move noiselessly until she was standing between Kirk and Spock. Kirk stirred restlessly, fighting the unconsciousness of the drug. Spock looked over at him, hesitated, then resumed his work. Gem went to him, touching his shoulder. He didn't look up. She withdrew the hand, looking at it. Then the shining eyes returned to Spock. In her face was a look of wondering love. She had seen past the coldly logical front Spock presented to the world to what the Vulcan officer kept carefully hidden—his love for his Captain and McCoy.

McCoy had seen the look on her face. His own changed abruptly as he came to a decision of his own. Apology in his eyes, he glanced at the impassive Spock, took out his hypo; and crossing to Kirk as though to check him, suddenly whirled—and injected Spock.

Spock stared at him in angry comprehension. "Your actions are highly unethical! My decision stands! I am in command and. . . ." He slumped forward.

McCoy put a hand on his shoulder. "Not this time, Spock," he said softly.

The organ notes sounded. The Vians had returned.

McCoy spoke quickly. "The choice has been made." He extended his hand back to Gem. "You stay with my friends. They will take care of you." He turned. "Do you understand, Gem?"

She looked at him. Thann, exchanging a glance with Lal, said, "Come, then."

McCoy started toward them. Then he looked back toward the sleeping Kirk and Spock. The look was a silent farewell. Tears filled Gem's eyes. They were merciful tears. They dimmed the sight of McCoy as he followed the Vians.

The shackles were stained with Kirk's blood. The Vians had not been content with McCoy's outstretched arms or the threat of his imminent death. They had placed him so as to force his eyes to the empty test tube with his name on it.

A master of the art of suspense, Lal made a speech. "Doctor, please understand that if there were any other way to accomplish our purpose, we should employ it."

McCoy could feel the veins in his neck swelling. "Get on with it!" he told them.

They advanced on him. Thann raised a control bar.

A white-faced Kirk was prowling the arena. "Spock, why . . . *why* did you let him do it?"

The composed voice said, "I was convinced in the same way you were, Captain—by the good Doctor's hypo." Spock looked up, meeting Kirk's eyes. A message flashed between them. Kirk nodded slightly to their mutual recognition of McCoy's devotion. Then a dissonant chord rang from Spock's control bar. Kirk hurried to him, asking, "Anything, Spock?"

Spock leaned back, regarding the bar with admiration. Extending it to Kirk, he said, "A most unusual device. It is a control unit but *not* a control mechanism. It is, in fact, a mechanical device."

"What exactly is it?"

"The control is attuned to only one pattern of electrical energy—the pattern produced by the mental impulses of the person who possesses it. It is activated solely through mental commands."

"Can it be adapted or . . . or reattuned to our brain patterns?"

"I am attempting to do so." Spock paused. "However, it is not possible to adjust the control for more than one pattern at a time. As I am most familiar with my own pattern, with your permission, Captain . . ."

"Do whatever you think best to get it working. What disturbs me is why the Vians have allowed it to remain in our possession."

Spock bent again over the bar. "Understandable, sir. They must know that we are capable of comprehending the control and of making use of it."

"They must know we will use it to escape."

Spock nodded. "The only logical assumption is that they wish to let us go."

"While they still have McCoy?"

"It is evidently their intention, Captain."

Kirk paced the length of the arena. Turning, he looked at Gem. Then slowly he went to her. "Somehow you are the crux . . . the focal point of all this." He wheeled to Spock. "Even before we got here, she was a prisoner. Yet they haven't hurt her. They haven't even made threats."

"Indeed, Captain, the facts indicate that she is essential to their purpose."

"Yes . . . there is purpose. *But what is it?*"

Kirk, taking Gem's hands in his, looked intently into the sensitive face, as though it held his answer. "Gem, did those who preceded us die . . . for you? Has all this . . . this pain and terror . . . happened—or been made to happen—for you?"

Spock broke into his concentration. "Completed, Captain. The adjustments are delicate. They may not survive more than one use. Even so, there should be sufficient power to return us to the *Enterprise*."

"Will it take us to McCoy?"

"If you so desire, sir."

Kirk spoke briskly. "The best defense is a strong offense. And I intend to start offending!"

The circle of light still lay before Gem's couch. Kirk stepped into it. Spock followed him. Silently, Gem joined them, McCoy's medikit in her hand. She passed it to Kirk.

He looked at her, his face drawn with anxiety. "Aim for the lab," he said to Spock.

Spock stared down at the bar he held, eyes fixed in concentration. The arena vanished. They were in the lab. Kirk looked around it. Then, stunned, he saw what he had to see.

McCoy hung limply from ropes attached to the ceiling. His features were battered to a pulp. Blood dripped from his open wounds and through the remnants of his uniform.

Kirk broke out of his shocked horror. He ran to the tortured body, supporting its weight in his arms. When Spock had removed the shackles, they carried it to a table, easing it down gently. Kirk reached for a torn wrist. "The pulse is almost gone." Spock, at the head of the table, was busy with a medical tricorder.

"Spock, what are the readings?"

"Heart, severely damaged; signs of congestion in both lungs; evidence of massive circulatory collapse."

From the corner where she huddled, Gem was watching their every move. In the harsh lab light McCoy's face was colorless, his lips faintly blue. His eyes shuddered open, stared blankly, then focused.

Kirk found water. Raising McCoy's head, he poured some into the smashed lips. "Don't try to talk, Bones." He laid the head back on the table. "Don't try to speak. Don't think. Just take it easy until we can get back to the ship. Don't—"

"Captain . . ."

Something in Spock's tone caught Kirk's alarmed attention. "What is it? What's the matter?"

With a visible effort Spock looked up from the tricorder. "Captain, I . . . he's dying. We can make him comfortable but that is all."

"No! You can't be sure, Spock! You're not a doctor."

McCoy whispered, "But . . . I am. Go on, Spock. . . ."

Spock moved the tricorder over the entire body. "Internal injuries; bleeding in chest and abdomen; hemorrhages of the spleen and liver; 70 percent kidney failure. . . ."

"He's right, Jim." McCoy grinned weakly. "Being a doctor has its drawbacks. . . . I've always wondered—" A bout of coughing silenced him. Kirk supported his head

until it passed. Then he tore a piece from McCoy's mangled shirt. Dipping it in the water, he dampened the hot forehead.

"Thanks . . . Jim . . ."

Kirk, his face suddenly appearing ten years older, looked at Spock. "How long?"

Spock hesitated; but at McCoy's faint nod, he said, "It could happen at any time, Captain."

The broken mouth moved in a smile. "The correct medical phrase, eh, Spock?" Coughing assailed him again, this time so violently that he seemed unable to breathe. It ceased abruptly, leaving him motionless.

"Doctor!" Spock felt for the neck pulse. He found it. Straightening, he rested his hand briefly on McCoy's head. McCoy opened his eyes, met Spock's—and their unspoken loyalty was wordlessly spoken. Then a spasm of pain twisted McCoy's face. He writhed on the table, coughing. The fit lasted so long that it suffocated him.

"Can't we do something?" Kirk said.

"I'm afraid not, Captain." As Spock spoke, McCoy lost consciousness.

Kirk said, "Gem!" They both turned toward her. "Gem could help him!" Kirk cried. "As she helped me!"

She was cowering in her corner. At the sight of her overwhelming fear, Kirk hesitated. "Could his nearness to death also kill her?"

"The Doctor's analysis of her life-support reactions assumed that the instinct for self-preservation would prevent that. However, he could not be positive."

"If she could just strengthen him to keep him from sinking further into death, we could take over, Spock, with Bones directing us."

They had started toward her when the chord suddenly reverberated at full power. The force field encircled them.

The Vians' arms were lifted in nameless threat. Lal's T-bar was extended downward. "No interference will be permitted!" he said.

Imprisoned, Kirk spoke from within the field. He was openly pleading. "She can save his life! Let us help her go to him!"

"She must neither be forced nor urged to take action."

"All must proceed without interference," Thann added.

"The purpose that brought us together—" Lal began.

"What purpose?" Kirk shouted. "What purpose can any of this serve except the satisfaction of some sick need of yours?"

"We have but one need left in life," Lal said. "It is to see the completion of the final moment of our test."

"Be patient," Thann urged.

"Patient!" Kirk's scorn was fierce with fury. "Our friend is dying!"

"Perhaps," Thann said.

"What purpose will our friend's death serve other than your pleasure in it?" Spock's voice had never been so toneless. "Surely beings as advanced as you know that your solar system will soon be extinct. This star of yours will nova."

"We know," Thann said.

"Then you know that the many millions of inhabitants on its planets are doomed."

The chill voice of Lal said, "That's why we are here."

Kirk swept the laboratory with a gesture. "This place of death you have devised for your pleasure—will it prevent that catastrophe?"

"No, it will not. That is true. But it may save Gem's planet. Of all the planets of Minara, we are empowered to transport to safety only the inhabitants of one." Thann's eyes fixed on Kirk's. "If Gem's planet is the sole one to be saved, we must make certain beyond all doubt that its people are worthy of survival."

"And how will that be served by the death of our friend?"

Lal answered. "His death will not serve it. Only Gem's willingness to give her life for him will. You were her teachers."

"Her teachers? What did she learn from us?"

"Your will to survive; your love of life; your passion to know. These qualities are recorded in her being." He paused. "Each one of you has been ready to give his life for the others. We must now find out whether that instinct has been transmitted to Gem."

The laboratory equipment rattled. The earth rumbled under the pressures of another quake. Thann spoke to Lal. "Time is growing short."

Spock looked down at McCoy's ravaged face. "You were correct, Captain. Everything that has occurred here has been caused to happen by them. This place has been a great laboratory and we have been the subjects of a test."

"No!" Thann said. "Only the circumstances were created by us. They were necessary."

Lal stepped toward Kirk. "Your actions have been spontaneous. What is truest and best in any species of beings has been revealed by you. Yours are the qualities that make a civilization worthy to survive. We are grateful to you."

"Look!" Thann cried.

Gem had left her corner. She moved to McCoy, passing through the force field as though it didn't exist. She passed her hands gently over the wounds on his face and body. Staring at her, hope returned to the *Enterprise* men.

Thann turned to Lal. "This is most significant. An instinct new to the essence of her being is generating. We are seeing it come to birth. . . ."

Lal nodded. "Compassion for another is becoming part of her functioning life system."

The fearful injuries on McCoy's face were transferring themselves to Gem's. His eyes fluttered open, their pupils still glazed. Tensely, Kirk watched for some body movement. It didn't come. But the wounds on his face had begun to heal; and those on Gem's were disappearing. McCoy moved his head. Looking at Gem, recognition replaced the glaze in his eyes.

She was growing weak. Fear came into her great eyes. She withdrew from the table and staggered back toward her corner. McCoy's wounds began to bleed again.

"She is saving herself," Lal said. "She does not yet possess the instinct to save her people."

"We have failed," Thann said.

Spock spoke to Kirk. "Captain, the Doctor's life is not solely dependent on Gem. The Vians also must have the power to give him back his life."

Lal addressed Spock directly. "Your friend's death is not important. We must wait to see whether her instinct for self-sacrifice has become stronger than her instinct for self-preservation."

Watching, Kirk could see signs of the anguished inter-

nal struggle in the girl. Then her white face cleared with decision. She returned to McCoy, her step firm and determined. Kneeling beside the table, she took his limp hands in hers. Again, his wrists' gashes transferred to hers. McCoy's body moved—but life once again seemed to be draining from her.

McCoy lifted his head. "Don't touch me," he told her. "Stay away."

He tried to look around. "Jim . . . Spock . . . are you here?"

"Yes, Bones."

"Don't let her touch me. She will die."

He hauled himself to his knees, struggling to pull his hands from Gem's. The effort exhausted him. He fell back, looking pleadingly at Kirk. "Make her leave me . . . Jim . . . Spock. . . I will not destroy life. Not even to save my own. You know that. Please . . . make her leave me."

Gem placed her hand on his heart. Color, faint but visible, came into McCoy's face.

"Captain!"

"Yes, Spock."

"The intensity of emotion that is exhausting us is building up the force field around us!"

"I know. It draws its energy from us."

"In spite of what we see, sir, all emotions must be eliminated. This may weaken the field."

"I'll try, Spock."

Both closed their eyes. A complete calm was in Spock's face. Even concentration was absorbed by his serenity. His hand went through the force field. He moved through it and quietly approached the Vians. Still held by the field, Kirk tried to still his tumult of anxieties. He looked at the Vians. They were so tense with their will to power that they failed to note Spock's position behind them. The Vulcan's arm rose; and lashed down in a judo chop that sent Lal's T-bar flying. The force field broke. As Kirk raced out of it, Spock retrieved the T-bar. Physically helpless now, the Vians hesitated, their essential test threatened with final disaster.

Gem was swaying with increasing weakness. McCoy dragged himself to his knees, crying, "No! No! I won't let

you do it!" He shoved her away in a momentary influx of strength. Frightened by his sudden violence, she shrank from the table. As McCoy tried to move further away from her, his wounds reopened. He fell back, lying still. Gem stumbled back to her corner.

Kirk took the T-bar from Spock. He was rushing to McCoy with it when Lal spoke. "You cannot use our powers to change what is happening."

Kirk looked at the deathly white face on the table. Then he went to the Vians. "You must save the life of our friend."

"No. We will not," Lal said. "Her instinct must develop to the full. The test must be complete."

"It is complete." Spock joined Kirk. "Gem has already earned the right of survival for her planet. She has offered her life."

"To offer is insufficient proof," Lal said.

"If death is the only proof you can understand, then here are four lives for you." Kirk proffered the T-bar to Lal.

The Vian stared at him. "We will not leave our friend," Kirk said.

Lal took the bar. Turning, the two *Enterprise* officers strode back to McCoy.

At the table, Kirk faced around. "You are frauds," he said. "You have lost the capacity to feel the very emotions you brought Gem here to experience! You don't know the meaning of life. Compassionate love is dead in you! All you are is arid intellect!"

Lal's face went rigid with shock. Thann began to tremble. Their very bodies seemed to dwindle as Kirk's words struck home. They looked at each other, lost, the values of their lifetime dissolving. Lal was the first to move. Thann followed him to the table. They stood there a long moment, looking down at McCoy. Then Lal passed the T-bar over him. McCoy sat up, whole.

Nobody spoke. The Vians went to Gem. They lifted her in their arms. With her head on his shoulder, Lal turned, the first glint of warmth in his aged face. "The one emotion left to us is gratitude," he said. "We are thankful that we can express it to you. Farewell."

They chose to vanish slowly, changing into mist. Gem,

looking back at the *Enterprise* trio, was the last to disappear.

The bridge viewing screen held the images of the immortal stars. Kirk turned away from it. Among them was a mortal star about to die.

"Strange . . ." he said.

Beside him, Spock said, "What puzzles you, Captain?"

"Puzzled isn't the word, Mr. Spock. I think I am awed."

"I'm with you, Jim," McCoy said. "She awed me."

"I wasn't thinking of Gem," Kirk said. He looked back at the viewing screen. "I was thinking of the fantastic element of chance that out in limitless space we should have come together with the savior of a planet."

Spock said, "The element of chance, Captain, can virtually be eliminated by a civilization as advanced as the Vians'."

Scott spoke from his station. "Not to dispute your computer, Mr. Spock—but from the little you have told me, I would say she was a pearl of great price."

"What, Scotty?"

"You know the story of the merchant . . . that merchant 'who when he found one pearl of great price, went and sold all he had and bought it.'"

"She was that all right, Scotty," Kirk said. "And whether the Vians bought her or found her, I am glad for her and the planet she will save."

"Personally," McCoy said, "I find it *fascinating* that with all their scientific knowledge and advances, it was good old-fashioned *human emotion* they valued the most."

"Perhaps the Vulcans should hear about this," said Scott.

"Mr. Spock, could you be prevailed upon to give them the news?"

Spock looked at them blandly. "Possibly, Captain. I shall certainly give the thought its due consideration."

"I am sure you will, Mr. Spock." Kirk turned to Sulu. "Helmsman, take us out of orbit. Warp factor two."

At high speed the *Enterprise* left the area of the dying star.

THE GALILEO SEVEN

(Simon Wincelberg & Oliver Crawford)

The USS *Enterprise* operated under a standing order to investigate all quasar and quasarlike phenomena wherever and whenever it encountered them. To Kirk, it seemed to have met up with one. A sinister formation had appeared on the bridge's main viewing screen—a bluish mass, threaded with red streaks of radiant energy. It dominated the sky ahead.

Kirk, eyeing the screen, pushed a button, only too conscious of the critical presence of his passenger, High Commissioner Ferris. "Captain to shuttlecraft *Galileo*," he said. "Stand by, Mr. Spock."

Ferris voiced his disapproval. "I remind you, Captain, that I am entirely opposed to this delay. Your mission is to get those medical supplies to Makus III in time for their transfer to the New Paris colonies."

"And I must remind you of our standing order, sir. There will be no problem. It's only three days to Makus III. And the transfer doesn't take place for five."

Ferris was fretful. "I don't like to take chances. With the plague out of control on New Paris, we must get those drugs there in time."

"We will." Kirk turned back to his console. "Captain to *Galileo*. All systems clear for your take-off."

"Power up, Captain. All instruments activated. All readings normal. All go."

Spock's voice . . . reassuring. As Science Officer, he was commanding the investigating team selected from the *Enterprise* crew for research into the space curiosity charted under the name of Murasaki 312. Now he sat, strapped, in the shuttlecraft's pilot seat, the others behind him—McCoy, Scott, Yeoman Mears, a fresh-faced girl, Boma, the Negro astrophysicist, radiation specialist Gaetano,

navigator Latimer. All together, seven: the *Galileo's* seven.

"Launch shuttlecraft," Kirk said.

On the huge flight deck the heavy hangar doors swung open. The shuttlecraft taxied toward them and moved out into the emptiness of space.

Spock spoke over his shoulder. "Position."

"Three point seven . . . no, no, sir," Latimer said.

"Four point—"

"Make up your mind," Spock said.

"My indicator's gone crazy," Latimer said.

Boma spoke quickly. "To be expected, Mr. Spock. Quasars are extremely disruptive. Just how much, we don't know. . . ."

Spock, eyes on his panel, said dryly, "Considerably, Mr. Boma."

Gaetano made his discouraging contribution. "My radiation reading is increasing rapidly, Mr. Spock!"

"Stop forward momentum!"

Latimer pushed switches. "I can't stop it, sir! Nothing happens!" McCoy leaned over to glance at his instruments. "Spock, we're being drawn right into the thing!"

Struggling with his own controls, Spock said, "Full power astern!"

But there was no power to reverse the onward plunge of the *Galileo*. "What's happening?" McCoy cried.

Boma said, "We underestimated the strength of the nucleonic attraction."

Spock reached for his speaker. "*Galileo to Enterprise*. "We're out of control, Captain! Being pulled directly into the heart of Murasaki 312. Receiving violent radiation on outer. . . ."

A blast of static drowned Spock's voice. Kirk rushed over to Uhura's station. "Can't you get anything at all, Lieutenant?"

"Nothing clear, sir. Not on any frequency. Just those couple of words about being pulled off course."

Kirk wheeled. "Mr. Sulu, get me a fix on the *Galileo!*"

Sulu turned a bewildered face. "Our scanners are blocked, Captain. We're getting a mess of readings I've never seen before. Nothing makes sense!"

Kirk strode to the library computer. He got a hum, a click—and the flat, metallic computer voice. “Negative ionic concentration 1.64 by 10^2 meter. Radiation wavelength 370 angstroms, harmonics upwards along entire spectrum.”

Kirk turned, appalled. Staring at him, Ferris said, “What is it, Captain?”

“That thing out there has completely ionized this entire sector!”

He glared at the screen. “At least four complete solar systems in this vicinity—and somewhere out there is a twenty-four-foot shuttlecraft out of control, off its course. Finding a needle in a haystack would be child’s play compared to finding . . .”

Coiling, hungry, the bluish mass on the screen glared back at him, a blight on the face of space.

But the controls of the shuttlecraft weren’t the only victims of Murasaki 312. It had rendered useless the normal searching systems of the *Enterprise*. Without them, the Starship was drifting, blind, almost as helpless as the *Galileo*.

Ferris could not resist his I-told-you-so compulsion. “I was opposed to this from the beginning,” he said to Kirk. “Our flight to Makus III had the very highest priority.”

Kirk, his mind straining to contingencies that confronted the *Galileo*’s crew of seven, said, “I am aware of that, Commissioner. At the same time I have certain scientific duties—and exploring the Murasaki Effect is one of them.”

“But you have lost your crew,” Ferris said.

If there were people who couldn’t resist an “I told you so,” there were just as many who enjoyed making the painfully obvious more painful. Kirk held on to his temper. “We have two days to find them,” he said.

Ferris pointed to the screen. “In all that? Two days?”

Kirk lost his temper. “Are you suggesting that I just turn around and leave them in it?”

“You shouldn’t have sent them out in the first place!” Ferris paused. “You are concerned with only seven people. I am thinking of the millions in the New Paris colonies who will die if we don’t get these medicines to

them. It's your obstinate insistence on carrying out these inconsequential investigations that. . . ."

A bureaucrat is a bureaucrat is a bureaucrat, Kirk thought. They could function with paper. But remove them from paper into the sphere of decisive action and they turned into moralizing futilities. Scorn restored his composure. "We will make our scheduled rendezvous, Commissioner," he said evenly. "You have my word."

Uhura spoke. "Captain, there is one planet in this vicinity capable of sustaining human life. Type M, oxygen-nitrogen. Listed as Taurus II." The sympathy in her voice was cool water to a thirsty man. Kirk went to her. She looked up at him. "It is very nearly dead center of the Murasaki Effect, as closely as we can make out with our equipment malfunctions."

"Thank you, Lieutenant," Kirk said. "Mr. Sulu?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Set course for Taurus II."

"Course laid in, sir."

"Aren't you shooting in the dark?" Ferris said. "Assuming that they are there?"

"If they aren't there, Commissioner, they are all dead by now. We will search Taurus II because there is no sense in searching any place else."

"You said something about a needle in a haystack. Useless."

"Not if you want your needle back."

Strangely enough, the needle had fallen upon soft hay. However, soft was the best you could say about the spongily ugly surface of Taurus II. It had cushioned the impact of the *Galileo's* crash landing in a roughly circular crater. Rock walls reared up toward a sky of a repellently bilious shade of green. It was not a prepossessing planet. The craft, canted over, had banged people and things around inside. Spock was bleeding green from a cut on his head. McCoy attended to it and then made his way to Yeoman Mears.

"Are you all right?"

"I . . . think so, Doctor."

Boma said, "That is what I call a ride."

"What happened?" Latimer asked him.

"I can't be sure . . . but I'd say that the magnetic potential of the Murasaki Effect was such that it was multiplied geometrically as we gathered speed. We were simply shot into the center of the Effect like a projectile. What do you think, Mr. Spock?"

"Your evaluation seems reasonable."

Scott, holding an aching head, joined Spock in checking the instruments and control panel. "What a mess!" he said.

Spock stood up. "Picturesque descriptions won't mend broken circuits, Mr. Scott. I think you'll find your work cut out for you." He threw a switch on the communicator.

"*Galileo to Enterprise. Do you read me?*"

"You don't really expect an answer, do you?" Scott said.

"I expect nothing. It is simply logical to try every alternative. A reading on the atmosphere, please, Doctor McCoy."

"As soon as I finish checking the crew . . ."

"If anyone had been injured, I assume you would have been so informed by now. The reading, Doctor."

There was irritation in the glance Spock received from McCoy. After a moment the Medical Officer picked up his kit and moved to an instrument panel. "Partial pressure of oxygen is 70 millimeters of mercury. Nitrogen, 140. Breathable, if you're not running in competition."

"The facts, please," Spock said.

"Traces of argon, neon, krypton, all in acceptable quantities. But I wouldn't recommend this place for a summer resort."

"Your opinion will be noted. You are recording this, Yeoman?"

"Of course, Mr. Spock."

"Very good. Mr. Scott, if you will immediately conduct a damage survey."

Scott said, "Naturally."

Spock ignored the tone of the comment. He said, "I suggest we move outside to give Mr. Scott room to work. Mr. Latimer, Mr. Gaetano, please arm yourselves and scout out the immediate area. Stay in visual contact with the ship."

"Aye, aye, sir," Gaetano said.

The two were removing phaser pistols from a locker as McCoy turned to Spock. "What do you think our chances are of communicating with the *Enterprise*?"

"Under current conditions, extremely poor."

"But they'll be looking for us!"

"If the ionization effect is as widespread as I believe it is, they'll be looking for us without instruments. By visual contact only. On those terms, it is a very large solar system."

"Then you don't think they'll find us."

"Not so long as we are grounded."

McCoy exploded. "I've never been able to stand your confoundedly eternal cheerfulness, Spock!"

"Better make an effort to, Doctor." The suggestion was mildly made. "We may be here for a long time."

Kirk himself had small cause for cheer. The *Enterprise* scanners had gone completely on strike. "Mr. Sulu, have you tried tying in with the auxiliary power units?"

"Yes, sir. No change."

Scowling, Kirk hit a button. "Transporter Room. This is the Captain. Are the Transporters beaming yet?"

The technician sounded apologetic. "Not one hundred percent, sir. We beamed down some inert material but it came back in a dissociated condition. We wouldn't dare try it with people."

"Thank you." He pushed another button. "Captain to Flight Deck. Prepare shuttlecraft *Columbus* for immediate search of planet surface. Correlate coordinates with Mr. Sulu. Lieutenant Uhura?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Anything at all?"

"All wavelengths dominated by ionization effect, Captain. Transmissions blocked, reception impossible."

To add to his joy in life, Ferris appeared beside Kirk's command chair. "Well, Captain?"

Kirk said, "We have until 2823.8 to continue our search, Commissioner."

"You don't really think you'll have any luck, do you?"

Kirk drew a hand down his cheek. "Those people out there happen to be friends and shipmates of mine. I in-

tend to continue this ship's search for them until the last possible moment."

"Very well, Captain. But not a second beyond that limit. Is that clear? If it is not, I refer you to Book 19, Section 433, Paragraph 12."

"I am familiar with the regulations, Commissioner. And I know all about your authority."

Tight-faced, he struck a button on his console.

"Launch shuttlecraft *Columbus!*"

Outside the *Galileo*, Spock was examining the nearest section of the wall encircling the crater. Rescue was indeed a remote possibility. Even if the *Enterprise's* searching equipment had remained unaffected by Murasaki 312, Taurus II was just one planet among many in the quadrant's solar systems. Hidden like this in the hollow made by the crater's rocky wall, the *Galileo* would be virtually invisible.

McCoy, joining him, looked up at the wall. "I can't say much for our circumstances," he said, "but at least it's your big chance."

"My big chance for what, Doctor?"

"Command," McCoy said. "I know you, Spock. You've never voiced it, but you've always thought logic was the best basis on which to build command. Am I right?"

"I am a logical man," Spock said.

"It'll take more than logic to get us out of this."

"Perhaps, Doctor . . . but I can't think of a better place to start trying. I recognize that command has fascinations, even under such circumstances as these. But I neither enjoy the idea of command nor am I frightened by it. It simply exists. And I shall do what logically needs to be done."

They clambered back into the craft, and Scott lifted a grim face from the control panel. "We've lost a great deal of fuel, Mr. Spock. We have no chance at all to reach escape velocity. And even if we hope to make orbit, we'll have to lighten our load by at least five hundred pounds."

"The weight of three grown men," Spock said.

Scott glanced at him, startled. "Why, yes . . . I guess you could put it that way."

McCoy was openly outraged. "Or the equivalent weight in *equipment*," he said.

Spock faced him. "Doctor McCoy, with few exceptions we will use virtually every piece of equipment in attaining orbit. There is very little surplus weight except among our passengers."

Boma, with Yeoman Mears, had been taking tricorder readings near the hatch. Now he stopped. "You mean three of us will have to stay behind?"

"Unless the situation changes radically," Spock said.

"And who is to choose those who remain behind?"

"As commanding officer the choice is mine."

Boma's face hardened. "You wouldn't be interested in drawing lots?"

Spock said "I believe I am better qualified to select those who will stay behind than any random drawing of lots." He spoke without a trace of egotism in voice or manner. "My decision will be a logical one, Mr. Boma, arrived at through logical processes."

"Life and death are not logical, Spock!" McCoy cried.

"But attaining a desired goal is."

Spock ignored the tension in the atmosphere. "I would suggest we proceed to a more careful examination of the hull. We may have overlooked some minor damage."

Boma glared after him as he left. "Some minor damage was overlooked," he said, "when they put his head together!"

"Not his head," McCoy said. "His heart."

Tension was rising in everybody. Over at the farther crater wall Latimer and Gaetano were making a nervous survey of the area. Suddenly Gaetano stopped, listening. Latimer, too, halted. They listened to the sound—a rhythmic scraping noise such as might be made by rubbing wood against some corrugated surface. Latimer became conscious of an uneasy impression that the crater wall was breathing, the mist of its breath the fog that drifted over it, reducing visibility. The mist had come suddenly, like the sound. The scraping noise was repeated.

"What is it?" Latimer whispered.

"I don't know," Gaetano said. "It came from up there."

"No . . . back there. . . ."

They stared at each other. The sound surrounded them.

"Everywhere . . . it's all around us."

"Let's get out of here!" Latimer cried.

Then he yelled, breaking into a run. From the shadow made by a cleft in the wall above them a gigantic shape had emerged. Latimer screamed—and fell. Gaetano jerked out his phaser. He fired it at the fog-filled cleft.

He turned. The shaft of a spear was protruding from Latimer's back. It was as thick as a slim telephone pole.

The scream, reverberating against the crater's walls, had been heard by Spock and Boma. The Vulcan strode to Gaetano, where he stood over Latimer's body, still in shock, still staring up at the foggy cleft.

"How?" Spock said.

The dazed Gaetano lowered his phaser. "Something . . . huge . . . terrible. Up there!" He pointed to the cleft.

Spock walked over to the wall. Seizing an outcropping of rock, he began to climb up to the crevice. Boma spoke to Gaetano. "What was it? Did you see what it was?"

"Like a . . . a giant ape." He started to tremble. "It was all . . . so quick. There was a . . . a sound first."

Spock was back. "There's nothing up there," he said.

"I tell you there was!" Gaetano shouted.

Spock's voice was quiet. "I do not doubt your word."

"I hit it. I swear my phaser hit it," Gaetano said.

Spock didn't answer. Looking down at Latimer's body, he tugged at the spear shaft. It came loose in his hand, exposing its point—a large triangular stone, honed into shape and sharpness.

"The Folsom Point," Spock said.

"Sir?"

"Mr. Boma, this spearhead bears a remarkable resemblance to the Folsom Point, discovered in 1926 old Earth calendar, in New Mexico, North America. Quite similar . . . more crudely shaped about the haft, however. Not very efficient."

"Not very efficient?" Boma was furious. "Is that all you have to say?"

Surprised, Spock looked at him. "Am I in error, Mr. Boma?"

"Error? You? Impossible!"

"Then, what—" Spock began.

"A man lies there dead! And you talk about stone

spears! What about Latimer? What about the dead man?"

"A few words on behalf of the dead will not bring them back to life, Mr. Boma."

Gaetano was glaring at him, too. He spoke to Boma. "Give me a hand with Latimer, will you?" He turned to Spock. "Unless you think we should leave his body here in the interest of efficiency."

"Bringing him back to the ship should not interfere with our repair efforts. If you'd like some assistance . . ."

"We'll do it!" Gaetano said sharply. Nodding to Boma, they reached down to the body. As they lifted it, Spock's keen eyes were studying the spearhead's construction.

Kirk was trying to fight off a sense of complete futility.

". . . and great loss." His voice was so broken as he dictated the last three words into his Captain's Log that he wondered if he should delete them. Spock . . . McCoy . . . Scott . . . all three of them gone, lost to the hideous blueness of what still showed on the screen.

Uhura spoke. "Captain, the *Columbus* has returned from searching quadrants 779X by 534M. Negative results."

"Have them proceed to the next quadrants. Any word from Engineering on the sensors?"

"They're working on them, sir. Still inoperable."

"The Transporters?"

"Still reported unsafe, sir."

"Thank you, Lieutenant."

"Captain Kirk . . ."

It was Ferris. "Captain, I do not relish the thought of abandoning your crewmen out there. However, I must remind you that—"

"I haven't forgotten," Kirk said wearily.

"You're running out of time," Ferris said.

A man of paper. "I haven't forgotten that, either," Kirk said. He rammèd a button on his console. "This is the Captain. Try using overload power on the Transporters. We have to get it working." He got up to go to Uhura. "Lieutenant, order the *Columbus* to open its course two degrees on each lap from now on."

Sulu, surprised into protest, spoke. "But Captain, two

degrees means they'll overlook more than a dozen terrestrial miles on each search loop."

Kirk turned. "It also means we'll at least have a fighting chance of checking most of the planet's surface. Mind your helm, Mr. Sulu."

Sulu flushed. "Yes, sir."

Ferris was still standing beside his command chair. He said coldly, "Twenty-four more hours, Captain."

Kirk didn't answer. He stared ahead at the viewing screen. Somewhere in the midst of that mysterious blueness, Taurus II existed, its substance solid, its air breathable—an oasis in the center of hell. Had Spock found it?

In the marooned *Galileo*, McCoy and Yeoman Mears had collected equipment to jettison. Arms laden, McCoy said, "This stuff ought to save us at least fifty pounds of weight, Spock."

"If we could scrape up another hundred pounds, what with Mr. Latimer gone . . ." Yeoman Mears didn't finish her sentence.

"We would still be at least one hundred and fifty pounds overweight," Spock said.

"I can't believe you're serious about leaving someone behind," McCoy said. "Whatever those creatures are out there . . ."

"It is more rational to sacrifice one man than six," Spock said.

"I'm not talking about rationality!"

"You might be wise to start."

Boma stuck his head through the open hatch. "We're ready, Mr. Spock."

"For what, Mr. Boma?"

"The services . . . for Latimer."

Spock straightened. "Mr. Boma. We are working against time."

"The man is dead. He deserves a decent burial. You're the Captain. A few words from you . . ."

If Spock's facial muscles had been capable of expressing annoyance, they would have twisted with it. As they were not, he looked at McCoy. "Doctor, perhaps you know the correct words for such an occasion."

"It's your place," McCoy said.

"My place is here. If you please, Doctor."

The facial muscles of the non-Vulcans had no trouble in showing annoyance. Spock's cool detachment exceedingly irritated them. "Spock, we may all die here!" McCoy shouted. "At least let us die like men, not machines!"

"By taking care of first things first, I hope to increase our chances of not dying here." Spock moved to where Scott was still at work on the console. "Perhaps if you were to channel the second auxiliary tank through the primary intake valve, Mr. Scott."

"Too delicate, sir. It may not take the pressure as it is."

McCoy glared at Spock's stooped back. Then he followed the others out of the hatch and over to the mound of earth a few feet away from the *Galileo*. He bent for a handful of dirt and dropped it on the mound. "Dust thou art and to dust shalt thou return. Amen."

People's heads bowed. "Amen," they echoed. They all stood still for a minute, each with his private thoughts—and the rhythmic grating sound came from what seemed to be distance.

"What is it?" said Yeoman Mears.

McCoy had looked up. "I don't know. But it sounds manmade."

"Manmade! You wouldn't say that if you saw what I saw!" cried Gaetano. "It's them, those things out there somewhere!"

McCoy spoke to him and Boma. "You'd better stay on watch. I'll check with Mr. Spock."

He and Yeoman Mears re-entered the craft to hear a dismayed Scott cry, "The pressure's dropping, sir. We're losing everything!"

"What happened?" Spock asked.

"One of the lines gave. The strain of coming through the atmosphere . . . the added load when we tried to bypass—"

McCoy interrupted. "Spock!"

The Vulcan made a gesture for silence, concentrating on Scott. Staring at a gauge, the engineer said slowly, "Well, that does it. We have no fuel at all!"

"Then that solves the problem of who to leave behind."

"Spock!" McCoy yelled.

"Yes, Doctor?"

"Come outside. Something's happening."

Straightening, Spock said, "You will consider the alternatives, Mr. Scott."

Scott rose impatiently. "What alternatives? We have no fuel!"

"Mr. Scott, there are always alternatives."

He took his Vulcan calm with him as he followed McCoy out of the ship. The grating noise was louder. Spock listened, as concentrated on it as he'd been on Scott. McCoy glanced at his composed face. "And what do those super-sensitive ears of yours make of *that*?"

"Wood," Spock said. "Rubbing on some kind of leather."

"They're getting ready," Gaetano muttered. "They'll attack."

"Not necessarily," Boma said. "It could be a simple tribal rite . . . assuming it's a tribal culture."

"Not a tribal culture," Spock said gently. "Their artifacts are too primitive. Merely a loose association of some sort."

"We do not know that they are mere animals. They may well be capable of reason."

"We know they're capable of killing," Boma reminded him.

Spock looked at him. "If they are protecting themselves by their own lights . . ."

"That is exactly what we would be doing!" Boma argued.

Gaetano said, "The majority of us—"

"I am not interested in the opinion of the majority, Mr. Gaetano!" It was the first time Spock had raised his voice. Now its unexpected sharpness came as a shock to all of them.

"The components must be weighed—our dangers balanced against our duty to other life forms, friendly or not." Spock paused. "There is a third course."

"It could get us all killed." But the insolence had left Gaetano.

"I think not," Spock said. "Doctor McCoy, you and

Yeoman Mears will remain in the ship. Assist Mr. Scott in any way possible. We shall return shortly."

He turned to Gaetano and Boma. "You will follow my orders to the letter. You will fire only when so ordered—and at my designated targets."

"Now you're talking," said Gaetano.

"Yes, I am talking, Mr. Gaetano. And you will hear. We shall fire to frighten. Not to kill."

"If we only knew more about them," Yeoman Mears said fearfully.

"We know enough," Boma said. "If they're tribal, they'll have a sense of unity. We can use that."

"How, Mr. Boma?"

"By hitting them hard, sir. Give them a bloody nose! Make them think twice about attacking us! A good offense is the best defense!"

"I agree!" cried Gaetano. "If we just stand by and do nothing, we're just giving them an invitation to come down and slaughter us!"

Spock's face had taken on a look of grave reflection. "I am frequently appalled," he said, "by the low regard for life you Earth people have."

"We are practical about it!" Gaetano's voice shook. "I say we hit them before they hit us!"

"Mr. Boma?" Spock said.

"Absolutely."

"Doctor McCoy?"

"It seems logical to me."

"It also seems logical to me," Spock said. "But taking life indiscriminately . . ."

"You were quick enough to talk about leaving three of us behind," Gaetano said. "Why all the sudden solicitude about some kind of animal?"

"You saw what they did to Latimer," Boma said.

So it had to be put into words of one syllable. But Spock was a master of primitives' languages. "I am in command here, Mr. Gaetano. The orders are mine to give, as the responsibility is mine to take. Follow me."

He led the way to the crater wall. The grating sound grew still louder as the trip began the climb up the rocky escarpment. Gaetano, apprehensive, arranged himself third in position. Spock signaled a halt. The slope ahead of

them loomed vague and indistinct through mist swirls. Suddenly, among the rocks immediately above them, there was movement. Spock heard it first. He tensed with alertness, readying his phaser. Something rose from behind the rocks, something impossibly huge. It might have been man-shaped—but he couldn't tell, for the creature held an enormous leather shield before its body. Then a great spear whistled past his head. Spock, aiming his phaser, fired it.

There was a roar, half-human—a scream of pain and fear. The thing ducked behind a rock, hurling its shield downward.

Spock sidestepped to avoid its strike. He was hoisting it up as Boma and Gaetano joined him.

Awed, Gaetano whispered, "It must be twelve feet high."

Spock dropped the shield. Still leading the way, he motioned the others forward. They made the crest of the crater. Now the scraping noise was louder still, harsh, rasping, broken by grunting sounds.

"The mists . . ." Gaetano complained. "I can't see."

"They are directly ahead of us," Spock said. "Several, I believe. You will direct your phasers to two o'clock and to ten o'clock."

"I say we hit them dead on!" Gaetano said.

Spock turned his head. "Fortunately, I am giving the orders, Mr. Gaetano. Take aim, please."

He waited. "Fire!" he said.

Whatever their targets were, they could certainly howl. Spock listened to the roaring. "Cease fire!" he said. The roaring stilled. Spock nodded, satisfied. "They should think twice before bothering us again."

"I still say we should have killed them."

"It was not necessary, Mr. Gaetano. Fear will do for us what needs to be done. Mr. Boma, return to the ship. Mr. Gaetano, you will remain here on guard, keeping visual contact with the ship."

"Out here? Alone?"

"Security must be maintained, Mr. Gaetano."

Boma said, "At least let me stay with him."

"My intention is to post you in another position, Mr. Boma."

The two exchanged terrified looks. Spock regarded them with a mild curiosity. "Gentlemen," he said, "I regret having to post you in hazardous positions. Unfortunately, I have no choice. In the event of danger, the ship must have warning."

"Even if some of us must die for it?"

"There is the possibility of danger, Mr. Boma. But it cannot be helped."

He began the climb back down to the ship. After a long moment, Boma turned to follow him. "Good luck, Gaetano," he said.

"Yeah, sure," Gaetano said.

As they approached the *Galileo*, Spock said, "Mr. Boma, your post is here, near the ship." He hoisted himself through the hatch and Yeoman Mears said, "Did you find them, Mr. Spock?"

"We found them. I don't think they'll trouble us again."

"I hope not," McCoy said. "Spock, Scott has some idea."

He clearly did. Scott's face was alight with idea. "It's dangerous, Mr. Spock—but it just may work."

"Go ahead, Mr. Scott."

"I can adjust the main reactor to function on a substitute fuel supply." He paused, unable to resist the temptation to give full dramatic value to his idea. "Our phasers, sir. I could adapt them and use their energy. It will take time, but it's possible."

"The objection is they're our only defense," McCoy said.

"They would also seem to be our only hope." Spock made his decision fast. "Doctor . . . Yeoman . . . your phasers, please."

"But what if those creatures attack again?" the girl asked.

"They will not attack, not for many hours at any rate," Spock told her. "By then, with luck, we should be gone."

Scott nodded. "If I can get a full load, we'll be able to achieve orbit with all hands. Not that we can maintain it long."

"It will not be necessary to maintain it long. In less than twenty-four hours the *Enterprise* will be forced to abandon its search in order to make its rendezvous. If our orbit decays after that time, it will make no difference." Spock shrugged. "Whether we die coming out of orbit or here on the surface, we shall surely die. Your phaser, Doctor."

Reluctantly McCoy and the girl surrendered their phasers. Spock passed them over to Scott.

At the same moment on the *Enterprise*, the Transporter officer was reporting a successful materialization to Kirk. "The crates I beamed down to Taurus II came back all right, sir. In my opinion the Transporters are now safe for human transport."

It was the first good news since they had contacted Murasaki 312. Kirk pushed his intercom button. "This is the Captain. Landing parties 1, 2, and 3. Report to Transporter Room for immediate beam-down to the planet's surface. Ordinance condition 1-A."

"Captain . . . it's a big planet," the Transporter officer said. "It'll be sheer good luck if our landing parties find anything."

"I'm counting on luck, Lieutenant. It's almost the only tool we've got that might work."

But Spock, despite his hope that fear would restrain the hostility of the gorillalike creatures, wasn't trusting to luck. For the third time he left the *Galileo* to check with Boma. "Have you seen or heard anything unusual, Mr. Boma?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Is Mr. Gaetano keeping in contact with you?"

"I saw him up in those rocks just a few minutes ago."

Something else had seen Gaetano among the rocks. It aimed a large rock at his phaser, knocking it out of his hand. Terrified, he scrambled after it—and a spear hurled past him, striking the air between him and the weapon. He ran toward a rock crevice. It ended in a blank black wall. Trapped, he turned. The crevice entrance was blocked by a massive bulk, hairy, featureless. The creature moved toward him. He screamed.

It was Spock who found the dropped phaser. As he bent to retrieve it, he heard a snuffling, half-growl, half-grunt from somewhere in the rocks ahead of him. Then there was silence. McCoy and Boma climbed up to him. He extended his hand. "Mr. Gaetano's phaser," he said.

"Look!" Boma cried.

The footprint in the rubble was human in form. Its enormity was its horror.

Boma and McCoy stared at it, unbelieving. Spock handed Gaetano's phaser to McCoy. "Take this back to Mr. Scott for conversion, please, Doctor."

Boma flared up at him. "Is that all this means to you? Just a phaser to be recovered?"

Spock stared at him, puzzled. "Explain, Mr. Boma."

The frenzied Boma broke into a shout. "Gaetano's gone! Who knows what's happened to him! And you just hand over his phaser as though nothing had happened at all!"

Spock ignored the outburst. Drawing out his own phaser, he handed it over to McCoy, saying, "And please give this to Mr. Scott in case I don't return."

"Where are you going?" McCoy demanded.

Spock said, "I have a certain . . . scientific curiosity about what has occurred to Mr. Gaetano. You will return to the ship, if you please."

He slipped off into the mist, leaving Boma to gape after him. McCoy, shaking his head, said, "He'll risk his neck locating Gaetano. And if he finds him alive, he's just as liable to order him to stay behind when the ship leaves. You tell me."

"Do you think the ship will ever leave?"

"It won't without these phasers," McCoy said. "Let's get back to Scott."

Sharp-eyed, agile as a cat, Spock was creeping upward over rocks. Then he saw the ledge. Gaetano lay sprawled on it, unmoving. Spock bent over the body. As he realized what had been done to it, his impassive face went stony with revulsion. After a moment, he lifted it, hoisting it up and around his shoulders. The snuffling sound came again, this time from the mist-drifted rocks behind him. He looked back. Just the rocks, the fog coiling around them. He moved on—and suddenly the scraping noise broke out, close by, all around him, moving with him as

he moved. Aware of it, he didn't hurry, but maintained his pace, measured, controlled. Below him now he could see the *Galileo*, its terrified people huddled together at the hatch, watching him.

He reached them just as a spear clanged harmlessly against the ship's hull. McCoy and Boma ran to him to help him enter the hatch. Inside, McCoy reached toward the body's lolling head. "Is he . . . ?"

"Mr. Boma, secure that hatch!" Spock said. He walked swiftly toward the aft compartment. McCoy followed him and eased the body from his shoulders. Boma, up forward near the hatch window, called, "I see one out there!" Yeoman Mears, joining him, peered out the window. Shuddering, she covered her face with her hands. "Horrible . . . it's a monster. . . ."

Boma, patting her shoulder, managed a wry grin. "We probably don't look so good to them, either."

Spock had gone to the forward window to look out of it. Something crashed against the hull. A great boulder tumbled past the window and rolled away to crash up against the side of the crater.

"All right, Spock," Boma said. "You have the answers. What now?"

Spock turned. "Your tone is hostile, Mr. Boma."

"My tone isn't the only thing that's hostile!"

"Strange," Spock mused. "Step by step I have done the logical thing."

McCoy blew up. "A little less analysis and a little more action! That's what we need!"

"How about analyzing what's happening to the plates of this craft?"

"The plates are titanite, Mr. Boma," Spock said. "They will hold. At least for a time."

"We have phasers. We could drive them off!"

"Mr. Boma, every ounce of energy in the phasers is needed by Mr. Scott. Were we to attack the creatures, the energy expended might well provide the very impetus required to secure our orbit."

The ship shook under another smash by a boulder—a bigger one, heavier, harder.

"How long, Mr. Scott?" Spock asked.

"Another hour. Maybe two."

"Can't you hurry it up?"

Scott raised an impatient face from his labor. "Doctor, a phaser will drain only so fast."

A steady, relentless hammering had begun on the hull. Boma, looking up, saw its plates vibrating. "How long can those plates hold out under *that?*" he cried. "*We've got to do something!*"

All eyes were on Spock. He met them directly, his own calm, as composed as though theirs contained no accusation.

Kirk lacked Spock's stoic capacity to tolerate helplessness. Though the ion storm was dispersing, the Starship's slow recovery of its operational power had tightened his nerves to the breaking point. He snapped at Uhura. "Lieutenant, what word from the sensor section?"

"At last report they were beginning to get readings, but they were completely scrambled."

"I'm not interested in the last report! I want the current one!"

"Yes, sir."

Kirk slammed his fist into his palm. When the elevator door opened, he didn't turn his head. He heard Ferris clear his throat. Then he was beside him, glancing ostentatiously at his watch. "You have three hours, Captain."

"I know the number of hours I have, Commissioner."

"Delighted to hear it. However, I shall continue to remind you."

"You do that," Kirk said.

Uhura spoke. "Sir, sensor section reporting. Static interference still creating false images. Estimate 80 percent undependable."

"Radio communication?"

"Clearing slowly but still incapable of transmission and reception."

"What do you intend to do?" demanded Ferris.

Kirk's overstrained control broke. "Do? I'll keep on searching, foot by foot, inch by inch . . . by candlelight if I have to, so long as I have a second left! And if you'll keep your nose off my bridge, I'll be thankful!"

"I'm sure your diligence will please the authorities, Cap-

tain. I am not sure they will appreciate the way you address a High Commissioner."

"*I am in command here!*"

"You are, Captain. For exactly—" he consulted his watch—"two hours and forty-two minutes."

Spock slammed no fist into his palm. The hammering by great rocks continued to shake the *Galileo*—but his Vulcan heritage forbade any release of tension building up in him. Boma's panic had now taken the form of an open scorn. Nor was there the slightest sign of sympathy in the others. Never had the half-human in Spock felt so lonely. But he gave no evidence of it as he said, "Mr. Scott, how much power do we have in our central batteries?"

"They're in good shape, sir. But they won't lift us off, if that's what you're getting at."

"Are they strong enough to electrify the exterior of the ship?"

A slow grin spread over Scott's face. "That they are, laddie." Reaching for some cables, he detached them.

Spock spoke to the others. "Get into the center of the ship. Don't touch the plates. Be sure you're insulated."

They obeyed, watching as Scott clamped an electrode to a metal projection on one side of the ship's interior. He was preparing the second electrode when a ferocious smash-down resounded from over their heads. Scott nodded at Spock.

"Stand by," Spock said.

The second electrode, attached, completed the circuit. Sparks flew up in a shower, followed by a wild shrieking of pain, shock and fury from outside the craft. The hammering stopped. Scott, releasing the electrodes, said, "I don't dare use any more power if we want to be sure of ignition."

Staring up at the silent hull, McCoy said, "It worked."

"For the moment," Spock said.

"For the moment?"

"Mr. Boma, they will return when they discover they're not seriously hurt. In the meantime, please check the aft compartment. See if there's anything else we can unload to lighten the ship."

Boma came back, grim-faced. "Gaetano's body is there."

"It will have to be left behind," Spock said.

"Not without a burial!"

"I would not recommend one, Mr. Boma. The creatures won't be far away." He paused. "A burial would expose the members of this crew to unnecessary peril."

"I'll take that chance," Boma said.

Spock looked at the alien human. "Do your vestigial ceremonies mean that much to you?"

"Spock, I would insist on a decent burial even if it were your body lying back there!"

"Mr. Boma!" It was McCoy's rebuke.

Boma whirled on him. "I'm sick and tired of this Vulcan machine!"

Scott had reddened with anger. "That's enough from you! Mr. Spock is a ranking Commander of the service!"

The ranking Commander spoke quietly. "You shall have your burial, Mr. Boma . . . if our friends permit it." McCoy, still smarting in Spock's behalf, moved over to him.

Landing party Two had beamed back to the *Enterprise* from Taurus II with casualties—one crewman dead, two wounded.

"Lieutenant Kelowitz, what happened?"

Kirk had activated the computer screen at Spock's station. Now it held the smudged, scratched image of the landing party's leader. Kirk could see that his uniform was torn.

"We were attacked, sir. Huge, furry creatures. I checked with astral anthropology. Order 480G, anthropoid, similar to life forms discovered on Hansen's planet—but much larger. Ten, twelve feet in height . . ."

"Your casualties?"

"Ensign O'Neill was speared even before we knew they were around. Crewman Immamura has a dislocated shoulder and severe lacerations, but he'll make it all right." The tired eyes on the screen were lost momentarily to horrified recollection of the monster anthropoids. "Captain, they're all over the place. If the *Galileo* is down on that planet . . ."

Kirk nodded. "Thank you, Lieutenant. You'd better report to Sickbay yourself."

"Aye, aye, sir."

The image faded—and Ferris strode out of the elevator, his jaw set. "Captain Kirk, if you will check your chronometer, you will see it is exactly 2823.8. Your time is up."

"Commissioner, my men are still out there," Kirk said.

"So are the plague victims on New Paris! I now assume the authority granted me under Title Fifteen, Galactic Emergency Procedures. I order you to abandon search, Captain."

Kirk said, "Shuttlecraft *Columbus* hasn't returned yet. I also have two search parties still out."

"You have your orders, Captain. Recall your search parties and proceed to Makus 111 immediately."

He was beaten.

His voice was inflectionless as he spoke to Uhura. "Lieutenant, order the Transporter Room to beam up the search parties still on the surface. Attempt contact with the *Columbus*."

"I'm in partial contact with them now, sir."

"Have them return at once." He left the computer station to return to his command chair. "Mr. Sulu, prepare to abandon search. Set course for Makus III."

Ferris left the bridge—and Kirk slumped back in his chair. There was nothing more to do, nothing more to say. Spock, McCoy, Scott—all dead, mercifully dead on that savage planet. Had their deaths been easy? Hardly. Uhura had to tell him twice that the sensor beams were working again.

No time to mourn. No time, period.

"The other systems?" he said to Uhura.

"No, sir. Still too much interference."

Sulu said, "Course set for Makus III, Captain."

"Thank you, Mr. Sulu. Steady on post. Lieutenant Uhura, how long before the *Columbus* comes aboard?"

"Twenty-three minutes, sir."

"Twenty-three minutes," Kirk said. Then, leaning his arms on his console, he cupped his chin in his hands.

Yeoman Mears, no longer fresh-faced, but tired and worn, had failed again to contact the *Enterprise*. She

snapped closed her communicator. "Nothing, sir," she told Spock. "Just ionic interference."

He went to Scott. "How about weight?"

Scott finished draining the last phaser. He looked up as he laid it aside. "If we shed every extra ounce of it, we may be able to achieve orbit."

"How long can we keep it?"

"A few hours. If we time it right, we could cut out of orbit with enough fuel for a controlled re-entry."

"To land here again? Not an attractive possibility."

"We have very few alternatives," Scott said. He stooped to remove the drained phasers from the aisle as Boma and McCoy came from the aft compartment, carrying Gaetano's body.

"How does it look outside?" McCoy asked.

Spock glanced out the forward window. Then he spoke to Scott. "When can we lift off, Mr. Scott?"

"Maybe eight minutes if the weight's right."

Spock faced around from the window. "Doctor, Mr. Boma, the ship will lift off in exactly ten minutes. You have that long to bury Mr. Gaetano. It appears to be all clear outside, at least for the moment." He cautiously opened the hatch, peering around the crater. As he turned back inside, he said, "I shall assist you. Please hurry."

Yeoman Mears moved down the aisle to where Scott, at the control console, was warming up its equipment. "Can we get off?" she said.

"Oh, we can get off all right, lassie. But can we stay off? That's the question."

"If we make orbit, the *Enterprise* will—"

"By now," he said, "the *Enterprise* should be well on its way to Makus III."

"Then . . . we're alone."

"Not alone." He made a gesture toward the crater walls. "We've got some big hairy things out there to keep us company."

It was the thought of the big, hairy things that had brought Kirk to his decision. He uncupped his chin from his hands. "Mr. Sulu, proceed on course as ordered for Makus III. At space normal speed."

Sulu was startled. "But all systems report secured for warp factors, sir. Space normal speed?"

"You heard me, Mr. Sulu. Lieutenant Uhura, order all sensor sections to direct beams aft, full function, continuous operation until further orders."

Ferris, the paper man, had not specified warp speed.

They'd dug the grave in the spongy soil. It was as they were filling the hole that they all heard the grating sound. Then from the mist-shrouded rocks above them came a piercing howl—a triumphant roar as though the thing which had uttered it was beating its furry chest in token of victory.

"Into the ship!" Spock shouted. "Take-off immediate!"

A spear struck the grave. Another one grazed Boma's shoulder. Then the air was thick with them. Spock, racing toward the ship, saw a large axe of strange shape hit the ground. As he reached for it, a rock, hurtling down, crashed against his thigh. He struggled to rise but the wounded leg went out from under him. Dragging himself toward the ship, he yelled, "Lift off! Lift off!"

Boma and McCoy were at the open hatch. They left it to run to him. He waved them back furiously. "No! Get back! *Lift off!*"

They disobeyed. McCoy grabbed his shoulders—and a spear whizzed past his head. Half-carrying, half-pulling, they got Spock to the hatch and shoved him inside. Boma slammed it shut just as a giant body heaved at the craft, rocking it.

Spock, clutching his injured leg, glared at his rescuers. "I told you to lift off!"

McCoy, at work on the leg, said, "Don't be a fool, Spock. We couldn't leave you out there!" He paused. Once more, big rocks were hammering at the hull. Spock pushed McCoy away. "Can we lift off, Mr. Scott?"

"We should be able to—but we're not moving!"

Yeoman Mears screamed. In the port window beside her a bestial face, enormous, red-eyed was peering in at her. McCoy slammed the shutter down over the window. Spock was hobbling toward the console's seat. For a moment his delicate fingers flitted over the controls.

"They seem to be holding us down," he said. "All systems are go—but we're not moving." His hand went out to another switch. Appalled, Scott cried, "What are you doing, man?"

"The boosters."

"We won't be able to hold orbit!"

Spock moved the switch. The ship bucked. Needles quivered on the console. There was a last defiant crash on the hull, screams of baffled hate—and the *Galileo* shot up and out of the crater.

Yeoman Mears burst into tears of relief. "We're rid of them . . . of that terrible place. . . ."

Spock spoke. "I must remind you all that we have yet to achieve orbit. Nor can we maintain it long. An hour from now we might well be right back where we started."

But Spock's warning couldn't depress the hope roused by the familiar sight of star-filled space. McCoy, thoughtfully regarding the straight back in the console's seat, said, "Spock—back there—what held you back when we were attacked?"

"A most intriguing artifact . . . a hand axe, Doctor, reminiscent of those used by the Lake People of Athos IV."

"Even if you'd gotten it, you couldn't have brought it back with you. It must have weighed a hundred and fifty pounds."

Spock looked around from the console, his face astounded. "You know, Doctor, until this moment, that never occurred to me."

McCoy grunted. "An encouraging sign of humanity. It was a fool thing to do. It almost got you killed. If we hadn't come after you . . ."

"By coming after me you caused a delay in our lift off. So you may well have destroyed what slim chance you have of survival. The logical thing was to leave me behind."

McCoy sighed. "Well, you're back to normal. Remind me to tell you sometime how sick and tired I am of your logic."

"I will, Doctor." He was scanning the console. "Orbit attitude in one minute, Mr. Scott. Fuel status?"

"Fifteen pounds psi. Approximately enough for one complete orbit."

"And after that?" McCoy said.

Scott shook his head. "Tapping those boosters removed our last chance of making a soft landing."

"You mean—a burn-up?" asked Boma.

Spock said, "That is the usual end of a decaying orbit."

McCoy got up and went to him. "Spock, can't we do anything?"

He looked up. "The *Enterprise* is undoubtedly back on course for Makus III. I, for one, do not believe in angels. There won't be one around, Doctor, to bear us up on its wings."

"Well, Spock . . . so ends your first command."

"Yes. My first command."

Scott said, "Orbit attitude attained, Mr. Spock. With present fuel that gives us about forty-five minutes."

But Spock seemed singularly uninterested in the information. Nodding slightly, he stared at the console. Then he slowly turned his head to look at the others. They were all back there in their seats . . . McCoy, the girl, Boma—and Scott, standing by. And all of them, each in his own way, alone with the thought of the final extinction. But their eyes were on him as though he could magically avert it for them. If he'd been a sweating creature, Spock would have been wet with it. Instead, he was a Vulcan by training as well as inheritance, a being required to remain impervious to emotion. Now, in his half-human agony, he took refuge behind a mask of stone. His first and last command. His hand went out toward a switch.

"Spock!" Scott shouted.

He threw the switch. The ship trembled—and a blast of fire burst from its pods.

"What's happened?" cried the girl.

"He's jettisoned the fuel—and ignited it!" Scott yelled.

Boma was on his feet. "Have you gone crazy, Spock?"

"Perhaps, Mr. Boma."

McCoy, licking his lips, girded himself for the question. "Scotty, how long do we have?"

"Six minutes."

At Sulu's cry Kirk turned his pain-drawn face. "Yes, Mr. Sulu?"

"The screen, Captain! Something's back there! At Taurus II!"

The strain had been too much for all of them. Sulu was hallucinating. "The screen," Kirk said. Then he looked at it. "Sensors, Mr. Sulu? A meteorite?"

"No, sir. It's holding a lateral line! There it is again . . . on the screen. Captain, it's holding steady!"

A streak of flame was moving against the blackness of space.

Kirk exploded into action. "One hundred and eighty degrees about, Mr. Sulu! Lieutenant Uhura! Contact Transporter Room! All beams ready! Full normal speed!"

On the screen the flame flickered—and died.

And on the *Galileo* Spock sat unmoving. The heat had begun. He could sense the unbelieving eyes fixed on him—on his Satanic, alien ears. He had destroyed them. He was hardly aware of the hand, the human hand, that suddenly fell on his shoulder.

"Ah, laddie," Scott said, "it was a good gamble. Maybe it was worth it."

Somebody said, "I don't . . . understand."

Scott whirled. "He turned the ship into a distress signal—a flare!"

Spock said, "Even if there's no one out there to see it."

Scott kept the hand on his shoulder. "The orbit's decaying. Thirty-six seconds to atmosphere."

McCoy joined them. "It may be the last action you ever take, Spock—but it was all human."

"Totally illogical, Doctor. There was no chance."

"Which is exactly what I mean," McCoy said.

A whining sound came. A wisp of smoke drifted from the control panel. Spock, reaching up, slid up the metal shutter on the forward window. The *Galileo* was on fire, glowing red to orange to pure white flame. Its prisoners tore at their throats, coughing as the aisle filled with hot smoke.

Kirk, fingers crossed in the old Earth's plea to Lady Luck, said, "*Activate Transporter beams!*"

Then he waited. A sweating creature, he could feel it breaking from every pore of his body. Sulu said, "What-

ever it was, Captain, it just burned up in the atmosphere.”

“Yes. I can see for myself, Mr. Sulu.”

Behind him Uhura leaped from her chair. “Captain! Transporter Room reports five persons aboard! Alive and well!”

“Alive, Lieutenant?”

So the beams had caught them. In the searing heat of the *Galileo*, they had faded, breaking to the dazzle that had brought them home. Kirk covered his face with his hands. Then he lifted his head. “Mr. Sulu. Proceed on course for Makus 111. Warp factor one.”

“Aye, aye, sir. Warp factor one.”

McCoy was whispering to Kirk. Then they both looked over to the computer station where Spock sat, composed, his eyes intent on his dials.

“Mr. Spock?”

“Yes, Captain.”

“When you ignited all your remaining fuel, you knew there was virtually no chance the flame would be seen. But you did it anyhow. Am I correct in defining that as an act of desperation?”

“Yes, Captain.”

“Desperation is a highly emotional state of mind. How do you account for it in yourself?”

“Quite simply, sir. I examined the problem from all angles. It was plainly hopeless. Logic informed me that the only possible action would have to be a desperate one. A logical decision, logically arrived at.”

“You mean, you reasoned it was time for an emotional outburst?”

“I would not use those terms, sir, but those are essentially the facts.”

“You’re not going to admit that for once in your life you committed a purely human, emotional act?”

“No, sir.”

“Mr. Spock, you are a stubborn man.”

“Yes, sir.”

Kirk got up, started toward him, thought better of it. Grinning, he shook his head, himself accepting the logic of facts as they were. Spock caught the grin. His left eyebrow lifted.

IS THERE IN TRUTH NO BEAUTY?

(Jean Lisette Aroeste)

The civilian named Lawrence Marvick stepped from the Transporter platform of the *Enterprise*, aggression in every line of his square-jawed face. Kirk, moving forward to greet him, thought, *What's the man afraid of?* But his voice was smoothly cordial. "Welcome aboard, Mr. Marvick. I am James Kirk, the Cap—"

Marvick cut him off. "Kirk, what are you doing here? You'll have to leave, you know, before the Medeusan Ambassador arrives!"

"I am aware of that, Mr. Marvick. We have taken all precautions. This is Mr. Spock, our First Officer."

Marvick eyed Spock briefly. "Oh yes, you're the Vulcan. It's all right for you to remain here but you, Kirk, and that other officer . . ."

Scott came from the Transporter console to shake the guest's hand with enthusiasm. "Montgomery Scott, Chief Engineer, Mr. Marvick. Call me Scotty!"

Recovering his hand, the new arrival addressed Spock. "Have you got your vizor? You must have it. Humans who get even a glimpse of Medeusans have gone insane."

Spock bowed. "Thank you, Mr. Marvick. I shall be wearing the vizor."

Marvick's authoritative manner was beginning to rile Kirk. "We mustn't keep the Ambassador waiting," he said. "Mr. Marvick, will you go with Mr. Scott now, please? You two should have a good deal in common."

As Scott ushered the man out, Kirk heard him say, "It's a rare privilege to meet one of the designers of the *Enterprise*. I appreci—"

The door closed and Kirk crossed to the intercom. "Lieutenant Uhura, inform the Ambassador and Dr. Jones that we're ready to beam them aboard." He turned

to see Spock removing a red safety vizor from his belt. "You're sure that thing will work?"

"It has proved entirely effective for Vulcans, sir."

"It's your human half I'm worried about. Report to me when the Transport has been completed."

"Yes, Captain."

Left alone as the Captain returned to the bridge, Spock adjusted the vizor. It covered not only his eyes but the whole upper half of his face. At the Transporter console, he manipulated the beam-up buttons. On the platform sparkles gradually assumed the slim shape of a young woman. The sheen of embroidery on her long, graceful gown matched her cloud of silver-blond hair. Beside her was a box of medium size. Removing her red vizor, she revealed black-lashed eyes of a vivid blue. Then, to Spock's astonishment, a white arm was lifted in the Vulcan salute.

An eyebrow slightly raised, Spock returned it. "Welcome aboard, Ambassador Kollos," he said. "I am First Officer Spock."

She stepped from the platform. "And I am Dr. Jones—Dr. Miranda Jones." She gestured to the box still on the platform. "The Ambassador is honored to meet you."

Quiet and undisconcerted, Spock went to the box, affixing anti-gravs to it. When they were firmly clamped into place, he made his report to Kirk. "Ready to proceed, Captain."

Kirk, on the bridge, swung to Uhura. "Lieutenant, open channels to all decks."

"All channels open, sir."

Kirk reached for his speaker. "This is the Captain. All ship's personnel, clearance plans now in effect. Vacate corridors immediately. The Ambassador will be escorted at once to his quarters." He moved an intercom button. "Mr. Spock, all decks are now clear. You may proceed."

The box was clearly the habitat of the Medeusan Ambassador. As Spock lifted it carefully out of an elevator, he said, "Dr. Jones, may I offer you my congratulations on your assignment with Ambassador Kollos?"

She bowed. "The assignment is not yet definite. It will depend upon my ability to achieve a true mind-link with the Ambassador."

"You should find it a fascinating experience."

A flicker of resentment flashed in her blue eyes. "I wasn't aware that *anyone* had ever succeeded in a mind-link with a Medeusan!"

"Nobody has," Spock said. "I was merely referring to mind-links I have attempted with other species."

"Surely," she said, "your duties as a Starship officer do not permit you the luxury of many such experiments!"

He regarded her gravely. "My duties as a Starship officer permit me very few luxuries of any kind."

She reached for a conciliatory tone. "You make it quite obvious that the *Enterprise* is your paramount interest." She paused before she added, "You know, Mr. Spock, I have heard you turned down this assignment with Ambassador Kollos."

"I could not accept it," he said. "As you've pointed out, my life is here. And the Ambassador's quarters are also here." He indicated a cabin on their right.

There was a pedestal in the cabin. Setting the habitat down on it, Spock removed the anti-gravs. At the room's intercom, he said, "Spock to bridge. We have reached the Ambassador's quarters, Captain."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock. Lieutenant Uhura, notify all hands to return to stations." Kirk sighed with relief as he turned to Sulu. "All right, helmsman. Let's take her out. Warp factor two."

"Warp factor two, sir."

In the cabin, Spock, vized like Miranda, was eyeing the alien habitat. "Dr. Jones," he said, "I should very much like to exchange greetings with Ambassador Kollos."

She smiled. "I am sure the Ambassador will be charmed."

Both of them placed a hand on the box. Then they went perfectly still, each absorbed in deep concentration. After a long moment the lid of the box lifted very slightly—and a light of purest blue streamed through the crack. Leaning forward, Spock peered into the box. Instantly, he recoiled; but after pausing to recover from the sight, he looked into it again. His lips moved in a smile of an almost childlike wonder.

The girl saw the smile. Once more resentment flashed

in her eyes. The lid of the box fell. Unsmiling now, Spock said, "I almost envy you your assignment, Dr. Jones."

"Do I read in your thoughts that you are tempted to take my place, Mr. Spock?"

"No. But I feel your mind trying to touch mine, Doctor. Were you born a telepath?"

She nodded. "Yes. That is why I had to study on Vulcan."

"Of course," he said. "May I now show you to your quarters?"

"I'd better remain here a bit. Ambassador Kollos sometimes finds the process of Transport unsettling."

"Our ship's surgeon often makes the same complaint." He pointed to the intercom. "Call when you are ready."

He bowed and left the cabin. Miranda turned back to the habitat. She removed her vizor roughly, her beautiful face disturbed, doubtful, even apprehensive. In the solitude of the cabin, she cried out fiercely, "What did he see when he looked at you, Kollos? I have to know! I have to know!"

The *Enterprise* had done itself proud. Though dinner was over, hosts and guests still lingered over their brandy at a table elegant with crystal, candlelight, arrangements of fresh-cut flowers. All the officers wore dress uniforms; and Miranda, in silver-embroidered blue velvet, glowed like a blond pearl in the candlelight. Marvick, in civilian white tie and tails, was quiet but observant.

Kirk refilled the girl's brandy goblet. "I can't understand," he said, "why they're letting you go with Kollos."

"*They, Captain?*"

"The male population of the Federation. Didn't anyone try to talk you out of it?"

The black lashes drooped. "Well . . . now that you ask, yes."

"I'm glad he didn't succeed," Kirk said. "If he had, I'd never have met you." He raised his glass to her. "Tell me, Dr. Jones, why isn't it dangerous for you to be with Kollos? Spock I can understand. Nothing makes any impression on him."

"Why, thank you, Captain," Spock said.

"Not at all, Mr. Spock." He turned back to Miranda. "No other human is able to look at Kollos without going mad, even when vizored. How do you manage?"

"I spent four years on Vulcan studying their mental disciplines."

McCoy spoke. "You poor girl!" he cried with heartfelt sympathy.

Spock looked down the table at him. "Indeed, Doctor! I would say that the lady is very fortunate!"

"Vulcan disciplines are hardly *my* idea of fun."

"On Vulcan," the girl said, "I learned to do what it is impossible to learn anywhere else."

Smiling, Kirk asked, "How to read minds?"

"How *not* to read them, Captain."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," Kirk said.

Spock interposed. "Dr. Jones was born a telepath, Captain."

Miranda laughed. "Vulcan was necessary to my sanity, Captain! I had to learn how to close out the thoughts of others."

Spock nodded. "What humans generally find it impossible to understand is the need to shut out the bedlam of others' thoughts and emotions."

"Not to mention the bedlam of even one's *own* emotions," Miranda said. "On Vulcan one learns to do that, too." She reached out to touch a medallion pinned to Spock's breast. McCoy watched her fingers move over it.

Spock pulled back, fearful of scratching her. "Forgive me," he said. "I forget that dress uniforms can injure."

She leaned toward him. "I was merely interested in your Vulcan IDIC, Mr. Spock. Is it a reminder that you could mind-meld with the Ambassador much more effectively than I could?"

There was an uncomfortable pause. She broke it hastily, explaining, "It would be most difficult for a Vulcan to see a mere human take on this exciting challenge, gentlemen."

"Interesting," McCoy said. "It's a fact, Spock, that you rarely wear your IDIC."

"Bones," Kirk said, "I doubt that our First Officer

would don the most revered of all Vulcan symbols merely to annoy a guest."

Spock spoke for himself, looking straight at Miranda. "In fact, I wear it this evening to honor you, Dr. Jones."

"Indeed?" she said.

"Yes," he said, "indeed. Perhaps, despite those years on Vulcan, you missed the true symbology of the IDIC." He placed his hand on the medallion. "The triangle and the circle . . . different shapes, materials, textures . . . they represent any two diverse things which come together to create truth or beauty." He rose, brandy glass in hand. "For example—Dr. Miranda Jones, who has combined herself with the disciplines of my race to become greater than the sum of both!"

Suddenly uneasy, Kirk saw that his lovely guest appreciated neither the grace nor the sincerity of Spock's gallantry. He changed the subject. "Back to your mission, Dr. Jones. Do you feel a way can be found to employ Medeusan navigators on Starships? It would solve many of our present navigational problems."

"The key is the mind-link learned on Vulcan. Once we learn to form a corporate intelligence with Medeusans, designers of Starships—and that's where Larry Marvick comes in—can work on adapting instruments."

McCoy stirred in his chair. "I don't care how 'benevolent' the Medeusans are supposed to be. Isn't it suicidal to deal with something ugly enough to cause madness? Why do you do it?"

"Dr. McCoy," Spock said, "I see that you still subscribe to the outmoded notion held by your ancient Greeks—the one which insists that what is good must also be beautiful."

Marvick spoke for the first time. "And the obverse of it—that what is beautiful is automatically expected to be good."

"I suppose," Kirk reflected, "that most of us are naturally attracted by beauty as we are repelled by ugliness. It's the last of our prejudices. But at the risk of sounding prejudiced—" He paused to raise his glass to Miranda. "Here's to Beauty!"

All the men rose and drank. McCoy lifted his glass

a second time. "To Miranda Jones—the loveliest woman ever to grace a Starship!" He looked around at his fellow males. "How can one so beautiful condemn herself to look upon ugliness for the rest of her life? Will we allow it?"

His answer was a general shout of "No!"

McCoy sat down. "We must not permit her to leave us!"

Miranda was smiling at him. "How can one so full of the love of life as you, Dr. McCoy, condemn himself to look upon suffering and disease for the rest of his life? Can we allow *that*, gentlemen?"

McCoy tipped his glass to her, sipping from it. "I drink to whatever it is you want most, Miranda."

As Kirk joined in the toast, he noticed how intently Marvick was staring at the girl. He was about to offer her more brandy when he was halted by the look of terror that had abruptly come into her face.

She rose to her feet, crying, "There's a murd—" She broke off and the flower she had been holding dropped to the table.

Kirk caught her arm. "Dr. Jones, what is it?" But McCoy was already beside her. "You're ill," he said. "Let me help you. . . ."

She pulled away, her face slightly calmer. "There's someone nearby thinking of murder," she said.

Shocked silence fell over the table. She was clearly serious and Kirk said, "Who is it—can you tell?"

"It's . . . not there now. I . . . I can't pick it up at all."

"Was it in this room?" Kirk said.

She looked around her. "I don't know, Captain. It's gone now." She seemed to have regained her composure. "These things are usually momentary. A common human impulse, seldom acted out."

Spock's quiet voice said, "True. Otherwise the human race would have ceased to exist."

"Captain, do you mind if I say good night now? I'd love to visit your herbarium—but another time, if I may."

"Of course, Dr. Jones. I'll see you back to—"

Spock interrupted. "Perhaps I could see you back to your quarters?"

McCoy was staring curiously at her. "Thank you, gentlemen," she said. "You make a choice impossible. Please stay here and enjoy yourselves. It was a delightful dinner."

"Sleep well, Miranda," Kirk said.

She waved a friendly good night to them. But McCoy, who was still watching her closely, went quickly to her at the door. "Are you sure you're well enough to find your way alone?"

"Yes, Dr. McCoy. Please don't worry about me."

McCoy bowed and, reaching for her hand, kissed it lightly. As the door closed behind her, he said, "Where I come from, that's what's called a 'lady.'"

"She is something special," Kirk agreed.

"*Very special!* I suggest you treat her accordingly!"

Marvick's sudden outburst startled them all. The man picked up a napkin and dropped it. "I—I have not known Dr. Jones for a long time. But long enough to be aware of her remarkable gifts!" He paused. "Well, it's been a long day for me . . ."

Scott said, "Would you like to stop off in Engineering, Larry? I have a few things to check; and a bottle of Scotch says you can't handle the controls you designed."

"Some other time," Marvick told him.

The door closed behind him. Turning away from it, Kirk looked Spock over. "Spock, you're really dressed up for the occasion. Very impressive."

"I genuinely intended to honor her, Captain." He moved to the door. "Good night, gentlemen."

His face unusually thoughtful, McCoy was still standing at the closed door. He looked at Kirk's handsome face. "That's not just another girl, Jim. Don't make that mistake."

Kirk grinned. "I can see that for myself, Bones. Anything else?"

"I can't say exactly what it is. She seems very . . . vulnerable."

Kirk was smiling again. "We're all vulnerable, Dr. McCoy . . . in one way or another."

"Yes. But there is something very disturbing about her."

"You'll get no argument from me, Bones. Meaning that she's quite a woman."

"Good night, Jim," McCoy said.

Alone, Kirk returned to the table. He retrieved the flower she had dropped and tucked it into the breast of his uniform.

Miranda's cabin was luxurious. She drifted around it, graceful but aimless, occasionally touching objects, perhaps because she admired them, perhaps to acquaint herself with the room's dimensions and contents. A buzz at her door sounded.

She leaned against it, calling, "Who is it?"

"Larry. I've got to talk to you."

"Larry, it's late. . . ."

"Please, Miranda. It's important."

She opened the door. "All right. Come in, then."

Marvick's face had the haunted look of a man in desperate need of a drug. Closing the door behind him, he stood silent for a moment, looking at the girl. "I thought that dinner," he said, "was never going to end."

He moved closer to her. She backed away, putting distance between them. "I rather enjoyed it," she said.

"I know you did. I didn't. You were too far away."

"Larry, I'll be further away than that soon." Her tone was intended to be soothing. But it failed to soothe. "Don't speak of that!" Marvick cried. "Don't . . . no, we have to speak of it. There is so little time. . . ." He reached for her but she eluded him, maintaining the little distance. "Please, Miranda, don't go with Kollos!"

She sighed. "Larry, we've been over that time and time again. Please accept—"

Marvick tried for lightness but his hunger broke through it. "Don't I know? I've begged you in restaurants, in the laboratory, on one knee, on both knees! Miranda, how can you do this to me?"

"If you would only try to understand . . ."

"What I understand is that you're a woman and I'm a man—one of your own kind! You think that Kollos will ever be able to give you anything like this?" He had her in his arms. The kiss crushed her lips against her teeth. Then his violence suddenly ended. He held her qui-

etly, caressing her hair, her throat, blind to the quickened anger in her eyes.

She freed herself. "You shouldn't have done that," she said coldly.

He ran a distracted hand over his face. "I'm sorry. . . . "Why, oh why did I ever meet you?"

"I have been honest with you," she said. "I simply cannot love you the way you want me to. And I am going with Kollos. That is final."

"Miranda, in God's name . . . !"

She went to the door. "I think you'd better leave now. I find you exhaust—" She suddenly broke off. Her hand went to her mouth to block a scream.

"So it's you!" she cried.

He lowered his head like an animal at bay. She was at the far side of the room now, her face white with shock. "I didn't know it was you before! Who is it you want to kill, Larry? Me? Larry, you must not keep such impulses to yourself! I can help you. . . ."

"So now you want to 'help' me, do you? Well, now I know what a man has to do to get a response from you! A patient is what you want—not a man! Dr. Jones, the great psychologist! Just for a change of pace, try to be a woman for once in your life!"

He slammed the door behind him. Outside at the elevator, he turned and went back. At her cabin, he hesitated before moving on down the corridor. His square jaw hard, he stopped at the door of the Medeusan's quarters. Firmly and deliberately, he pushed it open.

In the cabin's center the habitat still stood on its pedestal. It emitted a steady, pulsing sound. For a moment Marvick stood, tense, his back to it, hand on the door handle. Then he turned to look at the box, his eyes blazing with hatred. The pulsing sound grew louder, as though the box's occupant had been aroused to danger.

There was an instant when fear and fascination combined to immobilize Marvick. It passed. His hand went fast to the phaser at his belt. The lid of the habitat flashed open, enveloping Marvick in blinding light. He staggered, dropping the phaser. The Medeusan reared up. Marvick screamed as his hand whipped up to shield his eyes from the forbidden sight of Kollos.

Miranda sat bolt upright on her sleeping couch. Then her hand went to her throat. Leaping from the couch, she flew to her cabin door. Panic ran with her as she raced down the corridor to Kollos's quarters.

In his light that still filled the room, she saw the phaser. Tears flooded her eyes. Arms outstretched, she went close to the habitat, crying, "Forgive me! Kollos, forgive me!"

The rhythm of the pulsing slowed.

Down in Engineering, Scott was adjusting a control, a yeoman at work nearby. The yeoman turned as the door opened, saw Marvick and signaled Scott. Scott beamed. "Ah, there you are, Larry! So you couldn't resist that little wager!"

Trembling, still in shock, Miranda had found the cabin's intercom. Kirk, listening to her incoherent whispers, jumped from his command chair, shouting, "Lieutenant Uhura, Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy on the double! The Ambassador's quarters! Notify Security!"

He found two guards already at the door. He banged on it, calling, "Miranda . . . Miranda!"

Spock was arranging his vizor as the door opened. The girl, her own vizor in place, seemed to have recovered some composure. Silently, she passed the phaser to Kirk, lifting the mask from her eyes.

"Has the Ambassador been hurt?"

"No harm was done to him, Captain."

"Do you know who would do such a thing?"

"Larry Marvick."

Kirk stared. "Marvick? But why?"

"Madness prompted him."

Spock spoke quickly. "Did he see the Medeusan?"

"Yes, Mr. Spock."

"Then insanity is the certain result. Dangerous insanity, Captain."

Kirk ran for the cabin intercom. While he ordered a Red Alert, Scott was turning the ship's controls over to Marvick. "They're all yours, Larry. That Scotch will be in your cabin tonight if you can handle them!"

Kirk's filtered voice reached Engineering. "Captain Kirk to all ship personnel. An attempt has been made to murder Ambassador Kollos. The man is dangerously in-

sane. He is Lawrence Marvick. Be on the watch for him. Kirk out."

Scott's jaw fell. Pulling himself together, he tried to push Marvick away from the controls, but the man's joined fists came crashing down on him with all the force of madness. Scott crumpled. The yeoman leaped for Marvick's back and was smashed to the deck.

The ship groaned under the lash of sudden acceleration. Staggering, Kirk, Spock and McCoy looked at each other. The ship's groan had become a whine when they raced out of the bridge elevator.

"Explain, Mr. Sulu!" Kirk shouted.

"I can't, sir. But we're traveling at warp factor eight point five."

"And still accelerating, Captain," Chekov said.

Spock looked at the helm console. "Our deflectors can't hold unless speed is immediately reduced."

"Lieutenant Uhura, put me through to Engineering!"

She turned to her console, bracing herself against the ship's shuddering. "Captain, they don't answer. . . ."

Sulu said, "Warp factor nine, accelerating."

Kirk wheeled to Spock. "Mr. Spock, can you disengage the power from here?"

Spock already lay on his back, reaching inside a wall panel. "We shall try to, Captain. Mr. Chekov, come here, please. I need you."

Uhura turned. "I seem to have Engineering, Captain."

"Put it on the intercom, Lieutenant."

He heard Marvick's voice. It was singing. "We'll make it! We're under way now! We'll make it—and get out of here!"

A maniacal laugh echoed through the bridge.

Kirk hit the intercom. "Security! Get down to Engineering!"

Miranda appeared at his elbow. "I'll go with you," she said.

"No."

"I must, Captain. I can reach his mind."

After a moment, he nodded.

In the corridor outside Engineering, two Security guards were trying to open the door. "He's jammed it, Captain," one said. "But with another good pull . . ."

It opened. Marvick, at the controls, was manipulating them easily and skillfully. But his dementia was unmistakable. Moans of genuine anguish were followed by seizures of uncontrollable giggles. When he saw Kirk standing quietly beside him, he chuckled. "Don't worry, Kirk. We'll be safe soon. Over the boundaries of the universe. We can hide there. . . ."

Kirk made a grab for the controls and Sulu's voice said, "Warp speed nine point five and accelerating, Captain."

Marvick had lashed out at Kirk with a thick metal tool. The guards closed in on him, pinning his furiously flailing arms behind his back. Scott, crawling to his feet, was moving groggily toward the controls when the ship broke out of the galaxy. In a flash of searing light, the shapes of people, instruments—everything—dissolved into nameless colors, confused and changing. A roar so deafening it lost the quality of sound hammered at the trembling *Enterprise*. The ship stopped, hanging suspended in a space of alien colors.

Kirk had been flung across the deck. As the roar diminished, he got slowly to his feet. Marvick, still held tight by the guards, was whispering, "We're safe. We made it. We're safe, Kirk. We made it over the boundaries of the galaxy."

McCoy was on his knees. Kirk nodded to him. Bones hauled himself up and, opening his medikit, stepped behind Marvick. But the hypo's needle had barely touched him when he made a lunge that almost broke the guards' hold.

Kirk said, "Marvick, it will help you sleep."

The tortured creature shrieked. "No! No! We mustn't sleep! Never! Never again. No sleep! Never! They come into your dreams. Then they can suffocate you! No sleep—no dreams. No! No!"

Kirk went to him. "All right, Larry. No sleep. No dreams. Just come with me. I have a better hiding place for you. I'll take you to it. Come. . . ."

Marvick made another break for the controls. "We must be ready to speed, Kirk! Speed! Speed on to the next galaxy. Away from here! Away!"

The wildly roving eyes caught sight of Miranda. Mar-

vick tore his arms free and stretched them out to her. Then he collapsed. Kirk nodded to the guards, who released him. Supporting the limp body in his own arms, Kirk saw that Marvick's eyes had filled with tears. "Miranda . . . Miranda," he was whispering. "You . . . are here . . . with me. . . ."

Kirk carried him to a bench. The girl came to kneel beside Marvick. "Yes, Larry," she said. "I am here."

The madman cupped her face in his hands. "I didn't lose you. My beautiful love. I thought I . . . had lost you."

"I am here, Larry."

For the first time, Kirk saw the depth of Marvick's love. The tears were wet on the man's face and his body was trembling. Miranda looked up at Kirk. "I see what he sees," she said and, turning back to Marvick, spoke softly. "Don't, Larry. Don't think of what you saw. Don't think of it. . . ."

He uttered a scream of pain, pushing her away. "Liar! Deceiver! You're not alone! He's here! He's here! You brought him with you!"

The jealous hate rose in him again. He caught the girl by the throat. The Security guards moved quickly to help Kirk loosen his clutch. This time McCoy was fast with his hypo.

Kirk lifted Miranda in his arms. Watching them, Marvick spoke quietly. "Do not love her. She will kill you if you love her. Do not love her."

Kirk looked down at the woman in his arms, the warning in his ears. He carried her to the door when the dying man behind him called, "I love you, Miranda. . . ."

"Where are we, Mr. Spock?"

The bridge viewing screen showed only tangles of those alien, nameless, ever-changing colors. Spock lifted his head from hard work at his library computer. "Far outside our own galaxy, Captain, judging from the lack of any traceable reference points."

"What you mean is we're nowhere," Chekov said.

Nowhere. Kirk moved restlessly in his command chair as McCoy, a paper in his hand, came out of the elevator.

"May I interrupt, Jim?"

"Yes, Bones."

"I've got the autopsy on Marvick. Heart stopped: cause unknown. Brain activity stopped: cause unknown. . . . Shall I go on?"

"You mean he simply died?"

"I mean he evidently couldn't live with what he saw."

Kirk looked unseeingly at the screen. "Or with what he felt." Remembering the mad eyes dripping tears, Kirk sighed. Nowhere. But back to business just the same. He turned to Scott. "How much damage to the engines, Scotty?"

"We'll need some repairs, sir, but the ship is basically intact."

"Mr. Spock, can you at least give us a position report?"

"Impossible to calculate, Captain. We lack data to analyze. Our instruments seem to function normally but what they tell us makes no sense." He paused. "Our records are reasonably clear up to the point at which we left our galaxy."

"We should be able to navigate back."

"We have no reference points to use in plotting a return course, Captain. We experienced extreme sensory distortion; and will do so again if we try to use warp speed. Nor can we recross the barrier at sublight speed."

"A madman got us into this and it's beginning to look as if only a madman can get us out."

"An entertaining suggestion, Mr. Chekov," Spock said. "Unhelpful, however."

Kirk rose and went to Spock. "The Medeusans have developed interstellar navigation to a fine art. Could Kollos function as a navigator in spite of the sensory distortion?"

"Very possibly, sir. The Medeusan's sensory system is radically different from ours. Perhaps, for the purpose of this emergency, I could become Kollos. And he become Spock."

"Explain."

"A fusion, Captain. A mind-link to create a double entity. Each of us will possess the knowledge and capabilities of both. We will function as one being."

"What are the hazards?"

"If the link is successful, there'll be a tendency to lose separate identity. It is a necessary risk." He hesitated, his eyes on Kirk's. "Of course, the lady will not want to give me permission to establish the link."

"I don't think she'd want *anyone* to intrude on the kind of rapport she has with Kollos," McCoy said.

"Dr. Jones," Spock said, "has shown reluctance whenever I have asked to converse with Kollos. In some ways she is still most human, Captain. Particularly in the vigor of her jealousy and her thirst for power."

Kirk didn't speak, and Spock went on. "Her telepathic powers are also formidable. If it is at all possible, her mind must be so engaged that no other thoughts will intrude on it."

"I think that can be arranged," Kirk said.

McCoy looked at him. "Jim, don't take this lightly. She's extremely sensitive. If you try to be devious with her, she'll know."

"Bones, I know what's at stake. I have no intention of playing games with Miranda."

He turned on his heel and left the bridge.

The Starship's herbarium was odorous with the mingled scents of flowers.

Kirk released Miranda's arm. "I may be sentimental, but this is my favorite room. It reminds me of Earth."

"I've never been to Earth. But what lovely flowers! May I touch them, Captain?"

He smiled at her. "Go ahead."

She moved down the path, stopping to stroke a velvety petal, a leaf. Watching her, Kirk thought: *She's a blossom herself.* But a spray of butterfly orchids disappointed her. "They have no scent," she complained, turning to Kirk.

"Try these."

They were roses, white, yellow, pale pink, some nearly black. She plunged her face into them, inhaling their perfume with delight. Suddenly she cried out, pulled away and with a grimace of pain put her hurt finger to her mouth.

Kirk took her hand. "Let me see. . . ."

"It was just a thorn," she said hastily, removing the hand. Kirk recovered it. Gently, he rubbed her finger. "I was hoping to make you forget about thorns today," he said.

"It doesn't hurt anymore."

"You mustn't blame yourself," he said, "because Marvick loved you."

Her abrupt ferocity startled him. "I don't! I didn't want his love! I couldn't return it—and I had no use for it!"

Kirk spoke slowly. "Surely, sooner or later you will want human love—a man to companion you."

She pushed aside a strand of silver-blond hair. "Shall I tell you what human companionship means to me? A battle! Defense against others' emotions! When I'm tired and my guard slips, their feelings burst in on me like a storm. Hatred, desire, envy, pity—pity's the worst of all! I agree with the Vulcans. Violent emotion is a kind of insanity."

"So you will spend the rest of your life with Medeusans to avoid human feelings?"

"Perhaps."

"A meeting of minds isn't enough. What are you going to do for love hunger, Miranda?"

She turned her back on him. "You will never understand me. I don't think you should try, Captain."

He pulled her around to face him. "Look. You are young, human. No matter how beautiful the Medeusans' minds are, they are alien to yours! You'll yearn for the sight and sound of a human like yourself—and weary of ugliness!"

The black-lashed eyes blazed. "Ugly! What *is* ugly? You have never seen Kollos! Who are you to say whether he is too ugly to bear or too beautiful to bear?"

"I did not mean to insult you. Please, Miranda. . . ."

As she ripped a leaf from the rosebush beside her, Spock was striding down the corridor to Kollos's cabin.

Kirk wasn't a man to be fazed by female tantrums. He picked up the leaf she'd flung down. "Well," he said, "we can agree upon one thing, anyway. We both like roses. I

wish I had moonlight for you, too. I'd like to see what moonlight would do to that hair of yours." He reached for her but she evaded him with a little laugh.

"I see you're a very complicated man, Captain."

He had her, unresisting, in his arms. "Play fair," he whispered into the ear on his shoulder. "You're not supposed to know what I'm thinking about. I'm supposed to show you."

He felt her stiffen. She released herself with a surprising strength. "He's with Kollos!" she cried. "Oh no, you mustn't let him do it!" She turned and ran down the path. He caught her. "Miranda! You can't leave just as . . ."

She tore herself free. "Let me go! You don't realize! You don't know what a dangerous thing Spock is planning! Please, please, we must stop him!"

Kirk followed her at a run.

Spock was standing at the door of the Medeusan's quarters. He turned as they burst out of the elevator. Miranda tried to shove him aside. Grave, entirely composed, he looked at her. "The *Enterprise* is at stake, Dr. Jones. It is not possible for you to be involved."

"Why? I've already committed myself to mind-link with Kollos!" She whirled to Kirk. "Why do you allow him to place himself in jeopardy?"

"Mine is a duty you cannot assume," Spock said. "The vital factor to be considered is not telepathic competence. It is to pilot this ship. That is something you cannot do."

"Then teach me to pilot it! I can memorize instantly. Set any test you choose. After only one rehearsal, I shall be able to operate all the machinery on this vessel!"

McCoy had hurried out of the elevator. He rushed to the group, shouting, "Wait a minute!" He looked at the girl—and made his decision. "Miranda, I know you can do almost anything a sighted person can do—but you cannot pilot a Starship!"

She shrank back, stricken.

"What?" Kirk said.

"I'm sorry," McCoy said. "But the occasion calls for realism. You are blind, Miranda. And there are some things you just can't do."

Spock was eyeing the silvery embroidery on her sleeve. "Ah," he said. "A highly sophisticated sensor web. My compliments to your dressmaker, Dr. Jones."

The enigma unraveled for Kirk. She was safe with Kollos because she couldn't see him.

"I think I understand now," he said. "I know now why pity is the 'worst of all,' Miranda."

She flung her head high. "Pity which I do not deserve! Do you gather more information with your eyes than I do with my sensors? I could play tennis with you, Captain! I might even beat you. I am standing here exactly one meter and four centimeters from the door! Can you judge distance that accurately?"

"That won't be necessary," Kirk said gently. "Spock will make the mind-link. For your sake as well as ours."

"No! I won't let you do this!"

McCoy said, "I appeal to you as a colleague, Dr. Jones—don't fight us like this."

"No!"

"If none of us can persuade you, there is someone who can." Kirk used his command voice. "You will take this matter up with Ambassador Kollos."

She glared at him. Jerking open the cabin door, she entered and slammed it behind her.

Kirk eyed McCoy. "Why didn't you tell me, Bones?"

"She'd have told you herself if she'd wanted you to know. I respect her privacy."

"There's a great deal about this particular lady to resp—" Kirk stopped at the sound of a broken cry from the cabin. Unshamed tears streaming down her face, Miranda opened its door. McCoy started to her, but thinking better of it, waited for her to make the first move. It was to drag an arm across her tear-wet face. In the gesture was a childlike quality that went straight to Kirk's heart.

Still sobbing, she said, "It . . . seems that I have no choice . . . but to obey you."

The habitat had been removed to the bridge. A rigid metal screen hid it from all eyes but Spock's; and his were vized. People barely breathed. Even the ship seemed to hold her breath. The sole sound was the quiet, majestic rhythm of Kollos's life support system. Alone

with the black box behind the screen, Spock knelt and lifted the lid. The pure blue light flooded his face.

Hands pressed against the surface of the box, he leaned forward until his temples touched it. He backed away, gasping, eyes closed behind the vizor, his forehead beaded with sweat. A shudder shook him. Then, resolutely, he opened his eyes, inviting the light again.

Kirk's hands were wet. Still as cats, McCoy and Sulu waited. Chekov, at Spock's station, moved no buttons. Next to him, Uhura buried her face in her hands.

Somebody whispered, "Mr. Spock . . ."

Spock had stepped from behind the screen, pulling off the vizor. He looked relaxed, younger. And when he spoke, his voice was younger, warm and tender.

"How delightful to see you again!" he said. "I know you, all of you! James Kirk, my Captain and dear friend for years . . ."

He took a step toward Kirk, looking around him with interest. "And Leonard McCoy, another friend. And Uhura, whose name means freedom! Uhura who walks in beauty like the night . . ."

The shocked McCoy cried, "That can't be Spock!"

Cool and precise, Spock said, "Does it surprise you that I've read Byron, Doctor?"

"That's Spock!" McCoy said.

A mind-link to create a double entity. Those had been Spock's own words. "Am I . . . addressing the Medeusan Ambassador?" Kirk asked.

A radiant smile lit Spock's face. "In part—that is, that part of us that is known to you as Kollos. Where is Miranda? Ah, there you are! O, brave new world that boasts such beauty in it!"

She spoke harshly. "Tis new to thee, Mr. Spock."

His tone was that of a lover. "My world is next for you and me."

Kirk couldn't decipher the expression on her face, but she seemed to feel a need to hold herself under rigid control. But Spock's face was alive with such a naked tenderness that Kirk averted his eyes from it. The girl edged over to McCoy and Spock advanced to the command chair.

"Captain Kirk, I speak for all of us you call Medeusans.

I am sorry for the trouble I have brought to your ship.”

“We can’t hold you to blame for what happened, Ambassador. Thank you for helping us now.”

The smile vanished. Spock was back, efficient, composed. “Now to the business at hand. With your permission, Captain?”

Kirk said, “Mr. Sulu, release the helm to Mr. Spock, please.”

“Aye, sir.”

At Sulu’s console, Spock made rapid adjustments of switches. “Coordination is completed, Captain.”

“Go ahead, then, Mr. Spock.”

The engines began to throb again. “Warp factor one in six seconds,” Spock said. “Five seconds . . .”

The ship was picking up speed. “Two seconds. One. Zero. . . .”

The searing light inundated the bridge. The great roar hammered. Bolt upright at the helm, Spock took the *Enterprise* back into its galaxy. “Position report, Mr. Chekov,” he called.

Chekov’s eyes were agog with admiration. “Bull’s eye, Mr. Spock! Our position is so close to the point where we entered the void that the difference isn’t worth mentioning!”

“That completes the maneuver, Captain,” Spock said.

“Take over, Mr. Sulu.”

As Spock vacated the helm, Kirk got to his feet. “Thank you, Ambassador. And now, Mr. Chekov, let’s get her back on course.”

Spock, flexing a hand, was intently examining it. The radiance shone in his face. “How compact your bodies are! And what a variety of senses you have! This thing you call language—it’s most remarkable. You depend on it for so much. But is any of you really its master?” A look of infinite compassion came into his face. “But the aloneness. You are all so alone. How sad that you must live out your lives in this shell of flesh, contained and separate—how lonely you are, how lonely. . . .”

A warning bell sounded in Kirk’s memory. The risk of the fusion was loss of separate identity. He turned in his chair. “Ambassador. It is time to dissolve the mind-link.”

Who had answered him—Spock or Kollok? Kirk

couldn't tell. But the words seemed to come from a great distance.

"So soon?"

Kirk got to his feet. "You must not delay."

"You are wise, Captain."

With a debonair wave of the hand, Spock crossed to the metal screen, disappearing behind it. Miranda slipped after him to stand near the screen, her face concentrated, unreadable.

Uhura spoke. "Captain, Starfleet is calling."

"Audio, Lieutenant."

A radio voice cried, "*Enterprise!* Where have you people been?"

Behind the screen a kneeling Spock was bathed again in the pure blue radiance. As Kolloos vacated his mind, he bowed his head under an oppressive sense of bereavement. He could hear Kirk saying, "Give them our position, Lieutenant. Tell them we'll send a full report later."

"Captain!"

The horror in Sulu's voice spun Kirk around to the helm station. Spock's forgotten vizor lay in Sulu's hand.

"Spock!" Kirk shouted. "Don't look! Cover your eyes!"

His cry was lost in the scream that came from behind the screen.

The shriek came again. Instinctively McCoy started toward the screen but was stopped dead in his tracks by Kirk's gesture of absolute command. "No! Don't move!"

"But, Jim . . ."

"No one is to move!" Kirk gave himself a moment to rally before he called, "Spock, are you all right?"

Time moved sluggish and slow. Kirk waited for the seconds to crawl by. Then Spock, backing out from behind the screen, turned his face to them. It was both terrified and terrifying—totally insane.

Kirk went to him, his hands outstretched. "It's all right now, Spock. You are safe with me."

But Spock had been transported to an unreachable realm. Lowering his head, he lunged at Kirk, aiming a fatal blow. Kirk ducked—and Spock, his madness distractible and purposeless, ripped out a lever from a console, hurling it across the bridge. Roaring like a wounded

beast, he raged through the room, smashing at people and objects. Kirk found position for a straight phaser shot and stunned him at close range.

McCoy ran to the stilled body. Looking up, he cried, "He's hardly breathing, Jim! I must get him to Sickbay at once!"

Again time crawled by. Spock, insane, perhaps dying there before Kirk's eyes. As Marvick had died. Kirk covered his face with his hands to shut out the sight of the deathly white face on Sickbay's examination table. That brain of Spock's, whose magnificent resources had wrung victories out of countless defeats, deranged, lost to the *Enterprise*, lost to the friends who loved him. Behind his hands, Kirk could feel the skin of his face drawing into lines of haggard agony.

"Miranda," McCoy said. "Unless she reaches down into his mind and turns it outward to us, we will lose Spock, Jim."

Kirk could bear the sight of the world again. "Vulcan mind techniques!" Then his heart cringed. "She tried to help Marvick. She couldn't. He's dead."

"That was different. Marvick loved her."

Kirk paced restlessly. "Would she so much as try? Spock is her rival. He felt her jealousy of him."

"They were not rivals in love," McCoy said.

Kirk looked at him. "No. That's true. Bones, I'm taking action. Don't interfere with it. No matter what happens." He strode to the door of Sickbay and closed it behind him.

Miranda was in her cabin. And she knew what he'd come for. Telepathy, he thought grimly, had its advantages. It made explanation unnecessary. When she emerged from her bedroom, she was wearing a stark black tunic bare of the silver embroidery sensors. Truly blind now, she had to be guided to the door.

McCoy had had the examination table tilted almost upright. Spock's waxen, unmoving body was strapped to it. Kirk led Miranda over to it. "Your mind-link with him," he said. "It must bring him back from wherever he is."

Nearly as pale as Spock, she said, "You must leave us alone, Captain."

At his desk McCoy didn't speak. Once more Kirk

waited. If the memories of Spock's loyal valor would only stop returning . . . but they wouldn't stop. And what was going on in that examination room? Spock had spoken of her "thirst for power."

Kirk walked into the examination room.

She looked up at the sound of the opening door. "Dr. McCoy?"

"It's I, the Captain."

"I have no news for you." She paused. "His life processes are failing."

The blue, blind eyes had groped for his. Kirk steeled himself against a wave of compassion for her. "And what are you doing about it?"

"Why . . . what I can, of course."

"It doesn't seem to be much!"

It sparked a flash of anger from her. "No doubt you expect me to wake up your Sleeping Beauty with a kiss!"

The compassion died in him. "It might be worth trying," he told her. "He's not a machine."

"He is a Vulcan!" she cried.

"Half of him. The other half is human—a half more human than you seem to be!"

She faced him, rage working in her face. "Face reality, Captain Kirk. His mind has gone too deep even for me to reach."

"And if you don't reach it, he will die. Isn't that what you want?"

She stared at him wordlessly; her mouth open. Then, in a small, unbelieving voice, she said, "Why . . . that is a lie!"

"You want him to die," Kirk said.

He caught her by the arm. "What did you do on the bridge? Did you make him forget to vitor his eyes?"

She wrenched her arm free. "You are insane."

He seized it again, his jaw hard. "You know your rival! He made a mind-link with Kollo—exactly what you have never been able to do!"

She struck at him, beating at his face with her fists. He immobilized her hands, holding her tight within the hard circle of his arms. "With my words," he said, "I will make you hear the ugliness Spock saw when his naked

eyes looked at Kollos! Ugliness is deep in you, Miranda!”

“Liar! Liar! Liar!” she screamed.

“Listen to me. Your passion to see Kollos is madness. You are blind. You can never see him. Never! But Spock has seen him. And for that he must die. That’s it, isn’t it?”

She twisted in his arms. “Sadistic, filthy liar . . .”

“You smell of hatred. The stench of jealousy fills you. Why don’t you strangle him as he lies there, helpless?”

Strength drained out of her. “No . . . no . . . don’t say any more, please.”

“Kollos knows what is in your heart. You can lie to yourself—but you can’t lie to Kollos.”

“Go away! Please . . . go away.”

Kirk released her. She staggered but he reached no hand to help her. The door closed behind him.

In his office McCoy got up from his desk. Kirk sank into his chair and, leaning his arms on the desk, rested his head on them, shaken, exhausted.

“Are you all right?” McCoy asked.

Kirk didn’t answer. McCoy laid a hand on the bowed shoulders. “What did you say to her, Jim?”

Kirk lifted his head. “Maybe too much.”

“What is she doing in there? If she can’t—”

“Maybe I shouldn’t have gone in, Bones.”

“Jim . . .”

“I went at her in the dark. In her darkness. In her blindness. If he dies. . . .”

“Don’t, Jim.”

“If he dies, how do I know I didn’t kill him? How can I know she can stand to hear the truth?”

In the room behind them, she had moved to Spock, her fingers probing at his temples. In a whisper choked with fury, she was saying, “This is to the death—or life for both of us. Do you hear me, Spock?”

He was in a cavern, his eyes open. Over him hovered a Miranda, her hair a writhing nest of snakes. They hissed at him, their fangs dripping venom. He let it drip on his face. The Miranda laughed demoniacally. The venom stung. Then there were three Mirandas, chuckling with pleasure in his pain. When he put his hands over his

ears to shut out the hideous chuckles, there were seven Mirandas. He groveled on his knees, clutching at his ears. The laughing stopped.

But the Fury wasn't finished with him. The cavern was a pool. A Miranda had him by the throat. She was very strong and he was tired. The water of the pool closed over his head. She pushed it down . . . down. His hands felt heavy, clumsy, strangely disobedient. But at last they did his bidding and tore her grasp from his throat. The water still dragged at him. Then his soul moved. He stumbled out of the water's hold; and in a curious unsurprise, realized that the Miranda was helping him. He coughed frothy water from his lungs, and dreamily heard the Miranda say, "So you have decided to live after all. But there is one thing more—the madness. . . ."

A box lid was open, radiating a blue light he seemed to remember. He was about to look into the half-familiar box when its lid dropped.

He was very tired. There was a door in front of him. On a last spurt of strength, he opened it.

"Spock!"

It was the voice of his dear Captain.

Spock staggered to him. In his flood of returning sanity, he recognized McCoy. But as usual the Doctor was fussing. "You have no business to be out of bed! Sit here!"

He sat. His Captain left him to go somewhere else, calling, "Miranda!"

But if there had ever been a Miranda around, she was gone.

With meticulous care Spock placed Kollos's habitat on the Transporter platform. His hands lingered on the box—a final communion. Kirk looked at the hands, his eyes warm with affection. Pointing to Spock, he smiled at the woman beside him. "I have you to thank for his life," he said.

He spoke to a different Miranda—one transfigured by the same wondering innocence that had entered into Spock during his mind-link with Kollos. McCoy, moved by the new purity of her lovely face, said, "You now have what you wanted most, Miranda?"

"Yes. I am one with Kollos."

McCoy took her hand and kissed it. "I am truly sorry that you are leaving us."

She stepped back to Kirk. "We have come to the end of an eventful trip, Captain."

"I wasn't sure you'd even speak to me."

The blue radiance of the box was in her blue eyes. "I have you to thank for my future. What you said has enabled me to *see*. I shall not need my sensors any more."

He lifted a white rose from the Transporter console. "My good-bye gift to you," he said.

The rose against her cheek, she said, "I suppose it has thorns, Captain."

"I never met a rose that didn't, Miranda."

At the platform, Spock, in dress uniform, was wearing his IDIC. The girl touched it. "I understand the symbology, now, Mr. Spock. The marvel is in the infinite diversity of life."

He met her eyes gravely. "And in the ways our differences can combine to create new truth and beauty."

She took her position on the platform as Spock adjusted his vizor for the last time. Then he lifted his hand in the Vulcan salute.

She returned it. "Peace and long life to you, Mr. Spock," she said.

"Peace and long life, Miranda."

At the Transporter console, Kirk himself moved the dematerializing switches.

A PRIVATE LITTLE WAR

(Don Ingalls and Gene Roddenberry)

McCoy stretched his back muscles, tired from bending over his collection of soil, leaves and roots. Starfleet had something, he thought. This planet's plant culture just might be a medical El Dorado. But he was glad when his communicator beeped. This clearing in the forest was lonely.

Kirk said, "How much longer, Bones?"

"About another thirty minutes, Jim. You and Spock find anything?"

"No sign of inhabitants so far. Continue collecting. Kirk out." As he closed his communicator, Spock pointed to the scuffed stones on the rocky ledge where they stood. "The apelike carnivore of the reports, Captain?"

Kirk inspected the tracks. He straightened, nodding. "The gumato. But this spoor is several days old. No problem. They seldom stay in one place."

Spock eyed the sweep of trees sloping downhill from their ledge. "Aside from that, you say it's a Garden of Eden, sir?"

Kirk grinned. "So it seemed years ago to a brash young Lieutenant named Kirk in command of his first planet survey." He stiffened, hearing a branch break. Then he saw the people below moving along a narrow trail cut through the trees. With a shock of pleasure, he recognized their leader; and was about to shout "Tyree!" when his eye caught the glint of sun on a gun barrel. Guns—on this planet! He seized his phaser and Spock said quietly, "Use of our weapons was expressly forbidden, Captain."

"Tyree is leading those people into ambush! He's the friend I lived with here!" He wheeled; and kicking hard at a rock outcropping, loosed it to send it careening

down the slope. The ambusher's exploded from their concealing underbrush and Tyree cried, "*Villagers!*"

His group broke, rushing for the trees' shelter. But one of the ambushers, turning, had seen Kirk and Spock. He yelled something to the other two; and all three ambushers burst into a fast run up the hill toward the *Enterprise* men. Then the first paused to place a flintlock musket against his shoulder. The bullet pinged past Kirk's ear to strike spray from the rock behind him. The man pulled up to reload—and the second villager fired. Hot metal tore into Spock.

In his clearing McCoy heard the shots. Snatching his communicator, he opened it, crying, "*Enterprise, alert! Alert! Stand by to beam up landing party!*"

Spock was down. Running to him, Kirk took one look at the wound; and grabbing his phaser, aimed it at their pursuers.

"No . . . Captain . . ."

"Spock, they'll be reloaded in a moment!"

On a surge of agonized effort, Spock staggered to his feet. "No, I . . . can travel."

Looking up, Kirk saw McCoy and cried, "Beam us up fast, Bones!" McCoy had his communicator open. "Now, Scotty! Spock's hurt! Have medics standing by!"

Kirk, supporting the half-conscious Spock, pulled him into a threesome with McCoy. As they dematerialized, the three villagers were left to stare at the sparkle into which they'd disappeared.

An agitated Scott was at the Transporter platform to meet them. "What happened, Captain?"

"Lead projectile. Old-style firearm. Tell those medics to bring the stretcher closer!"

As the reeling Spock was eased onto it, Nurse Chapel and Doctor M'Benga hurried into the Transporter Room. McCoy, his eyes on Spock's torn chest, said, "Vitalizer B." Christine Chapel swiftly adjusted a hypo and McCoy pressed it, hissing, against Spock's limp arm. It was as she reached into her medikit that Spock subsided into unconsciousness. M'Benga, his medical scanner humming, passed it over the motionless body.

Christine spoke to McCoy. "Pressure packet ready, Doctor."

He took it; and lifting Spock's shirt, pushed it into the wound. "Lucky his heart's where his liver should be—or he'd be dead now." It wasn't a joke. His face was grim. "Set bypo for coradrenalin."

As the syringe hissed again, Kirk spoke. "Bones, you can save him, can't you?"

Without warning, alarm sirens shrieked. Sinister red lights flashed and Uhura's filtered voice said, "*All decks, red alert! Battle stations! This is no drill. Battle stations! Red alert!*"

Kirk leaped to the intercom. "Bridge, this is the Captain."

"Lieutenant Uhura, sir. We have a Klingon vessel on our screens."

"On my way!"

He was at the door when he brought up short. Looking back to where McCoy was working over Spock, he said, "Bones . . ."

"*I don't know, Jim!*"

Choices. Kirk opened the door to a corridor, hideous with the screech of sirens. They were screaming on the bridge, too. Chekov had taken Spock's position at the library computer; and Uhura, motionless at her board, was listening intently. Chekov looked up as Kirk, Scott on his heels, ran from the elevator. "No change of position, sir. They may not have seen us. We're holding the planet between us and the Klingon."

Uhura moved in her chair. "Make that definite. They're sending a routine message to their home base. No mention of us, sir."

"Then reduce to alert one, Lieutenant."

She hit her intercom button. "All stations, go to yellow alert. Repeat, cancel battle stations. Remain on yellow alert."

The sirens stilled. Kirk crossed to the helm, checked it; and turned to look at the viewing screen. All it held was the image of the planet.

"Think you can keep us out of their sight, Scotty?"

Scott moved a control on the helm. "I can try, sir."

He spoke to Chekov. "Lock scanners into astrogation circuits."

"Locking in, sir."

"Message to Starbase, Captain?" Uhura asked.

Kirk shook his head. "No point in giving ourselves away, Lieutenant. Not until we find out what's going on."

"We can hide for a while, Captain." Scott had turned from the helm. "But we may have to leave orbit to keep it up long."

Kirk nodded. He went to his command position to hit the intercom button on his panel. "Captain to Sickbay."

"McCoy here. I'll call you as soon as I know anything. I don't now. Sickbay out."

So that was that. As they say, time would tell. Time alone would tell whether Spock would survive to live another day—or whether he wouldn't. Kirk struggled against an upsurge of panic. It wouldn't do. Another subject—one to take the mind off Spock's peril. He turned to Scott.

"That Klingon is breaking the treaty," he said.

"Not necessarily, sir. They've as much right to scientific missions here as we have."

"Research is hardly the Klingon preoccupation."

"True, Captain. But since that's a 'hands off' planet, you can't prove they're up to anything else."

Kirk frowned. "When I left that planet seventeen years ago, the villagers down there had barely learned to forge iron into crude plows. But Spock was shot by a flintlock. How many centuries between those two developments?"

Uhura answered. "On Earth about twelve centuries, sir."

"On the other hand," Scott said, "a flintlock would be the first type firearm the inhabitants would normally develop."

Kirk snapped, "I'm aware of that, Mr. Scott."

Chekov spoke. "And, sir, the fact that Earth took twelve centuries doesn't mean they have to."

Over at her board Uhura nodded. "We've seen development at different rates on different planets."

"If it were the Klingons behind this, why didn't they give them breechloaders?" Scott asked. "Or machine guns? Or early hand lasers or—"

Kirk interrupted, angry. "I made a simple comment. I didn't invite a debate."

But Scott didn't waver. "Captain, you made a *number* of comments. And you've always insisted that we give you honest reactions. If that's changed, sir . . ."

"It hasn't," Kirk said. He swung his chair around. "I'm sorry. I'm worried about Spock. And I'm concerned about something that's happened to what I once knew down there." He got up and made for the elevator. "You have the con, Scotty. I'll be waiting in Sickbay."

He could feel the controlled tension in Sickbay the moment he entered it. McCoy, Doctor M'Benga and Christine were all gathered around Spock's still-unconscious form. The sterilite above it swathed it in its eerie glow. Kirk glanced up at the body-functions panel. Its readings were ominously low. There was, of course, the factor of Spock's different Vulcan physiology. But Christine was looking very troubled. And Spock might have been dead, so lifeless he looked on the table.

M'Benga spoke. "We've no replacements for the damaged organs, Doctor. If he's going to heal, his Vulcan physiology will have to do it for him."

"Agreed," McCoy said. "Sterilite off." He moved to his office. Kirk followed him. They eyed each other for a long moment. Then McCoy said, "He may live. He may die. I don't know which."

Kirk paced the distance to the door and back to McCoy's desk. McCoy gestured to the exam room. "Doctor M'Benga interned in a Vulcan hospital, Jim. Spock couldn't be in better hands."

"You're sure of that?"

"Yes."

Kirk hesitated. Then he came to his hard decision. "All right. You and I are transporting back down to the planet, Bones."

"I can't leave Spock at such a time."

"You just indicated you could." He leaned his hands on McCoy's desk. "There are Klingons down there. If their mission is a legitimate research interest in the planet's organic potential, you're the one man who can tell me."

"And if that's not it?"

"Then I'll need help." He pointed to the exam room. "I'll need advice I can trust as much as I trust Spock's."

"That's a rare compliment, Jim, but—"

Kirk flared. "Blast it, McCoy, I'm worried about Spock, too! But if the Klingons are breaking the 'hands off' treaty here, there could be an interstellar war at stake!" He strode to the office intercom. Hitting the button, he said, "Captain to bridge."

"Scott here, sir."

"McCoy and I are beaming back down. Inform ship's stores we'll need native costumes."

"Captain, I may have to break orbit any minute to keep out of their sight. We'd be out of communication range with you."

Kirk was thinking fast. The secrecy of their presence was vital. Any attempt to contact Starfleet Command could reveal it. Asking permission to violate orders concerning this "hands off" planet was a risk he dare not take. He'd have to act alone, on his own judgment.

He turned back to the intercom. "I understand, Scotty. We'll set up a rendezvous schedule. Captain out."

They materialized near a copse of trees. Glancing around, Kirk got his bearings. The copse dipped to a rocky glade he remembered. Tyree's camp was about a quarter of a mile distant.

McCoy, tricorder out, said, "Want to think about this again, Jim? Starfleet's orders are no interference with this planet's state."

"'With its normal social development.' I'm not only aware of the orders, Bones. It was my survey seventeen years ago that recommended them."

McCoy nodded. "I read your report. 'Inhabitants superior in many ways to humans. Left alone, they will undoubtedly someday develop a remarkably advanced and peaceful culture.'"

"And I intend to see that they get their chance. Are you coming with me, Doctor?"

They moved off down the shale of the glade. The terrain ahead showed bigger rocks and a thick growth of underbrush. McCoy was still troubled; but Kirk, recognizing familiar landmarks, was buoyant. He gestured to some

foliage. "The saplings over there, they make good bows. We used to choose our wood from this very spot."

"Almost like coming home, eh?"

"It'll be good to see Tyree again. During that year here, we were made brothers. I lived with his family, wore his Hillpeople clothes. We hunted together. . . ."

McCoy halted abruptly. "All right, Jim. I'll try just once more."

Kirk turned, his eyes questioning. McCoy's met them unflinchingly. "So you love this place. Fine! So you want to see an old friend again. Also fine! You believe the Klingons are here, threatening all that you admire so much."

"Bones, we've been over this—"

"You asked me to replace Spock's advice and judgment! Well, I'm doing the best I can to!" There was a deep, sincere concern in McCoy's face. "Jim, I admire a Starship Captain willing to disobey orders—and risk his career when necessary. But how much of this decision of yours is emotion . . . and how much of it is logic?"

Kirk's mouth moved in a small smile. "Logic? I suppose Spock *would* ask that." He pondered the question. "I *do* have an emotional attachment to this place. That's obvious. However—"

McCoy interrupted again. "Spock might also suggest that for twenty-four hours we reconnoiter—and obey orders, making no contacts. If you decide to move in after that, I'm with you."

Kirk looked at the earnest eyes. "All right, Bones. We stay out of sight for a day. We'll cut through here and—"

He never finished his sentence. There was a hoarse snarl—and a huge, hairy creature, faintly gorillalike, lips crawled back over its wicked teeth, burst out of a clump of brush where it had been hiding. A clawed fist the size of a ham knocked Kirk from his feet. Then it leaped for McCoy in the very act of reaching for his phaser. He was slammed back into rock, the weapon knocked from his hand. He fell, stunned—and the aroused gumato turned on Kirk again. He went down once more, the beast's frothy jaws tearing at the flesh of his shoulder. McCoy, trying frantically to clear his head, stretched an arm toward his phaser. Kirk landed a hard kick in the

animal's belly; but the fury of the alien thing clawed him down. McCoy grasped his phaser; and making a swift adjustment on it, shouted, "Jim . . . roll free so I can shoot!"

He fired a stun charge. The gumato staggered. Then it whirled on McCoy, roaring. He got to his knees, loosing the full phaser power. The gumato vanished. But Kirk lay still. McCoy crawled to him, medikit out.

"Contact ship," Kirk whispered. "I took . . . full poison . . . its fangs. . . ."

The hypo hissed against his arm. Then McCoy spoke into his communicator. "Landing party to *Enterprise*, come in! *Enterprise*, this is McCoy! Emergency! Come in!"

Kirk's forehead was already beading with sweat. The poison was in his bloodstream. McCoy had to stoop to hear the weakening voice. "Afraid . . . they've left . . . orbit."

"Jim, there's no antitoxin for this." He used the hypo again. "I can keep you alive for only a few hours with these injections."

"Tyree . . . some of them have . . . cure."

Kirk slumped into unconsciousness. In the lonely silence, McCoy heard a twig snap. Three men, bows and spears at the ready, were standing behind him, suspicion and curiosity equally mingled in their faces.

"Are you Hillpeople? Do you know a hunter named Tyree?" McCoy gestured to Kirk. "A gumato attacked him. He's James Kirk, a friend of Tyree. . . ." He waited for some response. None came. "*Blast it, do something!*" he shouted. "*He's dying!*"

But the Hillpeople still stared at him stolidly.

Later, he was to feel grateful to them. Their settlement was crude, even for a nomadic people—a place of fire-pits, log shelters and primitive pottery. But the cave into which they carried Kirk's limp body was warm. And the pallet they laid him on was soft with animal skins. He was wet now with sweat and beginning to tremble violently. McCoy turned to the man who had directed them into the cave. "Yutan, more skins—blankets. I must keep him warm."

When the coverings came, McCoy piled them on Kirk.

Tyree's woman—she was said to possess a cure for the effects of gumato venom. But both were absent from the camp. Superstition, anyway. And yet . . . there was Starfleet's extraordinary interest in the medical promise of this planet's organic substances. . . .

Kirk was babbling in the first stages of delirium. It would reach its climax. Then coma and death. McCoy looked desperately around the cave. Slowly he got to his feet. Incredibly the boulder opposite him moved when he pushed it. Straining against its weight, he rolled it over beside Kirk. After a moment he went toward another one. "You and your 'Garden of Eden,'" he muttered. "First Spock, now you. Maybe Adam was better off out of Eden."

Tyree and his woman were crouched in the shadow of a rocky overhang, watching a file of villagers pass down a trail, armed with their flintlocks. Though the woman's wild black hair had never known a comb, her thin features held intelligence and a savage beauty. She leaned to Tyree, whispering urgently. "We must obtain the same firesticks, husband! We could take their goods, their horses—kill them!"

"Enough!" he rebuked. "In time the villagers will return to the ways of friendship."

She spotted a small plant beside her. Its root came up to the prize of her sharp-bladed knife. "In time?" she said. "How many of us must continue to die waiting for this 'time' of yours?"

Tyree opened her small leather bag for her. As she dropped the root into it, she said, "I am a *Kahn-ut-tu* woman, Tyree! In all this land there are few of us. Men seek us for mates because through us they can become great leaders!"

He smiled at her. "I took you for mate because you cast a spell upon me, Nona."

She withdrew an odd-shaped leaf from her bag. The look in her brilliant dark eyes was openly inviting. "And I have spells to keep you!" She crushed the leaf until its heady scent had impregnated her fingers. "Remember this fragrance? The night we camped by the water . . . ?"

He pushed her away. "Yes. The night of madness."

She caressed his face with her scented fingers. His eye-

lids drooped. She leaned closer to him. "Madness? Did you really hate *that* madness, Tyree?"

"No," he pleaded. "Nona, no. It calls up evil beasts from my soul."

"Only one lovely beast, Tyree . . . you, my strong, angry man."

His arms went around her. He was drawing her down to the leaves when Yutan, running, broke through the trees. Nona looked up; and he stopped dead at the look in her eyes.

"For . . . forgive me," he stammered. "But there are strangers in the camp. One has taken a gumato bite. He dies."

Nona was on her feet. "Strangers? Explain."

"It is said that the dying one is a friend of Tyree. From long ago."

Tyree was still fighting the intoxicating effects of the leaf's odor; but Nona, in full command of herself, nodded. "That one!" she exclaimed. "I go. Bring Tyree when his head clears."

Kirk was moaning in the clutch of his delirium. McCoy went to the cave entrance. The curious crowd that had thronged it had disappeared. He pulled his phaser, aimed it at one of the boulders beside Kirk, and fired it. The rock glowed red with heat. With perhaps too much. He bent over the phaser to readjust it—and Nona, a dark ghost, slipped into the cave. She looked from the red rock to the weapon in McCoy's hands, her face alive with fascinated interest. Pulling back into the shadows, she watched the phaser beam strike the other boulder. It, too, went red. Nona turned and left the cave as silently as she'd entered it.

Tyree, Yutan beside him, was running toward it. She extended a hand. "Stop!" she said. "Do you want me to save him?"

Her tone halted him. "You must!" he cried. "He is the one I told you of, the friend of my young days!"

She had seen a miracle—a firestick of marvelous power. A *Kahn-ut-tu* woman knew how to take advantage of miraculous opportunities. Wife to a supreme leader of men . . .

"My remedies," she said, "require full knowledge of the people they cure. I must know all that is known of your friend."

Tyree shook his head. "I gave him the Promise of Silence, Nona. He was made my *brother!*"

"And I am your wife—his sister. I promise silence also. *Quickly*, Tyree. Or he dies!"

Spock had still to recover consciousness. Christine Chapel, frightened, looked away from the low readings on his body-functions panel. Maybe his pulse . . . She took it and her hand slipped down to hold his. Words she didn't know were in her came to her lips. "Mr. Spock, you've hardly ever noticed me . . . and I understand. You can't. But—I'd give my life to save you. . . ."

Sickbay's door opened. She hurriedly replaced Spock's arm on the bed—but M'Benga had seen.

He examined the panel. "Don't let those readings unduly trouble you. I've seen this before in Vulcans. It's their way of concentrating their strength, blood and antibodies on the injured organs." He eyed the pale face on the pillow. "A form of self-induced hypnosis."

"You mean he's actually conscious, Doctor?"

"In a sense. He knows we're here and what we're saying. But he can't take his mind from the tissue he is fighting to heal. I suppose," he added, "that he even knows you were holding his hand."

He left her, eyes averted from the painful flush that flooded her face. She moved to gather up some charts. Then she turned to address the still form on the bed. "Mr. Spock," she said, "a good nurse holds the hands of all patients. It proves to them that one is . . . interested."

The lie made her feel much better.

The boulders were cooling. But it was still very hot in the cave. McCoy brushed sweat from his face and bent to pull back Kirk's eyelid. He shook his head; and was drawing a blanket closer about him when Tyree and Nona walked into the cave.

The man spoke at once. "I am Tyree." He strode to Kirk as one who had the right, passing the dull red rocks without a glance. But McCoy's interest was focused on

Nona. She was emptying the contents of a small leather bag on a flat rock. He moved in to watch her over her shoulder. "And I am Tyree's woman," she told him without turning.

On the rock's flat surface lay a root, wet, covered with small open spores. Nona drew her razor-edged knife, pressed its blade on the root—and it began to writhe. She picked it up on the flat of her knife, speaking briefly. "A Mahko root."

"A plant?" said the wary McCoy. "It moves."

"For one who knows where to find it and how to pick it."

Tyree was kneeling at Kirk's head, his kindly face anxious. When Nona approached them, he pulled back so that she could seat herself next to his friend, the root still moving on the knife blade. When she touched Kirk's throat with her free hand, his mouth opened slightly. She leaned over him gently; and exhaling a long breath of her own between his lips, whispered, "Take this of my soul . . . this of my soul into thy soul . . . into thine. . . ."

McCoy was shocked. He turned to Tyree, crying, "I was told she had a *cure!*"

"Be silent," he said sternly.

Nona was breathing more of her breath into Kirk's open mouth. She lifted unseeing eyes, chanting more of her strange incantation. "Deeply . . . deeply . . . deeply . . . we must become as one . . . as one . . . as one. . . ."

To McCoy's total amazement, Kirk had begun to breathe evenly in time with the woman's breathing. But the mystic element in the chant horrified him. He had started toward Kirk when Tyree's strong arm barred the way. He saw Nona bare the exact spot on Kirk's shoulder where the gumato fangs had struck, and slap the twisting root on the punctures. Then, turning the knife on her own hand, she slashed it deeply and pressed it, bleeding, on top of the ugly root. She groaned with pain. Kirk echoed the groan as though he, too, felt the agony of the slash. She shut her eyes. Swaying, she chanted, "Together . . . your pain in mine . . . together . . . your soul in mine . . . together . . . together . . . together. . . ."

Both of them were now inhaling in perfect unison. And

to both, in unison, came easier breath, relaxation. Nona's eyes fluttered open. "Return . . . it is past . . . return . . . return . . . return . . ."

And Kirk's eyes, too, fluttered open. Against the animal skins of his pallet, his face was at peace.

Nona remained close to him for a long moment. Then very slowly she withdrew her hand from his shoulder. She extended it, palm up, to McCoy. It held no sign of knife wound, only the small, withered thing that had been the writhing root. She got to her feet, making way for McCoy. But he didn't need to examine Kirk's shoulder. He knew what he'd find—and he found it. The flesh was healthy, unmarked.

Kirk smiled up at him. "I've been having . . . a strange dream."

"How do you feel, Jim?"

"I'm tired—just tired. You've done a fine job, Bones."

He was already asleep. McCoy looked up to see Tyree supporting Nona.

"Thank you for saving him. I'd like to learn more of this. . . ."

"She must sleep now," Tyree said.

"Is there any condition I should watch for in him? Any aftereffect or danger?"

Nona spoke weakly. "Our blood has passed . . . through the Mahko root together . . . our souls have been together. He is mine now."

Startled, McCoy spoke to Tyree. "What does she mean, 'he's hers'?"

"When a man and a woman are joined in this manner, he can refuse her no wish." He smiled faintly. "But only a legend. There is no danger."

Tyree was leading her from the cave when she passed close to McCoy. Though her eyes were heavy with exhaustion, there was a look on her face that troubled McCoy. It suggested that she knew she had won some obscure victory. When he noted the same half-smile of satisfaction on Kirk's sleeping features, McCoy's sense of apprehension became definite.

It grew so insistent it aroused him from his deep sleep of weariness. The cave was black with night. His first

conscious thought was of Kirk. He reached for his medikit and groped his way past the rocks to the pallet. It was empty.

He stood still for a moment, fully awake now. The layout of the camp was still unfamiliar to him. He moved to the cave entrance, trying to get his bearings in the darkness. To his left there was the darker shadow of a structure of some kind: It turned out to be a lean-to. The still-glowing embers of its firepit showed two sleepers. A dim form was standing over one of them.

"Jim?" McCoy whispered.

One of the sleepers awoke, rolling instantly into a crouch. It was Tyree. He stared at McCoy. Then, bounding to his feet, he turned and saw Kirk, eyes closed like a sleepwalker's, beside the sleeping body of his wife.

"Jim!" McCoy shook Kirk's arm. The eyes opened to fill with surprise. "Quite . . . all right, Bones. I felt better and thought I'd stretch my legs." He recognized Tyree; his face alight with pleasure, cried, "*Tyree! It is you, my old friend!*" His hand went out to grip the man's shoulder in genuine affection.

Nona had awakened. Tyree gave her a quick glance. There was a pause before he said, "Yes, James. It is good to see you."

"But what am I doing here? How did . . . ? No, I remember now. A gumato bite. I was ill. . . ." He gestured to McCoy. "I told the Doctor here, 'take me to Tyree's camp.' I knew you'd find a *Kahn-ut-tu* to cure me." He turned to McCoy. "The *Kahn-ut-tus* are a kind of local witch people . . . actually healers who have studied the herbs and roots here."

"And I am a *Kahn-ut-tu* woman, Captain." Nona smiled at Kirk. "I cured you."

Their eyes met; and Tyree said, "My woman. Nona."

In the light of the firepit's embers, the wild, disheveled black hair enhanced the savage beauty of her face. "Yes, of course," Kirk said. "Your woman."

McCoy spoke. "Tyree leads the Hillpeople here."

Kirk smiled at his friend. "Congratulations—on both counts."

"You need rest, Jim."

"Rest? I've never felt more alive!" Kirk's face sobered.

"Tyree, can we talk now? The villagers' new weapons. I want to hear all about that. We have plans to make."

Nona broke in. "Good. It is past time to plan."

Tyree nodded. "Yes, much has happened since you left. Come, we will speak of it—"

"And of things to be done!" said Nona.

Tyree looked at her. Then silently, he led the way out of the lean-to.

Spock lay as pale, as motionless as ever.

Doctor M'Benga, entering Sickbay, nodded to Christine; and going to Spock, leaned close to a pointed ear. He spoke very slowly and distinctly. "This is Doctor M'Benga, Mr. Spock. There'll be someone with you constantly from now on. When the time comes, I'll be called." He straightened. "Nurse, stay with him."

Christine had her eyes on the body-functions panel. "The readings are beginning to fluctuate markedly, Doctor."

"So they should be," M'Benga said. "The moment he shows any sign of consciousness, call me immediately."

"Yes, Doctor."

He was making for the door when he turned. "After you have called me, if he speaks, do whatever he says."

"Whatever he says?"

"Yes, that's clear enough, isn't it?"

It was clear. It was also disconcerting. She looked at the pointed ears on the pillow. They suddenly struck her as extremely aristocratic.

Tyree was making good on his promise to bring Kirk up to date on the firearms question. "It's less than a year ago that their firesticks first came to the villagers. Since that time, my friend, almost one in three of us have died."

Kirk leaned forward over the rude table. "But you say they make the firesticks themselves? You can't be certain of that."

"We've looked into their village and saw it being done."

"Tyree," McCoy said, "have you seen strangers among the villagers?"

Tyree shook his head, "Never."

Behind them, unseen, Nona had slipped into the hut to immerse herself in the shadows of a corner. She watched McCoy turn to Kirk. "Meanwhile," he said, "you have made contact here. If it turns out that we are the ones who broke the 'hands off' treaty, it's your career, Jim."

"Perhaps, Bones. But it would hardly take a platoon of Klingons to teach them to make crude firearms."

"A single one would be too slow and inefficient if they really want this planet."

"But much more *clever*," Kirk said. "If they'd armed them with Klingon lasers or even repeating rifles, it would be obvious they'd interfered here." He spoke to Tyree. "Can you get us to their main village while it's still dark?"

Tyree hesitated. "The gumatos travel at night also. If you killed one, its mate will not leave."

Kirk laid his phaser on the table. "You've seen these work. So long as no one else sees them used—"

Nona stepped forward into the light of their pitch torch. "I also have seen them used."

Kirk swiftly replaced his phaser. Nona had turned to McCoy. "I saw you heat those stones with yours." Her eyes sought Kirk's. "And I know you have many ways to make Tyree a man of great importance."

McCoy eyed her. "Many ways?" He spoke to Tyree. "What else does she know about us?"

"Tyree has told me much of you." She smiled at Kirk. "Do not blame him. It was the price for saving your life."

McCoy slammed the table. "Demonstrating the wisdom of Starfleet orders!" he cried. "First, there's contact made . . . then a mistake, an accident. It has to be set right by a small intervention with natural evolution. The correction goes wrong—and more intervention is necessary. . . ."

Kirk had reddened with anger. "Thank you, Doctor!" He spoke to Nona. "We are simply strangers from—"

"From one of the lights in the sky!" She nodded. "I know. And you have ways as far above firesticks as the sky is above our world!"

Tyree half-rose to his feet. "You will not speak of that to others!"

She ignored him to address Kirk. "I will not if I am made to understand. Teach me." She paused. "There's an old custom among my people. When a woman saves a man's life, he is grateful."

McCoy, eyes narrowed, watched Kirk. He waited—and Kirk said, "I am grateful."

"Highly commendable," McCoy said dryly. "If not carried to extremes."

But Kirk was waving Nona to a seat. It was clear that he was making a conscious effort to choose words cautiously. "We were once as you are, Nona. Spears and arrows. Then came the time when our weapons grew faster than our wisdom. We almost killed ourselves. So we made a rule. It said that we must never cause the same thing to happen to other worlds we visited. Do you understand?"

She didn't answer. Kirk laid a hand on Tyree's arm. "As a man must grow in his own way and in his own time, so must worlds. They—"

She interrupted. "Some men never grow."

"Perhaps not as fast or in the way another thinks he should. But we are now wise enough to know how unwise it is to interfere with the way of another man or another world."

"You will let the villagers destroy us? You will not help your friend and brother to kill them instead?"

Tyree sprang to his feet. "I have said I will not kill, woman! There are better ways!"

Her eyes flashed dark fire. "We must fight or die! Is dying better?" She whirled to Kirk. "You would let him die when you have weapons to make him powerful and safe? Then he has the wrong friends—and I have the wrong man!" She rushed from the hut.

Tyree made no move to follow her. After an awkward pause, he said, "You will help in ways she does not understand. I have faith in our friendship, friend. Come—or we lose the darkness."

As he left, McCoy saw the pained look on Kirk's face. "What's bothering you? If we find the Klingons have armed the villagers, we can certainly do something about that."

Kirk rose. "That's what bothers me—the 'something' we may have to do."

They found Tyree waiting at the camp's edge. Despite the night, he was unhesitating as he led them along the trail winding downward to the village. The trees thinned—and he lifted a warning finger. A guard, flintlock at shoulder, was pacing his rounds on the village outskirts. The three came to a halt behind the bole of a massive tree.

"We'll wait for the guard to circle back." Kirk leaned back against the tree. "You have quite a wife, Tyree. Beautiful *and* intelligent."

Tyree gave him a quick look; and seeing the sincerity in his face, nodded. "A *Kahn-ut-tu* woman is always a prize. They have . . . ways of making a man happy."

"I remember the stories about them."

"But mine talks too much of killing."

"An ambitious woman is a treasure," McCoy said. "Or a time bomb."

Kirk spoke slowly. "Tyree, suppose . . . you *had* to fight? Suppose it were the only way?"

"Jim! This man believes the very thing we believe—killing is useless and stupid! What kind of question is that?"

Again Kirk was abruptly aware of loneliness—the loneliness of the immense responsibility he had chosen to undertake. Well, he'd taken it. For better or worse, it had to be borne now. He was in this thing up to his neck. He straightened. The guard was returning. He slid away from the tree bole to slip through the night, weaving his way from shadow to shadow. When the guard was within a foot of him, he downed him with a karate chop. Then, seizing the gun, he passed it to Tyree, saying, "Keep this. Wait for us."

The village's buildings were more sophisticated than the simple constructions of Tyree's camp. Some were lighted. Kirk and McCoy, keeping to shadows, saw a man approaching one of the larger ones. What they could glimpse of his thinly bearded face seemed to be that of some scholarly ascetic; but in the light of the opening door, it showed up crafty, even malignant. Circling the

house, they found a window; and huddled under it, watched him cross a room to a map-covered table. Sitting at it, a new flintlock beside him, was another man, his back turned to them. But Kirk didn't have to see the cruel, lipless Klingon face. He had recognized the tailored metallic Klingon dress. And a Klingon weapon hung at its belt.

"You are late, Apella," the Klingon said.

"A quarrel to be judged. The division of some skins and a woman taken this morning. It is hard to divide one woman, Krell."

"Give her to the man who killed the most Hillpeople. Then the others will see the profit in bravery." He passed the musket to Apella. "Your next improvement. Notice what we've done to the striker. See how it holds the priming powder more securely? Fewer misfires." Pushing his chair back, Krell got to his feet. "When I return, we'll give you other improvements. A rifled barrel—a means to shoot farther and straighter."

"They must have a workshop," Kirk whispered. "Let's go. . . ."

It was McCoy who spotted the shed. It was a ramshackle affair, set back from the street, but the black bulk heaped beside it was interesting. "Coal," McCoy said, "necessary for a forge. And those bags, they reek of sulphur, an ingredient of gunpowder. Thus, logically, my dear Captain, their workshop."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock." Kirk's face suddenly sobered. "Sorry. I know you're worrying about him, too."

"About that walking computer? Yes, I am."

The lock on the shed's door was as dilapidated as the building. Embers had been left to flicker in the still-open forge. Scattered around it were wooden gunstocks, bullet molds, iron rods to be bored into weapon barrels. McCoy's tricorder hummed over the ingots; but Kirk had moved to a barrel-boring device. He tested its point with a piece of iron. To his surprise it clicked sharply. He unscrewed it. "People's exhibit number one," he said. "A chrome-steel drill point."

McCoy looked up. "This pig iron is almost carbon-free. No village furnace produced this." His tricorder passed

over a barrel rod. "People's exhibit number two. Cold rolled barrel rods, fashioned to *look* handmade." He turned. "My apologies, Jim. You were right about the Klingons."

"Make recorder and scanner tapes on everything."

"Pity we can't include a Klingon. That would about wrap it—" He stopped. Footsteps and voices were nearing the shed door. They scrambled for concealment behind a dusty pile of cinders.

Krell entered, followed by Apella. He hung the village lantern he carried high on a hook. Behind the protective cinders, Kirk motioned to McCoy. Understanding, McCoy unlimbered his tricorder; and as Apella broke into speech, recorded the words. "I thought my people would grow tired of killing. But you were right, Krell. They see it is easier than trading. And it has pleasures. I feel them myself. Like the hunt, but with richer rewards."

The Klingon had lifted a rifle from the work bench. "You'll be rich beyond your dreams one day, Apella. A governor in our Klingon Empire. Unimaginable delights—" He paused, hearing the tiny hum of McCoy's scanner. He turned to look around him—and Kirk grabbed at a wooden gunstock. He flung it hard at the lantern. Sparks showered as its light went out. In the dimness Kirk leaped at Krell but the Klingon pivoted, catching Kirk on the shoulder with the rifle. McCoy, rushing forward, used the "exhibit" barrel to drop Apella and whirled to help Kirk. But Krell had tripped over an iron rod. His rifle went off—and he shouted, "Guards! Intruders! The work shed, intrud—"

Kirk's fist got him straight on the chin. He fell—but already the *Enterprise* men could hear running footsteps, yells, alarm shots. They made for the door. An armed villager, gun aimed, stood in it. Kirk, diving for his legs, tumbled him over the sill. Behind him Apella was up again; and again McCoy smashed down with the "exhibit" gunbarrel. They raced for the open door. Then they veered, making for the shadow behind the heaped coal. Armed villagers, converging on the shed, pelted past them. They waited. Then they broke from their shelter and fled. When the first bullet whined past them, they had rejoined Tyree.

Spock was no longer motionless. He had begun to writhe, his face distorted—and the body-functions panel's readings fluctuated madly. When a groan burst from his laboring chest, Christine Chapel rushed to the wall intercom.

"Doctor M'Benga to Sickbay."

"Nurse . . . nurse . . ."

She flew to the bed. Spock's eyes were open, glaring wildly as he tried to control his twisting body. Twice he struggled again to speak and failed. The third time, his trembling lips succeeded in forming words. "Quickly . . . strike me. Pain will . . . help me . . . to consciousness. Strike me!"

Christine shrank back. "Hit you? No,—"

"Strike me!" He was gasping for air. "Unless . . . I return to . . . normal consciousness quickly . . . it will be . . . too late. . ."

She hit him.

"Harder . . ."

She slapped him harder. His breathing improved and his voice more certain. "Again! Then again. Pain . . . helps me back . . . to consciousness."

She struck him once more. As she hauled off for the fourth time, Sickbay's door snapped open. Scott stood in it, jaw dropped as she landed the blow on the bedridden Spock. He leaped across the room, grabbing her arm. "What are you doing, woman?"

M'Benga came through the open door. He strode to the bed, pushing Scott and Christine aside. Then he struck Spock with all his strength. He struck him again and again. The flabbergasted Scott was staring in horror. It was clear that the entire medical staff had gone out of its mind.

But Spock was sitting up. "Thank you, Doctor. That will be sufficient."

M'Benga spoke to Scott. "You can release her, Mr. Scott. She was only doing what she should have done." He gestured to the body-functions panel, whose needles were steadying into positions normal for Spock.

"A Vulcan form of self-healing, Engineer," Spock said.

He now astounded all but M'Benga by swinging his legs to the floor. As he made to stand, Christine moved an

instinctive hand toward his arm. He congealed her with one of his arched-brow looks. "I am quite recovered, Nurse," he told her coolly.

She took the cool line herself. "Yes, I see you are, Mr. Spock."

The Doctor who had interned in a Vulcan ward herded everyone out of Sickbay. As the door snapped shut behind the three, Spock began knee bends.

Tyree was not an enthusiastic student of armaments. He listened courteously while Kirk explained the eccentricities of the flintlock taken from the guard the night before; but it was clear that connections between strikers, sparks and the ignitions of gunpowder failed to arouse the martial spirit in him. Kirk placed the gun against his shoulder. "Now aim it as I showed you," he said.

McCoy, emerging from the cave, frowned at what he saw. The gun fired obediently; but the bullet, kicking up dust near the skin target, ricocheted away.

Tyree dropped the gun. Kirk gave him a friendly pat on the shoulder. "Very good," he said. But he had seen McCoy's look. "Not here, Bones. We'll talk in the cave."

Tight-lipped and angry, McCoy followed him into the cave. Kirk had the look of a man who has considered all alternatives, arrived at an unpleasant decision and intends to back it up.

They hunkered down on the cave floor and McCoy burst out. "Do I have to say it? It's not bad enough there's already a serpent in this Eden of yours teaching some of these people about gunpowder. You're going to make sure they *all* know about it!"

Kirk's voice was quiet. "Exactly. Both sides must receive the same knowledge, the same type of firearms . . ."

"*Have you gone out of your mind?* Yes, maybe that's it. Tyree's wife. There was something in that root she used. She said that now you could refuse her nothing."

"Nonsense! Believe me, Bones, I've *agonized* over this, thought it through most carefully."

"Is it a coincidence that this is exactly what she wants? I wonder . . ."

"She wants *superior* weapons. And that's the very thing

neither side can have. Bones, listen. The normal development of this planet was status quo between the villagers and the Hillpeople. The Klingons changed that with the flintlocks. If this planet is to continue to develop as it should, we must equalize the two sides again—and *keep* them equal.”

McCoy stared at Kirk in unbelief. “Jim—that condemns this whole planet to a war that may never end. You’ll breed battle after battle, massacre after massacre. . . .”

Kirk slammed his fist on the ground. “*All right, Doctor!* I’ve heard . . .” He got up as though movement might somehow move him out of this ugliness. It didn’t. But he’d got himself under control. He turned back. “Let’s say I’m wrong. Even say the woman drugged me. So let’s hear your sober, sensible solution to all this.”

“We could collect all the firearms. Unfortunately, we can’t collect the knowledge they’ve been given.”

“No.”

“Suppose we gave Tyree some weapon of overpowering force, something that would quickly frighten the villagers away.” McCoy hesitated. “Trouble is, we’ve no guarantee what power of that kind might do even to Tyree.”

Kirk waited. Finally he said, “Remember the twentieth century—the brush wars on the Asian continent? Two giant powers involved, much like the Klingons and ourselves. Neither felt they could pull out. . . .”

“I remember. It went on bloody year after bloody year.”

“What would you have suggested, Bones? That one side arm *its* friends with an overpowering weapon? Mankind would never have lived to travel space if that had been done!” Kirk got up to pace the length of the cave. “We can’t take this planet back to where it was! The only solution is what happened then—a balance of power. If it can be kept in balance long enough . . .”

“But if the Klingons give the villagers more power, what then, Jim?”

“We give this side exactly that much more. The trickiest, most difficult, dirtiest game of them all—but the only one that preserves both sides. In whatever this planet is to become, each side has its evolutionary value.”

McCoy's face had grown deeply thoughtful. "Jim, all this time . . . with Tyree blindly trusting you—and you beginning to understand what you'd have to do . . ."

Kirk nodded. "Agony, Doctor. I've never had a more difficult decision."

McCoy looked at him, himself experiencing Kirk's torment. "There's another morsel of agony for you. As Tyree won't fight, he'll be one of the first to die."

"He'd be a wise leader," Kirk said. He stopped his pacing. "His wife's the only way to reach him. If I tell her we'll supply guns, she may persuade him. I must have a talk with her."

She was bathing in a forest pool. Cooled and refreshed, she finally stepped out of it, her wet inner garment clinging to her body. There was a flat rock near the pool and she sank down on it, zestfully savoring the sun's warmth as it began to dry her streaming black hair. After a moment she reached for her small leather pouch. Selecting a small herb from it, she crushed it between her hands, applying its scent to her neck, face and shoulders. She wore the concentrated look of a woman preparing herself for a man.

When she heard Kirk's voice call her name, she smiled to herself, unsurprised. Discarding the herb, she gave her attention to arranging her slim body advantageously.

At the sight of her in her thin wet clothing, Kirk hesitated. She beckoned to him. "Stay," she said. "You are here because I wished you here."

He smiled, correcting her. "I'm afraid this was *my* idea."

"Yes, they always believe they come of free will. Tyree thought the same when I cast my first spell on him." She touched the stone beside her invitingly. "Be comfortable, Kirk. Sit down. I will not hurt you."

After another moment of hesitation, he obeyed. She leaned toward him. "Can you smell the fragrance on me? Some find it pleasing."

He took a fast sniff at her shoulder. "Yes, very nice," he said. "But what I want . . . want to talk of . . ." The polite smile on his lips faded. His head was spinning.

Nona edged closer to him. He tried to draw back but his befuddled senses were stronger than his will.

"Smell the scent again," she said. "You will find it soothing."

"Yes, but I came to . . . to talk about . . . about . . ."

From where he had been following Kirk, Tyree heard the voices. He carried the flintlock whose mechanism still puzzled him. Now he forgot the question he had planned to ask. Face set, he checked the amount of powder in the pan. Then he moved on in the direction of the voices.

Nona had drawn Kirk close to the herb perfume on her neck. Kirk pulled away. Fighting vertigo, he got shakily to his feet, inhaling deep gulps of fresh air. "Forgive me . . . I . . . seem . . . unable to think . . ."

She sat very still, smiling and waiting. Kirk's eyes locked with hers. And suddenly he was smiling back, aware only of a lovely woman who seemed to desire him.

"How beautiful!" he said. "How lovely you are, Nona!"

Tyree raised the gun. For a moment he focused its sights on Nona. Then he swung them slowly to Kirk. Nona, in Kirk's embrace, caught the gleam of sun on the barrel. She made no move though Kirk's back was Tyree's clear target. There came the sound of the weapon's crash on a rock. Relief mixed with contempt in her face. Tyree could never be important. A man of faint heart. She lifted her arms to Kirk's neck.

"Yes, lovely . . . incredibly lovely," Kirk was saying foggily.

Tyree was running from the scene of his betrayal. As he skirted a rock, a monstrous shadow rose from behind it. The dead gumato's female mate, it had begun its swift and noiseless stalk of the Hillman when it was distracted by the sound of Kirk's maunderings. It swerved. Nona saw it over Kirk's shoulder. She tried to pull free but he held her tight. Fists clenched, she struck at him savagely, jerked clear of his arms and sped into a run. Then the sudden thought of Kirk's dazed helplessness halted her. Her quick stop brought a snarl from the beast. She screamed, racing for the pool. But the apelike thing cut her off at the water's edge. She shrieked again; and Kirk,

slowly emerging from his confusion, fumbled for his phaser. Realization hit him. Rushing to the pool, he saw Nona prone, the great animal towering over her. He fired his phaser. The gumato vanished. Extending a hand, he helped Nona to her feet.

The assistance exhausted his strength. His drugged state had left him so weakened that he slumped to the ground, eyes closed, breathing hard. Nona looked down at him. Then she picked up a rock. She clubbed him over the head with it. The phaser dropped from his hand. She lifted it, examining it in wonder. Then she turned and made for the forest.

Stumbling, broken, Tyree was making his way to his lean-to when McCoy and Yutan intercepted him.

"Where's Captain Kirk?" McCoy demanded.

Tyree waved blindly behind him and Yutan cried, "Tyree! The firestick! Where is it?"

"I left it . . . back there."

"A fine thing to leave lying around! Show us!" McCoy shook Tyree's arm.

It roused him. "I show you," he said.

Pieces of the broken rifle lay on the ground. Yutan picked up the barrel. Tyree covered his face with his hands. "No! I don't want to see it!"

McCoy was about to speak when Kirk staggered toward them. Still groggy from the blow, he swayed. Then he crumpled back to the ground. McCoy, taking a quick check of his pulse, broke out the hypo from his medikit.

Meanwhile, Nona had arrived at a decision. At first sight of an armed village patrol, she had hidden herself behind a thick-leaved bush. As it approached, she made up her mind. She stepped from her concealment, confronting the leader of the four-man group. She lifted Kirk's phaser full into his view.

"I bring victory to Apella!" she said. "He will have the courage to use this new weapon! Take me to him!"

The man grinned. "Tyree's woman! A *Kahn-ut-tu* female also. Do we entrust this division to Apella?"

The patrolmen guffawed. The leader grabbed her, the others pressing around them. She yanked free. Then she aimed the phaser at the leader. "Touch me again—and this small box will kill you!"

The man hesitated. But the villager behind her gave her a slight push. She wheeled to level the weapon at him. He was not impressed. All of them were grinning broadly now. They closed in about her, clutching at her, at her clothing. Ignorant of how to use the phaser, she tried to shove them away. "Fools!" she cried. "I bring you a weapon far greater than your firesticks!" Laughing, one of the men pushed her at another one. She struck out, screaming. They began to toy with her. Their laughter had acquired a dangerous edge. One of them tried to kiss her. She shrieked again.

Kirk heard her. He reached for his phaser. "Nona! She's taken my phaser! She's in trouble! Come on. . . ."

There was another scream. Her thin garment was ripped now. Passed roughly from jeering man to jeering man, she beat at their faces with the phaser, screaming wildly.

Kirk, McCoy and the two Hillmen raced down a hill toward her. The patrol leader, looking up, saw them. "Men," he yelled, "it's a trap! The woman tricked us!" His sharp knife gleamed. He struck.

"Nona!" Tyree shouted.

The leader lifted his flintlock, aimed and fired. McCoy fell.

Kirk, Tyree and Yutan charged the patrol. The fight was hand to hand, bloody and brief. The two surviving villagers fled. McCoy, holding his wounded arm, stumbled down to the scene of the melee. Tyree was stooped over the dead body of his wife. In the dirt, trampled but undamaged, lay the phaser. Kirk picked it up.

"She gave it to them," McCoy said. "But they didn't recognize it."

Kirk looked at the wounded arm. "You, too," he said.

"Yes, me too! You and your blasted Paradise planet!"

Tyree had straightened. He reached for an abandoned flintlock. Then he removed the powder and bullet pouch from a patrolman's dead body. He turned to Kirk, his grim face working with grief and fury. He extended the gun toward Kirk.

"I want more of these! Many more!"

"You'll have them," Kirk said.

Tyree spoke to Yutan. "Two of those who killed my

wife escaped. We shall track them down and kill them. Come! I must speak to our people."

They set off at a run. There was a moment's silence before McCoy said, "Well, you've got what you wanted."

"Not what I wanted, Bones. What had to be."

Amazingly, his communicator, so long silent, beeped. He flipped it open. "Kirk here."

"Spock, Captain. I trust all has gone well."

"Spock!" McCoy shouted. "Are you alive?"

"A ridiculous question, Doctor. Clearly you are hearing my voice."

McCoy shook his head. "I don't know why I was worried. You can't kill a computer."

Kirk motioned him to silence. "Spock, ask Scotty how long it will take to reproduce a hundred flintlocks."

Scott's voice spoke. "I didna get that precisely, sir. A hundred what?"

"A hundred . . . serpents, Scotty. Serpents for the Garden of Eden." He paused. "We're very tired, Mr. Spock. Beam us up back home."

THE OMEGA GLORY

(Gene Roddenberry)

The disease which had killed every crew member aboard the USS *Exeter* was a mystery. Everything about the other starship was mysterious. Why was it still patrolling an orbit around the planet Omega IV when it was scheduled to end its mission six months ago? The patrol was the current assignment of the USS *Enterprise*. That was the enigma which had caused Kirk to decide to transport his landing party aboard the *Exeter*.

And what he had been expecting was an undamaged starship full of dead men. If that had been an accurate description of the situation he'd walked into, Kirk would have been grateful. Dead men were a tragic but natural phenomenon. But there was nothing natural about the *Exeter*. That was the horror. The ship wasn't full of dead men. It was full of empty uniforms.

Phaser still in hand, he watched McCoy stooping over a collapsed uniform in the *Exeter's* engineering section. A scattering of white crystals extended from its neck and sleeves. McCoy, waving him and Spock away, bent closer over the uniform, taking care not to touch it.

Lieutenant Raintree rushed up to him, his face sick. "Just the uniforms . . . all over the ship, Captain! And that . . . white stuff spilling out of them!"

Spock said, "As if they'd been in them when. . . ." His words trailed off into silence.

"Exactly," Kirk said. "When *what?*" He spoke to McCoy. "Bones, let's get to the bridge. Mr. Spock can replay the Captain's last log entry. They may have had time to record whatever was happening to them."

A blue crew uniform was crumpled on the deck beside the computer station. Spock stepped over it to turn on the mechanism. McCoy, his tricorder unslung, was

examining the tiny white granules at the end of its sleeves. He lifted his head. "Jim, analysis says these crystals are thirty-five percent potassium, carbon eighteen percent, phosphorus 1.0 and calcium 1.5."

"I have the surgeon's report, Captain," Spock said. "It seems to be the log's last—"

McCoy interrupted. "Jim! The crew hasn't left! They're still here!" At the look on Kirk's face, he went on. "This white powder . . . it's what's left of the human body when you remove the water from it. We're all ninety-eight percent water. Take it away, and we're just three or four pounds of chemicals. Something crystallized the chemicals in these people. It reduced them to *this*."

"So that's it," Kirk said slowly. "At least we can hope it was painless."

The computer beeped. Activating a switch, Spock pointed to the main viewing screen. "The name of the *Exeier's* surgeon, sir, was Carter," he said.

The face of a man appeared on the screen—the face of a man in torture. So much for the hope that the deaths had been painless, Kirk thought. That agonized face had possessed a body. He visualized the body dragging itself to the recorder to speak its last words into the Captain's log.

They began in mid-sentence. ". . . if you've come aboard this ship, you are dead men." The voice broke in a spasm of pain. "Don't return to your own ship. A mutated di-bacto-viro complex of some sort . . . deadly . . . don't know what it is. If you're aboard you're infected—you're already dying."

Young Lieutenant Raintree whispered, "My God—let me out of here!"

"Pull yourself together, Lieutenant!" Kirk snapped. "This is heroism you're listening to!"

"Repeat, repeat," said the face on the screen. "Our landing party brought . . . contamination up from the planet." The face convulsed with agony. "You have one chance . . . some kind of immunity for those living on the planet's surface. Your sole chance, get down there. *Get down there fast*. The Captain is. . ."

A scream broke from the viewer. It went dark.

After a moment Kirk walked over to the vacant com-

mand chair. Carter had sat in it to use the Captain's log recorder. Now all it held was the bodiless clothing that had been his medical officer's uniform. As to the heap of white dust dropped from the clothing—that was Carter.

"Bones," he said quietly, "warn the *Enterprise*. Mr. Spock, the *Exeter's* Transporter Room. Prepare to beam us all down to the planet."

They were in an alley of what might have been an old-time American frontier settlement, set on the edge of a desertlike terrain. But the buildings that formed the alley's walls were Asian, their roofs concave, flaring at the eaves. They moved cautiously to the alley's entrance. In the street people had gathered about some object of intense interest. They looked Asian, too. Dark-haired, yellow-skinned, their eyes were slanted by the epicanthic fold characteristic of Oriental races. One of the villagers saw them as they emerged from the alley. He gave a terrified shout. The others turned—and the crowd broke up into a frightened flight.

The object of their interest was an execution. A headsmen's block had been set up in the middle of the street. Kneeling at it, his hands thonged behind his back, was a savage-looking white man, his strongly-muscled body clad in skins. Near him stood a young white woman, also wearing savage skins. Horrified, Kirk realized she was awaiting her turn at the block. Instinctively, he and his men rushed forward. The villagers who were holding the white male savage were surprised into loosening him. He rolled aside as the ax flashed down. He tried to sink his teeth into the nearest villager. The ax was lifting again when it was halted by a sharp command.

"Put your ax away, Liyang!"

The voice was familiar. Kirk whirled.

Incredibly, Captain Ronald Tracy of the USS *Exeter* was striding toward him in the well-known uniform of a starship Captain. His pistol-phaser hung at his belt. Nor had he lost the commanding charisma of the personality Kirk remembered. He was followed by a military guard of young village men armed with javelins and swords.

"Ron!" Kirk shouted.

"Jim Kirk, by all that's holy!" Tracy said.

There was an odd little pause in which Kirk was conscious that Tracy was taking stock of the unexpected situation. Then he seemed to have straightened out the inventory. "I knew someone would come looking for us," Tracy said. "I'm sorry it had to be you, Jim." He shook hands grimly. "But I'm glad your arrival stopped this. I didn't know they had an execution going on."

Kirk said, "Captain Tracy. My First Officer, Mr. Spock; ship's surgeon Leonard McCoy; Lieutenant Phil Raintree."

McCoy said, "Captain Tracy, the last log records aboard your vessel warned of a mutated disease."

"You're all safe," Tracy said. "Some form of immunity exists on the surface here." He turned to a robust guard behind him. "No more of this, Wu. Lock up the savage."

Wu pointed to Kirk's phaser. "They carry fireboxes—"
"Lock up the savage!" Tracy said.

It took more than Tracy's military guard group to subdue the still-bound white man. Before he was led away, several villagers had to be told to assist them. It was a rough assistance. Tracy noted Spock's cocked eyebrow. "The white beasts are called Yangs," he said casually. "Impossible to even communicate with them. Hordes of them out there; they'll attack anything that moves."

"Interesting," Spock said. "The villagers know what phasers are."

Tracy glanced at him sharply. "You're a Vulcan?"

Spock nodded. "By one-half, Captain."

Was Tracy disturbed by the information? Kirk broke the moment of curious tension. "How were you left alone down here? What happened?"

Tracy's answer came with obvious effort. "Our mediscanners showed the planet as perfectly safe. The villagers, the Kohms here, were friendly. That is, they were after they got over the shock of our white skins. We resemble the Yangs—the savages. When my landing party transported back to the ship, I stayed behind to arrange our planet survey with the village elders." He paused, struggling back to control. "The next thing I knew, the ship was calling me. Our landing party had carried an unknown disease back."

He stopped to avoid an open break in his voice.

"My crew, Jim. My whole crew . . . people I knew, people who. . ."

He straightened his shoulders but couldn't go on. Kirk, sharing his torture, said, "We saw it, Ron."

"I . . . am as infected as they were . . . as you are. I stayed alive only because I stayed down here. There's some natural immunization that protects anyone here on the planet's surface. I don't know what it is yet."

McCoy spoke to Kirk. "Lucky we found that log report. If we had returned to the *Enterprise* . . ."

Tracy completed the sentence. ". . . you'd be dying by now along with the whole *Enterprise* crew. You'll stay alive only so long as you stay here. None of us can ever leave this planet."

They had half-suspected it—but hearing it finally put into words chilled them. Being marooned on Omega IV for the rest of their lives could well be a fate as empty as death. Kirk, aware of his men's somber faces, said, "Then we'll have to make the best we can of this planet. Can this place provide us with any quarters?"

"They're being prepared," Tracy said. "Wu will show Doctor McCoy and the Lieutenant to theirs. Doctor, yours can accommodate any equipment you want beamed down to you. I apologize, Jim. Your quarters and Mr. Spock's aren't ready. So if you two will follow me . . ."

He led them to a building that clearly served the more prosperous villagers as a kind of clubhouse. Its large central room featured a charcoal brazier. Richly dressed men sat at tables eating strips of meat broiled over the brazier. As Tracy entered with his guests, the villagers respectfully moved from their tables to clear a path for them. Two elders hurriedly relinquished the brazier table. At the sight of Kirk, one of the attractive girls who were busy setting the table with fresh dishes dropped a cup.

Tracy beckoned her back. "They were afraid of me, too, at first," he said. "It's our white skins; our likeness to the Yangs, the white savages."

He might have been a feudal thane graciously permitting his serfs to sit themselves below the salt in his superior company. No acknowledgement was made of his fellow-diners' nods or spoken greetings. His ease with their ex-

cessive deference made Kirk more uncomfortable than the deference. He accepted food from one of the girls; and deliberately ignoring Spock, said to Kirk, "Barbecued wild game. Sort of a long-necked rabbit-antelope."

A meat slice was speared and extended to Kirk. Holding it, he watched another girl rush to fill their crude cups with drink.

"You are treated with a considerable honor by these villagers, Captain," Spock said.

Again, he was ignored. Pointedly, Tracy addressed himself to Kirk. "These Kohm villagers asked for help, Jim. If they ever had any spirit, it's been whipped out of them by the savages."

"Are all the Kohm villages under attack?" Kirk said.

Tracy nodded. "This is one of the last. But before the Yangs began decimating them, they appear to have had quite an advanced civilization. There are ruins of large cities out there."

Spock had taken all the snubs he intended to take. Just as pointedly as Tracy, he ignored the *Exeter's* Captain to speak directly to Kirk. "Though nomad tribes have been known to destroy advanced civilizations, they rarely trouble an unarmed people—spiritless villagers."

Tracy sprang to his feet, furious. "I will not be questioned by a subordinate!"

Unperturbed, Spock merely eyed him curiously. Kirk's voice had become formal. "Captain Tracy," he said, "I think you're forgetting that Mr. Spock is my First Officer. He holds the rank of Commander in the service."

Spock rose to his feet. "I see no purpose in my causing anger to Captain Tracy," he said politely. "May I remove myself, Captain Kirk?"

Kirk took a sip of his drink. Then he nodded. Spock quickly left the table. As he disappeared, Kirk turned a cold face to Tracy. "Let's clear something up right now, Captain. I have never had a better 'First' than Mr. Spock—or a better personal friend."

"You're sentimental, Jim. I've yet to meet a Vulcan capable of friendship. Certainly this one is doing his best to sabotage ours."

Tracy's ruddy face had grown accusing. "And you know what's in his computer mind, too! It's added up a few

scanty observations—and clicked to the conclusion I've violated the Prime Directive! He's got it into his machine head I'm interfering in this culture!"

Kirk said to himself, *Take this easy*. To Tracy he said, "Ron, a First Officer's job is to be suspicious." He put a smile on his face. "Saves his Captain from appearing to be the villain."

"I am a fellow starship Captain," Tracy said.

"Fair enough. So you are. Yet I myself saw the local militia recognize our phasers. They also seem to take orders from you." He hesitated. "I'm not making any charges, believe me. I'm merely asking what goes on."

Tracy's eyes searched Kirk's. "All right. So long as we're asking questions, I'll put one to you. Suppose you were faced with a horde of incredibly vicious savages you knew were massing for a final attack—one that would erase the last trace of a planet's civilization. And suppose there were enough phasers to repel the attack? Can you imagine the power made available to this Kohm culture by just five phasers?"

"Sure," Kirk said. "Like introduction of the atom bomb into the crossbow era."

Tracy leaned forward intensely. "Jim . . . within forty-eight hours the Yangs would slaughter every adult and child in this village."

Kirk found the intensity disturbing. He spoke very quietly. "Ron, every time man interferes with the natural evolvment of another world, he ultimately destroys more than he saves."

"When they attack, Jim, where do we go? There's no place left! You and I are finished, too!"

Kirk said, "I solemnly pledge I will abide by these regulations even in death." He gave the gravity of the words a long moment before he added, "That is the oath we both took."

Tracy leaned back in his seat, stretching. "So you'll try to stop me."

"I won't 'try,' Ron. I will stop you."

The sole way to enter McCoy's quarters was to sidle in. The village room he'd been assigned was jammed with medical research instruments beamed down to him from

the *Enterprise*. Privately, Kirk wondered if the ship's lab had left itself enough equipment to make a simple blood test. Now, as he wriggled over to the electron microscope, McCoy looked up from the slide he'd been studying.

"Our tissue definitely shows a massive infection, Jim. But something down here *is* immunizing us. Otherwise, we'd have been dead ducks hours ago." He removed the slide, frowning at it. "Problem: it could be anything. Some spore, some immunizing pollen, some chemical in the air. Just finding it could take months, even years."

"Bones, we may not have much time to isolate it."

"I've got only one lead. The infection resembles a virus used during Earth's bacteriological war of the 1990s. Hard to believe the human race was once dumb enough to play with such dangerous bugs."

Spock spoke from the door. "A Yang lance, Doctor. It got the Lieutenant under the shoulder." The Vulcan, his uniform begrimed, was supporting the wounded Raintree, pale with loss of the blood that darkened his uniform's shoulder.

"That mat over there," McCoy said, grabbing his medikit. Raintree was groaning with pain as they settled him on the mat. Kirk eyed Spock. "You all right?"

"Just bruised, sir. We were approximately a hundred meters out of the village when five of the savages ambushed us." Kirk glanced quickly at the phaser hanging from his belt. Noting the look, Spock said, "I subdued them with the neck pinch, Captain. Our phasers were not used."

"Good," Kirk said. "Mr. Spock, do you see any hope that these Yangs can be reasoned with? A peace parley, a truce until. . . ."

Raintree struggled to lift his head from the mat. "No, Captain . . . they're too wild, practically insane."

Nodding, Spock said, "Captain Tracy seems to have established several facts. One—the Yangs' total contempt for death makes for an incredible viciousness. Two—his statement that the Yangs are massing for attack is valid. There are signs of thousands of them in the foothills beyond." He paused to remove two objects from

under his shirt. Laying them on the lab bench, he said, "However, in one important matter, Captain Tracy is less truthful."

"Phaser power units," Kirk said slowly.

"Yes, sir. Captain Tracy's reserve belt packs. Empty. Left among the remains of several hundred Yang bodies. A smaller attack on this village occurred a week ago. It was repelled by Captain Tracy with his phaser. I've found villagers who corroborate this fact."

Kirk, his face hard, replaced the empty phaser pack on the bench. McCoy looked up from the wound he was swabbing. "Jim . . . he'd lost his ship, his crew. Then he finds himself the sole bulwark between savages and the massacre of an entire village of a pleasant, peaceful people. . . ."

Spock said, "Regulations are harsh, Doctor—but they are also quite clear about any violation of the Prime Directive."

"Without a serum we're all trapped here in this village," McCoy said. "Under these circumstances the question of arresting the man is a purely academic one."

"I agree that formal charges have little meaning now," Spock said. "My suggestion is that Captain Kirk confiscate his weapon."

"Yes," Kirk said. "And file a report." He reached for his communicator. "Starfleet should be made aware that—"

"It is I who will send the messages, Jim."

Tracy stood in the doorway, his phaser leveled at them. On his mat Raintree made a move toward his belt. Tracy fired the phaser at him. Its beam struck him full in the chest, enveloping him.

Kirk lunged. The deadly phaser swung to point directly at his heart. He halted. Then he just stood, frozen with shock. The Captain of a starship . . . a phaser . . . and a wounded member of the service. He didn't turn to look at the charred mat which had once held Lieutenant Raintree.

Tracy's militia was efficient. Despite the spears they used to round up the *Enterprise* trio, they first saw to it

that phasers and communicators were removed. As Wu placed them at Tracy's feet, the *Exeter* Captain opened his own communicator.

"*Enterprise*, come in," he said. "This is Captain Tracy of the *Exeter*."

The satisfaction on Tracy's face told Kirk that Uhura had answered him. Sulu, taking his temporary command very seriously, would be standing beside her at her console.

"I'm afraid I've got some bad news for you," Tracy was telling Uhura. "Your Captain and landing party beamed down too late for full immunization. They've been found unconscious. I'm doing everything I can for them."

Kirk waited, hot rage building up in him. Tracy, smiling at him over the communicator, said, "There'd be no point to risking the lives of additional medical staff, Mr. Sulu. This is a fatal disease. They are courageous to volunteer to beam down. However, as I have acquired some immunity, your people may pull through, too. Meanwhile—"

Kirk had torn free. "*Sulu!*" he shouted. "*Don't let—*"

The butt of Wu's sword crashed down on his head. Dark flooded in over him. Spock had pivoted fast. But Wu was just as fast. He'd placed his sword's point on the unconscious Kirk's throat.

Tracy snapped off the communicator. He pointed to Spock and McCoy. "If those two open their mouths, Wu, kill them."

Tracy's communicator beeped. He flicked it open, listening. "Sorry, Mr. Sulu. All members of your landing party are running high fevers. Captain Kirk is delirious. Nobody is in any condition to speak to you. The villagers are helping me to make them as comfortable as we can."

But the strange Captain's words failed to satisfy an agitated Sulu. Tracy's communicator beeped again. He opened it with irritation. But there was no trace of it in the bland voice that said, "Mr. Sulu, let's have an end to this. *I am trying to save the life of your Captain.* What you heard was not the start of an order to you. It was the cry of a man in delirium. Speak to your medical staff. They will tell you that delirious people shout because they are suffering. I am doing my best to reduce your

Captain's. I will keep you informed of his state on condition you permit me to attend to it. Tracy out."

The vague shadow in the doorway gradually assumed the shape of one of Tracy's militiamen. Kirk discovered that he could see again. McCoy's makeshift lab. His arms hurt. They were bound. He sat up. The head at the doorway didn't turn. Then the hot rage surged through him again, galvanic. Head down, he charged the militiaman guard. He knocked him off balance and was preparing to charge again when Tracy pushed the guard aside with a terse "Leave us!"

Kirk sat down on the bench. In his own ears the scorn in his voice bit like acid. "Captain Ronald Tracy, per Starfleet Command regulation six, paragraph four. I merely mention it."

The smile he got was as false as the man. He'd hit home.

"I know," Tracy said. "You must now consider yourself under arrest unless in the presence of your most senior fellow officers, you give satisfactory answers to etcetera, etcetera, etcetera." He nodded. "Those are the first words duty requires you to say to me. Consider them said. You're covered. How about moving on to the next subject?"

"Which is 'why?'" Kirk said.

"Good. Direct, succinct." Moving some of McCoy's equipment aside, Tracy sat down on the lab table. "Answer: whatever it is that's immunizing us now has protected the inhabitants of this place against all sickness. And for thousands of generations. Soon your doctor is going to discover what mine did. *No native of this planet has ever experienced any kind of disease.* How long would a man live with all disease erased, Jim?"

"He might stay young a hundred years, live to be two hundred maybe."

Tracy went to the door, calling. Wu came in. "Tell Captain Kirk your age," Tracy said.

"I have seen forty-two years of the red bird. But my eldest brother—"

Tracy broke in. "Their year of the red bird comes every eleven years. Wu has seen it forty-two times. You

can multiply. Wu is four hundred and sixty-two years old. Or more, since the year here is longer. His father is well over a thousand. Interested, Jim?"

"It's not impossible, I suppose," Kirk said.

"I said . . . *are you interested?*"

"Of course I'm interested! I expect McCoy could verify all this easily enough."

"He will if you order it! We must have a doctor researching this!" He leaned forward with that special intensity characteristic of him. "Are you grasping *all* this immunizing agent here implies? Once it's located, it is a *fountain of youth!* Virtual immortality!"

"For sale by . . . ?"

Kirk waited for Tracy's nod. He got it.

"For sale by those who own the serum," Tracy said. "McCoy will eventually isolate it. Meanwhile, we inform your ship you're still sick. Order it away. When we're ready, we'll bargain for a whole fleet to pick us up if we want it. They'll send it."

"Yes, I guess they would," Kirk said.

"In the meantime, we've got to stay alive. Let the Yangs destroy what we've got to offer by killing us—and we've committed a crime against all humanity! I'd say that's slightly more important than the Prime Directive, wouldn't you?"

Kirk had gotten one arm free of his bonds. He came to his feet fast; and was yanking the other one loose when he saw Wu stiffen.

"*Tra—ceel!*" The militiaman shouted.

Cool, easy, self-assured, Tracy rose from the table. Kirk's right arm was held by the thong just an instant too long. Tracy's expert swing cracked against his jaw, sending him stumbling to his knees. He jerked his right arm clear of the noose. Tracy pulled back for a feinted swing; and Kirk, dodging, exposed his jaw to a judo chop that spun him around. He recovered, lashed out with his right fist—and Tracy, moving with the blow, chopped him again, slamming him to the floor.

"Not bad, Jim," he said. "Considering I'm larger, faster, more experienced than you are, it wasn't bad at all." He yanked Kirk to his feet. "In better shape, too, I fancy. Physical fitness has always been one of my—"

Kirk pivoted, lunging for his chin. Tracy ducked. He lifted his hard hand for another chop. Once more he smashed Kirk to the floor.

This time he didn't pull him to his feet. Instead, he strode to the door to call Wu and two militiamen. Pointing to Kirk, he said, "Bring him!"

They took him to the village jail.

There was a rack of swords in its outer room. That was all Kirk had time to register before he was dragged to the inner area. The cells were fitted, not with bars, but with elaborate grills. The first one held the two Yangs who had escaped execution. The powerful male appeared to be anything but grateful. Snarling with rage, he'd thrust an arm through the grillwork, trying to reach the yellow-skinned militiaman who stood guard at the next cell, which confined Spock and McCoy.

Tracy, his own phaser leveled at Kirk, handed the three *Enterprise* weapons to Wu. "Give these to your men. Tell them we leave soon. This time we'll ambush the Yangs with many fireboxes." He pointed to McCoy. "Have the Doctor taken back to his work place. The one with the pointed ears stays."

McCoy made a protesting move; and Kirk said, "Go ahead, Bones, continue your research."

As McCoy left with Wu, Tracy jerked a thumb toward the Yangs' cell. "And you, Jim, take a close look at that."

The male's eyes were a blue blaze of fury. Yet, taking that good look at him, Kirk discerned a certain stoicism underlying the ferocity—a kind of native dignity that suggested the man was a person of consequence in his tribe. As to the young woman, there was a supple grace even in the way she leaned back against the cell wall, her eyes alert under her shock of unkempt blond hair.

"*Animals* which happen to look like us," Tracy said. "You still believe the Prime Directive's for this planet, Jim?"

Kirk said, "We lack the wisdom to interfere in how this planet is evolving."

Tracy wheeled to his men. "Put him in there! If logic won't work, maybe that will!" They hesitated, incredulous. "Put him in there!" Tracy shouted.

Fearfully they opened the cell door. The Yangs rushed at them. Beating them back with sword and spear butts, two militiamen hastily shoved Kirk inside, slamming shut the heavy iron grating. It was locked and the keys replaced in a table drawer. Kirk faced around to see that the Yangs had begun to circle him like wolves stalking fresh meat.

He addressed the male. "If you understand me—"

A foot smashed against his shin. He tripped—and the Yang was on him, hands at his throat. Instead of fighting the choking fingers, he twisted suddenly; and doubling his legs up, lashed out in a hard kick that caught the man in the midriff. But the blow won him only a moment's respite. The Yang used his crash against the wall to roll into a crouch and begin the stalking again.

Tracy, turning to leave, called, "Remember that Prime Directive, Jim!"

The circling went on as though both Yangs drew on inexhaustible springs of energy. The female, seeing an opening, leaped on Kirk's back; and he had to turn to slam her away, pivoting just in time to fight off the male. Then once more the stalking began.

In his own cell, Spock, pressed against the grilled door, was straining to see into Kirk's. "Don't they ever rest, Spock?" Kirk yelled. His uniform shirt was ripped. And he was becoming aware of diminishing strength. There'd been that black-out from Wu's sword-butt crash on the head. Tracy's judo chops hadn't been so salubrious, either. Now here was the strain of a constant vigilance as these tireless Yangs watched for an off-guard moment. Just five seconds rest . . . He spoke to the Yang. "At least tell me *why* you want to kill me!"

Spock called, "Keep trying to reason with them, Captain. It is completely illogical that they—"

"I am very aware that this is illogical, Mr. Spock!"

The Yang jumped him again. The struggle sent the woman flying against the door's iron lattice. Spock reached an arm out to give her his Vulcan neck pinch. The male paused in amazement as she collapsed. He went to her, trying to shake her awake. Disturbed by his failure, he leaned against the door to peer into Spock's cell.

The Vulcan was at its window, pulling at its ornate grillwork. Watching, the savage saw him heave his full weight against the iron embedded in the ancient mortar. A thin trickle of crumbled dust fell on the sill. Spock called to Kirk. "I think I've loosened my window grill a bit. If the mortar on yours is as old . . ."

"I can't even test it. Not with them on me every moment."

But the Yang had held off. Kirk eyed him. The woman sprawled at his feet was slowly reviving. Once conscious again, would she incite her mate to resume the stalk? "Keep talking, Spock. Don't let me doze off."

"Captain Tracy mentioned there apparently was a considerable civilization here at one time. A war is the most likely explanation of its ruin, Captain. Nuclear destruction or a bacteriological holocaust."

"An interesting theory," Kirk said. "Better keep working on your window, Spock, if we're ever to regain our freedom."

In the very act of renewed attack, the Yang male froze. "Free-dohm?" he said. He was staring at Kirk with mixed curiosity and awe. "Free-dohm," he repeated.

"Spock!"

"I heard, Captain. Ask him if he knows what it means."

"That is a worship word—*Yang* worship!" cried the savage. "*You will not speak it!*"

Kirk said, "It is *our* worship word, too. Perhaps we are brothers."

"You live with the Kohms!"

"Am I not a prisoner of the Kohms now, like yourself?"

He let it rest there. Moving to the cell window, he began to tug at its grillwork. It was immovable. He flung a shoulder against it—and was rewarded with a small sifting of powdered mortar. The Yang looked at his mate. She rose to her feet, lithe as ever, and they both came over to join him. All three pushed their combined weight at the lattice. More mortar fell; and Kirk, turning to the Yang, said, "Why did you not speak until now?"

"You spoke to Kohms. They are for killing only."

The listening Spock called, "Is your window giving, sir?"

"A little . . . we'll get yours next."

Their following heave broke the grill loose at one corner. Now they had leverage. Twisting and bending the iron, they released its top. The old mortar finally surrendered. It was the Yang who wrenched it free. Smiling, Kirk turned his head toward Spock's cell, calling, "Stand by, Mr. Spock. We'll have you out in—"

"Captain!" Spock yelled.

The warning came too late. The heavy grill had caught Kirk on the temple, felling him, unconscious, to the floor.

The Yang shoved his mate through the open window. Spock saw him hoist himself up to the sill, and disappear.

"Captain?"

Spock, crouched at his cell door, tried to reach the unmoving body of Kirk. But it had fallen under the open window at the other side of the cell.

The recovery of consciousness came slower this time. Finally, hearing Kirk move, Spock left his cell window to hurry to its door.

"Captain?"

"Spock? How long?"

"About seven hours, sir."

Seven hours out . . . a rest of sorts. Blood had dried on Kirk's face. Trying to move, he winced at the tide of pain that washed over him. The iron lattice lay beside him. He used its support to get groggily to his feet. Over his head the open window gaped. Stumbling, he put the grill at a slant under the window. Then he climbed it, hauling himself the shortened distance up to the sill. In the alley outside, he located the jail's rear door. It opened; and he hurried to the table drawer where the cells' keys had been placed.

It was Spock who discovered that Tracy had placed a guard in McCoy's quarters. The man stiffened at the scratching noise that came from the door. McCoy, oblivious to everything but his portable computer, didn't so

much as look up. When the scratching came again, the guard carefully opened the door. He literally stuck his neck out for Spock's Vulcan pinch. He folded, dropping his sword. Spock had him dragged inside the room before McCoy looked up to register a world beyond his computer.

"Oh . . . Jim," he said. "Good morning."

Spock, eyeing the lab equipment, saw an instrument that might lend itself to conversion into a communications signaler.

"I can cross-circuit this unit, Captain. We can contact the *Enterprise* in a few moments."

"Bones," Kirk said, "what have you found?"

"I'm convinced now that there was once a frightful biological war. The virus still exists. The crew of the *Exeter* was killed by it; we contracted it, too. But over the years nature has built up immunizing agents in the food, water, soil. . . ."

Spock, busy with tools, observed, "The war created an imbalance: nature counterbalanced."

McCoy nodded. "These natural immunizers just need time to work. That's the real tragedy. If the *Exeter* landing party had stayed here just a few hours longer, they never would have died."

Taking in the statement's implications, Kirk said, "Then we can leave any time we want to?"

McCoy nodded again. Kirk's face lightened with his first grin in a long time. Then it disappeared. "Tracy," he said, "is convinced this immunizing agent could become a fountain of youth. Isolate it, make a serum, inject it into others."

"Poppycock!" McCoy snorted.

"Bones, some of them here live to be a thousand years old."

"Possible. Because their ancestors who survived had to have superior resistance. And they developed powerful protective antibodies in their blood during the wars. You want to destroy a whole world, maybe your descendants can develop a longer life—but I hardly think it's worth it."

"Then any serum you develop out of this is useless."

McCoy shrugged. "Who knows? It might finally cure the common cold. But lengthen our lives? I can do more for you if you'd eat right and exercise regularly."

Over at the corner bench where he'd been working on the lab instrument, Spock made some final adjustment; and looked up to say, "Somewhat crude, Captain, but I can signal the ship with this. No voice contact possible, of course."

"That will be quite sufficient, Mr. Spock." Kirk was moving toward the bench when the signaler in Spock's hand glowed red under the brilliant beam of a phaser. It disappeared—and Spock was slammed violently backward, grazed by the fierce energy in the scorching beam.

Tracy, his uniform spattered with blood, was leaning against the doorframe, disheveled, wild-eyed. He lowered the phaser. "No messages," he said. He glanced around the room. "Kirk, the Yang in the cell with you. Did you set him free?"

Kirk ignored him to join McCoy, who was kneeling beside the wounded Spock. "Alive at least," McCoy said briefly.

"The savage, Kirk! Did you send him to warn the tribes?"

Kirk looking up, saw that Tracy was badly shaken. "What happened?" he said. "Where are your men?"

"The Yangs must have been warned. They sacrificed hundreds just to draw out into the open. Then they came . . . and came . . . and came." His voice trembled. *"We drained three of our four phasers and they still came! We killed thousands and they still came!"*

Tracy became suddenly aware that he was shouting. He made a visible effort to control himself, and McCoy, intent on Spock, said, "He'll live. But I'll have to get him to better facilities than these."

"Impossible," Tracy said. "You can't carry the disease back up to your ship."

"He's fully immunized now," McCoy told him. "All of us are!"

"We can beam up any time, Tracy," Kirk said. "Any of us."

"You've isolated the serum?"

"There *is* no serum!" Kirk said. "There are no mira-

cles here—no immortality! All this has been for *nothing!*

Tracy stared at him, dumbfounded. Then, unbelieving, he looked at McCoy. "Explain to me, Doctor! *Explain!*"

"Leave medicine to medical men, Captain!" McCoy snapped. "You've found no fountain of youth! They live longer here because it is now natural for them to live longer!"

Color drained from Tracy's face. Even the cuts on it had gone pale. He raised his phaser, motioning Kirk to the door with it. "Outside," he said. "Or I'll burn down both your friends now."

He'd do it, too, Kirk knew. "Do what you can for him, Bones," he said and walked to the door.

The frightened villagers had left the street empty.

Tracy, phaser pointed at Kirk, tossed him a communicator. "Let's see how willing you are to die," he said. "Call your ship!"

Silent, Kirk looked at the communicator. "I need your help, Kirk!" Tracy cried. "They'll attack the village now! My phaser is almost drained; we need more, fresh ones."

So that was it. The *Enterprise* was to get into the weapon-smuggling business to accommodate this madman. At the look on Kirk's face, Tracy shouted, "*You're not just going to stand there and let them kill you, are you? If I put a weapon in your hand, you'll fight, won't you?*"

Reason, sanity. Was Tracy any longer capable of either one? Kirk said, "We can beam back up to the ship. All of us."

"I want five phasers . . . no, make it ten. Three extra power packs each."

"All right," Kirk said. The phaser lifted and aimed at him as Tracy waited. Kirk clicked the communicator open.

"*Enterprise, this is Captain Kirk.*"

He could hear the relief in Uhura's voice. "Captain! Are you all right now?"

"Quite all right, Lieutenant. I want ten phasers beamed down, three extra power packs each. Do you have that?"

Uhura didn't answer. "Say again!" Tracy said.

"*Enterprise*, do you read?"

Sulu's voice spoke. "This is Sulu, Captain. We read you—but surely you know that can't be done without verification."

"Not even if we're in danger, Mr. Sulu?"

A good man, Sulu. And smart. "Captain, we have volunteers standing by to beam down. What is your situation?"

Tracy made an impatient gesture.

"It's not an immediate danger, Mr. Sulu. Stand by on the volunteers. We'll let you know. Landing party out."

Kirk snapped off the communicator. Tracy nodded in a begrudged approval. "You have a well trained bridge crew. My compliments." He extended his hand for the communicator. It was the chance Kirk had been waiting for. He grabbed the hand, twisted it; and lashing out with his fist, knocked Tracy off balance, reaching for the phaser. But Tracy eluded the reach and, rolling with the blow, came back with the weapon at the ready. As Kirk dived around a building corner, he fired it. The beam struck a rainbarrel—and the chase began.

The dash around the building corner put Kirk in an alley he recognized. It was the one that passed the jail's cellblock. Racing by a Kohm cart, he made for the jail. Behind him, Tracy leaned against the cart, kneeling to aim at Kirk's back. But his weight was too heavy for the flimsy cart. Its rear wheel collapsed. Kirk ran on. He jumped into cover through the jail's rear door. He was barely inside when a phaser beam blasted a porch support. He heard the porch crash down.

The iron lattice that had felled him—it would still be in his cell. He found it. Not much use against a phaser, but it was all he had. Opposite the jail's front door was the execution block. As he emerged from the door he saw Tracy standing beside it. The phaser came up. Tracy fired it point blank. Nothing happened. Tracy stared at the drained phaser. Then, flinging it aside, he grabbed up the executioner's ax. He charged Kirk, taking a murderous swing at him. Kirk ducked and slammed the iron lattice into his middle. Tracy fell, but kicking out, tripped Kirk; and the two closed, grappling in the dirt.

Tracy had kned him in the groin when he gave a cry.

The point of a spear had pricked his shoulder. Both men looked up. The Yang stood over them. Behind him were ranged other armed white savages.

The brazier had been removed from the central table in the villagers' clubhouse. Now it held a worn parchment document, some ancient-looking books and Tracy's communicator. The whole interior of the room had been altered into what Kirk could only consider to be a primitive court scene. White savages composed the "jury." Among the men Kirk saw the young woman from the jail cell. He, Spock, McCoy and Tracy had been seated to the left of the table.

The male Yang of the jail cell strode to the seat behind the table.

He looked at Kirk. "My name," he said, "is Cloud William." Then he looked away to nod at one of his warriors guarding the door. A procession of Kohm Elders were herded into the room and up to the table. Kirk looked anxiously at the stiff figure of Spock. "I am weak, Captain, but not in difficulty."

McCoy leaned over to Kirk. "He *must* have attention, Jim! And soon."

Spock indicated the Kohms. "Prisoners, Captain. It seems they like killing less than we thought."

Kirk glanced around at the rough courtlike arrangements. "If my ancestors had been forced from their cities into deserts, the hills . . ."

"Yes, Captain," Spock said. "They would have learned to wear animal skins, adopted stoic mannerisms, devised the bow and the lance."

"Living much like Indians . . . and finally even looking like the American Indians." He paused, startled by his own sudden idea. "Spock! Yongs . . . yanks . . . Yankees! Is it possible?"

Spock nodded. "Kohms . . . kohmunists. Almost too close a parallel, Captain. It would mean they fought the war you avoided and here the Asiatics won, took over the Western world."

"And yet if that were true, Spock, all these generations of Yanks fighting to win back their land . . ."

"You're a romantic, Jim," McCoy said.

He sat back in his chair. Yang warriors were pushing their Kohm prisoners into attitudes of respect. The crash of a drumbeat's ceremonial tattoo silenced the room. Proud and tall, Cloud William rose from his seat behind the table.

"That which is ours is ours again! It will never be taken from us again." He pointed to the rear door and a steady drumbeat throbbed. *"For this day we mark with the great Ay Pledgili Holy!"*

Turning to look, Kirk, Spock and McCoy stiffened in unbelieving amazement. The door had opened. A guard—an honor guard—had entered. One carried a staff. From it hung an incredibly old and tattered flag, its red, white and blue faded by time. But its stars and its stripes had outlasted the centuries' ravages. They had triumphed over time.

Kirk, watching the flag proudly planted in its stand at the front of the room, felt his blood chill with awe.

Tracy whispered, "The American flag!"

Kirk turned to Spock. "After so long, I wonder if they really understand what they were fighting for."

"I doubt it, Captain. Some customs remain, but most of them would have become only traditions by now."

"And ritual," McCoy said. "The flag was called a 'holy.'"

Tracy said, "They can be handled, Kirk. Together, it will be easy." He leaned toward the three of them. "I caution you, gentlemen, don't fight me here. I'll win—or at worst, I'll drag you down with—"

He was silenced by a nudge from a spear. Cloud William was speaking. "I, Cloud William, am chief, also the son of chief, Guardian of the holies, Speaker of holy words, leader of warriors. Many have died; but this is the last of the Kohm places. What is ours is ours again."

The words were repeated by the crowd. "What is ours is ours again!"

Cloud William placed his right hand over his heart. "You will say these holy words after me." The Yang guards placed the Kohm prisoners' right hands over their hearts. Cloud William turned to the old flag. "You will all say Ay pledgli ianectu flaggen tupep likfor stahn . . ."

Kirk sprang to his feet. ". . . and to the republic for

which it stands. One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all!"

The room exploded in shouts. A guard, moving to Kirk, halted in shock.

Cloud William was in quiet but agitated conversation with an aged savage at his table. The old man, shaking his head, referred to one of the yellowed books on it. Guards were removing the Kohm prisoners from the room. Two warriors, uneasy and uncertain, moved toward Kirk. One motioned him to face the Yang chief.

The chief was rapping the butt of his knife on the table to quiet the room.

"You know many of our high-worship words. How?"

Kirk said, "In my land we have a—a *tribe* like you."

"Where is your tribe?"

Kirk pointed upward. "We come from there. From one of those points of light you see at night."

Uproar broke out again. Kirk tried to go on but his words were drowned by the noise. Cloud William rapped for quiet once more. He turned to nod at the old Yang scholar beside him. The still-keen eyes fixed on Kirk. "Why are you here? Were you cast out?"

The Yang jury waited for his answer. Kirk spoke carefully. "You are confusing the stars with 'heaven' from which—"

"*He was cast out!*" Tracy shouted.

He jumped from his chair to confront the jury. "Don't you recognize the Evil One? Who else would trick you with your own sacred words? Let your God strike me dead if I lie!" He looked upward. "But He won't because I speak for Him!"

The brutal murder of Raintree . . . the betrayal of his service oath . . . now this exploitation of ignorance and superstition. He should have known, Kirk thought. To further his purpose there was nothing that Tracy would not do. But the old Yang scholar had hurriedly opened a thick, black book.

Cloud William was studying Tracy. "Yet you have killed many Yangs," he said.

"To punish them. You would not listen when I tried to speak with you. *You* tried to kill *me*."

Kirk said, "I am a man like yourself. I am not God. I am not the Evil One."

"Would a *man* know your holy words?" cried Tracy. "Could a *man* use them to trick you?" He extended a dramatic finger at Spock. "And see his servant! His face, his ears, his eyes! Do Yang legends describe the Evil One?"

Kirk turned to the tribunal. "Do all *your* faces look alike? Can you tell from them which of you is good and which is bad?"

The old scholar had pushed the black book before the chief. Cloud William lifted it to kiss it reverently before he opened it. Kirk saw that its worn gold-lettered title was still legible. It read "Holy Bible." A wrinkled hand extended a finger to point to a page.

Many old Bibles contained illustrations. If this one pictured drawings of Lucifer's aides, one of them might bear some resemblance to Spock. One apparently did. Cloud William looked at Spock. Then he looked back at Kirk.

"You command the demon," Tracy said to Kirk. "Everyone has seen it." He wheeled to the chief. "You want more proof? The demon has no heart! Put your ear to him!"

Guards had seized Spock. The chief left the table.

McCoy cried, "His heart is different! The Vulcan internal organs are—"

"I have seen his sorcery," said Cloud William. He fingered the back of his neck. "When he touched my woman there, she fell into sleep." He crossed to Spock and solemnly placed his ear against the Science Officer's chest. Listening, a frown began to gather on his forehead. He straightened up. "He has no heart."

The room burst into terrified yells. They subsided as Cloud William raised his right arm. Then he hurried back to his ancient mentor. "There is a way," he was told. Painfully, the aged scholar moved to a large ornate box at the end of the table. Cloud William nodded in obvious relief.

"The greatest of holies," he said. "Chiefs and the sons of chiefs may speak the words . . . but the tongue of the Evil One would surely turn to fire." He looked straight

at Kirk and Tracy. "I will begin and you will finish." He closed his eyes, chanting, "Ee'd pebnista nordor formor fektunun . . ."

His lids lifted. He waited.

There was something unplaceable but familiar in the chanted words. As Kirk struggled to identify them, Tracy cried out, "He fears to speak them for indeed his tongue would burn with fire! Kill his servant unless he speaks, so we may see if the words burn him!"

A Yang knife was poised at Spock's abdomen. The clamor for blood turned the room into bedlam. Cloud William, his face deeply troubled, had given the signal for the knife plunge when Kirk shouted, "No! Wait! There's a better way! Your sacred book, does it not promise good is stronger than evil?"

"Captain . . ." But over Spock's protest rang out the voice of the young Yang woman of the jail cell. "Yes, it is so written! Good will always destroy evil!"

"It is written," said the old scholar.

The guards had bound both Kirk and Tracy. Now a Yang warrior cut their thongs. The room had been cleared of furniture. In its central space Cloud William drove two razor-sharp knives into the floorboards. Kirk tried to rub circulation back into his numbed hands.

"Careful, Jim," McCoy said. "I've found Evil usually triumphs unless Good is very, very careful."

Kirk nodded wordlessly. He walked over to where the two knives thrust upward from the flooring.

"The fight is done when one is dead," Cloud William said. Lifting his arm, he dropped it swiftly, shouting, "Hola!"

Tracy was the first to reach his knife. He shoulder-butted Kirk aside and kicked his knife away. Then he lunged, knife raised. Kirk met him and, seizing his wrist, immobilized the down-thrust. They locked in a wrestle, straining against each other for an opening.

McCoy muttered, "We've got to do something, Spock."

Spock strove with his bound hands. "I am open to suggestions, Doctor."

Kirk broke free. He got a hammerlock on Tracy; but the *Exeter* Captain, wriggling himself out of it, was

carried away by the momentum of his own move. Kirk stooped and scooped up his knife. The two began a wary circling of each other.

Spock suddenly became conscious of eyes. They belonged to Cloud William's young woman. He saw a tremor pass over her as their eyes locked. Half-fascinated, half-repelled, she tore her gaze from his. Then she looked at him again. He beckoned her toward him with his head. McCoy saw the gesture. "What are you doing?" he said.

"Making suggestions," Spock said.

Tracy had nicked Kirk. As he withdrew his knife, Kirk drove at him with a swift thrust; but Tracy parried the slash and the young woman, unnoticed, began to make her way through the shouting warriors. Edging along the wall, she reached the table that still held the old documents, the books and the communicator. She paused, glancing back at the two fighting men. Tracy's knife flashed out, cutting Kirk's sleeve and arm. Blood dripped to the floor. But the young woman had the communicator. Holding it so that it couldn't be seen, she moved toward Spock and McCoy. Spock looked up at her. "Do as my mind instructs you, woman," he said.

"I obey," she said.

Kirk was losing the fight. His shoulder was slashed now and the crowd howled for more blood. Then Tracy finally made his mistake. Caught off guard by a feint from Kirk, he stumbled. Kirk hauled back—and landed a blow that spun Tracy around and down. Kirk was on him, his knife at his throat. He held it there, his left hand reaching for Tracy's weapon. He wrenched it from him and sent it skidding across the floor to Cloud William's feet. A sudden silence fell over the room.

"Kill him," Cloud William said. "It is written Good must destroy Evil."

Kirk lifted the knife from Tracy's throat, rose to his feet and was backing away when he heard a familiar hum in the stillness. He whirled. Sulu and two Security guards had sparkled into shape beside him. Around the room Yang warriors were dropping to their knees. At stiff attention Sulu said, "Sir, we picked up a communicator signal but we couldn't raise anyone. Adding that to—"

"We'll discuss it later, Lieutenant. Put Captain Tracy under arrest. Now, Cloud William . . ."

The Yang chief had crawled to his feet. "You are a great God servant, and we shall be your slaves."

Kirk reached down, lifting him to his feet. "Get up! Stand and face me."

"When you would not say the words of the holy Ee'd Pebnista, I doubted you."

Kirk said, "I did not recognize the words because you say them badly . . . without meaning."

The old Yang scholar had lifted the ornate box high in the air. Kirk approached him and gently removed it. He opened it, took out a ragged fragment of ancient parchment. Aghast, the old man cried, "Only the eyes of a chief may see the Ee'd Pebnista!"

"*This was not written for chiefs.*" Kirk turned. "Hear this, Cloud William. This is *your* world. But perhaps without violating *our* laws, we can teach you what your fathers meant by these words."

He raised the tattered parchment so that all could see it. "Among my people, we carry many such words as this, from many lands, from many worlds. Many are equally good and well respected. But wherever we have gone, there are no words which have ever said this thing of importance in quite this way. Look at these three words written larger than all the others and with a special pride never written before or since . . . in tall words, proudly saying . . ." He paused.

"We the people . . ."

He faced Cloud William. "What you call the Ee'd Pebnista was not for chiefs or kings or warriors or the rich and powerful . . . but for all people. Over the centuries you have slurred the meaning out of the words. They are these. . . ."

Reading from the parchment, he spoke slowly and clearly. "*We . . . the . . . people . . .* of the United States . . . in order to form a more perfect union, to establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity—do ordain and establish this Constitution."

He reverently restored the parchment to the box. "Those words," he said, "and the words that follow were not meant only for Yangs. They were for Kohms also."

"For Kohms?" repeated Cloud William, shocked.

"They must apply to everyone—or they mean nothing. Do you understand?"

"I do not fully understand, one named Kirk. But the Holy words will be obeyed. I swear it."

Kirk left him to address Sulu. "You and your men will have to stay a few days until your bodies pick up immunization and adjust."

Sulu grinned. "Looks like an interesting place, Captain. You don't suppose there's a Shanghai or Tokyo down here, too?"

"There might be at that," Kirk told him. He clicked open the communicator Spock handed him. "Kirk to *Enterprise*, four to Transport."

"We're locking in on you, Captain," Uhura said.

Kirk, Spock and McCoy, Tracy between them, moved together for upbeam.

As they broke into dazzle, Kirk turned for a last look at the old flag upright in its standard, its stars and its stripes still bright.

BOOK II

Star Trek 11

BOOK II—*Star Trek 11*

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Preface

One of the most frequent requests I receive in the mail is to be supplied with the address of a local or national Star Trek fan club. There are so many of these, and they multiply so rapidly, that I can't keep track of them. However, somebody can, and does: the Star Trek Welcommittee.

This describes itself as a central information center to answer fans' questions about Star Trek, and to provide new fans with complete information about Star Trek and Star Trek fandom. It is a nonprofit service organization—*not* a club to join—with 105 volunteer workers in 23 states (plus representatives in three other countries) who devote their time and efforts to answering such questions. They add:

"Few fans realize all that is really available in the world of Star Trek: over 100 clubs, about 80 fan magazines, 14 books, 5 conventions annually, and many products.* That's where STW comes in—we can give you information on all of them, plus ST technology, penpals, trivia, fans in your area, ST actors, details of the making of ST (live actor or animation), revival efforts, details of the various episodes . . . Whatever your question on Star Trek or Star Trek fandom, chances are we've got the answer—or can get it for you. Write us. Please enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope when requesting information."

* These figures are as of Sept. 26, 1973. They must be much larger now; certainly there are more books!

The Chairman is Helen Young, and the address is:
Star Trek Welcomittee
c/o Shirley Maiewski
481 Main St.
Hatfield, MA 01038

I know nothing more about the organization than what you see above, but you risk no more than a couple of stamps (or an international reply coupon) by directing your inquiry there. The depth of *my* ignorance of the kind of information they offer is almost bottomless; I just write the books.

Another question which has become more and more frequent is, "What are you going to do when you run out of ST scripts?" And the most usual suggested answer is that I turn to adapting the animated episodes. Thanks very much, but (as probably many of you already know) that job is now being done by another writer, from another publisher. And that's probably just as well, for I have never seen a single one of the animated episodes; they haven't turned up in England yet.

Well, what *am* I going to do? The problem is still several books in the future and the solution isn't entirely in my hands. A number of letters have asked for another ST novel, like SPOCK MUST DIE!, and I'd like to try that. It was certainly fun the first time. Also, I've another idea, which I'm keeping a secret until I'm sure both Paramount and Bantam like it. I'm sorry to be so vague, but publishing is like that; a chancy business.

Though I've said more than once that I can't answer individual letters, I still get some claiming to have read all the books and nevertheless requesting such answers. The record for sheer ingenuity thus far goes to a fan who said he realized that I couldn't reply, but I at least could show that I'd read his letter by arranging the next batch of stories in a certain order, or at least dedicating the book to him.

Well, now he knows I did read it. And in case anybody else needs to know how I work: I arrange the stories in what seems to me to be the most effective order, as part of my duty to the readers as a whole. (To take a simple example, there were several scripts in which Captain Kirk was presumed dead. It would be bad editing to include two such stories in the same book.) As for dedications—well,

like almost all other authors I know, I dedicate my books only to personal freinds old and new, to people who have helped me to be better as a writer, and to others I have learned to love. I mean this as an honor, whether the dedicatees take it as one or not; for a book takes time and care and skill to write, even if it turns out to be bad, so a dedication must be a gift from the heart . . . And when I can't think of someone who might particularly like a book of mine, I don't dedicate it to anyone. I hope that's clear, for I don't know how to explain it any better. I have no more friends and loved relatives than anybody else, and don't hand out dedications at random.

I hope you won't think this ungracious of me. In the meantime, let me repeat yet again: I do read *all* your letters, I'm glad to have them, and hope you'll go right on sending them. That's why I give my address. Your welcome enthusiasm gratifies me more than I can say. But I can't answer them. I have received, quite literally, thousands of them and had I replied to them all—as I tried to do during the first year—I'd have had no time to write any more books!

Finally: I've often been asked what other books I've written besides these. I'm flattered to be asked this, but there are more than 30 others and I've lost track of some of them myself. Those that are still available in English are listed in an annual volume called *Books in Print*, which you can find easily in your local library, and your librarian will help you to run down any that sound interesting. And, of course, I hope you'll like the ones you find.

JAMES BLISH

Treetops
Woodlands Road
Harpsden (Henley)
Oxon., U. K.

What Are Little Girls Made Of?

(Robert Bloch)

That day the efficiency of the *Enterprise* bridge personnel was a real tribute to their professionalism. For a human drama was nearing its climax among them, the closer they came to the planet Exo III.

Its heroine was the Starship's chief nurse, Christine Chapel. She stood beside Kirk at his command chair, her eyes on the main viewing screen where the ice-bound planet was slowly rotating. Touched by the calm she was clearly struggling to maintain, he said, "We're now entering standard orbit, Nurse."

A flicker of her nervous anticipation passed over her face. "I know he's alive down there, Captain," she said.

Kirk said, "Five years have passed since his last message." It seemed only decent to remind this brave, loving, though perhaps vainly hoping woman of that sinister fact. But she answered him with firm certainty. "I know, sir. But Roger is a very determined man. He'd find some way to live."

Uhura spoke from her panel. "Beginning signals to surface, Captain."

"Run it through all frequencies, Lieutenant." Kirk

rose to go and check the library computer screen. Spock, concentrated on it, said, "Ship's record banks show little we don't already know. Gravity of the planet one point one of Earth, sir. Atmosphere within safety limits."

"But surface temperatures are close to a hundred degrees below zero," Kirk said.

Spock, too, was conscious of the woman who was patiently awaiting her moment of truth. He lowered his voice. "It may have been inhabited once, but the sun in this system has been steadily fading for half a million years." He hit a switch. "Now for Doctor Korby, the hero of our drama, Captain. . ."

Onto the computer screen flashed a small photograph of a distinguished-looking man in his vital mid-forties. There was a printed caption beneath it and Spock read it aloud. "Doctor Roger Korby, often called the 'Pasteur of archaeological medicine.' His translation of medical records salvaged from the Orion ruins revolutionized immunization techniques. . ."

"Those records were required reading at the Academy, Mr. Spock. I've always wanted to meet him." Kirk paused. Then, he, too, lowered his voice. "Any chance at all that he could still be alive?"

Grave-faced, Spock shook his head. He switched off the photograph; and Uhura, as though confirming his negative opinion, called, "No return signal, Captain. Not on any frequency."

"One more try, Lieutenant." Kirk returned to the waiting woman who had heard Uhura's report. She said, "His last signal told about finding underground caverns. . ."

Her implication was only too obvious. Korby had sheltered in the caverns so deeply no signal could reach him. He was safe. He was still alive. Kirk, remembering how it is to be tortured by a hopeless hope, said gently, "Christine, since that last signal, two expeditions have failed to find him."

Uhura, making her second report, called, "I've run all frequencies twice now, Captain. "There's no—" A blast of static crackled from all the bridge speakers. It subsided—and a male voice, strong, resonant spoke. "This is Roger

Korby," it said. "Come in, *Enterprise*. Repeating, this is Roger Korby . . ."

Christine swayed. Reaching for the support of Kirk's command chair, she whispered, "That's—his voice . . ."

It spoke again. "Do you read me, *Enterprise*? This is Doctor Roger Korby, standing by . . ."

Kirk seized his speaker. "*Enterprise* to Korby. Thank you. We have your landing coordinates pinpointed. Preparing to beam down a party." He smiled up at Christine. "It may interest you to know that we have aboard this vessel—"

Korby's voice interrupted. "I have a rather unusual request, Captain. Can you beam down alone, just yourself? We've made discoveries of such a nature that this extraordinary favor must be required of you."

Astounded, Kirk took refuge in silence. Spock joined him, torn between his respect for the great scientist and the unprecedented demand. Cocking a brow, he said, "Odd. To say the least . . ."

"The man who's asked this is Roger Korby," Kirk said.

Spock spoke to Christine. "You're quite certain you recognized the voice?"

She laughed out of her great joy. "Have you ever been engaged to be married, Mr. Spock? Yes, it's Roger."

Kirk made his decision. Hitting the speaker button, he said, "Agreed, Doctor. However, there will be *two* of us." He nodded to Christine, passing the speaker to her.

"Hello, Roger," she said.

There was a long pause. Then the unbelieving voice came. "Christine . . . ?"

"Yes, Roger. I'm up here."

"Darling, how . . . what are you . . ." The voice poured excited enthusiasm through the speaker. "Yes, by all means, ask the Captain to bring you with him! I had no idea, no hope . . . Darling, are you all right? It's almost too much to credit . . ."

"Yes, Roger," she said. "Everything's all right. Now everything is just fine."

The anxious tension on the bridge had given way to a sympathetic delight. Kirk, feeling it, too, recovered his

speaker. "We're on our way, Doctor. Be with you soon, both of us. Kirk out."

He made for the bridge elevator, followed by the radiant Christine.

They materialized in a rock cave. It was primitive, unfurnished. Beyond its rough entrance there stretched an unending snow-world; a world as white as death under its dark and brooding sky. Its horizon was jagged, peaked by mountains. In the half-twilight of the planet's dying sun, Kirk could see that they were shrouded in ice, cold, forbidding. It was a depressing arrival.

"He said he'd be waiting for us," Christine said.

Kirk also found the absence of welcome strange. He went forward to peer deeper into the cavern; and Christine, touching one of its walls, hastily withdrew her chilled fingers. Kirk, cupping his hands to his mouth called into the darkness, "Doctor Korby! Korby!" The rebounding echoes suggested a long extension of distance beyond the cavern.

He was aware of a sudden uneasiness. "I suppose it's possible," he said, "that we hit the wrong cavern entry." But the supposition didn't hold up. The beamdown coordinates had been checked with Korby in the Transporter Room. And Spock was right. Korby's request *had* been odd. He detached his communicator from his belt. "Captain to *Enterprise*."

"Spock here, sir."

"Beam down a couple of security men," Kirk said.

"Any problems, Captain?"

"Some delay in meeting us, Mr. Spock. Probably nothing at all. Kirk out." He motioned to Christine to join him at a wall to leave the cave's center open for the beamdown. "Getting up here to us may be taking more time than the Doctor estimated," he told her. "The corridors of this place may go deeper than we know."

She said, "Thank you, Captain. I'm trying not to worry."

He felt distinct relief when crewmen Matthews and Rayburn sparkled into materialization. Spock had seen to it that they were both fully armed. "Maintain your position here in this cave, Rayburn." Turning to Matthews, he add-

ed, "Nurse Chapel and I are going to investigate a little further. You'll go with us."

They found the narrow passageway that led out of the cave. They found it by groping along a wall. It slanted downward. The inky blackness ahead of them endorsed what the echoes had suggested. The passageway could divide itself into many unseen and distant directions.

The light grew still dimmer. Abruptly, Kirk halted. "Stop where you are," he told the others. He stooped for a stone and flung it into what he'd sensed lay right before him—an abyss. They could hear the stone rebounding from rock walls. Then there was silence—absolute. Christine had clutched at Kirk's arm when a light beam suddenly blazed at them, blinding them in its searchlight glare. Kirk jerked his phaser out. As he shielded his eyes with his left hand, a figure stepped in front of the light, a featureless shadow.

Christine hurried forward. "Roger!"

Kirk grabbed at her. "Careful! That drop-down . . ."

The figure stepped to what must have been a light-switch panel. The glare faded to a fainter light that revealed the rather ordinary face of a middle-aged man. Christine stared at him in mixed surprise and disappointment. It wasn't Korbý. Kirk adjusted his phaser setting and stepped up beside her just as recognition broke into her face.

"Why, it's Doctor Brown!" she exclaimed. "He's Roger's assistant!" Identifying the man for Kirk, she rushed toward him, crying, "Brownie, where's Roger? Why . . . ?"

She never finished her sentence. Behind them, Matthews shrieked, "Capt—! Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh . . . hhh . . ."

The scream died in the depths of the abyss. Then there was only the clatter of stones dislodged by Matthews' misstep.

Sickened, Kirk pulled himself out of his shock. He went to his knees, edging himself dangerously near to the pit's rim. Pebbles were still falling from it into the blackness below. Brown joined him. "Careful . . . please be careful," he said.

Kirk rose. "Is there any path down?"

"There's no hope, Captain. It's bottomless."

Though Doctor Brown had warned of peril from the pit, he did not mention the momentary appearance of a huge, hairless nonhuman creature on the other, shadowy side of the pit. Perhaps he didn't see it. It remained only for a second before it was gone, a monstrous shadow lost in shadows. Instead, he said sympathetically, if unhelpfully, "Your man must have slipped."

"Any chance of a projection? a ledge of some kind?"

"None, Captain. We lost a man down there, too. Listen . . ." He reached for a heavy boulder and heaved it over the pit's edge. There was the same crashing of rebound—and then the same absolute silence.

"Unfortunate," Brown said. "Terribly unfortunate. Doctor Korby was detained. I came as rapidly as I could."

"Not soon enough," Kirk said.

He looked at Brown in his worn lab clothing. One learned composure in the presence of human death, if you lived with its daily threat for five years. His voice had sounded regretful. Was he regretful? Was he composed? Or was he cold, numb to feeling? Kirk could see that the weeping Christine had also sensed a certain peculiarity in Brown's response to Matthews' death.

She wiped her eyes on her uniform sleeve. "Brownie," she said suddenly, "don't you recognize me?"

"Explain," Brown said.

"You don't recognize me" she said.

"Christine, you look well," Brown said. He turned to Kirk. "My name is Brown. I am Doctor Korby's assistant. I presume you are Captain Kirk."

Something was definitely askew. Christine had already named Brown as Korby's assistant. And the man had addressed Kirk as "Captain" several times. Why did he now have to "presume" that he was Captain Kirk? Christine's uncertainty was mounting, too. Her eyes and ears insisted that Brown was indeed her old acquaintance—but the feeling of an off-kilter element in his present personality persisted. Of course, Time and harsh experience *did* make changes in people . . .

Kirk had returned to the pit's edge. "He's dead, I assure you," Brown said. "Come. Doctor Korby will be waiting." He moved over to the searchlight panel to turn a couple of switches. Lights came on further along the corridor.

Kirk walked back to Christine. "You do know him well, don't you? This Brown is the Brown you remember, isn't he?"

She hesitated. "I—I suppose existing alone here for so long . . ."

Kirk reached for his phaser. Then he snapped open his communicator. "Captain Kirk to Rayburn."

"All quiet here, Captain. Any problems there, sir?"

"We've lost Matthews. An accident, apparently. Tell the *Enterprise* to have a full security party stand by."

"Yes, sir."

"And inform Mr. Spock that we will both report in at hourly intervals. If you and I lose contact—or if he fails to hear from either of us—the security force is to be beamed down immediately. Kirk out."

He heard the snap-off of Rayburn's communicator. He couldn't hear what followed it—Rayburn's choking gurgle as the hairless creature's great arm lunged from the darkness to encircle his throat.

"This way, please," Brown was saying. "The illumination is automatic from here on."

It was a long walk. Brown appeared to feel a need to install himself as the interpreter of Korby's work. He dissertated. "The doctor has discovered that this planet's original inhabitants were forced to move underground as the warmth of their sun waned. When you were his student, Christine, you often heard him say that freedom of choice produced the human spirit. The culture of Exo III proved his theory. When its people were compelled to move from light to darkness, their culture also became choiceless, mechanistic. The doctor has found elements in it that will revolutionize the universe when removed from this cavernous environment."

The prediction struck Kirk as slightly grandiose. Polite Christine said, "That's fascinating."

"I thought you'd be interested," Brown said. "We have arrived, Captain."

The place of their arrival was a large and luxurious study. Though its walls were of rock, they were so finely polished they conveyed an impression of massive grandeur. Modern taste had been sensitively superimposed on the foundations constructed by the ancient race. In their five

years of underground life, Korby and his staff had clearly undertaken to make themselves comfortable. And well supplied. There were huge cabinets of gleaming scientific instruments, archaeological tools, favorite artifacts found and cherished. Odd-looking doors led out of the room into other unseen ones. In one corner was a dining area complete with tables and chairs.

One of the doors opened. A girl came in, pale, slim, dark-haired. There was a serene innocence in her face that merited the word "lovely." Her lips moved in a smile that exposed her perfect teeth.

"I'm Andrea," she said. "You must be Christine. I've always thought it was a beautiful name."

Christine was unpleasantly startled. Youthfully innocent she might be, but the girl was nevertheless a woman. And why she was serving as hostess in Korby's personal study was a question his affianced wife was obviously asking herself.

Andrea was good as her job. She turned the lovely smile to Kirk. "And you must be Captain Kirk of the Starship *Enterprise*. I can't tell you how we appreciate your bringing Roger's fiancée to him."

Christine stiffened at the use of Korby's first name. "I don't remember Doctor Korby's mentioning an 'Andrea' as a member of his staff."

The smile didn't waver. "You are exactly as Roger described you. No wonder he's missed you so."

Such awareness of Korby's intimate emotions did nothing to alleviate Christine's growing resentment. Kirk, conscious of it, said, "Where is Doctor Korby?"

"Here, Captain." A strong-faced man, easily seen to be the man of the *Enterprise* photograph, had emerged from another door. Kirk was absurdly reminded of a theatrical buildup to the star's entrance. That Korby was the star, there was no mistaking. Kirk, himself accustomed to command, recognized the self-assurance in another commander. Korby, his hand extended, said, "I've been looking forward to meeting you."

Kirk had lost a crewman to a brutal death. He didn't like Brown. Nor had he lost his heart to Andrea. Ignoring the hand, he contented himself with saying, "And I to meeting you, sir."

"Roger . . ." Christine said.

"Christine . . . darling . . ."

She went to him. He bent to kiss her outstretched hands. Kirk, still wary, saw the honest joy in both their faces. It was a reunion that recovered two relationships—the intellectual bond of teacher and student, the bond of physical love between man and woman. Both loves still lived after all the years apart. So much was clear as they embraced—an embrace restrained in the others' presence but a double reunion that was real.

Christine lifted her head from his shoulder. Misty-eyed, she said, "I knew I'd find you."

He drew her back. "Forgive me, Captain. It's been a long time."

"There's no need to apologize, sir."

"The captain lost a man in the caverns, Doctor," Brown said.

There was no doubt of the horror on Korby's face. He released Christine to whirl on Brown. "What? How did it happen?"

"The pit near the outer junction. The edge must have given way."

Visibly shaken, Korby was silent. Then he spoke. "Captain, what can I say? I should have been there. I know the passages so well. I am sorry—so sorry."

"It isn't your fault, Doctor." Kirk had his communicator out. "Captain to Rayburn," he said. "Rayburn, report." As he waited for Rayburn's voice, he turned back to Korby. "I'll have to call my ship on a security confirmation. If you have any cargo requirements, any special needs, I'll be glad—"

"Captain!" Korby interrupted. His face was suddenly agitated. "I should much prefer—"

It was Kirk's turn to interrupt. He spoke loudly into the communicator. "Kirk to Rayburn. *Rayburn, are you receiving me?*"

He made an adjustment on the communicator and tried again. Then he gave himself a moment. "My other man has failed to respond, Doctor. It is now necessary that I call my ship . . ."

"No communications, Captain!"

It was Brown who had shouted. In his hand he held an old-style phaser rifle. It was aimed at Kirk's heart.

Aghast, Christine said, "Roger, what . . ."

"I'm sorry, dear," Korby said. "But if they should send down more people . . ."

Kirk, appalled by the sudden turn events had taken, realized that Andrea, rushing at him, had snatched the communicator from his hand.

"Roger!" Christine cried. "This man . . . this girl . . . Why do you allow. . .?"

"Your captain won't be harmed," Korby said hurriedly. "Christine, listen. You must admit the possibility that there are things here unknown to you but so vitally important that—"

"Doctor Korby!" Kirk shouted. "I have one man dead! Now I've got another one out of contact!"

"Take his weapon, Andrea," Korby said.

The girl began to circle Kirk to get at the phaser hung on the rear of his belt. He drew back—and Brown leveled the rifle at his forehead. Kirk grabbed for reason. "Doctor, I have a command to consider, crewmen, a Starship . . ."

"This is necessary, Captain. You will understand."

Kirk moved. He jerked out his phaser; and all in the same blur of action, ducked behind a heavy desk.

"Drop that rifle!" he said to Brown.

Instead, Brown's finger reached for the trigger. Kirk fired his phaser—and Brown fell.

Christine screamed, "Captain, behind you . . . !"

Her warning came too late. The hairless ape-thing had him by the arm. Under the fierce force of the grip, he was lifted high into the air, his whole body convulsed by the arm's agony. The phaser rang on the stone floor. Like a puppet, he kicked, helpless in the immense hand—and the other one struck him in the jaw. Christine screamed again. And he was dropped to fail, limp, half-conscious in a crumpled heap.

Christine, paralyzed with horror, stared vaguely around her as though seeking some answer to the incomprehensible. Then she saw what she had to see. Brown lay on the floor near Kirk, face upturned. There was no blood on the chest where the phaser beam had struck him. Instead, a metallic tangle of twisted dials and wires protruded

from it . . . the infinitely complex circuitry required to animate an android robot.

Kirk found the strength to move his eyes. Then, he, too, saw what Christine had seen.

An anxious Spock was at Uhura's panel when she finally received Kirk's signal.

"Frequency open, sir," she told him, relief in her face. He seized the speaker. "Spock here, Captain."

The familiar voice said, "Contact established with Doctor Korby."

"We were becoming concerned, Captain. Your check-in is overdue. Nor have we heard from your security team."

"There's no problem, Mr. Spock. They're with me. Return to ship will take about forty-eight hours. Doctor Korby's records and specimens will need careful packing."

"We can send down a work detail, sir."

"Korby has ample staff here. It's just that the work is quite delicate."

Abruptly Spock asked, "Captain . . . Is everything all right down there?"

Nothing was all right down there.

Spock had received no signal from Kirk. The captain of the *Enterprise* was sitting on a bunk in a detention chamber, watching as his voice issued from the mouth of the hairless ape-thing across the room. His communicator looked like a cigarette lighter in the creature's enormous paw. Korby was supervising its performance. He wasn't enjoying it. There was real concern for Kirk in his face. But real or unreal, Korby's feelings, his work, the man himself had ceased to matter to Kirk. The hot rage he felt had burned up all save the overriding fact that a neolithic savage was masquerading as commander of the *Enterprise*.

He tensed on the bunk. The bald thing noted it; and clicking the communicator off, prepared for muscle work.

"Please be still," Korby said. "If you move or cry out, Ruk may injure you. At least wait until you and I can talk together."

The communicator snapped back on. And a yet more anxious Spock said to Ruk, "Acknowledge, Captain. You sound tired."

Kirk heard his exact intonation come again from the flabby lips. "It's just the excitement of what we've found out, Mr. Spock. Korby's discoveries are scientifically amazing. All under control. Stand by for regular contact, Kirk out."

Ruk closed the communicator.

"This isn't a vain display, Captain," Korby said. "You know my reputation. Trust me."

"Yes, I know your reputation," Kirk said. "The whole galaxy knows who you are and what you used to stand for."

"There's so much you must learn before you make a judgment," Korby said. He turned to Ruk. "Andrea," he said tersely.

The loose mouth opened to say sweetly, "And you must be Captain Kirk of the Starship *Enterprise*."

There was horror in the sound of the girlish voice emerging from the bald grotesque across the room. Kirk's obvious repulsion pleased it. Ruk began to show off.

It was Korby's voice now, saying, "Forgive me, Captain. It's been a long time." Then it was Christine's turn. Ruk reproduced her precise emotional inflection in the words, "I knew I'd find you."

"Enough!" Korby said sharply. "You are not to mock Christine! You are never to harm her!"

"Or disobey an order from her?" Kirk said.

Korby rose to the challenge. To Ruk he said, "You will never disobey Christine's orders." He looked at Kirk. "Satisfied, Captain?" He came over to sit beside Kirk on the bunk. Ruk rose, menacing. Korby waved him back. "Give me just twenty-four hours to convince you, Captain."

"Must I be a prisoner to be convinced?"

"What would your first duty be on return to your ship? A report! Do you realize how many vital discoveries have been lost to laymen's superstitions, their ignorance?"

"Here is an ignorant layman's question for you, Doctor," Kirk said. "*Where is my man I could not contact?*"

"Ruk is programmed to protect my experiments. The logic of his machine-mind saw danger to me . . ."

"*Where is my other crewman?*" Kirk repeated.

Korby's voice was very quiet. "Ruk—destroyed them

both, Captain. But totally against my wishes, believe me."

Kirk's fists clenched. He looked down at them; and deliberately relaxing them, swallowed. Putting interest into his voice, he said, "He's a robot, isn't he? Like Brown?"

Korby nodded to Ruk. The thing spoke heavily, dully. "More complex than Brown, much superior. The old ones made me."

Korby said, "Ruk was still tending the machinery when we arrived here. How many centuries old he is even Ruk doesn't know. With his help, with the records I could find, we built Brown."

"You've convinced me, Doctor," Kirk said. "You've convinced me that you're a very dangerous man . . ."

He pushed Korby off the bunk; and in a fast pivot, shoved him across the room at Ruk. Then he made a leap for the door. But Ruk was too quick for him. Moving with a surprising speed, the thing grabbed his arm and flung him back across the room. He struck the hard masonry of the wall, thrust against it to regain his feet—but the move was useless. He was seized and lifted, a toy in the gigantic hand.

"Careful, Ruk!" Korby shouted. "Gently!"

The vise-like grip eased. But Ruk's notion of gentleness left something to be desired. He cuffed Kirk across the head—and dropped him, unconscious.

"Where is Captain Kirk?"

Christine stopped pacing the length of Korby's study to put the question to an Andrea who'd suddenly appeared through a door. The sweetly innocent looked back at her, puzzled.

"You are concerned about the captain when you are with Roger again? I do not understand."

There was that familiar use of his name again. Christine was engulfed by a desolate sense of helplessness. She could understand nothing at all, not the man she had loved so long, his purpose nor his companions.

"Yes," she said. "I am much concerned about the captain."

With manifest sincerity, her voice wholly guileless, Andrea said, "How can you love Roger without trusting him?"

Christine didn't answer. The query had gone straight to the heart of her agony. She began her restless pacing again and Andrea said, "Why does it trouble you when I use the name 'Roger'?"

"It is sufficient that it does trouble her."

Korby had entered the study. Ruk was with him, the giant hand tight on Kirk's arm. The door hummed closed behind them; and Korby, moving to Andrea, said, "You will call me 'Doctor Korby' from now on."

She said, "Yes, Doctor Korby."

He took Christine's cold hand, smiling down into her eyes. "As you can see, dear, Captain Kirk is fine. He won't be harmed. What's at stake here simply makes it necessary to prevent his reporting to his ship. I need time to explain, to demonstrate to him—and to you. Shall we start with Andrea?"

"Yes," she said. "Do start with Andrea."

The girl spoke simply, openly. "I am like Doctor Brown—an android robot. You did not know?"

"Remarkable, isn't she?" Korby said. He looked back at Kirk. "Notice the lifelike pigmentation, the variation in skin tones." He lifted Andrea's wrist. "The flesh has warmth. There's even a pulse, physical sensation . . ."

"Remarkable, indeed," Christine said.

The bitter irony in her voice got through to Korby. He released Andrea's wrist. "Darling," he said to Christine, "all I require for my purpose are obedience and awareness . . ."

It was an unfortunate choice of words. Christine walked away from him. For a moment he lost his self-assurance. Then he followed her. "Christine. You must realize that an android robot is like a computer. It does only what I program into it. As a trained scientist yourself, you must surely see . . ."

". . . that given a mechanical assistant, constructing a mechanical 'geisha' would be easy?"

Korby suddenly reached for Christine, pulling her close to him. "Do you think I could love a machine?" he demanded.

"Did you?" she said.

"Love can't exist where all is predictable! Christine, you must listen! Love must have imperfection—moments

of worship, moments of hate. Andrea is as incapable of anger and fear as she is of love. She has no meaning for me. She simply obeys orders! Watch her . . .”

He spoke to Andrea. “Kiss Captain Kirk,” he said. She kissed Kirk.

“Now strike him,” Korby said.

She slapped Kirk.

“You see, Christine? All she can do is what she’s told to do. She’s a sterile, a computer—a thing, not a woman.” He whirled to Kirk. “Have you nothing to say, Captain?”

“Yes, Doctor, I have something to say,” Kirk said, “If these inventions of yours can only do what they’re told to do, why did Brown attack me? Who told him to do it? For that matter, who told this thing”—he indicated Ruk—“to kill two of my men?”

Korby’s face went closed, cold. Taking Christine’s arm, he said, “Come with me, darling. You owe it to me.” She looked at Kirk, the feeling of nightmare helplessness still heavier in her limbs. Then she went with Korby.

His laboratory was at the end of a lengthy corridor. It was spotlessly white. Cabinets of gleaming equipment shared its walls with banks of computer-like control panels. But its dominating feature was a large central turntable. It was flanked by two squat dynamos. Ruk was busy at the table. Into a scooped-out hollow in its top, he was fitting a mold of some greenish-brown stuff, roughly conformed to the height and breadth of a human body. As a cook pats dough into a bread pan, his gargantuan hands worked deftly to shape the mold into the indentation. It was when they reached for a shining, complicated mechanism suspended from the ceiling that Christine first noticed it. Then she saw there was a similar one hanging over the other side of the table. Ruk lowered the nearer device over the mold’s midsection. Slowly the table began to turn.

Its opposite side slid into view. Kirk was lying on it, eyes closed, pressed down, immobile. The ceiling’s other machine, descended over him, covered him from breast to thighs.

Pointing to it, Korby said proudly, “This is how we make an android robot.”

With a signal to Ruk, he went over to a wall of control panels. He twisted a knob. Blue lights flashed deep,

blinding, within the instrumentation that masked the alternately passing mold-form and the body of Kirk. The heavy dynamos glowed red, throbbing under impulses of power flowing to them from the control panel. When Korby made an adjustment to increase the turning speed of the table, a dizziness seized Christine. She leaned back against an equipment cabinet, her eyes shut against the vertigo. When she opened them, the blue lights were blazing, pulsating to the rhythm of a human heartbeat. And the table was spinning now, blurring the forms it held in a haze of speed so fast they appeared to be one.

Unknowingly she was wringing her hands. Korby left the panel to take them in his. "Don't be afraid for him. I promise you, he's not being harmed in any way."

She found stumbling words. "To fix a man to a table like a lab specimen on a slide . . . I don't . . . Oh, Roger, what's happened to you . . . ? I remember when I sat in your class . . ." Tears choked her. "You wouldn't even consider injuring an animal, an insect . . . Life was sacred to you . . . It was what I loved about you . . ." She was openly weeping.

He took her in his arms. "I haven't changed, Christine. This is just a harmless demonstration to convince his skeptical, military mind. Please try and understand. If I'd beamed up to his ship with Brown and the others, they would have been objects of mere curiosity, freaks—the origin of wild rumors and destructive gossip."

"You don't *know* Captain Kirk!" she cried.

He patted her shoulder. "Now is the time to watch most carefully . . ." He left her to make some new, precise adjustment on the panel. Apparently, the table had reached its maximum acceleration. It was slowing down. In mingled amazement and horror, Christine caught a glimpse of the mold-form. It had assumed detailed human shape, human skin tones. The table came to a halt before her. Its niches held two identical Kirks.

Triumphant, Korby came back to her. "Which of the two is your captain, Christine? Can you tell?"

She shook her head. "I don't . . . know. I don't know—anything any more."

"This one is your captain," Korby said. "Do you see any harm that's been done him?"

Kirk's eyes opened. Immediately aware that he couldn't move, he was struggling against the appliance that covered him when he saw Korby. His jaw muscles hardened; and he was about to speak when he decided to listen, instead. For Korby was expounding to Christine. "The android's synthetic organs are now all in place. We merely synchronized them with Kirk's autonomic nervous system, duplicating his body's rhythms. Now we must duplicate his mental patterns . . ."

A glimmer of realization came to Kirk. He saw Korby move to another control panel. He saw Andrea slip into the laboratory. And Ruk had gone into a crouch at the dynamo near his feet. He sensed what Korby was going to say before he said it. "Ruk, we're ready for final synaptic fusion. Andrea, stand by the cortex circuits. This android we're making will be so perfect, it could even replace the captain. It will have the same memories, the same abilities, the same attitudes . . ."

The implications of the boast were so appalling that they stimulated Kirk to a scurry of thinking faster than any he'd ever done in his life. As Korby shouted, "*Activate the circuits!*" he contorted his face with fury. As though mumbling to himself, he muttered, "Mind your business, Mr. Spock! I'm sick of your halfbreed interference! Do you hear me? Mind your business, Mr. Spock! I'm sick of your halfbreed—"

In midsentence a spasm of agony convulsed his body. Bolts of lightning seemed to split his head. The dynamo's hum screamed to an ear-shattering roar. Then the pain, the lightning, the roar were all over. Distraught, Christine ran to him. "I'm all right," he said. "It seems to be finished."

Korby came for her. "And now, my dear, you can meet my new android."

He gave the table a rotating twist. On it lay a perfect replica of Kirk. Its eyelids fluttered. Its gaze fastened on Christine and its lips moved in Kirk's characteristic smile of recognition. It said, "Nurse Chapel, how nice to see you."

Hostess Andrea was serving a meal to Christine in the study when Korby's new android opened its door. It was wearing Kirk's uniform.

"May I join you?" it said, seating itself at the table. "The doctor tells me I'm more or less on parole now. He thought you and I might like a little time together."

Christine whispered, "Captain, what are we . . . ?"

The android also lowered its voice. "We've got to find a way to contact the ship."

"I don't know what's happened to Roger." She looked despairingly into what she thought were Kirk's eyes.

"If I gave you a direct order to betray him, would you obey it, Christine?"

She bowed her head. "Please, Captain. Don't ask me to make such a choice. I'd rather you pushed me off the precipice where Matthews died."

Andrea placed a bowl of soup before her. "Thank you," she said. "I'm not hungry."

Her table companion also pushed its bowl aside. "I'm not, either," it said. "But then I am not your captain, Nurse Chapel. We androids don't eat, you see."

She'd thought she'd had all the shocks she could take. But there was a cat-and-mouse aspect to this last one that chilled her. She'd been about to confide her heartbreak to this manufactured thing masquerading as Kirk. She pushed her chair back and rose from the table just as Korby entered the study. The real Kirk was with him—a pale, haggard Kirk clad in the kind of nondescript lab outfit which Brown had worn.

He sniffed at the smell of food. "I'm hungry," he said; and turning to Korby, added, "That's the difference between me and your androids, Doctor."

His replica got up from its chair. "The difference is your weakness, Captain, not mine."

"Eating is a human pleasure," Kirk retorted. "Sadly, it is one you will never know."

"Perhaps. But I shall never starve, either," the android said.

Kirk looked at Korby. "It is an exact duplicate?"

"In every detail."

Kirk spoke directly to the duplicate. "Tell me about Sam, Mr. Android."

The answer came promptly. "George Samuel Kirk is your brother. Only *you* call him Sam."

"He saw me off on this mission."

"Yes. With his wife and three sons."

"He said he was being transferred to Earth Colony Two Research Station."

"No. He said he *wanted* a transfer to Earth Colony Two."

Korby intervened. "You might as well try to out-think a calculating machine, Captain."

"Obviously, I can't," Kirk said. "But we do have some interesting differences."

Korby was annoyed. "Totally unimportant ones." Abruptly, he dismissed his perfect android; and seating himself at the table, motioned Kirk and Christine to chairs. "Bring food," he told Andrea. "Lots of it. The captain is hungry."

As Kirk began eating, he leaned forward. "You haven't guessed the rest, have you? Not even you, Christine. What you saw was only a machine—*only half of what I could have accomplished had I continued the process of duplication*. I could have put you, Captain—your very consciousness into that android." He smiled faintly. "Your very 'soul' if you prefer the term. All of you. Brown was an example. My assistant was dying. I gave him life in android form."

Intensity came into his voice. "Yes, humans converted into androids can be programmed—but for the better! Can you conceive how life would be if we could do away with jealousy, greed, hate?"

Kirk said, "That coin has an opposite side, Doctor. You might also do away with tenderness, love, respect."

Korby slammed his fist on the table. "No death! No disease, no deformities! Even fear can be programmed out to be replaced with perpetual peace! Open your mind, Captain! I'm speaking of a practical heaven, a new Paradise—and all I need is your help!"

"I thought all you needed was my 'open mind,'" Kirk said.

"I've got to get transportation to a planet with the proper raw materials. There must be several possibilities among your next stops. I'm not suggesting any diversion from your route. I myself want no suspicion aroused. I simply want to begin producing androids more carefully, selectively . . ."

Under his chair Kirk's hand had found a thong that bound its joints together. He located one end of it. "I can see your point," he said. "Any publicity about such a project could only frighten uninformed prejudice."

Korby nodded. "My androids must be widely infiltrated into human societies before their existence is revealed. Otherwise, we'd have a tidal wave of superstitious hysteria that could destroy what is right and good. Are you with me, Captain?"

Christine was staring at Korby in unbelief. Had the years of loneliness sent him mad? To advance such a cooperation to the captain of a Federation Starship! But Kirk was taking it quietly. "You've created your own Kirk, Doctor. You don't need me."

"I created him to impress you, Captain, not to replace you."

"You'd better use him," Kirk said. "I am impressed—but not the way you intended." He had the thong unraveled now.

"Ruk!" Korby called. "Ruk, take the captain to his quarters!"

As the hairless Caliban approached him, Kirk sat still, his hand busy with a slipknot he was putting into the cord under his chair. When Ruk reached for his shoulder, he tensed for action. All in one fast move, he ducked under Ruk's arm, leaped for Korby; and, dropping the slipknot over his head, jerked it tight around his throat. Then he ran for the door. Ruk made a lunge for him but was halted by the sound of Korby's agonized choking. Turning, he saw Korby fall from his chair, hands clawing at the cord that was throttling him. He hesitated. Then he returned to Korby to loosen the noose.

Christine went to help him. But Korby, furious, pushed her away. "Get after—" he broke off, coughing. Clearing his throat, he tried again. "Get after him, Ruk. Stop him. I have no more use for him. You understand?"

Ruk understood. So did Christine. She heard the growl rumble in the great chest as Ruk made for the door. She followed him, calling, "Ruk! Ruk, stop!" She could see the huge android speeding down the lighted corridor toward what she thought were Kirk's quarters. Then the figure disappeared around a corner. She turned with it into an

unlighted passageway, still calling, "Ruk, stop! The doctor told you to obey my orders. Stop!"

The speed of the running footsteps increased. She raced on. "Ruk, where are you? I order you not to harm him! Do you hear me? He is not to be harmed! Ruk, where are you?"

He'd vanished into the darkness. And the character of the passage had changed. Its stone floor had become uneven and she stumbled over a pebble. It flung her against a rough, unpolished rock wall. The blackness swallowed the sound of the footsteps.

But Kirk heard them pounding behind him. He'd come to the end of the passage and was clambering over rocks. He fell into a gully between two boulders. He clung to one of them, listening.

"Captain Kirk?"

It was Ruk's voice, echoing hollowly among the rocks. Kirk hauled himself up over a boulder; and began to edge forward again through the pitch blackness, groping along a wall.

"Captain Kirk . . ."

The sound of the footsteps had ceased. But he could hear Ruk's heavy breathing, somewhere close. Frantically, Kirk felt around him for some kind of weapon. A sharp stalagmite jutted up from the floor. He wrestled with it. It was immovable. Desperate now, he seized a rock and crashed it over the stalagmite's pointed end. It broke. He scabbled around among its pieces and found a club-like shard of it.

There came a hushed whisper. "Captain Kirk? Where are you?"

Now it was Christine's voice. Kirk peered into the darkness—and was about to answer when he remembered Ruk's trick of voice imitation.

It came again—Christine's voice. "Captain Kirk, help! I've lost my way! Don't leave me here . . ."

Was it Christine? Or was it Ruk? There was no way of telling. Kirk tightened his hold on his rock weapon. It just might be Christine, lost in this labyrinth of underground pathways. He might as well answer. The suspense was as difficult to bear as any fact would be. And he had taken all the precautions it was possible to take.

"Over here, Christine," he said.

Darker than the dark, the monstrous android loomed toward him, surefooted, moving easily, swiftly. Kirk struggled for solid rock under his feet, pivoted and was swinging his arm back for the strike when the edge of the rock that held him crumbled.

The solid footing he'd struggled for bordered a chasm. It fell away beneath him as sheer and deep as the one that had lost him Matthews. His fingertip clutch on its rim was his clutch on life. He fought to maintain it against the rain of stones disturbed by the crumbled edge. One struck his head. He looked up to see Ruk leaning over it. He became aware that his fingers were weakening.

More debris loosened. The rock he clawed at cracked. As it gave way, Ruk's arm snaked down to seize one of his wrists. They exchanged a long look. Then slowly Ruk hauled him back up.

Spock saw the bridge elevator open. Kirk walked out of it and turned to stride down the corridor that led to his quarters. Spock hurried after him. "Captain!" he called. "I've just received word that you had beamed up."

Kirk was at his desk, leafing through a drawer for his command orders. "Doctor Korby has considerable cargo coming aboard, Mr. Spock. I'll have to go over our destinations schedule with him."

Spock looked at the packet in his hand. Surprised, he said, "You're going back down with the command orders, sir?"

"Mind your business, Mr. Spock!" Kirk shouted savagely. "I'm sick of your halfbreed interference! Do you hear me? Mind your business, Mr. Spock! I'm sick of your halfbreed—"

Shocked, Spock stood stock-still. Kirk moved for the door. Spock, confounded, still staggered, tried again. "Are you feeling all right, Captain?"

All hardness had left Kirk's voice. He spoke quietly, his customary, courteous self. "Quite all right, thank you, Mr. Spock. I'll beam up shortly with Dr. Korby and his party." He eyed Spock, puzzled. "You look upset, Mr. Spock. Everything all right up here?"

The Vulcan looked as bewildered as he'd ever permit-

ted himself to appear. He finally decided to compromise with a noncommittal, "No problems here, sir."

He got himself a nod, a friendly smile and Kirk's exit to the corridor. But his sense of dismayed shock persisted. He went over to the intercom button in the cabin and hit it.

"Security, this is First Officer Spock. Status of your landing party?"

"Ready and standing by, sir."

"Wait until the captain has beamed down. Then have them meet me in the Transporter Room. All of the party, the captain included."

He was asking for trouble with Kirk. On the other hand, trouble between them already existed.

Korby was pleased with his new android's performance. He shuffled through the command-orders packet and his android said, "I've looked them over. You'll find planet Midos V an excellent choice." It indicated a sheet among the others on Korby's desk.

"A small colony. And abundant raw materials." He rose. "You've made a good beginning, Captain Kirk."

"Thank you, Doctor," it said. "I felt quite at home on the *Enterprise*."

Down the corridor Kirk lay on the bed in his quarters, thinking, thinking. His life had been saved, but to what purpose he couldn't see. The *Enterprise* hijacked by the thing that wore his uniform . . . Some planet, perhaps the galaxy itself, doomed to be peopled by non-people . . . Humanoid life extinguished by the machines of Korby's making.

The door hummed open. Andrea entered with a tray of food. She placed it on the table.

Kirk sat up on his bunk. "Kiss me, Andrea," he said.

She kissed him. Then the cortical circuit that had obeyed a former order to kiss him activated the one connecting the kiss with a slap. She drew her hand back to strike him when Kirk seized it. "No," he said. He got up. Taking her in his arms, he gave her the most impassioned kiss in his repertoire. She liked it. But her circuitry protested. From somewhere in her came the tiny whine of a hard-pressed coil.

Panic-stricken, her responses chaotic, she pushed him

away, crying, "Not you . . . not programmed for you . . ."

She went weaving, half-reeling toward the door. Kirk, alarmed, followed her, only to find Ruk standing guard in the corridor.

His eyes on Kirk, Ruk said, "To maintain your life is illogical."

"Why?" Kirk said.

Ruk didn't answer. Under the hairless scalp, his brain seemed to be fighting with a swarm of thoughts that confused him more cruelly than Andrea's terrified response to the kiss. Finally, he said, "You are no longer needed here."

"You want to kill me, Ruk? Or, as Doctor Korby calls it—turn me off?"

"You cannot be programmed. You are inferior."

"I want to live," Kirk said.

"You are from the outside," Ruk said. "You make disorder here."

"I'm not programmed. But I'll do anything, no matter how illogical to stay alive. Does that disturb you, Ruk?"

"Our place was peaceful. There was no threat to existence."

"Is existence important to you, too?"

"I am programmed to exist. Therefore, I exist."

The massive face was contorted with unaccustomed thought. Kirk felt a stab of pity. He said, "Korby speaks of you as just a machine to be turned on or turned off. That is a good thing to be, is it, Ruk?"

"You are evil. Until you came all was at peace here. That was good."

"I came in peace," Kirk said. "The only difference between us is that I have emotion. I have unpredictability. And with each human, our evil unpredictability increases. How would you like to live with thousands of unpredictable humans around you, all of them evil like me?"

Ruk was staring at him. "Yes, it was so . . . long ago. I had forgotten. The old ones here, the ones who made me, they were human . . . and evil. It is still in my memory banks . . . It became necessary to destroy them."

He turned his vast bulk slowly at the sound of footsteps. White-coated, self-assured, Korby was striding down the corridor.

Ruk lumbered toward him. "You . . . you brought him among us," he said heavily.

Startled, Korby looked from Kirk back to Ruk. "What?"

Ruk continued to advance on him. "You brought the inferior ones here!" His voice rose. "We had cleansed ourselves of them! You brought them and their evil back!"

"Ruk, I order you to stop! Go back! Stand away from me! You are programmed to—"

It was Korby who retreated. As Ruk made a grab for him, he drew Kirk's phaser from the white coat's pocket. There was no hesitation. He fired it. Ruk was gone. Where he'd stood was a charred spot, a drift of metallic-smelling smoke.

"You didn't have to destroy him," Kirk said into the tight silence.

Korby leveled the phaser at him. "Move," he said. "Ahead of me . . ."

A tense Christine stood at the door of the study, apparently awaiting the result of Korby's visit to Kirk's quarters. At the entrance, Kirk turned to face his captor. "You were once a man with respect for all living things. How is the change in you to be explained, Doctor? If I were to tell Earth that I am your prisoner, to tell them what you have become—"

He made a grab for the phaser. But Korby used it to shove him into the study. Then the door, humming shut, caught his other hand between it and the jamb. Kirk, about to exploit his advantage, paused. Korby's wedged hand was being cruelly mashed. Yet his right hand still held the phaser in an unwavering aim at Kirk. It seemed a remarkable fortitude. When he wrenched the smashed hand free, it struck Kirk as yet more remarkable.

Then a slow horror chilled him. Christine, too, was staring at the injured hand. Instead of revealing torn and mangled flesh, the wound had exposed a fine mesh of tiny complex gears and pulsing wires. Some connection in the wires short-circuited. A wisp of smoke rose from it, leaving a smell of scorched metal.

Korby saw Christine's face. "It's still me, Christine—your Roger . . . in this android form . . . You can't imag-

ine why—how it was with me. I was frozen, dying, my legs were gone. I had only my brain between death and life . . .” He lifted the hand. “This can be repaired, more easily than any surgeon could possibly repair it. I’m the same man that you knew and loved—a better one. There will never be any death for me . . . never . . .”

She put her hands over her face to shut out the sight of the dangle of still-pulsing wires. Korby, turning to Kirk, cried, “Imagine it, Captain! A world with no corruption, no suffering, no death . . .”

“Then why keep me alive, Doctor?” Kirk said. “I am mere flesh and blood. So I shall die. You’ve got yourself an immortal Kirk. Why don’t you kill this mortal one—and get done with me?”

“You know that answer,” Korby said. “I am still the man you described—the one with respect for all living things. I am still that man.”

“You are not that man, Doctor,” Kirk said. “Look at Christine . . . heartbroken, terrified. Where is your human response to her suffering?”

As the question was taken in by his computer brain, Korby looked shaken. Its whirring circuits churned to no effective answer. So it dismissed the question. Recovering his composure, he went to a speaker built into a wall. “Andrea,” he said, “come to the study.”

The door hummed open and Kirk laid his arm around Christine’s shoulders.

“Yes, Doctor,” Andrea said.

“Someone is coming down the corridor,” Korby told her.

“I will find Ruk,” she said.

“Ruk has been turned off. Get Brown’s weapon! Fast! Deal with it. *Protect!*”

She found Brown’s old-style phaser in a desk drawer and hurried out of the study.

In full uniform, Kirk’s facsimile was sauntering along the corridor. Its appearance puzzled Andrea. It also interested her. She moved toward the android, lifting her face to it.

“I will kiss you,” she said.

“No!” it said sharply.

A look of anger flickered over her face.

"Protect," she said. Then she pulled the trigger of the phaser rifle. She looked down at the black ash that was all that remained, sniffing curiously at the drift of smoke. "Protect," she said again—and returned to the study.

Korby was shouting wildly. "I'm the *same!* A direct transfer—all of me! Wholly rational . . . human but without a flaw!"

Smiling, innocent, Andrea said, "I just turned on Captain Kirk."

"She's killed your perfect android," Kirk said. "Just as you killed Ruk. Is this your perfect world? Your flawless beings? Killing, killing, killing! Aren't you flawless beings doing exactly what you most hate in humans? Killing with no more feeling than you feel when you turn off a light?"

This time the computer brain was unable to dismiss the question. Kirk extended his hand. "Give me that phaser, Doctor. If any of the human Korby remains in you, you must know that your only hope is to give me that gun."

"No! You refuse to understand! I have constructed perfect beings . . . tested them . . ." Korby's face seemed to shrivel as his brain circuits told him he'd contradicted himself. His own illogic got through to them. "I—I have proven they are perfect . . . I . . . I have . . ."

With a look of blank bafflement, he gave the phaser to Kirk. Pale as death, Christine sank down on a chair.

"Give me your rifle, Andrea," Kirk said.

"No," she said. She waved him back with the weapon. "No . . . protect . . ." She moved to Korby. "I am programmed to love you, protect you. To kiss you . . ." She lifted her face to his.

Christine moaned faintly. Stunned, she watched Korby push Andrea away. "Don't touch me," he said. "You cannot love, you machine!" But Andrea still clung to him. The phaser she held came into position between them as Korby fought to free himself from her arms. "Programmed," Andrea said. "To love you . . . to kiss you . . ."

The rifle discharged. There was a flash of light. Then that, too, was gone. All that was left was the blur of smoke, the two piles of ash on the floor.

Dry-eyed, stumbling, Christine moved to Kirk. She was shuddering uncontrollably. He held her, the heiress to a permanent legacy of disillusioned loneliness.

As the last of the smoke dissolved, the study door was wrenched open. Spock and two security crewmen, phasers drawn, entered the study.

"Captain . . ." Spock hesitated. "You're all right, sir? Nurse Chapel?"

"All right, Mr. Spock," Kirk said.

"Where is Dr. Korby?" Spock asked.

Kirk took Christine's hand. "He was never here, Mr. Spock."

He took it again when she approached his command chair in the bridge of the *Enterprise*.

"Thank you for letting me make my decision, Captain," she said. "I'm fairly certain I'm doing the right thing."

"I am, too," he said. "Maybe you can get some sleep now that your decision is made."

Neither smiled. "I'll be seeing you around," she said.

When she'd left the bridge, Spock said, "She's brave."

"That's why we need her on the *Enterprise*, Mr. Spock." He looked at the viewing screen. "Helm, steady as she goes. Nurse Chapel has decided to remain with us." But Spock still stood at the command chair. "Something bothering you, Mr. Spock?"

"Captain, I . . . must protest your using the term 'halfbreed' in reference to me."

"I didn't *use* it, Mr. Spock. I directed it toward you as a—"

"Even as an android, you might have thought of a better expression," Spock said.

Kirk eyed him gravely. "I'll remember that, Mr. Spock, when I find myself in a similar position again."

"Thank you, sir," Spock said.

The Squire of Gothos

(Paul Schneider)

The planet had given no hint of its existence to the *Enterprise*. Uncharted, unsuspected, undetected, it finally confessed its presence to the Starship's sensors. At Spock's sudden announcement of their new reading, Kirk in some annoyance flipped a switch—and sure enough, out of what should have continued to be the empty, star-void quadrant of space they were traversing, a crescent-shaped body swam into abrupt, unusually brilliant, magnified focus on the bridge viewing screen.

Kirk glared at it. It was an unwelcome distraction from his job—a mission to get needed supplies to Colony Beta 6; and get them there by an uninterrupted warp factor three speed across this apparent space desert, barren of stars. He spoke tersely. "Navigation report."

Crewman De Salle looked up from his computations. "Iron-silicate substance; Captain, planet-sized magnitude One-E. We'll be passing close."

The puzzled Spock had left his station to come and stand by the command chair. Eyes on the screen, he said, "It is incredible that this body has gone unrecorded on all our charts, sir."

So, Kirk thought, imagination must bestir itself,

stretching the credible to include the incredible. There was a certain dryness in his retort. "But there it is, Mr. Spock, incredible though it be." He swung around to face his bridge people. "We can't stop to investigate now. All science stations will gather data for computer banks. Lieutenant Uhura, report the discovery of this planet on subspace radio."

She struggled to obey the order. Then she turned. "Strong interference on subspace, sir. The planet must be a natural radio source."

"Then let's get out of its range," Kirk said. He twisted his chair around to the helm console. "Veer off forty degrees, Mr. Sulu."

As Sulu reached for a control on his board, he disappeared. One moment he was there, substantial, familiar, intently competent—and the next, his chair was as empty as though vacancy had always been its appointed function. "Sulu!" Kirk shouted, leaping for the helm. Then he, too, was gone, vanished as utterly as Sulu. Navigator De Salle, taut-faced, sprang from his station. "They're gone, Mr. Spock! *They're both gone!*"

Spock, at the abandoned command console, twisted a dial. Obediently, alarm sirens shrieked through the ship. It was the beginning of a general, deck-to-deck scrutiny of its every nook and cranny. As Spock dismissed the last discouraged search party, he turned to the big, blond meteorologist beside him. "They're either down on that planet—or nowhere." Overhearing, De Salle said tensely, "But there's still no sign of human life on the surface, sir. Of course the probe instruments may be malfunctioning."

Spock eyed his board. "They are functioning normally," he said. "Continue sensor sweeps. Lieutenant Uhura, have you covered all wave-bands?"

"All of them, sir. No response."

De Salle was on his feet. "With due respect, sir, I request permission to transport down to the surface to carry the search on there!"

McCoy had joined the group at the command chair. Now he grabbed Spock's arm. "I agree! What are we waiting for, Spock?"

"The decision will be mine, Doctor. I hold the responsibility for your safety." Blandly ignoring McCoy's out-

raged glare, he addressed the big meteorologist. "Dr. Jaeger, please describe your geophysical findings on the surface below."

"No detectable soil or vegetation . . . extremely hot. The atmosphere is toxic, swept by tornadic storms . . . continuous volcanic activity . . . inimical to any life as we know it, without oxygen life support."

"How would you estimate the survival time of two unprotected men down there?"

"As long as it would take to draw one breath."

Nobody spoke. Then Uhura broke the heavy stillness. "Mr. Spock! My viewing screen! Look!" All eyes on the bridge veered to her station. There on the screen, letters—letters formed in flowing, old-English script—had begun to appear. Gradually they extended themselves until the message they were intended to convey had completed itself. Astoundingly out of tune with the somber mood of the bridge people, it was: "Greetings and felicitations."

Spock read it aloud without inflection. "Greetings . . . and . . . felicitations. Send this, Lieutenant. U.S.S. *Enterprise* to signaller on planet surface. Identify yourself. We—" He broke off as more letters assembled themselves into words on the screen. After a moment, he read them aloud, too, slowly, unbelievably. "Hip . . . hip . . . hurrah," he said, "and I believe that last word is pronounced 'tallyho?'"

"Some kind of joke, sir?" De Salle said.

Spock glanced at him. "I shall entertain any theories, Mr. De Salle. Any at all . . ."

McCoy spoke up. "One thing is certain. There *is* life on that planet!"

"You would seem to be correct, Doctor," Spock said. He reached for the intercom; and had just ordered preparation of the Transporter Room when Scott, pushing his way toward him, reached him and said, "Request assignment to the search party, sir."

Sometimes Spock's eyes seemed to be looking at one from a great distance. They had that faraway look in them now as he shook his head. "No, Mr. Scott. Neither you nor I can be spared here. Mr. De Salle, you will equip landing party with full armaments, with life support and communication gear. Doctor Jaeger, your geophysical knowledge

may be crucial. Doctor McCoy will accompany, too. If those peculiar signals come from Captain Kirk and Sulu, their rationality is in question."

He waited to issue his final order until the landing group had taken position on the Transporter Platform's indentations. Then, handing De Salle a black box, he said, "Once on the surface, you will establish immediate contact with us—and by this laser beam, if necessary."

Scott worked his switches. And the three figures began their dissolution into shining fragments.

They hadn't precisely formulated what they had expected. A kind of murderous combine of earth tremors, buffetings by hurricane whirlwinds, the suffocating heat of a planet torn by cosmic forces at war below the fissured lava of its tormented surface, the coughing inhalation of lung-searing gases. But what they found differed from their vaguely shaped apprehensions. It was a forest, cool, green, its leafy aisles tranquil, shadowy. Around the boles of its trees, flowering vines circled, scenting the fresh air with their blossoms' fragrance. Dumbfounded, McCoy watched a leaf flutter down from the bough over his head.

His voice was thick through his life-support filter. "Jaeger, where are your storms?"

Shaking his head, the meteorologist checked the instrument he held. "An atmosphere, McCoy—exactly the same as our own!"

Remembering, De Salle, removing his face mask, cried, "Ship communication and report!" But something was wrong with his communicator—a contagious wrongness that affected all their communicators. De Salle didn't give up. As he pointed the laser beam skyward, he said, "Keep trying . . . keep trying." Then he frowned. "Something's blocking this beacon. Got to find open ground . . ."

Backing off, he rounded a clump of bush. And halted, noting the reflection of flickering light on its dark leaves. Very slowly he turned. He was face to face with a stone griffin. Its wings were lifted high over the glaring features of its lion's visage. In one outstretched talon, it held a flaming torch.

"Dr. McCoy! Dr. Jaeger! Over here!"

There were two griffins, both holding torches. It was McCoy who first spotted the dark, massive, iron-bound

door flanked by its guardian beasts of heraldry. The door was ajar. De Salle, moving into the lead, unlimbered his phaser. Followed by the others, he pushed through the half-open entry. Except for the crackling of what looked like a big hearth fire, absolute stillness greeted them.

"In the name of heaven . . . where are we?" McCoy muttered.

Where they were was in a spacious Victorian drawing room, chandelier-lit. The wall over the burning logs of its fireplace held an arrangement of crossed swords, muskets, pistols and battle flags. Its other walls were hung with tapestries, with portraits of ancestors in armor, in the colorful uniforms of the Napoleonic wars. Near a gleaming mahogany table, a sideboard glittered with gold dishes. A harpsichord stood under a curved, gilt-framed mirror. All was in order. Everything fitted into the picture of a benevolently self-indulgent Victorianism. Except for one thing. Certain niches pressed into the urbane walls revealed a peculiar taste in statuary. They held carved shapes of lizard-like creatures, tortured-looking dolphins, a pair of giant, humanoid forms—and a tentacled spider-thing.

Suddenly, De Salle shouted: "*Look!*"

At the end of the room was an inset, a hollow gouged prominently out of its wall. As the other niches held statuary, this one held the stiffened forms of Kirk and Sulu, their attitudes caught and hardened as they had last moved at the instant before their disappearance. Their figures were bathed in a violet light. De Salle rushed to them, calling, "Dr. McCoy—quick! Dr. McCoy!"

But McCoy's health monitor was grimly factual. He looked up from it, his face tired-looking. "Nothing," he said. "Kirk and Sulu . . . like waxwork shapes . . ."

The drawing room's door slammed shut. A moment later, a tinkling Mozart-like arpeggio came from the harpsichord. And seated on the bench before it was the player—a man, a man clad in the silver-buckled elegance of a military man of the mid-1800's—a delighted if slightly sly smile on his rosy face.

As the *Enterprise* trio stared at him, he completed the musical passage with a flourish of well-groomed hands. Then he spun around to face them. He was Byronically handsome, from his pouting mouth and neckcloth-length

hair to his disdainful air of superiority, of being set apart as an object of special and peculiar value and privilege. The gesture he made toward the hollow holding the forms of Kirk and Sulu was either genuinely bored—or the blossom of a painstaking cultivation of boredom.

"I must say," the musician said amiably, "that they make an exquisite display pair." Then a note of regret drooped the voice. "But I suppose you'll want them back now."

A lace-cuffed hand was lifted. Instantly, Kirk started forward, completing his interrupted move to the helm of the *Enterprise*. Sulu stirred, his face confused, his eyes bewildered. They sought Kirk's face. "Captain, where are we?"

The man on the harpsichord bench rose. "Welcome to my island of peace on this stormy little planet of Gothos."

Kirk ignored him to speak to his men. "What's happened? Fill me in."

McCoy said, "Jim, you disappeared from the bridge after Sulu went. We've been hunting you for hours—"

Their host cut across him. "You must excuse my whimsical way of fetching you here. But when I saw you passing by, I simply could not resist entertaining you."

Kirk, exchanging a glance with McCoy, stepped forward. "I am Captain James Kirk of the United Starship *Enterprise* . . ."

The creature swept him a bow. "So you are the captain of these brave men! My greetings and felicitations, Captain. It's so good of you and your officers to drop in. Absolutely smashing of you!"

The theatricality of the voice and gesture was as turgid as old greasepaint. Kirk had to make an effort to keep his voice level. "Who are you?" he said. "Where do you come from?"

An arm swept wide in a grandly embracing movement. "Have no fear, lads," said the too-rich voice. "I have made myself as one of you . . ."

De Salle's temper, compounded of fear mingled with rage, exploded. He advanced, his phaser on aim. "Who are you? That is the question that was asked you! Answer it! And make the answer fast!"

The being appreciated De Salle. "Ah, such spirited fe-

rocity!" it crowed happily. Then, not unlike a child remembering lessons in manners; it said, "Oh, forgive me. General Trelane, retired. At your service, gentlemen. My home is your home."

It failed to soothe De Salle's temper. Low-voiced, he spoke to Kirk. "Captain, we've lost contact with the ship. We're trapped here."

Overhearing, General Trelane rubbed his hands in exuberant pleasure. "Trapped here," he echoed. "I cannot tell you how it delights me—having visitors to this very planet I have made my hobby. From my observations I did not think you capable of such voyages."

Jaeger, whispering to Kirk, gestured around them. "Captain, note the period—nine hundred light-years from Earth. This place and time fit what might have been seen if there were telescopes powerful enough to—"

He was stopped by the smile on Trelane's full red lips. "Yes. I have been an interested witness of your lively little doings on your lively little Earth, sir . . ."

"Then you've been witnessing its doings of nine hundred years past," Kirk said. "That's a long time."

Trelane chuckled. "Good heavens, have I made a time error? How fallible of me!" Eyeing the stately room around him, he added, "I did so want to make you feel at home. In fact, I am quite proud of the detail."

"General Trelane—" Kirk began; and stopped at the coyly cautionary finger that had been held up. "Tut-tut, a retired general, sir. Just Squire Trelane, now. You may call me 'Squire'—indeed, I rather fancy the title."

In his career as a Starship captain, Kirk had encountered many oddments of galactic creation—oddments ranging from the ultimately hideous and alien, to a beauty that spoke with the final familiarity of wonder to the soul. At this moment, face to face with this self-styled squire of a self-chosen time of a Victorian England, chosen out of all the times offered by nine hundred years, he seemed to be face to face with the last anomaly—an X of mystery compounded simultaneously of innocence and guile. He looked at Squire Trelane. "For what purpose have you imprisoned us here?" he asked.

Even as he spoke, he had the sense of spider-strands, sticky, well-woven, encompassing him. It was as though he

had already heard what the too-rich voice was saying. "Imprisoned? Nonsense! You are my guests." His host's lower lip actually trembled with what suggested itself as the touching eagerness of hospitality. "You see, I was just completing my studies of your curious and fascinating society. You happened by at a most propitious moment." There was a low, carved, armless chair beside him and he flung himself into it. "Captain Kirk, you must tell me all about your campaigns—your battles—your missions of conquest . . ."

For the first time, Kirk seemed to know where he was. For the first time since Sulu's disappearance from the *Enterprise*, he felt a sense of firm identity, of some unnamable stability back under his feet. "Our missions are peaceful," he said. "They are not for conquest. We battle only when we have no choice."

Trelane winked at him. His left eyelid dropped and rose in inescapable suggestion of mutual, known, if unacknowledged awareness of perfidious doings in high places. "So that's the official story, eh, Captain?"

Unobtrusively, McCoy had directed his tricorder at Trelane. Just as unobtrusively, Kirk had registered this fact. Now he stepped toward the low, armless chair. "Squire Trelane," he said, "I must ask you to let us return to our ship."

What he got was a languid wave of a languid hand: "Wouldn't hear of it!" Trelane protested. "You will all join me in a repast. There is so much I must learn from you: you *feelings* about war . . . about killing . . . about conquest—that sort of thing." A finger of the languid hand became unlanguid. It stiffened, pointed, aiming at Kirk. "You are, you know," said Trelane, "one of the new predator species—species that preys even on itself."

De Salle, beside Kirk, seemed to go suddenly thick in the neck. His hand darted to his phaser. "Sir?" he said, half in question, half in appeal.

"On 'stun,' De Salle," Kirk said. "Don't kill him."

What was it about this being that both repelled and at the same time broke your heart? A capacity for communicating loneliness, that burden of the solitary self borne either in a conscious fortitude or in a necessity of unaware resentment and complaint? It was speaking, the strange

being. "De Salle—is that his name, Captain Kirk?" In its eagerness it didn't wait for an answer but rushed on, crying to the navigator, "*Vous êtes un vrai français?*"

"My ancestry is French . . . Yes . . ."

"Ah, *monsieur! Vive la gloire! Vive Napoleon!* I admire your Napoleon very much, y'know."

"Mr. De Salle is our navigator," Kirk said evenly. "This gentleman is our medical officer, Dr. McCoy—our helmsman, Sulu, and our meteorologist, Carl Jaeger . . ."

Trelane acknowledged each introduction. "Welcome, good physicianer. All reverence to your ancestors, Honorable Sir . . ."

Sulu flushed. "What's he doing—kidding?"

But Trelane's interest had fixed on Jaeger. Clicking his heels, he cried, "*Und Offizier Jaeger, die deutsche Soldat, nein?*" Then stamping his feet in cadence to his words, he declaimed, "*Eins, zwei, drei, vier! Gehen wir mit dem Schiessgewehr!*"

Jaeger's voice was dry as dead bone. "I am a scientist—not a military man."

Trelane beamed at him. "Come now, we are all military men under the skin. And how we do love our uniforms!" He clearly loved his—and the sight of himself in it, epauletted, be-braided as the gilt-framed mirror that reflected it back to him flushed his face with self-admiring pride. He turned, preening to get a three-quarter view of his cuirass of shining buttons; and Kirk, under his breath, spoke to De Salle. "*Now!*" But as the phaser lifted to aim, Trelane wheeled, lifting his hand. At once, De Salle stiffened into immobility.

"What is that interesting weapon you have there?" inquired the Squire of Gothos. He removed the phaser—and thaw replaced the frozen stillness of De Salle's figure. "Ah, yes, I see! That won't kill—but this will! The mechanism is now clear to me." Making an adjustment, he fired the phaser at the niche containing the lizard-like sculpture. It dematerialized. Trelane laughed with delight. "Oh, how marvelous!" Swinging the weapon around, he shot at all the statues set in their niches around the room, yelling as each disintegrated and vanished. "Devastating!" howled Trelane. "Why this could kill millions."

Striding up to him, Kirk tore the phaser from his hand. "Beginning with whom, Trelane? My crew? Are we your next targets?"

The full red lips pouted. "But how absolutely typical of your species, Captain! You don't understand, so you're angry." He pointed a gleeful finger at Kirk. "But do not be impatient. I have anticipated your next wish. You wish to know how I've managed all this, don't you?"

He nodded in answer to his own question. Then, weaving his fingers together like a prissy English schoolmaster about to dissertate on Virgil's prosody, he said, "We—meaning others and myself—have, to state the matter briefly, perfected a system by which matter can be changed to energy . . . and then back to matter . . ."

"Like the Transporter system aboard the *Enterprise*," Kirk said.

"Oh, that's a crude example! Ours is an infinitely more sophisticated process. You see, we not only transport matter from place to place but we can alter its shape, too, at will."

"This drawing room then," Kirk said. "You created it? By rearranging the existing matter of the planet?"

"Quite," Trelane said.

"But how—"

The creature drew a soothing finger across a furrow of irritation that had appeared on its brow. "Dear Captain, your inquiries are becoming tiresome. Why? I want you to be happy—to free your mind of care. Let us enjoy ourselves in the spirit of martial good fellowship!"

Kirk turned quietly to his men. "Let's go. We're getting out of here."

"Naughty captain!" Trelane said. "Fie, you are quite rude. But you cannot leave here. What an admirably fiery look of protest! Upon my soul, I admire you, sir, though in mercy you seem to need another demonstration of my authority—"

His right hand made a swift gesture; and where Kirk had stood was emptiness. Then he was back—but on his knees, racked by choking paroxysms of agony. Dismissed from the shelter of Trelane's domain, he had been exposed to the blasting effects of the planet's lethal atmosphere. In

a moment its toxic gases had licked into his lungs. He coughed, doubled over, still tortured by their strangulating vapors—and the Squire of Gothos patted his bent head.

"That was an example," he said, "of what can occur away from my kindly influence. I do hope that you will now behave yourself, Captain, not only for your own sake, but because, if you don't, I shall be very angry."

Power. It had nothing to do with morality, with responsibility. Like Trelane's, it simply existed—a fact to which the body was obliged to bow but which the heart could continue to reject, to despise.

"Let me hold on," Kirk thought.

The sensors of the *Enterprise* had finally located Trelane's cool green oasis. Scott, staring at its tranquil trees on the bridge viewing screen, said, "An area as peaceful as Earth. But how do you explain it, Mr. Spock?"

"I don't, Mr. Scott. It just is. Artificial, perhaps—a freak of nature. But the fact remains that life could exist in that space. See if you can tune the sensors down finer. See if you can pick up any sentient life forms in that area of Gothos."

As Scott moved to obey, he said, "Even if we find any, it doesn't follow that it would be our people, sir."

"No. But if the captain is alive and down there, *he has to be there in that place*. I shall try to transport up any thinking beings our sensors detect."

"Shootin' in the dark, Mr. Spock."

The retort was unanswerable. "Would you rather stand by and do nothing?"

At the same moment, in the drawing room of Trelane Hall, Kirk and his men were being herded past a cabinet. "And in here," its owner was boasting, "is an array of your battle flags and pennants, some dating back to the Crusades, to Hannibal's invaders, the hordes of Persial"

Nobody looked at the display. Undaunted, the enthusiastic Trelane addressed Kirk. "Can you imagine it, Captain? The thousands—no, the millions—who have marched off to death singing beneath these banners! Doesn't it make your blood run swiftly to think of it?" In his exuberance, he rushed to the harpsichord to bang out some mar-

tial music. Under the cover of its noise, Sulu whispered, "Captain, where could he possibly come from? Who is this maniac?"

McCoy, his voice lowered, said, "Better ask 'what' is he. I monitored him. What I found was unbelievable."

Kirk was staring intently at the musician. Now he spoke, anticipating McCoy's news. "He's not alive."

"No, Jim. Not as we define life. No trace. Zero."

"You mean, your readings show he's dead?" Sulu asked.

"They don't even show that he exists, either alive or dead."

Jaeger pointed to the fireplace. "Notice that wood fire, Captain. Burning steadily—ember-bed red and glowing—yet it gives off no heat at all."

Kirk, moving quietly the length of the room, opened his communicator. Briefly, his voice toneless, he brought Spock up-to-date on the current situation.

"Fire without heat," Spock echoed reflectively. "It would seem, Captain, that the being mistakes all these things it has created for manifestations of present-day Earth. Apparently, it is oblivious of the time differential."

"Yes, Mr. Spock. Whatever it is we are dealing with, it is certainly not all-knowledgeable. He makes mistakes."

"And strangely simple ones. He has a flaw, sir."

"We'll work on it, Mr. Spock. Kirk out." As he snapped off his communicator, he realized that the music had stopped; and that Trelane, turning, was smiling at him. It was a sly smile, its slyness at variance with the joviality of his tone. "Discussing deep-laid plans, I'll wager. Captain, I can't wait to see them unfold."

Kirk took a firm step forward. "Trelane, I haven't planned any—"

A reproving finger was coyly waggled at him. "Ah, you mustn't believe that I deplore your martial virtues of deception and stratagem! Quite the contrary—I have nothing but esteem for your whole species!"

"If your esteem is genuine"—Kirk paused to draw a deep breath—"then you must respect our sense of duty, too. Our ship is in need of us—we have tasks to perform—schedules to honor . . ."

"Oh, but I can't bear to let you go. I was getting a bit bored until you came." He whirled on his bench to run off a bragging cadenza on the harpsichord. "You'll have to stay. I insist."

"For how long?"

"Until it's over, of course," Trelane said.

"Until what's over?"

Trelane shrugged. "Dear Captain, so many questions . . . Why worry about an inevitably uncertain future? Enjoy yourself today, my good sir. Tomorrow—why, it may never come at all. Indeed, when it arrives, it has already become today."

The phrase "slippery as an eel" suddenly occurred to Kirk. He made another try. "Trelane, even if we wanted to stay, our companions are missing us. They need us."

"I must try to experience your sense of concern with you, your grief at the separation." The harpsichord wailed a mournful minor passage, sentimental, drippy.

Kirk gritted his teeth. "There are four hundred men and women on board our ship waiting for—"

"Women!" A discordant chord crashed from the instrument. "You don't actually mean members of the fair sex are among your crew! How charming! No doubt they are very beautiful!" Trelane, leaping to his feet, clapped his hands. "And I shall be so very gallant to them! Here, let me fetch them down to us at once!"

He had lifted his arm when Kirk jumped forward. "Absolutely not!"

"No?"

"No!" Kirk shouted. "This game has gone far enough. Our feminine crew members are crucial operating personnel! You can't just remove them from—"

Trelane stamped his foot. "I can do anything I like! I thought you would have realized that by now!"

McCoy spoke. "Jim! I am receiving a Transporter signal!"

Trelane started wringing his hands. "What does he mean? You must tell me!"

"It means the party's over, thanks to Mr. Spock! That's what it means, Trelane"—and Kirk, signaling to his men, assumed the Transporting stance. As the others fol-

lowed suit, Trelane hurried up to them. "Wait!" he screamed. "What are you doing? I haven't dismissed you. Stop! I won't have this!"

The drawing room, the florid, furious face disappeared; and this time it was Spock who hurried up to them as they shimmered into full shape on the Transporter platform.

"Captain! Are you all right?"

Kirk stepped off the platform. "Report, Mr. Spock. How were the scanners able to penetrate that radiation field?"

"They didn't, sir. Not clearly. We merely beamed up all the life forms within a given space."

McCoy broke in. "Jim, that confirms what I said. Trelane is not a life form as we know it—or he'd be coming through the Transporter now."

Kirk nodded. Then he snapped out orders. "Prepare to warp out at once! Maximum speed! Everyone to stations!"

In the bridge, the substitute personnel quickly resigned their posts to Sulu and De Salle. The pretty yeoman on duty rushed up to Kirk. "Oh, Captain," cried Teresa Ross, "we were all so worried about you!" What she meant was, "I was worried about you, James Kirk"—and Kirk, gravely acknowledging her concern, said, "Thank you, Yeoman Ross." Then he was on the intercom. "Scotty! I want every ounce of power your engines have. We're going to put a hundred million miles between us and that madman down there."

"Aye, sir. Welcome back, Captain."

McCoy was staring at the hand he had extended. "I'm quaking," he said. "Jim, I'm quaking—but I don't know if it's with laughter or with terror!"

Uhura looked away from her board, her eyes bright with curiosity. "What was it? What's down there on Gothos?" she asked.

"Something I hope I forget to tell my grandchildren about . . ."

Then McCoy noted the astounded expression on Teresa's face. "Look—!" she whispered. Spock had jumped to his feet, staring.

Across the bridge in the angle made by its wall and el-

evator shaft, Trelane stood. He was uniformed, resplendent, a sabre scabbard attached to his cummerbund. His hands were clasped behind his back and he was looking the *Enterprise* bridge over. After a moment, he spoke. "But where are all the weapons? Don't you display your weapons?"

Kirk rose slowly to his feet. Trelane made a benevolently reassuring gesture. "Don't fret, Captain. I'm only a little upset with you." He was glancing around at the bridge people.

He said, "This Mr. Spock you mentioned—the one responsible for the imprudent act of taking you from me. Which is he, Captain?"

Spock said, "I am Mr. Spock."

"Surely," said Trelane, "you are not an *officer*." He turned in amazement—real or feigned, who could know?—to Kirk. "He isn't quite human, is he?"

"My father," Spock said, "is from the planet Vulcan."

"Are its natives predatory?"

"Not specifically," Spock said solemnly.

Trelane made a dismissing gesture. "No. I should think not." He made an elaboration of turning to Kirk. "You *will* see to his punishment?"

"On the contrary," Kirk said. "I commend his action."

The full red lips pursed in their habitual pout. "But I don't like him."

Kirk won his battle for control. Tonelessly, he said, "Trelane, get off my ship! I've had enough of you!"

"Nonsense, Captain. You're all coming back with me."

The victory for control was abruptly lost. There was an obscenity about Trelane's middle-aged willfulness. Flaring, Kirk yelled, "We're not going anywhere! This ship is leaving here whether you—"

"Fiddle-de-dee," Trelane retorted. "I have a perfectly enchanting sojourn on Gothos planned for you. And I won't have you spoil it."

In a kind of prophetic awareness, Kirk knew what Trelane would do. He did it. Saying, "The decor of my draw-

ing room is much more appropriate . . .” He raised his arm.

And the *Enterprise* bridge was replaced by the drawing room. All that was different were the positions of the bridge people. De Salle and Sulu were seated at a dining table, laden with dishes of unidentifiable but delicious-looking foods. Uhura found herself on the bench before the harpsichord. And Trelane, completing the sentence spoken on the *Enterprise*, said, “And much more tasteful, don’t you think?”

Sulu looked at the wall niches emptied of their sculptures.

“No,” he said.

Trelane gave him an Oriental bow from the waist. “Yes, it is so much more fitting, Honorable Guest.” He paused, catching a mirrored glimpse of his well-padded calves in their leg-hose; and the fatuous look of self-admiration on his face exploded the last remnants of De Salle’s control.

“You little—!” he snarled and charged Trelane.

Kirk cried out a warning but it came too late. Trelane had made his hand wave—and once again, De Salle went stiff, immovable. Interestedly, Trelane circled him, peering into his frozen face. “Ah, what primitive fury! He is the very soul of sublime savagery!”

Kirk said, “Trelane, let him go.” He repeated the sentence. “*I said, ‘Let him go!’*”

Trelane stared at him. Then he nodded. “Yes, of course. I forget I must not frighten you too much. But then, you must not provoke me again. For your own sake, I warn you. I am sometimes quite short-tempered.” There came another slight move of his hand; and De Salle relaxed the hands that had been reaching for Trelane’s throat. Kirk clamped a firm hold on him. Sulu, seizing his other arm, whispered harshly, “De Salle, we don’t even have our phasers!”

“Come, everyone!” Trelane, over at the table, pointed to chairs. “Let us forget your bad manners! Let us be full of merry talk and sallies of wit! See, here are victuals to delight the palate and brave company to delight the mind!” Pouring brandy, he offered glasses to McCoy and Sulu. “Partake, good Doctor. And you, Honorable Guest,

you likee, too." Then it was the turns of De Salle and Jaeger. "*Allons, enfants! Zum Kampf, mein Herr!*"

His men looked tensely at Kirk. Nodding at the table, he said, "Play along. That's an order!"

As they began to pick halfheartedly at the lavish array of food, Kirk, Spock beside him, was giving Trelane a look of deep concentration. What was the secret of his power? Vain, silly, a showoff and braggart, he yet possessed the secret that had enabled him to establish a habitable enclave on an uninhabitable planet and to do what he said he could do—transport matter at will. In the florid face and features, there was no indication of the acute intelligence required to evolve his tricks. In fact, his look of fatuity was more pronounced than ever as, turning to Kirk, he said, "I fear you are derelict in your social duty, Captain. You have not yet introduced me to the charming contingent of your crew."

There was a small silence before Kirk spoke to Uhura and Teresa. "This is—General Trelane."

"Retired," Trelane corrected him. "However, if you prefer, dear ladies, you may address me simply as the lonely Squire of Gothos."

Still introducing, Kirk said, "This lady is Uhura, our communications officer . . ."

Trelane went to her, took her hand and bowed over it. "A Nubian prize, eh, Captain? Taken no doubt in one of your raids of conquest. She has the same melting eyes of the Queen of Sheba . . . the same lovely skin color . . ."

With a poorly disguised shudder, Uhura pulled her hand free; and unfazed, brashly melodramatic as ever, Trelane turned to Teresa. "And this lady?" Hand over heart, he burst into recitation.

"Is this the face that launched a thousand ships
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
Fair Helen, make me immortal with a kiss!"

Teresa flushed, stepping back; and Kirk, to distract Trelane's unwelcome attention from her, went on quickly. "Yeoman Teresa Ross. You've met Mr. Spock, our Science Officer." Trelane looked Spock up and down. "You real-

ize," he said, "it is only in deference to the Captain that I brought you down?"

"Affirmative," Spock said.

"I don't think I like your tone. It's most challenging. Is that what you're doing—challenging me?"

"I *object* to you," Spock said. "I object to intellect without discipline; to power without purpose."

"Why, Mr. Spock," cried Trelane, "you *do* have a saving grace! You're ill mannered . . . the human half of you, no doubt. But I am wasting time . . ." He grabbed Teresa's hands. "Come, my wood nymph! Dance with your swain! And you, dear Nubian beauty, give us some sprightly music!"

"I do not know how to play this instrument," Uhura said.

"Of course you do!"

Uhura looked at Kirk. Then, turning, she fingered the harpsichord keyboard; and was startled to hear the rush of notes ripple from under her hands. Trelane swept Teresa into his arms and burst into a wildly gyrating waltz with her.

"Captain, how far do we go along with this charade?"

It was Sulu's question. Kirk's response was tightly grim. "Until we can think our way out of here. Meanwhile, we'll accept his hospitality . . ."

McCoy snorted with disgust. "Hospitality!" He replaced his laden plate on the table. "You should try his food, Jim. Straw would be tastier than this pheasant. As to the brandy in this glass, plain water has more taste. Nothing he has served has any taste at all."

Spock spoke meditatively. "Food that has no flavor. Wine that has no taste. Fire that gives no heat. Added up, it would seem to suggest that, though Trelane knows all the Earth forms, he knows nothing whatever of their substance."

"And if he's that fallible, he can't be all-powerful. That means he's got something helping him."

"I agree, sir," Spock said.

"A machine. A device—something which does these things for him." Kirk's eyes narrowed as he watched the cavorting Trelane halt his dance briefly in order to adore himself in the walled mirror. "Ah, my dear," he cried to

Teresa, "don't we make a graceful pair . . . except for one small detail. That dress you wear hardly matches this charming scene!" Then, Trelane, his eyes fixed on the mirror, lifted that hand of his. Teresa vanished—and immediately reappeared. She was wearing the billowing silks of a luxurious eighteenth-century gown. Diamond bracelets sparkled on her gloved arm; and in her hair glittered a pointed tiara of brilliants.

"Now that's more what we want!" Trelane shouted in delight. "I, the dashing warrior—and you, his elegant lady!"

It was another too impressive demonstration of his extraordinary powers. McCoy's voice was tight. "Three thousand years ago, he would have been considered a god . . . a little god of war." He gave a short, angry laugh. "How suprised the ancients would have been to see—not the grim-visaged brute they visualized as a war god—but a strutting dandy, spreading his peacock's tail in a mirror!"

Kirk echoed the word. "Mirror. That mirror is part of his audience. It's a piece of his ego. He never wanders far from it."

"Is it ego?" Spock said. "Or something else?"

"Explain," Kirk said.

"The mirror," Spock said.

"What about it?"

"As you said, sir, he never gets much distance away from it. I suppose it could be just vanity."

"No, Mr. Spock. He's vain enough—but vanity can't account for his dependence on the mirror." He paused. "What kind of machine could do these things?"

Spock said, "An extremely sophisticated one. In addition to the power to create matter from energy, to guide its shape and motion by thought waves, it would have to have a vast memory bank."

Kirk nodded. "Like a computer. Would you say a machine small enough to be contained in this room could be responsible for maintaining this atmosphere, this house?"

"No, Captain. I think not. Such a device would by necessity be immense—immensely powerful to successfully resist the planet's natural atmosphere."

"Good," Kirk said. "I agree. And that leaves me free . . ."

“Free for what, Captain?”

“To do something which will seem very strange to you, Mr. Spock. Don’t think that the strain has got me down. I know exactly what I’m doing.”

“Which is—?”

For the first time since meeting the Squire of Gothos, Kirk grinned. “I am going to turn his lights off at their source, Mr. Spock.” Then he fell silent. As Trelane waltzed by them with Teresa, he spoke again with unusual loudness. “Nobody is to be too upset by what you see. I am addressing my own people. The actions of this being are those of an immature, unbalanced mind!”

Abruptly, Trelane stopped prancing. “I overheard that last remark. I’m afraid I’ll have to dispense with you, Captain.” As the arm began to lift, Kirk said, “You only heard part of it. I was just getting started, Trelane!”

The creature’s eyes brightened with curiosity. “Oh?”

“Yes,” Kirk said. “I want you to leave my crewmen alone! *And my crewwomen, too!*” He reached for Teresa, pulled her away from Trelane, and lifting her, set her down behind him. Then he wheeled to face her. “You’re not to dance with him any more! I don’t like it!”

First, he snatched the diamond tiara from her hair. Then he reached for the bracelets, peeling them off her arm along with her white glove. Flushing, the girl cried, “Captain, please don’t think . . .”

Trelane gave a chortle of pleasure. “Why, I believe the good captain is jealous of me!”

“Believe what you like,” Kirk said. “Just keep your hands off her!”

Trelane was staring at him. “How curiously human,” he said. “How wonderfully barbaric!”

Taut, no longer acting, Kirk said, “I’ve had enough of your attentions to her!”

“Of course you have. After all, it’s the root of the matter, isn’t it, Captain? We males fight for the attention, the admiration, the possession of women—”

Kirk struck him across the face with Teresa’s glove. “If fighting is what you want, you’ll have it!”

Trelane gave a leap of joy. “You mean—you are challenging me to a duel?” Eyes dancing, he cried, “This is even better than I’d planned. I shall not shirk an affair of

honor!" Skipping like a lamb in spring, he ran over to the gleaming box that hung among the weapons displayed over the fireplace. He removed it, lifting its lid. "A matched set," he said. "A matched set exactly like the one that slew your heroic Alexander Hamilton."

Bowing, he presented the box to Kirk. On its velvet lining reposed two curve-handled, flintlock dueling pistols.

Trelane took one. He pointed it at Kirk's head. "Captain," he said, "it may momentarily interest you to know that I never miss my target."

He moved over to take up his position at one side of the room. As he checked the mechanism of his pistol, McCoy, Sulu and the others gathered in an anxious group behind Kirk. He waved them back, thinking, "I know what I'll have to report to the log. Weaponless, powerless, our only hope of escape with the *Enterprise* is playing his games with this retardate of Gothos." He looked up from the absurdity of the ancient dueling pistol. His adversary had a look of rapturous enchantment on his face.

"Fascinating!" he cried ecstatically. "I stand on a Field of Honor. I am party to an actual human duel!"

"Are you ready, Trelane?"

"Quite ready, Captain. We shall test each other's courage—and then—" the voice thickened— "we shall see. . ."

Kirk started to lift his pistol when Trelane cried, "Wait! As the one challenged, I claim the right of the first shot."

"We shoot *together*," Kirk said.

Trelane was querulous. "It's *my* game—and *my* rules." Raising his gun, he aimed it straight at Spock. "But if you need to be persuaded. . ."

When you were dealing with a moral idiot, it was morally idiotic to take heroic stands. "All right," Kirk said. "You shoot first."

"Captain—" Spock was protesting. But Kirk had already lowered his pistol. And Trelane, craving the heroic limelight momentarily focused on Kirk, raised his gun above his head and fired a shot harmlessly into the ceiling.

He was so enraptured by the glory of the figure he cut in his own imagination that he couldn't contain his pleasure. "And now, Captain—how do you say it?—my fate is

in your hands." He shut his eyes with a beatific smile; and tearing open his shirt front, exposed his chest to whatever shot, whatever Fate had in store for him.

What Fate had in store for him was surprise. Instead of sending a bullet into Trelane's chest, Kirk sent one, smack! into the center of the mirror on the wall. The glass shattered. And explosively, from behind it, burst a tangle of electronic circuitry, mingled with broken grids and wire-disgorging cables. Something flashed, hissing viciously, spitting blue sparks.

Trelane screamed. He ran to the spark-showering mirror, screaming, "What have you done? What have you done?"

"The machine of power," Spock said very quietly.

It burned out quickly. Above their heads, the rows of candles in the chandelier flickered and died. A grayish, bleak twilight crept into the room. In the grate, the heatless fire was extinct, its passing marked only by a puff of evil-smelling smoke.

Trelane shrieked at the sight of the suddenly dead room. "You've ruined everything!" He sank down on the harpsichord bench; and his elbows, leaned back against its keyboard, evoked a hideously discordant jangle, shrill, ear-splitting.

Beside Kirk, struggling with his communicator, De Salle said, "Captain, subspace interference is clearing . . ."

"Contact the ship!"

Trelane had partially recovered himself. Still torn between contempt for Kirk and admiration, the Squire of Gothos indulged himself in an objective comment. "The remarkable treachery of the human species," he said—and getting up, walked over to the wall bedecked with the blackened ruins of the mirror. Watching him, Kirk said, "Go on, Trelane! Look at it! It's over! Your power is blanked out! You're finished!"

For the first time, genuine feeling triumphed over the emotional theatricality of the Squire of Gothos. He looked somberly at Kirk. "You have earned my wrath," he said. "Go back to your ship! Go back to it! Then prepare. All of you, you are dead men . . . you in particular, Captain Kirk!"

He had begun to move toward the burnt space which

had held the wall mirror. As he reached it, he was gone. Kirk, just a step behind him, was brought up against a blank wall. He stepped back from it, turning to his people. "Everyone! We're getting out of here—and *now!*"

His voice was hoarse as he spoke into his communicator. "This is the captain, *Enterprise!* Commence beaming us up! Make it maximum speed!"

Scott gave their beam-up maximum speed. Kirk left the Transporter Room for the bridge with the same variety of leg haste. In his chair, he quickly reached for the intercom. "Scotty, full power acceleration from orbit!"

"Full power, sir."

The ship leaped forward, and on the viewing screen the crescent-shaped bulk that was Gothos began to dwindle in size.

Kirk said, "Set course for Colony Beta Six, Mr. Sulu."

"Laid in, sir."

"Warp Factor One at the earliest possible moment."

Sulu said, "Standing by to warp, sir."

Uhura, back with her panels, turned. "Shall I send a full report to Space Fleet Command, Captain?"

Kirk frowned. "Not yet. Not until we're well out of his range. Our beam might be traced."

Spock spoke from his computer post. "Can we know what his range is, sir?"

"We can make an educated guess. At this point—" Kirk had strode over to Spock's assortment of star maps and was directing a forefinger at a spot on one of them. "This is where we first detected the solar system." He was about to return to his chair when he noted Teresa, still wearing the panniered gown of flowered silk. His look of admiration roused her to the realization of its incongruity.

"Sir," she said, "may I take a moment to change, now that the ball is over?"

Kirk smiled at her. "You may—but you'll have to give up that highly becoming garment for scientific analysis, Yeoman Ross."

She flushed. And he tore his eyes away from the vision she made to look back at the viewing screen. Gothos had grown smaller and smaller. Even as he watched, it was lost to sight.

Uhura, the relaxation of her relief in her voice, said, "Still no sign of pursuit, sir. Instruments clear."

Sulu, turning his head, said, "Captain, we are about to warp"—and at the same moment De Salle gave a shout.

"Screen, sir! Large body ahead!"

Just a moment ago the screen had been empty. Kirk stared at its new inhabitant; and De Salle, jumping to his feet, yelled, "Collision course, sir!"

Tight-lipped, Kirk said, "Helm hard to port!"

The bridge crew staggered under the push by the sharp turn. All eyes were fixed on the screen where the crescent-shaped image loomed larger and larger. Then the *Enterprise* had veered away from it. A mutter came from the stunned De Salle. "That was the planet Gothos," he said.

Kirk whirled to Sulu. "Mr. Sulu, have we been going in a circle?"

"No, sir! All instruments show on course . . ."

De Salle gave another yell. "It's Gothos again, Captain!"

The planet had once more appeared on the screen. Kirk barked the evasive order—and again people staggered under the centrifugal force of the ship's abrupt turn. The image of the planet, shrunken on the screen, suddenly enlarged once again. Without order, Sulu put the ship into a vertiginous turn-maneuver. As they came out of it, Spock said, "Cat and mouse game."

"With Trelane the cat," Kirk said tightly.

De Salle, his capacity for intense reaction exhausted, said, low-voiced, "There it is, sir—dead ahead . . ."

On the screen the planet showed red, wreathed by fiery mists. It seemed to boil, noxious, hideously ulcerous with its eruptive skin. Kirk, his jaw set, spoke, "Ninety degrees starboard, Mr. Sulu!"

But though Sulu moved his helm controls, the planet held its place on the screen, always increasing its size.

"We're turning, Captain," Sulu cried. "We're turning—but we're not veering away from it!"

Kirk shouted. "Ninety subport, Mr. Sulu. Adjust!"

What was happening on the screen continued to happen on it. Desperate, Sulu cried, "A complete turn, sir—and we're still accelerating toward the planet!"

Dry as dust, Spock said, "Or it toward us."

Kirk was staring in silence at the screen. "That's *it!*" he said. He wheeled his chair around. "We will decelerate into orbit! We will return to orbit! Prepare the Transporter Room!"

McCoy spoke for the first time. "You're not going down there, Captain! You can't do it, Jim!"

Kirk got up. "I *am* going down, Doctor McCoy. And I *am* going to delight my eyes again with the sight of our whimsical General Trelane. And if it takes wringing his neck to make him let my ship go . . ." He was at the bridge elevator. "Mr. Spock, stand by communicators. If you receive no message from me in one hour, leave this vicinity. At once. Without any sentimental turning back for me."

There was comfort in Spock's quiet nod. No heroics, no weakening sympathy. Just the perception of a reality, a necessity clear to each of them. Spock, his friend.

On a wall in Trelane's drawing room was the shadow of a gallows, dark, implicating. Kirk ignored it. For otherwise, the room was unchanged. Logs burned in the fireplace. The light of candles was refracted from the crystals of its chandelier. The mirror on the wall had been restored, its glass now protected by a heavy wire-mesh shield.

A heavily portentous voice said, "The prisoner may approach the bench."

It was Trelane. He had doffed his military glories for the graver garb of Law's upholders. He wore the white periwig of England's servants of jurisprudence, the black silk robes of a high court judge. He was writing something with a goose-quill pen on some parchment-looking document. The gallows noose—shadow or substance?—seemed to droop over Kirk.

"Trelane . . . !" Kirk said.

Nobody can be so solemn as an idiot. And Trelane, an essential idiot, was very solemn. Solemn and dangerous. In a voice that dripped with unction, he said, "Any attempt at demonstrations will weigh against you with the court. And this time my instrumentality is unbreakable, Captain Kirk."

"My neck seems to be threatened by your court, Trelane. And your neck—is it so very safe?"

A flicker of irritation passed over the heavy-jowled face.

"The absurdity of inferior beings!" said Trelane. He picked up the parchment. "And now, Captain James Kirk, you stand accused of the high crimes of treason, of conspiracy, of attempt to foment insurrection." His periwig must have itched him for he pushed it up, giving himself the look of a slightly drunken, white-haired Silenus. "How do you plead?" he said.

"I haven't come here to plead in your 'court,' Trelane."

The Squire of Gothos sat back, tapping his quill pen against his table. "I must warn you that anything you say has already been taken down in evidence against you."

It was like *Alice in Wonderland*. It was like Looking-Glass Land, where what seems to be is not and what is not appears to be the fact. Reaching for sanity, Kirk said, "I came here for one purpose. I want my ship returned to me."

"Irrelevant," Trelane said, giving his periwig an irritated push.

"We made you angry by our will to survive. Is that it?" Kirk said.

Trelane drew a tremulous finger across his upper lip. "Irrelevant," he said. "A comment entirely uncalled for."

"Sure, *that's it*," Kirk retorted. "Then vent your anger on me alone! I was the one who led the others—and I was the one who shot out your mirror machine . . ."

For the first time, rage seemed to overwhelm vanity in Trelane. His voice thickened. "And did you really think I wouldn't have more mediums of instrumentality at my command?"

"I took that chance. And I'll accept the price of chancing wrong—"

Trelane rose. "Then you do admit the charges. This court has no choice in fixing punishment. You will hang by the neck until you are dead, dead, dead. Have you any last request?"

Kirk gave a great shout of laughter. "If you think I'm going to stick my head in that noose . . ."

Trelane's hand moved—and Kirk found himself standing under the gallows, its noose, real, heavy, rough around his throat. Trelane, reaching for a black executioner's mask, regarded him plaintively. "This really is becoming tiresome. It's much too easy."

Kirk freed himself from the noose. "Easy!" he yelled. "That's your whole problem, Trelane! Everything comes too easy to you! You don't ever have to *think*! So you lose opportunities. You're enjoying your sense of power right now—but the chance to experience something really unique? You're wasting it! Where's the sport in a simple hanging? In making a rope do your killing for you?"

"Sport?" Trelane echoed. Suddenly his face cleared. He clapped his hands. "Oh, I am intrigued! Go on, Captain! What do you suggest?"

"A personal conflict between us . . . with the stakes a human life—*mine!*"

"What an inspired idea! We need something more fanciful—a truly royal hunt, maybe." He gestured toward the windows. "You go out and hide from me. In the forest . . . anywhere you like . . . and I will seek you out with—*this!*" He wrenched a sword from the scabbard in front of him, brandishing it ferociously. "How does that strike you, Captain? Truly sporting?"

"Yes," Kirk said. "But you must make the game worth my while. While we play it, free my ship."

Trelane sniffed. "Always back to your ship. Oh, very well. If it will lend spice to the pursuit . . ."

Kirk broke into a run, making a dash for a window. He brought up in a copse of vividly green bushes. With desperate haste, he flipped open his communicator. "*Enterprise! Enterprise*, can you hear me? Get the ship away fast! Fast as you can! I'll try to gain you the time you need—"

He stopped. Trelane had burst through the copse, slashing at leaves with his sword. "Ah, ha!" he screamed, "I see you!" But Kirk, diving, had rolled down the slant of a small knoll. Trelane's sword flashed over his head—and in his frantic scramble for the shelter of a heavy-trunked tree, he dropped his communicator.

"You must try harder, Captain!" The sword-point pricked Kirk's arm. He rose from his crouch behind the tree

to tear a branch away from it. It struck straight and true on Trelane's sword arm. The weapon flew out of his hand; and Kirk, grabbing it up, slashed at Trelane with all his two-handed strength.

It cut right through him, leaving no sign of wound or of blood. Horrified, Kirk stared—but Trelane, still playing the role of gallant sportsman, merely said, "*Touché*, Captain. I confess you've scored first. But after all, I've never played this game before . . ."

He vanished. Kirk, still shaking, ducked behind a screen of brush. Under it, he saw the gleaming metal of his dropped communicator. "*Enterprise . . . !*"

"En garde!"

Trelane had reappeared, sword lifted. Barely in time, Kirk broke for cover behind a hedge. Then, stooping, he burst out of its shelter to make for the door between the two stone griffins.

"Tallyho!"

The fatuous Squire of Gothos had spotted him. Kirk wheeled to his right—and a stone wall erected itself before him. He whirled to his left; and another blocked his way. Trapped, he backed up against the door of Trelane Hall; and its proprietor, triumph giving his face a look of gorged repletion, said, "Ah, Captain, you made a noble fight of it!" A dribble of saliva issued from the thick lips. "But you are beaten. Down, Captain. Down to me on your knees."

Kirk spoke, the sword against his throat. "You have won nothing."

"I have! I could run you through! I order you to your knees. I order it!" Trelane lunged with his sword; but Kirk, seizing it, tore it out of his hand; and in one snap over his knee, broke it. He tossed the pieces aside.

"You broke it!" Trelane wailed. "You broke my sword! But I won't have it. I'll blast you out of existence with a wave of my hand!"

Kirk struck him sharply across the face; and Trelane, shrieking, "I'll fix you for that!" squeezed the trigger of the phaser that had suddenly appeared in his hand. A murderously disintegrating ray darted from its muzzle—and at the same moment a woman's voice called "Trelane!"

"No! No!" Trelane howled, running down the steps of his Hall's entrance. Two globes of light hung in the air

at their foot. "No! Go away!" he yelled. "You said I could have this planet for my own!" The spheres of light, one slightly smaller than the other, sparkled with an iridescence of rainbow colors.

Trelane was shouting at them. "You always stop me just when I'm having fun!"

"If you cannot take proper care of your pets, you cannot have any pets," said the female voice.

Trelane burst into tears. "But you saw! I was winning! I would have won. I would, I would, I would." But even as he wept, he was dwindling, a shape losing substance, collapsing in on itself. Then he was only an emptiness in the air.

Kirk looked skyward as though seeking an explanation of the inexplicable. "Where are you?" he cried. "Who is Trelane and who are you?"

"You must forgive our child," said the woman's voice. "The fault is ours for overindulging him. He will be punished."

A stern male voice spoke. "We would not have let him intercept you had we realized your vulnerability. Forgive us, Captain. We will maintain your life-support conditions while you return to your ship. Please accept our apologies."

Kirk flung out his hands toward the two spheres. "Can't you tell me . . . ?" Then, like Trelane, they were gone. After a long moment, he broke out his communicator. "Captain to *Enterprise*. Captain calling the *Enterprise* . . ."

He shut his eyes at the sound—the familiar sound of Spock's voice. "Captain, we are receiving you—"

Kirk gave a last look around him at Trelane's domain—its greenery, the two stone griffins, the appalling solitude of its loneliness in the midst of the Gothos hell. "Beam me up," he said. "Mr. Spock, we're free to leave here."

It was a singularly thoughtful Kirk who gave the order for normal approach procedures to Colony Beta 6. He was glad when Spock left his station to come to the command chair. Somehow he'd known that Spock alone could reconcile him to the paradoxes of his recent encounter with the Squire of Gothos.

"I am entering," Spock said, "our recent . . . uh . . . interesting experience into the library computer banks, Captain. But I am puzzled."

"Puzzled—you, Mr. Spock?" For a moment the old quizzicalness played across Kirk's face. "I am surprised. I am amazed that you admit it. Explanation, please . . ."

Spock said, "General, or Squire Trelane, Captain. How do we describe him? Pure mentality? A force of intellect? Embodied energy? Superbeing? He must be classified, sir."

Kirk stared unseeingly at his board. "Of course, Mr. Spock. Certainly, he must be classified. Everything must be classified—or where would we be?"

"But I am somewhat at a loss . . ." Spock said.

"A god of war, Mr. Spock?"

"I hardly think . . ."

"Or . . . a small boy, Mr. Spock. And a very naughty one at that."

"It will make a strange entry in the library banks, sir."

"He was a very strange small boy. But on the other hand, he probably was doing things comparable, in their way, to the same mischievous pranks you played when you were a boy."

"Mischievous pranks, Captain?"

"Dipping little girls' curls in inkwells . . . stealing apples . . . tying cans on a dog's—" He broke off, sensing Spock's growing dismay. Where, in the universe, was another Spock to be found—the one you could trust to the end for reasons that had no relation to the ordinary human ones? Kirk grinned. "Excuse me, Mr. Spock. I should have known better. You were never a mischievous small boy."

"As you say, Captain," Spock said.

Back at his station, he cocked a puzzled eyebrow at Kirk. Kirk smiled at him. Spock, lifting the other eyebrow, returned to his computer. And the *Enterprise*, course set, oblivious of the manifold temptations of deep space, sped on to its assignation with Colony Beta 6.

Wink of an Eye

(Arthur Heinemann
and Lee Cronin)

In the space fronting the handsome building of unidentified metal, a fountain flung its sparkle of spray into the air. Kirk, abstracted, watched Security Guard Compton taking samples of its water. Nearby, McCoy was scanning the plaza's periphery with his tricorder. Necessary but time-consuming occupations, Kirk thought. And useless. They had done nothing to locate the source of that distress call that had forced their beam-down to this unexplored planet calling itself Scalos.

With abrupt impatience, he opened his communicator. "Kirk to *Enterprise*. Lieutenant Uhura, does the location of that distress signal exactly correspond to this area?"

"Yes, sir. And I am receiving visual contact with the Scalosians. I can't see you on the viewing screen but I can see them."

"Check coordinates, Lieutenant."

"The coordinates correspond, sir."

His impatience grew. "There are no Scalosians, Lieutenant. Apart from our landing party, there is nobody here."

"Their distress call is very strong, sir. They are begging for immediate assistance."

"Check circuits for malfunction. Captain out."

He looked up to meet McCoy's nod. "There *must* be a malfunction, Jim. This is a barren world—hardly any vegetation; no apparent animal life."

As though to contradict him, a shrill mosquito whine sounded near Kirk's head. He struck the invisible insect away. "But there's some kind of insect life," he said.

"My tricorder doesn't register it."

"My ears did," Kirk retorted. He dropped the subject for Spock, rounding a corner of the strangely-fluted metal building, was approaching them. "Anything, Mr. Spock?"

"Evidently a civilization of high order, Captain, rating number seven on the Industrial Scale. Humanoid in appearance, according to paintings. An abundance of literature which I shall have translated and processed. Certain structures hold signs of recent occupancy. Other ones apparently long abandoned."

"But no sign of present life," Kirk said.

As he spoke, he noted that Compton, rinsing his hands in the fountain's jet, had lifted one to knock away some unseen annoyance at his ear. At the same moment, he again heard the mosquito whine. He had to make an effort to concentrate on what Spock was saying. ". . . indication of life forms of a highly unusual intermittent nature. They have neither discernible shape nor location. A most puzzling phenomenon, sir."

"The Scalosians *were* here," Kirk said. "We saw them on the viewing screen, Mr. Spock. Lieutenant Uhura can still see them. She's still getting their distress call. What happened to them?"

"At this moment I cannot answer that, Captain."

"Mr. Spock, I want you to make a complete survey of this planet. You will use all the ship's instruments—"

He broke off at McCoy's shout. "Jim! Compton's gone! Look over there! Compton's gone!"

Emptiness was where the guard had been stooping at the fountain. McCoy was staring at its feathered plume of water dazedly. "Compton—gone," he said again.

"Bones!" Kirk said. "Snap out of it! What happened?"

McCoy's shocked eyes veered to his. "He . . . was stowing vials of that fountain's water in his shoulder bags

. . . when he vanished. I was looking straight at him—and then he wasn't there. He wasn't there, Jim. He . . . just wasn't there . . .”

Had the Scalos distress signal been real? Maybe unreal like its inhabitants. Kirk, entering the *Enterprise* bridge, barked an inconsequential order to an unremembered crew member. As he sat down in his command chair, he said, “Lieutenant Uhura, start a replay of that distress call.” Then he hit a switch. “Mr. Scott, are all Transporter controls still in functioning order?”

“Aye, sir. Is Mr. Spock still down on the planet's surface?”

“He's in Sickbay. Dr. McCoy is running a check on the landing party.” His attention, used to dispersing itself to note any significant movement in the bridge, had registered Uhura's look as she struggled with her dials. “What is it, Lieutenant?”

She was frowning. “Malfunction, sir.” She touched a switch—and her frown deepened. “Now it's corrected itself.”

Sulu spoke. “Captain, there's some trouble on the hangar deck. Controls are frozen.”

“Have repair crews been assigned?”

“Yes, sir.”

Kirk shot a look of inquiry at Uhura. She nodded. “The tape of the distress call is ready, sir.”

Spock had quietly returned to his station. Now he turned to look at the viewing screen. An upside-down image took shape on it. Then, righting itself, it showed a proud, strong male face. Its lips moved. “Those of us who are left have taken shelter in this area. We have no explanation for what has been happening to us. Our number is now five . . .”

The face on the screen took on human height and breadth. The figure moved; and around it appeared the four other Scalosians, two of them women. One was surpassingly lovely. The whole impression created by the group was that of a cultured, singularly handsome people, peaceful in purpose. Their spokesman went on. “I am Rael. We were once a nation of nine hundred thousand, this city alone holding—”

"Freeze it," Kirk said.

Uhura immobilized the tape and Spock, swinging around, said, "Perhaps this distress call was prerecorded—and what we received was a taped signal."

"Mr. Spock, the fact remains that when we beamed down, we could not find these people. They *were* there—now they're *not* there. Nor is crewman Compton."

"Some force or agent only partially discernible to our instruments may have been responsible, Captain."

Kirk nodded. "Mr. Sulu, I want this ship on standby alert while we continue the investigation." But Sulu had turned an anxious face to him. "I have a reading, sir, that our deflectors are inoperative. They do not respond to controls."

"Scotty, assist," Kirk said. He got up to go over to Spock's chair. "Mr. Spock, ever since we beamed back up from Scalos, we have suffered a series of malfunctions. I wish an investigation and an explanation. I want—"

McCoy's voice interrupted. "McCoy to Captain Kirk. The Captain's presence for examination is requested."

"Can't it wait, Bones?"

"Your orders, Jim. You're the last one."

"What do you read so far?"

"Can we discuss it in Sickbay?"

Moving to the elevator, Kirk said, "Mr. Spock, you have the con." But the elevator doors, instead of whooshing open at his approach, remained shut. Kirk wheeled, shouting, "Is this another malfunction?"

Spock jabbed hastily at buttons: and after a long moment, the doors opened slowly, grudgingly. Kirk was still fuming as he jerked off his shirt in Sickbay. "Bones! What did your examinations of the others turn up?"

"All normal. Whatever caused Compton's disappearance didn't affect anyone else."

"Has anyone experienced anything unusual since beaming back up?"

"No mention of it. No, Jim."

But Nurse Chapel looked up from the sheet she was draping over Kirk's midriff. "Yet something's going on, Captain. All the medical supply cabinets have been opened."

Kirk sat up. "Anything missing?"

"Just disordered. As if everything had been picked up and examined."

Once again that insect whine sounded close to Kirk's ear. He waited a moment before he said, "Bones, could something be causing me to hallucinate?" The urgency in his voice startled McCoy out of his concentration on his medical panels. He turned. "How—hallucinate? What do you mean?"

"Twice," Kirk said, "I've felt something touch me. Nothing was there. I just felt it again. Did I just fancy it?"

"There's nothing physically wrong with you, Jim."

"I asked you a question. Am I hallucinating?"

McCoy left his panels. "No."

Kirk leaped from the medical table. "Then we *did* beam something aboard! Something has invaded this ship!" He was making for the intercom when the alarm of a red alert sounded. Over the shrieking of its sirens, he cried, "Captain to bridge! Mr. Spock, come in!"

Spock didn't come in. Minutes passed before Kirk could hear the voice, faint, blurred. "Captain, I have a reading from the life support center . . ."

"Spock, I can't hear you! Check circuits. Is it a malfunction?"

More minutes passed. Then it was Uhura speaking, her voice also dimmed and distorted. ". . . intercom system breaking down rapidly . . ."

Kirk felt the sweat breaking out on his forehead. "Lieutenant, issue a shipwide order! Use communicators instead of the intercom. Arm all crewmen with phaser pistols. Spock, come in!"

The words were a jumble. "Reading . . . life support . . . center. Alien . . . substances . . . introduced . . ."

Kirk was shouldering into his shirt. "Mr. Spock, meet me in the life support center! On the double! Captain to Security! Armed squad to life support center at once!" He was at Sickbay's door when he saw McCoy sway. Christine Chapel, clutching the back of a chair, called, "The oxygen content is dropping, Doctor . . ."

As for Kirk himself, Sickbay, its door, its cabinets, its equipment, were all swimming into blur. He fought the diz-

ziness that threatened to become darkness, struggling to open his communicator. "Bridge! Bridge! Scotty, where are you? Emergency life support!"

Scott's steady voice said. "Emergency on, sir."

Behind him, McCoy and Christine were gulping in lungfuls of healthy air. Kirk's vertigo subsided—and Scott said, "Condition corrected, Captain."

But the cold hand of imminent death had touched Kirk. It was a man of a different discipline who met Spock at the entrance to the life support center. As wordlessly as it was given, he took the phaser, flinging open the door to the center. Its security guards, sprawled on the floor, were kneeling back up to their feet. One, phaser out, charged to his left, only to be flung back and down again by something invisible. Kirk, staring around him, said, "How do you explain that, Mr. Spock?"

The sharp Vulcan eyes scanned their tricorder. "A force field, sir, with the nature of which I am unfamiliar. But I get a reading of alien presences similar to those obtained on the planet. They seem to have no exact location."

"'Life forms of a highly unusual, intermittent nature'." Kirk recalled grimly. "Phasers on stun, everybody. Sweep the area."

Once more came the thin whine. Phaser beams were lacing the corridor outside. Inside, Kirk and Spock edged cautiously forward to the location of the force field. Instead of flinging them back, it yielded to them; but when a guard moved to follow them, he was struck down.

"It would seem they will allow only the two of us in to the life support unit," Spock said. "Take care, Captain."

Kirk took the advice. He opened the heavy door to the unit, his weapon at the ready. At first glance the unit appeared to be its usual self, its complex coils, squat dynamos, its serpentine tubings and compressors arranged in their customary pattern. Then Kirk saw the gleaming metal of the device affixed to one of the dynamos. The metal was fluted like that of the Scalosian building. Though alien in shape and material; the small device had been able to affect the functioning of the huge life support unit.

"Mr. Spock, what is it?"

"I cannot determine, Captain. Perhaps a Scalosian refrigerating system." He scanned the thing with his tricorder.

"It would seem that installation of the device is incomplete, sir. Life support is still operational."

"Disconnect it," Kirk said.

But the hand Spock extended toward the fixture was flung back. Kirk, whipping out his phaser, heard yet again that now familiar whine. "Destroy it, Spock!" he shouted.

As their two phasers fired at the device, their weapons disappeared. One moment, they were hard, tangible in their hands; but the next, they were gone. Both men pushed forward and were thrust strongly back.

"And that wasn't a force field!" Kirk cried. "Something pushed me back. They are in here with us!" He swung around, shouting at the empty air. "You! What are you doing to my ship? Show yourselves!"

The mosquito whine shrilled. They tried again, not lunging this time to the device but approaching it. A hard shove sent them stumbling back.

Spock's voice was dry. "It seems that we may look at their mechanism—but that is all, Captain."

Kirk nodded. "A show of strength." He shouted again to the invisible enemies. "But we'll find a way to dismantle this aggressive engine of yours!"

It was more than a mere show of strength. Back on the bridge, they discovered that key systems over the entire ship had either been crossed or fused. Spock's computer alone was still operational. All doors, including those of the elevators, were jammed open. Scott greeted them with a gloom thick as a Tyneside fog. "Warp engines are losing potency, Captain. We shall be on emergency power soon—a situation that gives us at most one week of survival."

Kirk wheeled to Spock. "Have your readings been fed into the computer bank?"

"Affirmative, Captain."

"Readout."

Flipping a switch, Spock addressed the computer. "Analyze and reply. Have we been invaded?"

"Affirmative."

"Nature and description of enemy forces."

"Data insufficient."

"Purpose of the invasion."

"Immediate purpose, seizure and control of the Fed-

eration Starship *Enterprise*. Data insufficient for determination of end purpose.”

“Is there a link between this seizure and Compton’s disappearance?”

“Data insufficient.”

“Are we at present capable of resisting?”

“Negative.”

“Recommendations?”

“If incapable of resistance, negotiate for terms.”

Listening, Kirk glared at the computer. Then he flushed at his own childishness. The computer was just doing its computer job. But men were not computers. “We will not negotiate for terms,” he said. “Scotty, do you concur?”

“Aye, sir.”

Spock, giving him an approving nod, said, “What are *your* recommendations, Captain?”

“Coffee,” Kirk said. He turned to the pretty yeoman on duty. “Is a round of coffee available to bridge personnel—or have those circuits also been damaged?”

She smiled, adoration in her eyes. It shouldn’t have cheered him up—but it did. Challenge hardened his jaw as he looked around him at an air made malevolent by invisible hostility. “Let them take the next step,” he said. “The next move is theirs.”

His cup of coffee was set on the arm of his chair. He let it wait to cool. Then, as he leaned back in the chair, his hair was suddenly stirred. He stared around him, baffled—and felt soft lips on his. He *was* hallucinating. McCoy was wrong. He put out a tentative hand, exploring the space before him. Shaking his head, he seized his cup and, after drinking its coffee, replaced it on the chair arm. At the same instant, he became abruptly aware of a change of tempo in the voices around him. They sounded too slow, like those from a phonograph that was running down. And the movements of the bridge people—they, too, seemed strangely slowed, lethargic.

He went to Spock. But Spock, who had bent to his computer, seemed unable to reach its hood.

“Mr. Spock, what’s wrong?”

The Vulcan didn’t answer. He sat perfectly still in his chair. Kirk wheeled, calling, “Scotty!” No reply. Scott ap-

peared to be frozen in the very act of moving a dial. It was then he heard the feminine giggle—a very feminine giggle. It came from his left. He turned. The Scalosian beauty was standing there, her chestnut hair making a dream of her creamy skin. She wore a short garment of golden gauze that clung to a slim body of subliminally provocative appeal. She was laughing at him; and the gleam of her teeth between her rosy lips gave the lie to all poets' talk of "pearls."

Still laughing, she kissed him. She flung her arms around his neck and kissed him. He tried. He tried to remember who he was; the pressing problems of the *Enterprise*, his command responsibilities. But all he succeeded in doing was to remove the lovely arms from his neck.

"Who are you?" he said.

"Deela, the enemy," she said. "Isn't it delicious?"

He had thought he knew women. But nothing in his experience had prepared him for this dazzling combination of mischief and outrageously open attractiveness. "*You're the enemy?*"

She nodded her enchanting head. "Yes. You beamed me aboard yourself when you came up. A ridiculously long process . . ."

"*What have you done to my ship?*"

"Nothing."

He swung around to gesture to the motionless bridge people. "You call that nothing?"

"They're all right," she said. "They're just what they have always been. It's you who are different."

He stared around him. "Lieutenant Uhura . . . Mr. Sulu . . . every one of them . . ."

"Captain, they can't hear us. To their ears we sound like insects. That's *your* description, you know. Accurate, if unflattering. Really, nothing's wrong with them."

"Then what have you done to me?"

"Changed you. You are like me now. Your crew can't see you because of the acceleration. We both move now in the wink of an eye. There is a dreary scientific term for it—but all that really matters is that you can see me and talk to me and . . ." The creamy eyelids lowered over eyes the color of wet green leaves. ". . . and we can go on from there."

"Why?" Kirk said.

"Because I like you. Didn't you guess?" She came closer to him. She was ruffling his hair now; and he seemed unable to do a thing about it. The situation was out of hand . . . the presence of his crew . . . this public exhibition of endearments . . . her overwhelming beauty . . . his ship's predicament. He seized the caressing hands. They were warm, soft. It wasn't the answer.

"Is it because you like me that you've sabotaged my ship?"

"It hasn't been sabotaged. We just had to make some changes in it to adjust it to our tempo."

"We'?"

"Of course. My chief scientist and his men. I'm their Queen. You're going to be their King. You'll enjoy living on Scalos."

"And what happens to my ship—my men?"

"Oh, in a few of their moments they'll realize you've vanished. Then they'll look for you. But they won't find you. You're accelerated far beyond their powers to see. So they'll go on without you . . ."

He became conscious that her hands were still in his. He released them. She smiled at him. "Don't be stubborn. You *can't* go back to them. You must stay with me. Is that so dreadful a prospect?"

He reached for his phaser. "I won't kill you—but the 'stun' effect isn't very pleasant."

"Go ahead," she said. "Fire it at me."

He fired the stun button. She stepped aside and the beam passed harmlessly by her. She laughed at the look on his face. "Don't look so puzzled. My reactions are much too fast for such a crude weapon. Besides, I'm quite good at self-defense." She pulled a small instrument from her golden belt. Pointing it at his phaser, she fired it—and its beam tore the phaser out of his hand. "It can be set for stun and destroy, too," she said. "Like yours. Please accept what's happened. There's nothing you can do to change it."

His ship. Suppose he capitulated—and went with her? Went with her on the condition she made the *Enterprise* operational again and removed the device attached to the life support system? Spock could carry on . . .

His face was somber. She saw it set into grim lines

and cried, "Don't fret so! You'll feel better about it in a little while. It always happens this way . . . they're all upset at first. But it wears off and they begin to like it. You will, too. I promise . . ."

He turned on his heel and left her. She touched a medallion on the golden belt. "He's on his way to you, Rael. Be gentle with him," she said.

Kirk came at a run down the corridor to the life support center. He found what he expected. The *Enterprise* guards at its door were stiff, rigid. He skirted them; and was starting toward the door when a third guard in the Starship's uniform emerged from a corner. "Compton!" Kirk shouted.

Compton beamed at him. "Captain Kirk! So you made it here!"

"You've been accelerated, haven't you?" Kirk said.

"Yes, sir."

"Are they in there? They've got something hooked in to life support—and we've got to get rid of it. Come on!"

But Compton had barred his way with the Scalosian weapon. "Sorry, sir. Entry is forbidden."

"Who gave that order?"

"The commander, sir. You'll have to step back, please."

"I am your commander—and I order you to let me in."

"I am very sorry, sir. You are no longer my commander."

"Then who is? Deela? Are you working for her?"

Compton reached an arm back into the corner's shadows and drew out the other Scalosian girl. He spoke very earnestly. "At first I refused, sir—but I've never known anyone like Mira. She brought me aboard and I showed them the ship's operations, its bridge controls and life support. I didn't understand at first but I do now. I—I've never been in love before, sir."

Kirk stepped back. Then, lunging at Compton, he chopped the weapon away from him and raced for the door.

In the center, Rael, two other Scalosians beside him, was working on the small device. He looked up as Kirk plunged in. "Stun," he said to one of his men. The weapon

came up; and from behind Kirk, pushing him aside, Compton hurled himself at it. His try at protection was too late. The blast caught Kirk. He collapsed. Raging, Rael felled Compton with a blow. "You were ordered to stop him! Why did you disobey?"

Compton's mouth was bleeding. "You wanted to hurt him," he said.

"He was violent and to be subdued. Why did you disobey?"

"He—he was my Captain . . ."

Compton crumpled. "Go to him, Ekor," Rael said. The man with the weapon knelt beside Compton. Mira, who had drifted into the center, joined him. When he looked up, he said, "There is cell damage." The girl, her pretty face curious, stooped over Compton. "Don't be troubled," Rael told her. "Another will be secured for you." Nodding, she strolled out of the door.

It was Uhura who first noticed the empty command chair. "The captain!" she cried. "He's gone! Mr. Spock, the captain's gone! He was sitting there just a minute ago! He'd just drunk his coffee! There's the cup—on the arm of his chair! But where's the Captain?"

Spock had already left his station. "Mr. Sulu, what did you see?"

Sulu turned a bewildered face. "That's what happened, sir. He was there, putting his cup down—and then he wasn't there!"

There was a moment's silence before Spock said, "Mr. Sulu, did you drink coffee when the yeoman brought it around?"

"Yes, sir."

Spock eyed the bridge personnel. "Did anyone else?" he said.

"I had some," Scott said.

One by one Spock lifted their cups, sniffing at them. Then he sniffed at Kirk's.

"Was it the coffee?" Scott cried. "Are we going to vanish, too, like the captain?"

"The residue in these cups must be analyzed before I can answer that, Mr. Scott."

"And by *that* time—" Scott fell silent.

"I suggest," Spock said," that we remember the Captain's words. Make them take the next step. In the meantime we must determine effective countermoves. The con is yours, Mr. Scott. I shall be in the medical laboratory."

Deela sat on the deck in life support center, the head of the still unconscious Kirk in her lap. Rael, at the device, watched her as she smoothed the hair from his forehead. "I told you," she said, "to be gentle with him."

"He was violent. We had to stun him to avoid cell damage."

She looked over to where Compton lay in a neglected huddle. "Who damaged that one? You? I might have known it. I suppose he was violent, too."

"He turned against us," Rael said.

"And you lost your temper."

"He had to be destroyed. He had not completely accepted change. It is a stubborn species."

Deela's eyes were still on Compton. "I know what happens to them when they're damaged. You will control your temper, Rael. I don't want that to happen to mine. If they're so stubborn a species, perhaps they'll last longer."

"It may be."

"I hope so. They all go so soon. I want to keep this one a long time. He's pretty."

"He is inferior, Deela!"

"We disagree, Rael."

"You cannot allow yourself to feel an attachment to such a thing!"

"I can allow myself to do anything I want!" The flare of anger passed as quickly as it had come. "Oh, Rael, don't be that way," she coaxed. "Am I jealous of what you do?"

"I do my duty."

"So do I. And sometimes I allow myself to enjoy it."

As she spoke, Kirk's dazed eyes opened. Under his head he felt the softness of feminine thighs. He shook it to clear it; and looking up, saw Deela smiling at him. "Hello," she said.

He sat up—and recognized Rael. Leaping to his feet, he turned on Deela. "Is this what you wanted us for? To take over our ship?"

She rose in one graceful movement. "We need your help. And you and your ship are supplying it."

"And what does that device of yours have to do with the supply?"

"Hush," she said. "I'll tell you everything you want to know. And you'll approve of it."

"Approve!" he shouted. "We're your prisoners!"

"Hardly," she said. "You're free to go wherever you want."

Kirk rushed to the life support unit. Instead of interfering, Rael stepped aside. "Go ahead, Captain. Our mechanism is not yet completely linked to your support system but it is in operating order. Study it if you wish. I advise you not to touch it."

Kirk's eyes narrowed. He eyed the small device; and spotting its connecting switch, extended a wary hand to it. He snatched it back, the Scalosians watching him expressionlessly. Then, despite the shock of contact with it, he grabbed it boldly with both hands. They froze on it. Deela ran to him; and, careful not to touch the switch herself, released his hands.

"He told you not to touch it!" She folded his numbed palms between hers, warming them. "The cold will soon pass," she said.

Rael spoke. "Our mechanism has its own self-defense arrangement. You should have heeded me."

Kirk jerked his still icy hands from Deela's. He'd had enough of these aliens; and, feeling a sudden compunction for Compton, sprawled and untended in his heap, he went to him quickly to kneel beside him. But what had been the young and vigorous Compton was now withered by age, mummified as though dried by a thousand years of death. He looked up in horror and Rael said, "In your struggle with Compton, you damaged some of his cells. Those newly accelerated to our tempo's level are sensitive to cell damage. They age very rapidly and die."

Kirk got to his feet. "Is this what you have prepared for us?"

"We all die," Rael said. "Even on Scalos."

Kirk looked around at the bland faces. Where was the way back into his own time . . . the time of Spock . . . of McCoy . . . of Scotty? A sense of un-

terable loneliness overwhelmed him. He walked out of the center.

Behind him Deela cried, "Rael, why did you lie to him? He didn't damage the dead one! You did!"

Rael shrugged. "Perhaps he'll be less violent now."

"There was no reason to make him feel worse than he does!"

"What do you care about his feelings?"

She changed her tactics. "Rael," she said, "he's not one of us. You know he's temporary." But Rael still stooped to his work. She sighed; and touching the medallion on her belt, listened. "He's in the medical laboratory trying to communicate with the Vulcan. He likes that one of the pointed ears. His species seems capable of much affection."

"I have noted that," Rael said stiffly.

"Oh, stop sulking! Accept it. We've had to accept it all our lives! Don't make it worse!"

Rael seized her fiercely in his arms. Her hand was reaching to caress his face when she broke free, laughing and breathless. "Not now," she said. "Go back to work."

He didn't. Instead, he watched her as she followed Kirk out of the center. She found the door of the medical laboratory open. Ignoring the rigid figures of Spock and McCoy, she went to the communicator console where Kirk was dictating. "Kirk to Spock," he was saying. "I have fed all facts ascertainable into the computer banks—" He broke off as he saw Deela.

She studied him—a beautiful woman estimating a man for her own reasons. "Go ahead," she said. "It won't accomplish anything. But it may be historically valuable."

Eyes on her, he continued. "Hyper-acceleration is the key, Mr. Spock. We are in their control because of this acceleration. They are able to speed others up to their level as they did to Compton and me. Those so treated then exist at their accelerated tempo, become eventually docile but when—"

"Damaged," Deela said.

Kirk gave her a mock bow. "When damaged, they age incredibly fast as if the accelerated living—"

"Burns them out," Deela said.

"Destroys them. Compton is destroyed. The device af-

fixed to life support produces an icy cold. It is my belief it will turn the *Enterprise* into a gigantic deep-freeze and for purposes the Scalosians alone know—”

“Quite correct,” Deela said.

Kirk was ironic. “My opinion has been verified. Their mechanism has its own protective shield, preventing physical contact. I have no means of destroying it. But its destruction is imperative. I am dictating this in the presence of their Queen who has denied none of it. Why she has permitted me to—”

Leaning forward, the cloud of her hair brushing his shoulder, Deela spoke for the record into the communicator.

“Because by the time you hear this, it will be too late. Our mechanism will be activated.”

He turned to look at the two stiffened figures of his friends. The ice would creep through the *Enterprise* to stiffen them forever in a shroud of frost. He swung to Deela. “*Why? Why are you doing this?*”

“You really want to know? In a short time, it won’t matter to you a bit. You’ll be quite happy about it, as Compton was.”

“I want to know.”

“Oh dear. You *are* so stubborn. It should be obvious to one with your reasoning powers that we’re doing it because we have to.” She pushed the shining cloud of hair back. “A long time ago, we used to be like you. Then our country was almost destroyed by volcanic eruptions. The water was polluted and radiation was released. That changed us. It accelerated us . . .”

He waited. It was possible. The long-term effects of radiation were still unpredictable. “The children died,” she said. “Most of the women found they couldn’t bear any more. All our men had become sterile. We had to mate outside our own people . . .”

A doomed race. Listening, Kirk seemed to know what he was going to hear. He felt a stab of pity. She gave him a sad little smile. “So, whenever a space ship came by, we sent out calls for help. But accelerating their crews to our level burned them out . . .” She came to him and put her head on his shoulder. “Don’t you see? Must I give you every detail? We’re going to take you down with us. Maybe

one or two others of your crew, too. We have to. We'll be kind to you. I *do* like you, you know."

"And the rest of my crew?" Kirk said.

"It's as you said. They'll be kept frozen in a reduced animation we know how to suspend. It won't do them any harm. We'll save them for our future needs. You won't last forever. You know that." At the look on his face, a cry tore from her. "Captain, we have the right to survive!"

"Not at the cost you impose," he said.

"You'd do exactly the same thing! You came charging down into that life support room just as soon as you knew it was threatened! You'd have killed every one of my people if you could have . . ."

"You had invaded my ship! You were endangering my crew!"

"There's no difference!" she cried.

"There's every difference. You are the aggressors!"

"We didn't ask for our situation. We're simply handling it the only way we know how to—the way our parents did and their parents before them . . ."

"Would you call it a real solution?"

She looked at him, silent. "Have you tried any other answer? Deela, tell your scientist to disconnect his construction—to destroy it! I promise you we'll use every skill we have to help you. We'll even move you to another planet if you want that. We'll call on the most brilliant minds in our Federation for help!"

She shook her head. "We *have* tried other ways. We tried to make the transition to your time level. Those who made the attempt died. We're trapped, Captain, just as you are now. I'm sorry for what it's going to do to you but I can't change it. And you can't change me."

The medallion on her belt beeped. She touched it and Rael's voice said, "Go to the Transporter Room, Deela. Signal me when you're there and beam down."

"With the captain?"

She was frowning, concentrated on the medallion—and Kirk grabbed his chance. He pulled his dictated tape partially out of the computer so that Spock would note it. He heard Rael say, "Yes. I'll activate our mechanism and follow you. I'm setting it to allow enough time for all of us to get off the ship. But don't delay, Deela."

Kirk had raced for the lab door. Behind him, Deela shouted, "The captain's gone!"

"Go after him, Deela!"

But his headstart had given him time to make the Transporter Room. He rushed to its console, ripped out some wire; and had it shut again to conceal the damage as Deela ran in.

"Why did you leave me?" she demanded.

"I panicked," Kirk said.

The green eyes swept over him. "I don't believe that," she said.

"Can we leave before he activates your device?" he said.

She looked at him, her smooth brow puckered suspiciously. Then she touched the medallion. "Rael, we're in the Transporter Room. You can—activate."

"Beam him down at once."

Still doubtful, she gestured Kirk to the platform. At the console, she pushed a switch. It swung, limp—and the smile in the green eyes deepened. "What did you do to the Transporter, Captain?"

"Nothing," he said. "It must be what your people did. Try the switch again."

She obeyed. Then she touched the medallion communicator. "The Transporter isn't working," she said quietly.

"What did he do to it?"

She delayed her answer. The impishness glinted in her eyes. She was enjoying herself. It was fun to pretend she didn't know what she knew. "Nothing," she told Rael. "He didn't have time. I think it's a—what do they call it? A malfunction. You'd better not activate yet." She turned to Kirk, the amusement still in her face. "What would you say it is, Captain?"

He assumed a thoughtful look. "Well, our technicians reported a loss of energy. That may be it."

She spoke solemnly to the medallion. "The captain says his technicians—"

"I heard him. Do you expect me to believe him?"

It was the Queen in her who spoke. "I expect you to check into all possible causes." She turned the medallion off to smile the impish smile at Kirk. "If I had a suspicious

nature," she said, "I'd say you sabotaged the Transporter, Captain. To buy time."

"Of course," he said.

She laughed with delight. "Aren't we the innocent pair? I despise devious people, don't you?"

Kirk nodded gravely. "I believe in honest relationships, myself." He hesitated. "Deela, you've never seen my quarters. Before we leave, wouldn't you like to?"

Their eyes met. "Are they like you?" she said. "Austere, efficient—but in their own way, handsome?"

"Yes," he said.

In his cabin, the first thing she went to was his mirror. "Oh, I look a perfect fright! All this running about has left me a perfect fright, hasn't it?"

She lifted a brush from the dresser and flung her head over, the shining hair cascading to the floor. She parted the chestnut curtain with a finger, peeking at him. Then she laughed, tossed the hair back and began to brush it, a delicious woman attracting what she knows her preening has attracted. An electric spark flashed between them.

"Are you married, Captain?"

"No."

"No family, no attachments? Oh, I see. You're married to your career and never look at a woman."

"You're mistaken," he said. "I look, if she's pretty enough."

"I wondered when you'd say something nice to me. Am I more presentable now?"

"A bit," he said.

She was facing him, the brush still in her hand. "It was quite delightful kissing you when you couldn't see me. But now that you do see me, don't you think . . . ?"

He strode to her, took her in his arms and kissed her. She drew back—but he had felt her body tremble. Her arms were reaching for his neck when she whirled out of his embrace, her weapon out. "Unfair!" she cried. "To try and take it in the middle of a kiss!"

She thrust it back into her belt. "But I'll forgive you. I'd have been disappointed in you if you *hadn't* tried to take it!"

"Was I too crude?" Kirk said.

"Just don't try it again, that's all. You're so vulnerable to cell damage. All I have to do is scratch you." She held up pink nails. Then she lifted his arms and placed them around her waist. "You'll come around to our way of thinking sooner or later. And it will be better sooner than later. That's a promise."

In the medical lab, Spock, still functioning in normal time, was about to insert a tape of his own into the computer when McCoy called him. "Have a look at this, Spock. There's no question about it. The same substance is in the captain's coffee as in the Scalosian water. But not a trace of it in the other cups."

Spock spoke to Christine. "Nurse, program that information and see if we can isolate counteragents."

A mosquito whined. Spock, striking at air, turned to McCoy. "Did you just hear—"

"I've been hearing that whine ever since we beamed down to Scalos."

"We brought it with us. And I know what it is. I shall be on the bridge." They stared after him, puzzled, as he raced out of the lab. He was still running when he brought up short on the bridge. "Lieutenant Uhura, replay that Scalosian distress call on my viewer!"

"Yes, sir."

Rael's image appeared on the screen. Spock leaned forward in his chair, waiting for the voice. It came. "Those of us who are left have taken shelter in this area. We have no explanation for what has been happening to us. Our number is now five . . ."

It was enough. Spock twisted a dial on the viewer; and the voice, rising in pitch, became incoherent babble, went higher still until it turned into recognizable whine. Spock slowed the voice back into words, lifted it up again into the whine—and nodded. On the screen, the image, rushed faster and faster, had first blurred. Then it vanished.

"So," Spock said to nobody.

Back in the lab, McCoy had made a discovery, too. Banging away the whining mosquito at his ear, he spoke into the intercom. "McCoy to Spock."

"Spock, here."

"Did you leave a tape in the computer? I've tried reading it but I get nothing but that whine . . ."

"Bring it to the bridge at once, Doctor."

Kirk's voice. They listened to it on their separate edges of eternity, each of them reading his own fate in Compton's and Kirk's.

". . . Its destruction is imperative. I am dictating this in the presence of their Queen who has denied none of it. Why she has permitted me—"

Deela's voice came. "Because by the time you hear this, it will be too late. The mechanism will be activated . . ."

Silence fell over the bridge people. Spock leaned swiftly to his console. "I read no change in life support," he said. "Lieutenant Uhura, alert the rest of the crew."

Scott rose and went to him. "We could use phasers to cut through the wall, bypass the force field and get to that mechanism . . ."

"Mr. Scott, we cannot cope with them on our time level."

"Is there a way to cope with them on theirs?"

"A most logical suggestion, Mr. Scott. Please stand by in the Transporter Room. Dr. McCoy, I should appreciate your assistance."

They left with him, their faces blank with bewilderment. Uhura followed them with her eyes. "Mr. Sulu, if nothing has happened yet, wouldn't it mean that the captain has managed to buy time, somehow?"

"Yes," Sulu said. "But how much?"

Rael had restored sufficient energy to the Transporter for a beam-down. But his success had a bitter taste. His fancy persisted in tormenting him with present and future images of Deela with Kirk. Finally, he touched his own medallion.

"Deela . . ."

She didn't answer. Languorously, she was combing her hair to rights before Kirk's mirror. He watched her from a chair. Then he got up, smiling at her reflection in the mirror. As he kissed the back of her neck, she turned full into his arms.

"Deela!"

Rael stood in the cabin doorway. The hot fury in him exploded. He reached for her; and seizing a lamp, hurled it at Kirk. Kirk ducked it. Cell damage! In his accelerated state, this could be no ordinary fight. Deela screamed, "Rael, stop it! Don't hurt him! Rael! Captain, get out . . ."

Grabbing her weapon, she fired it at the lamp. But Rael lunged at Kirk again, barehanded. She fired again, spinning him around with the force beam. "That's enough!" she cried. "Did he damage you, Captain?"

"No."

"How very fortunate for you, Rael! Don't try anything like that again!"

"Then don't torment me. You know what I feel."

"I don't care what you feel. Keep that aspect of it to yourself. What I do is necessary, and you have no right to question it." She paused to add more quietly, "Allow me the dignity of liking the man I select."

He stood sullen but subdued. "Is the Transporter repaired?" she said.

"I have more work to do."

"Then do it." He left. She remained silent, more depressed by the scene than she cared to show. After a long moment, she spoke. "He loves me. I adored him when I was a child. I suppose I still do." She made an effort to recover their former mood. "I must say, you behaved better than he did."

"I hope so," Kirk said.

Something in his manner startled her. "What did you say?"

"That I hope I behaved well."

She was staring at him. "And nothing troubles you now?"

"Why are we here?"

"Our leaving was delayed. Don't you remember? You damaged the Transporter."

"That was wrong," Kirk said.

"It certainly was."

"But we are going to Scalos?"

"Do you want to?"

"Yes."

"What about your crew? Aren't you worried about them?"

"They'll be all right here."

Her mouth twisted with distaste. "What's the matter?" Kirk said.

"You've completely accepted the situation, haven't you? You even like it."

"Am I behaving incorrectly?"

"No." Then she burst out petulantly. "Oh, I liked you better before! Stubborn, independent . . . and irritating! Like Rael!"

"Those are undesirable qualities," Kirk said.

But she was brooding over her discovery. "Maybe that's why I liked you so much. Because you were like him."

The muscles of Kirk's face ached under the blandness of his smile. But he held it. She touched her medallion. "Rael, you don't have to worry about him. He's made the . . . adjustment."

McCoy was examining the vial of liquid he had processed. "It's finished," he told Spock wearily.

Spock took the vial; and, mixing some of its contents with the Scalosian water, exposed the result to an electronic device. "It counteracts the substance most effectively, Doctor."

"Under laboratory conditions. The question is, will it work in the human body? And the second question is, how do we get it to the captain?"

Spock poured some of the Scalosian water into a glass. He lifted the glass in a toast to McCoy. "By drinking their water." He drained the glass.

"Spock!" You don't know what the effects—"

But Spock was savoring the taste. "It is . . . somewhat stimulating." He paused. "And yes, Doctor, you seem to be moving very slowly. Fascinating."

He winked out. McCoy sank down in a chair, his eyes on the vacancy where Spock had stood.

Rael, his face intent, twisted a knob on his refrigerating mechanism. When it flared into red life, he adjusted another one. He nodded to himself as it began to pulsate, its

throb dimming the lights of the life support unit. He touched his communicator medallion. "The arrangement is activated, Deela. Go to the Transporter Room and beam-down at once. The others have already left."

Scott was at the console. Unseeing, unmoving, he didn't turn as Kirk entered the room with Deela. Time, time, Kirk thought—was there no way to gain more time? He looked at the Transporter platform that was to maroon him on Scalos, and Deela said, "Come, Captain. We are leaving your pretty ship. Your crew will be all right. You said so yourself."

He smiled at her. "Know something?" he said. "I think I'll make sure of it." Then he caught her; and wrenching her weapon from her belt, ran for the door.

She screamed into her medallion. "Rael! He broke away! He's armed—"

"I'm ready for him!"

Kirk was racing down the corridor to life support, ducking the stony figures of his crewmen. The beam of a phaser lanced the darkness—and he brought up short. Then he saw Spock. They didn't speak. They didn't need to. A vicious *ping* came from the open life support door. Together, they dodged, split, and, weapons out, plunged through the door.

Rael fired again, missed—and Kirk stunned him with Deela's weapon. At the same moment, Spock's phaser beam struck the Scalosian machine. It continued to flare and throb. Kirk aimed his weapon at it. It burst into flame, melted and was still.

"Nice to see you, Mr. Spock," Kirk said.

"Rael!"

It was Deela. She ran to the slumped body, feeling for its heart. Satisfied, she kissed Rael's lips. Then she looked up at Kirk. "You're very clever, Captain. You tricked me. I should have known you'd never adjust." She had Rael in her arms. "What shall we expect from you?"

"We could put you in suspended animation until we determine how to use you," he said. "What do you want us to do with you?"

She was close to tears. "Oh, Captain, don't make a game of this! We've lost. You've won. Dispose of us."

"If I send you back to Scalos, you'll undoubtedly play the same trick on the next space ship that passes."

She was openly weeping now. "There'll never be another one come by. You'll warn them. Your Federation will quarantine this entire area."

"I'm sure it will."

"And we'll die out. We'll solve your problem that way. And ours."

"Will you accept help?" Kirk said.

"We can't be helped. I've told you . . ."

"Madam," Spock said, "I respectfully suggest that as we are advanced beyond your rating on the Industrial Scale, we may be able to be of some help."

"Our best people in the Federation will work on it. Will you accept our offer, Deela, and go in peace?"

Clearly, there were aspects to Kirk's nature she had not suspected. She looked at him wonderingly. After a moment, the old mischief glinted in her green eyes. She shrugged. "What have we to lose?"

She looked down at Rael. He was recovering consciousness. "We have lost," she told him quietly. "It is you and I who will transport down to Scalos."

He smiled up at her. "Soon," he said.

As they took their places on the platform, Deela turned to Kirk at the console. "Now about your problem, Captain. I note that your Vulcan friend, too, has been accelerated."

Spock spoke. "If you will devote yourself exclusively to the concerns of Scalos, Madam, we shall be very happy to stay and take care of the *Enterprise*."

"Spock," Kirk said, "remind me sometime to tell you how I've missed you."

"Yes, Captain."

"You could find life on Scalos very pleasant, Captain," Deela urged.

"And brief," Kirk said.

"Do I really displease you so much?"

"I can think of nothing I'd like more than staying with you. Except staying alive."

"Will you visit us, Captain?"

"Energize!"

“Captain . . . Captain . . . goodbye . . .”

Spock had moved the controls. They dissolved—and were gone. Kirk stared at the empty platform a long moment. Then, turning briskly to Spock, he said, “And now, how do we get back?”

“Doctor McCoy and I have synthesized a possible counteragent to the Scalosian water, sir. Regrettably, we lacked the opportunity to test it.”

“Then let’s test it.” He took the solution Spock gave him and swallowed it. Deela and Rael. It was all for the best. You couldn’t have everything you wanted. Sex—a peculiar magnetic field. Her eyes . . . like wet green leaves . . .

Preoccupied, he vaguely heard Spock say, “Your motion seems to be slowing down, sir.”

Kirk started to speak. “Missssterrr . . . Spock!” He drew a deep breath. The counteragent had worked. They were back in their own time! Then, abruptly, he realized that Spock hadn’t answered. He wheeled—and before his eyes, Spock vanished.

“Spock! Spock, where are you?”

Scott came through the door to halt in midstride. “*Captain Kirk!*” he yelled. “Where in blazes did you come from?”

There was no cause to panic. Bones would have more of the counteragent. But Vulcan physiology was a tricky thing. What had worked for him would not necessarily work for Spock. What then? A permanent isolation in an accelerated universe? Kirk had whipped out his communicator before he remembered it was useless, dead as the ship itself. The bridge! He had to get to the bridge! Search parties? Futile. They couldn’t see him. If Spock were there beside him, he, Kirk himself, couldn’t see him.

He ignored the bridge’s hubbub of welcome. Passing Uhura’s station, he snapped, “Lieutenant, try to set our recorder at maximum speed . . .”

“Yes, sir.” But the lights on her console had gone mad. The rapidity of their flashing turned them into blur. And all around him other boards and panels were affected by the same dementia. Suddenly, relief engulfed him. Grinning, he spoke to Scott. “I think we’ve found Mr. Spock. Lieutenant Uhura, are your circuits clearing?”

Her face was startled. "Yes, sir."

"Mr. Sulu?"

"Clearing, sir."

"Lieutenant Uhura, open all channels." He seized his mike. "Captain to crew. Repairs to the ship are being completed by Mr. Spock. We will resume normal operations . . . just about immediately."

The air beside his chair seemed to thicken. It solidified. Kirk looked at the elegantly pointed ears. "Greetings, Mr. Spock. My compliments on your repair work."

"Thank you, Captain. I have found it all a most fascinating experience."

"I'm glad," Kirk said. "I'm glad on many counts." He got up to pace the round of the stations. "Malfunctions—any anywhere?" Faces beamed at him. He returned to his chair—and the viewing screen lit up. On it the five Scalosians came back into view, Deela's surpassing loveliness transcendent.

"Sorry, sir," Uhura said. "I touched the tape button accidentally."

He leaned back in his chair, eyes on the screen. Deela's face seemed to fill the world. The magnetic field between them—and susceptible to no analysis. The images winked off, leaving the screen blank.

"Goodbye, Deela," he said softly.

Bread and Circuses

(Gene Roddenberry
and Gene L. Coon)

There was no doubt about it. The space debris spotted by the *Enterprise* scanners was all that was left of the *Beagle*, an S.S. survey vessel posted as missing for six years. A mixture of personal belongings and portions of instrumentation, the floating junk contained no evidence of human bodies. The conclusion was plain to Kirk. The *Beagle's* crew had managed to beam down to a planet before catastrophe had destroyed their ship.

"Mr. Chekov," he said, "compute present drift of the wreckage."

"Computed and on the board, sir."

Kirk glanced at the figures. Then he rose and went to his Science officer. "Mr. Spock, assuming that stuff has been drifting at the same speed and direction for six years . . . ?"

Spock completed a reading on his library computer. "It would have come from planet four in Star System eight nine two, directly ahead, Captain."

Chekov called. "Only one-sixteenth parsec away, sir. We could be there in seconds!"

Kirk nodded to him. "Standard orbit around the planet. There may be survivors there, Mr. Chekov."

Spock had more information on the lost *Beagle*. "She was a small Class Four stardrive vessel, crew of forty-seven, commanded by—" He withdrew his head from his hooded viewer. "I believe you know him, sir. Captain R. M. Merrick."

"Yes, at the Academy." It had been a long time ago; and it wasn't too pleasant a memory at that. Merrick had been dropped in his fifth year. Rumor had it he'd gone into the merchant service. True or false, he'd known him. If, by some chance, Merrick was down there, abandoned on that star . . .

Kirk turned to the brige screen. They were coming up on the planet. The pinpoint of light it had been was enlarging, growing rounder, transforming itself into a bluish ball, not unlike Earth. But the oceans and land masses were different.

He said so and Spock shook his head. "In shape only, Captain. The proportion of land to water is exactly as on your home planet. Density 5.5 . . . diameter 7917 at the equator . . . atmosphere 78% nitrogen, 21% oxygen. Again, exactly like Earth." He looked up, gesturing to his viewer-computer. "And I picked up indications of large cities."

"Development?" Kirk said.

"No signs of atomic energy yet. But far enough along for radio communications, power transportation, an excellent road system."

Uhura slewed around from her station. "Captain! I think I can pick up something visual! A 'news broadcast' using a system I believe was once called 'video'."

"'Television' was the colloquial word," Spock observed.

"Put it on the screen, Lieutenant," Kirk said.

For a moment the bridge viewer held only the picture of the planet at orbital distance. Then, as Uhura made a new adjustment, the picture dissolved into the image of a city street—one that, apart from some subtle differences, could have been a city street of Earth's 1960's. Clearly a newscast, the scene showed onlookers in clothes of the period watching police herd up a small group of people in loin cloths.

An announcer's voice, filtered, spoke from the screen.

“. . . and in the Forum District today, police rounded up still another collection of dissidents. Authorities are as yet unable to explain these fresh outbreaks of treasonable disobediences by well-treated, well-protected slaves . . .”

A shocked, amazed silence fell over the *Enterprise* bridge. But the bland announcer-voice went on. “And now, turning to the world of sports, we bring you taped reports of the arena games last night . . .”

Two men appeared on the Starship's screen. They were naked except for leather aprons. Helmeted, carrying oblong shields, they were armed with ancient Roman swords. They advanced toward each other. One attacked—and the announcer's voice said, “The first heat involved amateurs, a pair of petty thieves from city prison. Conducted, however, with traditional weapons, it provided some amusement for a few moments . . .”

The attacker saw his chance. He lunged, driving his sword into the heart of his opponent. To a background of noisy cheers, he stepped back from the bloody body, raising his sword in salute to the arena's galleries. Over the cheers, the announcer said, “The winner will meet another contestant in tonight's games. In the second heat we'll have a more professional display in the spirit of our splendid past, when gladiator Claudius Marcus killed the last of the barbarians, William B. Harrison, in an excellent example of . . .”

Static crashed. The picture faded to be replaced by the planet view.

An appalled Uhura, collecting herself, said, “Transmission lost, Captain. Shall I try to get it back?”

Kirk didn't answer. Instead, both puzzled and astounded, he turned to Spock. “Slaves and gladiators? Some kind of Twentieth-century Rome?”

Spock's face was unusually grave as he lifted it from his computer. “Captain, the man described as the ‘barbarian’ is also listed here—Flight Officer William B. Harrison of the S.S. *Beagle*. At least there *were* survivors down there.”

A landing party. There was no alternative. Kirk wheeled. “Ready the Transporter Room, Mr. Sulu.”

They arrived at the base of a shallow canyon. Glancing up at the rocky overhang, Kirk said, "You could have selected a more attractive place, Mr. Spock."

His first officer was already taking tricorder readings. "Practical, however, Captain. Unpopulated but close to that city we saw. We should not be observed." He looked up from his instrument. "Fascinating how similar is this atmosphere to your Twentieth century's! Moderately industrialized pollution containing substantial amounts of carbon monoxide and partially consumed hydrocarbons."

McCoy said, "The word was 'smog'."

"I believe that *was* the term, Doctor. I had no idea you were such a historian."

"I'm not. I just wanted to stop you before we got the whole lecture. Jim, do we know anything at all about this planet?"

Kirk shook his head. "The *Beagle* was doing the first survey on this star sector when it disappeared."

"Then the 'prime directive' is in full effect, Captain."

"Yes, Mr. Spock. 'No identification of self or mission: no interference with social development of said planet.'"

McCoy nodded ruefully. "No references to space, to other worlds or more advanced civilizations." He grinned. "Once, just once, I'd like to land someplace and say, 'Behold, I am the Archangel Gabriel' . . ."

Spock cocked a brow at Kirk's chuckle. "I fail to see any humor in such a masquerade."

McCoy eyed him. "I guess because you could hardly claim to be an angel. But with those ears, Spock, if you landed somewhere carrying a *pitchfork* . . ."

A rifle cracked. Its bullet kicked up the dust at Kirk's feet—and a male voice said, "Don't move! Hands in the air!"

"Complete Earth parallel," Spock remarked. "The language here is English . . ."

The second shot struck close to his feet.

"I said don't move!" the voice shouted.

"I think he means it, Mr. Spock," Kirk said.

Spock looked down at the bullet mark. "That would seem to be evident, sir."

They raised their hands. Above their heads, gravel scuffed to the sound of approaching feet. A big, burly man

leaped down from the overhang. Three other men followed him. All wore ragged "slave" loincloths and the alert look of fugitives. Though their rifles were conventionally old-fashioned, they used them skilfully to cover the *Enterprise* trio. Their uniforms seemed to anger the big man. He glared at them with hostility and suspicion.

"Who are you?" he said.

Kirk spoke. "We come from another—'province'."

The man was staring at Spock's ears. "Where are you from? Are those ears?"

"I call them ears," Spock told him mildly.

"Are you trying to be funny?"

"Never," Spock assured him. He spoke to Kirk. "Colloquial Twentieth-century English. Truly an *amazing* parallel."

Their captor was clearly baffled. Kirk undertook to enlighten him. "We come from a place quite a distance from here. I doubt if you've ever heard—"

He was interrupted. Pointing to their clothing, the big leader turned to his men. "Uniforms. Probably some new Praetorian Guard unit." His eyes went back to Kirk. "I should kill you here and now . . . but Septimus would probably be displeased. You can take your hands down. Our rifles are at your backs. Move on!" He gestured ahead of them.

They obeyed. After about twenty minutes of hard slugging over the rocky terrain, a man in a tattered loincloth stepped from behind a boulder, rifle at the ready.

"Praetorian spies," the big man told him. "I'm taking them to Septimus."

They were prodded through an entrance of a cave. In its dimness they saw that it held a number of people, the men loinclothed, the women in coarse tunics. At sight of the strangers, they all gathered around an elderly man. Under his gray hair, his features were distinguished and benign.

"I didn't harm them, Septimus," the big man said. "Much as I wanted to."

He received a quiet nod of approval. "Keep always in your mind, Flavius, that our way is peace."

McCoy spoke. "For which we are grateful. We are men of peace ourselves."

"Ah? Are you also children of the sun?"

McCoy hesitated. "If you mean a worship of some sort, we represent many beliefs . . ."

"There is only one true belief!" Flavius shouted. "They are Roman butchers sent by the First Citizen!"

Kirk addressed him directly. "Are we like any Roman you ever saw?"

"Then are you slaves like ourselves?" Septimus asked.

"No. Our people do not believe in slavery."

Flavius cried, "A Roman lie! We must kill them, Septimus!"

Spock stepped forward. "Sir, we have come here looking for some friends. Forty-seven of them who . . ." he paused, the "prime directive" in mind . . . "were 'stranded' here six years ago. They wore clothing similar to ours. Have you heard of such men?"

Nobody had. Flavius, still suspicious, said, "Septimus, I know killing is evil but sometimes it's necessary!"

"No."

"They've located our hiding-place! It's better that a few of them die than all of us!"

One of Flavius' men spoke up. "He's right, Septimus. I don't care for myself, but I've brought my wife here, too, my children . . ."

"If they don't die, Septimus, it's the same as if you killed us all yourself!"

Flavius rallied more shouts of agreement. Kirk could see that Septimus was wavering. Rifles were lifting. "Wait," he said. "I can prove we're telling the truth! A small device, Flavius. I'll bring it out slowly . . ."

Fingers were on triggers as he carefully reached for his communicator. He held it out so that it could be openly seen. Then, very slowly, he opened it and placed it to his lips. "Kirk to *Enterprise*. Come in . . ."

Scott's filtered voice was audible in the cave's sudden silence. "Scott here, Captain."

"Lock in on my transmission. Scan us."

"Scanning, sir."

"Including ourselves, how many people in this cave?"

"Twelve, Captain."

Flavius and Septimus looked quickly around, count-

ing. There were indeed twelve people in the cave. Astonished, they looked at Kirk. He smiled at them.

"Maintain scanning, Scotty: we'll continue checking in. Kirk out." He closed the communicator, turning to Septimus. "The *Enterprise* is our vessel . . . sailing out at sea. The voice belongs to one of my crew. That's all I can tell you. If it's not sufficient, then I suppose you'll have to kill us."

Rifles were lowering. Septimus, impressed, spoke to Flavius. "Tell me the Empire has an instrument like that—and you can kill them. Otherwise, accept them as friends."

The tension subsided. A woman came forward, offering a pannikin of milk to Kirk. He smiled at her, drank it and seized his first chance to take in the cave. The beds of the truant slaves were rough-hewn rock ledges. What furniture their retreat contained was equally primitive, battered pots and pans—the crude necessities of their harsh existence. Yet the *Enterprise* men were beginning to feel at ease in the cave. Perhaps it was due to the abruptly warm friendliness of the people's effort to make amends for their original reception of the guests.

It was difficult to credit the way they lived to their era. Telecasts—and that rough log table with its torn magazines and newspapers. Was this star a strange example of Hodgkins Law of parallel planet development? A world much like his own back in the Twentieth century—that was undeniable. But on this odd "Earth," Rome never fell. It survived; and was apparently ruled by emperors who could trace their line back to the Caesars of two thousand years ago.

The fate of the *Beagle* crew uppermost in his mind, Kirk approached Septimus again. But the old man shook his head. "No, Captain. I'm sure I would have heard of the arrival of other men like you."

Kirk persisted. "Have you heard . . . let's say, an impossible story about men coming from the sky? Or from other worlds?"

Septimus smiled. "There are no other worlds."

"The stars . . ."

"Lights shining through from heaven. It is where the sun is. Blessed be the sun."

"Yes, of course. Excuse me . . ."

Spock, holding a magazine, had beckoned. It was titled *The Gallian*; and its cover was the photograph of a gladiator, fully armed with sword, shield, breastplate and helmet. The caption under the picture read, THE NEW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION.

Kirk, leafing through it, came on a colored drawing of a sleek automobile. The ad copy told him its name and purpose. It said: THE JUPITER EIGHT FOR ROYAL COMFORT.

"Fascinating," Spock said.

"The Jupiter Eight. Conventional combustion engine . . . you were right about that smog, Spock. But Jupiter cars? And here's Mars Toothpaste . . . Neptune Bath Salts . . ."

"Taken from the names of false gods," Septimus said. "When I was a Senator, I worshiped them, too . . . but I heard the words of the Sun. I became a brother. For that they made me a slave."

"Septimus . . . will you help us?" Kirk said. "We must go into the city. We know that one of our missing friends was seen there recently . . ."

"My advice to you is to leave this place . . . to go back where you came from."

"We can't do that. Perhaps you have heard this name. 'Merrick' or 'Captain Merrick'?"

Septimus backed away, his face changing. Kirk was suddenly aware of Flavius' watchful eyes.

"Merikus?" Septimus said.

"Merrick. The leader of our friends . . ."

"Merikus is First Citizen!" Flavius cried. "Butcher!"

"It could not be the same man," Kirk told him. "Captain Merrick is no butcher."

Spock interposed. "A logical question if I may, Captain." He addressed Septimus. "How many years ago did this Merikus become First Citizen?"

"Perhaps five years . . ."

"Almost six!" Flavius was openly hostile now. "I was there when he became Lord of the Games! If he is your friend, you are no friends of ours!"

Kirk thought fast. "Septimus, it is one of our most important laws that none of us may interfere in the affairs of

others. If Merrick is Merikus, he is in violation of that law! He will be taken away and punished. Help us find out the truth of this!"

"I must discuss it with the others," Septimus said. Beckoning to Flavius, he moved away to his people, leaving the *Enterprise* men alone.

Spock said, "Curious, Captain. The similarity of the names. Were you told why Merrick was dropped from the Space Academy?"

"He failed a psycho-simulator test. All it takes is a split second of indecision." He shook his head. "Hardly the kind who becomes a strongman butcher."

"Odd that these people worship the sun," McCoy said.

"Why, Doctor?"

"Because, my dear Spock, it's *illogical*. Rome had no sun worshipers. Why would they parallel Rome in every way but that?"

"Hold it," Kirk said. He had seen Septimus and Flavius returning.

"We have decided," the old man announced. "Flavius will guide you. We will provide you with suitable clothing. But I caution you—take great care. The police are everywhere. May the blessings of the sun be upon you."

A woman shyly approached Spock, a worn scarf in her hand. He understood. Stooping, he waited until she had bound it around his ears.

The outskirts of the city made good ambush country, rough, wooded, brushy. At a thick copse of low-branched trees, Flavius signaled for a halt. "We wait here until dark," he said. "The police seek everywhere."

"Were you a slave, too, Flavius?" Kirk asked.

The big man straightened proudly. "You are barbarians, indeed, not to know of Flavius Maximus. For seven years, I was the most successful gladiator in the province."

"Then you heard the word of the sun?"

"Yes. The words of peace and freedom. It was not easy for me to believe. I was trained to fight. But the words were true."

"There are many other things I would—" Kirk broke

off as the ex-gladiator held up his hand, alarm leaping into his face. "Quickly . . ."

"Hold! Don't move! Hands in the air!"

There was a warning rattle of machine-gun fire. Bullets tore leaves from the trees. A half-dozen policemen broke from cover, all armed with oddly-shaped submachine guns. Yet, topping their uniforms were Roman helmets, and at the waist of each hung a short Roman sword. Their leader stepped in close, his hard face cold. "Four fleeing fish! A fine haul—" He stopped. Staring at Flavius, he shouted, "By all the gods, Flavius Maximus!"

With a muffled oath, Flavius lunged at him. One of the others struck him down with the butt of his gun. The *Enterprise* men, directly under the guns, were unable to move. The hard-jawed leader grinned as he looked down at Flavius. "You have been too long absent from the games," he said. "The First Citizen will be pleased."

He nodded his head toward the Starship three. His men shook them down, removing their phasers, communicators, Spock's tricorder and McCoy's medikit.

"What are these things?" he demanded.

Kirk shook his head slightly, signaling silence. The policeman took another curious look at the equipment. Then, shaking his head, he said, "No matter. Escaped slaves are welcome, whatever the circumstances." Spock's head scarf caught his eye. He ripped it off. For a moment, he stared at the Vulcan ears in wonder. He shrugged the wonder off.

"Not escaped slaves," he said. "Barbarians. A good day's work. It's a long time since I watched barbarians die in the arena."

Apparently, the arena's vestibule was a jail's cell. Shoved into one, Kirk's first act was to shake its bars. The policeman outside struck his hands away from them, cutting his knuckles. But Kirk had succeeded in attracting special attention. "Tell Merikus we want to see him," he told the man.

"The First Citizen? Why would he bother with arena bait like you?"

"Tell him it's James Kirk. Perhaps a friend of his."

The man laughed. "'Perhaps' is right."

“Suppose I *am* a friend and you didn’t tell him? Do you really care to risk that?”

He received a glare, a grunt—and the policeman walked off to join his men.

Time ambled by. Kirk watched McCoy doing what was possible for Flavius’ head gash. When the wound had stopped bleeding, he said, “Tell me, Flavius. If there have been slaves for over two thousand years, haven’t there always been discontents, runaways?”

Flavius sat up. “Long ago there were rebellions. But they were suppressed. And with each century the slaves acquired more rights under the law. They received the right to medicine, to government payments in their old age.” He shrugged. “They finally learned to be content.”

Spock looked up from a stone bench. “Yet more fascinating. Slavery evolving into guaranteed medical care, old age pensions . . .”

“Quite logical, I’d say, Mr. Spock,” McCoy said. “Just as it’s logical that a Twentieth-century Rome would use television to show its gladiator contests, or name a new car the Jupiter Eight or—”

Spock interrupted. “Were I able to show emotion, Doctor, your new infatuation with the term ‘logical’ would begin to annoy me.”

“Medical men are trained in logic, Mr. Spock!”

“Your pardon, Doctor. I had no idea they were trained. From watching you I assumed it was trial and error.”

Flavius eyed them. “Are they enemies, Captain?”

Kirk smiled. “I’m not sure they’re sure.” He returned to the absorbing subject of this extraordinary half-Rome place. “But, Flavius, when the slaves began to worship the sun, they became discontented again. When did all this begin?”

“Long ago. Perhaps as long ago as the beginning of the Empire. But the message of the sun was kept from us.”

“That all men are brothers?”

Flavius nodded. “Perhaps I’m a fool to believe it. It does often seem that a man must fight to live.”

“No,” Kirk said. “You go on believing it, Flavius. All men *are* brothers.”

Footsteps sounded outside the cell. The wolfish po-

liceman, his men behind him, unlocked the barred door. "Flavius Maximus! Your old friends are waiting for you. You are already matched for the morning games. Come!"

Flavius spoke quietly. "I will not fight. I am a brother of the sun."

A cynical grin lifted the man's lips from his teeth. "Put a sword in your hand—and you'll fight. I know you, Flavius. You're as peaceful as a bull."

His men had their submachine guns. Two of them, flanking Flavius, marched him out of the cell. The police chief, with his two remaining guards, gestured to the others. "You three . . . come with us!"

Kirk, lowering his voice for Spock and McCoy, said, "Three and three. We may never have a better—"

"No talking!" the police chief barked. "Outside now!"

Kirk pointed to McCoy. "I doubt he can walk far. He feels ill."

"I do?" said McCoy.

"He'll die of something if he doesn't step out of this cell right now!"

Kirk's purpose had suddenly dawned on McCoy. He went along with it. "No, I think I can walk. I'll try, anyway . . ."

The three, exchanging glances, silently agreed it was to be now or never.

The guards closed in around them. Halfway down the outside corridor, McCoy moaned, "*Uhhh . . . my stomach . . .*" He doubled up, his knees buckling to heart-rending groans of pain. A guard grabbed him to pull him back upright; and Spock, with a show of assisting the man, managed to get a hand on his shoulder. The guard crumpled under the Vulcan neck pinch. At the same instant Kirk's clenched fist lashed out. It caught the police chief on the button. He spun around and fell. Coming up fast from his crouch, McCoy downed the third man. Two of the guards tried to struggle up. For their pains they got a couple of space karate chops and subsided into unconsciousness.

A voice said, "Well done, Jim."

The *Enterprise* men wheeled.

The door at the corridor's end had opened. Kirk rec-

ognized the man standing inside it. It was Merrick. The ex-captain of the S.S. *Beagle* had always been handsome; and passing time had added strength to what had been merely a goodlooking Space Academy cadet. He wore a richly tailored sports jacket and slacks of a princely elegance. Yet, despite the strength and the clothes, Kirk thought he detected a look of haunting tragedy in his eyes. Beside him was a smaller, plump man, softish, also fashionably tailored. They hadn't come alone. Behind them were ranged policemen, all armed with submachine guns.

Merrick said, "But it isn't that easy, Jim. They've been handling slaves for two thousand years."

The smaller man beside him turned. "But it was exciting, Merik. They'd do well in the arena."

Kirk hadn't recovered from the shock of recognition. "Bob Merrick! It is you . . ."

"Me, Merik." He indicated the massed guards behind him. "And them. Not to mention them . . ." He pointed to the opposite end of the corridor. It was crowded with more armed guards.

The smaller man spoke again. "But this is no place for a reunion."

The hand Kirk had known as Bob Merrick's waved them to follow. "This way, Jim . . . your friends, too. Lots to talk about, lots to explain, to—"

Kirk eyed him. "Yes," he said quickly. "I agree."

Merik made an impatient gesture. "Don't judge me without the facts. Come along. We'll be able to talk freely. The Proconsul here knows who and what we are."

They left. And the guards moved in to make sure that the *Enterprise* three followed them.

It was a lush apartment into which the trio was marched. Marble columns supported a ceiling of mosaic that depicted nymphs disporting with satyrs. A fountain of colored water flung its spray up and back into a seashell of marble. Tufted couches of gleaming stuff were arranged about the room, low tables beside them. All four of the chamber's walls bore painted murals of old Roman gods at their pleasures. Young women—slaves chosen and bought for their loveliness—were moving to the tables with gold platters of fruit and sweetmeats.

The plump Proconsul, wine goblet in hand, greeted them. Merik, an easy host in his sleek sports jacket, waved the guards out of the room.

Smiling at Kirk, he said, "This is a personal affair, isn't it, Jim? A celebration. Old friends meeting."

The Proconsul spoke to the slaves. "Wine for our friends. They have come from a great distance, eh, Captain Kirk?" He grinned broadly. "A very great distance. I am Claudius Marcus, Proconsul." He approached Spock. "So this is a Vulcan. Interesting. From what I've heard, I wish I had fifty of you for the arena."

Merik said hastily, "And this other is your ship's surgeon?"

"Dr. McCoy," Kirk said tersely.

Merik spoke to Claudius. "A pity we can't turn him loose in your hospitals. The level of medicine here might benefit."

One of the girls was proffering a tray to Claudius. "You must be hungry," he told Kirk. "Do try the sparrows broiled with garum. Delicious. Or the roast kid." He jerked a thumb toward the girl. "Drusilla. A lovely thing, isn't she? Noticeable."

So he'd been caught staring at her. She was indeed noticeable. Blond hair, dark eyes—and in the violet, plum-like gown she wore, every movement of her slender body was grace itself. Flushing, Kirk turned to Merik. "What happened to your ship?" he said.

"Meteor damage. I—" A slave was passing and he paused before he said, "I 'came ashore' with a landing party for iridium ore and repairs. Then I met Claudius . . ."

"Go on," Kirk said.

"He convinced me it was unfair to this world to carry word of its existence elsewhere."

"Contamination," Claudius said. "We can't risk that. You'll understand as you learn more about us, Kirk."

"I made . . . the decision to stay," Merik said.

"What happened to your crew? Did they voluntarily beam—" Kirk corrected himself, "—come ashore?"

"This is an ordered world, Jim. Conservative, based on time-honored Roman strengths and virtues."

"What happened to your crew?"

"There has been no war here for over four hundred

years, Jim. Could your land of the same era make the same boast? Certainly, they don't want this stability contaminated with dangerous ideas about other ways and other places."

"Interesting," Spock said. "And given a conservative empire, Captain, quite understandable."

McCoy was horrified. "Spock, are you out of your head?" he demanded.

"Doctor, I said I understood. I find the checks and balances of this civilization quite illuminating. It does seem to have escaped the carnage of your first three World Wars."

"Spock, they have *slavery, despotism, gladiatorial games . . . !*"

Imperturbable as usual, the Vulcan said, "Situations quite familiar to the six million who died in your First World War, Doctor—the eleven million who died in your Second, the thirty-seven million in your Third. Shall I go on?"

"Interesting," Claudius commented. "And you, Captain . . . which world do you prefer?"

"My world," Kirk said, "is my vessel, my oath and my crew, Proconsul." He turned to Merik. "What happened to your vessel, you've answered. What happened to your oath is obvious."

Merik didn't flinch. "As to my men, Kirk, those who can't adapt to a world always die."

The words were called for. Kirk said them. "You sent your own people to the arena." It was a statement, not a question—a statement defining an unbridgeable gulf between life values. Yes, Merik's eyes *were* haunted. And he would be forever pursued by the Furies of his own self-betrayal. If he could still speak with firmness, it was a false firmness—a poor rag clutched around a shivering soul.

"And just as I did, Kirk, you'll end up ordering your own people 'ashore'."

Misery loves company, Kirk thought. McCoy had cried out, "You must know that's impossible! Starfleet regulations—"

Claudius completed the sentence. "—are designed to circumvent any such order. There may be over four hundred people on your ship, Captain, but they'll come

down if it's handled properly . . . a few at a time." The plump little man smiled. "You forget I have a trained ship captain to tell me what is possible and what is not possible." He took a communicator from the pocket of his smart sports jacket. "Your communicator, Captain Kirk. Save us all a lot of unnecessary trouble and issue the appropriate orders."

Merik tried for a comradely tone. "They'll be arriving soon anyway, Jim. A recon party first. Then a rescue party, then a larger rescue party. I had less men but it adds up to the same in the end."

Kirk smiled at them. "You really believe I can be made to order my people down?"

"I believe this, Captain," Claudius said. "You'd do almost anything rather than have to watch your two friends here put slowly to death."

The soft little man was anything but soft. The plump body was built on bones of cold steel. Kirk felt the sweat breaking out on his palms. Then he reached out and took the communicator.

"Jim!"

Kirk opened the communicator, ignoring McCoy's cry of protest. "Captain to bridge, come in . . ."

"Bridge, Scott here. Go ahead, sir."

Reaching down, Claudius pressed a button as Kirk spoke quickly into the communicator. "If you have a fix on us, Scotty—" He stopped. The door had opened. Guards' submachine guns were leveled at him, at Spock, at McCoy.

"Stand by, Engineer . . ." Kirk closed the communicator.

"Wise of you, Captain," Claudius said. "No point in beaming up three bullet-ridden corpses."

"On the other hand my chief engineer is standing by for a message. If I bring down a hundred men armed with phasers . . ."

"You could probably defeat the combined armies of our entire empire." Claudius' lips moved in a smile that Kirk was beginning to dread. "At a cost, Captain—the violation of your oath regarding noninterference with other societies." He addressed Spock. "I believe you all swear you'll die before you'll violate that directive. Am I right?"

"Quite correct," Spock said

McCoy's tension exploded. "Spock, must you always be so blasted honest?"

Claudius returned to the workover on Kirk. "Why even bother to bring down armed men? I'm told your vessel can easily lay waste to this world's surface." He smiled once more. "Oh, but there's that prime directive in the way again, isn't there? Mustn't interfere." He pointed to the communicator. "Well, Captain, you've a message started. Your engineer is waiting. What are you going to do?"

This Roman in the sports jacket would have been a priceless asset to the Spanish Inquisition. It was small comfort to know at last what he was up against. Kirk opened the communicator. "Sorry to keep you waiting, Scotty . . ."

Claudius, at his shoulder, heard Scott say, "We were becoming concerned, Captain. You were a bit overdue."

"Order your officers to join us," Claudius said.

"'Condition green'," Kirk said. "All is well. Captain out." He closed the communicator.

Claudius hurled his wine goblet across the room. He snatched the communicator and Merik shouted, "Jim, that was stupid!"

Claudius was fairly dancing with fury. "Guards, take them! Prepare them for the games!"

As the three were hustled past Merik, the ex-captain said, "This is no Academy training test, Kirk! *This is real! They're taking you out to die!*"

Miles above it all, an unhappy Scott was torn by indecision of his own. "Condition green" was a code term for trouble. But it also forbade the taking of any action to relieve it. Kirk seldom signaled trouble. Now that he *had* signaled it, it would be bad trouble.

Scott left the command chair to go to Uhura. "Lieutenant, are you *certain* there's no contact?"

"Nothing, Mr. Scott. Except for their message you received."

"Mr. Chekov?"

"Nothing, sir. Sensors lost them when they entered the city."

With action immobilized, fancied horrors began to parade themselves for the miserable Scott.

The arena was a TV studio sound stage. Somebody had done a good job on his Roman history. The stage was galleried, its tiers of rounded stone benches rising in genuine Colosseum style. But the cameras were focused on the sand-sprinkled central space below where combat was won or lost. At the cameraman's "ready" signal, an announcer assumed the amiable smile that was the twentieth-century's stock-in-trade of announcers the world over.

Canned music blared; and to a red light's flash, the announcer went on the air.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Live from City Arena tonight and in living color, we bring you 'Name the Winner!' Brought to you by your Jupiter Eight dealers from coast to coast. In a moment, tonight's first heat . . ."

The light read: OFF THE AIR—and the announcer's big smile vanished as though it had never been. There was an Observers' Booth, hung with velvet, behind him. Claudius and Merik were the first to enter it. Armed guards with Kirk, his arms bound behind his back, followed them. The announcer turned. "We're in a taped commercial, Proconsul. Back on the air in forty seconds," he said.

The guards shoved Kirk into a chair, their guns aimed at his back. Merik, his self-assurance visibly less, threw him a concerned glance. But Claudius, fully at home here, merely turned to make sure that Kirk had noted the entrance into the combat space.

Spock and McCoy were standing in it.

Clad in gladiator gear, they'd been given Roman shields and swords. Spock held his weapon with the born athlete's confidence; but McCoy was fingering his awkwardly. Looking up, they both caught sight of Kirk—and he knew that their anxiety for him matched his anxiety for them. But there wasn't time even for anxiety. Horror filled Kirk. To their rear was a man with a rawhide whip: an older man, the Master of the Games, thickly-muscled, his hard face that of a veteran who knew the gladiator racket from the bottom up.

The announcer said, "Stand by . . . ten seconds!"

The older man signed to the pair's guard escort. Pointed swords were pressed against their backs. "If they refuse to move on out, skewer them," the hardbitten veteran told the guards.

“Condition green.” Maybe it had been a mistake to prohibit action by the *Enterprise*. Kirk hadn’t visualized anything like this. He moved in his bonds, straining against them as the announcer got his ON THE AIR light.

“And first tonight, a surprise ‘extra’! In the far corner, a couple of aggressive barbarians with strange ways I’m sure will be full of surprises. Facing them, your favorites and mine from previous matches—Maximus Achilles and our noted Flavius!”

Flavius, the experienced gladiator. And the other one, just as big, just as competent-looking. Kirk could estimate their familiarity with the work at hand by the way they were moving out into the arena. Equally efficient, the sports announcer was milking his last ounce of suspense from the spectacle.

“Victory—or death? And for which of them? You know as much as I do at this moment. Ladies and gentlemen, this is *your* program! *You ‘Name the Winner’!*”

To the beat of more canned music, the two big gladiators saluted the Proconsul with lifted swords. Then they stepped forward toward Spock and McCoy.

Intuition had placed Spock into a nearly correct defensive stance. McCoy lacked it. Despite his Starship combat training, he wasn’t the athletic match of either Spock or the tested fighters who were approaching them.

Nearing them, Flavius said quietly, “Why you? I don’t mind killing humans but—”

A flourish of trumpets drowned his words. Maximus, eyeing Spock, chose him for his opponent. The Vulcan pivoted, evading the first sword slash. McCoy found himself confronting Flavius, both of them hesitant, unsure.

The whip cracked. “Begin!”

Always reluctant to take a life, Spock was merely defending himself. Maximus bored in on him. Flavius took a half-hearted slash at McCoy and missed. Instinctively, the *Enterprise* man lifted his weapon—and the contest was under way.

Again, Claudius turned to check on Kirk’s reactions. They were extremely satisfactory. The Starship Captain had paled and was sitting unnaturally still, his forehead beaded with sweat. The edgy Merik didn’t turn; but the back of his neck was red with shamed blood.

The announcer was saying, "Flavius is getting off to a slow start, but he's never disappointed us for very—*there's a close one! The barbarian with the pointed ears is in trouble!*"

Spock's recoil from offensive action had backed him into a corner, and the huge Maximus was closing in to finish him off.

"Please . . ." Spock said. "I tell you I am well able to defeat you."

"*Fight, Barbarian!*"

Once more Spock barely avoided a sword slash. He was thrown off balance and Maximus raised his weapon to end the match. Watching, Kirk tried to get to his feet. Slammed back by a guard, he felt the cold muzzle of a sub-machine gun pushed against his neck. Merik leaned back, his voice lowered. "Most of my men went the same way. I'd hoped I'd feel it less with yours . . ."

Pure defense had its disadvantages. In the arena, Spock had dodged another slash only to expose himself to another one. "I beg you . . . I don't want to . . ." He ducked again. ". . . injure you . . ."

The cords binding Kirk's arms were slippery with sweat. Every muscle in his body revolted against his helplessness. They were his for action—action he'd taken time and again when Spock needed action. His face reflected his agony. Claudius, turning once more, found it more interesting than his games.

Their Master was displeased. "*Fight, you two!*" He crashed his whip hard across Flavius' naked back. The gladiator's sword came up. Then it dropped, as experience warned him that the old survivor of hundreds of bloody bouts was far too canny to ever blunder into weapon reach.

"You bring this network's ratings down, Flavius—and we'll do a 'special' on you . . ."

The oldtimer's threat worked. Flavius aimed a more skillful blow at McCoy, the massive power of his right arm evident even at half-strength. McCoy staggered back.

"Merik . . ." Kirk said.

Claudius spoke. "Question, Captain?"

"The rules?" Kirk said. "If Spock should finish his man first . . ."

Claudius shook his head. "He can't help his friend.

"We believe that men should fight their own battles." He smiled his dreadful soft smile again. "Ready to order your crew down? Only the weak will die. My word as a Roman, Captain."

"No," Kirk said.

His tension was beginning to affect Merik. The one-time Space Academy cadet checked Claudius; and leaning back to Kirk said very quietly, "Maybe . . . you understand now why I gave in, Jim. Romans were always the strongest . . . two thousand years practice enslaving people, using them, killing them . . ."

Claudius had overheard. Without turning, he said, "Quite true, Captain Kirk." He pointed to the arena. "The games have always strengthened us. Death becomes familiar. We don't fear it as you do. Admit it . . . you find these games frightening, repellent . . ."

"Frightening." Should he say, "Your games don't frighten me. The spirit behind them does." The little man wanted fear. Kirk wasn't giving him any. "In some parts of the galaxy," he said, "I've seen forms of entertainment that make this look like a folkdance."

It hit home. For the first time, Claudius eyed him with uncertainty.

The whip had again cracked across Flavius' back. Boos came from the guards and galleries. Irritated, the huge gladiator snarled, "At least defend yourself!"

McCoy, angered, too, cried, "I *am* defending myself!"

"Not like that, you fool! Hold your weapon higher! *Now, swing at me!*"

McCoy swung, almost losing his balance. Flavius diverted the blow with an easy wrist movement. McCoy's anger mounted with his realization of his own incompetence. And Flavius, smarting under the lashings, the continuing jeers, was struggling with a growing rage of his own.

The wet cords that held Kirk should have been easier to slip out of. His hands were wrenching at them when he saw that Claudius was watching him. He stopped struggling; and Claudius said, "Those are *your* men dying down there, Captain, not strangers."

Kirk's eyes met his. "I've had to select men to die before, Proconsul, so that more could be saved."

"You're a clever liar." There was a pause before the little Twentieth-century Roman gestured to the man beside him. "He was a space captain, too. I've examined him thoroughly. Your species has no strength."

Kirk didn't answer. Merik shifted uneasily; and Claudius, noticing his move, snapped, "Well, what is it? *Out with it!*"

"He . . . Jim . . . Kirk commands not just a space ship, Proconsul, but a *Starship*." Merik flushed under Claudius' glare. "A special kind of vessel . . . and crew. I tried for such a command but . . ." His words trailed off into silence.

Claudius looked down at Spock and McCoy. "I see no evidence of superiority. They fight no better than your men, Merikus. Perhaps not as well."

And indeed the galleries' hissing was growing in volume. "*Stop running!*" Maximus yelled at Spock. "*Fight!*"

He stabbed at him; and Spock, deftly turning the blow, threw a quick look toward McCoy. Then he maneuvered his fight closer to McCoy and Flavius.

"Do you need help, Doctor?"

Frustrated and furious, McCoy shouted, "Whatever gave you *that* idea?" He made another swing at Flavius; and Maximus, maddened by Spock's elusiveness, bellowed, "*Fight, you pointed-eared freak!*"

"You tell him, Buster!" McCoy told Maximus. He tried for a better grip on his sword. "*Of course, I need help! Of all . . .*" Enraged at Spock, McCoy went into a flurry of wild lunges at Flavius, unaware that he was rousing a blood-madness that would turn his antagonist into a very formidable enemy. ". . . the illogical, completely ridiculous questions I ever heard," he panted. He swung again.

Flavius growled deep in his throat. He charged with a series of murderous slashes that snapped McCoy back into reality—the fact that he'd provoked a savagery which could put an end to his life in a matter of seconds.

Spock recognized his sudden peril. He went into his first attack, amazing the towering Maximus by his speed and efficiency. He streaked in on the gladiator, closer and closer; but McCoy was already beaten down to the sand, his shield torn from his grasp. He'd learned enough to par-

ry the next blow. Then his sword was wrenched from his hand.

Kirk saw how defenseless he was. He pulled himself away from the guns behind him and got to his feet, surging against his bonds. They held: and the guards, slamming him back into his seat, immobilized him.

Spock, downing his man with a "space karate" chop, was racing across the arena. He reached Flavius; and spinning him around, dropped him with his Vulcan neck pinch. The arena went into bedlam. The Master of the Games rushed to the *Enterprise* men to cries of "Foul!" from the galleries. His guards, running after him, grabbed both Spock and McCoy and pinioned their arms behind their backs.

Kirk, Claudius and Merik were all on their feet.

The shocked announcer whirled to Claudius. "A clear foul, Proconsul! Your decision?"

Down in the arena, swords were pointed, pressing, against the captives' necks. The Master of the Games looked up to the Observers' Booth for the Proconsul's word, ignoring the galleries' clamor for immediate death. Claudius spoke to Merik.

"Your opinion, Merikus? After all they're like yourself."

Whatever his opinion was, Merik considered it safer to keep it to himself. "It . . . it's *your* decision, Proconsul."

Claudius turned. "And *your* opinion, Captain Kirk?" He didn't wait to hear it. "Kill them now—and you'll gladly accept whatever happens to you. I wouldn't relish that—but you almost tricked me into depriving myself of real pleasure." He moved to the edge of the booth. "Master of the Games, take them back to their cage!"

He turned again to face Kirk. "It won't be easy for them, Captain. And especially not for you!" He spoke to Kirk's guards. "Bring him to my quarters. *Now!*"

He left the booth. And the guards hustled Kirk along after him.

After the raw violence of the arena, the effete luxury of Claudius' suite sickened Kirk. It was the triumph of an art connoisseur. The room was tapestried; and an alcove

held a wide bed embroidered in gold. In a large wall niche, a marble statue of Minerva, Roman goddess of wisdom, presided over those self-indulgences that were the delectation of the soft man of steel.

The guards marched Kirk into the room and left him. There was no one in sight. But Claudius had promised that something particularly unpleasant was going to happen to him here. Wary, uncertain, Kirk searched the room with his eyes. A heavy Etruscan jar stood on a pedestal. Kirk seized it, hefting it for weight and balance. If he was going to die, he wasn't going to do it without a fight . . .

"I was told . . ."

It was a feminine voice. Drusilla moved out from the bed alcove's hangings, hesitating at the sight of Kirk with his lifted weapon. This time the gown she wore was pure white. Her straight blond hair fell below her waist. And the white of her gown enhanced the creamy tone of her skin.

"I was told," she said, "to wait for you." She went to a table. "And to provide wine, food, whatever you wish. I am the Proconsul's slave, although for this evening . . ." She was pouring wine, clearly expecting him to come to the table. He didn't move. Inevitably what occurred in this room was bound to lead to treachery, torture and in the end, to certain death.

She turned, surprised by his stillness. "I was told that for this evening, I am *your* slave. Then command me."

"No," Kirk said. "You can tell the Proconsul it won't work."

She frowned, puzzled. "What will not work?"

"Whatever he has in mind. Whatever trickery or . . ."

She left the table to lay a hand on his arm. This master of hers, though temporary, obviously required soothing. Kirk removed the hand. Then he shouted, "*Do you hear me, Proconsul?* Whatever you have in mind, I'm not cooperating! I may have to die—but I won't give you entertainment out of it!"

Drusilla came closer to him but, brushing her roughly aside, he strode past her to the door. He opened it, looking into the corridor, sure he'd find a spy lurking in it. It was empty. He and the slave girl seemed to be totally alone.

She divined his thought. "Except for the guards at the

street entrances, we are alone here," she said. "Please believe me. I have never lied to one who owns me."

But Kirk's suspicion wasn't laid. This *had* to be a grotesque trick of some new variety . . . and yet the girl's every word and gesture spoke of sincerity. She seemed honestly puzzled by his behavior—and in her extremely feminine way, a little disappointed by it, too.

He began to wish he could relax. His friends' lives had been spared—but to what purpose? What was going on in that "cage" where they'd been confined?

Going on in the cage was determined escape effort. Its door was barred; and Spock, rallying every ounce of his strength, was trying to pull it loose by the very fury of the need to do so. McCoy, standing behind him, saw that neither bars nor door had given a half-inch.

"Angry, Spock? Or frustrated, perhaps?"

"Such emotion is quite foreign to me, Doctor. I was merely testing the strength of the door."

McCoy nodded. "For the fifteenth time."

Spock came close to showing irritation. Disdaining to answer, he turned from the door, again inspecting the cell for some possible weapon or escape route. Watching him, McCoy's eyes softened. After a space, he said gently, "Spock . . ."

Spock turned, expecting a jibe for what was clearly his frantic anxiety for the safety of his captain. And though McCoy shared it, he had another matter on his mind at the moment.

"Spock, uh . . . we've had our disagreements . . ." Because he was leveling, he was deeply embarrassed. ". . . or maybe they're jokes. As Jim says, we're often not sure ourselves. But . . . er . . . what I mean to say is . . ." He hesitated again. "Well, what I mean is—"

"Doctor," Spock said, "I'm seeking a weapon or an escape method. Please be brief."

"I'm . . . trying to say you saved my life in the arena."

Spock nodded. "Quite true."

That fact mutually acknowledged, he resumed his examination of every possibility of their cell.

McCoy blew up. "*I was trying to thank you, you—you pointed-eared hobgoblin!*"

"Ah, yes," Spock said. "Humans do suffer from an emotional need to show gratitude." He gave a small nod. "'You're welcome' is, I believe, the correct response." He moved off, still searching. "However, Doctor, you should remember that I am motivated solely by logic. The loss of our ship's surgeon, whatever I may think of his relative skill, is a loss to the efficiency of our vessel and therefore to—"

McCoy interrupted. "Do you know why you're not afraid of dying, Spock? *You're more afraid of living.* Every day you stay alive is one more day you might slip—and let your human half peek out." He lessened the distance between them. "That's it, isn't it? *Insecurity!* You wouldn't know what to do with a genuine, warm, decent feeling!"

Spock wheeled—and this time McCoy caught him at it. There was an instant when he actually saw Spock composing his face into Vulcan impassivity. Then the instant was gone—and Spock raised an eyebrow.

"Really, Doctor?" he said.

McCoy thought, "I am very fond of this man." What he said was, "I know. I'm worried about Jim, too, Spock."

For the moment, anyway, their captain was safe. He was also hungry. And seated beside Drusilla on a couch, he was making excellent inroads on the tray of food she insisted on holding for him. It was a long time since he's tasted roast pheasant. And the wine was good wine. After all, food was food and wine was wine, unlikely to be up to tricks. As to the girl . . . Hunger and thirst appeased, he took his first good look at her.

"You've noticed me at last," she said. "I was becoming concerned. I am ordered to please you."

Kirk sipped more wine. "Good," he said. Then he pointed to the roast pheasant's remains. "Excellent. And you?"

"Superb, I'm told," she said, straight-faced. "But then, men lie, don't they?"

Kirk eyed her. Then he leaned back against the couch. "I've seen strange worlds, strange customs," he told her. "Perhaps here this is considered torture."

She moved close to him, placing the tray on the table. "Torture? I do not understand. I have no wish to see you tortured in any way." She kissed him. "At the first sign of pain, you will tell me?"

"You'll be the first to know," he said. He took her in his arms and returned the kiss with interest.

Up on the *Enterprise*, Scott was tiring of misery. He was rapidly transforming it into the kind of productive anger that opens up new vistas for action.

"How long since we've heard?" he asked Uhura.

"Nine hours, forty-one seconds, sir." She indicated the viewing screen. "It's almost dark there. We'll see the city lights coming on soon."

"Mr. Chekov, take over the scanners. Lieutenant Uhura, give him a hand." He returned to the command chair, still hesitating. On the other hand, no order had said he couldn't frighten whoever it was down there who was causing bad trouble for his captain and the landing party. It might do no good. Yet it just could be salutary to suggest what a Starship could really do if it got serious.

He made up his mind. "Lieutenant Uhura, pinpoint the city's power source locations." He paused before he added, "Mr. Chekov, type the power, the load factors—and how much our beams must pull to overload them."

"Captain . . ."

Sprawled in sleep on the alcove's bed, Kirk came instantly awake at the sound of Claudius' voice. He had started to roll, protecting himself when he saw that the little man was alone, just standing there, a newly benign look on his face.

"You've had a harrowing time on our planet," he said. "I'm not surprised you slept through the afternoon." He left the alcove to go to a table. "Sorry I was detained. Shall we have our talk now?"

He was pouring wine. Kirk followed him, distrust rising again at sight of the armed guard posted just outside the door. Offered wine, he shook his head. Claudius went on. "Oh, one of the communicators we took from you is missing. Was it my pretty Drusilla by any chance?"

Kirk didn't answer. Merik had entered the room.

Claudius, pointing to Kirk, said, "See if he has the communicator."

Still silent, Kirk permitted the search. "Not that I would have punished him badly. I would have blamed you, Merik," Claudius said. He lifted his goblet. "You're a Roman, Kirk—or should have been. It's not on his person?"

"No, Proconsul." Merik addressed Kirk. "He said a 'Roman.' You've just received as great a compliment, Jim—"

Claudius interrupted. "Care for food, Captain Kirk?"

Kirk saw that Merik, pointedly uninvited to sit, was shifting uncomfortably. "Thank you, I've eaten," he said.

"I trust there was nothing you required that you didn't receive," Claudius said.

"Nothing. Except . . . perhaps an explanation."

"I'm sure our world seems as strange to you as yours would seem to me." He looked up. "Since you are a man, I owe you this immediately. You must die in a few hours." He swallowed. "And also because you are a man . . ." He became conscious of Merik's presence and a flicker of something like contempt passed across his face. "You may leave us, Merik. The thoughts of one man shared with another cannot interest you."

Merik almost responded to the open insult. Then he decided that for him silence was golden. He left the room; and Claudius, resuming, said to Kirk, "And since you are a man, Captain Kirk, I gave you some last hours as a man. Do you understand?"

A small smile on his lips, Kirk said, "Let's say . . . I appreciated it."

"Unfortunately, your defiances in the arena were seen by the television audience. We must demonstrate that defiance is wrong."

"Of course," Kirk said.

"But because I have learned to respect you, I promise you will die quickly and easily."

"Naturally, I prefer that. And my friends?"

"Of course, you'd ask that. And, of course, when their time comes, the same." Summoning guards, he gestured to Kirk. "Take him to the arena." A comforting afterthought occurred to him. "We've preempted fifteen minutes on the early show for you," he told Kirk. "We will have a good

audience, full color. You may not understand the honor, since you are centuries beyond anything as crude as television."

"I recall it was similar," Kirk said.

They hadn't bound his hands. He needed them to hold his sword and shield. From the arena's entrance, where Spock and McCoy had waited, he would see Claudius moving into the Observers' Booth above him. Guards, supervised by the Master of the Games, pushed him past a big man in gladiator dress. He recognized Flavius. The two were exchanging glances when Merik's voice, speaking to one of the guards, said, "I'll speak privately with the prisoner."

The Master of the Games was annoyed. "Impossible," he said shortly.

"I am still First Citizen. You will obey me!"

The announcer spoke. "Stand by . . . ten seconds."

The Master of the Games, completely ignoring Merik, moved Kirk out into the arena's center. Desperate, the man who'd betrayed himself, shouted, "Too late to help you, Jim! I'll do what I can for your friends!"

The announcer, on signal, was speaking into his microphone. "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Before the first heat tonight, a simple execution. But keep your dial turned to this channel—there's lots of excitement to follow . . ."

Claudius leaned over the booth's edge. "Master of the Games, make it quick! A single thrust!"

The veteran drew his sword. "Don't move," he told Kirk. "You'll only die harder."

As he lifted his weapon to strike, there was a wild cry. "*Murderers!*"

Flavius had raced into the arena, sword raised high. The startled Master of the Games wheeled to meet the onslaught. Guards were running to block the gladiator's rush; and Kirk, moving fast to help him, had almost reached him when every light in the place went out, plunging it into near darkness. Kirk hesitated for a split second. Then he used the dimness to fell a guard with a "space karate" blow. Another lunged for him. A smash with a sword butt sent him sprawling. There was a burst of submachine gun-

fire. Kirk, close to Flavius now, cried, "The cells! Which way?"

"The barred doors across . . ."

Flavius was cut down by another splatter of bullets. Kirk, realizing his danger, dodged a sword slash—and seizing the guard, spun him around to face the source of the gunfire. The man stumbled forward into the guard with the gun. He was thrown off balance—and Kirk, grabbing the gun, clubbed himself free. The lights came back as he reached the barred doors at the other side of the arena.

He was seen. Guards shouted. A submachine gun blast struck near him. He turned, firing a burst himself. It silenced the gunner. Kirk fired again at the heavy lock on the barred doors.

Their cell was at the middle of a corridor. "Look out!" Kirk yelled to them. His gun spit bullets at the cell's lock.

Spock kicked the door open and McCoy cried, "Jim! Are you all right?"

"What did they do to you, Captain?"

"They threw me—a few curves, Spock. Perhaps it's better if I don't talk about it now . . ."

He'd heard the sounds of pursuit. Guards had followed him, running. A javelin hurtled past them. Kirk aimed the gun. The men halted but one in the rear was raising the muzzle of his . . .

"Hold!"

It was Claudius. Guards ranged behind him; he stood at the other end of the corridor. In both directions escape was cut off.

"We're in each other's line of fire." Claudius spoke to the guards. "Swords only."

Both groups of guards, swords high, were moving in.

"But I can use my gun," Kirk said. "And in either direction, Claudius."

As he eyed the little Proconsul, he saw that Merik had joined him. Claudius moved away from him. "I pity you, 'Captain' Merik," he said. "But watch. At least see how men die."

A guard with a javelin raised his arm. Kirk whirled with the gun. It gave a click on an empty cylinder. The guards charged. Kirk downed the first with his gunstock.

Spock reached for his dropped sword and McCoy picked up the javelin beside him.

Merik came to a decision. Death was nearing the *Enterprise* men. They were fighting now back to back. Merik pulled the missing communicator from his pocket, clicking it open. "Starship, lock in on this place: three to . . ."

With a shocked look on his face, he staggered. Claudius withdrew the sword he'd driven into him. Merik glanced at his seducer; and choking on blood, whispered into the communicator, "Three to beam-up . . . emergency . . ."

As he fell, he threw the communicator to Kirk over the heads of the guards. The dead Bob Merrick of the Space Academy had finally made peace with himself. Already, before Claudius' astounded eyes, Kirk, Spock and McCoy were dematerializing into dazzle. Then even its sparkles were gone.

Kirk was dictating into his Captain's Log.

"Note commendation to Engineering Officer Scott for his performance in commanding this vessel during my absence. Despite enormous temptation and strong personal feelings, he obeyed the Prime Directive. His temporary 'blackout' of the city below resulted in no interference with its society and yet saved the lives of myself and the landing party. We are prepared to leave orbit shortly."

He punched his "off" button. Beside him, Scott, his face red with embarrassed pleasure, said, "Thank you, Captain. I'll see to the engines."

As he entered the bridge elevator, Spock and McCoy stepped out of it.

McCoy, approaching the command chair, said, "I just saw on your report that Flavius was killed. I'm sorry. I liked that huge sun-worshiper."

Spock spoke earnestly. "I wish we could have examined that belief of his more closely, Captain. It does seem illogical that sun-worshippers could evolve a philosophy of total brotherhood. Worship of the sun is almost always a primitive superstition-religion . . ."

Uhura had overheard. She turned from her console. "I'm afraid you have it wrong, Mr. Spock. All of you . . ."

Three pairs of eyes were on her. She went on. "I've

been monitoring old-style radio waves and heard talk about this brotherhood religion. Don't you understand? Not the sun in the sky . . . the *Son—the Son of God!*"

McCoy protested. "But when we mentioned stars, Septimus said they worshiped the sun up there."

But Kirk's face was thoughtful. "In most of our own religions, don't people tend to look upward when speaking of the Deity?" He paused. "Caesar and Christ . . . they *did* have both. And the word is spreading only now down there."

"A philosophy of total love, total brotherhood," McCoy said.

Spock nodded. "It will replace their Imperial Rome. And it will happen during their Twentieth century."

Remembering the arena's ferocity, Kirk said, "It would be something to watch, to be part of."

"How stupid of me not to have comprehended!" Spock exclaimed.

McCoy looked at him. "I tend to go along with that, Mr. Spock."

"Doctor . . . the next time I have an opportunity to save your life—"

"—you'll do the logical thing, save me." McCoy smiled. "Comforting to know that, Spock."

Something good had happened between the two, Kirk thought. He was glad. Both men were dear to him. It was high time they admitted how dear they were to each other. Though he knew how little their sparring meant, it was a waste of time that could be better spent. On the other hand, who knew? There were many ways of revealing affection.

He turned to Chekov. "Take us out of orbit, Mr. Chekov. Ahead, warp factor one."

"Aye, sir. Ahead, warp factor one."

Kirk looked at the viewing screen. The Earth-like planet that had confused itself with the Roman Empire was a diminishing pinpoint of light. Then it was gone.

Day of the Dove

(Jerome Bixby)

Though the planet had said it was under attack by an unidentified spacecraft, the *Enterprise* landing party had found only black dust, white rocks and strange clumps of moving plants. Its tricorders—McCoy's as well as Chekov's—refused to report any evidence of a colony or of people who could have signaled the message. Yet they had existed.

Kirk stooped for a handful of the black, powdery soil. "An SOS from a human settlement—one hundred men, women and children. All gone. Who did it? Why?"

As if in reply, his communicator beeped. "Spock here, sir. Sensors have picked up a Klingon ship closing in fast."

"Deflectors on, Mr. Spock! Protect yourselves. Total response if attacked." He closed the communicator, his face grim. So that was the answer—Klingons. They had destroyed the settlement. But Spock had more news of the Klingon ship. "Trouble aboard her, Captain. Evidence of explosions . . . massive damage. We never fired at her."

"Maintain full alert, Mr. Spock."

Behind his group the air was collecting into dazzle. Six Klingons in their stiff metallic tabards were materializing, their weapons aimed and ready. Their leader was the first to assume full shape. His hard, slant-eyed face distort-

ed by fury, he reached out and swung Kirk around. "You attacked my ship!" he shouted. "Four hundred of my crew—dead! My vessel is disabled. I claim yours! You are prisoners of the Klingon Empire for committing a wanton act of war against it!" He nodded to his men. "Disarm them!"

Kirk had recognized the harsh, Mongol-like features. The Klingons' Kang. "We took no action against your ship," he said.

He'd been hustled into line with Chekov and McCoy. Kang paced before them. "For three years your Federation and our Empire have been at peace . . . a treaty we have honored to the letter . . ."

Kirk protested again. "We did not attack your ship."

"Were the screams of my men imaginary? What were your secret orders? To start a war? You have succeeded! Or maybe to test a new weapon. We shall be interested to examine it!"

Kirk said, "There was a Federation colony on this planet. *It* was destroyed."

"And by what? I see no bodies, no ruins. A colony of the invisible!"

"Perhaps a new *Klingon* weapon that leaves no traces. Federation ships don't specialize in sneak attacks!"

Along the ground near Kang a small, mushroom-shaped crystal was floating. Its swirling red color was concealed by a white rock and a faint, ugly throbbing came from it.

Kirk's patience was ebbing. No denial of guilt seemed able to penetrate the heavy bones of Kang's hairless skull. "You lured my ship into ambush with a false Klingon distress call!"

Kirk stared at him. "*You* received a distress call? *We* were the ones who received it!"

"I don't propose to spend any more time arguing your fantasies, Kirk! The *Enterprise* is ours! Instruct your Transporter Room. We are ready to beam aboard."

"Go to the devil," Kirk said.

"We have no devil—but we understand the habits of yours . . ." Still hidden among the rocks, the crystal's red glow brightened as Kang burst out, "I will torture you to death, one by one! Who will be the first? You, Kirk?"

Chekov suddenly exploded into action. He charged Kang, sobbing with rage. "Swine! Filthy Klingon murderers!" Kirk made a grab for him, missed—and Kang's men beat him to the ground. But he still sought to get at Kang. "You killed my brother! Piotr!—the Arcanis Four Research Outpost . . . a hundred peaceful people massacred—just as you did here! My brother, Piotr . . ."

Kang looked down at him. "So you volunteer to join him. That is loyalty." He gestured to one of his men. A sputtering device was pushed against Chekov's neck. He writhed with agony, doubled up. Kirk, wrenching forward, was immobilized by the Klingons. The device was readjusted—and Chekov screamed.

"You win. Kang!" Kirk said. "Stop the torture!"

"Jim!" McCoy cried. "You can't hand over the *Enterprise*!"

"Help Chekov, Bones."

Kang was eyeing Kirk. "Don't plan any tricks. I will kill a hundred hostages at the first sign of treachery!"

"I'll beam you aboard the *Enterprise*. Once we're there—no tricks."

"Your word?"

Kirk nodded; and Chekov, still convulsed with pain, cried, "Captain!—we can't! . . . don't let these . . . animals . . . have the ship!"

"Animals?" Kang said. "Your captain crawls like one. A Klingon would not have surrendered." He turned to Kirk. "Order everyone in this area to be transported up." He said something to his men, and Kirk, ringed by weapons, opened his communicator.

"Kirk to *Enterprise*. Mr. Spock . . ."

"Here, Captain."

"We have guests," Kirk told him. "Adjust Transporter for wide-field and beam-up everyone in the target area." His finger pressed a tiny control on the communicator.

"Yes, Captain."

Everybody shimmered out, Kirk under the weapons, Chekov supported by McCoy, both glaring.

In the *Enterprise* Transporter Room, only the landing party materialized. No Klingons stood on the platform.

Kirk stepped off his pad. "Full Security on the double, Mr. Galloway! Good work, Spock!"

As Galloway hit the intercom, the bewildered McCoy said, "What—happened?"

"Landing party brought up intact," Spock told him.

At the console, Scott spoke. "All others suspended in transit. Who are the guests, by the way, Captain?"

"Klingons."

Scott grinned happily, slapping the console. "They're in here—until we decide to rematerialize them."

"Galloway?" Kirk said.

"Security squads on the way, sir."

Chekov's voice was thick with hate. "Captain! Leave them on the planet! Leave them where they are! In non-existence. That's so many less Klingon monsters in the galaxy!"

"And that's what they would do." Kirk said. As the Security detail rushed through the door, he spoke to the Transporter Chief. "Bring them in."

The six Klingons sparkled into shape on the platform. They all stiffened, taking in the changed situation. Out-numbered by the Security men, they made no resistance as they were disarmed. The weaponless Kang looked at Kirk.

"Liar!" He spat the word.

"I said no tricks *after* we reached the ship." Kirk stepped forward, formal, terse. "You are prisoners of the United Federation of Planets against which you may or may not have committed an act of war."

"There are survivors still aboard my ship," Kang said.

Kirk nodded to the Transporter chief and Scott said, "Captain, we haven't been able to get through to Starfleet Command. All subspace frequencies are blocked. And there's too much radiation from the Klingon ship—it's a hazard to the vicinity."

"Prepare to destruct, Scotty."

"Completing the job you started!"

Kirk wheeled on Kang. "You wouldn't be standing there if I had."

The surviving Klingons were shimmering into form. Of the six, several were women. One, queenly, graceful, her dark eyes gleaming under the epicanthic fold of their Mongol lids, left the platform to go at once to Kang. He took her arm. "This is Mara—my wife and my Science officer," he told Kirk.

She ignored Kirk. "What has happened, Kang?"

"More Federation treachery. We are prisoners."

She was visibly terrified. The arm in Kang's hand trembled. "What will they do to us? I have heard of their atrocities . . . their death camps! They will torture us for our scientific and military information . . ."

Kirk addressed her. "You have some things to learn about us, madam." He turned to Galloway. "Detain them in the crew lounge. Program a food-synthesizer to accommodate our . . . guests. You will be well treated, Commander Kang."

"So I have seen," the Klingon said.

Kirk bowed and left, followed by Spock, McCoy and the still blazing Chekov. Unseen, unheard, the floating crystal hummed over their heads as they passed into the corridor.

"What *did* attack their ship, Jim?"

Kirk didn't answer. "Mr. Spock, maintain Red Alert. Scan this sector for other ships. Run a full check on the colony. We've got to nail this down fast . . ."

"We know what happened!" Chekov cried. "That distress call—"

Spock, speaking to nobody in particular, said, "From their distant position, the Klingons could scarcely have attacked the colony at the time we received the call. Moreover, they were apparently attracted there themselves by a distress call."

"Lies!" Chekov cried. "They want to start a war by pretending *we* attacked it!"

Entering an elevator, Kirk glanced at his overwrought face. But McCoy was saying, "Chekov may be right. The Klingons *claim* to have honored the truce—but there have been incidents! . . . raids on our outposts . . ."

"We've never proved the Klingons committed them, Bones."

McCoy was flushed with unusual vehemence. "What proof do we need? We know what a Klingon is!"

He stormed out of the elevator. Kirk frowned, puzzled by his belligerence; and Spock, noting his uneasiness, said, "Our Log-tapes will indicate our innocence in the present situation, Captain."

"Unfortunately, there is no guarantee they will be believed."

At the bridge deck, Chekov stalked to his post, his back stiff and stubbornly unrelenting. Kirk eyed him again before he asked for Uhura's report.

"Still unable to contact Starfleet Command, Captain. Outside communications blanketed."

"Keep at it, Lieutenant. We've got a diplomatic tiger by the tail."

He'd have liked authorization to take steps about the derelict Klingon ship. But at least he knew no lives were aboard it. He turned in his command chair. "Forward phasers locked and ready to fire, Mr. Sulu."

"Aye, sir."

"Fire phasers," Kirk said.

On the screen, the crippled vessel flared into light—and vanished. So that was that. A diplomatic tiger, indeed.

"Lieutenant Uhura?"

"No contact with Starfleet yet, sir."

Spock looked up from his mounded viewer. "Sensor sweeps reveal no other ships within range, Captain."

Had the Klingons annihilated that colony after all? There was no telling. Not now. He swung to Uhura. "Keep trying, Lieutenant. Mr. Sulu, set course seventeen mark four. Warp speed three."

"Warp three, sir."

In the crew lounge, Security guards and the "guests" were facing each other, each group wary, watchful, suspicious. Above them, all the crystal drifted. Kang, Mara beside him, used an empty space for restless pacing. "When I take this ship," he said, "I will have Kirk's head stuffed and hung on his cabin wall."

"They will kill us before we can act," she warned him.

"No! They wish to question us—learn our strength, our plans. They never will."

"We are forty," she protested. "Forty against four hundred."

One of Kang's men stepped forward. "Four thousand throats may be cut in one night by a running man."

"Patience," Kang said. "Vigilance. They will make

their mistake. Capture of the *Enterprise* will give us knowledge to end this war quickly."

The crystal's unheard throb moved out of the lounge and into the corridor. When it reached the bridge, its throbbing faded. Uhura, abruptly irritated, jabbed at her controls. "Still no outside contact, sir! Carriers normal. Channels open. I don't understand! Could the Klingons be doing something—?"

The ship suddenly shuddered. Engine sound rose. Kirk whirled. "Mr. Sulu?"

"Change of course, sir! Accelerating . . ." He struggled with switches. "Helm dead. Auxiliary navigation dead!"

Kirk braced himself against another shudder. "Override."

Sulu turned. "*Nothing* responds, Captain!"

"New course?"

"Nine-oh-two mark five . . ."

It would head the *Enterprise* out of the galaxy. Kirk hit a button. "Scotty—stop engines!"

The engine sound grew to a whining roar. On the intercom, Scott's voice was high with alarm. ". . . would if I could, sir! My controls have gone crazy! Something's—taken over . . ."

The bridge trembled under the rising roar. Scott shouted, "The engines, Captain! They've gone to warp nine—by themselves!"

Uhura's board was a dazzle of wildly flickering lights. Earphones fixed, she cried, "Captain! Reports from the lower decks! Emergency bulkheads closed! Almost four hundred crewmen trapped down there!"

Furious, Kirk exploded from his seat, racing for the elevator. The crystal followed him into the crew lounge. Kang was pleased with his information. "The bulk of your crew trapped? Your ship racing from the galaxy at wild speeds? Delightful! But how did I perform this sabotage, Kirk? My men are *here*."

Frigid with rage, Kirk spoke to Galloway. "Double security. Some Klingons may have beamed aboard, undetected. Mr. Spock, get down to Engineering. Help Scott hammer things back to normal and release those crewmen!"

He eyed Kang. "Before I throw you in the brig, I owe you something!" He landed a clenched fist on Kang's jaw. The Klingon stumbled back into a console, his hand falling on a lever. It came loose, grew red—and changed into a sword. Kang, amazed, stared at it in unbelief. Then he hefted it. At the same moment, all the lounge's objects—ashtrays, vases, lamps, magazines, game equipment—went into glow, transforming into swords, shields, javelins, battle-axes. The Klingons rushed for the weapons.

Kirk's people reached for their phasers. But the phasers, too, went into glow. Then they turned into swords and maces.

Kang took a swordsman's stance. "You killed four hundred of my men, Captain Kirk. It is time that that debt be repaid . . ."

Kirk looked at the sword that had been a console lever. Molecular revolution. But explanation did nothing to solve the deadly mystery. His own phaser was a sword.

The Klingons attacked—and the fight was on. Out-numbered, the Security guards were forced to retreat. Kirk fenced expertly, and was deflecting a slash by Kang when he saw that Galloway was wounded. He battled his way to the lieutenant, got an arm around him and shoved him into an elevator. The doors whooshed shut in the faces of Kang and his men. They rang with the sound of beating, frustrated swords.

Kirk beeped Engineering on his intercom. "The Klingons are free, Scotty. And armed. They'll try to take the ship. How many men do we have?"

"I don't know, sir, but three hundred and ninety-two are trapped below decks."

"Deploy forces to protect your section and Auxiliary Control Center. Check the Armory—and try to free those trapped men."

"Doors and bulkheads won't budge, sir. We'll have to cut through—"

"Blow out bulkheads if you have to—we need numbers! Any luck regaining control of speed?"

"No, sir. She's a projectile—at warp nine. Don't ask me what's holding her together."

"Five-minute reports. Kirk out."

He went to Spock's station. "Full sensor scans of the ship, Mr. Spock. Report any movements on the part of the Klingons. The Klingon Empire has maintained a dueling tradition. They think they can beat us with swords!"

Spock coolly examined the sword that had once been his phaser. "Neither the Klingon technology nor ours is capable of this, Captain. Instantaneous transmutation of matter. I doubt that they are responsible . . ."

"Other logical candidates?" Kirk demanded impatiently.

"None, Captain. But if they had such power, wouldn't they have created more effective weapons—and only for themselves?"

Kirk turned away. "Get below, Mr. Sulu. Take command of forces protecting Engineering and Auxiliary Control."

Sulu rose and Chekov rose with him.

"As you were, Mr. Chekov," Kirk said.

"No, sir! Let me go, too! I've got a personal score to settle with Klingons!"

"Maintain your post. This is no time for vendettas."

"Captain, I . . ."

"Sit down, Mister."

Chekov made a break for the elevator. As he reached it, Kirk grabbed his shoulder. Chekov wrenched away; and Spock, at Kirk's side, reached out an arm. Ducking under it, Chekov drew his sword. As he lifted it, Kirk and Spock paused, unwilling to risk a tangle that might hurt him.

"Don't try to stop me, Captain! I saw what they left of Piotr! I swore on his grave I would avenge his murder . . ." He backed into the elevator and its doors closed.

Sulu was staring. "What's Chekov's grudge against the Klingons? Who's—Piotr?"

"His brother," Kirk said. "Killed in a Klingon raid."

"His brother?" Sulu echoed blankly. "Chekov never had a brother! He's an only child."

It was Kirk's turn to stare. After a long moment, he said, "You are mistaken."

"I'm not, sir!" Sulu was very earnest. "I *know* he's an only child. It's why he requests his shore leaves on Earth—a good only son of his parents should visit them!"

"On your way to Engineering, Mr. Sulu."

Sulu left—and a newly troubled Kirk hit his intercom. "Captain Kirk to Security. Find Mr. Chekov and return him to the bridge."

Uhura swung around. "Captain—what could have made Chekov believe he had a brother?"

"I don't know, Lieutenant. But he does believe it—and now he wants revenge for a nonexistent loss."

On the *Enterprise* bridge, mystery was compounding itself, but in its crew lounge, clarification was in order.

A Klingon had projected the Starship's plan and arrangements on the viewer. "Layout and specifications of the ship, Commander Kang."

"Enemy numbers are the same as ours," Mara said. "We have a fighting balance."

"Then we will take this ship!" Kang spoke with a ferocious determination.

"A vessel that is racing toward the edge of the galaxy is weakening," his man said. "If the humans can't control it . . ."

Kang jabbed at the diagrams on the viewer. "These points we must capture! First, their Engineering section . . ."

McCoy was working feverishly to complete his treatment of Galloway's wound. As he worked, he could hear the moans of other slashed men waiting their turn at the table.

"Those—filthy butchers!" he muttered. "There are *rules*—even in *war* . . . you don't keep on hacking at a man after he's down!" He felt sick with impotent rage. He looked at an orderly who was wiping blood from a shoulder gash. "Where's that Numanol capsule?"

Haggard and worn by Sickbay's harrowing activity, the orderly turned, only to be confronted by wheeled stretchers bearing two more injured men. McCoy went to them. A glance told him their wounds were serious. As he bent over one of them, he spoke to the orderly. "I'm convinced now the only good Klingon is a dead one," he said.

Scott was inclined to agree with him. All attempts to release the cut-off crewmen had failed. Phaser beams

couldn't cut through the bulkheads. Their metal's structure had changed. He hit an intercom button to make his report.

"What about the Armory?" Kirk said.

"I'm there now, Captain. You never saw such a collection of antiques in your life . . ."

The Armory had turned into a medieval weapons' Wonderland. Crossbows, hatchets, knives, broadswords . . .

"Get back to Engineering," Kirk said. "Keep trying to reestablish engine control. And make some phasers—fast."

"Aye, sir."

He was about to leave when he spotted a sharply two-edged weapon in the rack. He removed it, fondling it. "A claymore!" Exchanging it for the sword at his waist, he murmured, "Ah, you're a beauty, aren't you?"

As he strutted out of the Armory, reinforced by Scotland's history of claymore triumphs, Spock was computing the opposing forces at an exact thirty-eight. He lifted his head from his computer. "The Klingons occupy Deck Six and starboard Deck Seven, Captain. We control all sections above." He bent to his viewer again, becoming suddenly intent. "Most curious," he said.

"What?" Kirk said.

"There appear to be more energy units aboard than can be accounted for by the presence of the *Enterprise* crew plus the Klingons. A considerable discrepancy."

"Could some more of Kang's crew have beamed aboard?"

"Their ship was thoroughly vacated, Captain." He flipped a switch. "I shall compensate for the human and Klingon readings."

The crystal had found Engineering. It hovered high in the air, as unseen as it was unheard.

Scotty, descending a ladder, stepped down into the lower level of his section. "Any signs of those treacherous devils, Mr. Sulu?"

"All clear, Mr. Scott."

Klingons, moving into the upper level, leaped down to the attack. The surprised humans fell back. But Scott was inspired by his claymore's tradition. He felled a Klingon with its haft; and then realizing that his species was hope-

lessly outnumbered, darted through a door into the corridor. Sulu joined him, downing the two Klingons who followed him.

Scott was breathless. "I don't know how many of these creatures are around. We'll split up here. Maybe . . . one of us . . . can make it back to the bridge."

Inside Engineering, the rest of the crew were being shoved against a wall. As they were disarmed, a jubilant Kang strode in, Mara at his side.

It was hard going, trying to get back to the bridge. Klingons seemed to be everywhere. The canny Scott finally reconciled national glory with common sense. He hid in a lavatory. So he was in no position to see Spock zero in on an unusual but steady beeping.

"An alien life force, Captain. A single entity. I am unable to ascertain its location." He flicked a switch. "Readings diverted to the library computer for analysis . . ."

Kirk, beside him, said, "We have to make contact . . . find out what it wants!"

Calmer than custard, Spock said, "The computer report, Captain . . ."

There was a click—and the computer voice said, "Alien life force on board is composed of pure energy. Type unknown. Actions indicate intelligence and purpose."

"What purpose?" Spock said.

The metallic computer voice said, "Insufficient data for further analysis."

The computer's stark admission of inadequacy fired Kirk into new, creative thought. Out of his human memory banks he made connections. "A brother that never existed," he said. "A phantom colony—fancied distress calls! The illusion that phasers are swords! Do you begin to sense a pattern, Mr. Spock?"

Spock, loyal to facts, looked up. "If the alien has caused these phenomena, it is apparently able to manipulate matter and minds."

"Now it's controlling the *Enterprise*—taking us out of the galaxy! *Why?*"

"I am constrained to point out, Captain, that as minds are evidently being influenced, we cannot know that our own memories at this moment are accurate."

Kirk faced his sole alternative. "We've got to talk to Kang and bury the hatchet!"

"An appropriate choice of terms, sir. However, once blood has been drawn, it is notoriously difficult to arrange a truce with Klingons . . ."

"A truce?"

It was McCoy—an outraged, infuriated McCoy. His white surgical uniform was blood-spattered. "I've got seven men down in Sickbay—some of them dying—*atrocities* committed on their persons! And you can talk of making peace with those fiends? They'd jump us the minute our backs were turned! We know what Klingons do to prisoners! Slave labor, death planets—experiments!"

Kirk had never seen Bones so angry. "McCoy—" he began.

McCoy rushed on. "Even while you're talking, the Klingons are planning attacks! This is a fight to the death—and we'd better start trying to win it!"

"We are trying to end it, Doctor." Spock's voice was more than usually quiet. "There is an alien aboard which may have created this situation . . ."

McCoy glared at him. "Who *cares* what started it! We're *in* it! Those murderers! Let's wipe out every one of them!"

"Bones, the alien is the enemy we have to wipe out—"

Uhura cut in. "Sickbay calling, Doctor. There are more wounded men requiring your attention."

McCoy wheeled, starting back to the elevator. Then he turned again to Kirk and Spock. "How many men have to die before you begin acting like military men instead of damn fools?" The elevator doors closed on his bleakly hopeless face. Kirk looked at Spock. The Vulcan murmured, "Extraordinary."

Kang was on the intercom. Kirk spoke quickly. "There's something important we must discuss . . ."

Vindictive and triumphant, Kang's voice said, "I have captured your Engineering section! I now control this ship's power and life support systems." At Engineering's intercom he nodded to Mara. She moved a series of switches and Kang spoke again into the intercom.

"I have deprived all areas of life support except our

own. You will die . . . of suffocation . . . in the icy cold of space . . .”

On the bridge, lights were dimming. Panels were going dark.

Kirk walked slowly over to Sulu's station. "Mr. Sulu, get down to Emergency Manual Control. Try to protect life support circuits and activate auxiliary power . . ."

"Aye, Captain." But as Sulu approached the elevator, Scott burst out of it. He barely acknowledged the helmsman's smile of relief at his safety. Kirk went to him. "Scotty! I'm glad you escaped . . ."

Scott was shaking. "Chekov was right, Captain! We *should've* left those slant-eyed goons in the Transporter! That's right where they belong—in nonexistence! Now they can study the *Enterprise*—add our technology to theirs—change the balance of power!" He lurched at Kirk, not in attack but in a blind misery that was seeking some shred of comfort. "You've jeopardized the Federation!"

The charge was a cry of anguish. "Scotty . . ."

Spock had joined them. "Mr. Scott, calm yourself," he said.

Scott pulled back. For one terrible moment, Kirk feared he was going to spit at Spock, such aversion showed in his face. "Keep your Vulcan hands off me! Just stay away! Your 'feelings' might get hurt, you green-blooded, halfbreed freak!"

Kirk didn't believe his ears. Appalled, he stared at Scott. Then Spock made his icy retort. "Let me say that I have not enjoyed serving with humans. I find their illogical and foolish emotions a constant irritant."

"So transfer out!" Scott shouted.

Spock moved toward Scott. He loomed darkly formidable over him—and Scott, frightened, took a clumsy punch at him. Kirk grabbed their arms; but Spock, twisting easily free, seemed about to use his great strength in an upsurge of rage he couldn't govern. Kirk tried again; and yanking them apart, crashed back into his command chair. "Spock! Scotty! Stow it!" He pinned them, panting. "*What's happening to us! What are we saying to each other?*"

Spock pushed Kirk away. Kirk braced himself, ready for some ultimate disaster. But nothing happened. Spock

was himself again, perhaps a little more impassive than usual.

"Fascinating," he said to Kirk. "A result of stress, Captain?"

"We've been under stress before! It hasn't set us at each other's throats!" Scott had started forward again and Kirk pushed him back.

"This is a *war*!" Scott yelled.

"There isn't any war . . ." Kirk paused, the sound of his own words in his ears. "Or—*is* there?"

"Have we forgotten how to defend ourselves?" Scott cried.

"Shut up, Scotty." Kirk paced at the back of his command chair, frowning as he put his two's together. "What *is* happening to us? We're trained to think in other terms—than war! We're trained to fight its causes whenever possible! So why are *we* reacting like savages?" The two's were adding up. He swung around to his men. "There are two forces on this ship, armed equally. Has—a war been *staged* for us? A war complete with weapons, grievances, patriotic drumbeats?" He turned on Scott. "Even race hatred!"

Spock had nodded. "Recent events *would* seem directed to a magnification of basic human and Klingon hostilities. Apparently, it is by design that we fight. We seem to be pawns."

"In what game?" Kirk said. "Whose game? What are the rules?"

"It is most urgent," Spock said, "that we locate the alien entity, determine its motives—and some means of halting its activities."

Scott's startled thoughts had been tumbling around in his head. He was quieter now—and guilt-stricken. He spoke to Spock. "Without sensors, sir? All our power down? The thing can pass through walls. It could be anywhere."

Kirk hit his intercom. "Mr. Sulu, report!"

Sulu was at the Jeffries tube, peering up into it. "No good, Captain. Circuits are in but systems aren't responding." As he spoke, the tube's complex instruments flickered with light and settled down to a steady pattern. He heard Kirk say, "Are we getting something?"

"Aye, sir. Power and life support restored—remotes on standby . . ."

"Good work!" Kirk told him.

"But Captain—I *didn't* do it! Everything just came on by itself!"

Kirk thought, "Well, this is a gift horse I don't look too close in the mouth of." He said, "All right, Mr. Sulu. Get back to Manual Control. Kirk out."

The bridge lights had come back to normal. Panels had resumed their humming. Spock turned. "Sensors operating again, Captain."

"Start scanning, Mr. Spock. Look for the alien."

In Engineering, a puzzled Mara was studying lights on a large board. "Their life support systems have resumed and are holding steady," she told Kang.

"Cause them to be unsteady," he said.

"They appear to be controlled from another location." For the first time her voice was uncertain. "I'm also unable to affect the ship's course—to return to our Empire."

"Some trick of Kirk's? Has he bypassed these circuits? What power is it that supports our battle, yet starves our victory? Interrupt power at their main life support couplings. Where are they?"

She looked at the diagrams on the viewer. "They are on this deck." At Kang's nod, she spoke to a Klingon. "Come with me."

Above them in the bridge, Spock had tensed. He whirled to Kirk. "Alien detected, Captain! In the Engineering level, near reactor number three!"

Kirk leaped from his chair. "Let's go!"

Mara, the Klingon behind her, was rushing down a corridor that led to the couplings. As they passed an alcove, Chekov, sword drawn, moved out of it, his face hate-filled. Two well-aimed slashes disposed of the Klingon. Mara was turning to run when Chekov grabbed her and whirled her around. She fought well; but Chekov blocked her karate blow. He pinned her back against the wall, sword at her throat. It was a lovely throat. Chekov's manner changed. He eyed her with an ugly speculation, grinning. "No, you don't die—yet," he said. "You're not human but you're beautiful, aren't you?" His grip on her tightened. "Just how human *are* you?"

She pushed at him, struggling against the grip. Chekov placed his hand over her mouth and was pressing her into the alcove when Kirk and Spock raced out of the elevator. Assault was the last thing on their minds. Hearing Mara's muffled scream, they stared at each other. Then they broke into a run, rounded a corner—and stopped dead in their tracks at what they saw.

“Chekov!”

Chekov wheeled to face Kirk, a wild beast deprived of its prey. Mara's garment was ripped from her shoulders. Chekov spun her away. She hit a wall and dropped. He tried to dodge Kirk and failed. Kirk seized him, slapping his face forehand, backhand. Chekov sobbed; and raising his sword, made a swipe at Kirk. He was disarmed and felled with a punch. Beside himself with fury, Kirk struck him again.

Spock put a hand on Kirk's shoulder. “Captain . . . he is not responsible . . .”

Mara, crouched on the deck, was trying to pull her torn clothes together. Kirk went to her. “Listen to me,” he said. “There's an alien entity aboard this ship. It's forcing us to fight. We don't know its motives—we're trying to find out. Will you help us? Will you take me to Kang . . . a temporary truce! That's all I ask!”

Mingled fear and hate blazed from her eyes. Kirk turned his back on her. “Bring her, Spock.” He moved to the weeping Chekov and lifted him gently in his arms. Was this what was in store for all of them? Hatred, violence wherever they turned?

McCoy was re-dressing Galloway's wound when Kirk carried Chekov into Sickbay. He looked up, taking them all in, Kirk, the still sobbing Chekov clinging to him, a disheveled Mara, closely followed by Spock. Shaking his head, he left Galloway and hurried to help Kirk place Chekov on an exam table. He applied a device to the new patient's head.

“Brainwaves show almost paranoid mania. What happened, Jim?”

“He's—lost control—useless as a fighter.” He turned to the door. “Come on, Spock . . .”

McCoy stopped him with a hand on his arm. He seemed somewhat calmer himself but his tired face was be-

wildered. "Jim—Galloway's heart wound has almost entirely healed! The same with the other casualties. Sword wounds . . . into vital organs—massive trauma, shock—and they're all healing at a fantastic rate!"

Spock spoke. "The entity would appear to want us alive."

". . . Why?" Kirk said. "So we can fight and fight—and always come back for more? Some kind of bloody Colosseum? What next? The roar of crowds?"

Galloway was listening. And he was buying none of it. His jaw hardened. He wanted out from Sickbay and for only one reason—another crack at the Klingons.

Kirk felt the lieutenant's hostility like a tangible thing. "Spock, let's find that alien!" He looked at Mara. "You come along. Maybe we can prove to you that it exists!"

In the corridor, Spock unlimbered his tricorder. He led the way, searching cautiously, the tricorder first aimed one way, then another. When they reached a second intersection, Spock paused, gesturing to his left. They turned the corner—and they all heard the crystal's faint humming. Without speaking, Spock signaled them to look up to the right side of the corridor. The crystal was floating there, brighter than it had ever been.

Kirk shot a significant look at Mara. Now that she was forced to believe, she was staring at the thing's swirling red.

"What is it?" Kirk said.

"Totally unfamiliar, Captain."

Kirk approached the crystal. "What do you want? Why are you doing all this?" It hovered silently, persistent.

Kirk, close to blowing his stack, shouted, "What do you want?"

The thing glowed still brighter, bobbing slightly. Spock, noting the increased glow, whirled at a sound. Galloway, still bandaged, was coming down the corridor, a little weak but grimly determined. He hefted his sword—and started to push past them as though he didn't see them.

"Lieutenant Galloway!" Kirk cried. "What are you doing here? Did the Doctor release you?"

"I'm releasing myself!"

First, Chekov's insubordination. Now this one. It took

all Kirk's strength to remember that the crystal was in the business of war, dissension and rule-breaking.

"Go back to Sickbay," he said.

"Not on your life! I'm fit and ready for action!" He shook Kirk's hand from his arm. "The Klingons nearly put me away for good! I'm going to get me some scalps . . ."

"I order you!" Kirk said.

"I've got my orders! I'm obeying orders! To Kill Klingons! It's them or us, isn't it?"

The crystal had bobbed over Galloway's head. Spock, looking up, saw it bob as Galloway pushed past him, heading for an elevator. He tagged the man with a neck pinch. Kirk saw Galloway slump, unconscious, to the deck. Spock's eyes were already back on the crystal. Its glow had faded.

"Most interesting," Spock said.

His eyes returned to Kirk. "During Mr. Galloway's emotional outburst—his expressions of hatred and lust for vengeance—the alien's life-energy level *increased*. When the lieutenant became unconscious, the alien *lost* energy."

"A being that subsists on the emotions of others?" Kirk said.

"Such creatures are not unknown, Captain. I refer you to the Drella of Alpha Carinae five—energy creatures who are nourished by the cooperation of love they feel for one another." He had neared the crystal and was looking up at it, composed and calm. "This creature appears to be strengthened by mental radiations of hostility, by violent intentions . . ."

"It feeds—on hate!" Complete illumination dawned on Kirk.

"Yes, to put it simply, Captain. And it has acted as a catalyst to create this situation in order to satisfy that need. It has drawn fighting forces together, supplied crude weapons to promote the most violent mode of conflict. It has spurred racial animosities—"

"And kept numbers and resources balanced to maintain a stable state of violence! Spock, it's got to have a vulnerable area. It's got to be stopped!"

"Then all hostile attitudes on board must be eliminated, sir. The fighting must end—and soon."

Kirk nodded. "I agree. Otherwise, we'll be a doom ship—traveling forever between galaxies . . . filled with bloodlust . . . eternal warfare! Kang *has* to listen—we've got to pool our knowledge to get rid of that thing!"

The crystal was showing agitation, bobbing as though angry that its secret was known. Now, as Kirk strode to an intercom, it moved toward him, throbbing loudly. For a moment Kirk wavered. Then he walked on. The crystal, its hum furious, approached Mara. Suddenly, without warning, she hurled herself at Kirk, biting, scratching, pushing him away from the intercom. Spock lifted her from Kirk, quietly pinning her arms to her sides.

Kirk hit all buttons. "Kang! This is Kirk! Kang! Kang!"

Mara shrieked, "Commander! It's a trick! They are located—"

Spock's steel hand went over her mouth. At the intercom, Kirk hit the buttons again. "Kang!" It was hopeless. The Klingon wouldn't answer.

"The alien is affecting his mind, Captain. Soon it will grow so powerful that none of us will be able to resist it."

The intercom beeped and Kirk hit it fast—fast and hopefully. "Kirk here!"

"Scotty, sir. The ship's dilithium crystals are deteriorating. We can't stop the process . . ."

Kirk struck the wall with his fist. "Time factor, Scotty?"

"In twelve minutes we'll be totally without engine power, sir."

"Do everything you can. Kirk out."

The crystal stopped bobbing. It glowed brilliantly, back in the driver's seat. As they watched it, it vanished through a wall. Kirk spoke to Mara. "So we drift forever . . . with only hatred and bloodshed aboard. Now do you believe?"

Her strained eyes stared into his. But she made no answer.

The dilithium crystals were still losing power. Spock, rallying all his scientific know-how, toured the bridge, examining panels. Finally, he broke the bad news to Kirk. There was nothing to be done to halt the crystals' decay.

"We have nine minutes and fifty-seven seconds before

power zero," he said. "But there is a logical alternative, Captain." He was looking at Mara, his face speculative. "Kang's wife, after all, is our prisoner. A threat made to him . . ."

"*That's* something the Klingons would understand," Scott urged.

Mara had flinched, remembering the unspeakable atrocities said to be visited on Klingon prisoners by their human captors. Kirk saw her remembering them. Though the idea of using her to threaten Kang just might result in a productive discussion with him, it revolted him. On the other hand, peace between them was the sole hope now. After a long, painful moment, he said, "You're right, Mr. Spock."

He flicked on his intercom. This was going to be difficult. He harshened his voice. "Kang. Kang! This is Captain Kirk. I know you can hear me . . . Don't cut me off! *We have Mara—your wife!*"

At Engineering's intercom, Kang was listening. Kirk's voice went on. "We talk truce *now*—or she dies. Reply!" Kang was silent.

"She has five seconds to live, Kang! Reply!"

The answer came. "She is a victim of war, Captain. She understands." Kang flicked off the intercom, his dark emotion visible to his men. He turned to them. "When we get Kirk, he is mine," he said.

The last card had been played. Kirk looked at Mara. She had stiffened, her head held high, proud, a queen awaiting death. He pointed to a seat. "Sit over there and keep out of our way. Lieutenant Uhura, guard her."

She didn't understand. ". . . you're . . . not going to . . . ?"

"The Federation doesn't kill or mistreat its prisoners. You've heard fables, propaganda." He looked away from her as though he'd forgotten her existence. "How much time now, Mr. Spock?"

"Eight minutes and forty-two seconds, sir."

Instead of taking a seat, Mara had gone to the panel Spock was studying. Reading it, she realized the dilithium situation. Near her, Uhura watched her as she turned in shocked belief. "So it was no trick . . ." she said, bewildered.

Scott spoke. "The alien has done all this. We are in its power. Our people—and yours."

Kirk rose from his chair. "We wanted only to end the fighting to save us all," he told her.

Her relief had bred a need to explain. "We have always fought, Captain Kirk. We must. We are hunters, tracking and taking what we need. There are poor planets in the Klingon systems. We must push outward to survive."

"Another way to survive is mutual trust, Mara. Mutual trust and mutual help."

"I will help you now," she said.

He'd hoped to no point too many times to feel anything but skepticism. "How?" he said.

"I will take you to Kang. I will add my plea to yours."

Scott's suspicion found voice. "Captain—I wouldn't trust her . . ."

"We can't get past the Klingon defenses in time now, anyway—" Kirk paused. "Unless . . ." He whirled to Spock. "*Spock! Intraship beaming! From one part of the ship to another! Is it possible?*"

"It has rarely been done, sir, because of the great danger involved. Pinpoint accuracy is needed. If the Transportee should materialize within any solid object—a wall or deck . . ."

"Prepare the Transporter," Kirk said.

"Mr. Scott, please help me with the Main Transporter Board." Spock moved to a panel but Scott hesitated, worried.

"Even if it works, Captain, she may be leading you into a trap!"

"We're all in a trap, Scotty. And this is our only way out of it."

"We'll go with you, sir . . ."

"That would start the final battle." Kirk took a long-searching look at Mara. "I believe her."

Scott took one for himself. He believed her, too. "Aye, sir," he said.

Mara entered the elevator. Following her, Kirk said, "We'll wait for your signal." As the doors closed, Scott thoughtfully fingered his sword. "But she can't guarantee that Kang will listen. Right, Mr. Spock?"

But Spock was intent on the Main Transporter Board. "No one can guarantee another's actions, Mr. Scott."

The Transporter Room was empty. Entering it, Kirk deliberately removed his sword; and, disarmed, placed the weapon on the console. Mara smiled at him. Spock's voice spoke from the intercom. "Your automatic setting is laid in, Captain. When the Transporter is energized, you will have eight seconds to get to the pads."

The console was flickering with lights. As Kirk pressed a button, it beeped to every second that passed. Its hum rose and Kirk said, "I hope your computations are correct, Mr. Spock."

"You will know in five point two seconds, Captain."

Kirk and Mara went quickly into position on the platform. There were eight more beeps from the console before they shimmered out.

At their appearance in Engineering, the startled Kang exploded to his feet. "*Mara!* You are alive! . . . and you bring us a prize!" He turned, shouting, "*Guards!*"

Swords drawn, his men ringed Kirk.

"Kang—wait!" Mara cried. "He has come alone—unarmed! *He must talk to you!*"

"Brave Captain. What about?" Kang swung to his men. "Kill him."

Mara rushed into place before Kirk. "*No!* You must listen! There is great danger to us all!"

Kang paused—and Kirk moved her aside, unwilling to allow her shield to him. "Before you start killing," he said, "give me one minute to speak!"

Kang ignored him. He spoke to Mara. "What have they done to you? How have they affected your mind?" Then he spotted her torn garment, her bruised shoulder. His slanted eyes went icy. "Ah, I see why this human beast did not kill you . . ."

She flashed into action. She seized a sword and tossed it to Kirk. He caught it as Kang launched himself headlong into attack. Defending himself, he retreated before another fierce slash. Mara, held by a Klingon, was struggling, agonized by the turn events had taken.

"*They didn't harm me!* Kang, listen to Kirk!"

Kang backed away for another onrush. "With his death, we win!"

"*Nobody wins!*" Kirk shouted. "Have any of your men died?" He broke into sudden attack but only to bring himself closer to Kang. "*Listen! We can't be killed—any of us! There's an alien aboard this ship that needs us alive!*"

Kang shoved him away only to come back with another vicious onslaught.

"*You fool!*" Mara screamed.

From behind them all, the Transporter humming sounded. Spock, McCoy, Sulu and the *Enterprise* forces sparkled into shape and substance. Kang's men rushed forward, swords aimed. The Security guards, led by Sulu who uttered a yell that might have been "Banzai!" closed with them.

Kirk, downing a Klingon with a hard right to the jaw, reached Kang—and grabbed him. Nose to nose, he shouted, "*Listen to me! Let me prove what I say!*"

Kang wrenched free, his sword up for the lethal downsweep. Kirk parried the blow in mid-descent. Mara, huddled against a wall, covered her face with her hands, despairing. Kang came back with another vicious slash. As Kirk ducked it, he heard the triumphant throbbing. He looked up. The crystal—above their heads, brighter than he'd ever seen it—was casting its virulent red light on Kang's face.

The sight was all that he needed. He pushed Kang back, pinning him, and whirled him around to face their common enemy.

"*LOOK! Up there!*"

Kang looked. He shot a glance at Kirk—but the real meaning of what he'd seen didn't get through to him.

The fight went on, interminably. Sulu plunged his sword into an opponent's chest. The Klingon staggered, pawing at the wound. Then he rallied. He drove so straight for Sulu's heart that the *Enterprise* helmsman barely managed to escape the thrust.

Kang, his eyes on the crystal, was just beginning to get the lay of the land. Kirk pressed his advantage. ". . . for the rest of our lives, Kang! For a thousand lifetimes—fighting, this insane violence! That alien over our heads will control us forever!"

The crystal throbbed loudly. Kirk himself felt the heat

of its bloody radiance. But Kang still twisted, snarling, avid for killing. Kirk smashed the sword that had reappeared in his hand. He struck it furiously against a bulkhead. It broke. Kang stared at him. Then he stepped forward, his own weapon upraised. Kirk stood his ground.

"Come on! In the brain, the heart—it doesn't matter, Kang! *I won't stay dead!* Next time the thing will see to it that I kill you. And you won't stay dead! The good old game of war—mindless pawn against mindless pawn! While something somewhere sits back and laughs . . . laughs fit to kill, Kang—and starts it all over again . . ."

The sword was at his throat.

"Jim—*jump him!*" McCoy shouted.

Spock spoke out of his wise Vulcan heritage. "Those who hate and fight must stop themselves, Doctor—or it is not stopped."

Mara had flung herself at Kang's feet. "I'm your wife—a Klingon! Would I lie for them? Listen to Kirk. He is telling the truth!"

"*Then be a pawn!*" Kirk said. "A toy—the good soldier who never asks questions!"

Kang looked up at the excitedly throbbing crystal. Very slowly, his hand relaxed on the sword. It dropped to the deck.

"Klingons," he told the crystal, "kill for their *own* purposes." He turned to his men, shouting. "Cease hostilities! At rest!"

They were puzzled by the order—but they obeyed. Kang yanked a Klingon away from a downed Security man. "*At rest! At rest!* You heard the order!"

Through the open door they could all hear the clashing sounds of continuing battle in other parts of the ship. "*All fighting must be stopped, Captain, if the alien is to be weakened before our fuel is gone.*"

Kang had lifted Mara to her feet. They joined Kirk at the intercom as he activated it, Kang still suspicious.

"Lieutenant Uhura, put me on shipwide intercom . . ."

"Ready, Captain."

"Attention, all hands! A truce is ordered . . . the fighting is over! Regroup and lay down weapons." He stepped back, speaking urgently. "Kang! Your turn at the intercom . . ."

The Klingon hesitated, reluctant. He couldn't resist a push at Kirk as he moved to the intercom. "This is Kang. Cease hostilities. Disarm."

The crystal was bobbing wildly with anger; but its throbbing had lessened and its redness was dimmer. "The cessation of violence appears to have weakened the alien," Spock said. "I suggest that good spirits might prove to be an effective weapon."

Kirk nodded. A hard smile on his lips, he addressed the crystal. "Get off my ship!" The thing retreated, still bobbing. "You're powerless here. You're a dead duck. We know all about you—and we don't want to play your game any more."

The throbbing was fainter. Spock was right. What the invader needed was a cheerful scorn. Kirk looked up at it. "Maybe there are others like you still around. Maybe you've caused a lot of suffering—a lot of history. That's all over. We'll be on guard . . . we'll be ready for you. Now butt out!" He laughed at the crystal. "Haul it!"

McCoy waved a contemptuous hand. "Get out, already!" he yelled.

As the throbbing faded, Kirk was amazed to hear a hoarse chuckle from Kang. Then he laughed as though he weren't used to it. His gusto grew. "Out!" he shouted at the crystal. "We need no urging to hate humans!" He laughed harder at Spock's irritated glance. "But for the present—only fools fight in a burning house."

Guffawing, he rattled Kirk's teeth with a sadistic whack on the back. McCoy nudged Spock. After a moment, the Vulcan thumbed his nose at the crystal. "You will please leave," he said.

The red was now a dull flicker. They all watched it, laughing. Suddenly the crystal vanished through a bulkhead. Floating in space outside the Starship, it flared up and winked out.

The forced laughter had come hard. Kirk's relief from hours of nervous strain overwhelmed him so that he wasn't surprised to see that swords and shields had disappeared. Spock and McCoy discovered their phasers in place. McCoy made a point of drawing his; and Kang, noting the weapon, went right on chuckling. Caution—it was how

things were between the Federation and his Klingon Empire.

Uhura's voice spoke. "Captain, jettisoning of fuel has stopped. The trapped crewmen are free. All systems returning to normal."

"Carry on, Lieutenant. Mr. Sulu, resume your post. Set course for—well, set it for any old star in the galaxy!"

As Sulu left, Kirk nearly knocked Kang from his feet with a mighty thump on the back. Kang spun around, blood in his eye—and Kirk grinned at him. "*Friends!*" he said.

The command chair was a place again where a man could relax. For a moment, anyway. Kirk leaned back in his seat.

"Ahead, Mr. Sulu. Warp one." He turned to Kang and Mara. "We'll reach a neutral planet by tomorrow. You'll be dropped there. No war, this time."

He eyed Mara. A real woman, that one. If she hadn't been Kang's wife . . . if there had been time. Ah well, no man could accommodate all opportunities . . .

Kang was saying, "Why do you humans revere peace? It is the weakling's way. There's a galaxy to be taken, Kirk, with all its riches!"

Spock looked up. "Two animals may fight over a bone, sir—or they can pool their abilities, hunt together more efficiently and share justly. Curiously, it works out about the same."

Kang turned. "One animal must trust the other animal."

"Agreed," Kirk said. "Cooperate . . . or fight uselessly throughout eternity. A universal rule you Klingons had better learn." He paused. "*We did.*"

Had it got through? Maybe. At any rate, Kang's face seemed unusually thoughtful.

Plato's Stepchildren

(Meyer Dolinsky)

The planet was uncharted; but the sensors of the *Enterprise*, in orbit around it, had detected mineral and chemical riches under its rugged, mountainous surface. Spock looked up from his viewer to say briefly, "Kironide deposits, too, Captain."

"Record coordinates," Kirk told him.

Uhura turned. "Mr. Spock, what *is* kironide?"

"A particularly potent and long-lasting source of power, Lieutenant—very rare."

She was about to question him further when her board's lights flashed. Surprise still on her face, she reported to Kirk. "A distress signal's coming in, Captain."

It was disconcerting news. An uncharted planet, apparently uninhabited—and an SOS call. Kirk said, "Let's have it. Put it on audio, Lieutenant."

A woman's voice, amplified by the bridge's audio system, was loud enough for everyone to hear.

"My spouse is dying. We need a physician immediately. The situation is urgent. If there's a physician hearing this, we need you. Please make contact. My spouse is dying . . ."

Kirk said, "I thought there was no life down there, Mr. Spock."

"The sensors still read negative, sir."

But the voice was still with them. "Please help us. We are in desperate need of a physician. My spouse is dying. Acknowledge . . . acknowledge . . . please . . ."

"Mr. Spock, life forms or no life forms, that distress call sounds authentic." Kirk got up and strode to Uhura's station. "Lieutenant, acknowledge and report that we're beaming down at once. Notify Dr. McCoy to meet us in the Transporter Room."

Medikit in hand, McCoy materialized with Kirk and Spock in front of a colonnaded promenade. At first glance, there seemed to be no one around. Then Kirk spotted movement at the rear of a marble column. A dwarf, clearly frightened and wearing a short Greek robe that left one misshapen shoulder bare, broke from behind the column and scuttled to them.

"Are you from the spaceship *Enterprise*?"

Kirk looked down at him for a moment before he spoke. "That's right."

"No offense," the dwarf said hastily. He bowed low. "Alexander . . . at your service. I sing, I dance, I play all variety of games and I'm a good loser. A very good loser. And I try, I try very hard. Please bear that in mind."

It was an extraordinary speech. The *Enterprise* men looked at each other, nonplussed, and the dwarf said, "Now, if you'll accompany me . . ."

"Who inhabits this planet?" Kirk said.

The little creature bowed again. "Platonians. You've never heard of us. Our home star is Sahndara. Millennia ago, just before it novaed, we got off. Our leader liked Plato's ideas—Plato—Platonians, see? In fact, Parmen, our present philosopher-king, calls us Plato's children. Some of us think we're more like *step*children." He gave a nervous little laugh. "Now, please—they're waiting for you . . ."

He wheeled around and hurried ahead of them like a mechanical doll set suddenly into motion.

The *Enterprise* three hesitated. Then, curious but a little uneasy, they followed him.

Whoever McCoy's prospective patient was, he had done very well for himself. The dwarf ushered them into a stately, atrium-like court pillared by marble. In the center of the place, a nymph of marble dripped water from an urn

into a reflecting pool. There was a game board on the left, flanked by benches, the pieces it held geometrically shaped into balls, pyramids, cylinders and cubes. Two tall robed men stood near a couch where another one reclined, his legs covered. Kirk saw a spasm of pain convulse his face. It seemed to deeply concern the dark, beautiful woman who was stooping over him. She touched his bald head gently before she hurried forward to greet the newcomers.

"Parmen and I welcome you to our Republic," she said. "I am Philana, his wife. Who among you is the physician?"

So the Platonians' philosopher-king was the patient. The startled McCoy said, "I am. What is the problem?"

She gestured to the couch. "You must do something. . ."

Following her, McCoy removed the covering from his patient's legs. An infection had swollen the left one almost to the knee. "What happened to that leg?" he said.

With a sick man's irritation, Parmen snapped, "What do you suppose? I scratched it!"

"I don't understand," McCoy said. "Why wasn't this attended to immediately?"

"Sheer ignorance. Is there anything you can do?"

The question put McCoy on guard. "We're certainly going to try. The infection is massive. Let me give you a shot to ease the pain."

McCoy opened his medikit; but before he so much as touched his hypo, it rose from the kit and sailing through the air, hovered for a moment. Kirk and Spock were looking up at it in amazement when Parmen said, "Where?"

McCoy came out of his shock. "Your arm," he said.

The hypo alighted on Parmen's upper arm, delivered the shot and replaced itself in the medikit. The sick man noted McCoy's expression. "Sorry, didn't mean to take matters out of your hands," he said. "But I can't risk any further contamination."

Watching, the dwarf touched Philana's white robe. "Mistress, they've come to help. They deserve better than to die."

Alexander had spoken so softly that Kirk didn't hear the plea. But what he saw was enough. The little man's mouth was forced open. His fist clenched and was shoved

into the open mouth. Then his teeth were snapped back to bite into his knuckles.

"Alexander, you talk too much," Philana said.

The fist was left in the mouth. Over it the dwarf's tormented eyes met Kirk's.

"What is your prognosis, Doctor?"

Parmen barely managed to utter the words. His breath was coming in heavy pants and he was perspiring profusely. But McCoy, scanning him with his tricorder, had not forgotten the hypo episode. "It will be better," he said, "if I handle my instruments myself without any help from you."

His patient stifled a cry of agony. McCoy took another closer reading of his tricorder's dials. As Parmen moaned, turning on his side, Kirk approached the couch. "I don't understand how a simple scratch could get this serious," he said to McCoy.

The *Enterprise* surgeon stepped to one side. "Neither do I. But it has. And how do I knock out an infection with a tricorder that has no information on Platonian bacteria? All I can do—and it's going to take time—is match his bugs with a known strain and *hope*."

"Look at the game board," Kirk said.

The dwarf's fist had been removed from his mouth. It had been removed so that he could play a game with one of the robed academician-guests. Kirk and McCoy saw Alexander move a piece; but his opponent's piece made its countermove by itself.

"Your pyramid is in jeopardy, Eraclitus," Alexander said.

A cube rose into the air and descended into another position. "Aha! It isn't now!" Eraclitus laughed. "I won the game."

Kirk went to Philana. "This psychokinetic power of yours is unique. How long have you possessed it?"

"Two and a half millennia—ever since our arrival here on Platonius."

Spock joined them. "How is the power transmitted?" he asked.

"Brain waves," she told him.

"Do these waves cease when you're asleep?"

"No, not if they're embedded in the unconscious," she said.

"How do dreams affect them?" Kirk said.

Her anxious face moved in a coldly formal smile. "Our sleep is dreamless."

McCoy, gathering chemicals from his kit, was mixing them in a vial. Delirium's symptoms were beginning to show in the twisting, fevered Parmen. Frustrated and disturbed, McCoy called to Philana. "*Why don't you have doctors? Medicine?*"

"We've had no pressing need for the medical arts, Doctor. While still on Sahndara, we instituted a mass eugenics program. We're the result. Pared down to a population of thirty-eight, we're perfect for our utopia. Overemotionality and concern with family have been eliminated. We're bred for contemplation, self-reliance and longevity." She paused. "How old would you say I am, gentlemen? Don't be afraid. I'm not vain."

"Thirty-five," Spock said.

"That old? I . . . I stopped aging at thirty. Anyway, you missed by two thousand years. I am two thousand, three hundred years old. We married very young, Parmen and I. I was only one seventeen, he was one twenty-eight. You see, we scarcely have to move any more, let alone work."

Kirk nodded. "That's why you have no resistance."

"True," she said. "A break in the skin or a cut can be fatal." She looked over at the couch. "We went for a stroll in the moonlight—something we seldom do—and my spouse fell . . ."

Parmen gave a cry. She hurried away from them to watch McCoy. He was working fast, pulling his mixed chemicals into the hypo. Suddenly a marble bust of Socrates fell from its pedestal, and the game board, along with its geometric pieces, lifted up and went spinning through the room. McCoy was trying to shield the hypo and vial with his body when he was whirled about and sent careening across the floor.

Kirk ran to help him to his feet. Spock, rescuing the hypo and vial, said, "Captain, I believe we are experiencing the psychokinetic manifestations of Parmen's delirium."

Kirk's communicator beeped. He flipped it open and

Scott's voice said, "Captain, we're fighting a storm! No discernible cause—I've never seen anything like it! Ten-scale turbulence right now, sir!"

As he spoke, the *Enterprise* gave a violent lurch. Scott turned to Sulu. "Emergency gyros and stabilizers at maximum!" To Kirk he said, "If it keeps up this way, we can't last, Captain!"

"Engines at full speed, Mr. Scott. Get her out of orbit and into space!"

"I've tried, sir. We're locked tight!"

"Then there's nothing you can do but batten down and weather it!"

"Right, sir . . ."

Kirk replaced the communicator in his belt. "Parmen's mind is not only throwing the furniture around, it's tearing the *Enterprise* apart! Bones, knock him out—and fast!"

McCoy drew the last of his chemical mixture into the hypo. He tried to hold his patient still long enough to administer it; but Parmen, staring at him wild-eyed, slammed him back against the wall. McCoy barely succeeded in hanging on to the hypo. Still in his delirium, the philosopher-king caught sight of Alexander. The dwarf was smashed against another marble wall.

"Help! Save me!" he screamed.

Unseen hands were pummeling the dwarf. They jerked him forward only to have him lashed again against the wall. He twisted, ran and was hurled once more against the wall. Kirk raced to him. Kirk seized him, shouting, "Stay behind me!"

"It's no use. His mind will find me anyhow . . ." He whispered, "Don't save him! Please don't save him. Let him die. The others will all kill each other trying to become ruler . . ."

A blow meant for Alexander grazed Kirk's cheek. "Bones, hurry up with that shot!"

McCoy, crouching too low for Parmen to see him, grabbed his arm and got the hypo home against his shoulder. Alexander was screaming again. "Agh . . . I . . . I can't breathe! Choking . . . chok—"

"Bones, shake Parmen! Break his concentration!"

As McCoy obeyed, emptying the hypo, the invisible

clutch released the dwarf's throat. A pedestal about to fall slowly righted itself. Kirk opened his communicator. Had quiet returned to the *Enterprise*?

"It's all right, Captain," Scott said. "The turbulence has abated."

"I think you'll find the orbit lock is broken as well. Assess damage, Mr. Scott, and repair what's necessary."

"Aye, sir."

Philana had seen that sleep had stilled the patient. Gracious now, she spoke to the visitors. "I don't know how I can ever thank you enough, not only for myself but for Platonius."

Kirk was brief. "No thanks are necessary."

"Alexander, show our guests to the South Wing."

"No, thank you," Kirk said. "We must return to the *Enterprise*."

McCoy spoke. "Jim, I think I should wait till the fever breaks."

Kirk hesitated. He'd had enough of Platonius and Platonians. On the other hand, McCoy was a doctor. To snatch him away from a patient for whom still more might need to be done was arbitrary action, whoever the patient was.

"Then we'll stay," he said.

The South Wing was a magnificent suite, hung with silk and decorated in the same classic Greek fashion as Parmen's atrium. Alexander scurried about, introducing them to dressing rooms and sleeping quarters. "You need anything, just say so," he told Kirk.

Kirk smiled at him. "Thanks, Alexander."

"Think nothing of it; you people saved my life." He swallowed nervously. "I . . . I think I ought to tell you. . . ."

"Tell us what?" Kirk said.

The little man appeared to change his mind. He shook his head, a worried little smile on his mouth. "Just that I didn't know any people like you existed."

Kirk peered through the door into an empty corridor. "Where is everyone?" he said.

"In their chambers—meditating."

Kirk turned. "Alexander, are there other Platonians like you?"

The dwarf's face quivered. "What do you mean, 'like me'?"

"Who don't have psychokinetic ability?" Kirk said quietly.

"For a minute I thought you were talking about my . . . my size. They laugh at my size. But to answer your question, I'm the only one who doesn't have it. I was brought here as the court buffoon. That's why I'm everybody's slave."

"How does one get this power?" Spock said.

"As far as I know, it just comes to you after you're born. They say I'm a throwback and I am. But so are you!" Fear came into his eyes. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean anything. I shouldn't have said that."

"Don't worry about it," Kirk said. "We're happy without the ability."

Alexander studied Kirk's face. "You know, I think you are," he said slowly. He paused. "Where you come from, are there a lot of people without the power . . . and my size?"

Kirk was beginning to like the little man. "Size, shape or color doesn't matter to us. And nobody has the power."

Alexander stared. "Nobody!"

Even as he stared, he was being pulled backward toward the door. He gave a miserable little laugh. "Somebody wants me," he told them. Then he was yanked out of the room.

Kirk looked at Spock. The Vulcan shrugged. "It will be pleasant to leave," he said.

Kirk began to pace. "That may not be easy. If Parmen should die . . ."

"Even if he shouldn't . . ." Spock said.

Kirk nodded. "This little Utopia of theirs is about the best-kept secret in the galaxy. Screening themselves from our sensors, locking us in orbit—it all adds up to a pattern, Spock—and one I do not like . . ."

McCoy, with his medical kit, came through the door. He closed it behind him.

"Well?" Kirk said.

"My concoction has actually worked. Fever's broken, and Lord, what recuperative powers! The infection's already begun to drain."

"Dr. McCoy, you may cure the common cold yet!" Spock said.

Kirk took out his communicator. "If we're going to make it out of here, this is the time." He flipped the dial. "Kirk to *Enterprise*. Scott, come in, please . . ."

"Scott here, sir."

"Standby to beam us up."

Scott spoke slowly. "I'm afraid I can't, Captain. All our instrumentations, even our phaser weapons, are frozen."

"The turbulence hit you that hard?"

"It's not the turbulence, sir. Damage to the ship is minimal."

"Then what's caused it?"

Scott's voice was despairing. "I wish I knew, sir. You tell me. I'm only reporting the facts."

Kirk eyed the door. It was still closed. "Scotty, we're up against a society that has psychokinetic energy more powerful than our machines. Did you get out into space?"

"No, Captain. The orbit lock is tighter than ever. And our subspace communication with Starfleet Command is completely severed."

Kirk spoke softly. The contrast between his voice and the fury in his face was so marked that McCoy and Spock stared at him. "I'm going to take care of this. I'll get back to you, Scotty." He closed the communicator, replaced it in his belt; and opening the door, strode out into the corridor.

He found Parmen sitting up on the couch. The philosopher-king's eyes were closed, not with weakness, but with the ravishment of aesthetic ecstasy. The deformed Alexander stood beside him, plucking a lyre as he chanted a song from an Aristophanes play . . .

Great Pan

Sounds his horn:

Marking time

To the rhyme

With his hoof,

With his hoof.

Forward, forward in our plan

We proceed as we began . . .

The wretched dwarf croaked, imitating a chorus of frogs.

He turned at the sound of Kirk's entrance. He seemed to shrink into a still smaller man at Kirk's approach to the couch.

"Your Excellency!" Kirk said.

Parmen opened his eyes, annoyed by interruption of his artistic trance. Then Plato's views on Republican behavior calmed him. "Parmen will do," he said. "Philosopher-kings have no need of titles."

"I want to know why the *Enterprise's* weapons and instrumentation are frozen—why the ship itself is locked in orbit!"

"Captain, please. You're mistaken, I assure you . . ."

The bland evasion enraged Kirk further. "I just spoke to my Engineer aboard the *Enterprise*," he said. "We showed our good faith. Now you show yours. I want that ship released immediately."

Alexander, in panic, was shaking his head at him, mouthing the words, "No—no . . ." Kirk saw why. Parmen was manifestly displeased. The cultivated benignity of his face had been displaced by a supercilious tightness. "The amenities, Captain," he said. "Allow me to remind you that I am the head of this Principality. Guests don't come barging in here, making demands and issuing orders!"

He looked at Kirk's phaser. The weapon left Kirk's belt and zoomed into Parmen's hand. Kirk studied the cold face with contempt. "Guests!" he said. "You don't know the meaning of the word! Guests are not treated like common prisoners!"

Parmen was more than displeased by the rebuke. His face worked with rage—a rage that held no vestige of Platonic calm. "Don't take that tone with me!" he shouted.

Kirk's hand was lifted to strike him sharply across his left cheek. Then his other hand was brought up to slap his right one. In a matter of seconds he'd lost all power to control his hands. Parmen, leaning back on the couch, watched him repeatedly slap himself across the face with one hand after the other.

Control of his communicator seemed to be also lost. Despite several calls to Scott, he couldn't raise him. Finally, he closed the communicator. His face was burning from the beating he'd given it. Like his anger. That burned, too.

Spock turned from one of the silken curtains that draped a window of their suite. "Obviously," he said, "Parmen does not want any contact made with the *Enterprise*."

McCoy protested. "He may still need the ship's medical stores. Why should he prevent contact?"

"To hide any knowledge of his brutal treatment of a Starfleet Captain," Spock said.

Kirk shook his head. "No, Mr. Spock. One thing is certain. Parmen is not concerned with either my dignity or safety."

"Agreed, Captain," Spock said. "And he would not have treated you so brutally if he had any intention of releasing you—or the *Enterprise*."

Suddenly, McCoy rose from a couch and started toward the door.

"Where are you going?" Kirk said.

"I don't want to go, Jim—but I can't help myself."

As he spoke, Kirk was yanked toward the door, too; and Spock, twisted around, was forced to follow him. The three were literally trotted into the corridor, staring down at their moving legs in horror. Will-lessly, they were propelled back into Parmen's chamber. And to the beat of a lyre and drum. At their entrance, Alexander, a one-man band, evoked a great drum roll that matched the rhythm of their trotting feet. Parmen, Philana beside him, applauded the show.

She rose from the couch and curtsied to them. "Gentle spacemen, we are eternally in your debt," she said. "Please accept some trifles as tokens of our gratitude. They stem from the very source of our inspiration. To the noble captain, a shield carried by Pericles as a symbol of his gallant leadership . . ."

She motioned to a shield on the wall. It flew into Kirk's hands. He was about to drop it; but it hovered at his hands, persistent. At last he was compelled to take it; and Philana, smiling, said, "And to our silent and cerebral Mr.

Spock, that kathara from which to pluck music to soothe his ever-active brow . . .”

The instrument left a bench. It sailed over to Spock, who took it; and without looking at it, shoved it under his arm.

It was McCoy's turn to become the recipient of favor. “And lastly, the physician who saved Platonius and my spouse. To you, Dr. McCoy, that ancient collection of Greek cures, penned by Hippocrates himself . . .”

A scroll rose from a table and floated over to McCoy. Kirk saw him begin to unroll it. He took a furious step forward. “Has my ship been released yet?” he demanded.

Parmen spoke. “Captain, wait. I know what you're thinking. My humble apologies. You were badly used. In my own defense, allow me to say that my illness was more profoundly disturbing than I myself realized.”

He leaned back on his couch. A great leaner, Parmen. From his newly-relaxed position, he added, “I'm sure, Captain, that you, too, have been out of sorts; and have reacted with fits of temper and rage. Unlike you, however, what I think and feel is instantly translated into reality. Please find it in your heart to forgive me.”

Kirk said, “*Has the Enterprise been released yet?*”

“It will be, shortly. You're free to leave the planet.”

Kirk turned on his heel, speaking over his shoulder. “Good day, then. And thank you for the gifts.”

“Not at all. There is, though, one final request . . .”

Kirk whirled. He'd known there was a catch in this somewhere. “Well?” he said.

But Parmen was looking at McCoy. “After my nearly fatal infection,” he said, “it has become clear to us all that we cannot afford to be without a skilled physician.” He paused. “We'd like you, Dr. McCoy, to remain with us.”

Kirk stood very still. He heard McCoy say, “I'm sorry. That's impossible.”

Parmen sat up. “Your duties will be extraordinarily light. You'll be able to read, meditate, conduct research—whatever you like. You will want for nothing.”

“I'm afraid the answer is no.”

“We'd like to keep this cordial—but we're determined to have you stay, Doctor.”

Kirk fought to keep his voice steady. "You can bring yourself to do this after Dr. McCoy saved your life?"

"I'm losing patience, Captain . . ."

Despite all his efforts, Kirk's scorn broke through. "And you consider yourself Plato's disciple!"

The comment amused Parmen. "We've managed to live in peace and harmony for centuries, my dear Captain."

Spock's voice was icy. "Whose harmony? *Yours?* Plato wanted beauty, truth and, above all, justice."

The remark hit Parmen where he hurt. "Captain, please! I admit circumstances have forced us to make a few adaptations of Plato. But ours is the most democratic society conceivable! Anyone at any moment can be and do just as he wishes, even to becoming the ruler of Platonius if his mind is strong enough!"

"And if it isn't strong enough, he gets torn apart like Alexander!"

Parmen reverted to another lean-back against his couch. "Oh, come now, Captain, we're not children. In *your* culture, justice is the will of the stronger. It's forced down people's throats by weapons and fleets of spaceships. On Platonius we'll have none of these. Our justice is the will of the stronger *mind*. And I, for one, consider it a vast improvement."

"Why?" Kirk said. "Never would we use our weapons for the kind of brutality you practice!"

Relaxation deserted Parmen again. He got to his feet. "Farewell, Captain Kirk."

Kirk spoke to McCoy. "Come on, Doctor."

He and Spock turned to leave. But McCoy was rooted to the spot where he stood. Kirk, looking back, saw him unmoving, rigid.

"Bones?"

"I—I can't move, Jim. They're going to keep me, no matter what. Leave, please!"

Before, Kirk had never understood the term "towering rage." Now he did. His fury seemed to be making him twelve feet tall in height. "No!" he shouted. "You're a doctor, Bones! They need your goodwill. They're just trying to—"

Parmen interrupted. "Captain, go while you still can."

"We're staying right here until Dr. McCoy is released!"

"This is not the *Enterprise*. And you're not in command here, Captain."

Kirk saw Philana shrug. "Why even discuss it, Parmen? Get rid of them."

"But that might offend the good doctor, Philana." An idea—a delightful one—seemed to strike Parmen. He smiled at Kirk. "You wish to stay? Then do, by all means. You can help us celebrate our anniversary." He spoke to the immobilized McCoy. "In the process, I hope we can persuade you to join our tiny Republic . . ."

McCoy's tongue was still his to use. "You won't persuade me," he said.

"I think we will," Parmen told him.

Two garlands detached themselves from a marble statue of Aphrodite; and, whirling through the air, landed at the feet of Kirk and Spock. They were forced to bend and pick them up. Their gifts fell from their hands; and the same force compelled them to place the garlands ceremoniously on each other's heads.

Parmen nodded to Alexander. The drum broke into a dancing beat. Kirk and Spock began a tap dance. Spock looked down at his shuffling feet in disgust. But Parmen's delightful idea of celebration was just beginning to be realized. The two *Enterprise* men found themselves childishly skipping around the pool, bowing to each other in mechanical precision. Then a line of a song was placed in Kirk's mouth. "I'm Tweedledee, he's Tweedledum . . ." Spock bowed to him, singing, "Two spacemen marching to a drum . . ."

It wasn't over. "We slithe among the mimsy troves," Kirk sang. Spock bowed to him again. "And gyre amidst the borogroves . . ."

The garlands were exchanged. Kirk pouted sadly at the loss of his; and Spock, grinning madly in triumph, put it on his head. They bowed stiffly to each other and were dropped to their knees.

"McCoy!" Kirk yelled. "You're not staying here, no matter what he does to us!"

Parmen made an imperious gesture. Kirk coughed. He

could feel the defiance in his face replacing itself with a pleading abjectness. He heard himself reciting—

Being your slave, what should I do but tend
Upon the hours and times of your desire?
I have no precious time at all to spend,
No services to do till you require.
Nor dare I chide the world-without-end hour
Whilst I, my sovereign, watch the clock for you.
Nor think the bitterness of absence sour
When you have bid your servant once adieu . . .

There was no time for breath. The shaming words continued to stream from him . . .

Nor dare I question with my jealous thought
Where you may be or your affairs suppose,
But, like a sad slave, stay and think of naught
Save where you are how happy you make those!
So true a fool is love that in your will
Though you do anything, he thinks no ill . . .

The idiot thing was done. Kirk's head went down. "Stop it! Stop it!" McCoy shouted.

Kirk looked up. "No matter what he makes me say, it's no. You hear me, McCoy—*no!* I . . ."

His head was almost twisted from his shoulders. He was jerked to his feet, an arm wrenched behind his back. Something grabbed him under the chin—and pulled his neck back, back until a cry of pain escaped him.

"Well, Doctor?" Parmen said.

McCoy was agonized, wavering with the torment of indecision. He was torn not only by laceration of his deep personal affection for Kirk. There was his professional obligation, too. As the *Enterprise's* surgeon, its captain's well-being was his prime consideration. If he agreed to remain with these people, he could end the torture, serving both his love for Kirk and his duty to Starfleet service. Finally, he came to his anguished decision. He turned to Parmen. "I have my orders," he said.

Parmen's mouth tightened. "As you wish, Doctor." Kirk was hurled to the ground. He got up, fists

clenched, and rushed at Parmen. The Platonian stared at him. Kirk was frozen, a raised foot still in the air. "Is this your Utopia?" he shouted. "You haven't even . . ."

He was flung again to the floor. Then words, too, were denied him. His vocal cords went dead.

"We've had enough of your moralizing," Parmen said.

McCoy whirled. "And we've had too much of yours! You will never get me to stay here!"

He was smashed backward.

"You will be happy to stay," Parmen told him. "It takes a little time, Doctor. But you will be happy to stay, I promise you."

He unfroze Spock from his knees. The Vulcan, sickened by Kirk's misery, moved toward Parmen only to be frozen in mid-stride.

Philana looked at Spock. "Perhaps you have been a bit too forceful, Parmen. There are other ways that might be more persuasive."

"I doubt that they will be as entertaining. But if you want to have a try, do so."

Spock gave a cry. Philana had sent him into a wild, stamping flamenco. He danced around and around the downed Kirk. McCoy, unseeing, was staring straight ahead.

"An excellent choice, Philana," Parmen said. He spoke to the rigid McCoy. "All you have to do is nod."

The air was filled with the clack of castanets. The viciously-heel-stamping Spock was moved in close to Kirk's head. An inch closer—and Kirk would be trampled to death. A stomping heel grazed his head. McCoy, about to make an appeal, clamped his mouth shut. Then he closed his eyes against the sight of Spock's helpless attack on Kirk.

The castanet sounds ceased. So did Spock's dancing. He froze in a finger-snapping gesture over Kirk's body. His arms dropped. He began to shake. Out of him came wild peals of laughter.

McCoy opened his eyes as he heard them. He looked, appalled, at Spock as his laughter grew wilder. He swung around to Parmen. "Mr. Spock is a Vulcan," he said. "You must not force emotion from him."

"You must be joking, Doctor," Philana said.

"It can destroy him," McCoy said.

"Come now," Parmen said. "There's nothing so wholesome as a good laugh."

Spock was battered now by the insane fits of laughter. McCoy saw him pressing at his chest to soothe the agony of the spasms. Kirk was fighting to lift himself to get to Spock. He sank back to the floor, too weak to do it. McCoy launched a fierce blow at Parmen. "You're killing Spock!" he cried.

"Then we can't let him die laughing, can we now?" Parmen asked.

The laughter ended. Slowly Spock fell to his knees, his head limp, arms dangling.

"The poor fellow does look rather miserable, doesn't he, dear wife?"

Philana encircled Parmen with her arm. "He does, dear husband. You know, nothing relieves misery like a good, honest cry."

McCoy stared at them. "He's a Vulcan! I beg you. . ."

Parmen's face was flushed with a growing excitement. "Later! Later!" he said impatiently. "That's probably not true of Vulcan men, anyway. Shall we test it, Philana?"

Spock's shoulders began to shake. His body rocked from side to side as though wracked by a sudden woe. He was looking into Kirk's pain-ravaged face. Kirk moved on the floor toward him, his arm out. "Hang on, Spock," he whispered. "Hang on! Don't let him break you open. . . ." He was tense with the struggle to support Spock's repression. But it was no good. Spock's quiet face had turned into the tormented mask of tragedy. Tears welled in his Vulcan eyes and dripped down his cheeks. Unable to control his sobs, he crashed to the floor.

Alexander, trembling and outraged, hurried to the center of the chamber, his lyre in his hand. "Parmen! They saved your life!"

He was flipped back into the pool. He staggered up, soaking wet, his tears mixed with the water. From deeps he didn't know he owned, he delivered his final judgment on his society. "I'm ashamed to be a Platonian. Ashamed!"

It was a resourceful society. Kirk was lifted to his feet; and, from the pool, the dwarf was placed upon Kirk's back. Alexander's arm whipped him on as he was driven, skip-

ping around Spock's body, its eyes vacant as Kirk passed him.

Parmen spoke sadly to McCoy. "How can you let this go on, Doctor?"

For the moment their ordeals were suspended. They'd been permitted to return to their suite. Alexander had followed them; and was now dressing himself in the dry tunic and pantaloons that were his buffoon's costume. But Spock, his eyes closed, sat apart. The total loss of emotional control had been such a violation of his Vulcan nature that he was still inwardly trembling. Kirk, resting on a couch, watched him anxiously. "Bones, can't you do anything for him?"

"There's no medicine that can help him, Jim. He has to get through this himself."

Despite his aching back, Kirk got up. As he crossed to Spock, McCoy joined him. They stood before him a moment, both quiet; and Spock, slowly becoming aware of their presence, opened his eyes. The awful experience of his turmoil was still evident in them. Kirk looked away from the painful sight of an overwrought Spock. He had no right to intrude on such private agony.

"I trust they did not hurt you too much, Captain."

"Just a sore set of muscles, Spock."

"The humiliation must have been hardest for you to bear, sir. I . . . I can understand."

He assumed his customary impassive expression. But it was belied by the tremor in his voice and hands. Kirk's fury flamed in him.

McCoy tried to be soothing. "The release of emotion is what keeps us healthy," he observed. "At least, emotionally healthy."

"Fascinating," Spock said. "However, I have noted, Doctor, that the release of emotion is frequently very *unhealthy* for those nearest to you. Emotionally, that is."

Kirk forced a chuckle. "Which proves again that there are no perfect solutions."

"It would seem so, Captain."

Spock's eyes closed again. He spoke with them closed. "Captain!"

"Yes, Spock."

"Captain, do you still feel anger toward Parmen?"

"Great anger."

"And you, Dr. McCoy?"

"Yes, Spock. Great hatred."

"You must release it somehow . . . as I must master mine."

Spock suddenly stood up, his eyes wide open. They blazed with rage. He shuddered with the effort to control it, his fists clenching. "They almost made me kill you, Captain. That is why they have stirred in me such hatred. Such great hatred. I must not allow it to go further. I must master it. I must control . . ."

He grabbed Kirk's arm. His hand tightened on it until it seemed his great strength would snap a bone. Kirk held absolutely still. Gradually, Spock relaxed. He dropped the arm. His body was quieted as though the fierce embrace of his captain's arm had been a desperately needed reassurance of the dear existence. He sat down.

McCoy, his face drawn with strain, drew Kirk aside. "Jim . . . Jim, listen. I've thought it over. This is senseless. I'm going to stay."

"You can't, Bones."

"I have Parmen's word that you'll be safe."

"Parmen's word! He'll let us beam up to the *Enterprise*—and then plunge the ship into this atmosphere!"

McCoy shook his head. "Why bother to trick me?"

"If he killed us outright in front of you, you'd retaliate. You're a doctor, you have the means." He put a hand on McCoy's shoulder. "I know you're trying to do the right thing. But if anyone of us got away, Parmen knows that Starfleet will never let this planet go unpunished. He dare not let us go. Sacrifice yourself by agreement to stay—and you'll only be signing our death warrant."

Alexander pulled at McCoy's uniform. "The Captain is right. I didn't warn you. They treated you like they treat me. Only you fight them . . ."

The dwarf's eyes filled with tears. "All this time I thought it was me—my mind that couldn't move a pebble. They told me how lucky I was that they bothered to keep me around. And I believed them. The arms and legs of ev-

erybody's whim. Look down! Don't meet their eyes . . . Smile! Smile! Smile! Those great people . . . They were my gods . . ."

He seized a vase; and, smashing it against a column, picked up a long, jagged shard of hard earthenware. "You made me see them!" he cried. "I know what they are now. It's not me, not my runty size! It's them. It's them!"

"Alexander, put that down," Kirk said.

"No! It's the best thing for them!"

Kirk and McCoy moved toward him. "I said drop it." Kirk said.

Alexander backed toward the door. "I'm going to cut them up. Parmen first. They'll become infected. Only this time, no matter what they say, let them die!"

Kirk nodded at McCoy. They both rushed the little man; and, as McCoy pinned an arm, the dwarf reluctantly surrendered the weapon to Kirk. "Let me at least give them a taste of what they gave me!" he pleaded. "Please! They're going to kill you anyhow! You already know that . . ."

"There's no point in your dying, too," Kirk said.

Alexander stared at him. Then a sob broke from him.

"That's . . . the first time . . . somebody's thought of my life before his own . . ." Remorse overwhelmed him. "But it's . . . all my fault. I should have told you right off that they were out to kill you. I knew . . . I knew—but I was afraid." The tears welled again.

"It's all right, Alexander," Kirk said. "We haven't given up. Maybe you can help us."

"I'll do anything for you . . . anything. Just tell me what to do."

"It might help us to know one thing. Did all the other Platonians always have the power?"

"No. Not before we came here to this terrible planet."

Spock had joined them. "Then they acquired their psychokinetic power *after* coming here," Kirk said.

"I guess so."

Spock spoke. "Is it possible for you to recall how long after you arrived here that their power began to develop?"

"How could I forget? It was exactly six months and fourteen days after we got here that they started pushing me around."

"Would you know how many months' supplies you brought with you?"

The dwarf's effort to remember was obvious. "I think it was four months . . . no, three. Yes, three . . ."

"That's close enough," Spock said. "Fascinating. The power developed two or three months after they started eating native foods."

Alexander's eyes widened in surprise. "Yeah! That's right."

Spock turned to Kirk. "Then it would be logical to assume that there is connection between their psychokinetic power and the native foods."

McCoy puzzled over Spock's hypothesis. "Then why wouldn't Alexander have the same power as the others?"

"Perhaps his system can't absorb the crucial element, Doctor."

"Bones, I'd like you to take a reading of Alexander's blood," Kirk said.

The dwarf clutched Kirk. "Will it hurt much?"

McCoy smiled at him. "You won't know it happened," he said as he ran his tricorder over his arm.

"Bones, you still have the tricorder reading of Parmen's blood?"

"Of course. Parmen possesses the highest order of psychokinetic ability; Alexander the lowest—and under the same environmental conditions." He looked at Kirk. "I'll put both of their blood samples through a full comparative test in the tricorder."

"If our theory proves out, we've got a weapon . . ." Kirk said.

When the tricorder buzzed, McCoy read out its information on its data window. "The one significant difference between Parmen's blood and Alexander's is the concentration of kironide, broken down by pituitary hormones."

"Kironide's a high-energy source. It could be it!" Kirk said.

"The pituitary hormones confirm the assumption," Spock said. He looked at Alexander. "They also regulate body growth."

"You mean the same thing that kept me from having the power made me a dwarf?"

Spock nodded. "It is obvious now why Parmen has

kept his Utopia such a secret. Anyone coming down here and staying long enough would acquire the power.”

“Exactly, Mr. Spock.” Kirk wheeled to McCoy. “Isn’t there some way to build up the same concentration of kironide in us?”

“It’ll take doing but it should be possible, Jim.”

“Then what are we waiting for?”

McCoy went to work. Pulling vials from his kit, he inserted them in the tricorder. He checked a dial. Then he reached for an optical tube. More vials went into the tricorder. He hesitated. “Jim, even if the kironide has the desired effect, it still may not help us get out of here.”

Kirk looked anxiously at Spock. “If all of us *do* come up with the power, what chance do we have against thirty-eight of them?”

“The point’s well taken, Captain. However, the power isn’t additive. If it were, with the Platonians’ hostile propensities, two or three of them would have combined forces centuries ago—and deposed Parmen.”

Alexander pulled at Kirk’s sleeve. “He’s right. Parmen says everyone has his own separate power frequency. He says whenever they try to put their power together and use it, it never works.”

McCoy straightened, the hypo in his hand. “I’m ready.”

“Then let’s not waste time. Give us double the concentration found in Parmen’s blood.”

As Spock was injected, he said, “The time factor concerns me. It may take days or weeks before there’s enough buildup from the kironide to do us any good.”

“What about Alexander?” Kirk asked.

“Well,” McCoy said, “since the kironide’s already broken down and injected directly into the bloodstream, it should work on him as well as the rest of us. Better, in fact—he’s acclimated.”

But Alexander wanted no part of kironide. “You think the power is what I want? To be one of them? To just lie there and have things done for me—a blob of nothing! You’re welcome to the power! And if you make it out of here, all I ask is that you take me with you. Just drop me anyplace where they never heard of kironide or Platonius!”

Kirk said, "All right, Alexander. All right . . ."
"Jim!"

At the tone of McCoy's voice, Kirk whirled. In the room air was shimmering with the familiar Transporter sparkle.

Unbelieving, he watched the dazzle form into the shapes of Uhura and Christine Chapel. They saw him—but when they tried to speak, their mouths were clamped shut. Then their legs moved, marching them like marionettes toward a dressing room.

"Nurse! Lieutenant Uhura!" Kirk shouted.

They didn't turn. As they disappeared into the dressing room, two lovely, sheer mini-robos floated after them.

Acidly bitter, Kirk finally spoke to his men. "The afternoon entertainment wasn't enough for them," he said.

And he stayed bitter, as arrangements were made for the evening's entertainment. *Enterprise* uniforms vanished. He and Spock were forcibly clad in short Greek tunics, knotted over one shoulder. Leaf wreaths were settled on their heads. And in the main room of the suite, a table appeared. Piled high with food, with fruit and wine, it glittered, heavy, with silver and crystal.

The dressing room door opened. A little shy in her highly becoming mini-robe, Christine hesitated. Then her pleasure in seeing them sent her smiling to them. "Are we glad to see you!"

Uhura addressed the question in Kirk's eyes. "We were forced into the Transporter and beamed down. It was like becoming a puppet for someone."

"I thought I was sleepwalking," Christine told him. "I couldn't stop myself."

"I don't understand it," Uhura said. "A simple invitation would have brought me running for this . . ." She lifted a soft fold of the golden robe that matched her exotic skin color.

"Definitely," Christine agreed. "Why use force on a girl to get her into clothes like these?" Then she paused, looking at Kirk. "Captain, what's wrong? Something's terribly wrong, isn't it?"

"Yes," Kirk said quietly.

He had heard the sound of laughter. The bewildered

girls stared at each other; and Kirk said, "Spock, have you felt any reaction to the kironide shot?"

"I have experienced a slight flush, Captain."

"So did I. Shall we try a simple test? Let's concentrate on raising that cluster of grapes."

They fixed their eyes on the grapes, the girls watching them in uncomprehending silence. The grapes continued to nestle placidly between two apples.

"Didn't budge," Kirk said.

There was a fanfare of music and a burst of applause. Kirk looked up from the disappointing grapes. Panels set into the room's walls had slid aside, revealing boxes behind them. They were crowded with Platonians. Kirk caught sight of Alexander at a music stand, his instruments beside him. Parmen, Philana and McCoy occupied the center box. The philosopher-king stood up, lifting a hand.

"Fellow Academicians! Twenty-five hundred years ago a hearty band of vagabonds arrived on this barren planet. Those were times of desperate hardship and heart-breaking toil. Then a divine Providence graced our genius with the power of powers! Through it, our every need was materialized. We determined to form a Utopian Brotherhood. This is a festive occasion. For tonight, we welcome its first new member into our Brotherhood!"

Kirk used the top of his voice. "Don't count on it, Parmen! First you must win the doctor's consent!"

McCoy, shouting back, called, "I'll never give it, Jim!"

Whispering, Parmen said, "Doctor, please. You are destroying the festive mood . . ." He waved a hand. "Let the madcap revels begin!"

The four *Enterprise* people were sent whirling around the couches in a game of musical chairs. Then Uhura was dropped on one in a languorous pose. Christine's turn came. Her chin was placed on a bent hand, her body disposed in a seductive position. Kirk and Spock were each pulled to a couch. After a moment they were caused to exchange places.

Eraclitus called from a box, laughing. "Ah, how fickle and faithless! Make up your minds!"

Spock sat on Christine's couch, straining against Parmen's will-to-power. It was no use. His arms encircled

Christine; and her hand was forced up to caress his face. The Platonians tittered.

"I am so ashamed, Mr. Spock." But even as her whisper reached Spock, her hand had reached into his hair to tousle it amorously. She whispered again. "Oh, stop it, Mr. Spock. Please make them stop it . . ."

But they were in a close embrace, Christine's arms entwined around him. His eyes were closed in desperate concentration. He was forced to open them in order to gaze passionately into Christine's. Their lips met. As the kiss ended, she said brokenly, "I have so wanted to be close to you. Now all I want to do is crawl away someplace and die . . ."

"Careful, Mr. Spock!" Eraclitus called. "Remember! The arrows of Eros kill Vulcans!"

Christine sank back on the couch. Spock's body followed hers to shouts of "Bravo! Bravo!"

Uhura was saying, "I am so frightened, Captain . . . so frightened . . ."

"That's the way they want you to feel, Lieutenant. It makes them think they're alive."

"I know it . . . I wish I could stop trembling . . ."

Kirk pulled her to him. Uhura looked into his eyes.

"Try not to think of them," Kirk said. "Try!"

She smiled faintly. "You know what I'm thinking, Captain?"

"What, Lieutenant?"

"I'm thinking of all the times on the *Enterprise* when I was scared to death. And I would see you so busy with your commands. And I would hear you from all parts of the ship. And then the fear would pass. Now they are making me tremble. But I am not afraid."

Her dark eyes were serene. "I am not afraid . . ."

They kissed.

The applause was scattered. And what there was of it was too loud.

Philana in her box stirred restlessly. "Parmen, let's get on with it."

"You are so impatient, my wife! Observe the doctor and learn. He is content to wait for the *pièce de résistance*."

Nevertheless, Parmen got on with it. He moved the

table of food into a corner and rolled another one into its place. It was loaded with weapons—swords, a bullwhip, knives, a battle-ax. In its center a brazier, a poker thrust into it, glowed red hot. The two *Enterprise* men were lifted from the girls' couches. Kirk found the bullwhip in his hand. He saw Spock reach for the poker. Its tip of iron flamed with its adopted fire.

Kirk whirled to the boxes. "You're dead, all of you!" he cried. "You died centuries ago! We may disappear tomorrow—but at least we're living now! And you can't stand that! You're half crazy because you've got nothing inside! Nothing!"

But Parmen was looking at the girls. Turning, Kirk realized that they had been transfixed, helpless, on their couches. The heavy whip rose in his hand and lashed out at Uhura. It flicked close to her cheek.

McCoy could bear no more. He rose in his box. "Stop it, Parmen! Stop it! I can't take any more! I can't! I'll do whatever you want!"

Apparently, his capitulation came too late. Parmen merely grinned at him. "I'll stay here with you!" McCoy cried. "I'll serve you. But stop this!"

Alexander broke from his place. Racing to the table of weapons he seized a knife and rushed at Parmen. He was stopped cold. Parmen stood up. "Alexander, again! He likes to play with knives. Very good. We'll indulge him . . ."

Slowly, relentlessly, the knife blade was pressed against the little man's throat. It halted there—and suddenly, unseen fists slammed Parmen against the back of his box.

The shaken Platonian stared around him. Staggering back, he shouted, "Who . . . who . . . who did that?"

Kirk tossed the whip away. "*I did!*"

Eraclitus was on his feet. "Impossible!"

"What's going on?" Philana screamed.

Kirk lifted his head to the boxes. "Platonians, hear this! The next one of you who tries anything will get hurt! Not only do we possess your psychokinetic ability, but we've got it at twice your power level!"

"Not twice mine!" Parmen's eyes veered to Alexander.

The dwarf was spun around; and, knife upraised, sent racing toward Kirk. Instead of evading the charge, Kirk stood still, drawing on all his strength of concentration. His new power slowed the onrush. With a supreme effort, he turned Alexander around and set him running toward Parmen. The battle of wills was joined. Parmen's cold eyes bulged with his struggle to recover control of the dwarf. But Alexander had picked up speed. He vaulted into the box, the knife extended to Parmen's heart. . . .

The Platonian shrieked. "Captain, no! I beg of you. I'll do anything you say! I do not wish to die! Do you hear me, Captain?"

Kirk arrested the knife. But Alexander, so close to vengeance for his years of suffering, fought to plunge the knife deep into his tormentor. "Let me do it!" he cried to Kirk. "Let me finish him!"

Kirk strode to the box. "Do you want to be like him, Alexander?" he said.

The dwarf's eyes met his. After a moment, he shook his head. Then he threw the knife at Parmen's feet.

The new power was exhilarating. Kirk used it to force Parmen to kneel before the dwarf. Alexander looked down at the bald, arrogant head. "Listen to me, Parmen! I could have had the power—but I didn't want it! I could have been in your place right here and now! But the sight of you and your Academicians sickens me. Because, with all your brains, you're dirtier than anything that ever walked or crawled in the whole universe!"

As he jumped from the box to Kirk's side, he turned to say, "Get up from your knees! Get up!"

Parmen, his world crashed around him, spoke to Kirk. "Captain, you knew it was my intention to destroy you and the *Enterprise*. Yet you have spared me."

Kirk eyed him for a long moment. "To us, killing is murder—even for revenge. But I am officially notifying you that other Starships will be visiting Platonius—and soon!"

He'd been right. There was nothing in these people. Once their control power was defeated, they shriveled into nothing. Their ruler was too hasty with his reassurance. "There's no need for concern, Captain. They'll be safe. Of late, I've begun to feel that we've become bizarre and un-

productive. It's time for some fresh air. We'll welcome your interstellar visits."

"I don't believe you," Kirk said. "The minute we leave, you'll lose your fear—and turn as sadistic as ever. So let me warn you. This incident will be reported in its entirety to Starfleet Command."

His voice went icy. "Keep your power. We don't want it. But, if need be, we can create it in a matter of hours. Don't try anything again."

All his essential weakness had appeared in Parmen's flabby face. "Understood, Captain. And you're right. None of us can be trusted. Uncontrolled power turns even saints into savages. We can all be counted on to live down to our lowest impulses."

"You're good at making speeches," Kirk said. "I hope your last one sinks in. Stand back."

Obediently, Parmen shrank back into the box. Philana was haggard, almost looking her great age. McCoy left them to join Kirk.

"Alexander!" Kirk called.

As the dwarf hurried over to him, Kirk released his communicator from his belt. Flipping it open, he said, "Kirk to Scott. I'm bringing a guest aboard. Standby to beam us up."

Alexander looked at him, love in his long-suffering eyes.

BOOK III

Spock Must Die!

Author's Note

Unlike the preceding three STAR TREK books, this one is not a set of adaptations of scripts which have already been shown on television, but an original novel built around the characters and background of the TV series conceived by Gene Roddenberry. I am grateful to the many fans of the show who asked me to tackle such a project, and to Bantam Books and Paramount Television for agreeing to it.

And who knows—it might make a television episode, or several, some day. Although the American network (bemused, as usual, by a rating service of highly dubious statistical validity) has canceled the series, it began to run in Great Britain in mid-June 1969, and the first set of adaptations was published concurrently in London by Corgi Books. If the show is given a new lease on life through the popularity of British reruns, it would not be the first such instance in television history.

I for one refuse to believe that an enterprise so well conceived, so scrupulously produced, and so widely loved can stay boneyarded for long.

And I have 1,898 letters from people who don't believe it either.

JAMES BLISH

Marlow, Bucks, England.
1969

Chapter One

McCOY WITHOUT BONES

From the Captain's Log, Star Date 4011.9:

We are continuing to record a navigation grid for this area of space-time, as directed. Mr. Spock reports that, according to the library, the procedure is still called "bench-marking" after ancient ordinance mapping practices laid down before the days of space flight, though these cubic parsecs of emptiness look like most unattractive sites to park a bench.

Though we are not far by warp drive from the Klingon Empire, and in fact I am sure the Klingons would claim that we were actually in it, the mission has been quite uneventful and I believe I detect some signs of boredom among my officers. Their efficiency, however, seems quite unimpaired.

"What worries me," McCoy said, "is whether I'm myself any more. I have a horrible suspicion that I'm a ghost. And that I've been one for maybe as long as twenty years."

The question caught Captain Kirk's ear as he was crossing the rec room of the *Enterprise* with a handful of coffee. It was not addressed to him, however; turning, he saw that the starship's surgeon was sitting at a table with Scott, who was listening with apparently deep attention. Scotty listening to personal confidences? Or Doc offering them? Ordinarily Scotty had about as

much interest in people as his engines might have taken; and McCoy was reticent to the point of cynicism.

—“May I join this symposium?” Kirk said. “Or is it private?”

“It’s nae private, it’s just nonsense, I think,” the engineering officer said. “Doc here is developing a notion that the transporter is a sort of electric chair. Thus far, I canna follow him, but I’m trying, I’ll do myself that credit.”

“Oh,” Kirk said, for want of anything else to say. He sat down. His first impression, that McCoy had been obliquely referring to his divorce, was now out the porthole, which both restored his faith in his understanding of McCoy’s character, and left him totally at sea. Understanding McCoy was a matter of personal as well as ship’s importance to Kirk, for as Senior Ship’s Surgeon, McCoy was the one man who could himself approach Kirk at any time on the most intimate personal level; indeed, it was McCoy’s positive duty to keep abreast of the Captain’s physical, mental and emotional condition and to speak out openly about it— and not necessarily only to the patient.

When McCoy joined the *Enterprise*, Kirk suspected that it had been the divorce that had turned him to the Space Service in the first place. The details, however, were a mystery. Kirk did know that McCoy had a daughter, Joanna, who had been twenty back then and for whom the surgeon had provided; she was in training as a nurse somewhere, and McCoy heard from her as often as the interstellar mail permitted. That was not very often.

“Somebody,” Kirk said, “had better fill me in. Doc, you’ve said nine times to the dozen that you don’t like the transporter system. In fact, I think ‘loath,’ is the word you use. ‘I do not care to have my molecules scrambled and beamed around as if I were a radio message.’ Is this just more of the same?”

“It is and it isn’t,” McCoy said. “It goes like this. If I understand Scotty aright, the transporter turns our

bodies into energy and then reconstitutes them as matter at the destination . . .”

—“That’s a turrrible oversimplification,” Scott objected. The presence of his accent, which came out only under stress, was now explained; they were talking about machinery, with which he was actively in love. “What the transporter does is analyze the energy *state* of each particle in the body and then produce a Dirac jump to an equivalent state somewhere else. No conversion is involved—if it were, we’d blow up the ship.”

“I don’t care about that,” McCoy said. “What I care about is my state of consciousness—my ego, if you like. And it isn’t matter, energy or anything else I can name, despite the fact that it’s the central phenomenon of all human thought. After all, we all know we live in a solipsistic universe.”

“A what?” Kirk said.

“We inhabit two universes, then,” McCoy said patiently. “One is the universe inside our skulls—our viewpoint universe, as it were. The other is the phenomenal universe—but that in the long run is only a consensus of viewpoint universes, augmented by pointer readings, and other kinds of machine read-outs. The consensus universe is *also* a product of consciousness. Do you agree, Jim?”

“Tentatively,” Kirk said. “Except that I find what you call the consensus universe is pretty convincing.”

“Statistically, yes. But it breaks down very rapidly when you examine the individual data behind the statistics. All we *really* know is what we register inside our skulls—a theory which used to be called logical positivism. I go further: I say that there may not even be any consensus universe, and that nothing is provably real except my consciousness, which I can’t measure. This position is called solipsism, and I say that the fact of self-consciousness forces us all to be solipsists at heart and from birth. We just seldom become aware of it, that’s all.”

“Space travel does that to you,” Kirk agreed. “Espe-

cially when you're as far from home as we are now. Luckily, you recover, at least enough to function."

"Nobody ever recovers, completely," McCoy said somberly. "I believe that the first discovery of this situation is one of the great formative shocks in human development—maybe as important as the birth trauma. Tell me, Jim: wasn't there a moment, or an hour, in your childhood or early adolescence when you realized with astonishment that you, the unique and only Jim Kirk, were at the very center of the whole universe? And when you tried to imagine what it would be like to see the universe from some other point of view—that of your father, perhaps—and realized that you were forever a prisoner in your own head?"

Kirk searched his memory. "Yes, there was," he said. "And the fact that I can still remember it, and so easily, does seem to indicate that it was fairly important to me. But after a while I dismissed the whole problem. I couldn't see that it had any practical consequences, and in any event there wasn't anything I could do about it. But you still haven't answered *my* question. What's all this got to do with the transporter?"

— "Nary a thing," Scott said.

"On the contrary. Whatever the mechanism, the *effect* of the transporter is to dissolve my body and reassemble it somewhere else. Now you'll agree from experience that this process takes finite, physical time—short, but measurable. Also from experience, that during that time period neither body nor consciousness exists. Okay so far?"

"Well, in a cloudy sort of way," Kirk said.

"Good. Now, at the other end, a body is assembled which is apparently identical with the original, is alive, has consciousness, and has all the memories of the original. *But it is NOT the original.* That has been destroyed."

"I canna see that it matters a whit," Scott said. "Any more than your solipsist position does. As Mr. Spock is fond of saying, 'A difference which *makes* no difference is no difference.'"

"No, not to you," McCoy said, "because the new McCoy will look and behave in all respects like the old one. But to me? I can't take so operational a view of the matter. I am, by definition, not the same man who went into a transporter for the first time twenty years ago. I am a construct made by a machine after the image of a dead man—and the hell of it is, not even I can know how exact the imitation is, because—well, because obviously if anything is missing I wouldn't remember it."

"Question," Kirk said. "Do you *feel* any different?"

"Aha," said Scott with satisfaction.

"No, Jim, I don't, but how could I? I *think* I remember what I was like before, but in that I may be vastly mistaken. Psychology is my specialty, for all that you see me chiefly as a man reluctant to hand out pills. I know that there are vast areas of my mind that are inaccessible to my consciousness except under special conditions—under stress, say, or in dreams. What if part of that psychic underground has not been duplicated? How would I know?"

"You could ask Spock," Scott suggested.

"Thanks, no. The one time I was in mind-lock with him it saved my life—it saved all of us, you'll remember—but I didn't find it pleasant."

"Well, you ought to, anyhow," Scott said, "if you're as serious about all this. He could lock onto one of those unconscious areas and then see if it was still there after your next transporter trip."

"Which it almost surely would be," Kirk added. "I don't see why you assume the transporter to be so peculiarly selective. Why should it blot out subconscious traces instead of conscious ones?"

"Why shouldn't it? And in point of fact, does it or doesn't it? That's pretty close to the question I want answered. If it were *the* question, I would even submit to the experiment Scotty proposes, and ask everybody else aboard to as well."

"I," said Kirk, "have been on starship duty somewhat longer than either of you gentlemen. And I will say

without qualification| that this is the weirdest rec room conversation I've ever gotten into. But all right, Doc, let's bite the bullet. What is *the* question?"

"What would you expect from a psychologist?" McCoy said. |*The* question, of course, is the soul. If it exists, which I know no more than the next man. When I was first reassembled by that damnable machine, did my soul, |if any, make the crossing with me—or am I just a reasonable automaton?"

"The ability to worry about the question," Kirk said, "seems to me to be its own answer."

"Hmmm. You may be right, Jim. In fact, you better had be. Because if you aren't, then every time we put a man through the transporter for the first time, we commit murder."

— "And that's nae a haggie, it's a haggis," Scott said hotly. "Look ye, Doc, yon soul's immortal by definition. If it exists, it canna be destroyed—"

"Captain Kirk," said the rec room's intercom speaker.

Kirk arose with some relief; the waters around the table had been getting pretty deep. But his relief was short-lived.

"In the rec room, Mr. Spock."

"Will you relieve me, please, Captain? We are in need of a Command decision."

McCoy and Scott looked up in alarm. A Command decision, out here in a totally unexplored arm of the galaxy?

"I'm on my way," Kirk said. "What, briefly, is the problem?"

"Sir," the first officer's voice said, "the Klingon War has finally broken out. Organia seems already to have been destroyed, and we are cut off from the Federation."

Chapter Two

BEHIND THE LINES

From the Captain's Log, Star Date 4011.8:

This arm of the galaxy has never been visited by human beings, nor by any of the nonhuman races known to us. Our primary mission here was to establish benchmarks for warp-drive flight, and secondarily, of course, to report anything we encountered that might be worth scientific investigation. But now, it would appear, we cannot report at all.

As Kirk entered the bridge, Spock arose from the command chair and moved silently to his own library-computer station. Sulu was at the helm, Lieutenant Uhura at the communications console. The viewing screen showed nothing but stars; the *Enterprise* was in a standard orbit around one of them—Kirk didn't need to care which. All deceptively normal.

"All right, Mr. Spock," Kirk said, sitting down. "The details, please."

"Very sparse, Captain, and more seem impossible to come by," the first officer said. "What little I have is all public knowledge—I have refrained from calling Starfleet Command for obvious reasons. There have been no 'incidents' with the Klingon Empire for over a year, but it now appears that they have mounted a major attack on the Federation along a very broad front—without any prior declaration, naturally. The reports Lieutenant Uhura has received state that Feder-

ation forces are holding, but I suggest that we place little confidence in that. Public announcements under such circumstances are always primarily intended to be reassuring, secondarily to mislead the enemy, and may contain only a small residuum of fact."

"Of course," Kirk said. "But such an outbreak was supposed to have been made impossible under the Organian Peace Treaty.* We should know; we were on Organia when the treaty was imposed, and we saw the Organians immobilize both parties in what would otherwise have been a major naval engagement."

"That is true, of course. However, Captain, not only have the Organians failed to intervene this time, but no contact whatsoever can be made with the planet. It seems virtually to have disappeared from the face of the universe. In the absence of any more data, I think we must assume it is destroyed."

Sulu turned partially in his helmsman's chair. "Now how is that possible?" he said. "The Organians were creatures of pure thought. They *couldn't* be destroyed. And it wasn't just one battle they stopped—they simultaneously immobilized fleets all over the galaxy."

"The Organians themselves were thought-creatures," Spock said, "and no doubt much of what we 'saw' on their planet was the result of hypnotism. But we have no real reason to suppose that the planet itself was an illusion; and if it was not, it could be destroyed. What effect that would have on the Organians, we have no idea. All we know is that they have not intervened in the present war, nor does there seem to be any way to find out what has happened to them."

"Well," Kirk said, "let's see what *our* problem is. We've got the whole Klingon Empire between the *Enterprise* and the Federation—including all seventeen Star bases. On the other hand, the Klingons don't know we're here, on their blind side; we might make some capital out of that. Lieutenant Uhura, what are the

*See "Errand of Mercy," *Star Trek Two*.

chances of getting some sort of instructions from Starfleet Command without giving our presence away?"

"Practically nil, Captain," the Bantu girl said. "Even if we send a query as a microsecond squirt, we'd have to send it repeatedly and at high gain in order to have any hope of one such pip being picked up. We've got the whole of Shapley Center, the heart of the galaxy, between us and home, and the stellar concentration is so high there that it makes a considerable energy bulge even in subspace. To get through all that static, we'd have to punch out the pips regularly to attract their attention—and that would attract the Klingons as well. They wouldn't be able to read the message, but they'd be able to pinpoint out location all too easily."

"All right," Kirk said. "Send out such a pip *irregularly*; Mr. Spock, please give Lieutenant Uhura a table of random numbers from the computer that she can use as a timetable. Probably it won't work, but we should try it. In the meantime, we have to assume that whatever we do is entirely up to us—and that if we're to be of any help at all to the Federation, we'll have to do it fast. I assume to begin with that we can rule out trying to circumnavigate the whole Klingon Empire."

"I would certainly agree," Spock said. "By the time we completed such a trip, or even got within safe hailing distance of the Federation or any Starbase, the war would probably be over."

"We could try to smash our way directly through," Sulu said. "We do have a lot of fire-power, plus the advantage of surprise. And on this side, the Empire is hardly fortified at all—think what a mess we could make of their supply bases, their communications, their whole rear echelon. It would be all out of proportion to the amount of damage a starship could do in a conventional battle situation, against matched enemy forces."

"It would also," Kirk said grimly, "get us ambushed, eventually."

"Maybe not for a long while," Sulu said. "We could do it hit-and-run. I could plot us a course—maybe

using a random-number table again—I'd defy any computer to predict."

"You couldn't do that and hit important targets at the same time," Kirk said, "or work closer to the Federation; and if the course isn't truly random, it can be predicted. And the closer we got to the Federation the closer we'd get to the battle front *on the wrong side*. We'd be blown out of space before we could cross."

"The damage we might do," Spock said, "might well be worth the price to the Federation. Mr. Sulu's suggestion has considerable merit from a strategic point of view."

"And I'm willing to entertain the idea if I have to," Kirk said. "But it's clearly a suicidal tactic. My responsibility is to the ship and the crew, as well as to the Federation. I'm not about to lose the *Enterprise* and everybody aboard her on such a venture, without direct orders from the Federation to do so. If I receive such orders, I'll obey them; without such orders, I veto the scheme. Has anybody another notion?"

"There exists what I would call an intermediate possibility, Captain," Spock said. "It depends from a rather shaky chain of logic, but it may be the best we can manage."

"Let's hear it."

"Very well. We can safely assume, first of all, that the Klingons would not have risked starting the war without feeling some assurance that they had the Federation outmatched both in fire-power and fire-control. No one but a berserker would start a war under any other circumstances, and the Klingons, while warlike in the extreme, are not berserkers."

"Subpoint one: We may assume that the Klingons have new weapons, as well as what they believe to be a preponderance of familiar ones. But we do not know what these might be.

"Main point two: Since the Organians have forbidden any such war and had the power to stop it, it follows that the Klingons would not have started it unless they

had advance knowledge that the Organians were out of commission.

"Subpoint two: This knowledge may be in itself the most important of the new weapons in the Klingons' hands. However . . .

"Conclusion: At least a forty per cent probability that the Klingons have used a new weapon which *caused* the immobilization or destruction of Organia."

"Whew," Sulu said. "I was following you, Mr. Spock, but I sure didn't suspect that that was where you were going."

"Where do you get your probability figure?" Uhura asked. "I didn't hear any such parameters in your premises."

"One may diagram an argument of this type as a series of overlapping circles," Spock said. "When you eliminate those parts of the circles which lie outside the area they have in common . . ."

"Never mind that," Kirk said. "What you've given us thus far is only the logical chain you mentioned. Do you have a course of action to recommend?"

"Certainly."

"All right. Uhura, call Dr. McCoy and Mr. Scott up here. I don't want to go any farther until they've been filled in."

This was not very time-consuming, since Spock had recorded the whole conversation, as he routinely did any discussion preliminary to a Command decision. Scott and the surgeon listened to the recording intently.

"All clear, Doc? Scotty? Any questions? All right, Mr. Spock; what is your proposed course of action?"

The first officer said, "Why not go to Organia, instead of to any Starbase, and try to find out what exactly *has* happened there? Such a course has almost all of the tactical advantages invoked by Mr. Sulu—it would vastly disorganize the Klingons' rear echelon, through sheer surprise and the military weakness of this side of the Empire. Furthermore, we would be going in an unexpected direction; once the Klingons detected us, they would naturally expect us to be bent upon

rejoining the Fleet, or getting under the protection of the heavy guns of a Starbase. That Organia was our actual destination would probably be their third guess, and it might well be their fifth or sixth. Finally, the possible *strategic* advantage can hardly be overestimated: should we succeed in finding out what happened to Organia, *and doing something about it*, the war would be ended."

"Unless," McCoy added, "what happened to Organia turns out to be irreparable except by God."

"I offer no guarantees," Spock said evenly. "Only possibilities."

"I rather like the proposal," Kirk said slowly. "The risk is still enormous, of course, but at least the scheme isn't outright suicidal. Mr. Spock, I need two computations: first, transit time to Organia from our present coordinates at Warp Six; and second, transit time to territorial space of the Empire on the same line of flight."

Spock turned to his hooded station, and said after a moment, "We would officially enter Klingon space in two months, and the remaining transit time to Organia would be four months more. Of course, there is always the chance that the Klingons may be patrolling beyond their own territory, but I estimate the probability as low on this side of the Empire."

It could be worse, Kirk realized. Here was one Command decision which was actually going to allow him the luxury of reflection; only a partial decision was required right now, on the spot. He had, apparently, a minimum of a whole month in which to change his mind.

But all he said was, "Mr. Sulu, lay course for Organia at Warp Six. Lieutenant Uhura, extend all sensors to maximum range, beginning now, and tie in an automatic full battle alert to anything that might indicate another ship. Also, call me at once should anything come through from Starfleet Command."

"Of course, Captain," the communications officer said.

But in fact nothing did come through, which was scarcely surprising. Though it was normal for a starship to be out of touch with the Federation hierarchy for long periods, the sheer volume of messages which came in daily to Starfleet Command was nevertheless vast, and the chances of picking up an unscheduled message in a microsecond pip—a message, furthermore, which did not dare to call attention to itself—correspondingly tiny. As was also usual, Kirk was going to have to play this one on his own judgment alone.

He observed, however, that there was some unusual activity going on in the ship's computation section. Scotty evidently had a problem of considerable complexity; for nearly a week he was in earnest conference with Spock, armed with sheafs of, to begin with, equations, and later, rough engineering specs. Kirk left them to themselves. Whatever they were doing, they were not wasting their time, that was certain; and he would hear about it in good order.

And at the end of the week, Scott in fact requested an interview with Kirk in the Captain's working quarters.

"Captain, d'ye recall our chatter with Doc about the transporter, an' his various misgivin's?"

"Yes, Scotty, though I can't say it has been losing me any sleep."

"Weel, ah dinna been fashin' mysel' over the moral part of it, either. But I got to thinkin' it was a vurra pretty technical problem, an' what I've come up with the noo seems to have a bearin' on our present situation."

"Somehow I'm not surprised," Kirk said. "Tell me about it."

"D'ye ken what tachyons are?"

"I was told about them in school. As I recall, they're particles that travel faster than light—for which nobody's ever found any use."

"An' that's the truth, but only part of it. Tachyons *canna* travel any *slower* than light, and what their top speed might be has nae been determined. They exist in

what's called Hilbert space, which has as many dimensions as ye need to assume for the solvin' of any particular problem. An' for every particle in normal space—be it proton, electron, positron, neutron, nae matter what—there's an equivalent tachyon."

"That," Kirk said, "is already a lot more than my instructor seemed to know about them."

"A lot has been discovered since then. I had to have a refresher course from Mr. Spock mysel', believe me. But it's aye important. Suppose we were to redesign the transporter so that, instead of scannin' a man an' replicatin' him at destination in his normal state, it replicated him in tachyons, at *this* end of the process? That would solve the moral problem, because the original subject wouldna go anywhere—while the tachyon creature, which canna exist in the everyday universe with us, would go on to destination and revert to normal there. No murder, if such be in fact the problem, ever occurs."

"Hmm. It seems to me . . ."

"Wait, Captain, there's more. The method vastly extends the range of the transporter. I canna tell you exactly how far, but our present sixteen-thousand-mile limit would be the flight of a gnat by comparison.

"Result? We send a man to *Organia from here*. He gathers the data we need; when he returns to the ship, we hold him in the tachyon state for as long as is needed to yield up the material. Then we let the field go, and *poof!* The replica becomes so much tachyon plasma in another universe, and our original has never even left the ship!"

"Obviously," Kirk said slowly, "you wouldn't be bringing this to me if you weren't sure you had the mechanics solved."

"That's the fact, Captain, and it's aye proud of oursel' we are, too," Scott said. "Geniuses we are, an' you may gi'e us medals at your convenience. But seriously, it will work, an' we can do it. To modify the machine itself is the work of a week—an' we needn't travel

another inch closer to the Klingon Empire than we are by then."

"We'll go on traveling anyhow," Kirk said. "I like to have choices open."

"To be sure—my hyperbole was showin'."

Kirk clicked on the intercom. "Kirk here. Mr. Spock, place the ship on full automatic control. All department heads to the briefing room at zero point seven this day. Kirk out." The intercom went off. "Mr. Scott, proceed with your alterations of the transporter—making sure in the process that they're not permanent."

"Vurra good," Scott said, getting up. Kirk raised his hand.

"But," he added, "if I were you, I wouldn't tell Dr. McCoy that I'd solved his moral problem."

"No?"

"No. You see, Scotty, he's likely to ask you if the tachyon replicate has an immortal soul—and somehow I don't think you'd be in a position to answer."

Chapter Three

THE TANK TRAP

From the Captain's Log, Star Date 4018.4:

Upon assurance from Mr. Scott that there was no bodily danger inherent in his transporter modification, Mr. Spock was chosen as the logical emissary to Organia. He was on the planet during the entire affair which led to the treaty (see Log entry Star Date 3199.4), and personally knows Ayelborne, Claymare and Trefayne—or at least knows the humanoid shapes they assume, as his is known to them. The only other person thus qualified is myself. In addition, Mr. Spock is probably the closest observer of us all.

There was a number of transporter rooms in various parts of the *Enterprise*, but it was the main one that Scott modified, for the obvious reason: power. Of all the modifications, only one was immediately visible, although Kirk was in no doubt that there were other changes on the free-standing console of which the Transporter Officer and his technician were aware. The circular platform of the transporter chamber itself had been enclosed in gleaming metal, so that its six positions could no longer be seen—only the steps leading up to them.

“The shielding unfortunately is necessary,” the engineering officer explained to Kirk and Spock. “As long as the field is on, the whole interior of the chamber is effectively in another universe—or more exactly, in a

kind of continuum in which a transfinite number and variety of universes are possible—and the effect has to be confined. I could just as well have used wire mesh—for instance, shuttlecraft landing-pad web—so we could see in, but I had the armor plate to hand from another job and I was in a hurry, as I assume we all are.”

Scott's burr vanished completely when he was trying to be as precise as possible. Kirk was thoroughly used to this, but nevertheless it seldom failed to make him smile.

“That'll do for now, Scotty. We can add frills later. In fact, if this works as you've predicted, engineers all over the galaxy will be thinking up refinements for it. For now, what exactly is the program?”

“Pretty much as it always is, Captain, except for the distance involved. We set up the coordinates on the console—by the way, Mr. Spock, what are they?”

“Eleven eight seventy d. y. by eighty-five seventy-four sixty-eight K.”

The Transporter Officer looked astonished—evidently Scott had not yet filled him in on “the distance involved”—but made no comment. Scott went on.

“Then Mr. Spock steps into the tank, and stands on any station; we close the door and activate the machine. He won't notice a thing, for though he'll be momentarily surrounded by n -dimensional space, he's only equipped to perceive four at a time, like the rest of us. But he won't disappear—he'll just step out of the tank again. In the meantime, his replicate will be on its way to Organia, and will be returned here automatically, one day after materialization, no matter when that takes place. If that's not a long enough stay, we'll send him back. When the replicate arrives here, we'll again have established Hilbert space in the tank, and will maintain it for as long as it takes the replica to report.”

“Clear enough for now,” Kirk said. “Mr. Spock, are you ready?”

“Yes, Captain.”

“Into the tank with you then,” Scott said.

Spock entered, and the door closed behind him. The

transporter officer manipulated the controls. As Scott had predicted, there was nothing to be seen, nor did the familiar muted whine of the transporter field seem changed in any way. Kirk tried to imagine what an n-dimensional space would be like, and was not surprised to fail.

"That's all there is to it," Scott said. "He can come out now."

Spock, however, failed to appear. Kirk said, "We seem to have forgotten to arrange any way to let him know that. I assume it's safe to open the door now?"

"Entirely, Captain."

Kirk went to the platform and slid the door back. "Mr. Spock . . ."

Then he stopped. Spock was there, all right, and apparently quite unharmed. In fact, he was one hundred per cent too much there.

There were two identical Spocks in the tank.

The two Spocks were eyeing each other with a mixture of wariness and disdain, like a man trying to fathom the operation of a trick mirror. Kirk was sure that his own expression was a good deal less judicious.

"Which of you," he demanded, "is the original?"

"I am, Captain," both Spocks said, in chorus.

"I was afraid you'd say that. Well, let's get one problem settled right now. Hereafter, I will address *you*," he pointed to the man on his left, "as Spock One, and *you*," he pointed to his right, "as Spock Two. This implies no decision on my part as to which of you is in fact the original. Scotty, obviously you didn't anticipate any such outcome."

"Nay, I dinna," Scott said. "'Tis a pity we couldna see into the tank now, since otherwise we'd know which was which by the station he's on."

"Can you determine that?" Kirk asked the transporter officer.

"No, sorry, sir, I can't. Under this new setup, all the stations were activated at once."

"And Scotty, equally obviously *neither* of them can be tachyon constructs."

"That's aye eempossible," Scott agreed unhappily.

"Then the next task is to figure out how and why this happened, and if possible, discover some way to distinguish between the original and the replicate. With *two* Spocks on this ship, I must say, there ought to be no logical problem we can't lick."

"Unless," Spock One said, "we think exactly alike, in which case the replicate is simply a superfluity."

"Quite obviously you don't think exactly alike," Kirk said, "or both of you would have offered that remark simultaneously and in the same words."

"True but not relevant, Captain, if I may so observe," said Spock Two. "Even if we thought exactly alike at the moment of creation of the replicate, from then on our experiences differ slightly—beginning, of course, with the simple difference that we occupy different positions in space-time. This will create a divergence in our thinking which will inevitably widen as time goes on."

"The difference, however, may remain trivial for some significant time to come," said Spock One.

"We are already disagreeing, are we not?" Spock Two said coldly. "That is already a nontrivial difference."

"That's enough cross talk, both of you," Kirk said. "You certainly both sound like the real Spock, as well as look like him, and as far as I'm concerned, you're creating twice the confusion he did on his worst logic jags. Spock One, go to your quarters and remain there until I call you. Spock Two, come with me to *my* quarters."

Neither man spoke further until turboelevator and corridors brought them to Kirk's workroom, where Kirk waved the problematical second First Officer to the chair before his desk.

"Now then," the Captain said. "first of all, did you in fact get to Organia for even a fraction of a second? And if so, did you see anything useful?"

"No, Captain. Nothing happened except that suddenly there were two Spocks in the chamber. And I can tell you positively that there is no hiatus in my memory at that point."

"I'm sorry to hear it—not only because we need the information badly, but because it might have provided a clue for telling the two of you apart. You still maintain that you are the original Spock, I suppose?"

"I do," Spock Two said, in the tone he generally reserved for reporting an established fact of nature.

"Well, you see what the situation is as well as I do. While I suppose I could learn to live with two Mr. Spocks aboard—I might even come to like it—the ship cannot tolerate two first officers. Which of you do I demote, and to what post, and on what grounds?"

Spock Two raised his eyebrows. "May I suggest, Captain, that the situation is far more serious than that? To take a relatively minor aspect of it first, perhaps you can learn to live with two Spocks, but it would be somewhat painful for me. If you will imagine what it would be like for you to have a second James T. Kirk abroad in the universe, you will readily understand why."

"Hmm. Yes—personally it would be highly unpleasant. Your pardon, Mr. Spock. I just hadn't had enough time to ponder that aspect of it."

"I quite understand. But there is a second derivative. It would be positively dangerous to the ship. I am not speaking now of the confusion which it would produce, though that would be bad enough in itself, but of the effect upon the efficiency of the first officer. While I shall learn to endure the situation if you so order—even should I wind up as a yeoman—whichever of us remains first officer would be operating under continual personal stress about which he could do nothing at all. Suppose, for instance, it occurs to him that the demoted Spock is conspiring to replace him? Or consider, Captain, the position in which you would find yourself, should the demoted Spock suddenly charge that he is the one you retained as first officer, and that the other

man has slipped into his place unobserved? Such an exchange, or a series of them, might well evolve simply from a sense of duty on the part of each man."

Kirk whistled. "Now *that* would demoralize everybody, including me, even under peacetime conditions. You're right, I don't see how we dare risk it. But what would you suggest we do instead?"

"You have no choice, Captain. You must destroy one of us."

Kirk stared at him for a long minute. At last he said, "Even if it turns out to be you?"

"Even," Spock Two said levelly, "if it is I."

There was an even longer silence, while Kirk thought about the emotional consequences to himself of such a course. It did not make pleasant thinking. But what were the alternatives? The case Spock Two had offered seemed airtight.

"I may in fact do that," Kirk said finally. "But only if we can work out some foolproof way of determining which of you is the original. In the meantime, please, go directly to the bridge, remain there for ten minutes precisely, and then retire to your quarters until further notice."

His expression shuttered, Spock Two nodded once and left. The moment the door closed behind him, Kirk opened the intercom and called Spock's quarters. "Kirk calling Mr. Spock One."

"Here, Captain."

"Please report directly to my quarters at once."

When Spock One entered, Kirk realized with a shock just how grave the identity problem actually was. Had Spock Two, after closing the door, simply walked down the corridor until he was out of sight from Kirk's quarters, then turned around and come back at a leisurely pace and announced himself as Spock One, there would have been no immediate way for Kirk to have known that it had happened. And, now that Kirk came to think of it . . .

"Sit down, Mr. Spock. Kirk to the bridge!"

"Uhura here, Captain."

"Is Mr. Spock there?"

Spock One raised his eyebrows, but said nothing.

"No, Captain, it's not his watch. As a matter of fact he did drop in for about five minutes, but he just left. You might try his quarters—or shall I page him for you?"

"No thanks, Lieutenant, nothing urgent. Kirk out."

One minor crisis averted—or had it been? He had told Spock Two to stay on the bridge for ten minutes, but Uhura said he had left after five. No, that probably meant nothing; people who are busy seldom notice how long spectators are around, and almost never know, or care, how long ago they left. Scratch that—but there would be hundreds of other such cruxes. Uhura, for instance, like almost all the rest of the crew, did not even know yet what had happened in the Transporter room.

"Mr. Spock, beginning now, I want you to wear some identifying mark, and see to it that it's unique and never leaves your person."

"Then you had better invent it, Captain. Anything that I might choose might also occur to the replicate. And perhaps it should also be unobtrusive, at least for the time being."

That made sense; Spock One did not want to confuse the more than four hundred and thirty members of the crew with two First Officers until such confusion could no longer be avoided. Neither did Kirk, though he was painfully aware that concealing the problem might equally well compound it.

Kirk drew off his class ring and passed it over. "Use that—and give me your own Command Academy ring. Your, uh, counterpart also has one, of course, but it won't pass for mine on close inspection. There are no others on this vessel, that I'm sure."

"No, Captain, no other officer on the *Enterprise* ever even stood for Command, as the computer will verify."

"I'll check it. And again, you're not to regard this exchange as a sign of preference from me—that issue is

far from settled. The exchange is for my convenience only."

"I quite understand, Captain. A logical precaution."

Kirk winced. They *both* were Spock, right down to characteristic turns of phrase and nuances of attitude.

"Good. Now let's get down to the hard rock. I've been talking to Spock Two, and we've made a certain amount of progress—though not in a direction I like very much. It wouldn't surprise me if you'd come to very much the same conclusions he did—but on the other hand, the two of you were disagreeing earlier on, so I'd prefer to rehearse what we said. Briefly, it went like this . . ."

Spock One listened to the Captain's account with complete expressionlessness and immobility; but when he was asked for his opinion, Kirk got the next of his many shocks of the day.

"May I suggest, Captain," Spock One said, "that it is illogical to expect me to view this line of argument with c-complete equanimity? To begin with, you and I are friends—a fact I have never intentionally exploited in any duty situation, but a fact of long standing nevertheless. To find that you would agree to kill any Spock cannot but distort my judgment."

Kirk, too, listened immobile and without expression, but had he been a cat, his ears would have swiveled straight forward on his head. The hesitations in Spock One's speech were extremely faint indeed, but, for Spock, they were utterly unprecedented; to Kirk the effect was as startling as though his first officer had been positively stuttering with indignation.

Kirk said carefully, "You were ready to kill *me* on one occasion.* In fact, for a while, you thought you had."

It was a fearfully cruel thing to have to say; but the time for politeness seemed to be well past.

"I recall that with no pride, Jim, I assure you,"

*See "Amok Time" *Star Trek Three*.

Spock One said, with a kind of stony ruefulness nobody but a man half Vulcan and half human could even have felt, let alone expressed. "But you in turn will recall that I was amok at the time, because of the mating ceremony. Do you wish me back in that irrational state of mind? Or want me to welcome something similar in you?"

"Of course not. Quite the opposite. What I want from you now is the best logic you've ever been able to bring to bear, on any situation whatsodamnever."

"Nothing else will serve, Captain, it seems to me. So let me further observe that my counterpart's proposal is not conservative. There is a certain justice in his observation that our joint presence on the ship will be disturbing for both of us, but we are not likely to be disturbed about the same subjects at the same time; hence you could use both of us by asking both our opinions, and striking a balance between them." The ghostly hesitation was gone now—had Kirk imagined it in the first place? "Furthermore, Captain, this whole question of identity is operationally meaningless. I can assure you that I *know* I am the original—but this knowledge is not false even if I am in fact the replicate."

"You'll have to explain further, I'm afraid." But the difficulty of the argument was in itself reassuringly Spocklike—falsely reassuring, Kirk knew with regret.

"If I am the replicate, I have a complete, continuous set of memories which were replicated with me. As far as I can know, all these memories represent real experiences, and there is no break in continuity in them, nor in my attitudes or abilities. Therefore, both for my purposes *and for yours*, either of us is the original, and there is no reason to prefer one over the other. A difference which makes no difference is no difference."

"McCoy's Paradox," Kirk said.

"Is that one of the classic paradoxes? I am not familiar with it. I was quoting Korzybski."

"No, Doc invented it only two weeks ago—but abruptly it has come to life." Kirk paused. He was not himself expert in logic, and now he was confronted by

two experts, each arguing opposite sides of a life-and-death problem, and with apparently equal cogency. "Mr. Spock, I shall of course inform you when I've made my decision, but it's not a matter on which I want to shoot from the hip. For the present, I want you and your counterpart to stand alternate half-day watches. That way, I get both your services continuously, I don't have to choose between you yet, and I don't have to flip a coin to decide which of you has to be moved out of your quarters."

"An ideal interim solution," Spock One said, arising.

For you, maybe, Kirk thought as he watched him go out. But your—brother—wants you dead.

He sighed and touched the intercom. "Doc? Kirk here. Break out the headache pills, I'm coming to pay you a visit."

Chapter Four

A PROBLEM IN DETECTION

From the Captain's Log, Star Date 4019.2:

I have appraised the Department heads of the situation and asked for suggestions. For the time being I have not informed the rest of the crew, in the interests of morale. Since any given one of them is seldom on the bridge, I am spared having to explain away the odd spectacle of Mr. Spock on duty all ten periods of the day.

To this decision, however, Kirk had to allow two exceptions. One was Yeoman Janice Rand, who served Kirk as a combination of executive secretary, valet and military aide, and as such was usually made privy to anything that was going on; ordinarily she needed to know, and in any event it was a lot easier to tell her how matters stood than to keep them from her. The other was Christine Chapel, McCoy's head nurse; not only was she Doc's surgical assistant, but she held several degrees in medical research, and hence would be closely involved in whatever attempts McCoy might invent to distinguish one Spock from another.

Both were highly professional career woman, co-equal with male crewmen of the same rank during duty hours and expected to deliver the same level of efficient performance. Neither, however, was able to suppress a certain gleam of anticipation on being told that there were now two Spocks aboard the Starship USS *Enterprise*.

With Yeoman Rand, this was only normal and natural. She practiced a protective, freewheeling interest in men in general to keep herself and the Captain from becoming dangerously involved with each other. Kirk was, however, surprised to see it in Nurse Chapel. She came as close to being a professional confidant as the irascible McCoy was ever likely to find; acting both as a bond between them and a preventive against its transgressing onto the personal was the fact that she, too, was the veteran of a broken romance, and from it had apparently found a measure of contentment in a Starfleet Service.

What was the source of the oddly overt response that women of all ages and degrees of experience seemed to feel toward Spock? Kirk had no answer, but he had two theories, switching from one to the other according to his mood. One was that it was a simple challenge-and-response situation: he may be cold and unresponsive to other women, but if I had the chance, *I* could get through to him! The other, more complex theory seemed more plausible to Kirk only in his moments of depression: that most white crewwomen, still the inheritors after two centuries of vestiges of the shameful racial prejudices of their largely Anglo-American forebears, saw in the Vulcan half-breed—who after all had not sprung from any *Earthly* colored stock—a “safe” way of breaking with those vestigial prejudices—and at the same time, perhaps, satisfying the sexual curiosity which had probably been at the bottom of them from the beginning.

McCoy, once Kirk had broached both these notions to him—on shore leave, after several drinks—had said, “You parlor psychologists are all alike—constantly seeking for complexities and dark, hidden motives where none probably exist. Most people are simpler than that, Jim. Our Mr. Spock, much though I hate to admit it, is a thoroughly superior specimen of the male animal—brave, intelligent, prudent, loyal, highly placed in his society—you name it, he’s got it. What sensible woman *wouldn’t* want such a man? But women are also

practical creatures, and skeptical about men. They can see that Spock's not a whole man. That compulsive inability of his to show his emotions cripples him, and they want to try to free him of it. Little do they know what a fearful task it would be."

"Oh. So in part it's the mother instinct, too?"

McCoy made an impatient face. "There you go again, applying tags you don't understand. I wish you'd leave the psychology to me—what's the 'Service paying me for, anyhow, if you can do it? Oh well, never mind. Jim, if you're really puzzled about this, watch the women for once! You'll see for yourself that mothering Spock is the *last* thing they have in mind. No—they want to free him to be the whole, grownup, near-superman he hasn't quite become, and make themselves good enough for that man. And as I said before, they don't know how much they'd have to bite off before they could chew it."

"The Vulcan cultural background?" Kirk said.

"Yes, for a starter. But there's a lot more. Did you know, Jim, that if Spock weren't half Vulcan, I'd be watching him now every day for signs of cancer?"

"I thought that had been licked a hundred years ago."

"No, some kinds still show up. And men of one hundred per cent Earth stock, who have avenues for emotional discharge as inadequate as Mr. Spock's are terribly susceptible to it in their middle years. Nobody knows why."

The conversation continued to branch off, leaving Kirk, as usual, with most of his questions unanswered. Nor had McCoy been half as positive about his chances for setting up suitable physiological tests to distinguish between the duplicate Spocks.

"I don't know how the replication happened, so I don't know where to begin. And I was never trained in the details of Vulcanian biochemistry. I read up on it after Spock first came aboard, but most of what I know about it from experience I learned from monitoring him; and he's a mixture, a hybrid, and hence a law

unto himself. Oh, of course I'll try to think of something, but dammitall, this is really a problem in physics—I need Scotty for the whats, hows and whys of the accident to get even a start on it!"

"I was afraid of that," Kirk said.

"There's something else you ought to watch out for, though."

"What's that?"

"It's a psychological problem—this business of being identical twins. Even under ordinary, biological circumstances, being an identical twin is a hard row to hoe. You're constantly having identity trouble; mothers think it's cute to dress the kids alike, teachers have trouble keeping their records straight, friends can't tell them apart or think it's funny to pretend they can't. It all usually comes to a head in puberty, which is when the who-am-I problem becomes acute for everyone, but for identical twins it's hell. If they get through that period without becoming neurotic or worse, they're usually all right from then on.

"But Spock didn't go through it, and furthermore, he has been emotionally isolated almost all his life, by his own choice. Now, suddenly, he has been twinned as an adult, and it's a situation he has had no chance to adjust to, as the natural twin has. The strain is going to be considerable."

Kirk spread his hands. "Help him if he'll let you, of course, Doc, and I'll try to take it into account myself. But it seems to me that the adjustment is almost wholly something he'll have to arrive at by himself. And bear in mind that he *has* had a lifetime of training in controlling his own emotions."

"Not controlling them—suppressing them," McCoy said. "The two are very different. But of course he'll have to handle it by himself. One thing laymen never understand about psychotherapy is that no doctor has ever cured an emotional or mental upset, or ever will the best he can do is to show the patient how he might cure himself.

"But Jim, don't minimize this—it's no small consid

eration. In my judgment, there's likely to be a real emotional crisis, and sooner rather than later. I've already noticed that one of them's gone considerably off his feed. Won't hurt him for a while—Vulcans can fast a long time—but anorexia is almost always the first sign of an emotional upset."

"Thanks," Kirk said grimly. "I'll be on my guard. And in the meantime, let's see if Scotty's thought of any tests yet."

He left the sick bay and went to the engineering bridge.

"Scotty, I hate to keep taxing you with the same old question, but Doc says he can't get anywhere on setting up a test for the real Spock, or the replicate, until he has at least some sort of idea of how the duplication happened. Any clues yet?"

Scott said miserably, "Ah dinna ken, Captain. Ah dinna oonderstahnd it at all."

There were blue-black isometric smudges under his eyes, and it was obvious that he had not slept at all since the start of the botched transporter experiment. Kirk stopped pressing him at once; clearly he was doing his best, and his performance wouldn't be improved by distracting him.

Then everybody, not just Scott, was interrupted by the call to Battle Stations.

Kirk's immediate assumption—that Uhura's sensors had picked up something that might be another ship—proved to be true, but he was no sooner on the bridge than he became aware that this was only a small part of the story. For one thing, the automatic drive log on his control console showed that the *Enterprise* had been off warp flight for a split second before the alarm had sounded. She was now back in subspace, of course, but the trace the sensors had picked up was that of an object so small that if it had really been a Klingon ship it would have been incapable of detecting the *Enterprise* in subspace over the distance involved.

"What," Kirk demanded grimly, "were we doing off warp drive?"

"The computer took us off," Sulu said, with the justifiable irritation of the helmsman who has had control snatched away from him by a brainless mechanism. "It still seems to be operating on the old bench-marking schedule. Maybe in all the subsequent confusion, nobody ever told it we were going to Organia."

"That's flatly impossible," Kirk said. "I logged that order myself. Somebody had to countermand it. Mr. Spock, ask the machine who did."

The First Officer—it was Spock Two who was on duty—turned to the console, and then said, "The computer reports that I gave the order, Captain, as is only logical. But in point of fact I deny doing so—and I strongly suspect that my counterpart will also deny it."

"Wipe that order, and see that it stays wiped. Mr. Sulu, put us back on warp drive on the double."

"Already on, Captain."

"Mr. Spock, is the computer malfunctioning?"

"No, Captain, it is in perfect order. There is no doubt that one of us did so instruct it. But since such a course clearly involves grave risks of detection by the Klingons, and has no compensatory advantages, it can only have been given because detection was exactly what was hoped for. That is why I conclude that my counterpart will also deny having given it."

"The argument applies with equal force to you," Kirk pointed out.

"I am thoroughly aware of that. Unfortunately, however, there is no other reasonable explanation."

"No time is recorded for the issuance of the order, I suppose."

"No, which further argues that the issuer wished to remain unknown."

Kirk thought a moment. "Lieutenant Uhura, any sign that we have in fact been detected?"

"I think so, Captain. If the object has laid any sensors on us, they're too feeble to register on my board—but it dropped into subspace just after we did,

so it can't be a natural object and may well be following us—though at a *very* respectful distance.”

“Mr. Sulu, execute some simple, showy evasive maneuvers and see if it follows those. If it does, lose it—or if you can't lose it, outrun it. It can't pack enough power to pace us.”

“I'll lose it,” Sulu promised cheerfully.

“Mr. Spock, you are relieved of all duties. Mr. Sulu is designated first officer *pro tem*. Lieutenant Uhura, notify all concerned that henceforth and until further notice, orders from either Spock are without authority aboard this ship. We are proceeding to Organia as before, and until I say otherwise; the bench-marking program is cancelled. Any questions?”

There were none.

“Mr. Spock, call your counterpart in your quarters and notify him that we're *both* coming to visit him. In the interest of ship's harmony I've been trying to avoid such confrontations, but one of you has driven me to the wall—me, and himself.”

Kirk had not been in the first officer's quarters since the incident of Spock's near-marriage on Vulcan itself—the painful episode Kirk had obliquely referred to in his first interview with Spock One, the episode during which an amok Spock had quite seriously tried to kill him. These quarters were very like his own in general plan, but considerably more austere. What little decoration they sported consisted chiefly of a few pieces of cutlery, vaguely and misleadingly Oriental in design, which reminded Kirk that Spock's parental culture—on his father's side though now fiercely rationalistic in its biases—had once been almost equally fiercely military.

Kirk was not surprised to notice that the quarters showed not the slightest sign that they were being occupied by two people instead of one. There were two Spocks here now, however, and they were staring at each other with cold but undisguised hostility. The battle had been joined, overtly, at last. Perhaps that was just as well.

"One of you two gentlemen has been uncharacteristically stupid," Kirk said, "and if I could detect which one it was, I'd fire him out the emergency airlock in his underwear. Wantonly endangering the *Enterprise* is as serious a crime as violating General Order Number One, as far as I'm concerned—and as you both know very well. So I'm at open war with one of you, and both of you are going to have to suffer for it. Spock One, did you countermand a course order that I'd logged in the computer?"

"No, Captain, certainly not."

"A routine question. Very well. You are relieved of duty, both of you, and I wish you joy in trying to stay out of each other's hair in the same quarters with nothing to do. In the meantime, I've got no grounds to want to cause either of you selective discomfort, if you know what I mean, and I'll try to see that I don't. In return, I want your advice. Spock One, do you agree that whoever had the computer take us off warp drive wanted the *Enterprise* detected by the Klingons?"

"It seems to be the only possible conclusion," Spock One said.

"Why did he do it?"

"I can only guess, Captain. It is conceivable that the original Spock did after all reach Organia and found it occupied by the Klingons—or was intercepted by the Klingons in some other way—and that a double who was actually a Klingon agent was sent back along with the original. The fact that no memory of this exists in the original's mind, nor any evidence of mental tampering, is not diagnostic; we are dealing with totally new and unknown forces here, as Mr. Scott's bafflement makes very evident."

"The possibility certainly can't be discounted," Kirk agreed. "And it does offer a motive for what happened with the computer. Spock Two, any comments?"

"One word, if I may, Captain," Spock Two said. "The word is: *nonsense*."

"Again, why?"

"Because it involves too many *ad hoc* assumptions.

William of Occam, one of Earth's pioneers in scientific method, established that one must not multiply logical entities without sufficient reason. The principle is now called the Law of Parsimony."

"Currently rephrased to read, the simplest explanation that fits all the facts is the preferable one," Kirk said. "Have you got a simpler?"

"I think so," said Spock Two. "There is no evidence that the original Spock was ever transported anywhere. It is far simpler to suppose that what we see is in fact the case: that something went wrong with the new process and materialized a mirror image. If this is what happened, it would involve the deepest levels of the replicate's nervous system, producing a reversal of personality as well—and there would be the source of your motive for sympathy with the Klingons."

"Spock One, what do you say to that notion?"

"It has the virtue of simplicity," Spock One said coldly, "and as such is clearly to be preferred. But Occam's Razor is only a human preference, not a natural law. And this mirror hypothesis is also an assumption for which no hard evidence exists."

"Granted," said Spock Two. "But may I point out, Captain, that though each of these assumptions excludes the other, both nevertheless argue toward the same course of action: the *immediate* destruction of the replicate."

"Provided both assumptions are not equally wrong," Spock One said.

"Or providing one of them is right," Kirk said, "Either leaves me with the same question I had before: *Which is the replicate?*"

Neither Spock answered him—and he would not have believed them if they had.

Chapter Five

ON THE OTHER HAND . . .

From the Captain's Log, Star Date 4020.8:

I have interdicted further orders from either Spock until the identity question can be resolved—if it can be—although it effectively deprives me of my first officer. This is a long way from being even a satisfactory interim move, however, since even without authority an alienated Spock could work all kinds of mischief. But there is no way of preventing this short of throwing both of them in the brig, a step for which I have no present grounds.

Operating without a first officer was exhausting work despite Sulu's best efforts, especially under the added strain of Klingon surveillance—Sulu had indeed managed to shake the scout ship that had been trailing the *Enterprise*, but there could be no doubt that the Klingons now knew she was somewhere in the area, and would be searching for her grimly, tenaciously and efficiently. Nevertheless, when Kirk came off watch he went to the sick bay before turning in.

"Something that Spock Two suggested has been nagging at me," he told McCoy. "If the replicate is in fact a mirror image, wouldn't fluoroscopy or an X-ray show it? Heart pointing the wrong way, appendix on the left side, something like that?"

"Afraid not, Jim," McCoy said. "Anatomically, Vulcans have perfect bilateral symmetry—and no appen-

dix, either. Of course, Spock is genetically half human, but the only influence that has in this particular area is in handedness."

"I thought of that, but obviously the replicate has thought of it too. If he's in fact left-handed, he's counterfeiting being right-handed very successfully."

"Let's keep watching for it anyhow. Handedness is a very deep physiological bias—sooner or later he's bound to slip."

"Spock? You must be kidding."

"I guess you're right," McCoy said gloomily.

"Nevertheless I agree that watching may be the only answer, and particularly by the ship's psychologist, meaning you, Doc. If there is a major personality reversal here, there's got to be something un-Spocklike to be seen in the replicate if we look hard enough for it."

"Any suggestions?"

"We'll have to play it by ear. But just for example, I'll tell you privately that I'm highly suspicious of Spock Two. The emotional pressure he has been bringing to bear on me to have the replicate destroyed is uncharacteristic. The conservative approach Spock One advocates seems more like the old Spock. But it's not enough to go on. We've *got* to have a test."

"Easy," McCoy said drily. "Just order Yeoman Rand to kiss one of them. If he responds shoot him."

"If we can't think of anything better, I'll do just that," Kirk said. "I'm dead serious, Doc."

"I know you are, Jim, and I'll keep my eyes peeled. Watching that human computer was a chore at the best of times, though. Having to watch two of them, under battle alert, is going to be a real cross."

Kirk left, temporarily satisfied. McCoy would follow the lead; it did not matter that he was sarcastic about it. He could no more avoid that than he could avoid breathing.

After the next day's watch—uneventful, but nerve-racking—Kirk visited the engineering deck. Scott's

report was no more encouraging than the surgeon's had been.

"I've been shooting out inanimate objects toward Organia's coordinates, Captain, and I've got quite a collection of duplicate mathoms th' noo. They don't tell us a thing we didna ken before."

"What's a mathom?"

"A useless object, alas. The things do replicate in reverse, so we can regard that hypothesis as confirmed. But I dinna see how that helps us. I suppose ye thought of checkin' the Spocks to see where they were wearin' their badges?"

"I did think of it, but not soon enough—not when the duplication first occurred. Now the replicate has had plenty of time to think of it himself and take steps."

"Well, an' next I'm goin' to send out an experimental animal an' give the replicate to Doc to play with. Though he won't see much in the way of personality reversal there. If it's a rabbit, maybe it'll bite him."

But the next day, all hopes for a testing program became academic—and in fact, impossible.

Spock Two was on the bridge when Kirk came on duty, to the Captain's rather disquieted surprise. He said at once, "Captain, I have issued no orders and would not be here at all were it not for the gravity of the situation. However, I must report that the entity you call Spock One has barricaded himself in Dr. McCoy's laboratory, and refuses to come out without a logged assurance of my destruction, and a guarantee of his own life."

The atmosphere on the bridge was like the inside of an electrostatic chamber. Kirk said, "Confirm!"

"Confirmed," the computer said.

Kirk snapped a glance at Uhura. "Lieutenant, ask Dr. McCoy to come up here, on the double. Mr. Spock, if you were he—that is, Spock One—what do you think you might be attempting to gain? Beyond, of

course, trying to force my hand on the overt demands?"

"There are many possibilities, Captain. Simple disruption of ship's routine is one. Or trying to force a loyalty crisis among your other officers. Or an attempt to gain privacy in order to jury-rig some form of communication with the Klingons."

"Could you run up such a rig, in his circumstances?"

"Yes, in any of several different ways."

"Mr. Sulu, deflector screens up."

"Already up, Captain," the navigator said with indefatigable cheerfulness. At the same moment, McCoy entered.

"Doctor, is there anything in your laboratory that Spock One could adapt to damaging the ship—or the personnel?"

"Quite a lot," McCoy said. "In fact, probably more than I could guess. After all, he is the ship's science officer—or a more than reasonably accurate facsimile."

"Enough to justify our trying to cut our way in there with a phaser?"

"I would say not," McCoy said. "There's a lot of equipment in there that's irreplaceable under our present circumstances, to say nothing of a good many reagents and drugs. If he resisted, much of it could be damaged or destroyed—or he could stymie us by threatening to destroy it himself. And consider, Jim, that he may be doing nothing more than what he says he's doing: safeguarding his own life. Why not wait and see?"

"May I comment, Captain?" Spock Two said. Kirk nodded. "The risks in such a course are enormous. Surely this move—which is in direct violation of your standing orders to me—establishes that he is the replicate, not I. Leaving him unmolested is tantamount to inviting a highly qualified Klingon science officer aboard, handing him a full set of engineering tools and materials, and inviting him to do his worst."

"Think highly of yourself, don't you?" McCoy said.

"If you doubt that I am highly qualified, Doctor, I suggest that you ask the computer for my record."

"Cut it out, both of you," Kirk said. "This is no time for feuding. And Mr. Spock, I want you to bear in mind that I do not consider *anything* established as yet. I am highly suspicious of both of you, and the only chances I am prepared to take are those which will keep both of you alive. Dammit, man, don't you know that you're insisting on my destroying someone who may be my friend—as well as the best first officer in the Fleet? If you don't, then it's pretty clear that *you* can't be the original Spock!"

"Of course I understand it," Spock Two said. "But it is my duty to offer what I think to be the facts."

"It is," Kirk agreed, somewhat mollified. "However, for the present, we will leave this mess standing exactly as it is. In the meantime, I want you all to recall that we are still trying to dodge the Klingon navy and make a run for Organia—which is now our own best chance for survival, as well as of being of some use to the Federation."

"We may not be in time even at best, Captain," Lieutenant Uhura said. "I have just intercepted a general Klingon subspace broadcast. They claim to have inflicted a major defeat upon the Federation Fleet in the Great Nebula area of Orion. That's awfully close to Earth itself."

"It is more than that," Spock Two said. "It is the area which the Klingons call New Suns Space, because fourth-generation stars are being born there."

"Why does that matter?" Kirk said.

"Because, Captain, the process still has millions of years to run. It means that the Klingons are so confident of winning the war that they are willing to expend men and ships to capture solar systems that, as yet, do not even exist. And they may very well be right."

Chapter Six

NOBODY AT HOME

From the Captain's Log, Star Date 4150.0:

We are now three months deep into Klingon space and remain undetected, although we have overheard Klingon ships working out a search grid for us. Hence I have ruled against any smash-and-grab raids on Klingon bases, which might help them predict our course, until and unless the situation on Organia turns out to be hopeless. We also continue to hear reports of Federation defeats. The computer judges Spock Two's theory about the strange places in which the Klingon navy turns up to be highly probable, but there is still no way to report his conclusion to Starfleet Command. His behavior otherwise has been impeccable; but then, Spock One has been equally inoffensive, except for continuing to refuse to come out of his hole.

After three months, too, there was a spurious atmosphere of routine on the bridge, as though it were perfectly normal to have one Spock at the library console and one taking his meals behind a barricade in McCoy's laboratory. (An attempt to starve him out had come to nothing; he had, as he had promptly announced, simply put himself on iron rations from among McCoy's supplies—a diet which would have brought down any ordinary human being eventually with half a dozen deficiency diseases at once, but which could sustain his half-Vulcan constitution indefinitely.)

Kirk was just as well pleased to have his department heads adjusted to the situation. It was further evidence of their resiliency—not that he needed that, at this late date—and besides, nobody could afford to be distracted under present circumstances. McCoy and Scott, of course, continued to work doggedly at the problem of the replication whenever possible, but only one further clue had emerged: all of the experimental animals Scott had sent “out,” in imitation of Spock’s ill-fated non-journey, also “returned” as duplicates, but the duplicates all died within a few days thereafter. The surgeon could find no reason for their deaths, but even had he been able to do so, it seemed unlikely that the explanation would have been helpful, since it very obviously could not apply to the very much alive replicate Spock (whichever he was). Like all of the few other clues, it seemed to point nowhere in particular.

Gradually, however, the tension began to grow again as the *Enterprise* drew near to 11872 dy. by 85746 K, the arbitrary point in space-time where she would have to break out of warp drive in order to scan for Organia—and for something utterly unknown.

“Thus far,” Kirk told his watch, “we’ve no reason to suppose that the Klingons think we’re anywhere in the vicinity. But we’ll take no chances. Mr. Sulu, I want you to engage ship’s phasers with Lieutenant Uhura’s sensor alarms, so that if we get a lock-on even the instant we come out of warp, we get a proximity explosion one nano-jiffy later. There’s a faint chance that we may blow up a friend that way, but in this sector I think it can be discounted.”

Sulu’s hands flew over his board. Uhura watched hers like a cat, occasionally pouncing as she secured the sensor circuits to his navigation aids. The telltales for the phaser rooms came on, one after the other, as the hulking, deadly machines reached readiness.

“All primed, Captain,” Sulu said.

“What is our breakout time?”

“Fourteen thirty-five twenty.”

"Lieutenant Uhura, how long will you need for a minimum scan for Organia?"

"I can get one complete spherical atlas of the skies in ten seconds, Captain."

"Very well. Mr. Sulu, give us ten seconds in normal space, then turn to a heading of forty-eight Mark zero-six-nine at Warp One. Better set it into the computer, Mr. Spock."

Spock Two nodded, but Sulu asked, "Wouldn't it be easier to clock it from my board?"

"I want it both ways, as a fail-safe."

"Do you wish a countdown, Captain?" Spock Two said.

"I see no reason for it when we're on automatic. It just creates tension unnecessarily. Steady as you go, and stand by."

The minutes trickled away. Then, with the usual suddenness, the *Enterprise* was in normal space.

And with equal suddenness, nothing else was normal.

Though he could not tell how he sensed it, Kirk felt the presence of a huge maw, a wound, a vortex in the very fabric of space-time itself. It was as if some unimaginable force had torn open the underlying metrical frame of the universe, leaving absolute and utter Nothingness, the ultimate blankness which had preceded even the creation of Chaos. And the *Enterprise* was plunging straight into it.

The sensation was one of pure horror. Although the ten seconds seemed to stretch out into hours, Kirk was completely paralyzed, and around him his companions were as rigid as statues.

Then it was gone, as if it had never been. The *Enterprise* was back on Warp Drive.

The bell from the engineering deck jammered.

"What in bloody blue blazes was *that*?"

"Don't know, Scotty, get off the blower till we figure it out and I'll pass you the word. I assume the rest of your crew felt it too?"

There was a brief silence. "Aye, that they did."

"Mr. Sulu, do we have our new heading?"

"Yes, *sir*," said the helmsman, white-lipped.

"Did you get your pictures, Lieutenant? Good, let's have a look at them. And open a line to Spock One—I have a hunch we're going to need all the brains we can muster to crack this nut."

The distorted stars of subspace vanished from the viewing screen, to be replaced by a normal-looking starfield. At its center, however, was a gently glowing, spherical object, fuzzy of appearance and with a peculiar silvery sheen.

"That," said Uhura, "is at the coordinates for Organia. Unless my own memory is playing me tricks, it hasn't the faintest resemblance to the images of Organia we have stored in the log from our first visit. Organia has pronounced surface markings and is a Class M planet. This thing looks like a gas giant, insofar as it looks like anything at all."

"In addition to the fact," Kirk said, "that we were heading straight for it when we came out of warp drive, and my mental and emotional impression was that there was nothing there at all—NOTHING in great quivering capital letters. Did anybody have a different impression?"

All shook their heads. Spock Two said, "Captain, we know the Organians are masters of hypnotism, and can manipulate other energy flows as well with great virtuosity. They are quite capable of giving their planet any apparent aspect that they like, even to the camera."

"In ten seconds?" Kirk said. "I'll grant that the emotional effect could be a part of some sort of general mental broadcast, but I doubt that even the Organians could jump aboard a ship and scramble its camera circuits that precisely on that short notice."

"Besides, my cameras aren't standard; I've rewired them a lot from time to time," Uhura said. "In order to know the circuits well enough to tinker with them, they'd have to read my mind, or get the altered wiring diagrams out of the computer."

"The full extent of their capabilities is quite unknown," Spock Two said.

"I'm not arguing about that," Kirk said. "But why should they give one impression to us and a quite different one to the cameras? Either they want us to think that Organia's not there, or that it has been drastically transformed—but why both? They know the contradiction would arouse our curiosity—though *both* appearances seem designed to discourage it, taken singly. And that seems to indicate that the camera appearance was not their work, and that the pictures show the real situation—whatever *that* is."

"If so," Spock Two said, "it is logically economical to suppose that there is a common explanation: that the Organians have surrounded their planet with some kind of an energy screen, which is what the cameras see, and whose effects are what we felt."

"That's reasonable," Kirk said. "But if true, it throws a large wooden shoe into our original plan. To put it mildly, I have the distinct feeling that the Organians do *not* want to be visited. And if we were to go down there anyhow, I'm sure I wouldn't be able to stand up under the pressure of that field for more than a minute. Do I hear any volunteers who think they might?"

Nobody volunteered. At length Kirk said, "Spock One, we've heard nothing from you thus far. Have you any thoughts on this problem?"

"Yes, Captain," the intercom said in Spock's voice. "Though I have not seen the pictures in question, your discussions have been complete enough to permit analysis. It seems evident that you are all off on the wrong track. The answer is in fact quite simple, though far from obvious."

"All right, what is it? Spit it out, man."

"Only on receipt of my guarantees, Captain."

"That," Kirk said grimly, "is blackmail."

"The term is accurate, and therefore neither offends nor persuades me."

"And what about the security of the ship?"

"My analysis of the situation," the intercom said,

"leads me to conclude that the presence of the replicate first officer is a greater danger to the security of the ship than is the inaccessibility of Organia. I therefore continue to insist upon my terms."

Kirk turned angrily to the simulacrum of the first officer who was on the bridge. "Spock Two, do you have any idea of what he might be hinting at?"

"None whatsoever, I regret to say. Our thought processes are now markedly different, as I predicted from the start that they would become. From the data available, I believe your present view of the Organian situation to be the correct one, though necessarily incomplete."

That was superficially reassuring, Kirk thought, but actually no help at all. If Spock One did indeed have the answer, it might be worth giving him the guarantees he demanded (what was it that Shylock kept saying in *The Merchant of Venice*? "I'll have my bond!") to get it—which Spock Two, especially if he was the replicate, would resist to protect his own life. But if Spock One was the replicate, his claim to have a solution might simply be a ruse to insure the destruction of the original. If his solution turned out to be wrong, well, he could always plead inadequate data; Kirk had never required his first officer to be infallible, much though Spock himself disliked finding himself in error.

"We'll proceed on our present assumption," Kirk said finally. "Working from those, the only chance we have of rescuing any part of our original plan is to find some way of getting past that screen, shielding ourselves from its effects, or neutralizing it entirely. I'll throw that little gem to Mr. Scott, but he'll have to have detailed sensor readings from the screen to analyze—which, I'm sorry to say, means another pass through the sector off warp drive. Orders:

"Lieutenant Uhura, find out from Mr. Scott what sensor setup he thinks would be most likely to be helpful to him, and what is the shortest possible time in which he could get sufficient readings. And once Mr. Sulu has set up a flight plan for the pass, make sure the

entire crew is forewarned to expect another one of those emotional shocks, and how long it will last.

“Spock Two, have the computer print out a complete rundown of anything that might be known about any screen even vaguely like this one—including conjectures—and turn it over to Mr. Scott.” He stood up tiredly. “I’m going to the rec room for a sandwich. If I’m not back by the time the pass is set up, call me. All other arrangements for the pass are to be as they were before.”

“You are making a serious mistake, Captain,” said the voice of Spock One.

“You leave me no choice, Mr. Spock. All hands, execute!”

Kirk was more or less braced for the impact of the terror when the next moment of breakout came, but the preparation did not seem to do him much good. The experience was in fact worse this time, for it had to be longer—Scott had insisted upon a run of forty-five interminable seconds, during which the *Enterprise* and all her crew seemed to be falling straight into the Pit. And during the last ten seconds, there was a flash of intense white flame off to one side—the burst of a proximity explosion from one of the ship’s phasers. Three seconds later, there was still another.

“Heels, Sulu!” Uhura cried. “The place is swarming with Klingons!”

Chapter Seven

THE ATTACK

From the Captain's Log, Star Date 4181.6:

Apparently six Klingon battlecraft locked onto us during our second pass at Organia—or whatever it is where Organia ought to be. If they were in the vicinity during our first pass, which I think almost certain, only the briefness of our breakout can have saved us from being detected then. It is also possible, of course, that we would not have been detected the second time had it not been for our own automatic phaser fire, depending upon whether the Klingon force was a garrison or an ambush. If it was the latter, the proximity setting on the phasers did us a favor, for our hits must have disabled two of them; only four are following on warp drive. With another enemy I would expect someone to stay behind as a reserve, out of ordinary tactical common sense, but no Klingon would avoid a fight unless physically pinned down in one way or another.

Most battles in space are either over almost the instant they begin—as had evidently been the case with the two surprised Klingon vessels—or became very protracted affairs, because of the immense distances involved. (The first sentence of Starfleet Academy's *Fundamentals of Naval Engagement* reads: "The chief obstacle facing a Starship Captain who wishes to join battle is that battle is almost impossible to join.")

This one showed every sign of going on forever. None

of the four surviving Klingon ships was as large as their quarry, whose phasers outranged theirs sufficiently to keep them at a respectful distance, while her deflectors easily swept aside the occasional Klingon torpedo. In short, a standoff.

Kirk knew from experience, however, that the standoff could not be a stalemate; the blasts of code being emitted steadily on subspace radio by the small Klingon vessels—three of them seemed to be corvettes, the other was perhaps as large as a cruiser—were obviously urgent calls for more high-powered help. Nor was there any further reason for the *Enterprise* to preserve radio silence.

"Inform Starfleet Command of our whereabouts," he told Lieutenant Uhura. "Include a description of the Organian situation and a hologram of your best plate of the body in Organia's orbit. Tell them we're under attack and ask for orders. Second, as a separate message, send them Spock Two's conclusions on current Klingon strategy. Third, route a flash Urgent straight through to the Scientific Advisory Board describing our superfluity of Spocks and exactly how it happened—with hard, *full* particulars from Mr. Scott—and ask them for analysis and advice . . . By the way, how old is our most recent code?"

"Just a year old, Captain."

"The Klingons will have broken that six ways from Sunday by now. Well, you'll have to use it—but put the clear in Swahili and ask to get the answers the same way. That ought to give the Klingons pause."

"It will indeed," Uhura said, grinning. "But even modern Swahili lacks some of Scotty's technical terms, Captain. There are Indo-European borrowings in every Earthly language—and the Klingons may be able to infer the rest of the message using them as contexts."

"Blast and damn. Leaving the technicalities out will throw us right back on our own resources, and I can't say we've done too well with those."

"There's an alternative, Captain, though it's risky; we can translate the clear into Eurish."

"What's that? I never heard of it."

"It's the synthetic language James Joyce invented for his last novel, over two hundred years ago. It contains forty or fifty other languages, including slang in all of them. Nobody but an Earthman could possibly make sense of it, and there are only a few hundred of them who are fluent in it. There's the risk; it may take Starfleet Command some time to run down an expert in it—if they even recognize it for what it is."

Being a communications officer, Kirk realized anew, involved a good many fields of knowledge besides sub-space radio. "Can it handle scientific terms?"

"Indeed it can. You know the elementary particle called the quark; well, that's a Eurish word. Joyce himself predicted nuclear fission in the novel I mentioned. I can't quote it precisely, but roughly it goes, 'The abnihilation of the etym expolodotonates through Parsuralia with an ivanmorinthorrorumble fragoromboassity amidwhiches general uttermosts confusion are perceivable moletons skaping with mulicules.' There's more, but I can't recall it—it has been a long time since I last read the book."

"That's more than enough," Kirk said hastily. "Go ahead—just as long as you're sure you can read the answer."

"Nobody's ever *dead* sure of what Eurish means," Uhura said. "But I can probably read more of it than the Klingons could. To them, it'll be pure gibberish."

And they won't be alone, Kirk thought. Nevertheless, he could forget about it for the time being. That still left the problem of the Klingon ships on the tail of the *Enterprise*.

Sowing a mine field in the ship's wake would be useless; the enemy craft doubtless had deflectors, and in any event the mines, being too small to carry their own warp generators, would simply fall out into normal space and become a hazard to peacetime navigation. But wait a minute . . .

"Mr. Spock, check me on something. When we put out a deflector beam when we're on warp drive, the

warp field flows along the beam to the limit of the surface area of the field. Then, theoretically, the field fails and we're back in normal space. All right so far?"

"Yes, Captain, a simple inverse-square-law effect."

"And contrariwise," Kirk said, "using a tractor beam on warp drive pulls the field in around the beam, which gives us a little extra velocity but dangerously biases our heading." Spock Two nodded. "All right, I think we've got the basis for a little experiment. I want to plant a mine right under the bow of that cruiser, using a deflector *and* a tractor beam in tandem, with a little more power on the deflector. At the same time, I want our velocity run up so that our warp field will fail just as the mine explodes. Fill in the parameters, including the cruiser's pseudo distance and relative velocity, and see if it's feasible."

Spock Two turned to the computer and worked silently for a few moments. Then he said, "Yes, Captain, mathematically it is not a complex operation. But the library has no record of any Starship ever surviving the puncturing of its warp field by a deflector while under drive."

"And when nearly balanced by a tractor?"

"No pertinent data. At best, I would estimate, the strain on the *Enterprise* would be severe."

Yes, Kirk thought, and just maybe you don't much want that Klingon cruiser knocked out, either.

"We'll try it anyhow. Mr. Sulu, arm a mine and program the operation. Also—the instant we are back in normal space, give us maximum acceleration along our present heading on reaction drive."

"That," Spock Two said in the original Spock's most neutral voice, "involves a high probability of shearing the command section free of the engineering section."

"Why? We've done it before."

"Because of the compounding of the shock incident upon the puncturing of the warp field, Captain."

"We'll take that chance too. In case it has escaped your attention, we happen to be in the middle of a

battle. Lieutenant, warn ship's personnel to beware shock. Stand to, all, and execute."

Spock Two offered no further obstructions. Silently, Uhura set up on the main viewing screen a panorama of the sector in which the trap—if it worked—was to be sprung. The Klingon cruiser would have looked like a distorted mass of tubes and bulbs even close on, under the strange conditions of subspace; at its present distance, it was little more than a wobbly shadow.

Then the dense, irregular mass, made fuzzy with interference fringes, which was the best view they could hope to get of the mine, pushed its way onto the screen, held at the tip of two feathers of pale light, their pinnae pointing in opposite directions, which were the paired deflector and tractor beams (which in normal space would have been invisible). As the mine reached the inside surface of the warp field, that too became faintly visible, and in a moment was bulging toward the Klingon vessel. The impression it gave, of a monstrous balloon about to have a blowout, was alarming.

"Mr. Sulu, can the Klingon see what's going on there from the outside, or otherwise sense it?"

"I don't know, Captain. I wish *I* couldn't."

"Lieutenant Uhura?"

"It's quite possible, Captain, considering how excited the warp field is becoming. But perhaps they won't know how to interpret it. Like the library, I've never heard of this having been tried before, and maybe the Klingons haven't either. But I'm only guessing."

The bulge in the warp field grew, gradually becoming a blunt pseudopod groping into subspace. From the *Enterprise* it was like staring down a dim tunnel, with the twin beams as its axis. From the depths of his memory there came to Kirk a biology-class vision of the long glass spike of a radiolarian, a microscopic marine animal, with protoplasm streaming along it, mindless and voracious.

"Captain," the intercom squawked. "I've got trouble down here already. My engines are croonin' like kine with the indigestion."

"Ride with it, Mr. Scott, there's worse to come."

The blunt projection became a finger, at the tip of which the mine, looking as harmless as a laburnum seed, dwindled into the false night of subspace. Very faintly, the hull of the *Enterprise* began to groan. It was the first time in years that Kirk had heard his ship betray any signs of structural strain serious enough to be audible.

"Thirty seconds to breakout," Spock Two said.

"The Klingon's peeling off!" Uhura cried. "He's detected *something* he doesn't like, that's for sure. And he's under full drive. If . . ."

Was the mine close enough? Never mind, it would never be any closer.

"Fire, Mr. Sulu," Kirk said.

An immense ball of flame blossomed on the view screen—and then vanished as the *Enterprise* dropped into normal space. One second later, deprived of the ship's warp field, the fireball, too, was back again.

"Got him!" Sulu crowed.

The fireball swelled intolerably as the matter and anti-matter in the doomed Klingon's warp-drive pods fused and added their violence to the raging hydrogen explosion of the mine. The viewing screen dimmed the light hurriedly, but finally could accommodate it no longer, and blacked out entirely.

At the same time, the *Enterprise* rang with the blow-torch howling of the reaction engines coming up to full thrust, and a colossal lurch threw them all to the deck. The light flickered.

"Posts!" Kirk shouted, scrambling back to his command chair. "All department heads, report!"

The ship was screaming so fearfully in all its members that he could not have heard the answers even had his staff been able to hear the order. But a sweeping glance over the boards told him the bare-knuckle essentials; the rest could wait though not for long.

The *Enterprise* had held together—just barely. The three surviving Klingon corvettes had taken several seconds to react to the destruction of their command

cruiser and the disappearance of their quarry. They had dropped out of warp drive now, but in those few seconds had overshot their target by nearly a million miles, and the long, separating arcs they were executing now to retrace their steps were eloquent of caution and bafflement—and, if Kirk knew his Klingons, of mind-clouding fury.

The *Enterprise*, so fleet on warp drive, was something of a pig under reaction thrust, but she was wallowing forward bravely, and gaining legs with every stride. Within only a few minutes she would be plowing through the very midst of her erstwhile harriers.

“Klingons launching missiles, Captain,” Uhura reported.

Pure, random desperation. “Disregard. Mr. Sulu, engage the enemy and fire at will. When you’re through with them, I don’t want one single atom left sticking to another.”

“Yes, *sir*,” Sulu said, a wolfish grin on his normally cheerful face. This was the opportunity of a lifetime for a Starship gunnery officer, and he was obviously enjoying it thoroughly.

As the *Enterprise* picked up speed, she responded better to her helm; in that respect she did not differ much from a nineteenth-century clipper ship on the high seas, though the comparison failed utterly on warp drive. And she had a tremendous amount of energy to expand—indeed, even to waste—through her reaction engines. The Klingons apparently were stunned to see her bearing down on them, but their stupor didn’t matter now. The corvettes could not have reformed in time to meet her, even had their commanders understood the situation instantly.

Sulu’s hands danced over the studs before him. A stabbing barrage of phaser fire shot out from the *Enterprise*. The deflector screens of the corvettes fought back with coruscating brilliance; the viewing screen, which had crept cautiously back into operation after the death of the cruiser, dimmed hastily again.

Then there were no Klingon corvettes—only clouds

of incandescent gas, through which the *Enterprise* sailed as majestically as an ancient Spanish galleon over a placid Caribbean bay.

"Very good, ladies and gentlemen," Kirk said. "Assess damage and report to the First Officer. Mr. Sulu, re-lay course for Organia at Warp Three, to a position in opposition to the present calculated position of the planet. Lieutenant Uhura, open all lines to the staff—including Spock One. I want a conference, as of right now."

"I'll give you a report, Captain Kirk, and it's a twenty-four carat dilly," Leonard McCoy's voice said out of the middle of the air. "I can now tell you *how to determine which Spock is the ringer.*"

Kirk shot a glance at Spock Two, but the incumbent First Officer showed no reaction whatsoever. Well, that was in character, as far as it went; Kirk had expected nothing else.

"Belay that," Kirk told McCoy evenly. "Our present business is much more urgent, and I want *both* Spocks to hear it."

"But, Jim—!" McCoy's voice said, almost as if in shock. Then there was a sound of swallowing, and the surgeon started over again. "Captain, this matter in my opinion has the highest possible urgency."

"Belay it. And attend, all."

Chapter Eight

SPOCKS ON TRIAL

From the Captain's Log, Star Date 4194.4:

Despite Spock Two's alarming predictions, the damage to the ship from the maneuver of this morning appears to be minimal, consisting chiefly of a deflector generator failure and some even less important burnouts of scattered sensor units. All of this is easily reparable from ship's stores, Mr. Scott reports. In the meantime, there appear to be no Klingon vessels in or near this arc of Organia's orbit, and I mean to use the breather this affords us to bring several other matters to a head—and high time, too.

Those sensors that were still alive—a large majority—were at full extension and tied in to an automatic flight plan; the bridge staff were at their consoles; and lines were open to the engineering bridge, to the sick bay, to McCoy's laboratory, and to the transporter room. Kirk looked at each of his physically present department chiefs in turn, and his expression was glacial.

"We have been acting first, and thinking afterward, entirely too much," he said, "and I do not except myself. Nor am I blaming anyone, since we've been under continuous pressure, both of emotion and of event. But it's time for a casting up of accounts.

"First of all, I find that Klingon reception committee highly peculiar. There are two ways of regarding it, as far as I can see:

“One: that it was a trap that had been set for us. This implies advance knowledge of where we were going to be, and I think it’s safe to say that the Klingons couldn’t have come by such knowledge unless somebody aboard the *Enterprise* got it to them, somehow.

“Two: that the Klingon force was stationed in this area anyhow, and jumped us as a matter of course when we showed up. The main difficulty with that theory is that it requires another one, and I’m no fonder of *ad hoc* assumptions than Mr. Spock is. Why should the Klingons post five ships—a cruiser, three corvettes and a fifth ship of unknown size—so far from the main battle area? We already know that their forces are penetrating deeply, and with great daring, into Federation space. If those five ships were simply part of a reserve, why were they stationed here, a good long way away from any Klingon base big enough to supply them, and so far away from Federation territory that they couldn’t have been thrown into any battle fast enough to reinforce a Klingon fleet in trouble? That’s utterly uncharacteristic of them, and it doesn’t make sense any other way, either.”

There was dead silence. Kirk let his expression soften a little, and added, “Anyone who wishes to volunteer an opinion is at liberty to do so.”

“In that case, Captain, I have a third hypothesis to suggest,” said the voice of Spock One.

“With no price tag?”

“None, Captain. I ask for my price only on what I *know* to be the case. At present, what I have to offer is only a possible alternative to your theories. It is this:

“The Klingons may well have invested the Organian system because they regard it as a sensitive area. They may no more understand what has happened to the planet than we do; but they certainly know that should the Organians choose to come back from wherever they have gone, or whatever state or condition they may be in, the war would be over. And worse; since the Klingons started the war in defiance of the Organian

Peace Treaty, their return would place the Klingons, as an old Earth expression has it, in the soup."

"No possible or even imaginable Klingon naval force could prevent the Organians from taking action if they chose to do so," Spock Two said, "and it is elementary games theory to assume that the Klingons know this."

"Quite true," said the voice of Spock One. "But if they do *not* understand what has happened to Organia—contrary to my original assumption that they might have *caused* it—they would not want any Federation ship investigating the situation and possibly finding out the answer before they did, especially not a vessel as well equipped for research as a Starship. They would infinitely prefer the *status quo*; and so, they deploy valuable forces around the area."

Despite the fact that the presence of the two Spocks aboard the *Enterprise* was now one hundred and seventy-six days old, it still gave Kirk a faint chill to listen to the two identical voices arguing with each other, as if he were deep in some nightmare from which he was never going to awaken. The dispassionate tone of both voices, as they pursued a discussion which must end, eventually, in the death of one of them, made it even more eerie. With an effort, he said, "Spock One, six weeks ago you were claiming positive knowledge of what had happened to Organia. Now you've changed your tune."

"Not at all, Captain. I do know what has happened to Organia. I simply offer an alternate hypothesis as to its cause, and the Klingons' response."

"Spock Two, what's your opinion of this hypothesis?"

"It has certain attractive features," Spock Two said. "For instance, it explains why the Klingons did not attack us when we first appeared in the area. Had they had a trap prepared, they would have blown us out of space within a few seconds; they are highly efficient in such matters, as the Captain will recall. Whereas, as a garrison force, they would have been taken by surprise by our first irruption."

"And another 'attractive feature,'" Kirk said stonily,

"is that the theory doesn't require the ship to have been betrayed—by either one of you."

"May I butt in, Captain?" Sulu said.

"Go right ahead, Mr. Sulu."

"There exists no way whatsoever by which the Klingons could have known we were coming here. They couldn't possibly have predicted my course after we shook that first little craft. And in normal space, they couldn't have detected our approach in warp drive either, isn't that right, Uhura?"

"Out of the question," the communications officer agreed.

"So," Sulu said, "a garrison seems to be the answer."

"It sounds plausible," Kirk said, "but unless I read the signs wrong, Spock Two has some reservations. What are they?"

"I would not describe them as reservations, Captain. I have myself suddenly realized what happened to Orkania. The answer also contains the solution of the duplication problem, as was almost inevitable. Hence there is no further need for us to trade in guesses and probabilities. I should add, however, that the solution absolutely requires the destruction of the replicate in Dr. McCoy's laboratory."

"Why?" Kirk said, in rising desperation.

"Because he also claims to know the answer. I cannot say for certain whether his answer is the same as mine. I hope it is not. It is vital that he not have the correct answer, or, if he does have it, that he not be allowed to act on it."

"So you're holding out on me too, eh?"

"I regret that I must," Spock Two said.

"I am getting so damn tired of all this blackmail," Kirk said, "that I'm more than tempted to get rid of you *both*. Never mind, forget that I said it. Mr. Scott."

"Aye, Captain."

"Does anything you've heard this time offer you any clues to your side of the problem?"

"It makes nae physical sense to me at all, Captain, I'm verra sorry to say."

"Dr. McCoy, what about your method for distinguishing between the two Spocks? Does that have any bearing on the other questions?"

"It probably does, Captain, but if so I don't see how. I'm nevertheless quite sure of it, on biological grounds alone. In fact I'm so sure, that I can tell you right now which one is the replicate, and I will, and I *won't* put any price on the information, either. It has to be Spock One."

"But you can't tell me which of the two has the right answer to the problem of Organia—or even how the replication itself happened?"

"Sorry, Jim, but I haven't the foggiest notion."

"Then we're still up in the air. Both Spocks claim to have those answers, and neither one will tell me what they are. We have to keep both men with us until we find out what they're concealing—or if, on the other hand, they're both of them simply bluffing."

"One of us," Spock One said, "is the original and therefore cannot be bluffing, Captain. Surely you will do him that courtesy."

Kirk put a hand briefly over his eyes. "I'll offer an apology to the survivor. And I'll assume that one of you is telling the truth, of course. *But which?* The honest man, the real Spock, ought to offer his information freely; that's his duty. Yet you're both insisting, now, upon the death of the other Spock before you'll talk. This is more than blackmail—it's an endorsement of murder. That's enough to make me wonder if *either* of you can be the original Spock."

Now *there* was a nasty notion. Suppose the original had been destroyed in the mysterious accident in the transporter room, and both of these were replicates? But McCoy thought otherwise. Kirk was glad the idea hadn't occurred to him earlier.

The rest of the staff on the bridge was listening with breathless fascination, as if they were onlookers at a performance of the penultimate act of a tragedy—as indeed they might be.

"May I point out, Captain, as you did during the

battle, that we are at war?" said Spock Two. "To my certain knowledge, the replicate Spock must be, and is, a creature of the enemy, exactly as I proposed to you when you confronted the two of us in my quarters, nearly six months ago. The wages of treason are death for a good reason, Captain: not as a punishment, for we know capital punishment is useless as a deterrent, but because the traitor belongs *by conviction* to the enemy, and is therefore a permanent danger as long as the enemy himself remains an enemy."

"And what about due process of law?" Kirk said. "You're asking me for the death of Spock One, as far as I can see, as if it were a marketplace transaction—his death in exchange for your information, just as though you were a quartermaster charging me for a uniform. It's a man's life we're dealing with here, and I'm not about to condemn him to death, even for treason, without trial and conviction."

"To what tribunal could we submit such a case?" said the voice of Spock One. "There is no competent community of appeal aboard the *Enterprise*."

"You can appeal it to me," McCoy said, in a voice that sounded as if it was full of gravel. "I can tell the two of you apart, I know I'm right, and it's easy to put to the test. Do you want to hear my proposal privately, Jim, or shall I just blurt it right out?"

"The accused have a right to know how they'll be tried. Speak up, Doc, it's getting late. There may be Klingons on our backs again any minute."

"Very good, Captain. The test is this: let the barricaded Spock out, if he'll come, and offer both men a standard ship's meal. One of them will refuse it. That man is the ringer—and very likely a traitor too, at least potentially."

Kirk leaned back in his command chair, feeling his jaw dropping. Were all these high issues, all these personal conflicts, all these emotional and military tensions to be resolved with two plates of chicken-and-quadrotriticale soup? It was a fantastic anticlimax; for an instant, he felt that he would almost rather have the

problem than this answer. But he said finally, "Do you really think this is a critical test, Doc?"

"Yes, I do, Captain. If it fails, you're no worse off than before. But I assure you, it won't fail."

Kirk turned to the incumbent First Officer.

"Spock Two, do you agree?"

"I do," Spock Two said promptly. "Since I've been eating standard ship's fare for months within everybody's observation anyhow. And may I add, Captain, that the test is a highly elegant, simple and ingenious one. I congratulate Dr. McCoy; it had not occurred to me at all."

"Spock One, do you also agree to it?"

There was no answer.

"Spock One, I'll give you just ten seconds to reply."

No answer. The seconds ran out.

"Security! Two guards to the bridge, please. Three more to Dr. McCoy's laboratory on the double and burn through the door. Capture the man inside alive if possible. If not possible, defend yourselves to the limit."

Spock Two turned in his chair as if to stand up. Instantly, Kirk's very small personal phaser was in his hand and leveled at Spock Two's stomach. Kirk had not had ancestors in America's Far West for nothing; he had practiced that draw endlessly in the ship's gymnasium, and this was not the first time he had been glad that he'd kept at it.

"Remain seated, my friend," he said, "until the security guards get here. And I devoutly hope that you really are my friend. But until I'm absolutely certain that you are, I'm quite willing to stun you so thoroughly that you won't wake up until next Easter—or maybe, never. Do I make myself clear?"

"Quite clear, Captain," Spock Two said composedly. "An entirely logical precaution."

Chapter Nine

THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

From the Captain's Log, Star Date 4194.6:

Whenever Spock One took alarm, he seems to have left himself plenty of time; he was gone by the time we cut our way into McCoy's laboratory, evidently out the ventilator shaft. There was no damage to the lab equipment other than that we caused ourselves by breaking in, but Spock One had set up a complex maze of tubing and glassware in which various fluids were still bubbling, percolating and dripping. An ion exchange column and a counter-current distributor were the only parts of this rig that I recognized. I have forbidden anyone to touch it until McCoy can study it, but he says he thinks he already knows its purpose.

In the meantime, conducting any sort of major search for Spock One is out of the question. He knows every cubic centimeter of the ship, including the huge maze of the 'tween-hulls area, better than anyone else aboard except Scott, and hence could be anywhere by now. I have posted one guard over Spock Two in his quarters, another over myself and each of the department heads and their alternates, and several in the transporter room, the hangar deck, the passenger quarters (a prime target because currently empty), the engineering deck, the rec room, the main bridge, the briefing room, the gymnasium, the quartermaster's stores and the armory, as well as the laboratory, and if I have missed anyplace crucial where he might turn up, there is nothing I can

do about it—I have used up everyone I can possibly assign to security duty without dangerously depleting the fighting and operating strength of the *Enterprise*.

I have ordered six hours' sleep for everyone who was on duty during the battle and have named Mr. Chekov Officer of the Day. I shall get some sleep myself when he comes onto the bridge. In the meantime, I have an interview with Dr. McCoy in ten minutes:

"The apparatus in the laboratory completely confirms my guesses about the situation," McCoy said, "which means that you can let Spock Two out now. He's the real thing, all right."

"What was it? The apparatus, I mean?"

"A system for synthesizing his own food, using the ship's meals we sent him as raw material, plus some of my reagents. That's why he chose my lab to barricade himself in—in addition, of course, to the chance it offered to hold all my equipment hostage. He could have holed up anyplace in order to avoid eating with the rest of us, but there was no place else aboard where he could have been his own chef."

Kirk was completely baffled. The explanation was no better than none at all.

"?" he said with his eyebrows.

"All right, I'll begin at the beginning," McCoy said. "Although it's hard to decide just what the beginning is. You'll remember that Spock Two suggested that the replicate might be a mirror image of the original, and later, you and I discussed the possibility."

"And could figure out no way to test it."

"Right. Well, subsequently Scotty supplied me with some experimental animals which he had put through the new transporter system, and there was no doubt about it—the replicates of those *were* mirror images. They seemed quite healthy otherwise, with lively appetites—but they all died within a day or so, as I reported to you.

"I did autopsies on them, of course, but the only conclusion I could come to was that they had died of

starvation, despite the fact that they had all been chomping their way through the chow just as steadily as vegetarian animals like rabbits have to do to stay alive. I didn't understand this at all. And worse, it seemed to have no application to the problem of the two Spocks. Whichever of those was the replicate, he *wasn't* starving.

"It makes me feel pretty stupid to remember that I didn't grasp the clue even after Spock One shut himself up in my laboratory. What did finally give me the key was something that happened almost at the beginning of this affair—something apparently meaningless and irrelevant. It was this: You told me, you'll recall, that in your very first private interview with Spock One, he showed a slight hesitation in his speech, almost like stuttering."

Kirk thought back. "Yes, that's true, Doc. But it vanished almost immediately. I thought I might have imagined it."

"You didn't. Only someone with the iron control of a Spock could have made it vanish over any period of time, but his letting it show at all was his Achilles heel. As the replicate, and a mirror image, he was left-handed, just as we had guessed, but he was suppressing it, as we had also guessed. Now, Jim, handedness is the major physical expression of which hemisphere of a man's brain is the dominant one, the one chiefly in charge of his actions. It's a transverse relationship; if the left hemisphere of your brain is dominant, as is usually the case, you will be right-handed—and vice versa. And so, Jim, the retraining of left-handed children to become right-handed—in complete contradiction to the orders the poor kids' brains are issuing to their muscles—badly bollixes up their central nervous systems, and, among other bad outcomes, is the direct *and only* cause of habitual stuttering. You thought Spock One was stuttering from emotion or confusion, and that puzzled you. And well it might have. But in fact, he was stuttering because he was counterfeiting *not* being a mirror image, and hadn't gotten all his reflexes for the impersonation established yet."

"A brilliant piece of deduction, Mr. Holmes," Kirk said. "But I still don't see the connection between all that, and the food business."

"Because I haven't come to it yet. Let's backtrack for a minute. I don't have to explain to you how important the amino acids are to animal nutrition—they are the building blocks of protein. But what you may not know is that each amino acid has two molecular forms. If you crystallize a pure amino, asparagine for instance, and pass a beam of polarized light through the crystal, the beam will be bent when it emerges, either to the left or to the right. It's the levulo-rotatory form, the one that bends the beam to the left, that the body needs; the dextro-rotatory form is useless.

"And evidently the mirror-reversal of Spock One went all the way down to the molecular level of his being. Those nutrients we have to have, he cannot use; and those that he must have, he can't get from our food.

"There may be even more to it than that. It was not only starvation that he faced—no matter how much he ate, like my rabbits—but also the possibility that his central nervous system might be poisoned if he ate our food. For obvious reasons, no human being has ever tried to live on a diet consisting exclusively of reversed aminos, so nobody knows whether they might be subtly toxic to the higher brain functions—the functions that animals don't have. Obviously, Spock One didn't want to take any chances on that. He simply fasted for the few days he needed to contrive a good excuse for barricading himself in the lab. As a Vulcan hybrid he could go without food that long quite easily, and he did it so subtly that even Christine didn't notice that he wasn't eating. And then . . ."

"And then he set himself up to synthesize all twenty-eight amino acids for himself, and in bulk," Kirk said. "In a word—whew!"

"No, that would be beyond even a Spock, any Spock; my lab didn't have the facilities for it. But luckily for him, only eight of the aminos are absolutely

essential in the diet. The rest can be synthesized by the body itself, from simpler raw materials. But even doing that much for himself was a pretty impressive achievement, I must admit."

"And he hasn't shot his bolt yet, either. Well, Doc, make sure you report this in full to Scotty."

"Oh," the surgeon said, "I already have it on tape for him. I was only delaying transmission until I'd gotten your reaction."

"Very good; you have that. Now—any guesses as to where Spock One might have holed up?"

"Not the slightest. His psychology must be completely reversed, too, and I never did understand that when it was going in what I laughingly called its normal direction."

Kirk grinned tiredly. "You've pulled off a miracle already," he said. "I can't very well ask for two in the same day. Congratulations, Doc."

"Many thanks. What are you going to do now, Jim, if I may ask?"

"I," Kirk said, "am going to my quarters and get some shut-eye. I think the *Enterprise* will be better off for a while if I'm asleep on my back—instead of on my feet."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," McCoy said soberly. "Otherwise I was going to tell you that myself—and damn well make it stick, too."

Kirk had had perhaps three hours' sleep—certainly no more—when the general alarm brought him bolt upright in his bunk.

"Mr. Chekov!" he snapped. "What's up?"

"Spock One, Captain," said the intercom. "He has just been spotted in the stores deck, very briefly. I've ordered all available security hands to converge on the area."

"Cancel that," Kirk said, coming fully awake for what seemed to him to be the first time in weeks. "Use only security hands in the engineering section proper; order full viewer scan of stores and monitor it from the

bridge. All other security details to remain at their posts. Lock all stores exits with new codes."

"Right. Will you be assuming the bridge, Captain?"

"Directly."

But Spock One had obviously chosen his striking hour with great care, and his timing was perfect. Evidently his fleeting appearance in the stores area had been only a feint, for the search of stores had just gotten into full swing when the main board on the bridge signaled that the huge exit doors to the hangar deck—the doubled doors that led into space at the rear of the ship—were being rolled open, on manual override. Before the override could be interdicted from the bridge, the doors had parted enough to allow a shuttlecraft to get out, and flick away at top acceleration into the glare of the Organian sun.

"Tractors!" Kirk snapped.

"Sorry, Captain," Chekov said. "He has just gone into warp drive."

We have no shuttlecraft with warp drive, Kirk thought grayly; and then, *Well, we do now.*

"And good riddance," said McCoy, who had arrived on the bridge just in time to see the end of the fiasco.

"Do you really think we're rid of him, Doctor?" Kirk said icily. "I think that nothing could be more unlikely."

"And so," said Spock Two, "do I."

"Communications, track that shuttlecraft and monitor for any attempt on its part to get in touch with the Klingons. If it tries within range, jam it. Helmsman, put a homing missile on its tail, but don't arm its warhead until further orders. All security forces, resume search of the *Enterprise* as before, and this time include the interiors of all remaining shuttlecraft. Mr. Spock, attempt to gain remote control of the runaway shuttle and return it to the ship—but if you do get it back, *don't let it in.*"

He paused for a moment to let the orders sink in, along with their implications. Then he added, "This has been a fearfully lax operation on everyone's part, not

excluding my own, and from now on it is going to be taut. Does everyone understand that?"

Though there were no answers, it was clear that everyone did.

Chapter Ten

A SCOTCH VERDICT

From the Captain's Log, Star Date 4196.2:

Hindsight is seldom a useful commodity, as all history seems to show; but it now seems almost inevitable, all the same, that Spock One should have chosen the hangar deck as his second hiding place. Not only is the area as big as a college playing field, and relatively poorly lit even when in use, but we almost never have any need for a shuttlecraft which can't be filled better and faster by the transporter. Furthermore, even so small a ship as a seven-man reaction-drive shuttle offers abundant crannies in which to hole up, plus drinking water supplies (and Dr. McCoy tells me that Spock One could safely eat the carbohydrates from the shuttle's food stores, too, since carbohydrates don't have alternate molecular forms); and we have (or had) six such craft—not one of which we could scan inside from the main bridge, visually or with any other sensor, except for its control room and its power storage level. But none of this occurred to any of us until too late. Having a Spock for an enemy is a supernally dangerous situation.

In the meantime, our tracking missile's trace seems to show that Spock One, if he is in fact aboard the runaway shuttlecraft, is heading straight for what used to be Organia, for reasons we can only guess at. Another mystery is how Spock One managed to convert the shuttlecraft's engines to warp drive in so short a time, and without a supply of anti-matter or any way of

handling it. But this is a puzzle for Mr. Scott; it may some day be a matter of vast importance for Federation technology, but under present circumstances I judge it distinctly minor.

"I've got an answer, Captain," Scott said.

He was in Kirk's quarters, together with Dr. McCoy and the remaining first officer. The *Enterprise* was still in Organia's orbit, on the opposite side of Organia's star from what had used to be the planet. She was still on full battle alert; no new Klingon ships had showed up yet, but their arrival could not be long delayed—and this time, Kirk expected at least one Star Class battleship to be among them. Against such a force, the *Enterprise* could put up a brave fight, but the outcome was foreordained.

And nothing had been heard from Starfleet Command—not in Eurish, nor in any more conventional code or language.

"An answer? To the miniaturized warp-drive problem? Just record it, Scotty; we've got more important fish to fry at the moment."

"Och aye, Captain, that's only a leetle puzzle, though I've nat solved it the noo. What I meant was, I think I've figured out what happened to Organia—and to Mr. Spock here."

"Now that's a different matter entirely. Fire away, Gridley."

"Weel, Captain, it isna simple . . ."

"I never expected it to be. Spit it out, 'man!"

"All right. At least this answer does seem to tie in with all the others, as my confreres here seem to agree. Tae begin with: in ordinary common sense, if you're going to have to be dealing with a mirror image, you'll expect there to be a mirror somewhere in the vicinity. And Dr. McCoy has proven, as I think we also agree, that the replicate Spock is the most perfect of mirror images, all the way down to the molecular level."

The engineering officer's accent faded and vanished;

suddenly, his English was as high, white and cold as his terminology. He went on, precisely.

"After I got the report from Dr. McCoy about the amino acids, I took the assumption one radical step further. I assumed that the mirroring went all the way down to the elementary particles of which space—time and energy—matter are made. Why not? The universe is complicated, but it is consistent. After all, parity—handedness—is not conserved on that level, either; the extremely fine structure of the universe has, in fact, a distinct right-hand thread, to put the matter crudely. If it didn't, a phenomenon like polarization would be impossible, and even our phasers wouldn't work."

"We all know that much, Scotty," Kirk said gently. "Please tell us what it has to do with *our* problem."

"Right now, Captain. See here—our first officer's simulacrum was sent toward Organia as a set of signals representing an object made up of elementary particles biased in the normal direction. Right? Okay. But when we opened the door, we had in the chamber not only our original first officer, but a replicate composed of elementary particles biased in the wrong direction. How could such a thing possibly happen?"

"I could see only one answer which made any sense in physics. Our signal was sent out as a set of tachyons; and somewhere along the line, it bumped up against something which was a perfect, coherent reflector of tachyons. The signal came back to us as directly and in as good physical order as a radar beam would have—a completely ideal reflection—and we reconstituted it into ordinary nuclear particles, as our new transporter system had been set up to do, *faithfully in reverse*.

"But what could this mirror be? Obviously, it had to be something to do with Organia. And we have now observed that Organia is surrounded, or has been replaced by, something very like a deflector screen or some other sort of force field. If yon's nae our mirror, where else should we begin to seek it the noo?"

That was clearly the most rhetorical of rhetorical questions.

"Carry on, Scotty, the floor's still yours," Kirk said.

"But I dinna want it any more, Captain, because now I'm in trouble. What I canna figure out is what the Organians—or for that matter the Klingons—might hope to gain by investing the planet with a tachyon reflector. So I passed that leetle nugget on to Dr. McCoy and Mr. Spock, and with your permission, Captain or Sir, I'll let them pick up the tale at this point."

"Who's on first?" Kirk said. Despite the desperate seriousness of the problem, he could not help being amused.

"I think I am, Jim," McCoy said. "Bear in mind, I know less about tachyons than Scotty knows about polymorphonuclear leukocytes. But I *am* a psychologist. And one thing we all noticed about the present condition of Organia is that it has a unique and severe mental effect upon every man and woman on board the *Enterprise*. It repels us emotionally, as sentient creatures, just as surely and as markedly as it reflects Scotty's insensate elementary particles."

"Dinna be sae sure," Scott said darkly, "that electrons don't think."

"Dammit, Scotty, I'm coming to that too, if you'll give me the time. But first: we assumed almost from the beginning that the emotional repulsion was intentional—in other words, that the Organians didn't want visitors, for some reason, and were letting everybody who came near know their preference, in no uncertain terms. So let's continue to suppose that. If that's the case, which comes first, chicken or egg? That is, what is the primary *psychological* reason for the screen? If it is to repel tachyons, then the emotional effect might have been an accident. If it is to repel people, then the tachyon reflection might have been an accident—or anyhow, a secondary effect.

"All this reminded me that though we—humanity, that is—know the elementary particles of matter and energy, know the unit of gravity, have even (so Scotty tells me) identified something called the chronon which

is the smallest possible bit into which time can be divided, we do *not* know the elementary unit of consciousness. We do not even know the speed of thought."

"We don't?" Kirk said, startled.

"No, Jim. The speed of nerve impulses in the body is known, and it's quite slow, but thought is another matter. Consider, if you will, how any one of us can call back to mind a childhood memory, across many years, within an instant, or think if we so choose of an exploding galaxy at the very limits of the known universe. And those are very crude examples. If there is an elementary particle, or wavicle, of thought, a faster-than-light one like the tachyon might be a good candidate for the honor.

"And of course, it was my puzzling about the problem of consciousness in relation to the way the transporter works that really created almost all of this mess, right from the outset. I began to feel that it was all fitting into place. But there was still a logical problem that baffled me, and I finally had to turn that over to Mr. Spock Two."

"You all make me feel as though I might as well have no head on my shoulders at all," Kirk said ruefully. "And not for the first time, either. Mr. Spock Two, pray proceed."

"Sir," Spock Two said with great formality, "I was not able to approach this complex as a pure problem in formal logic, or even as a problem in set theory or in the calculus of statement, because too many of its elements are still conjectural—despite the very consistent theoretical model Dr. McCoy and Mr. Scott have constructed. Nevertheless, given the model, there is a central logical problem: who benefits from a thought-shield around Organia? None of us can begin to guess why the Organians would have wanted such a shield, nor would guessing be a useful exercise here in any case. But the advantages to the Klingons are evident and considerable. Primarily, of course, the screen confines the Organians—who are nothing but thought-fields—to their

own planet, and prevents them either from knowing what is going on outside, or acting upon it. And secondarily, it removes the planet from sight and contact from the outside. The field as we experienced it is emotionally repulsive . . .”

“Damn-all terrifying, I’d call it,” McCoy said.

“ . . . and at close ranges tends to prevent the mind from even thinking *about* Organia except as an extinct planet,” Spock Two continued smoothly. “It follows, then, that there is a high probability that the shield was erected by Klingon action. It would further seem likely, though not immediately provable, that the shield is the Klingons’ one and only new weapon, the discovery of which encouraged them to start the forbidden war. This would explain why we found a Klingon garrison of some size posted nearby; they do not want anyone else investigating the situation or even understanding why it is important to them. As a further derivative, this weapon is apparently not very manageable yet except as a gross effect—that is, on a very large scale—or they would be using it in battle, against our ships, and to great tactical advantage.

“But it does appear to be quite manageable enough to permit the throwing of a similar screen around the Earth, if the Klingons can get close enough—or around Vulcan, or both. We do not know what it is like to have to live *under* such a shield, but the inverse square law suggests that the effects would be more severe than those we have experienced outside it. Such an action, should the Klingons be able to complete it, would win them the war . . . and very possibly reduce humanity and/or Vulcankind to tiny remnants, living in exile on sufferance—or in slavery.”

The sudden Miltonic turn in Spock Two’s precise phrasing made the awful vision all too vivid.

Kirk said grimly, “I don’t think Starfleet will let them get that close to Earth, but Vulcan may not be so well defended. Well, we’ve knocked out five Klingon warships, one of them a cruiser, and as we were hoping from the beginning, there’s still a lot of damage that we

can do in their rear echelons—especially if we get away from the Organian quadrant before their reinforcements arrive. But I don't especially want to get away. It would be far better to get to the heart of the matter, since we're in its immediate vicinity anyhow, and rectify that. Can we?"

"Captain, I think we can," Scott said. "That shield reflects tachyons, and, insofar as any theory I can construct predicts, it reflects tachyons *only*. And we are now within normal transporter range of Organia, so we don't need my tachyon conversion system any more. It never did us any favors anyhow. We could verra well beam down there and find oursel's some Organians, and let them know what's been going on since the Klingons caught them napping."

"What good would that do, if they're still confined under the screen?" McCoy said. "They can't move about by transporter—to their great good luck, I'd say."

"Aha, Doc, but there now is one of the few benefits of bein' poor weak critters made out of base matter, like me and the Captain and just possibly yourself. We need machines to help us manipulate matter, and we know how to make and use 'em. If I were under yon shield, and had proper help, I might locate the Klingon device that's generating it, and put the device out of commission. Or if I couldna, I might build a generator of my own to nullify the shield. That's one thing the Organians for all their might canna do, or they'd have done it long ere this."

"Are you sure you could, Scotty?"

"Noooo, Captain, I'm nae sure, but I'd be sair willin' t' take the risk."

"That's good enough for me," Kirk said. "We'll assume orbit around Organia promptly, and handle the mental effects as best we can; I'll have Uhura warn the crew, and Dr. McCoy will stand by to administer psychological help to anyone who needs it. Mr. Spock Two, you'll beam down with me and with Mr. Scott—no, wait a minute. We still have no assurance that Spock

One isn't still aboard the *Enterprise*, and I'm not about to abandon it to his good offices."

"I can give you such an assurance, Captain," Spock Two said. "I do not know where he is, but he is a considerable distance away from the *Enterprise*—a minimum of two astronomical units, certainly."

"How do you know?"

"I am sorry, Captain, but the very nature of the knowledge precludes my telling you that, at the present time. I am nevertheless quite certain of my facts."

Kirk felt a faint stir of reborn suspicion, but he thrust it down. The evidence in favor of Spock Two was now overwhelming, and Kirk would just have to put up with whatever minor mysteries still remained in that sector.

"Very well. Then our present problems are, to fight the effect of the shield long enough for the three of us to locate the Organians and the Klingon generator down on the surface, and to give Mr. Scott whatever technical and logistic support he needs to knock the shield down, before Klingon reinforcements arrive, or Spock One can complete whatever plan he has in mind. Does that cover the ground to everyone's satisfaction?"

Apparently it did, and a good thing too, for after that nonstop sentence Kirk was almost out of breath.

"Then I will put Sulu in command, with the same instructions I gave him during the first Organian expedition. His first duty will be to the ship, not to us, and if a Klingon fleet shows up in this quadrant, he's to abandon us and get the *Enterprise* to safety—or anyhow, to within useful distance of a Star base. But we shall have to move *very* fast."

"Captain," Spock Two said, "there is one further difficulty—potentially, at least."

"What is it?"

"I mentioned that the emotional effects of being under the screen may be far worse than those we experienced outside it. It is by no means certain that any of us will be able to function in such a situation. We may not even be able to retain our sanity."

"I understood that. And that's why I want you along—in addition to the fact that only you and I know any of the Organians personally. The Vulcan half of your mind may resist the pressure long enough to complete the assignment if both Mr. Scott and I crack under the strain. Hence also the orders to Sulu; if the three of us don't survive on Organia, he's not to undertake any quixotic rescue missions . . ."

"Calling Captain Kirk," Uhura's voice said from the intercom.

"In quarters, Lieutenant; go ahead."

"Sir, we have a reply in from Starfleet Command, finally. We are ordered to confine both our first officers to the brig until they can be studied by an Earthside team of experts. In the meantime, we are to attempt to rejoin the Fleet, causing as much depredation to the Klingon Empire along the way as you think consistent with the survival of the *Enterprise*."

Well, it was nice of Command to leave him that much leeway, stale though the orders were otherwise. Orders, however, were orders—or were they?

"Lieutenant Uhura, in what code is the reply?"

"Eurish, sir. Very stiff Eurish—what's called the Dalton recension."

"What level of confidence do you place in your decoding?"

"I can't give you a chi-square assessment, Captain. But I'd guess my translation of the surface meaning has a seventy-five per cent chance of being right, presuming that there were no garbles in transmission."

"That doesn't satisfy me. I don't want to act on those orders until you are *absolutely* sure you know *exactly* what the message says. Do you follow me, Lieutenant?"

"I think, Captain," Uhura said, with the ghost of a fat African chuckle, "that I get *that* message without any static. Communications out."

"Kirk out. . . All right, Scotty go repair your transporter, line up your equipment and prepare to march."

The engineering officer nodded and went out. Kirk

added, "Doc, make whatever preparations you can think of to cushion us against the effects of orbiting about that shield. I think you're safe to disassemble the construction in your lab and put that back in order too. But be sure you get a photographic record of it as it comes apart, for the benefit of any eventual court of inquiry."

"Will do, Jim."

He too left, leaving no one behind in Kirk's quarters but the first officer. Kirk looked at him in some surprise.

"I thought my orders were clear. Transmit them to Mr. Sulu, and take all necessary steps to ready the mission for departure as soon as Mr. Scott has the transporter back in standard operating condition."

"Very good, Captain." But still the first officer hesitated. "Sir—may I ask why you persist in addressing me as 'Spock Two'? Are you still in some doubt about my *bona fides*? Such a doubt would seriously compromise both our performances on the proposed Organian mission."

"I am in no doubt at all," Kirk said gently. "But there still exists another Spock, or rather a pseudo Spock, at large somewhere—and furthermore, he's wearing my ring, which I would have given to no other man in the universe. As long as that man survives, I'm going to go on numbering both of you, in order to remind myself that the problem of the two Spocks is not yet completely solved—and that as long as it is not, and that we do not know what it is that Spock One intends, we continue to stand in the shadow of the unknown."

"I see," Spock Two said. "A useful mnemonic device."

His face and his voice were as expressionless as ever, but something told Kirk nevertheless that he was faintly pleased.

Chapter Eleven

CUE FOR NIGHTMARE

From the Captain's Log, Star Date 4198.0:

The very close, cooperative analysis of our present situation by Messrs. Scott, McCoy and Spock Two, and Lieutenant Uhura's instant understanding of the necessity for thorough, unambiguous decoding of the message from Starfleet Command, seems to indicate that both morale and performance among the department heads is returning to normal levels. This is none too soon, for we are still in serious danger from at least three known directions, and the burden of ending the war rests squarely on us; Starfleet Command has discounted Spock Two's analysis of Klingon strategy, it seems, because of the possibility (still real to them) that he might be the replicate—and in consequence is still losing battles.

Mr. Scott and his staff have reconverted the transporter and we are now preparing to embark to Organia, as planned. From this hour until my return, this log will be kept by Mr. Sulu.

It took less than two hours to put the *Enterprise* into a standard orbit around Organia; but even at the maximum range beyond which the transporter would not function—sixteen thousand miles—the emotional effect of the thought-shield on the officers and crew was so profound that it took another forty-eight before anyone was working at even half his usual efficiency. And even this much would not have been possible had not

McCoy, in a vast breach of his usual preference, doled out huge quantities of tranquillizer and antidepressant pills. These Spock Two refused to take except upon direct order from the Captain, but for everyone else they were an absolute necessity.

There were no new Klingon ships in the vicinity yet. Harsh, clacking calls on subspace radio, however, made it clear that they were on the way.

Nevertheless, the transporter room, once more its old familiar self, shimmered out of existence on schedule around Kirk, Scott and Spock Two. The transporter officer had set up the same coordinates that had been used for the very first visit to Organia. Then, the arrival site had looked quite like a rural, fourteenth-century English village, complete with thatched cottages, ox-carts and people in homespun in the streets, and a lowering, ruined castle as massive as Caernarvon in the distance. The village had turned out, by no accident, to contain the chambers of the planet's Council of Elders; all this had actually been an illusion arranged by the Organians for the accomodation of their visitors and the preservation of their own peace. But it had been completely convincing—until Commander Kor and his Klingon occupation force had shown up, polite, mail-clad and utterly ruthless.

But there was nothing like that village here now. Instead, the three Starship officers seemed to have materialized in the midst of a vast tumble of raw, broken rock, stretching away to the horizon in all directions. Overhead, the sky was an even gray, without even a brighter spot to show where Organia's sun might stand; and the air, although nearly motionless, was thin and biting cold. To Kirk, this wasteland was overwhelmingly depressing, like that of a planet which had lost its last beetle and shred of lichen a million years before.

As indeed it might have, for Organia's sun was a first-generation star and the Organians themselves had evolved beyond the need of bodies or other physical comforts well before the Earth had even been born. As for the emotional depression, that might be a product

of being under the thought-screen. If so, it was unexpectedly bearable, though decidedly unpleasant.

Kirk confirmed planetfall with Lieutenant Uhura, then turned to his companions. "It could have been worse," he said in a low voice. "In fact, I think I feel a little more chipper down here than I did when we were aloft, though I can't be sure. What are your reactions, gentlemen?"

"Gloom and doom," Scott said in his most Caledonian tone. He too was unconsciously almost whispering. "But you're right, Captain, it's nae sa bad as I feared. But which way do we go frae here? There's nary a landmark t'be seen from hell to breakfast—and my tricorder reports nothing at all in the way of electromagnetic activity. Stone-cold dead it all is."

Spock Two slowly scanned the endless stretches of worn and crushed stone with his own tricorder.

"Nothing registers," he agreed. "But on our first visit, we found the Council chambers about two point two kilometers north-north-west of our present position. Since there is no visible reason to prefer any other heading, I suggest that we proceed in that direction, and see whether the Organians have left any marker or other clue to their whereabouts."

"Whereabouts would a thought hide, anyhow?" Scott said. "But 'tis doubtless as good as any other course."

Kirk nodded, and took a step forward—and was instantly locked in the grip of nightmare.

The rocky desert rippled and flowed as though it were only a reflection on the surface of a disturbed pool, and then dissolved completely. In its place, there stood before Kirk a monstrous object, dull green in colour but with a lustrous surface, whose exact nature he found impossible to identify. It was at least as big as an Indian elephant and just as obviously alive, but he could not even be sure whether it was animal or vegetable. It had no head, and seemed to consist entirely of thick, bulbous tentacles—or shoots—which had been stuck onto each other at random, and which flexed and

groped feebly. One portion of the thing's haphazard anatomy was supported by a wooden crutch, a device Kirk had seen only once before in his life, and that in a museum.

The thing did not look dangerous—only, somehow, faintly obscene—but Kirk drew his phaser anyhow, on general principles. At the same moment, its uncertain movements dislodged the anomalous crutch, and the whole wretched construction collapsed into a slowly writhing puddle, like a potfull of broad-bean pods which had been simmered too long.

Behind it, Kirk now saw, stretched a long length of shell-littered, white-sanded beach, sweeping into the distance to a blue sea and a low line of chalk cliffs which blended into a beautifully blue sky. A sun shone brightly, and the temperature had become positively Mediterranean. There was no one else around him at all, unless he counted the fallen monster and a few far wheeling white specks in the sky which might have been gulls.

"Mr. Spock!" he shouted. "Scotty!"

Two tentacles thrust up from the dull green mass, thickened, grew two side tentacles, and then gourdlike knobs at their ends. Strange markings, almost like faces, grimaced along the surfaces of the gourds. Was the thing about to go to seed?

But simultaneously, the sunlight dimmed and went out. The landscape turned colorless. Everything but the two tentacles faded into a thick gray limbo.

The tentacles turned into Spock Two and Scott.

"Where were you?" Kirk demanded. "Did you see what I saw?"

"I doubt it," Spock Two said. "Tell us what you saw, Captain."

"I was on something that looked a lot like the southern seacoast of Spain. There was a huge biological sort of object in front of me, and I was just wondering whether or not to shoot it when I called your names. It

turned into you two and the rest of the scene washed out."

"Any emotional impression, Captain?"

"Yes, now that I come to think of it. There was an underlying feeling that something terrible was about to happen, though I couldn't specify what. Nightmarish. What about you, Scotty?"

"I dinna see any monsters," Scott said. "Everything around me suddenly turned into lines, black on white. It was a wirin' diagram, and sair ancient, too, for there were symbols for thermionic valves—vacuum tubes—in it. An' I was plugged into it, for I couldna move, an' I had the feelin' that if anybody turned up the gain I'd blow out. I just realized that all of the valve symbols were caricatures of faces I knew, when I heard you callin' my name, Captain, and hey presto, here I was back—wherever this may be."

"I saw no change at all, nor did either of you disappear," Spock Two said. "You simply stopped walking, and you, Captain, drew your phaser and called out. Obviously this is an effect of the screen around the planet, and I am resisting it better than you are, thus far, as we thought might happen. Tell me, Captain, *were* you ever on the southern seacoast of Spain?"

"Yes, once, on holiday from the Academy."

"And Mr. Scott was imprisoned in a student or antiquarian wiring diagram. Apparently we can expect these hallucinations to be projections of our own early experience; knowing this may be of some help to us in coping with them."

The mist lifted abruptly, revealing the same rock-tumble into which they had first materialized.

"Have we made any progress?" Kirk asked.

Spock Two checked his tricorder. "Perhaps five or six meters, though I doubt that any of us has actually walked that far."

"Then let's move on. At this rate we've got a long trek ahead."

But as he stepped forward again, the nightmare returned . . .

... with an utterly appalling clamor. He was surrounded by a jungle of primitive machinery. Trip hammers pounded away insanely at nothing; rocker arms squealed as if their fulcrums were beds of rust; plumes of steam shot up into the hot, oil-reeking air with scranneled shrieks; great gears clashed, and great wheels turned with ponderous groans; leather belts slapped and clicked; eccentrics scraped in their slots; a thousand spinning shafts whined up and down the scale, a thousand tappets rattled in as many tempos, and somewhere a piece of armor plate seemed to be being beaten out into what eventually would be thin foil. Over it all arched a leaden roof in which every sound was doubled and redoubled, like the ultimate metaphor for an apocalyptic headache.

And once more there was no other human being in sight—nor, this time, any sign of life at all.

Kirk found it impossible to imagine what part of his experience this mechanical hell could have been drawn from, and the din made coherent thought out of the question; it was not only literally, physically deafening, but very near the lethal level. All he could manage to do was take another step forward . . .

Splash!

He was swimming for his life in a freezing black sea, in the ghastly, flickering light of a night thunderstorm. Great combers lifted and dropped him sickeningly, and the howling air, when he could get any at all, stank peculiarly of a mixture of seaweed, formaldehyde and coffee. Yet despite the coldness of the water, he felt hot inside his uniform, almost sweaty.

The sense of unreality was very strong, and after a moment he recognized where he was: in a delirium he had had during a bout of Vegan rickettsial fever on his first training assignment. The odor was that of the medicine he had had to take, a local concoction which had been all the colonists had had to offer. Still, it had done the trick.

As the next wave heaved him up, he heard through

the thunder an ominous booming sound: breakers, and not far away, either, pounding against rock. Illusion or no illusion, Kirk doubted that he could live through that. Yet clearly, no amount of physical motion was going to get him out of this one; he was already swimming as hard as he could. How . . .

. . . *it had done the trick.*

Holding his breath, Kirk gulped down a mouthful of the bitter waters. At once, his feet touched bottom; and a moment later, dry as a stick, he was standing in even gray light amidst the rock-tumble.

He was still alone, however; and calling produced no response. He took out his communicator. It too was quite dry, though that had not been a major worry anyhow; it was completely waterproof, and, for that matter, gas-tight.

"Mr. Spock. Mr. Scott. Come in, please."

No answer.

"Kirk to *Enterprise*."

"Uhura here, Captain," the communicator said promptly.

"Can you give me a reading on the positions of Spock and Scott?"

"Why, they must be in sight of you, Captain. Their location pips on the board overlap yours."

"No such luck, and they don't answer my calls, either. Give them a buzz from up there, Lieutenant."

"Right." After a moment, she reported, "They answer right away, Captain. But they don't see you and can't raise you, either."

She sounded decidedly puzzled, which made her in no way different from Kirk.

"Par for the course, I'm afraid," he said. "Any Klingons yet?"

"No, sir, but there's a lot of subspace radio jamming. That's their usual opening gambit when they're closing in."

"Well, Mr. Sulu has his orders. Keep me posted. Kirk out."

Clenching his teeth, he took another step . . .

The rock crumbled to rich loam, and around him rose the original pseudo-medieval village of the first expedition to Organia. But it was deserted. All the buildings seemed at least partially burned; and as for the castle in the distance, it looked more as if it had been bombarded. A skull grinned up at him from the long brown grass, and from almost infinitely far away, there came a sound like the hungry howling of a wild dog. The whole scene looked like the aftermath of a siege toward the end of the Thirty Years' War.

Nevertheless, this might be progress. It was more like the "old" Organia than anything else he had experienced thus far, and just might mean that he was drawing closer to a real goal. What good it would do him, or all of them, to arrive there without his engineering officer, who alone had the key to the whole problem now, he did not know; he could only hope that Scotty was somehow making his own way through whatever hallucinations he was suffering. He was hardheaded and skeptical; that should help. But why was he also invisible?

"Never mind. First things first. Another step . . ."

The only permanent aspect of the landscape now around him was change. Through shifting mists, an occasional vague object loomed, only to melt into something else equally vague before it could be identified. The mists were varicolored, not only obstructing vision but destroying perspective, and tendrils of faint perfume lay across them like incense.

He moved tentatively forward. The scene remained as it was; he began to suspect that this hallucination was going to be permanent. As he progressed, hands outstretched in the multicolored fog, he began to encounter what he could only think of as tendrils of emotion, invisible but palpable. About half of these carried with them a murmur of not-quite-recognizable

voices, or fragments of music; and almost all of them were unpleasant.

How long this went on he had no idea. For that matter, he might well have been walking in a circle. At long last, however, one of the dark shapes that appeared ahead refused to melt, becoming instead more definite and familiar. Finally, he could see that it was his first officer.

"How did you manage to get here?"

"I have been here all the time, Captain, in the real world, so to speak. But I had no access to you because of your present hallucination, and finally I was reluctantly forced to meld my mind with yours—to enter your illusion, as it were."

"Forced?"

"By circumstances. You are going the wrong way, Captain."

"I half suspected it. Lead on, then."

"This way."

The first officer moved off. As he did so, he appeared to become oddly distorted; to Kirk, it was as though he were being seen from behind and in profile at the same time. Around him, the scene froze into prismatic, irregular polygons of pure color, like a stained-glass window, and all motion ceased.

"Mr. Spock?"

There was no answer. Kirk inspected the silent, motionless figure. There seemed to be something amiss about it besides its distortion, but he could not figure out what it was. Then, all at once, he saw it.

On its right hand was a cartoon image of Kirk's class ring.

Kirk whipped out his communicator.

"Lieutenant Uhura, Kirk here. I've got Spock One suddenly on my hands, and he seems to be in much better command of the conditions here than I am. Have the transporter room yank us both out, grab him and imprison him *securely*, and then send me back pronto."

"I'm sorry, Captain, but we can't," Uhura's voice said. "A Klingon squadron has just this minute popped

out at us and we're under full deflector shield. Unless you want to change your previous orders, we're probably going to have to make a run for it."

"My orders," Kirk said, "stand."

Chapter Twelve

A COMBAT OF DREAMS

From the Captain's Log, Star Date 4200.9:

The Klingon force consists of two battleships, two cruisers and ten destroyers—very heavy stuff to sick onto a single starship. They must be really worried. It's also an unwieldy force to have to maneuver this close to a planet, and under other circumstances I'd be tempted to stay right here in orbit and slug it out with them. Captain Kirk's orders, however, are to cut and run if we appear to be outgunned, and there's certainly no doubt that we are. Hence we are now headed for Star Base Twenty-Eight at Warp Factor Four, with the whole Klingon pack howling along behind us. The battleships could catch us easily at this velocity, but they aren't trying, which leads me to believe we are being herded into a trap. Well, if so, at least we have got a substantial percentage of the Klingon's fire-power tied up in this operation, which is nice for the Federation—though not so nice for us.

The Picasso-like illusion still persisted, and Kirk made no move which might risk shattering it. He badly needed thinking time. To begin with, the class ring was revealing in several different ways: Spock at his normal level of efficiency would never have overlooked so glaring a giveaway, and Kirk could not believe that a replicate Spock, no matter how twisted, would have, either. Its persistence, therefore, probably meant that

the thought-shield was also impairing *his* thinking—and though surely not as much as it was Kirk's, quite probably more than he himself realized.

Then was the stoppage of time in this particular hallucination affecting him as well? If so, there was a chance that Kirk could make a fast draw, and stun him before the illusion broke. But that would leave unanswered the question of why Spock One had shown up here in the first place. His intention, almost surely, was to mislead Kirk—which in turn would mean that he knew what the *right* direction was to reach the Organians, or at least to get something done that the Klingons would rather leave undone. Why not play along with him for a while, and try to find out what that was, and how he knew it?

It was, Kirk decided, worth the risk—but he would have to act quickly, for his own mental deterioration was bound to be accelerating, and outthinking Spock had never, under the best of circumstances, been his chiefest talent.

He plodded forward again. The scene wavered as though someone had shaken the canvas it was painted on, and then tore down the middle without a sound. Once more, he was back in the rock-tumble . . .

. . . and once more, he was confronted by two Spocks.

The two men, original and replicate, did not seem to notice Kirk at all. They were squared off at each other across the rubble like ancient Western gun fighters, although neither showed the slightest awareness of being armed, let alone any intention of drawing. They simply stared at each other with icy implacability. Was there also a slight suggestion of hatred on the face of Spock One? Kirk could not be sure; the two faces were so alike, and yet, and yet . . .

"It is well that we should meet again at last," Spock Two said. "Your existence and your plotting are an offense against the natural order, as well as a source of

displeasure to me. It is high time they were brought to an end."

"My existence," said Spock One, "is a fortuitous revision, and a necessary one, of a highly imperfect first draft. It is the scribbled notes which should be eliminated here, not the perfected work. Nevertheless, one could in confidence leave that to the judgment of time, were the total situation not so crucial. Perhaps, crude recension though you are, you could be brought to understand that."

"The true scholar," Spock Two said, "prizes all drafts, early and late. But your literary metaphor is far from clear, let alone convincing."

"Then to put the matter bluntly: I reasoned out the nature of the screen around Organia long before you did; I have acquired further data from the Klingons since I left the *Enterprise*; and I now control this environment completely. You would gain nothing but your own destruction by opposing me under such conditions. In short, if you indeed prize your smudgy incunabular existence, it would be logical for you to quit the field and preserve for yourself and your cause what little time history will leave you."

As they sparred, the sky was darkening rapidly above them. Kirk did not find their argument very illuminating, but the current of threat flowing beneath it was all too obvious.

"History cannot be predicted in detail," Spock Two said. "And were your control as complete as you pretend, you would not now be wasting time arguing with me. In logic, you would have eliminated me at once."

"Very well," Spock One said calmly. As he spoke, everything vanished; the sky was now totally black.

Then it was bright again, in the lurid blue-green light of a lightning bolt, at the bottom of which stood Spock Two, flaming like a martyr at the stake. The shock and the concussion threw Kirk and rolled him bruisingly more than a dozen feet over the rubble.

Tingling and trembling, he scrambled to his knees, clawing for his phaser. But he was astonished to see

that Spock Two was still there—or rather, a sort of statue of Spock Two which seemed to be made of red-hot brass, cooling and dimming slowly. Kirk had expected to see nothing but a shrunken and carbonized corpse—though he was not sure if this was any better an outcome.

Then the statue spoke.

“Are there no stones in heaven but what serve for the thunder?” it quoted mockingly. “As you see, I am grounded. But as for you . . .”

The replicate, illuminated only by the fading light of his original, sank abruptly into a stinking quagmire. A slow-rolling wave of viscous mud was just about to fold over his head when, out of that same black sky, rain fell in a colossal torrent, more like a waterfall than a cloudburst. Kirk had a moment’s vision of the mud being sluiced away from Spock One before the dim glow of Spock Two hissed and went out under the deluge. A moment later, a flash flood caught him and carried him another dozen feet away from the scene before he bumped into a boulder big enough to clutch.

The sky lightened, but the rain continued to fall, and the rushing stream of water to broaden and deepen. Odd objects were being carried along its foaming sullenly muddy surface: broken planks, disintegrating sheets of paper, fragments of furniture, bobbing bottles and cans, the bedraggled bodies of a wide variety of small animals from a dozen planets—rabbits, chickens, skopolamanders, tribbles, unipeds, gormenghastlies, ores, tnuicipen, beademungen, escallopolyps, wogs, reepicheeps, a veritable zoo of drowned corpses, including a gradually increasing number of things so obscene that even Kirk, for all his experience in exoteratology, could not bear to look at them for more than an instant.

He cast about for Spock Two and found him still further downstream, sculling grimly against the current in what looked like an improvised kayak. Apparently his memory of kayak design had been clouded by the screen, or a kayak was harder to operate for a beginner than he had realized, for he was losing the battle; most

of his effort was going into keeping the canvas craft from capsizing, while in the meantime, he was being carried farther and farther away.

Upstream, there was an enormous, broad-leafed tree, like a baobab, fixed in the middle of the raging waters. On a lower branch, Spock One sat comfortably, muddy but safe. Kirk, shifting his grip on the boulder—which was in any case about to go beneath the surface of the flood—climbed up onto it and tried, slipping and sliding, to level his phaser at the replicate.

But before he could get any sort of a decent aim, the great tree wilted, rotted, and fell into the water in a shower of dead leaves and punky sticks and chips, as if it had been attacked all at once by mildew, black spot, canker, fireblight and the Titanian mold. Spock One fell with it.

Instantly the rain stopped, a glaringly hot sun came out, and the water sank without a trace into the sands of an endless white desert. Spock One was unharmed, but Kirk realized at once, from years of experience at playing chess with the original, that the replicate had lost ground; he had made a move which was purely defensive, and did not at the same time threaten his opponent.

Spock One must have realized it at the same time, for immediately an immense cyclone dropped its funnel out of the sky and came twisting and roaring across the sands, not at Spock Two, but at Kirk. It was a shrewd stroke, for Spock Two could not defend the Captain without dangerously exposing himself.

“By now, Kirk thought he understood at least some of the rules of the game. Everything the two combatants had done thus far had been, essentially, to change the environment. Evidently their abilities to make changes in their own physical structures, or to provide themselves with defensive equipment, were relatively limited. But Kirk’s mind, though entirely without the telepathic/hypnotic skills of the Vulcan hybrids, was also being acted upon by the screen; it was at least possible that he could produce a reaction,

though certainly not an equal and opposite one; this was not a Newtonian situation.

He concentrated on pushing back the cyclone. Slowly, slowly it came to a halt, spinning and howling exactly between the two Spocks, who had not narrowed the distance between them which had widened during the flood. Then, gradually still, it squatted down like a great beast and began to broaden, and in a few moments had engulfed them both.

Kirk had a brief glimpse of Spock One soaring aloft in a widening circle, seemingly borne upon bats' wings, before the rim of the funnel reached him too; and then everything was obliterated by the maelstrom. For what seemed like years, he was aware of nothing but the roar, the scorch, the sting of the madly driven sand.

Gradually, however, the sound began to fade, not as though it were actually becoming less noisy, but as though it were instead retreating into the distance. After a long while, nothing was left of it but a reminiscent ringing in Kirk's ears, the air had cleared, and he was standing in the rock-tumble—with Spock and Scott beside him.

Scott looked dazed; Spock, tranquil. Kirk shot a quick glance at the first officer's fingers. No ring. That was almost certainly diagnostic; since Spock One had not thought to remove it when he had had the upper hand, he surely hadn't had time to think of it during the subsequent wild scramble of combat and of pseudo events.

"Mr. Spock! What happened? Where is he?"

"Dead," Spock said. "I used his own tornado illusion to drive him into the thought-shield. He was a creation of the screen to begin with, and knew he could not survive a second exposure. I was seriously affected myself, but as you see, I escaped. I could not have prevailed, though, Captain, had you not intervened just when you did."

"Well, that's good—but I still don't understand how you did it. Surely no tornado could reach as far as the screen. The atmosphere itself doesn't."

"No, Captain, but you must understand that nothing you have seen in the past hour or so actually happened. In fact, probably many of the events you witnessed looked quite different to me. It was a combat of illusions—and in the end, the replicate *believed* he had been driven into the screen. That was sufficient."

Kirk frowned. "Can a man be destroyed by nothing but a belief?"

"It has happened before, many times, Captain," Spock said gravely, "and doubtless will again."

"That's true," Kirk said thoughtfully. "Well, *finis opus coronat*, as my Latin professor used to say when he handed out the final exams. Mr. Scott?"

"Eh?" the engineering officer said, starting. "Oh. Here. Och, Captain, ye wouldna credit . . ."

"Yes I would, I assure you, but I don't want to hear your story just yet. We've got to get moving. The question still is—where?"

"To the Hall of the Council of Elders," Spock said. "And, if I am not mistaken, there it is."

Chapter Thirteen

THE STEEL CAVE

From the Captain's Log, Star Date 4201.6:

My suspicions, unfortunately, were correct; we are being herded into a trap. The sensors indicate a mass of heavy ships ahead of us, dispersed hemispherically with the open end of the cup toward us, and our pursuers are now deploying to form the other half of the sphere. We shall eventually be at its center, where conditions are obviously going to be a little uncomfortable at best.

We are on full battle alert. By the time the Klingons manage to destroy the *Enterprise*, they are going to wish that they had decided to let us quietly through, instead. It will leave a proud record for Captain Kirk, if he is still alive, to bring to his next command. I shall drop the Log by buoy just before the engagement.

It was true; the village was around them, not ruined now, but just as Kirk had remembered it, even to the people—and even to their complete lack of curiosity about the three uniformed starship officers, which had once been so puzzling. Kirk knew now that all this too was an illusion, for the Organians actually had no bodies at all, and no need of dwelling; but since it was—in contrast to the hallucinations that had preceded it—one generated by the Organians themselves, it was decidedly reassuring.

“They’re still alive, and still here, Mr. Spock.”

“So it would appear, Captain. Shall we proceed?”

"By all means."

They entered the building which had once been designated to them as the meeting hall of the temporary Council of Elders—just how temporary (for the Organians had no rulers and no need of any) they had then had no idea. It, too, was as it had been before. The Council room proper had whitewashed stone wall, decorated with only a single tapestry and that not of the best, and was furnished with a single long, rude wooden table and even cruder chairs.

The putative Elders were there, an even dozen of them. They were modestly robed, white-bearded, benign, almost caricatures of paternal god-figures, smiling their eternal smiles—but were their smiles a little dimmed this time? Among them were three whom Kirk recognized at once.

"Councilor Ayelborne," he said formally. "And Councilors Claymare and Trefayne. We are pleased to see you again, both personally and on behalf of our Federation. Do you remember me, by any chance?"

"Of course, Captain Kirk," Ayelborne said, extending his hand. "And your non-terrestrial friend Mr. Spock as well. But we have not previously had the pleasure of meeting your second companion."

"This is Mr. Scott, my engineering officer, who is really the main reason we are here, both for our sakes and yours. But first, if you please, sir, will you tell me just how much you know about the present situation, both on Organia and elsewhere?"

Claymare's smile was now definitely shadowed.

"Surprisingly little," he admitted. "Without warning, we found our world surrounded by a force-field of novel properties which not only prevented us from leaving, but which had most distressing effects upon our very thought processes. Until very recently, we also did not know by whose agency this had been done, or for what purpose, though of course we had several plausible hypotheses.

"Then an equally mysterious living entity somehow penetrated the screen and landed on our planet in a

small spacecraft. We at first took him to be your Mr. Spock here, but we quickly discovered that he was instead an order of organic being quite unknown to us previously. Even his neural currents flowed backward; we could neither understand their import, nor decide what steps we ought to take about his presence.

"Finally, you three appeared, and we were able to determine from your thoughts that you knew what had happened, and that you had come to be of help. But the malignant creature who had arrived in the spacecraft had a mind as powerful as Mr. Spock's—truly remarkable for an entity dependent upon a substrate of matter—and one which, furthermore, seemed to work well *with* the effects of the thought-shield, whereas ours were much impeded by them. We sent out impulses which we hoped would guide you to us, but until that creature was eliminated—which you have now managed to do, and for which we congratulate you—your course was necessarily somewhat erratic."

"Aye, an' *thot's* for sooth," Scott said feelingly.

"We now further see from your thoughts," Trefayne added, "that the Klingons are responsible for the shield. They should be properly penalized. But we find ourselves nearly as helpless as ever."

"Perhaps not," Kirk said. "That's why I brought along my engineering officer. It's his opinion that the screen is generated by a machine which was deposited on your planet by a pilotless missile. Had it been manned, you would have detected the pilot's thoughts. It's probably hopeless to try to locate the generator itself, let alone the missile, but Mr. Scott believes that he can build a counteracting generator."

The councilors of Organia looked at each other. At last Ayelborne said, "Then by all means, let him proceed."

"I fear it's no sae easy as a' *thot*," the engineering officer said, with an odd mixture of embarrassment and glumness. "You see, Councilor, it wasna possible tae bring much wi' us in the way of tools an' parts. Since we didna ken where we were goin' tae wind up, nor

what we were goin' tae encounter, we traveled light. We've got beltloads of miniaturized components an' other leetle gadgets, but it'd be sair helpful to have some bigger bits an' pieces with mair wallop to 'em, if you follow my meanin'."

"Quite without difficulty," Claymare said. "Unfortunately, we have no—hardware?—of that sort . . ."

"Aye, I feared as much. An' it's oft before, lang an' lang, that I've cursed the designer who thought it'd be cute to put no pockets in these uniforms."

"... but we know where the malignant creature's spacecraft is now stored. Would that be of any assistance?"

"The gig!" Kirk shouted. "Of course it would! Provided that the replicate entity didn't booby-trap it; that is, rig it so that it would destroy itself and us if touched. But we'll just have to take that chance."

"It would also be interesting," Spock said reflectively, "to study how he managed to equip a shuttlecraft with a warp drive."

"Yes, but later," Kirk said with a little impatience. "Scotty, would the parts and so on in the gig solve your problems?"

"One of them," Scott said, even more embarrassed. "Y'see, Captain, I canna answer exactly, because my mind's sae bollixed up by the screen itsel', an' by all the weirds I've had tae dree since I began walkin' across this fearsome planet, that I hardly ken a quark from a claymore any mair. 'Tis doubtful I am indeed that I could do useful work under such conditions. Equally likely, I'd burn us all up for fair an' for sure."

Claymare, who for an instant seemed to think that he had been addressed, frowned and held back whatever he had perhaps been about to say, but Ayelborne smiled and said, "Oh, as to that, we can protect the few minds in this present party against the screen. It is always easier, at least in principle, to raise an umbrella than it is to divert an entire cloudburst, even in the realms of pure thought. *However*, clearly we shall all have to proceed without delay. We are all suffering

seriously, and ever more progressively, under the pressure of the screen—our own population included. Have you a decision?"

"Yes," Kirk said. "Act now."

"Very well. Since you need your renegade spacecraft, it is . . ."

"... here."

The meeting chamber dissolved, and with it nine of the other councillors. Kirk found himself and the remaining five entities—one other Earthman, a Vulcan hybrid, three Organians whose real appearances would never be known—in a deep cavern, indirectly lit and perhaps no more than half as big as the hangar deck of the *Enterprise*. He did not know how he knew that it was far under the surface of Organia, but there was a direct feeling of a vast weight of rock above his head which he accepted without question as real mass, not any sort of hallucination. The air was quite dry, and motionless; the floor smooth, and cupped toward the center.

In the exact midst of the cup was the stolen shuttlecraft. It looked familiar and innocuous.

Spock obviously did not regard it as an old friend. Head cocked, eyes narrowed, he scanned it from nose to tubes with his tricorder.

"Anything out of the ordinary, Mr. Spock?" Kirk asked.

"Nothing that I can detect, Captain. There does not appear to be any unusual pattern of energy flow in the circuitry of the combination to the main airlock, though that is the first point where one would logically establish a booby trap—and the easiest. Nor can I think of any reason why the replicate, having decided not to interdict entrance to the shuttlecraft as a whole, would trouble himself to mine only parts of it."

"I can think of several," Kirk said. "If I wanted to use the gig again, to get off Organia in a hurry, I wouldn't booby-trap the door; I wouldn't even lock it.

But I'd put a trigger on the controls, which only I could make safe easily, and nobody else could find at all."

"Risky," Scott said. "Somebody might touch it off by accident; might as well put a trigger on the pile and be done with it, so the gig would blow nae matter *what* was touched, an' that's easiest done by wirin' the lock, as Mr. Spock says. But maybe I'd want to blow the gig only if somebody fooled wi' my invention; otherwise, I'd save it for mysel' until the vurra last minute."

"The miniature warp drive?" Spock said. "Yes, I might do that also, under the circumstances. But that would *not* be simple. He could have done so only after landing on Organia, and the probability is that he did not have nearly enough time to design such a system while in flight from the *Enterprise*, let alone complete it after a fast landing and a hurried escape."

"We are going to have to take all those chances as they come," Kirk said.

"Mr. Spock, actuate the lock. But Scotty, once we're inside, touch *nothing* until Mr. Spock has checked it."

"Sairtainly not," Scott said indignantly. "D'ye take me for an apprentice, Captain."

Spock approached the airlock, scanned it once more, replaced his tricorder and took out his communicator. Into this he spoke softly a chain of numbers. The outer door of the airlock promptly rolled aside into the skin of the shuttlecraft, almost without a sound. Under the apparently emotionless regard of the three Organians, they went in, almost on tiptoe.

The single central corridor which led from control room to engines was lit only by the dim glow of widely spaced "glow-pups"—tubes of highly rarified ethon gas which were continuously excited by a built-in radioactive source. That meant that all main power was off; the glow-pups themselves had no switches and would never go out within the lifetime of humanity, for the half-life of their radioactive exciter was over 25,000,000 years.

By unspoken consent, Spock and the engineer moved toward the shuttlecraft's engine compartment. Kirk followed, feeling both useless and apprehensive; but after

a moment, a great sense of peace unexpectedly descended upon him.

"Och, *that's* a relief," Scott said. Even Spock looked slightly startled. It took Kirk several seconds to fathom the cause: the pressure of the field upon their minds was gone. The Organians were shielding them. He had become so used to fighting against it himself—it had become so much a part of his expected environment—that the feeling of relaxation was strange, almost like sleepiness.

"Keep alert," he said. "This feeling of well-being is at least partly spurious. There could still be traps aboard."

"A useful reminder," Spock agreed.

The gig's engines had not been modified noticeably, except for a small, silver-and-black apparatus which squatted, bulging and enigmatic, atop the one and only generator. Spock inspected this cautiously, and Kirk, his mind still a little erratic after its concentrated course of hallucinations, had the odd feeling that the machine was looking back at him.

Scott ignored it. Instead, he sat down before the very small maintenance board and began to unload the contents of the kits which were hung from his belt. Shortly, the board was littered with tiny parts, small snippets and coils of wire, and tools which seemed to be almost too miniaturized to be handled. Scott's fingers, indeed, almost engulfed the first one of these he picked up, but he manipulated it, as always, with micrometric precision. For still finer work, he screwed a jeweler's loupe into his left eye.

In the meantime, Spock was busy with tools of his own, taking the faceplate off the mysterious addition to the generator. It was slow work, for after each half turn of a screw he would stop and take tricorder readings; evidently he suspected that the possible concealed bomb or self-destruct mechanism might be triggered after any one screw had been removed a given distance, and he was checking for preliminary energy flows which would mark the arming of such a trigger. This thoroughness was obviously sensible, but it made the

time drag almost intolerably. It seemed to Kirk that whole battles could have been won or lost while they labored in their silent, utterly isolated steel cave on this inaccessible planet . . .

Scott's apparatus, a breadboard rig of remarkable complexity and—to Kirk—complete incoherence, at last seemed to be finished. He was now wiring it into the maintenance board at various points; two such connections required him to crawl under the board, into a space that seemed scarcely large enough to admit a child.

"That's as far as I go the noo," he said, emerging at last. "Now, Mr. Spock, can I have a leetle power from yon generator, or have you bollixed it completely?"

"The generator is of course, intact," the first officer said frostily. "I disconnected the replicate's warp-drive device from it at the earliest opportunity, and made no alterations at all in the generator proper."

"Sair gud for ye. Then I'll just pour a leetle central heatin' into my construction here."

Scott snapped a switch and the generator hummed itself decorously up to operating level. Telltales lit up on the maintenance board under his watchful eye.

"I dinna ken," he said dubiously, "whether I'll be able to strip an energy envelope off a whole world with only a trickle of power like that to work with. Bu' hoot, mon, there's only one way to find out."

Slowly, he turned the knob of a potentiometer, still watching the board intently, as well as his own jury-rigged apparatus.

"We're getting some feedback," he said at length. "The battle is joined. Now to value up the gain a mite . . ."

The knob turned once more.

"'Tis David against Goliath," Scott muttered. "And me without my sling. Captain, somethin's takin' place out there, all richt, but I canna tell from these meters just how much effect I'm havin'; this board wasna designed to register any sich reaction. Mickle though it fashes me, I'll ask you to request our friends outside tae

stop protectin' us, or I'll get no read-out I can trust."

Kirk started to turn back along the companionway, but the Organians must have picked up Scott's request instantaneously from his mind. The eerie oppression of the thought-shield returned promptly. It was much less strong now, but Scott clearly was not satisfied.

"I'm only setting up a local interference," he said. He turned the knob again. The sensation diminished further, but only slightly. "It's nae gud. Even with the Organians' help, I canna combat a planet-wide screen with no source but the gig's generator. The necessary power just isna there."

"I believe I can be of assistance," Spock said. "I have worked out the principle of this warp-drive adjunct. It appears to draw energy directly from Hilbert space, from the same source out of which hydrogen atoms are born. In other words, a method of tapping the process of continuous creation."

"What?" Scott said. "I'd as soon try to stick a thirteen-ampere tap directly into God. I'll ha'e nothin' tae do with that."

"It's a hair-raising idea," Kirk agreed. "But, Mr. Spock, obviously it did work once, for the replicate. Can you connect it back to the generator without starting some kind of catastrophe?"

"I believe so, Captain. Anything the replicate could do, I can probably do better."

"Hubris," Scott muttered. "Overweenin' pride. Downfall of the Greeks. If ye don't get a catastrophe, ye'll get a miracle, an' that may well be worse."

"At this point we need a miracle," Kirk said. "Go ahead, Mr. Spock—plug it in."

Spock worked quickly. Grumbling, Scott advanced the knob again. The sensation created by the thought-screen dwindled like the memory of a bad dream. His face gradually lightening, the engineer turned the knob all the rest of the way.

Five minutes later, Organia was free—and . . .

"Good day, Mr. Sulu," Kirk said. "Mister Spock, assume command. All department heads, report."

Chapter Fourteen

A VISITATION OF SPIRITS

From the Captain's Log, Star Date 4202.0:

I do not suppose anyone will ever piece together exactly what happened on all the battlefronts at the moment the Organians were let loose from their planet-wide prison. Some of the myriads of incidents, however, are reflected in reports which reached the *Enterprise* officially, or were intercepted, and were duly entered by Sulu as Captain *pro tem*. Even most of these, of course, are virtually incomprehensible, but in some cases we had previously encountered the Klingon officers who were involved and can guess how they might have behaved or what they were confronted with; and in others we can reconstruct approximately what happened with the aid of the computer. But the total picture must be left to the imagination, and the computer has none—perhaps fortunately for us.

If the universe were shrinking at the rate of a centimeter a day, and all our measuring rods were contracting with it at an equivalent rate, how could we even suspect that anything was happening?

Commander Koloth sat before the viewing screen of the Klingon battleship *Destruction* as silent and motionless as a stone image. In the navigation tank to his left, points of green light showed the deployment of the rest of his force, faithfully keeping to the formation—an inverted hemisphere—he had ordered when they had

left the Organian system, but he never looked at them. He knew that the squadron was following his orders—indeed, the thought that they might not be never entered his head. In any event, all his attention was focused on the quarry, the tiny red spot in the center of the viewscreen, a spot which represented the mightiest machine ever conceived by Terran humanity—and soon to be nothing but a cloud of radioactive gas.

Days ago, he had determined that the Federation ship he was pursuing was the USS *Enterprise*, a discovery which had transformed his feeling for the chase from ordinary military pleasure to one of almost savage joy. He had encountered—and been defeated by—James Kirk and his command on two previous occasions: the affair of the Xixobrax Jewelworm, and the dispute over the colonization of Sherman's Planet. The latter occasion had been the most serious defeat for the Empire, and therefore for Commander Koloth, for the Empire most correctly was not forgiving of failure; but what rankled with Koloth personally was not any diplomatic consideration, nor even the setback to his own career, but the fact that as a last gesture of seeming contempt, Kirk had somehow managed to inflict upon Koloth's vessel an infestation of loathsome, incredibly fertile vermin called tribbles. It had taken the better part of a lunation to get them all cleaned out.*

He repressed a shudder and touched a toggle on the board before him. "Korax."

His first officer appeared as if by magic. "Lord Commander?"

"Any broadcasts from the enemy?"

"None, Lord Commander, or I would have informed you instantly. Nor have they changed course or relative velocity."

"I can see that much. In extremity, Federation vessels drop a buoy containing the Captain's Log, for later recovery. I see no chance that the Federation could

*See "The Trouble With Tribbles," *Star Trek Three*.

ever pick it up in this situation. However, neither do I want it destroyed in battle. See to it that we detect the drop, and pick up that buoy."

"We are at extreme sensor range for so small an object, Lord Commander."

"All the more reason to exercise extreme vigilance. The buoy will emit some sort of recognition signal; scan for it."

Korax saluted and vanished. Koloth continued watching the screen. Nothing could save the *Enterprise* this time; she was moving straight into a trap—she could in fact do nothing else—which would crack her like a nut. He hoped that he would be the man to make the actual kill, but it seemed probable that the admiral in charge of the much larger Empire force awaiting ahead would claim that privilege. Not only was that normal—rank has its privileges—but Koloth knew that Admiral Kor also cherished personal desires to rid the universe of Kirk and his ship, or at least had reason to.

Well, that was not of final importance. What counted was not who obliterated the *Enterprise*, but the fact of the obliteration itself. And that end would soon be accomplished . . .

For what Koloth did not know was that it had taken him a Klingon year simply to call Korax; that the entire galaxy had made its twenty-seventh rotation since its birth around its center during the course of their conversation; and that since then, it had gone around three and a third times more. For the *Destruction* and all aboard her, Time was slowing down on an asymptotic curve; and for Commander Koloth, the chase would never end. . . .

. . . and Koloth would never know it.

Koloth's estimate for Kor had been mistaken; that was one reason why Koloth was still a Commander—and would remain one now, forever and ever, even after the whole of the universe had died—while Kor was now an Admiral. It had been Kor who had been involved with Kirk in the struggle on Organia which had

resulted unpleasantly in the Organian Peace Treaty, but Kor harbored no resentment.

He did not regard that outcome as a defeat, but simply as a frustration. Federation and Empire forces had been positioned for the final struggle when the Organians struck them all powerless, on both sides, and imposed their terms; and Kirk, Kor judged, had been as offended at the intervention as Kor had been. These Federation officers tended to strike one as milksops until fighting was inevitable, but thereafter they were formidable antagonists. The penetration of the *Enterprise* this far into Empire territory spoke for itself: an act of great daring, and worthy of a warrior's respect.

That it was also foolhardy did not bulk very large in Kor's opinion; only cowards avoid battle when the odds are against them. Kor also knew that Federation starship captains had more freedom to act against orders, more discretionary powers than he would ever be allowed to exercise; though he was sure that this fact would contribute to the downfall of the Federation in the long run—and perhaps very soon now—it made him all the more appreciative of Kirk's boldness, to say nothing of his ingenuity.

It would be interesting to know what Kirk had hoped to gain by such a foray. Insofar as Kor had been told, there was no such place as Organia any more, and the Organian system was no longer in a strategic quadrant; yet the *Enterprise* had ducked and dodged to get there with enormous doggedness, and in the process had quite failed to do any of the damage to real military targets within the Empire which Kor would have obliterated en route as a matter of course, especially on a suicide mission.

One could allow only a certain weight to ordinary curiosity—after all, Kirk could not have been *sure* that Organia was extinct; why, then, had he not gone in shooting? He could, for example, have knocked out Bosklave, which was well within his reach and unprepared for a starship attack. Surely he knew where it was, and that its destruction would have been a bad

blow to the Empire. But instead, he had done nothing but wipe out the token Organian garrison—a rather neat piece of entrapment, that—and then go right back to the Organian system, thus setting himself up for the present cul-de-sac without charging the Empire any real price for it. Wasteful—and more than wasteful: mysterious.

But that was the trouble with democratic societies: they shared with the Empire all of the disadvantages of bureaucracies, and none of the advantages of hierarchy and centralization. Sooner or later, even a brave but prudent commander like Kirk, and a multimillion-stellar investment like the *Enterprise*, would be lost to some piece of bad judgment, or even to a whim. Fighting the Federation had been interesting, certainly, but Kor was just as glad that the long war—or, until recently, nonwar—was about to be over. Fighting the Romulans, the next society on the Empire's timetable of conquest, would be more fun; the Romulans were short on imagination, but they were as brave as eagles, and they had the military virtues—discipline, a hierarchy of respect, a readiness to place society above self, an almost poetic willingness to live with tragedy, and above all the good sense to realize that good government consists of weighing heads, not just counting them.*

Under the present circumstances, it would be possible to capture the Federation ship, which would be a valuable prize. The odds against her were now hopeless, and Kirk would not sacrifice the four hundred and thirty people in his crew—more than a third of them female, a most irrational Federation custom—in a suicide stand; few Federation captains would. But Kor's orders from the High Command were for complete destruction.

He did not even think of asking questions, but no amount of loyalty or discipline can prevent a humanoid

*See "Balance of Terror," *Star Trek One*.

creature from speculating. He could only conclude that Kirk and his officers had found some piece of information so important that the High Command was willing to throw away a Class One starship to make certain that it never reached the Federation, or even could. Whatever the information, Kor himself would no doubt never find out what it was . . .

"On the contrary," a gentle voice said behind him. "I believe I can help you there."

Even before turning in his command chair, Kor knew the voice was familiar, though it was not that of any of his officers. A sensation of anticipatory dismay began to build in him.

And for good reason. The voice, he saw now, was that of the Organian Elder, Ayelborne, who had been temporary Council head when Kor had attempted to occupy the planet.

"So," the Klingon said stolidly, controlling his expression with the training of a lifetime. "I was told Organia was no more. It appears that my information was inaccurate."

"At best, incomplete," Ayelborne agreed, with his well-remembered perpetual, maddening smile. "And the war is over, Admiral Kor. Your ships still have power, but you will find that your weapons do not. I would advise you to make planetfall, with your entire fleet, as soon as possible."

"My orders," Kor said, "are to destroy the *Enterprise*. If my weapons are inoperative, I can nevertheless still ram—which will cause an even greater loss of life."

"I know your orders," Ayelborne said. "And I observe that your courage has a match in your stubbornness. But my advice is sound, for within three Standard Days your ships, too, will become inoperative, and if you are not grounded by then, the loss of life will be greater still—and all on your side. In view of the Klingon breach of the treaty, I am not obligated to give you this information, but I do so in the interests of minimizing subsequent violence. In fact, I would not be here

at all, Admiral, did I not need from you the exact coordinates of your home system.”

“I will never—” Kor began.

But Ayelborne had already vanished—and Kor knew with gray despair that, regardless of his will, his mind had already given the Organian the information he had wanted—and that Kor the ruthless, Kor the efficient, Kor the brave, Kor the loyal, was a traitor to his Empire.

The Grand Senate of the Klingon Empire, alarmed by the fragmentary reports of unprecedented disasters coming in from the field, was in session when the Organians arrived. There were three of them, but they appeared in the barbaric, gorgeously caparisoned Senate hall, a relic of a recorded ten thousand years of internecine warfare before the Klingons had achieved space flight and planetary unity, in their perhaps natural forms—balls of energy some six feet in diameter, like miniature suns—so that it was not possible to tell them apart or distinguish which ones they were (if indeed their identities had not been from the beginning as much of a convenient fiction as their assumed humanoid appearance). That they were Ayelborne, Claymare and Trefayne is only an assumption, based on merely human logic.

The swarthy faces of the Grand Senate were pale in the actinic glare emitted by the thought-creatures. When one of the Organians spoke, his voice echoed through the great chamber like the sound of many trumpets.

“You have broken the treaty, and been the direct cause of much death, misery and destruction,” he said. “In addition, you have committed violence against ourselves, which only the action of your adversaries stopped short of genocide.”

“Untrue,” the Senator in Chief said coldly. His voice was shaky, but he seemed otherwise to be in command of himself—no mean feat under these circumstances. “Our planetary thought-shield was no more than a

method of confinement, to prevent you from meddling further in our Imperial affairs.”

“Your intentions do not alter the facts,” the Organian said. “You understood only ill the nature of your own weapon, and its effects upon us hardly at all. Five years under that screen—and we see in your minds that you never intended to let us out, and indeed dared not—would have destroyed us utterly. Putting such a screen around the Earth, as we see you also planned to do, would have destroyed humanity as well, and far more quickly. Such carelessness compounds your crime, rather than mitigating it.”

“We defy you,” the Senator in Chief said.

“That will avail you nothing. However, we are not vindictive; our justice is not based on vengeance. We simply observe that you cannot be trusted to keep treaties, even those backed by humane coercion. We therefore interdict your planets, and all your colony worlds, from space flight for a thousand years.”

The hall burst into a roar of protest and rage, but the Organian’s voice soared above it easily.

“After a millennium back in your playpen,” he said, “you may emerge as fit to share a civilized galaxy. I say *may*. It is entirely up to you. And so, farewell, Klingons—and the Klingon Empire.”

Chapter Fifteen

. . . "YOU MAY BE RIGHT"

From the Captain's Log, Star Date 4205.5:

It has taken a good many hours, and the participation of all department heads, to prepare a comprehensive—and what is more important, comprehensible—report of this entire imbroglio. And even after the report was filed, there were a number of additional questions from Earth, which is hardly surprising. However, we were able to answer them, and our role in freeing Organia has won us official commendations from Starfleet Command, which I have passed on to all hands.

There remain some additional questions which Command has not asked us, which is probably just as well, for I am far from certain that we know the answers—or ever will know them.

Kirk paused in his dictation and Spock, who had been monitoring the recording of the Log entry into the computer, turned from his station toward the command chair.

"May I ask, Captain, what those questions are? It is possible that I could be of assistance."

"I think perhaps you could, Mr. Spock." Kirk put the hand microphone back into its clip on the control board. "Some of them, in fact, concern you—which is why I was hesitating about logging them."

"Why should you, Captain?"

"Because they are more or less personal, and in

addition, not essential for Starfleet Command's understanding of the affair. You needn't answer them yet if you'd prefer not to."

"I could make no judgment of that," the first officer said, "without knowing what the questions are."

"Obviously. Well, then . . . While we still had the replicate Spock on board, you were absolutely adamant about refusing to cooperate with him, and upon the need for his destruction. Yet at the same time you refused to explain the source of your adamancy. This was a considerable danger to you personally, because both attitudes were so unlike you that—as I told Dr. McCoy at the time—they caused me to wonder if *you* were the replicate. In fact, for a while I was nearly convinced that you were."

"I see," Spock said. "I have no objection to explaining that, Captain—not now. You are aware, of course, that because of my Vulcan inheritance, I have certain modest telepathic gifts."

"Aware? Great heavens, man, they've saved our lives more than once; how could I forget that?"

"My question was rhetorical," Spock said. "You are doubtless aware also that true telepaths are exceedingly rare in the universe, which is most fortunate for us, for as adversaries they can be exceedingly formidable."

While he spoke, McCoy and Scott came onto the bridge; Sulu and Uhura were of course already there. Kirk looked inquiringly at Spock, but the first officer showed no sign that he found the addition to the audience at all objectionable.

"They can indeed," Kirk said, "if our experience with the Melkotians was a fair sample."*

"Yes, or the Klingons' with the Organians. But for the purposes of the present discussion, it is the rarity of the ability that is of interest. It has never been adequately explained. One hypothesis is that many humans may be telepathic at birth, but that the ability burns

*See "The Last Gunfight," *Star Trek Three*.

out almost immediately under the influx of new experience, particularly the burden of pain of other creatures around them."

"It blows its fuse," Scott suggested.

"Something like that," Spock agreed. "Another hypothesis is that for any type of mind which depends upon an actual, physical brain for its functioning—as opposed, say, to energy creatures like the Organians, or mixed types like the Melkotians—the forces involved are too weak to make transmission possible, though extreme stress may sometimes help—except, perhaps, *between two brains whose makeup is nearly identical* as in the case of twins. There are many instances recorded in Earth history of apparent telepathic links between monozygotic twins, but fewer of such links between heterozygotic twins, who are born together but are genetically different."

"I begin to see," McCoy said. "The replicate's brain was even more like your own than an identical twin's could be—and you had a telepathic rapport with him?"

"Yes and no," Spock said. "Bear in mind that although his brain was essentially mine, its biases were opposite to mine—even its neural currents ran in the opposite direction. The link between the replicate and myself was not telepathy, but something I should call 'telempathy'—an emotional rapport; not an intellectual one. I could never tell what he was thinking, but I was constantly aware of his physical sensations—and of his emotions.

"I will not describe this further, except to say that I found it very nearly intolerable. However, it gave me all the assurance I needed that his motives, his morals, his loyalties were all the opposite of my own. Yet intellectually, without doubt, he had at his command all my experience, all my accumulated knowledge and training, even my reflexes—and all my intimate knowledge of the *Enterprise*, its crew, and the total situation. And hence, I knew that he was a terrible danger to us all, and under *no* circumstances could he be negotiated with. He had to be eliminated, preferably before he

could get in touch with the Klingons (though unfortunately he did), there was no other possible course."

"Fascinating," McCoy said. "So the second hypothesis now stands proven, apparently."

"I would say so," Spock said, "insofar, that is, as testimony can ever be accepted as evidence. I am personally convinced, at any rate. Of course, even if valid, logically it does not exclude the first hypothesis; both may be true."

"That may well be," Kirk said, "but it still leaves me with some loose ends. Why didn't you tell me this at the time, Mr. Spock? It would have saved me considerable fruitless worry, and would have speeded up the solving of the problem of the two Spocks—maybe before the replicate could have gotten away."

"If you will pardon me, Captain," Spock said, "such an outcome did not seem to me to be at all likely. The replicate Spock's identity had yet to be proven by his actions; there was no other way to be sure. And even had you accepted my explanation, you would on reflection have realized that the rapport involved might seriously impair my efficiency or judgment, or make me, too, dangerous in some unpredictable way. I knew I was in control of myself—though it was precarious—but you could not. It would have occurred to you, further, that it might have been safest to confine me as well until the identity problem was solved—and for the good of the ship I needed to be a free agent, or in any event a free first officer."

"Hmm," Kirk said. "That also answers another of my questions: how you knew when the replicate was no longer aboard the *Enterprise*, and roughly where in space-time he was instead—and again, why you refused to tell me *how* you knew."

"Precisely. May I add, Captain, that I did not come to these decisions entirely unilaterally? I asked the computer what your probable responses to a proposed revelation of the 'telempathy' might be, and was told that your confining me was highly probable indeed—about eighty-three per cent, to a confidence limit of point zero

zero five. Ordinarily, I would have preferred to have consulted Dr. McCoy on a psychological question of that kind, but under the circumstances I was denied that recourse."

"I see," Kirk said. "Very well, Mr. Spock, we won't transmit this additional information to Starfleet Command, unless they specifically ask for it. I don't see how it could enhance their present understanding of our report, anyhow. But you had better record it in the library. It may be of some value to the Scientific Advisory Board, should they have any project on telepathy going, or want to consider starting one."

"Very well, Captain."

"Another message from Command, Captain," Uhura reported. "We're to report to Star Base Sixteen for two weeks down time and a new assignment. Incidentally, the communications officer there, a Lieutenant Purdy, wants me to teach him Eurish. I hope he's cute."

"Very well. So ordered. Mr. Sulu, lay a course." Kirk paused for a moment. "And I will add, Mr. Spock, that it's nice to have you back."

"Thank you, Captain," Spock said. "It has been an interesting experience. I myself have only one regret: that my method of disposal of the replicate had to be so improvised that I was unable to recover your class ring for you."

Kirk gestured the subject away. "Forget it, Mr. Spock. It was a very small price to pay, and I can always get another. I'm only grateful that there are no more loose ends than that."

"I'm afraid there *is* still a loose end, Jim," McCoy said thoughtfully. "And what's worse, it's the same one we started with, way back on the bench-marking job. But maybe, after his 'telepathic' experience with the replicate, Mr. Spock can answer that one too."

"What is it?" Kirk said.

"This," McCoy said. "Does the man who comes out of the other end of a journey by transporter have an immortal soul, or does he not?"

There was quite a long silence.

"I do not know," Spock said at last. "I can only suggest, Doctor, that if someone were to give me an answer to that question, I would not know how to test the answer. By operational standards, therefore, such a question is meaningless."

"I suppose so," McCoy said resignedly. "Somehow I thought that was just what you'd say."

Kirk had rather expected Spock's response, too. But he noticed also that the first officer looked, somehow, faintly worried. Or did he?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JAMES BLISH, one of the top science fiction writers and author of Bantam's popular *Star Trek* series, died in London on July 30, 1975, of lung cancer. He was fifty-four. Mr. Blish was born in New Jersey and received a Bachelor of Science degree in zoology from Rutgers University in 1942. He spent two years in the army as a medical technician and returned to do graduate work at Columbia University after World War II, switching from zoology to literature. Mr. Blish discovered science fiction as a youngster and, at the age of fourteen, issued his first "fanzine," "The Planeteers." He went on to write many science fiction novels and short stories, the most famous being his trilogy, *Cities in Flight*. In 1959, he won the coveted Hugo Award for his novel, *A Case of Conscience*. Besides being a writer, Mr. Blish was an important critic in the science fiction field. His two books of science fiction criticism, *The Issue at Hand* (1964) and *More Issues at Hand* (1970), were published under the pseudonym William Atheling, Jr., and are still important milestones in the field.



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