





# MASJORM-D

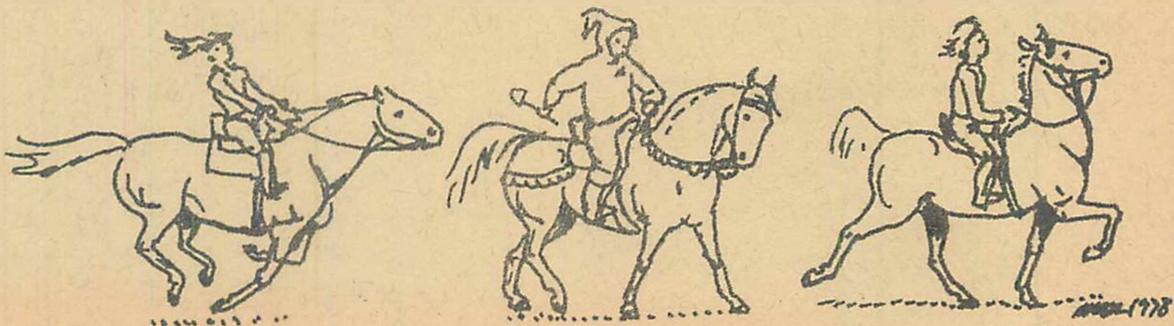
## NUMBER TEN

Poison Pen Press, 627 East 8th St, Bklyn NY 11218. Available for \$1.50 by hand, \$2 book rate, \$3.75 book rate special-handling insured. Subscriptions: 2 for \$4 book rate, 2 for \$7.50 special. Also available for contributions, pre-arranged trade, review, or editorial whimsy.

*Devra Michele Langsam, Editor*

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial Maunderings	5
Mandatory <i>Star Wars</i> Item, by Sheryl Adsit	8
The Kinderhook Centennial, by Lois Welling	12
The Resh-Fish and the Sage, by Eleanor Arnason	23
More Lines We'd Like to Hear, by Elizabeth Carrie	34
<i>Mat-zellof</i> , by Vida Hull	35
Nasty Klingon Sayings, by David Lubkin	44
In the Time of the First Beginnings: The Bronze Age on Vulcan, by Sandra Wise	45
<i>The Free Enterprise</i> , by Elizabeth Carrie, Carolyn Hillard, Marian Turner, Gaylen Reiss, and Barbara Wenk	55
Accident, by Anna Mary Hall	63
Bottle-Casting, by Nancy Giudice	79
. . . And Comfort to the Enemy, by Barbara Wenk	81



## ARTISTS

Sheryl Adsit \_\_\_\_\_ 8  
 Kathy Carlson \_\_\_\_\_ 24, 27, 29, 30, 33, 72, 75  
 Hans Dietrich \_\_\_\_\_ 13, 16, 19  
 Phil Foglio \_\_\_\_\_ bacover  
 Lillianne Forbin \_\_\_\_\_ 59  
 Caroline Hedge \_\_\_\_\_ 6, 8 (border), 58  
 Carolyn S. Hillard \_\_\_\_\_ 47, 56, 77  
 Vida Hull \_\_\_\_\_ 35, 39, 41, 44  
 Sue Johnston \_\_\_\_\_ 21  
 Terri Laponovich \_\_\_\_\_ 34  
 Doug Lovenstein \_\_\_\_\_ 78  
 M R O Ludwig \_\_\_\_\_ 3, 11, 46, 57, 65, 70  
 Steven Miller \_\_\_\_\_ 80  
 Pat O'Neill \_\_\_\_\_ 49, 50  
 Deborah Lleyn Phillips \_\_\_\_\_ 10  
 Carrie Rowles \_\_\_\_\_ 22, 62  
 Carolyn Ruth \_\_\_\_\_ 54  
 Carol Walske \_\_\_\_\_ 85, 91, 97, 110, 114  
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# Stokaline

## *Editorial Maunderings*

This past October, I visited Marshall Space Center with Barbara Wenk. Barbara, who works for an aerospace organization, was able to get me on one of the tours she helps organize, and I gave her a hand with the registration and things like that. We went to the museum, too, like regular tourists. The moon-ride is noteworthy.

Prior to entering the ride itself, you are carefully warned not to take it if you have a weak heart, or circulatory problems, and they give very concise instructions about behavior during the ride itself. ("Do not move your head during acceleration or you may experience discomfort." *Translation:* You'll get drop-sickness.) During the ride, the entire room acts as a centrifuge, rotating around the center portion. The couches (which you strap yourself onto) move from their original vertical position to a horizontal one as the acceleration continues, and at the peak, you are experiencing two and a half gees. Most disconcerting--when you try to lift your arm, it takes a positive effort, and when you let it go, it *falls*--as though you were dropping a lump of meat, or a stuffed toy. Your cheeks feel as though they're flattening, and your eyes feel funny. It was great. *Sensawonda!*

The tour of the labs at the Space Center itself was very impressive indeed. The mechanization of micro-chip production and the energy conservation gizmo (you may have seen the ad in *Scientific American*) in particular. . . and the materials test lab where they were stressing a turbine part, taking it to 18,000 degrees--it glowed like a minor sun when they opened the crucible. As I said, neat. Thanks, Barbara and Mr. Harford.

As you may have noticed, it is now May-edging-into-June. Sigh. I had originally intended this issue of masiform D to come out at Townsley's February con 1980; it is convenient and, generally, financially rewarding to bring out a new issue at a convention. However, it was not to be.

Two of my artists for this issue were not able to make their scheduled deadlines, due to a combination of the flu and other problems.

Without the material in hand, or the impetus that "It's all here; get to work on it", I put off typing the stencils. (I am even now typing this stencil, Wednesday May 14th, 11:05 pm.) So there I was, February 8th, and no stencil typed, no zine in sight.

To be honest, there were other causes. Barbara Wenk finished ". . . And comfort to the Enemy" in a burn-out of emotion, and then couldn't bring herself to go back and write the four or so connective paragraphs she'd skipped in the frenzy of creation. I kept waiting for her to recover enough to fill in the gap. . . . The fact that her art was one of the sets delayed-by-flu only made it easier for *me* to procrastinate.

Then, of course, there was The Novel. I've printed a novel before: Fern Marder and Carol Walske's excellent *Threshold*. (It is now out-of-print!) However, Barbara Wenk's novel is twice as long, and the considerations of collating (125 sheets plus cover plus. . . time 500) and binding (stapling through how many inches?) drove me hither and yon like a demented chicken. There, also, were the gaps and gaplettes so dear to the reluctant writer. And . . . Suffice it to say that I spent a great deal of time on One Way Mirror that should have gone to MD #10. But the novel was more exciting, more troublesome (I *knew I* was printing MD#10. and I didn't need to call strangers and price their per-page cost, and will you bind if I bring you the collated material, and how much are those little screw-posts?)

The result of all this is that One Way Mirror and MD #10 will be appearing simultaneously, at Mos' Eastly Con. (Printing a zine, preparing a novel for the printer, and planning a con to come out the same weekend is definitely *not* a smart thing to try, folks.)

I am, thank Ghu, thoroughly pleased by the results of using Multiprint, the vanity house I graced with our job. The book is beautifully printed, perfect-bound (like a trade paperback, which is what Elyse Rosenstein told me it was--shook my teeth to think of that), and they delivered. All collated and *everything* (oh bliss).



When the time came to do preliminary advertising for Barbara's novel, author and editor had a slight difference of opinion on the proper form and strategy. I favored the following:

# One Way Mirror

by BARBARA WENK

illos: M. R. O. LUDWIG

editor: DEURA LANGSAM

*HER blazing passion (to stay alive)!*

*HIS burning need (to get Imperial Star Fleet off his back)!*

*THEIR mutual indifference!!*

*Jenny Marlowe was a perfectly normal STAR TREK fan.*

*Commander Slair was the Third Officer of the ISS Victory . . .  
and a Vulcan.*

*When she was captured by alien slavers, he made her an  
offer she couldn't refuse. Unfortunately for all concerned,  
he wasn't interested enough to ask the right questions . . .  
and so a STAR TREK fan found herself playing officer's lady  
in MIRROR, MIRROR.*

*From the author of a number of other nasty-minded stories. . . .*

Barbara, however, preferred a more restrained approach:

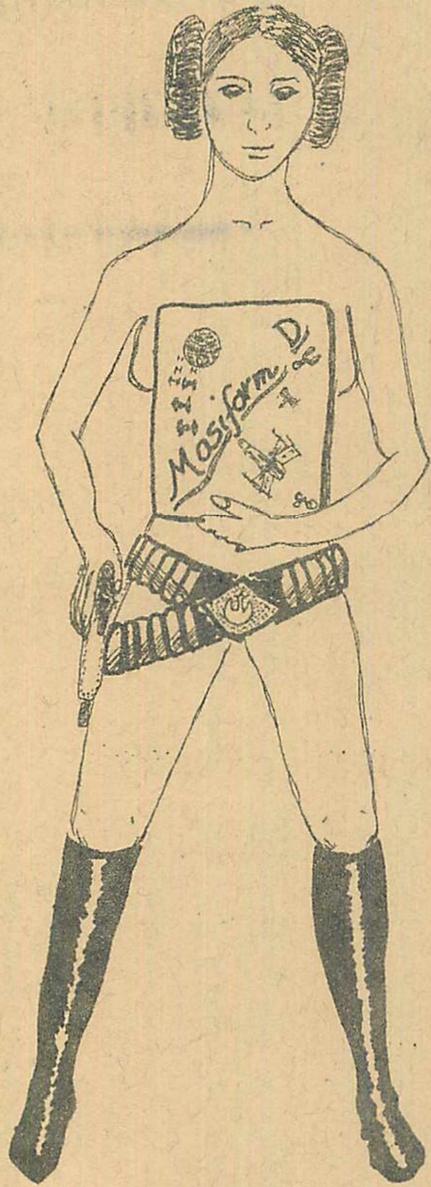
ONE WAY MIRROR

A Mirror, Mirror story . . .

sort of.

Therefore, to comply with Federal Equal Time standards, keep peace  
in our time, and avoid being hit over the head with an IBM Selectric, I  
hereby give you your choice of ad.

(\$5 book rate or by hand, \$6.75 book rate special handling insured.)



I dreamed I led  
the Rebellion  
in my  
MASIFORM D!

MARTIAL SPIRIT--Both my teachers are now 5th degree black belts in juijitsu, and thus entitled to be addressed as "Master". Shades of kershu--though somehow "Master Gordon" doesn't have quite the ring that "Master Kinet" does.

Kershu! Ghu Bless You! I'm sorry to say that the plot problems with my second and third kershu stories *could not* be worked out. There remain, therefore, only the one-page gem done by Barbara's father, and--possibly--a very short piece that is really part of the defunct third story. Unless Susan Crites is inspired to do one. . . .

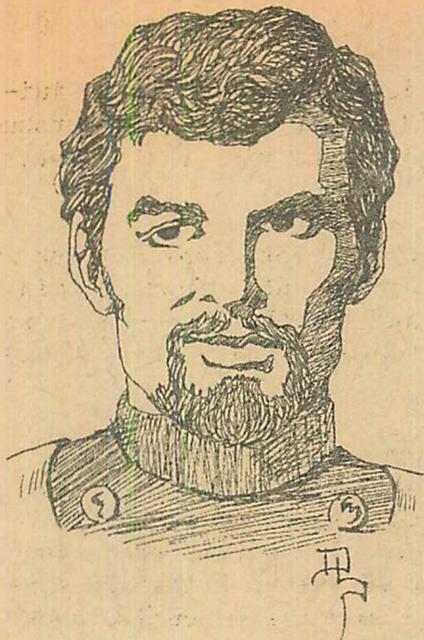
For those of you who are just dying to know, Jan and Korbas get married when they grow up, and run a successful kershu school of their own, complete with one child (Kevin) and a large shaggy dog, and possibly a Siamese cat. Master Kinet and Manardesa also marry, producing 3 or 4 children. Kintam becomes the Bruce Lee of kershu fighting, fantastically successful and wealthy, and Ruth becomes his executive secretary and business manager and--(Barbara says Ruth has too much sense and good taste to marry and/or sleep with Kintam--but here we must agree to differ.) (What do you mean, why does she become his secretary--have *you* ever tried to find a job with nothing but a degree in Pre-Imperial Kersherani verse forms?) Kintam's most remarkable tri-dee to date has been one made with a Terran company. The film is entitled *Kershu Kittens*--er, *Kershu Kapers*, and Kintam plays the role of teacher in a girls' co-species college, where--but I digress.

If I'd been able to write these stories (like the incident of the plastic flowers, and Kinet's parting gift to his master, Kemiskhan) I would have done so. *\*sigh\**

I now have a new landlord, with hordes of children who run around and thump most alarmingly at odd hours. At least I don't need to feel guilty about *my* noise.

England was fine in '79. I spent several days there visting Ruth Bollerud and Bawn O'Beirne-Ranelagh, as well as attending the con at Brighton. I can't say that I managed my travel really well, but I'm inept about some things. . . .

ST--The Ten-Year Wait--In December, I was pleased to be invited (Pleased? I was *ecstatic!*) by Gene Roddenberry to attend the ST movie premier. That was a real riot. The original invitation was a phone call asking me if I were interested. The confirming invitation was lost in the mail when my local mail holding-box was robbed. Calling to apprise Paramount of this problem, on the Thursday prior to the opening, we were given the first inkling that I had been offered not one, but *two* tickets. (One for my *escort*, of course. At this point, Joyce offered to wear a tux--) On Monday, Steve Rosenstein picked up duplicate invitations and tickets in Manhattan, whereupon I suddenly wondered if Shirley Maiewski (*ST Welcom-mittee* Chief Drudge, and everybody's ST grandmother) realized that she had



two tickets also. (No, of course *NOT*.) This led to frantic phone calls, and to Shirley's asking Barbara Wenk if she'd like to use the ticket. Barbara, who had no vacation left, no spare money, and no suitable clothes, of course said "Yes", and the merry scramble to get ourselves outfitted and down to DC in time began

...

I doubt if one of the fans invited that I knew wore all their own clothes. Joyce borrowed her mother's mink jacket, Joan Winston wore her agent's dress, Linda Deneroff had her co-worker's dress, I wore Barbara's dress and she borrowed one of mine. . . . Bjo Trimble did Barbara's hair *a la Botticelli*, braided with pearls, and it was beautiful.

Luckily it was extremely warm for December, or we would all have gotten pneumonia, since none of us but Joyce had proper coats or wraps.

The movie itself, in my opinion, was not a marked success. I found it disappointing: far too long in the special effects, and lacking the humor, character interaction, and plot excitement familiar from the TV show. Maybe they'll re-edit it; I understand that there were miles of film cut out. . . .

The reception, however, was a success. I, a rather picky and snobbish cook, found nothing to fault in the catering. It was exotic, plentiful, and tasty. Filet mignon, crab claws, *runaki*, cheese platters, aspic'd ham and turkey, fruit baskets, hot biscuits, shrimp, coffee with whipped cream and liqueurs, open bars--I particularly enjoyed the cream puffs shaped like miniature swans, and the rum balls.

Thanks, Gene.

After all, how many other chances am I likely to have to go to a world movie premier?

Buck up--I'm enjoying the Buck Rogers TV show. The plots are not perhaps the world's greatest, but they're fun. The show doesn't take itself too seriously, and they have fantastic continuity and a fine set of running gags (Dr. Huer and his rubber plant) that are a delight. And Wilma's nobody's dumbie, either; she and Buck make a good team.

Anne Zeek's brother Richard assures me that the new *Galactica* is much much better than the original, and well worth seeing. I have yet to view an entire episode, however.

I *did* see "Time After Time" and was very pleasantly surprised: an excellent time travel-cum-mystery story. Poor Herbert (Wells, H.G.)--when he daringly mentions his newspaper articles on "Free Love" [after all,

his luncheon companion *is* a divorcee] and she says, "I haven't heard that phrase since I was in the eighth grade"! A charming and exciting movie (and I only paid 80¢ to see it.)

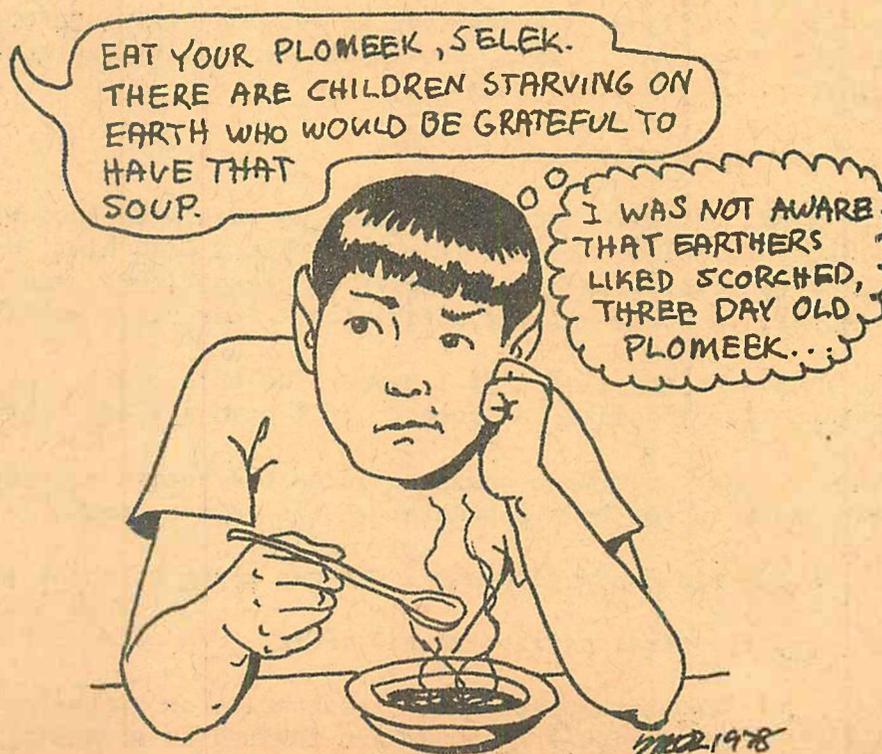
Less on all counts was "Black Hole"--I *hate* cute robots! But it wasn't as bad as *some* I've seen.

Time passes. I've been with the Boring Public Library 14+ years now (and you thought I was a child genius!) and have been granted two extra days vacation as a reward. I now rejoice in 27 paid vacation days, plus 12 legal holidays. I do; I really do rejoice.

It is now May 15, six months since I wrote the first draft of this editorial. Because of abysmal stupidity, I have left myself minus time to finish this issue for our con, and so *NO ONE* has proofread this zine. All typos are my fault, and I apologize to my authors.

In the next two weeks, I must finish the printing, collate this zine, and help Joyce run a 350-person convention. If I survive *that*, I shall, I hope, return in December with the next issue. Submissions are welcome!

Have a good summer, friends.



THE  
KINDERHOOK  
CENTENNIAL

by

Lois Welling

James Kirk and Leonard McCoy sat in the captain's quarters.

"We've got him this time, Jim. He can't get out of *these* functions. Besides, he hasn't been off this ship in so long his skin's paled out from olive to fish belly white."

Kirk eyed his friend. "Bones, you go easy on him, understand. After those last two jabs. . . . Well, you should be glad he has such a forgiving nature. . . ."

"Me? What about that time . . ."

"Never mind," Kirk interrupted. "Just go easy. We know he's not going to like this. I don't like it myself, but I need him. With all these damn ceremonies, I'll have to split up the officers, and even then we won't be able to cover all the activities. Star Fleet socials!"

"Jim, I've seen the list. If I have to do this, well, there are a couple of functions I'd like to attend. If I have any say, that is."

"I know, Bones. Everyone wants to judge the beauty contest. What I need is for Spock to set up a schedule. Let's go see him."

McCoy rubbed his hands gleefully. He was going to enjoy this.

They found the first officer in his cabin.

"Spock, it's about the Centennial celebration on Kinderhook. As the Federation's representatives, we have been invited to no less than forty different events."

"Captain, I have already begun organizing a schedule." Spock punched the computer buttons and the agenda appeared on the screen.

Kirk studied it. "I see, Spock. Looks good. But you have Linowski down to judge the flower show. He doesn't have enough brass to impress the locals. Sulu should do that."

"Mr. Sulu will be addressing the botany research commission at that time."

"Oh, yeah. Well, continue with this and I'll go over it tomorrow."

"Jim." Bones nudged him. "About that function I'm interested in. . . ."

Kirk checked the diagram. "Spock, you've got Uhura and Chekov judging the beauty contest?"

"Chekov! Chekov judging the beauty contest!" McCoy yelled. "What about me?"

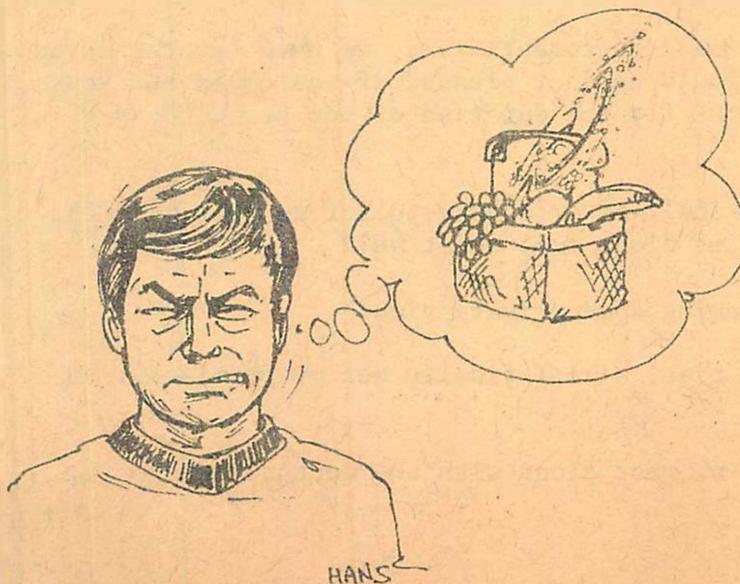
"Doctor, at that time you will be conducting a workshop on nutritional awareness for the senior citizens. I believe the subject to be discussed is 'The Galaxy: A Nutritional Fruitbasket'."

McCoy sank into the nearest chair.

"Spock, what about you?" Kirk asked.

"I have assigned myself several activities. I shall be judging the science fair and the 'Chemicals Can Be Fun' contest. I will be reading a paper before the physics research department at the University, and will also be touring the new solar energy plant."

McCoy jumped up. "What about some of those gawdawful socials?"



"The Galaxy: A Nutritional  
Fruitbasket"

"I have taken my share of those, Doctor."

"Spock, you know Star Fleet regs. All officers must escort someone to these functions. No unattached personnel; it's safer that way. Put your name into the computer for draw. . . ."

"Captain, I understand the procedure, but it may not be necessary. I am in the process of making arrangements."

Both men's ears perked up at the sound of these words. But before they could say anything, the intercom sounded.

"Spock here."

"I have your party, Mr. Spock."

"Thank you, Lieutenant."

The three men stared at a blank screen and listened to assorted fumbling noises and a woman's muttering voice.

"Diana? Diana, are you there?"

"Spock? Why didn't you say so? I thought it was a stranger." The screen lighted to reveal a very beautiful, dripping-wet female clutching a towel around her.

"Diana, I am not alone."

The screen snapped off.

"I'm sorry, Spock."

"No matter. Diana, I am calling because I should like to see you."

"Well, of course. Is the *E* here for the Centennial?"

"Correct. As the Federation's representatives, we have several obligatory functions to attend. I would be most pleased if you could see your way clear to acting as my consort for the duration of our stay. Do you have plans?"

"I'll cancel them. And I shall be *delighted* to act as your consort. But Spock, we will have some time alone too, won't we?"

"I see no problem in arranging some private time."

"Oh, another thing. This time, will I finally get my promised tour of the Big *E*?"

Spock looked at the captain, who, along with the doctor, was gaping at the blank screen.

"Captain?"

"Huh? Oh yeah, sure. No problem."

"Diana, I shall contact you again when plans are finalized. Peace."

"Peace to you also, Spock."

The conversation ended.

The two men stared at the first officer. Kirk recovered first. "Well, Spock, I will leave you to your planning." He and McCoy left.

"I need a drink," McCoy said as soon as the door closed behind them.

"I'm with you, Bones."

Two days later Spock was on his way to the transporter room to meet Diana when the captain fell into step besides him. Before they could say anything, Leonard McCoy caught up with them.

"Gentlemen?"

"We just thought you might enjoy some assistance in welcoming the lady aboard, Mr. Spock," Bones said.

"Besides, I make a point of meeting beautiful women whenever the opportunity presents itself," Kirk added.

Spock's raised eyebrow was his only comment.

Kirk stopped. "Spock, if we're intruding. . . ."

"No, Captain. I shall be pleased to introduce you both."

A figure shimmered into existence on the transporter pad, and what a figure it was. She was exquisite: a classic beauty oozing class. In her high heeled shoes she was almost as tall as Spock, well proportioned, with a hint of curves under the flared-leg slacks and soft print blouse. She wore her honey-blond hair pulled back, but not severely.

She smiled warmly and reached out her hand. "Spock, it's been much too long." Her voice had the light musical tones of Kinderhook.

He stepped forward to greet her. She blinked and then fainted. He caught her, scooped her into his arms. "Sickbay," he said, already moving toward the door. McCoy and Kirk were right behind him.

Within a few minutes she began to come around. "Ooooooh." She looked around. "Spock?"

He took her hand. "Diana."

"What happened?" she asked, while trying to sit up.



"Transporter-induced vertigo, I suspect. Was this your first time?"

She nodded.

"I should have considered it. Careless of me."

McCoy was at their side. "Better take it easy, Ms. You could be dizzy again."

"Thank you . . ."

"Doctor Leonard McCoy at your service, Ma'am."

"Thank you, Doctor."

Kirk coughed gently, and recalled Spock to protocol. "Diana Fallon, may I present Captain James Kirk."

"A pleasure, Ms. Fallon," Kirk nodded from his position against an empty exam bed.

"Captain, Doctor, Spock has told me so much about you both. I'm embarrassed that our first meeting should be like this. But I really am all right now."

With Spock's help, she slid off the table. "Spock I am sorry about this."

"Nothing for you. . . ."

"Spock," McCoy interrupted, "I suggest about thirty minutes of rest and quiet for the lady."

"I concur, Doctor. Diana, we shall go to my quarters and you may rest there."

"And my tour?"

"Later." He took her arm to steady her as they moved toward the door.

"Spock, you are planning to stay planetside with me, aren't you?"

"Yes, I had thought to."

"Excellent. I was counting on it. I bought some of those breakfast rolls that you liked the last time. . . ."

The Sickbay door slid closed, leaving its two occupants in shock.

Kirk dropped his plate of creamed chicken onto the table next to Bones' and Scotty's. "Good afternoon, gentlemen," he said between clenched teeth.

"Bad morning, Jim?" the doctor asked.

"I don't want to discuss it." Kirk took a bite of his food. "Uhg! This stuff is cold, too," he said with disgust, and put down his fork.

"Sorry, Jim. I should have warned you."

"Bones, I'm not going to live through this weekend."

"Aye, sir. I know what you mean. If I have to face one more class of pimply-faced adolescents and talk about the job of engineering, I'll go berserk. Then do you know what they offer me to drink? *Ice Water!*"

"What about me and all those medical lectures? New and safer methods of proctoscopy! Boring! And touring free clinics. . . ."

Spock and Diana approached the table.

Kirk brightened. "Ms. Fallon, Spock."

Spock nodded and said, "Diana, you remember Mr. Scott."

"Yes; hello again. Captain, Doctor."

"Joining us for lunch?" Bones inquired.

"Actually we have had our lunch, at the 'New Foods and Fixings Home Economics Fair'. Excellent. Do you agree, Diana?"

"Yes. Your vegi salad looked very nice and my luncheon steak was delicious. And the fresh fruit desserts . . ."

"Captain, the reason for this intrusion is to request additional time in which to complete Diana's tour of the *Enterprise*. We spent so much of our last tour visiting that we ran out of time."

"Sure, Spock. No trouble."

Spock nodded. "Thank you, Captain. Diana, shall we go? We do not want to be late for the amateur robot-building contest."

The three men stared after them--her. She was wearing a dress that billowed softly when she walked, and a large straw hat. So feminine.

"Scotty," Kirk asked. "You've met her before, with Spock?"

"Aye, sir. Several years ago with Chris Pike. If I recall, they were having lunch at one of those outdoor cafes."

Doctor McCoy sighted Kirk as he emerged from the receiving line. He made his way through the crowd to the captain.

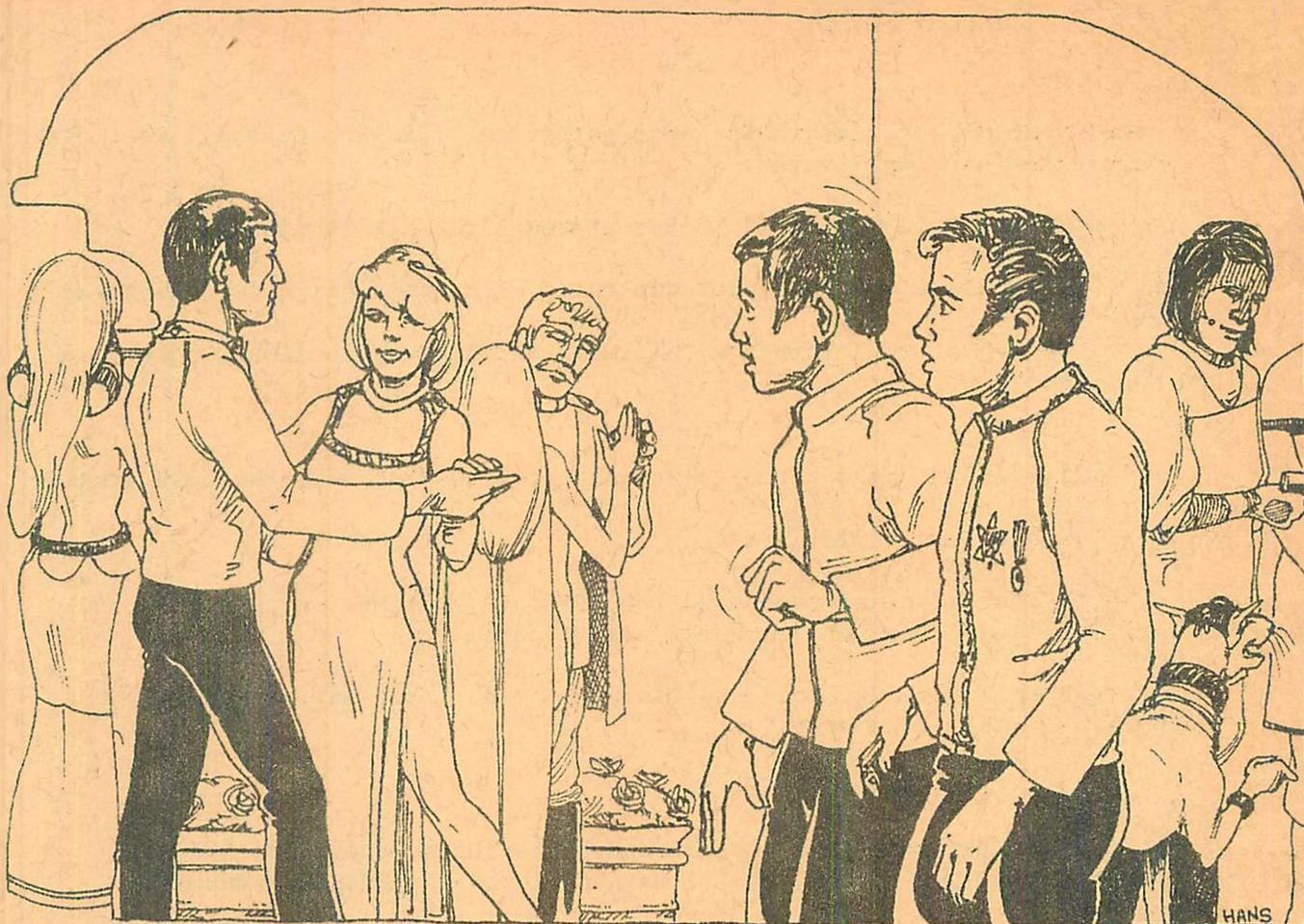
"Jim, how'd it going?"

Kirk glared at him. "Don't ask, Bones. I spent all morning at a kindergarten explaining how exciting it is to be a starship captain, all afternoon riding in a parade (McCoy noticed Kirk's very sunburnt nose) *behind* the sacred court gananzos. (McCoy winced.) Then, to top it off, the ensign I drew for tonight is so scared of me that every time I speak to her, I'm afraid she's going to burst into tears."

"That's almost as bad as what I drew. The nurse I escorted is a giggler. This way to the bar, Captain."

They were still working their way toward the bar when Kirk said, "Bones, Bones, am I really seeing that, or have my eyes gone bad?"

There on the dance floor was Spock, Spock and Diana, Spock and Diana dancing, dancing together, and doing it well.



"They see us. Here they come."

"Captain, Doctor. I trust you are enjoying yourselves."

"Yes, Spock, Ms. Fallon. Dandy, just dandy." *God, is she gorgeous,* Kirk thought. Her dress was not as revealing as most that were being worn here; was it in deference to Spock, he wondered. Vulcans didn't go in for exposing the body. But the dress did more to excite than the ones that left nothing to the imagination. She was wearing her hair up, but again, the style was soft, not severe. She had no jewelry except that one piece in her hair. Kirk moved slightly for a better look. The overall effect was stunning. *And Spock's spending the night at her place--again. . . .*

"Spock, if you're going to finish Ms. Fallon's tour, it will have to be early. We're leaving orbit at 0800 tomorrow."

"Indeed? Has there been a change in orders?"

"My orders!"

"Very well. If you will excuse us. Our host, Professor Millhouse,

seems ready to proceed to the next gathering. Perhaps we shall meet again before the evening is over."

"The cheerful Vulcan." Bones stared after him in disbelief.

"If he says one more pleasant thing, I'm gonna kill him," Kirk said.

"Jim, hang on. Tomorrow this will all be over; besides, here comes your date."

Kirk and McCoy entered the transporter room at 0800 the next morning.

"Status, Mr. Kyle."

"All present and accounted for, Captain, but Mr. Spock's guest is still aboard. They are on their way, though."

At that instant Spock and Diana entered. "You may be excused, Mr. Kyle. I shall take over."

Kyle left the room.

Diana smiled at the captain and Doctor McCoy and said, "You will be glad to know, Doctor, that I have mastered the art of transporter travel."

She and Spock talked quietly for several seconds. Then he handed her up onto the pad.

"I do hope it won't be such a long time between visits again, Spock."

He moved behind the console. "My hope also, Diana." He raised his hand in the Vulcan salute, and she did the same. "Live long and prosper, Diana. If you would convey my spect and best wishes to Harvey and the children. And thank him again for sparing you to be with me this weekend."

She nodded. "Certainly. Peace to you, Cousin. In your next tape to them, give Aunt Amanda and Uncle Sarek my regards."

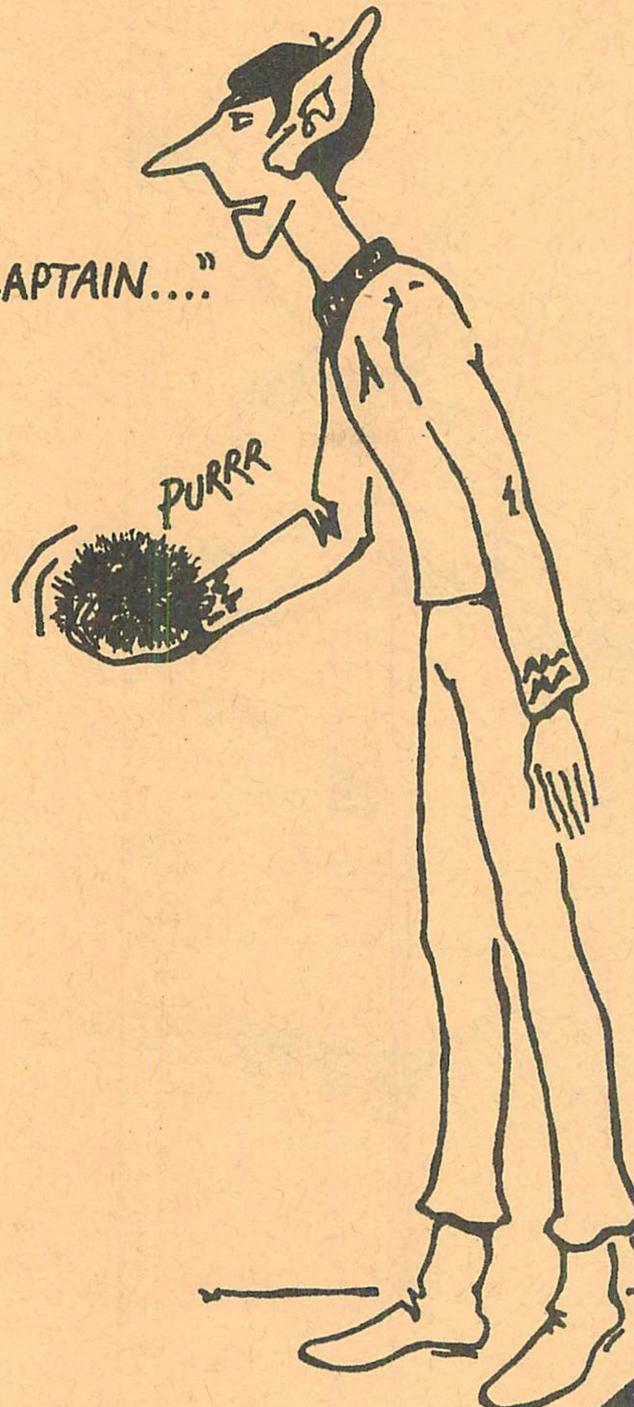
"I shall," Spock answered, and Diana Fallon shimmered away.

"Cousin! Cousin!" Kirk and McCoy said in unison.

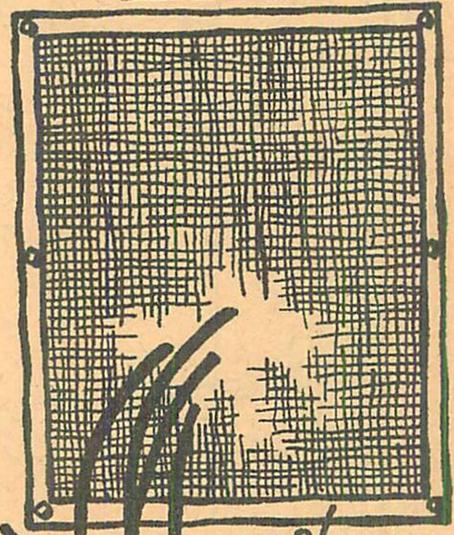
"Bones, I'm gonna kill him. . . ."

"Me first. . . ."

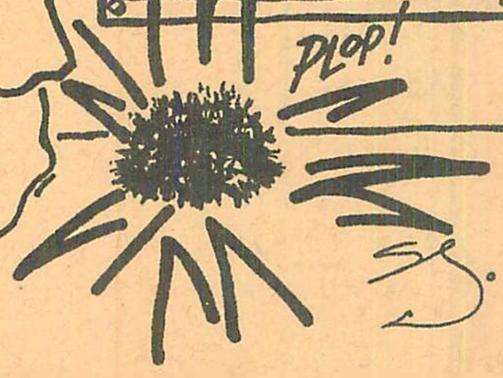
"...ER, CAPTAIN..."

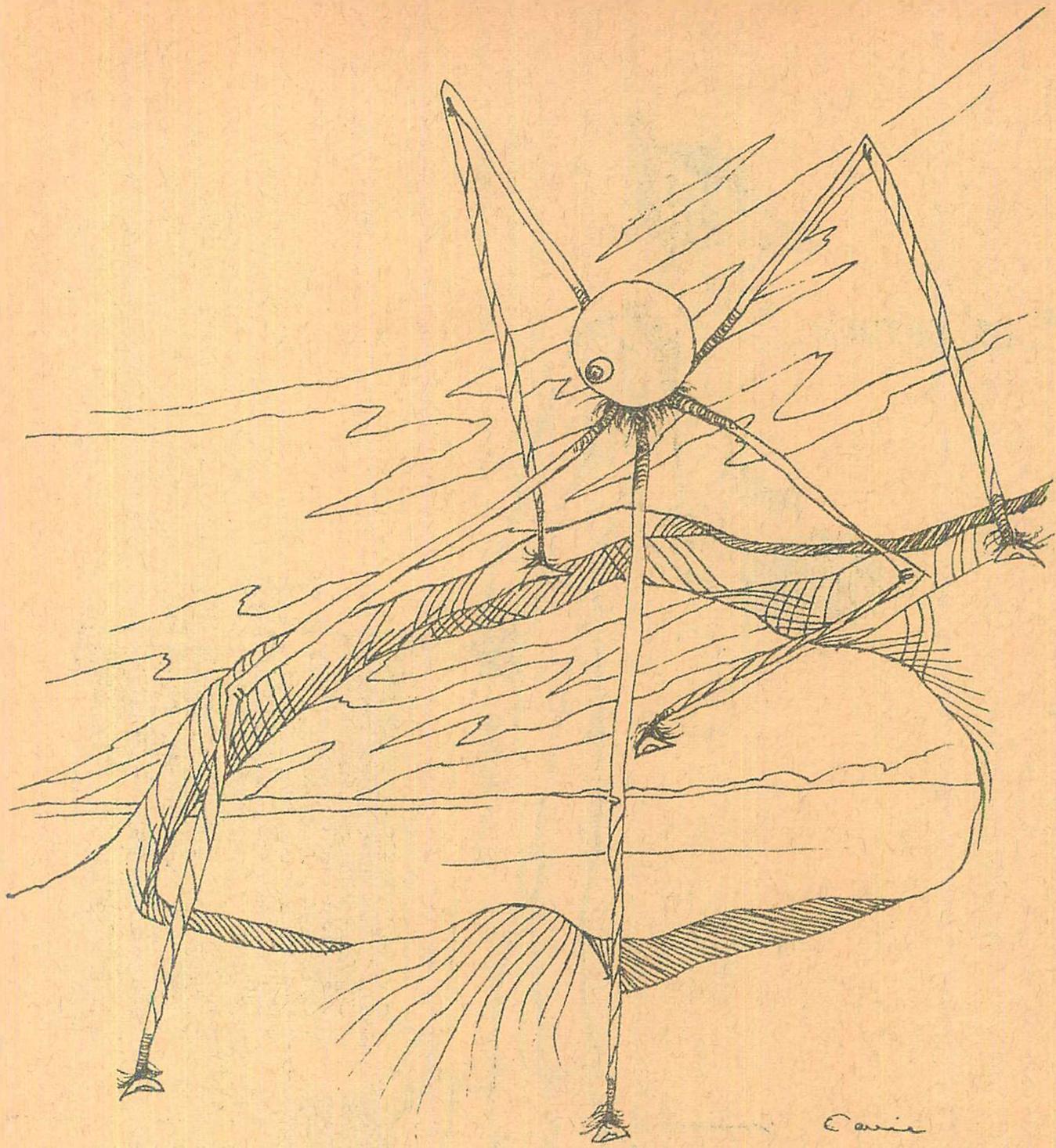


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# the resh-fish and the sage

By  
eleanor arnason

He was serving time on Beta Hydri IV, when the prison computer went crazy and began killing people. A dangerous situation! But he managed to get through the machine's defenses and turn it off. For this, they gave him a pardon.

"Just get off the planet, Blackie," the grateful warden said.

"Sure thing," said T. C. Black.

He caught the first ship going anywhere. After a while, he found himself on Tau Ceti II. It was a world of vast, desolate continents and long, narrow, shallow seas. The inhabitants -- tall, spindly folk with blue-black skins -- fished or dug up precious stones. Somehow, Blackie liked the place. He didn't know why.

After a week or so, he left the city near the spaceport. A boat took him south. It was a trip to remember. Sunlight sparkled on the water. Birds with scarlet wings soared overhead. Blackie developed a liking for native cigars and for the bitter tasting native beer. At night, he slept quietly. He remembered no dreams -- a blessing for him. His dreams were usually bad.

He got off the boat in a town on the southmost continent. He would stay a while, he thought. Learn the native language. Think about his future. He found an interpreter and hired a sleeping room.

Usually, he went to the harbor in the morning and watched the fishingboats leave. They were metal trawlers, equipped with sonar and radar. The fishermen painted eyes on their prows, so the spirit of the boat could see.



At noon, he went to a language shop. There, he studied the local language and listened to the old man Ul complain. Life was hard, he said. Modern people had stomachs made of stone. They would not buy poetry. They hurried to and fro, obsessed with time--a modern idea, which Ul held in contempt.

"Our ancestors believed in fate, not time. Listen to our language, Mr. Black. You say, 'he ran, he runs, he will run'. Is that not so?"

"Yes."

"Why? A thing is possible or impossible. It happens or it does not happen. That is what is important. In our language,

we say, 'he is running, he is probably running, he is possibly running, he is certainly not running'. Now, this information is useful. It is something we must know. But to worry about time-- What folly!" The old man waved his hands. "Who cares when a thing happens? What matters is--did it happen?"

Blackie nodded. "Sure."

In the afternoon, when the sun was hot and bright, he went to the market. There, in cool arcades, the merchants of the city sold their wares. He was especially fascinated by the jewel merchants. They were grave and courteous women, who wore grey-white robes and no jewelry at all. He spent hours in their shops, smoking native cigars and talking about their trade. Most of them spoke English.

After a month or so, one lady said, "You ask such a multitude of questions. Are you a merchant?"

"No."

"Ah. You are not a collector. You have bought nothing. Are you a thief?"

He drew on his cigar, then blew the smoke out and watched it drift upward. Why not tell the truth? If he lied, the ladies would not believe him. They would send a message to the spaceport and find out who he was. "Yes, I am," he said at last.

The lady, whose name was Seket, stared at him a moment, then poured herself a cup of tea. "Ah. Then we shall have to watch you."

"I'm taking a rest. I don't intend to do anything."

"Someday, Mr. Black, I will tell you the story of the resh-fish who took a vow of nonviolence. At the moment, I must go warn my friends about you."

Blackie grinned, then got up. "See you tomorrow."

Seket inclined her head.

He strolled through the arcade to the shop of the poet Ul. The old man held out his hand. Blackie dropped in a coin. "Tell me about the resh-fish who took a vow of nonviolence."

"The holy sage Ana, a well-known nincompoop, decided to lecture to fishes. One of the fish, a large and ferocious creature called a resh, listened and was so impressed by the sage's arguments that it took a vow of nonviolence. Unfortunately, the resh was a carnivore. For a month, it harmed nothing -- and therefore ate nothing. Then, driven crazy by hunger, it ate the holy sage. If you wish me to explain the tale or extemporize verse on the fate of the sage, you must pay me more."

"No thanks." Blackie grinned. "I know what it means. You can't escape what you are."

"Ah. But that is only the first meaning. There are seven more, each more subtle than the last."

"Un-huh. Goodby."

A week later, he saw a human walking through the market. She was tall and slender with hair the color of silver. Her face was sun-burnt red. Her eyes were dark grey, the color of a stormy sea.

She stopped when she saw him. "I thought I was the only human on this continent."

"I got here a month ago."

"Oh."

She told him her name -- Lydia Hall. She was an archeologist. There were ruins in the desert: enormous cities, built of stone. Inside the buildings were pieces of corroded metal. These, she believed, had once been machines.

"There are starmaps carved on the walls, and figures which seem to be alien. One is common: a thing like an octopus with eyestalks on top. What does that sound like? The Vegans, of course! They are a very old race, and they used to travel. These people must have met them."

Blackie nodded. "Sure."

"But no one believes me. Everyone says, these people have never been in space. It's maddening! By the way, what is your name?"

"T. C. Black."

She stared at him. "I think you are. I saw you once on Terra-- on the holovision. You were being arrested for something."

"That sounds right. I have some beer at my place. Do you want to come over?"

"You don't steal purses, do you?"

"No."

"I didn't think so."

They spent the afternoon in his sleeping room. Lydia described the ruins in greater detail. Blackie listened and drank. After a while, he made dinner: a cold fish stew. Lydia kept talking. She had found inscriptions, which no one could decipher. Some of the characters reminded her of High Vegan.

"Yeah? Do you have a place to spend the night?"

"No."

"Stay here."

She did. They made love, and Blackie slept unusually soundly. In the morning, he woke and found her gone. His money was gone, too--all of it: the native coins, the Terran credit card, and the two blue-white diamonds, that he carried in a compartment in his electric toothbrush. He didn't mind losing the credit card. He couldn't use it except at the spaceport, and Lydia couldn't use it anywhere. She didn't know his code number. No machine would accept the card without the proper code. But he was furious about losing the diamonds.

He made himself a pot of tea, then sat and drank it. Okay, he thought. What were the options? He could process Lydia, which sounded appealing. But first he had to find her. How? Ten t one, she was half-way across the continent. He had no vehicle and no way to hire one. He could steal one, of course. But he didn't want to. He remembered the story of the resh-fish. He would prove these people wrong, he decided. He would stop being a thief. For a while, at least. He decided to go see Seket.

"Ah. Mr. Black," she said. "Our chamber of commerce sent a message to the spaceport. They know you there. In fact, you are notorious."

"Yeah? We can talk about that later. Tell me about Lydia Hall."

"She is a crazy woman. She goes into the desert and looks at scratches on rocks and claims they are starmaps. I tell you this in confidence. I do not wish to be known as a malicious gossip."

Blackie got out a cigar and lit it. "She's more than crazy. She's a criminal. She robbed me last night."

"Ah. This is bad news. A thief without money is a thief about to steal."

"No. I told you I was taking a rest. I'm not ready to go back to stealing. But I need money. Where can I get a job?"

"Do not be absurd, Mr. Black. Who would hire a thief? Let me give you some money. I will pay your fare back to Tau Ceti City."

He thought a moment, then shook his head. "No. I want to go after Lydia Hall."

"She has probably gone back to her ruins." Seket sat without moving for a while. At last, she said, "I cannot loan you a tractor. They cost too much. I cannot trust you."

"Okay. Can you find me a job?"

"No. I am sorry, Mr. Black."

He left and went down to the harbor. The foreman at the shipyard would not hire him. He used the verb form that meant 'certainly not', and then he said a word Blackie didn't recognize.

"What?"

The man repeated the word.

"I do not understand."

The man grabbed Blackie's arm and pulled off the bracelet. "You do this."

"Steal," Blackie said in English. "Word gets around." He took back his bracelet. It was gold. Maybe Seket would buy it, he thought.

It took him eight days to find a job. He



lived on the money from the bracelet. He was being crazy, he knew. A sane man would steal a tractor and go after Lydia Hall.

By the middle of the eighth day, he was ready to admit defeat. Tomorrow, he would go to Seket and ask her for a ticket to Tau Ceti City. He spent the last of his money on a jug of beer.

In the evening, when he was good and drunk, Ul came to see him.

"Yeah?" Blackie said.

"My mother's sister--may her fate be good!--is willing to offer you a job."

"Yeah?" Blackie pushed his hair back, then rubbed his forehead. He was dizzy, and Ul was out of focus. "Pull up a mat. Sit down."

"Thank you." Ul sat down on the floor. "She is a building contractor, Mr. Black, and she has agreed to repair the seawall at the entrance to the harbor. A disagreeable job. No one wants to do it. Therefore, she is willing to hire you. But she will keep both eyes well opened when you are around. So she has told me. Be warned. Try nothing."

"Okay." Blackie rubbed the back of his neck. "I can't start tomorrow. I'm going to wake up sick. Is the day after tomorrow okay?"

"Yes," said Ul. He stood up. "Goodbye."

Blackie spent most of the day sleeping. A good idea. He was almost out of food. If he slept, he didn't eat. Late in the afternoon, he made a sandwich: flat bread and pickled fish. He ate it and finished off the beer. Then he went walking along the harbor. The sun was setting. The fishingboats came in. They were dark silhouettes against the orange sky. He felt an odd contentment. He didn't know why. Surely there was a poem which expressed his present mood. He couldn't think of it.

The next day, he went to meet the building contractor. She was an extremely old lady, bent and wrinkled, with bristly, blue-grey hair. She stared at Blackie for a while, then said, "Get on the boat. But keep your hands in your pockets. Touch nothing. I will be watching you."

Why was he doing this? he wondered as he stepped on board. Was he seriously crazy?

The other workmen arrived. They looked solid and stupid. Their clothes were badly worn. Losers, every one. The boat started across the harbor. Ahead of them was the seawall: built of large blocks of grey-white stone. It went halfway across the harbor entrance. When they were closer, Blackie saw gaps in the wall, where blocks had fallen out. In one place, there were several blocks gone, and the

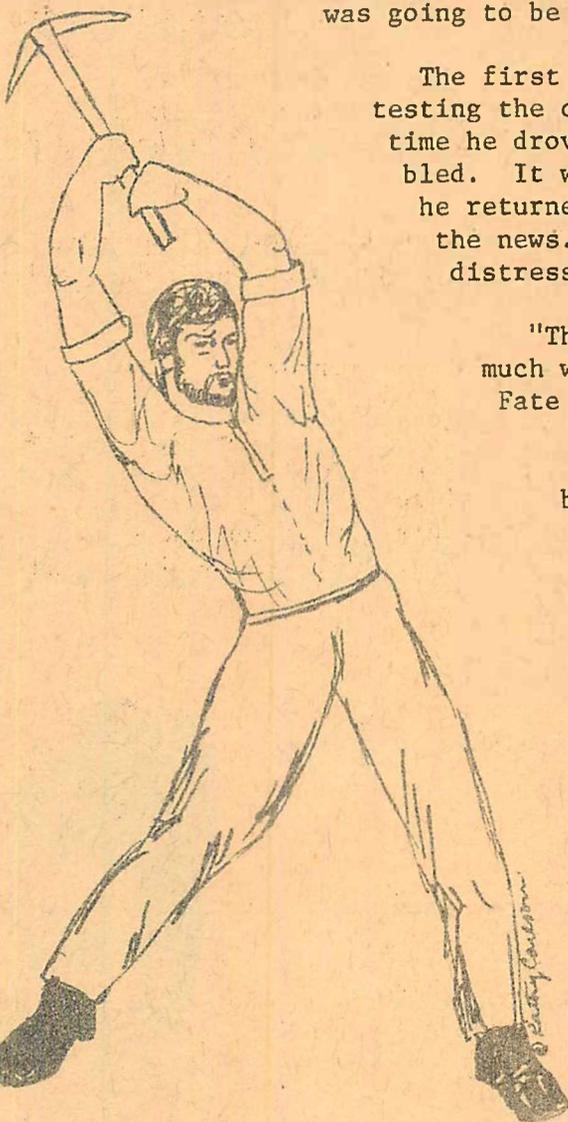
sea washed through. *Ul was right*, he thought. This was going to be a disagreeable job.

The first day, he went along the seawall, testing the cement between the blocks. Every time he drove the pick in, the damn stuff crumbled. It was rotten everywhere. At twilight, he returned to the boat. He told his boss the news. She whistled, which was a sign of distress.

"The other men say the same thing. So much work! I shall not make a profit. Fate is hard on me."

Well, he didn't have to worry about being laid off for lack of work. He got out his last cigar and lit it. The boat started back to shore.

After that, the days blurred together. It was late summer. The sky was always clear. The sun burned overhead, and the sea was ablaze with sunlight. He worked with a pick or a jackhammer, digging out the old cement. It was a terrible job. His back hurt. His hands got blistered. The glare off the water was almost unbearable. And he didn't like the sound of the jackhammers--or the feel of them, for that matter. Each day, he asked himself, *Why?* This behavior was not typical. All the tests ever



done on him indicated that he had the classic criminal personality. He could not tolerate frustration or defer gratification.

"You see things out of context," one patcher said. "For you, everything exists by itself--like a diamond ring found on an empty beach. Mine, you think. You reach out and grab it."

*Oh yeah?* Blackie thought. *Explain this, patcher. Where is the gratification here?*

Every day, before he left the boat, his boss counted her tools. Then she stuck her hand in her pocket and fingered the coins she kept there. At last, she nodded, took out a coin and paid him. He bought food and beer on the way home. In his room, he ate, then got drunk. It was a dull life, but he didn't really mind it. Beer and exhaustion kept him from thinking, which was perfectly okay. He had done too much thinking

over the years. And this life had its pleasures: the taste of the first beer of the day, for example, or the sense of doing something well. He was the one who kept the cement mixer going. It wasn't easy. The thing had an ancient engine.

*Well, Seket, what about the resh-fish? Two months had gone by, and he hadn't bit anyone. He had kept his promise--his vow--whatever it was.*

One day, it rained. His boss said. "No work. Look at the waves out there. You would all be washed away. Ah! The sour taste of fate! I am already behind schedule."

He wandered through the market. Outside the mirror shop, he stopped. There was a mirror on display. He looked at himself. He was a lot thinner now. His face was sunburnt, and his hair was down to his shoulders. It seemed to him there were new lines around his mouth. His clothes were a wreck: stiff with salt, sunbleached, torn. He would have to buy new clothes soon. He grinned at his reflection and went on. As he turned a corner, he met Lydia Hall. He grabbed her shoulders and slammed her against the nearest wall.

"You!" she said. "What are you doing here?"

"Lady, you took all my money. I couldn't afford to leave."

"But Seket. . . ."

"What?" He let go of her for a moment, then grabbed hold again. "Seket what?"

"I don't think I should talk to you. Let me go."

He was beginning to get seriously angry. He moved one hand to her throat, and she shrieked.

"At last, Mr. Black. You reveal your nature."

It was Seket, of course. She stood a few meters away. Her dark hands were clasped in front of her. The hood of her robe was up. It shadowed her face. He glanced at her, then let go of Lydia.

Lydia said, "You told me you gave him money. You said he was gone."

"I have never been truthful. I assume, Miz Hall, that you will complain to the mag-



istrate in charge of public conduct. Mr. Black has behaved badly in a public place. We all saw him."

"She robbed me!"

"Is that so? How do we know that? You never complained to anyone. Besides, the property of a thief is stolen property. One cannot steal what is stolen, any more than one can kill what is already dead."

"That is so," a man said. Blackie looked at him. It was the mirror maker, holding a piece of glass.

Blackie looked to Seket. "What did you do? Call Lydia and tell her it was safe to come in?"

"No. I sent a messenger. As I expected, she was at the ruins. She is obsessed. But that is her nature--just as it is your nature to steal and my nature to manipulate. We must accept what we are, Mr. Black. Surely you cannot be happy, working for old Hesha. No one ever is. I will give you the money to get to Tau Ceti City. Take it, please. Go away. You make us uneasy. It is a form of madness to deny what you are. Think of the resh-fish. It was clearly crazy. Some people say that it died of indigestion, after eating the holy sage."

Blackie sighed. "Okay. I'll go."

"Excellent. I am sure that Miz Hall will forget her complaint." She looked at Lydia, who nodded. "Excellent. Come to my shop, Mr. Black. I will get the money."

He followed her through the arcade. It was still raining. Puddles of water shone in the street. Gusts of wind blew raindrops in. *Oh well*, he thought. *Seket was probably right.*

They entered her shop. She went into the back room. Blackie glanced around. He was alone. In front of him was a case, full of jewels. Most of them were nightstones, set in silver or white gold. They glittered darkly. He considered opening the case. But he had no tools. Besides, he was better with computers than with locks. He sat down and waited.

"I see that you have resisted temptation," Seket said when she came back. She counted out the omney, then put it in a bag.

Blackie took it.

"And this, Mr. Black." She held out his credit card. "It was found."

"Sure." Blackie stuck it in his pocket. "You thought I would get angry when I saw Lydia."

"I ~~as~~ not certain. But I did not think you would let her go. It seemed worth a try. I had to do something, Mr. Black. I have not slept

well, since I learned of your reputation. The boat will be here in two days. Please leave on it."

"Did you organize the whole operation?"

"I do not understand."

"Did you tell Lydia to rob me? Was it your idea all along?"

"No. She did that on her own. She is almost out of money, and she does not want to leave the ruins. As I said before, she is crazy. There is nothing in the desert worth looking at."

He went to the door, then turned and looked back. "I didn't steal anything, while I was here. You tricked me into committing assault. But I didn't steal."

She answered in her own language, using the verb form that meant absolute certainty. "You will steal again. You must."

He took the boat two days later. It was raining: a fine, misty drizzle. Blackie stayed on deck until the boat was out of the harbor. They passed close to the seawall. Old Hesha's boat was beside it, and he saw men clambering over the stones. *Things could be worse*, he thought. *He could be out there with a jackhammer.* He went inside.

Half a year later, on Terra, he told the story to Loy Pren, an old friend of his, who was a Vegan and a thief. They were in a bar in Old New York: a dark, warm place that smelled of sawdust. Pren always knew how to pick bars. When he was done talking, Blackie glanced across the table. Pren--who looked something like a fat, pink octopus--raised a couple of eyestalks and looked around. "An edifying tale, pal. Can you see a waiter?"

"No."

"I am extremely out of beer. A strange lot, the Tau Cetians. We used to run into them, back when we traveled between the stars. They built ships that looked like pomegranates turned inside out. Or so I have been told. It was before my time. Way back. Nine millennia. Ten millennia. Something like that. Ah! Waiter!" Pren waved three or four tentacles.

"Lydia was right?"

"Certainly. Another round, if you please--or even if you don't please."

The waiter nodded and left.

Pren continued. "In a sense, they're right about time. It really doesn't exist, when you exceed the speed of light. Space doesn't really exist either. Nor does mass. But probability ye shall always have with ye."

The waiter brought the beer. Pren drank. "The trouble with the Tau Cetians is--they generalize. They like rules that work everywhere, no matter what. It's a harmless vice, so long as you live in a primitive society. But starfarers have to take things as they come. There is a very old Vegan story, which illustrates this point. It's called 'The Philosopher, the Foll, and the Starship Captain'."

"I don't want to hear it."

"Very well. But you don't know what you're missing."

"I can guess. Your stories never make sense."

"Exactly. In any case, the Tau Cetians couldn't cope with the psychic problems of star travel. Going back and forth between time and non-time. Having a body and then not having a body. Things like that. Many people find them unnerving. In the end, they gave up and went home and tried to forget the whole experience. I gather that they have succeeded. Waiter! More beer!"

Blackie got out a cigar and lit it. "I feel I owe that lady an apology. I thought she was crazy."

"Lydia Hall? Don't blame yourself. She is a notorious crackpot, just as you are a notorious thief. All intelligent species have a tendency to generalize and jump to conclusions. Except the Vegans, of course. We have outgrown it. So will you Terries--in time. Or do I mean, in all probability?"



## More Lines We'd Like to Hear

by

Elizabeth Carrie

Spock: "These restraints will no longer be necessary. Nor will your sedatives, Doctor."

McCoy: "That's what you said last time. And would you please explain where you keep finding splinters on a starship?"

Chekov: "You never felt as I did."

Spock: "You don't really understand about Vulcans, do you, Ensign?"

Romulan Commander:

"Then by your own standards of normality, this man is not fully competent."

McCoy: "No--but that hasn't made any difference so far."

Kirk: "Thanks a heap."

McCoy: "Jim, I don't think there's anyone in there."

Kirk: "But it's so *dark*. Please--just look in the closet."

McCoy: "Jim, Spock is contaminating this boy."

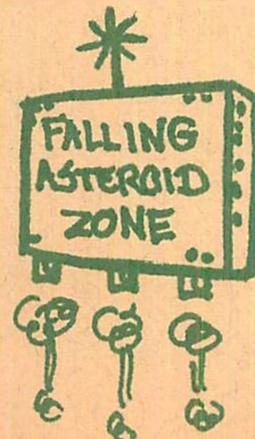
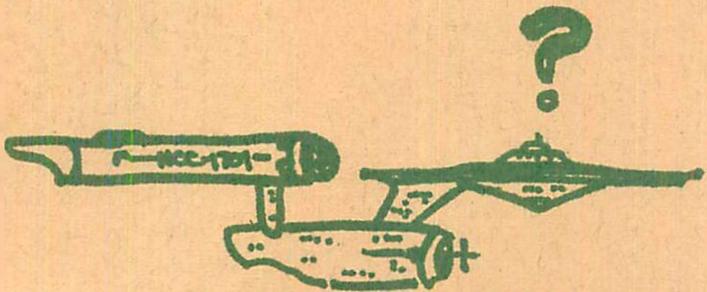
Kirk: "You mean because he's turning green?"

Spock: "I don't know how much longer I can hold out against the pain."

McCoy: "All you have to do is order boots that fit."

McCoy: "It is a pity brief blindness did not increase your appreciation of beauty."

Spock: "No matter who many times I close my eyes, it will still be the same crummy piece of art. You were taken, sucker."





# MATAZELOFF

by

Vida Hull

I like Chaim, I really do. And I like tradition . . . as long as it's sensible. I mean, this is the twenty-third century, isn't it? And in all that time we have made a few changes. Some of us have. Not Chaim Levine. Not Bernie Goldstein either, may he rest in peace.

Which was nice. I mean, the Holy One, blessed be His name, gave us lots of ways to worship Him. Or maybe men figured out a lot of ways to worship . . . and if one of them doesn't grab you, there's always another way. Or maybe you don't believe in God? Well, that's your right. After all, didn't one of our rabbis portray God as saying, "If only they would forsake Me, but keep My Torah!"? So if you live justly, I should argue with you? How does Commander Spock say it? "Infinite diversity in infinite combinations." Now there's a Vulcanism to live by!

Chaim's a decent man, a fine officer, a good engineer, and--Lord knows--a pious Jew. Very pious, very orthodox; and if I didn't have so much respect for tradition, I'd have pulled his forelock and told him to take a walk outside the *Enterprise* without a life support belt. But I'm pious in my own way, and I have a lot of respect for tradition, and that's why I spent ten hours of my off-duty time trying to find a solution that would satisfy Lieutenant Levine.

Not that I'm complaining! Everything worked out for the best, and David's even taken to calling me "Reb Rachel." It's a joke. I've never seen the inside of a *yeshiva* and microbiology, not religion, is my specialty; but I am sort of proud, all the same. But if Chaim hadn't been so stubborn, we'd all have been saved a lot of trouble.

It started after Bernie Goldstein was killed in the Klingon surprise attack over Canopus IV. We were going to sit *shiva*, as best we could given our starship duties, and recite *Kaddish* for him. Bernie would have appreciated it. Even I would have appreciated it. I told you I like tradition.

But you need a *minyan*, a quorum of ten Jews, for the prayer. And that was the problem. Oh, we had ten . . . but not ten that Chaim would accept. I know it's a little late to complain, but couldn't Abraham have asked God to spare Sodom and Gommorah for only nine good men . . . or maybe ten virtuous sapient beings? Maybe then we wouldn't have had the problem.

Anyway, the three of us--Chaim Levine, David Abrams, and me, Rachel O'Brien--were sitting around the rec room discussing the problem. What? How'd a good Jewish girl get a name like O'Brien? You've heard that Jews don't proselyte, and you can't figure it out? Well, they did--until about the fifth century C. E., when it became illegal. I mean, you don't make a law about something that's not going on. But that didn't stop conversions altogether. So sometime before the Eugenics Wars, there was this Irishman who started studying Judaism. The local rabbi discouraged him on at least three separate occasions--as he's supposed to--but O'Brien persisted, and today there's a whole passel of Jewish O'Briens.

So they three of us were trying to solve the problem. Personally, I thought we could have used a little Vulcan logic, but David said the situation didn't have its roots in logic, so a lot of good logic would have done!

David's a dear, but he's as stubborn as Chaim . . . and nobody wears Chaim down when he's made up his mind. I wish I could forget that conversation.

"You couldn't make an exception just this once?" David pleaded.

Engineer Levine looked offended. "Tradition is tradition. Law is law. Nothing personal, Rachel."

"I know, Chaim." I'm always reasonable, but I let out a great sigh just to let him know I was hurt. "We'll just have to find another man, David."

"And where are we going to find him, I'd like to know? When Joseph was transferred to the *Yorktown* I knew we were in trouble."

"That still left ten," commented Chaim.

"Eleven," I corrected sweetly.

"You know what I mean."

It wasn't worth arguing about anymore so I just nodded. I was tired. The argument had gone on long enough.

David had enough energy to continue, however. "Look, Chaim, I understand your feelings, I respect your devotion to tradition; but Ensign Goldstein is dead, we can't say *Kaddish* without a *minyan*, and there is nothing so terrible about counting Rachel as number ten. Jews have been doing it for centuries."

"*Goyisch* Reformers," muttered Levine. He didn't mean it. He just says things like that when he's upset. Actually, he's glad we're here.

Can you imagine how he'd feel on an Andorian starship? Oh, there are Jews on Andoria--but not many; and if Chaim thinks I'm a little radical, can you imagine how an Andorian Revolutionary Constructionist would seem to him? We won't discuss it.

I know Chaim doesn't mean it, but his Hebrewer-than-thou moods always rile David. He grinds his teeth. Me, I just chuckle.

"It's okay, David," I told him. "Goldstein would have felt the same way. Klingons just have no respect for piety." I winked at Chaim. He ignored me.

"Which doesn't solve the problem. If Chaim won't accept nine men and one woman as a *minyan*, how do we say *Kaddish* for Goldstein?"

"You weren't listening. We have to find another man."

"You know there's not another Jew aboard the *Enterprise*."

"Maybe so, maybe not. Any law says he has to be a pious Jew?"

"No," said Chaim.

"Or even a practicing Jew?"

Chaim shifted uncomfortably in his seat. He can't stand the thought of a secular Jew. He pretends they don't exist. Finally, he muttered, "For a *minyan*, a Jew's a Jew . . . as long as he's male."

"So I'll find one. You two have to be on duty in five minutes."

I thought it would be as easy as programming the computer to excuse Chaim from duty on Sabbath. It wasn't. Oh, I found the personnel officer easily enough, but it seems there's a regulation against giving out information concerning species, religion, color, or planetary origin. (A big help! Maybe she thinks I'll lead a pogrom against my own people? A pogrom against the Klingons I should lead!) So I explained again and I pleaded again, and she said that she sympathized but regulations were regulations and what's Lieutenant Levine got against women and she's really sorry but. . . . Finally, she let it slip.

"I can't give out that information without Captain Kirk's approval."

That was the easy part. Not that an ensign microbiologist has immediate access to the captain, but Uhura can always be counted on to do a favor for a friend. I talked to Uhura, Uhura talked to the captain, the captain talked to me, and I got to talk with the appropriate computer memory banks.

The computer talked back. It gave me the names of ten crewmembers--myself included--who cited Judaism as a religion. So tell me something I don't know already.

But I wasn't beaten. Rachel Maccabee maybe? I came back fighting. Anyone with a Jewish mother is considered Jewish, so. . . . A word of advice: never ask a starship computer to list Jewish mothers. They aren't programmed for it. The poor thing had a mechanical nervous breakdown.

So I had to ask Mr. Spock for help. After all, who knows more about computers? He was quite intrigued with the problem. . . . an interesting if illogical human custom.

"Not just human. There are blue Jews on Andoria and Aldebaran and brown, pillow-shaped Jews with tentacles on Rigel V and eleven-armed Jews from Zsouchmuhn."

"Fascinating."

You can always count on Mr. Spock. A real *mensch*! He cured the computer's neurosis in nothing flat, but even he couldn't coax information out of a computer that hadn't been programmed in.

So maybe I'm not a Maccabee. I gave up. I was going to tell Chaim that he should either count himself twice for extra orthodoxy or admit that God cares more for the heart than for quantity. Enough's enough! While Chaim is fooling with anti-matter reactors or some such thing, I'm looking for Jewish mothers in a starship computer. Let Chaim make a fool of himself in front of the Vulcan Science Officer. I have to work with Mr. Spock. Wasn't it Hillel who said, "If I'm not for myself, who is?" I know, I know. He also said, "If I'm only for myself, what am I?" I really did want to solve Chaim's problem. For myself--or rather for Bernie--I'd have said *Kaddish* alone. Under the circumstances, the Most High should object? But *Chaim* objected.

But what more could I do? Not much.

"I really appreciate your efforts, Mr. Spock, but I can't think of another question to ask."

"If, upon further reflection, you arrive at a new approach, I shall be available for further assistance."

"Thanks. I'll try to come up with something. Oh, Mr. Spock, I've been meaning to congratulate you on the citation from the Vulcan Science Academy. *Mazel tov!*"

Such a look he gave me! Both his eyebrows shot up. Then he gave me the kind of penetrating Vulcan stare that could x-ray neutronium.

"I was not aware that you spoke Vulcan."

"Vulcan! I'm ashamed to say I don't know a word."

"But you just said. . . . Perhaps I was mistaken."

"What did I say? If I'm speaking Vulcan, I want to be the first to know."

נילם ?



"I must have misunderstood. I thought you were mispronouncing an ancient Vulcan expression of congratulations: *Mat-zeloff*."

"*Mat-zel-off*?" I repeated it slowly.

"Affirmative."

"What does it mean?"

"Literally?"

"Yes."

"It presumably alludes to the fortuitous alignment of heavenly bodies. I am at a loss to explain the etymology of the phrase. To the best of my knowledge Vulcans have never--not even prior to the time of Surak--believed in astrological influence on the behavior of sapient beings."

"*Matzeloff* means 'lucky star'?"

"A Terran approximation."

While I was digesting that, Mr. Spock raised his hand in the Vulcan salute as a farewell gesture, and I knew I had something. The Vulcan salute goes like this: Raise your right hand, palm forward, thumb outstretched; press your first and second fingers together and your third and fourth fingers together. Double it. If you don't know what that means, you are either abysmally lacking in curiosity or you slept through Yom Kippur.

"Peace and long life," Mr. Spock said formally. I know, he's always formal.

I had to ask. "Mr. Spock, how do you say 'Peace' in Vulcan?"

He gave me that quizzical look which he reserves for us illogical creatures and said, "*Shay-lom*."

"*Shay-lom*?"

"Mr. Spock, it's a joy to work with you. May your years be as Methusaleh's, your descendants as Abraham's, your wisdom exceeding Solomon's. If there isn't a special blessing for Vulcans, I'll make one."

"Indeed!"

After explaining that I might very well need his assistance later, I spent the afternoon at the computer console, researching Vulcan history, language, rituals, philosophy *et al*. Or rather, I asked the questions: the computer isolated relationships. Maybe I should have been an anthropologist . . . comparative civilizations, no less.

Then I took my findings to Chaim and David. I showed them all the evidence: the linguistic parallels, the similarity of the Vulcan alphabet and sentence structure to biblical Hebrew, the traces of analogous ceremonies and practices, philosophic positions such as respect for life, for divergent opinions, for justice and liberty, for learning and study, and a deep and abiding commitment to peace. The Vulcans seem to have found peace, too. On Vulcan a man can truly sit under his fig tree (his *d'terbin* tree?) and not be afraid. Maybe Surak was their Messiah? Who am I to say. The evidence was impressive. Even Chaim admitted that.

"So how do you explain it?" he asked.

"How should I know? Maybe they're one of the ten lost tribes of Israel. Maybe when Elijah transported up in the fiery chariot he went straight to Vulcan. Maybe Moses was an interplanetary emissary from Vulcan. All I know is that the parallels are too strong to be mere coincidence. Even if the memory of the exact relationship died out long ago, it can't be disregarded."

"You're trying to tell me that Vulcans are Hebrews?" asked Chaim.

"I would never try to tell you anything. Make your own evaluation. I'm just presenting evidence."

Chaim wrinkled his brows and pulled his forelock. "Well," he said reluctantly, "it does look pretty convincing . . . although I don't think anybody knows much about Vulcan religion."

I opened my eyes wide and said innocently, "You said he didn't have to be *practicing* . . . just male."

"It's not that," said Chaim. "There's one other thing I have to know."

"So?"

"Sign of the covenant. Did he have a *brit*? Is he circumcized?"

I just stared at Chaim. I mean, I should have anticipated the question. But why ask me? I should know?



"Chaim, if you think I'm going to walk up to Mr. Spock and ask him *that*. . . ."

It was Chaim's turn to play innocent. "Well, you have connections with the medical staff. You could always ask Christine Chapel to check the medical records."

"Do you want to break up a beautiful friendship? I ask Christine that, and she's liable to sprinkle Rigellian fever bacilli on my bagels and hide the ryetalin supplies."

Actually, I sympathize with Christine's affection for Mr. Spock. I mean, he's a terrific person, and who needs emotion? It's only transitory anyway. A pretty yeoman walks by and *pfff!* So much for emotion. But there are some things one does not say to Christine and---though I've never tried it---I'm sure that is one of them.

Chaim left. We decided that *he* could consult Dr. McCoy about the state of Spock's anatomical member if he was that concerned. After all, it isn't the *brit* that makes the Jew. It's being born (or converted, as in the case of *Zayde* O'Brien). I was feeling pretty self-satisfied. I'd actually found a solution which seemed to content Chaim. But pride goes before a fall.

David hadn't said a word through the whole thing. He just sat there.

"What's the matter, David? Chaim's convinced. And as far as you, I, and the rest of the group are concerned, we're a *minyán* even without a Vulcan."

David shook his head. He looked at me with woebegone eyes. "It won't work, Rachel."

"Why not?"

"You and Chaim haven't been on the *Enterprise* as long as I have."

"No, only a few months. Why?"

"I was here back on stardate 3842 when Spock's parents were on board."

"So?"

"Rachel, Spock's only half-Vulcan."

I could see it coming. "Which half?" I asked weakly.

"His mother's human."

"Is she. . . ?"

"She isn't."

"Oy vey!" I know it's an antique expression, but what more could I say? It had been so beautiful. If Vulcans were Jews and Spock was a Vulcan, we had our orthodox *minyan*. He didn't have to participate, just be there. He could pretend he was doing research on alien cultures or whatever. But if his mother wasn't Vulcan. . . . The child of a Jewish mother is a Jew, but--by rabbinical law--the child of a Jewish father and a gentile mother is not.

"Oy vey," I said again.

"There must be a solution," said David. "We aren't the only starship in the fleet with less than ten male Jews."

"Maybe we'll be at Starbase Six for Bernie's *yahrzeit*. Commodore Rabinowitz is there."

"Aren't there exceptions to the ten men rule . . . for emergencies? What did the computer say?"

"A Talmudic computer we've got now." But I told him, "One slave and nine men a *minyan* make, or one boy and nine men."

"Starfleet won't recruit anyone under thirteen."

"So complain to the Chief of Staff."

"Maybe we shouldn't tell Chaim. We'd still have our ten."

"Some Jew you are . . . bearing false witness."

"Just keeping my mouth shut. Still, you're right. He'd find out sooner or later. Then he'd never trust us. He'd turn his back on us for good, and we'd never find a *minyan* for congressional worship."

Something jogged in my brain: the picture of Chaim standing there with back turned to the other nine of us.

"That's it!" I cried.

"What's it?"

"It's simple. With Chaim and me and the other eight we've got a *minyan*, right?"

"But if Chaim won't accept you. . . ."

"Chaim doesn't have to *participate*; he just has to *be* there. He can turn his back to us to show he doesn't approve, but with his presence it's still a *minyan* for us. We can say *Kaddish* for Bernie, and when we get to a starbase, we can find another man and do it Chaim's way."

"Bernie would have liked that."

"Alevasholem."

Chaim wasn't hard to convince. He's a good man at heart. Even Mr. Spock sat in. Insatiable Vulcan curiosity and all that. The anthropology section is fascinated with the data on Vulcans, and they keep asking me to comment on new hypotheses. So what am I, a rabbi already?

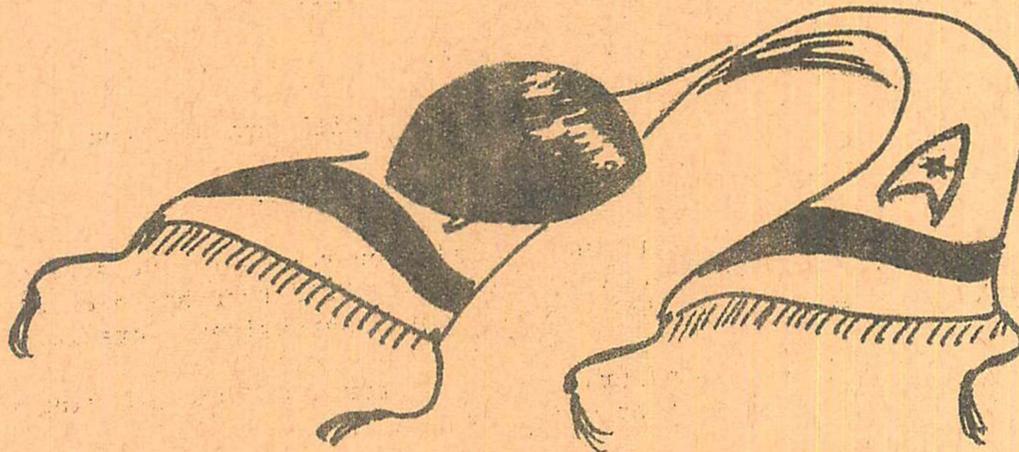
Still, it's a shame about Spock. He would have made a *shayner Yid*, a beautiful Jew! But who knows?

David's the second shift navigator. When he came on duty last night, he went to check the last computer readouts. You'd never guess. Spock had hooked the Universal Translator into the comparative religion memory banks and was studying Talmud in Vulcan translation.

Wonder what he thinks of Talmudic logic.

\* \* \*

The author's thanks to Rabbi Max Hausen of Main Line Reform Temple for the solution to Chaim's problem.



#### NASTY KLINGON SAYINGS

quoted by David Lubkin

"A penny saved is worth stealing."

"Do unto others."

"Reason is the last refuge of the incompetent."

"Snitching a dime saves time."

"If at first you don't succeed--try blackmail."

*In The Time Of The First Beginnings:*

The Bronze Age on Vulcan

by

Sandra Wise

The Bronze Age on Vulcan lasted from approximately 10,000 to 7,000 BR. 1.

The hot, dry climate which makes Vulcan an archeologists' paradise has preserved enough artifacts from this era to permit us to make an outline of the culture, albeit a sketchy one.

The ancient legend tells how metal-working was discovered by the volcano-god Apu ("Fire") when he placed a flat piece of copper ore in the fire in order to cook *ruppoks* 2. and discovered that the heated stone wept tears of pure copper.

There is no reason to believe that some such incident did not actually happen, although of course no dietary need have been involved.

From working copper, it was only a short step to discovering that when the copper was mixed with tin, the resulting alloy was harder than either of its components, and far superior to the flint, chert, and obsidian weapons and tools previously used.

At the start of the Bronze Age, most Vulcans were still nomadic hunters and food-gatherers. At some point, they domesticated various types of animal, the most important of which were the *sehlat* and the *om-jetah*, and became herdsmen, although they remained semi-nomadic.

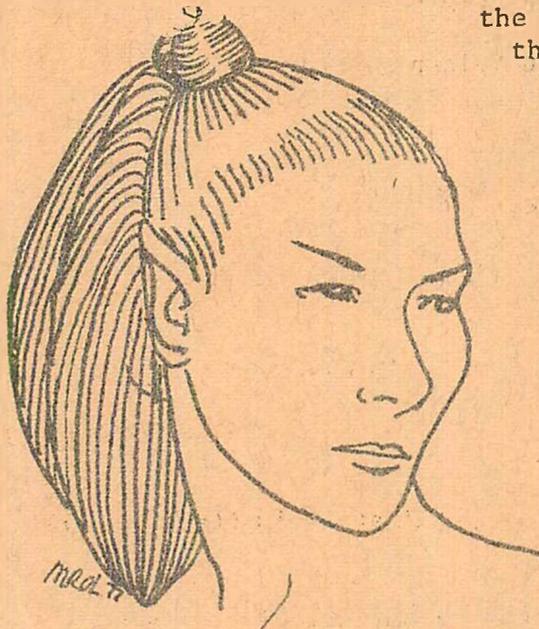
Finally, they established permanent settlements and began growing much of their food.

Naturally, the three stages of development did not follow each other in this neat, precise fashion. The hunters had already domesticated the *sehlat*; the farmers still supplemented their diet by hunting, just as

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1. BR: Before the Reform, which took place some 2,000 Standrad years ago.

2. *ruppok*: a highly nutritious tuber which is a staple food of Vulcan.



the hunters and herdsmen supplemented theirs by gathering vegetable foods. The social development of ancient Vulcan was not a clear stream flowing toward the great sea of Galactic Civilization, but a muddy, meandering brook which doubled back on itself any number of times. In this, it resembled every other civilization known to the Federation.

### TRIBAL GOVERNMENT

The basic social structure of Bronze Age Vulcan was the tribe. These tribes were never very large. Various factors (the low birth rate, natural enemies, intertribal wars) conspired to keep numbers down. It is estimated that the average tribe consisted of a hundred and twenty individuals, of whom no more than forty to fifty would be males of warrior age.

Therefore, when the poet of "The War of the Well" laments "so many warriors dead", it is not merely poetic hyperbole.<sup>3</sup> Although the casualties numbered eleven, the tribe had lost up to a quarter of its fighting men, and was correspondingly weakened.

The tribe was ruled by the Men's Council, headed by the Chief, and the Women's Council, headed by the Wise Woman. No important action could be taken without the consent of both councils.

### THE CHIEF

The Chieftainship was elective rather than hereditary, and the Chief could be deposed at any time if the councillors decreed it.

In theory, the Chief was both the mightiest warrior and the wisest man in the tribe. Such paragons must have been rare, however, and in practice, brains probably had a slight edge over brawn. One of the greatest Chieftains, the legendary Sessek the Short, seems to have been a dwarf. It is said that the top of his head only came to an ordinary man's belt.

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3. "The War of the Well; a Vulcan elegy", translated by Sandra Wise. *Masiform D #8*, February 15, 1979, p. 66 ff.

## THE WISE WOMAN

The tribal Wise Woman combined the functions of Healer, Historian, and Seer. One of her titles was "Lore-Keeper", and it was her duty to preserve and transmit the history of the tribe. She was also called "Guardian of the *R'Lurl*". 4.

By the period we are discussing, the Wise Woman was already using a form of the mind-meld as a means of transmitting her accumulated knowledge to her chosen successor. But, as it was considered to be a sacred mystery, not to be used for mundane purposes, the mind-meld was known only to a small group of initiates.

Each Wise Woman chose her own successor, using some form of fitness test which has not come down to us. It is speculated that the candidates were tested for latent telepathy, as well as for knowledge of tribal lore and of herbal medicines. The winning candidate was often the Wise Woman's own daughter or grand-daughter, since the tribes, very sensibly, did not require the Wise Woman to remain a virgin. Among other things, this ensured that the telepathic gift did not die out, but was bred into the population.

The Wise Woman undoubtedly enjoyed a very high status. Certain traditional customs, dating from the Bronze Age, which survive on present-day Vulcan, tend to give out-worlders the wrong idea about the status of Vulcan women. A Vulcan woman walks behind her husband not because she is his inferior, but so that *he* will encounter any danger *first*. She stays far enough back to give him fighting room.

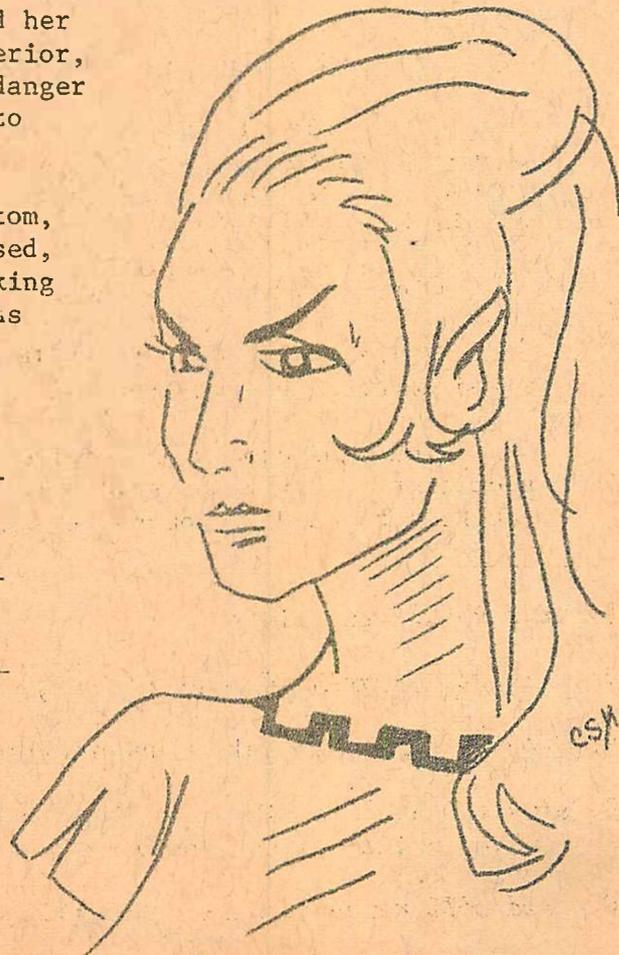
If the survival of such a custom, long after the need for it has passed, seems absurd to the reader, try asking a Vulcan what s/he thinks of various Terran customs, such as bringing a tree into the house every winter solstice.

Certainly there is nothing inferior or down-trodden about women like T'Pau, T'Etha, 5 Inipi, or Z'Ayn, as we may see by the following legends.

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4. *R'Lurl*: The collective, external soul of the tribe; sometimes translated as *totem*, but this does not convey the full meaning, which is untranslatable.

5. "The War of the Well", *op. cit.*



How Inipi Won Back Her Husband From the Dead  
(from *Legends of Old Vulcan*)

Inipi was a Wise Woman. One day her husband Ska was killed while hunting. That night, while the tribe slept, Inipi left their tents and walked into the desert. She walked until she reached the spot where the Star Road <sup>6</sup> touches the ground. <sup>7</sup> Then she began to climb. She climbed and climbed until she came to the dwelling of the Star Mother. <sup>8</sup> The guardian monsters came running, intending to cast Inipi down, so that she would be dashed to pieces, but she took off her ritual necklace <sup>9</sup> and cast it before them. All the beads rolled in different directions and the monsters chased after them. Inipi passed through unharmed, and entered the presence of the Star Mother.

The Star Mother of Night sat on Her throne; Her glory shone like a star through the black robe She wore.

Inipi bowed to the Dark Woman and began to recite Wise Woman's lore. Three days and three nights she continued without faltering, until the Star Mother said, "Stop!"

Inipi fell silent.

"What is your wish, My Daughter?" asked the Star Mother.

"My Lady, give me back my husband," said Inipi.

"Your wish is granted," said the Star Mother, "but because he has been among the dead, his seed will never quicken. <sup>10</sup> If you ever reproach him because of this, he must return to the dead."

"My Lady, I will remember Your words," said Inipi.

Inipi returned to the tribe and found Ska alive. They lived together happily for many years, but had no children.

The time came when Inipi was old and must choose her successor. To Ska she said, "It is your fault that I have no daughter to be Wise Woman after me."

6. *Star Road*: the Milky Way.

7. *where the Star Road touches the ground*: the horizon.

8. *Star Mother*: see below, under RELIGION.

9. *ritual necklace*: The Wise Woman's badge of office; made of crystals which chimed as she moved.

10. *seed will never quicken*: He will be sterile, *not* impotent.

Instantly, Ska faded away like smoke blown away by the wind. Inipi realized too late what she had done: Ska had gone back to the dead, and this time there would be no returning.

## RELIGION

A discussion of early Vulcan religion is difficult, because the lore was so sacred that it could not be written down. We do not even know the true names of the gods, only their titles.

There seem to have been three main deities:

The Sun God, called "Ruler of Day", "The Burning One", "He Who Parches", "The Shining Lord", *etc.*

The goddess called "Star Mother", "Dark Woman", "Dark Mother of Night", "Our Lady", *etc.*

and the Volcano God, called "Fire Lord", "The Roaring God", "Lord of the Fires Within the Ground", "The Shaker" (because he was responsible for earthquakes), *etc.*

All we know for certain about these deities comes from scraps of information embedded in the ancient tales and poems. As these lie mostly outside the scope of the present article, the interested reader should see *The Legends of Old Vulcan* <sup>11</sup>. for further information.

## DOMESTIC ANIMALS

The *sehlat*, which has been described as a teddy-bear with six-inch (15cm.) fangs, served many of the functions of the Terran dog: as a hunting partner, as a guardian and protector of the herds, and as a faithful companion. *Sehlats* were also trained to fight beside their masters in the ceaseless intertribal wars.



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<sup>11</sup>. *The Legends of Old Vulcan*, translated by A. E. Grayson. Old Boston, Terra, Harvard University Press.

In addition, the combings from their pelts were spun and woven into fine *sehlat*-cloth, similar in texture to camelhair.

The most common herd-beast was the *om-jetah*. Since this name means literally "one-horn", it is sometimes facetiously translated as *unicorn*. However, aside from being a quadruped with a single horn, the *om-jetah* bears no resemblance whatever to the delicate, faerie creature of Terran myth. *Horned horse* might be a better translation, since the animal was used as a riding- and pack-beast, as well as a source of meat, milk, and leather, and of the coarse haircloth used to make tents. However, it is not much like a horse, either. If one absolutely *had* to find a Terran analogue, a small, humpless camel would be about the closest one. Its broad, flat feet are camel-like, at any rate.

### CLOTHING, HAIRSTYLES, AND JEWELRY

The basic garment of Bronze Age Vulcan was the caftan-like softsuit. Differences of cut and ornamentation served to distinguish the sexes. Slit up the front and back, and worn over leggings or trousers, it could be used for riding. Toward the end of the period, however, the short tunic and trousers were coming into fashion. This was an adaptation of the warrior's dress, a sleeveless tunic over which was worn a cuirass and loinguard of boiled and lacquered leather, reinforced with mail.

Helmets were not, in general, used at this time.

At this period, both sexes wore the hair long. Warriors combed it back into a single braid or "horsetail", sometimes shaving the front of the head. From comments in various legends, it is clear that the function of the "horsetail" was to give the enemy something to grab if a fighter showed cowardice and turned to run away.



Women wore a variety of braided and coiled hairstyles. Only little girls and mourning widows wore the hair loose and flowing. "To put up the hair" was to achieve adulthood.

Jewelry was extremely popular as a means of displaying wealth and status. Judging from archeological finds, it was a very poor Vulcan who could not afford ornaments, whether of glass, pottery, metal, or wood. Silver was rarer, and therefore more highly valued, than gold or copper. Wood, however, was rarer still, and therefore more valuable than metal.

Women wore a full range of gewgaws: hair ornaments, necklaces, pectorals, anklets, bracelets, earrings, brooches, and rings.

Men's jewelry tended to be more "practical": cloak pins, archers' wristguards, jewelled weapon-hilts, and the like.

The usual footgear for both sexes consisted of sandals or short boots.

## WEAPONS

The oldest known Vulcan weapon was the *alm-woon*, a combination sling/bola/garrote of leather. When not needed, it could be worn as a belt or baldric.

The true warrior's weapon was the *lirpa*, a lethal waraxe-cum-club.

The *huhn-kte*, originally made of wood or bone, with chips of flint or obsidian set along its edge, evolved into a kind of sword with a saw-toothed blade.

Likewise, the *kagah*, originally a knife with a flint or obsidian blade, eventually became a bronze-bladed knife. These were worn by both sexes, either in a belt-sheath, or strapped to the leg.

Short bows of *om-jetah* horn were known by the end of the period. With these, the Vulcans shot arrows of wood or bone with metal tips and whorled barbs.

## INTER-TRIBAL RELATIONS

The average person thinks of nomads as spending all their time moving from place to place. The Bronze Age Vulcans might better be described as semi-nomadic. Each tribe moved on a seasonal basis around its own territory, halting at the same campsites year after year. The tribe remained in a camp until the food ran low, then moved on to the next site.

Naturally, there were frequent territorial disputes with other tribes. Skirmishes and border-raids went on non-stop, often erupting into full-scale warfare which might end in the annihilation of the losing side. 12.

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12. "The War of the Well", *op. cit.*

Nonetheless, there was a certain amount of intertribal communication. At certain times of the year, a truce would be called and two or more tribes would meet to trade, to hold various types of competition (*sehlal* fights, *om-jetah* races, wrestling matches), to redeem prisoners held for ransom by other tribes, and to arrange marriages. Apparently the Vulcans were well aware of the dangers of inbreeding, and the need to expand the gene-pool.

Later, these truces became regular fairs, which attracted traders and professional entertainers from great distances.

Truce-time was sacred; to call someone "truce-breaker" was one of the worst insults possible.

## RECREATION

Life on Bronze Age Vulcan was not entirely grim, although it might seem so from our comfortable viewpoint. In the midst of a day-to-day struggle for mere survival which would daunt the most ardent spirits, the tribes found time for music, poetry, dancing, and story-telling.

They also played various types of board-games, for which beautifully inlaid boards and 'men' have been found. From these remains, it has not been possible to determine the rules of the games, but we know that they were taken seriously, since more than one blood-feud started in a dispute over a gaming-board.

## SOCIAL LIFE

The tribe functioned as an extended family, since most of the members were related either by blood or by marriage. Monogamy was the rule, and marriages were usually arranged by the parents, although childhood betrothal was not practiced until much later. Concubinage was not generally practiced, nor was slavery, although prisoners being held for ransom could be compelled to work for their keep. The tribe could not afford to feed useless mouths.

In theory, children were allowed no say in the choice of a life partner, but in practice, it was a rare parent who would force a child into an abhorrent marriage. If nothing else worked, the woman always had the option of challenge (*kal-if-fee*), and if that was not enough, the enterprising Vulcan woman was capable of taking matters into her own hands, as the following folktale illustrates.

### The Marriage of Z'Ayn (from *Legends of Old Vulcan*)

Z'Ayn's father had no sons, so he taught his daughter the use of weapons. When she reached marriageable age, he betrothed her to Selleck, the greatest warrior in the tribe. Z'Ayn, however, desired to marry no man except Sebek, who was

not much of a warrior, although he was very clever. Z'Ayn knew that Sebek could never defeat Selleck in combat, so she decided against using him as her champion.

When the marriage-day came, Z'Ayn cried, "I challenge!"

"Choose your champion," said the Wise Woman.

Z'Ayn cast off her ~~softsuit~~; under it she wore warrior's dress. "I will be my own champion," she said.

"I do not fight women," said Selleck.

"Then you will be known as He-who-fears-women," said Z'Ayn. "Everyone will laugh at you."

"If you refuse the challenge, you forfeit your claim to the woman," said the Wise Woman.

At that, Selleck accepted the challenge, and combat began. It was a fierce fight. Selleck was stronger, but Z'Ayn was more agile. In the end, however, Selleck won.

Z'Ayn had hoped that he would refuse her, for daring to challenge, but he did not, and she had to become his wife.

The next morning, Selleck was found dead in his bed. Everyone suspected Z'Ayn of having killed him, but they could find no marks of violence on his body, and no trace of poison.

Z'Ayn held her head high, in spite of the whisperings of the tribe, and married Sebek as soon as she could.

After that, Z'Ayn hung up her weapons and studied the arts of peace. In time, she became the tribe's Wise Woman.

Many years passed, and Z'Ayn lay on her deathbed. Her chosen successor knelt beside her and whispered, "Grandmother, did you kill Selleck?"

Z'Ayn said, "Yes."

"Did you strangle him with your hair, as the people say?" asked the new Wise Woman.

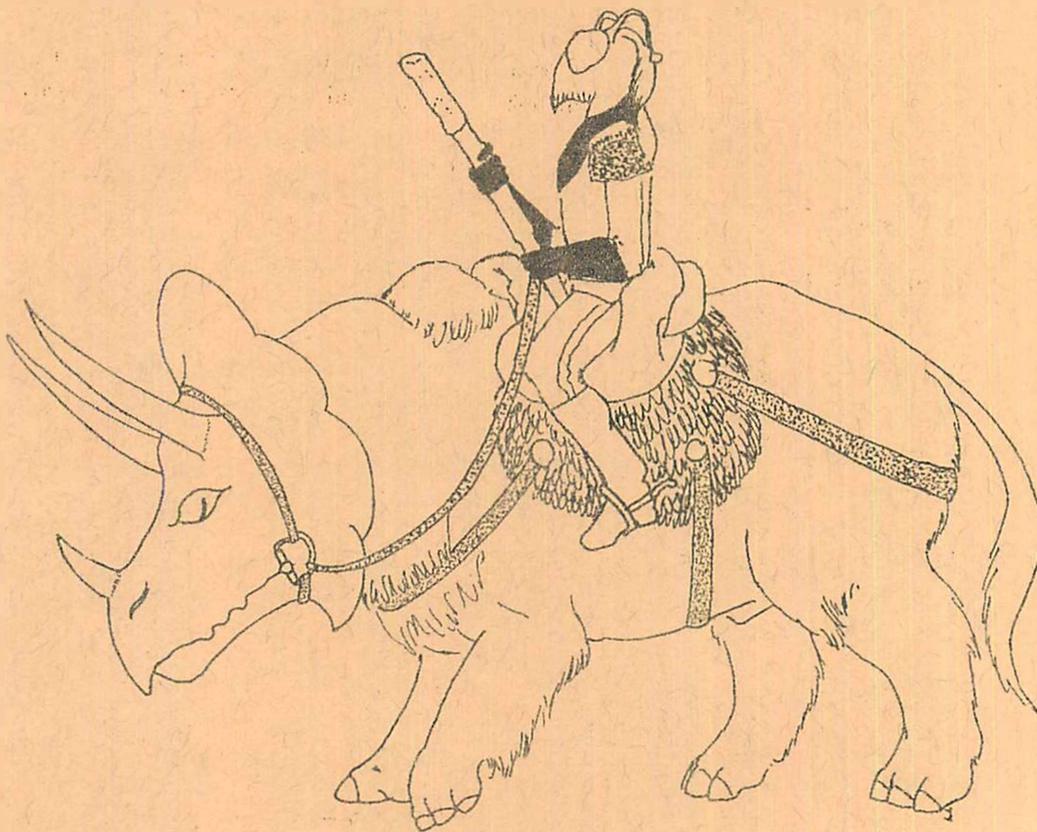
"No. I took a long needle and thrust it into his ear as he slept, until it penetrated the brain. A little blood came out, but I wiped it away. That way, no traces were left."

After Z'Ayn was dead, everyone learned the truth, and all agreed that she had been a dangerous person to cross.

## CONCLUSIONS

Modern Vulcans look back on this period of their history with mixed feelings. On the one hand, they are proud of their traditions, which date back to this era; on the other hand, they are appalled by the savagery of their ancestors.

We who belong to the younger cultures, who are closer to our own beginnings (or, as the Vulcans see it, have not yet climbed out of the slough of barbarism ourselves) can perhaps judge the Bronze Age Vulcans more fairly. Living on such an arid world, they had to be as harsh as their own climate in order to survive. That they not only survived, but rose from such bleak beginnings to be the ultra-civilized people they are today, is all the justification they could ever need.



## THE FREE ENTERPRISE

*A Magazine of Insubordination, Harassment, and Slander*

## Contributions This Issue

by

Sundry

## ANNOUNCEMENTS &amp; MEMOS

Compiled by Lieutenant E. Carrie  
of the FE staff

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

To the crewmembers who reported hallucinating out of the Deck Seven port-hole: a projector was connected to the screen. It wasn't *really* people waving from space. Good effect, though, don't you think?

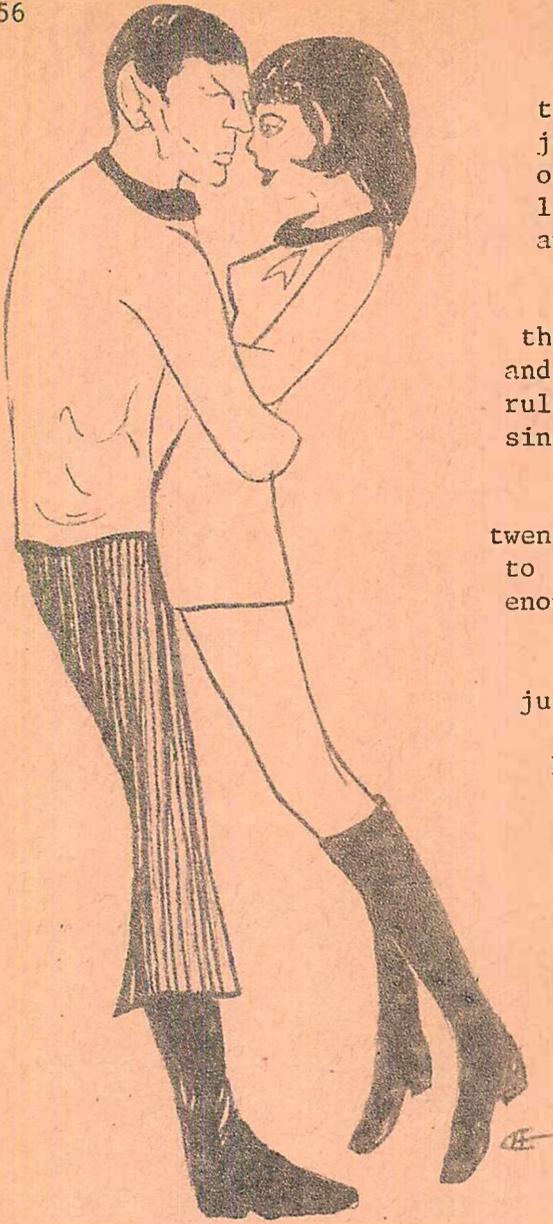
To the lab techs who've been conducting off-duty 'research' in certain darkened cubicles: your activities are now known to certain officers who, rumor has it, expressed a desire to 'get in on the action'. We didn't tell, honest.

Lab Ten: It is rumored that Mr. Spock isn't thrilled by the line of research you're embarking on. You won't tell, and he's too embarrassed to talk about it. Does it have anything to do with 'going amok', or are you just into basic anatomy?

To All Crewmembers:

"Corn Pone and Porn Cone", that outstanding (snicker) art holograph created by the phenomal Lt. J, will be on display in the main rec room until further notice. No crowding; holo copies will be available shortly, for a nominal fee.

Inspired by Lt. J, an art contest will be held in the gym. Purpose: decorating those dull, tacky walls. Any subject welcome, providing you speak to the captain first. Neatness and originality count, of course. Deadline: when we all decide we're done (this leaves room for Red Alerts and other distractions.) Prizes will be awarded by the judge, Dr. McCoy.



First Prize: a bottle of brandy, the genuine article, donated by the judge--and three hours with the senior officer of your choice. Activities limited to what the officer will allow, and you can get away with.

Second Prize: a bottle of synthetic brandy, also donated by Dr. M., and an hour with the s.o.o.y.c. (Same rules as for First Prize, and good luck, since you'll have a third of the time.)

Third Prize: two brandies and twenty minutes with any officer willing to stay with you that long. (Should be enough for you 'enterprising' sorts.)

Booby Prize: a bottle of grape juice and an evening with Mr. Spock.

Prizes to be awarded at the convenience of the 'prizes' (their rule, not ours, but it was the only concession to agreeing.) In the event of duplicate choices, the higher winner goes first. (The captain suggested this, since he's expecting to be a prize in more than one case, if you get my meaning.) In the event that the Booby Prize should also be the choice of one of the other prize winners, you'll have to work that out with Mr. S.

"If you don't mind my saying so Commander... I think your Dr. McCoy impression is much more convincing..."

#### FACTS RECENTLY DISCOVERED:

A turbolift dropped ten decks in freefall, then

stopped suddenly; *will* cause a human complexion to turn a shade comparable to Vulcan green. Of course, when the experiment was conducted, both researchers had already conducted extreme testing with certain hidden stores in sick bay, and even a normal trip in the turbolift can do that, under the circumstances.

And speaking of Vulcan complexions--observers of the last crew psychiatric physicals noticed that the First Officer didn't react to the naked woman holograph beyond turning a slight green. As to whether this means a blush, or nausea, we don't know. Perhaps with a *live* model . . . ? Volunteers for next time?

And, during that round of psych checks, those same observers noted that the captain's eyes dilated to the same degree when staring at the bare beauty holo as when he was shown an ice cream sundae with chocolate sauce, whipped cream, chopped nuts, and a cherry on top. There was disagreement, with one observer insisting the sundae reaction was greater. We tend to support this belief. The captain sees fewer sundaes, much less getting to have one. Officers seeking promotion, take note.

There is no evidence to support the belief that handling Vulcans will give one warts . . . but we haven't found any evidence to refute this, either. Be careful around you-know-who, just in case.

You can fool some of the people some of the time, some of the people all of the time, but you can't fool a Vulcan . . . about some of the people. On the other hand, you *can* fool the captain about the Vulcan some of the time, and Norman all of the time, if you're illogical enough--but you can't fool Mom (if she's Vulcan, that is.)

#### MEMO DEPARTMENT

From Doctor McCoy:

To those who have been skipping physicals with the excuse of 'the Vulcan mating urge': since none of you are Vulcan, this seems both flimsy and a little suspicious . . . and if you're telling the truth, I *really* want to see you.

To the person or persons who replaced my medikit with beads and rattles: you make it difficult to get work done around here. Lucky for everyone I know how to use those substitutes.

To the person who put up the sign stating 'Doctor McCoy is Jimmy Carter's long lost brother--and Jimmy would like to trade for Billy any time': I don't even know who Jimmy Carter is.



To the person or persons responsible for the bowls of *plomik* soup placed in various mess rooms with signs saying 'Vulcan blood--not for human consumption': it might not be digestible, but it certainly *isn't* Vulcan blood . . . I think. . . .

To all hands: my private stock of brandy and other delicacies is just that--private. Let this be fair warning-- *anyone* found withdrawing from my private stores will find his or her next physical a . . . memorable experience. Do I make myself clear?

From Captain Kirk:

To Doctor McCoy: Does that warning include *me* . . . your commanding officer?

To the person or persons who replaced my mirror with one-way glass: I know there are boring stretches in space duty, and that I'm probably *the* most entertaining 'sleeper' on the ship, but as captain I do deserve *some* privacy.

To all female hands: a bonus of two days leave, or a night in my cabin, (with a blanket over the mirror, of course) to the volunteer who mends my torn shirts.

To the jokester who tied an inner tube to the gym apparatus with the sign 'the captain's *other* spare tire': I found it unfunny, tasteless, weak, and disrespectful.

From Mr. Spock:

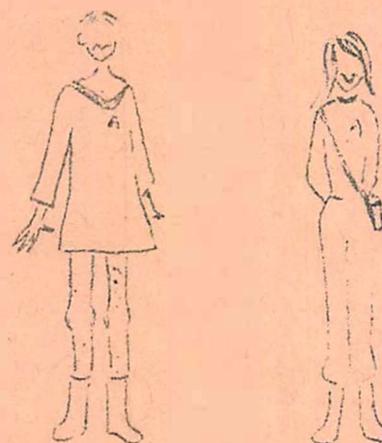
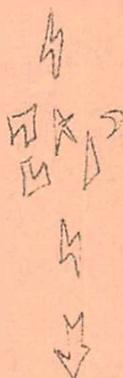
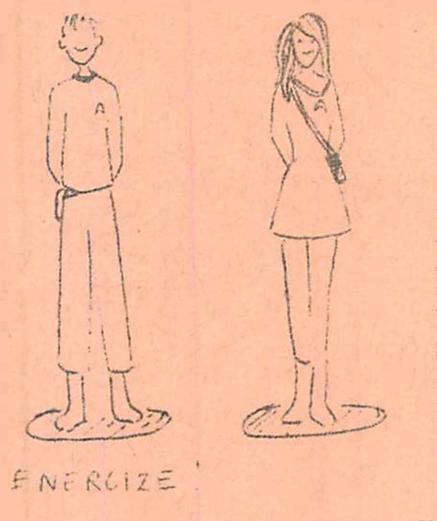
To all hands: who removed the sign I placed on the inner tube?

To the person who left the inflatable woman in my cabin: please, take it back. I appreciate the thought, but it's really unnecessary. (Hang on to it, however; seven years can pass *so* quickly.)

To all hands: anyone knowing the whereabouts of my stuffed *sehlat*, please contact me.

To the yeoman who prepared last week's buffet: no, chopped chicken liver is *not* considered animal flesh on Vulcan. Next time, save some for me.





#### PRESS RELEASE

reported by Carolyn Hillard

#### SICK BAY: FLASH!!

Chief Medical Officer Leonard McCoy established a new medical policy recently during an informal gathering in Rec Room Three.

In the future, according to McCoy, Vulcans will be given their physicals ahead of other crewmen. The doctor suggested that this would help eliminate the feeling of dread he gets while waiting for Commander Spock's turn to come up.

McCoy, savoring his fifth mint julep of the evening, also announced his intention of solving the current Vulcan problem aboard the *Enterprise*.

This announcement came as quite a surprise to several of the crew present, since they had thought the "sealing the Science Officer in the empty shuttlecraft" caper had taken care of the problem.

Commander Spock, fresh from 48 hours of trying to extricate himself from the *Galileo II*, interrupted the doctor's discourse on the curse of Vulcan physiology to request that the doctor exert control over Nurse Chapel, who had accompanied Spock into the room, clinging leech-like to his arm.

Nurse Chapel would only comment that since she was the one who had finally freed the captive Vulcan, she felt she had "dibs on him".

A custody hearing is scheduled for Stardate 4362.76.

BRIDGE BRIEFS

Rumor has it that shore leave on Canopus IV was cancelled rather abruptly when the powerful one above (upon beaming down to the surface) discovered several old problems he'd left behind . . . one blond, one brunette, and one with pale blue antennae. . . .

First Officer Spock, when questioned by a *Free Enterprise* cloak-and-dagger reporter concerning the Captain's frequent lapses of captainly decorum, quickly cut right to the core of the matter with his usual astute observation. Unfortunately, his comments were in Vulcan, and none of our editorial staff have been able to decipher them. We have put in a request for a copy of the *Berlitz Vulcan Phrase Book* with the ship's library however and hope to have that report for our readership by next issue.

Meanwhile, shore leave has been rescheduled on Argus VI, for those of you who don't have the problems the higher-ups have.

LATE-BREAKING STORIES

Submitted by Marian Turner

A concert will be given by the Life Science Glee Club (a.k.a. Sulu and the Botanists). There will be a free will offering, proceeds being donated *in toto* to the Security Team Widows and Orphans Fund.

Speaking of Toto, all are invited to speculate as to the meaning of the latest addition to the Grafitti Wall: "I'll get you, my pretty--and your little dagget, too!" Equally obscure is the suggestion that someone throw water on our illustrious First Officer to "see if he'll melt." Any comments, people?

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Carrie Rowler 78

# Accident

By Anna Mary Hall

Engineering Technician Second Class Nadine Nallet whistled softly as she walked down the deserted corridors. When your duty hours came during the ship's night you could pretend the ship belonged to you. Letting the fantasy slip for the moment, she picked up her clipboard in the Engineering Office and scanned the list of assigned tasks. It was a pleasure working for Mr. Scott, or for someone he had trained, she added mentally as she noted that De Salle had signed the work orders. The jobs were grouped in one area; it wasn't necessary to dash from one section of the ship to another. The tool belt she was fastening around her waist was the only one she would need all night, and since she was working alone, all the jobs could be done by one person.

Waving at two of her co-workers who were trotting down the corridor to avoid being late, she stepped into the turbo-lift. "Deck Two." Even beyond the solitude, she enjoyed the night work. Major repairs requiring a team effort weren't scheduled, only the small maintenance jobs that would disrupt the normal ship's routine if carried out during the busy work day. These tiny adjustments that kept the *Enterprise* purring like a kitten changed from shift to shift. Tonight she was working in the saucer; tomorrow she might be on the hanger deck.

It was near the end of the delightfully quiet shift--the only living soul she'd spoken to all night had been a lonely microbiologist nursing an experiment through a crucial stage--when she entered one of the messrooms on Deck Six. She shook her head in silent amusement at the sight of a card game going on in the far corner. The pleasure other people found in gambling had always mystified her. Laying out her tools, she began dismantling the food dispenser's selector panel.

The game broke up a few minutes later and John Kyle wandered over to lean against the wall and watch her work. "What's wrong with it, Nadine?"

Nadine's eyes flickered to the cup in his hand, then she ducked her head to hide a sudden grin. "Nothing much. It just put sugar in the captain's coffee, pepper in Chin's won ton soup, and thyme in someone's tea."

"That hardly sounds worth all this mess." Kyle took a swallow from his cup.

"Just mistakes in seasoning," Nadine agreed, beginning to delve into the circuits before her. "Of course, some of the seasonings we

have available for non-humans are poisonous to humans." There was a loud gulp behind her. "On the *Excalibur* they had five people in sick bay when one of their dispensers started using Andorian *anselga* instead of sugar to sweeten drinks." She manufactured a frown and looked around at Kyle, who was staring suspiciously at his cup. "Did you get your tea from this dispenser? Does it taste all right, John?" As he started to nod she added, "That doesn't prove anything, though. Sugar and *anselga* taste the same, and nothing happens until the *anselga* hits the liver."

"What happens then?" Kyle asked hollowly, feeling cautiously of his left side.

Nadine kept her brow furrowed as she fought a smile and invented a list of symptoms. "Your temperature rises, your skin takes on a greenish cast, your hair turns black, your ears get long and pointed," she finished quickly as Kyle began to recognize the symptoms, "and you make only logical statements."

Kyle looked down at her sadly, and shook his head. "That's the first time you've caught me . . ."

". . . since Jimmy was killed," Nadine finished matter-of-factly, then grinned at him. "I'm on duty, so you'll have to wait for your revenge."

"That will make it all the sweeter," Kyle warned as he left.

It took twenty minutes to locate the trouble, five to correct it. Nadine tucked the tiny circuit into her belt. It would be analyzed to determine what had caused it to fail. The doors swished open as she was punching for a cup of tea to check her work.

Captain Kirk stood just inside the doors, eyeing the parts still littering the floor. "Good morning, Captain." She gestured with her cup. "It's in working order. I just haven't put the front panel back in place. May I get you something?"

Kirk nodded as he moved to the table nearest to the selector. "Coffee, and eggs, scrambled, Miss . . ." He hesitated.

"It's Nallet, Captain. I didn't use Rizzo even when Jimmy was alive." Her face was calm and untroubled as she set the tray in front of Kirk. "I've been meaning to thank you for the letter you sent his parents. You said all the right things. I just couldn't think of them at the time. They appreciated the thought."

"I've had to practice saying the right things," Kirk said shortly, then tried to ease his unintentional harshness. "Won't you join me?"

Nadine studied his face for an instant, then accepted. "After the panel is in place, if you really want company. I thought you might be eating early to avoid people."

"I can always eat in my quarters if I want to do that," Kirk found himself explaining.

"We lowly ensigns don't have that choice," Nadine reminded him as she smoothly fitted the pieces back together. The last piece clicked into place and she stowed the tools on her belt.

Nadine punched her order and carried the tray to Kirk's table. "It's my lunch," she said as his eyebrows rose at the sight of her fresh cup of tea and bowl of green pea soup, "and I'm scheduled for exercise in the gym as soon as this shift is over."



Kirk swallowed a bite of eggs and asked a question he wished wasn't necessary. He tried to keep track of everything, everyone, on the *Enterprise*, and never quite managed it, but he shouldn't have neglected Ensign Nallet at this time. "What are you doing on this shift, working by yourself . . ."

". . . so soon after Jimmy's death?" Nadine finished for him. She ate a spoonful of soup and asked a question that had often occurred to her. "I have never understood why people worry so much about me. Do I look unstable, or what?"

"No, not unstable," Kirk admitted, studying her for a moment as though he had never seen her before. Short wavy ash-blond hair, dark brown eyes, lightly tanned skin, average height, average figure, a pleasant face that was trying unsuccessfully to conceal growing amusement. "You look perfectly normal, but you don't react the way people expect you to. It baffles them." Faced with her wide-eyed surprise, he sought for an example. "Your response to Lieutenant Rizzo's death was hardly what one expects of a bride of four months."

Nadine sighed. She'd thought the explanation to Doctor McCoy was the only one needed, but apparently one more was necessary. She gazed into the depths of the cup of tea turning between her suddenly restless hands. "The marriage would have broken up soon. I should never have married him, Captain. There were too many differences, and not enough love to make the struggle to overcome them worthwhile."

*She's unhappy about it, Kirk thought, but not uncertain.* "Then why did you marry him?"

"I was feeling lonely," Nadine said simply. "He wanted me; it was fun to be with him; he was a nice person." Nadine saw Kirk wince and matched his rueful grin with one of her own. "It is a damning thing to say about a person you're supposed to have been in love with, isn't it?" She ran a slender finger along the edge of the tray. "He might have developed some character if he'd lived to face enough personal conflicts, but Jimmy was a nice boy, nothing more, when he died. I knew I'd made a mistake within a month of the wedding. I was planning to live with it, and see what would develop. Then he started talking about the family we would have, and I realized how little we knew about each other."

Kirk tried to go beyond his surface knowledge and the memory of the unnaturally pale face against the sick bay bed. He managed to dredge up one fact, and he knew it only because he'd sent the message to Lieutenant Rizzo's family. "He was from Rigel IV."

Nadine nodded. "A frontier world. Large families expected, almost mandatory. That's what he expected from a wife. He was completely dedicated to Star Fleet, but he expected me to resign and be the mother of his children. He felt strongly enough about having a family that he would have eventually, after a lot of unhappiness on both our parts, forced me to choose between being his wife and serving in Star Fleet." The brown eyes met Kirk's squarely. "He and the children would have lost, because space service has been my dream since I was old enough to understand that the stars in the sky were other suns with worlds almost like the one I lived on. I wasn't about to give this up," her gesture encompassed the uniform, the ship, and the space around them, "for a man and his dreams of children."

"Of course not," Kirk heard himself agreeing. "But couldn't he had changed?"

"Jimmy pitied me, Captain, because I was an only child, and bragged that his mother was a grandmother by the time she was thirty. The conditioning was too deep. When Jimmy was killed I regretted it, but his absence from my life was something I had already accepted." Catching a look of concern on Kirk's face, she smiled grimly. "He didn't know what I'd decided, and if he had lived, I think I could have eased him out of the marriage without any great emotional strain on either of us."

"That's a cold-blooded attitude," Kirk said, chilled by her detachment.

"Why? What would you have me plan to do? Weep and wail and disrupt both our lives? Let it drag along until there was an enormous emotional scene? Just because my emotions got me into the situation didn't mean I had to completely abandon the use of my brain. There was no need to hurt Jimmy. He hadn't done a single thing that couldn't have been predicted by anyone who had studied his background." For the first time tears glinted in her eyes. "It would have been a lot of trouble, but I wish I'd had to work it out."

The doors swished open and the entrance of two yawning ensigns signalled the beginning of the breakfast rush.

"I must turn in my clipboard before someone is assigned to do the work I've just finished." Nadine slid her tray into the disposal slot and returned to the table for her clipboard. "Have a peaceful day, Captain."

Nadine clamped her teeth together and refused to let the curses flowing through her mind become vocal. Volley ball! When would the physical training director admit that she just wasn't a team member and let her exercise alone? She loved the feel of her body working smoothly, the thrill of mastering a new dive, or a difficult maneuver in gymnastics. She liked the excitement of pitting her skills against someone else in a mock battle, contest, or race--anything but trying to work with a group, to anticipate their movements and to hold hers to the circumscribed role she was assigned.

Her anger ebbed as she changed clothes. She was the one out of step. Growing up on a planet with a population of 5000, and those 5000 spread over the entire globe, did not fit you for life in a closely knit society. Martian Forge, the preeminent terra-forming conglomerate of the Federation, knew that hiring couples and paying them well was the best method of keeping the turnover among their highly skilled employees at reasonable levels. But when equipment, building supplies, and food had to be shipped to the work site, company policy certainly didn't encourage those couples to have children.

Even the water and oxygen had had to be imported to the planet where she was born. Her arrival had been carefully planned to coincide with the completion of the second of the domes Forge was building there. As she'd often heard, her arrival had given her parents first choice of the new quarters.

Beta, where she'd done most of her growing up, had been an improvement. Sure they'd lived in domes, but Beta had water that could be purified, and air that her mother had always described as being "marginally breathable". No one ever intentionally breathed it without a filter, but it would have taken a week of constant exposure for it actually to have permanently damaged your lungs. Nadine smiled at the shoe she was tying. She still didn't trust open planets where you couldn't see and smell the air.

It had been good training; she'd been earning half pay by the time she was twelve years old, and had had her own monitor station 500 miles from the nearest neighbor when she was fifteen. But people, according to her upbringing, were to call on in times of trouble, or to meet with for fun. You did not depend on them while you were working. Work was between you and your machines. You did not depend on people for companionship; you survived without the physical presence of another human being for weeks, or months. And you did not play team sports!

"Coming, Nadine?"

"On my way." She gave a last vicious jerk to the laces on her shoes and followed the others to the court.

\* \* \*

Nadine wandered into sick bay cradling her right elbow in her left hand, still in her exercise leotard. "Anybody on duty?" she asked the empty room.

"Back here," came McCoy's voice from the next room. He stepped to the door and sighed as he saw her. "What have you done now, Ensign Nallet?"

"Scraped the skin off my arm diving after a volley ball. It isn't bleeding, but it sure hurts." She turned the injured arm for his inspection.

McCoy glanced at the sensor he had run across the scrape. "Hmmm. We'll do something about the pain first, then remove that loose skin." A few minutes' work left the arm painless, with only a light patch of untanned skin to show where the floor burn had been. "Come sit down and talk for a minute," McCoy suggested, gently guiding her into his office. He watched her unconsciously running his fingers over the patch of new skin and asked softly, "Do you want me to get you out of these team sports? I could do it. One discussion of the relevant section of your psychological profile and McKenny would quit trying to make you fit into a team."

"That would be heavenly." Nadine smiled as she contemplated the possibility. Then she sighed and her smile faded. "But if I'm ever going to be anything more than an ensign I've got to learn to work with a group, both as a member of it, and as a leader of it. Team sports are one form of practice."

"Do you want to be something more than an ensign?"

Nadine looked at McCoy in blank amazement. "Everyone wants to be something more than an ensign."

"Do you?" McCoy demanded.

"Yes," Nadine said firmly. "I hate following detailed orders and having someone looking over my shoulder checking on my work. There would be less of that as a lieutenant, enough less to make up for having to give orders to other people."

McCoy dismissed her with a wave of his hand, wondering if she realized what an odd list of reasons for wanting to be a lieutenant she had given.

The surprise birthday party to Ensign Garrovick had nearly run its course. Most of the crowd had cleared out of the Deck Six Portside Lounge reserved for the party, and the only people left were close friends. Nadine quit playing hostess. Susan Kieser, her roommate and co-hostess, had given up on the job even earlier.

Easing her feet out of the high-heeled sandals, Nadine settled down on the floor against the cushions and took a moment to appreciate her

friends. Tonight she *could* appreciate them, for finally they had stopped hovering. They had been Jimmy's friends, too, and she had been glad to have their support after his death. Garrovick, who had gone through the Academy with Jimmy, had actually felt Jimmy's death more deeply than she had. It had comforted both of them when he stood beside her during the burial service and helped pack Jimmy's things to send to his parents. It had been thoughtful of Susan to immediately move back in as her roommate. She hadn't been looking forward to facing the empty room that first night. She had *needed* Thoval's help with the legal forms required by Star Fleet, Rigel IV, and Mars, her 'home' planet though she'd never spent two months straight there. But when they'd started turning up at her elbow every time she was off-duty--slipping into a seat beside her at a meal, appearing to walk in the garden, seeing that she attended concerts and other entertainments--she'd thought she would smother. Even after the years in Star Fleet Academy, and the months here on the *Enterprise*, she couldn't stand that closeness. Careful, patient explanations and some fancy dodging had convinced them she neither wanted nor needed what they were offering. Tonight had marked a complete return to the old easy relationship of equals.

Kyle wandered over with a pitcher and refilled her glass, then sat down beside her. They drank in companionable silence, watching Garrovick trying to juggle the set of beautifully hand-carved, and deliberately off-balance, ivory balls she and Jimmy had found on a shore leave three months ago.

Kyle nudged her with an attention-seeking elbow as Garrovick dropped the balls for the fourth time. "Did you get that increase in pay?"

Nadine blinked. She must have had more to drink than she'd thought. "What increase in pay?"

"You're still an engineer, aren't you?" Kyle paused until she nodded. "And now you've taken up floor polishing, with your elbows, yet. Isn't Star Fleet going to pay you for that?"

"Ohhh," she groaned, "that's feeble, John."

"You ought to at least ask for combat pay while you're playing volley ball," he insisted stubbornly, touching the latest patch of light skin. "That's both arms, and now a knee."

"All I have to do is learn to let the other team members return some of the balls. If I'm kicked off many more teams, someone is going to start taking official notice. I'll stick it out."

Routine, routine. Everything about her first day back on the day shift irritated Nadine. The ship was noisy, crowded, too bright. And the work . . . Hour after hour of monitoring gauges and readouts, and reporting those dull results to someone else. Noting the last reading, she moved on to the next panel. Halfway down the panel, her eyes brightened. There was a low reading on the flow gauge of one of the



pressurized gas feeds from raw material storage to the organic fabrication section. The reading on the pipe itself was also low, eliminating the possibility of a malfunctioning gauge. She notified the Fabrication Room of the trouble, and closed the shut-off valve. The filter located just before the gauge was the most likely site of trouble, and if it was just a clogged filter, she didn't need any help fixing it. She turned the upper valve, isolating the short section of pipe containing the filter. The tools she needed were stored in the room, and a quick turn of the wrench had the pipe loose. The flexible pipe slipped easily out of line, and she removed the filter. Something sticky that wouldn't wipe out was clogging the filter and a quick search showed there was no replacement in the tool cabinet.

The correct procedure at this point was to have someone bring her the needed filter, and Nadine considered doing just that. The nearest supply clerk was two decks away, and the supply cabinet where she could find a replacement was fifty steps down the corridor. Fitting the pipe back in place, so it would not bow out of shape, she trotted down the corridor to the supply cabinet. Three minutes later she returned to see Mr. Scott turning the lower valve.

"Stop!" She knew the shout was too late even as she uttered it, and hurled herself backwards at the closing door. The blast caught her halfway through, throwing her sideways against the doorjamb. Her body held the door open, allowing much of the force of the explosion to vent itself into the corridor.

Nadine was vaguely aware of figures in the corridor as she twisted around and crawled back into the room. Mr. Scott was crumpled against the bulkhead, blood on the deck beneath his head. The air was already bad, and more pressurized vapor was spewing into the room every second. Dropping to her stomach, Nadine slithered across the deck until the cut-off valve was above her head. With the hiss loud in her ears, she climbed to her feet, closing her eyes as her head entered the layer of stinging gas. Two turns and the hiss began to die; another two and it ceased. With her eyes still closed, she felt her way to the air inlet and switched it to emergency flush, then dropped back to the deck.

There was a figure kneeling over Mr. Scott and she realized with relief that her responsibility for action had ended. She lay on the deck, conscious now of the ache all down her right side, and that she had had to use her left hand to turn the valve. Her eyes and throat burned; her chest hurt with every breath. Lying still, she concentrated on the pain, willing it to push her down into darkness. Her fault, her fault. . . . She had ignored every safety lecture ever given, every rule. Tears were running down her twisted face when the hypo hissed against her shoulder and all pain and worry floated away.

Awakening was slower. There was no pain, but the memory of pain held her motionless as the disorientation faded. Sickbay . . . the accident swept through her mind in vivid detail and she sobbed. One careless act--what had it--what *would* it cost? Would she have to live her life with the knowledge that she had killed a friend?



A hand touched hers and Nurse Chapel, drawn by the racing heart-beat reflected by the monitor, offered comfort in the form of information. "Scotty's alive, and Dr. McCoy thinks he will stay that way."

Christine laid a finger across Nadine's lips as they opened. "No, don't talk. Your throat was burned, and while it may feel all right, it isn't, yet. You aren't to talk for at least twenty-four hours." Taking in the readings at a glance, Christine said, "Let's get you fixed a little more comfortably, and I'll try to answer your questions without you having to ask them." She raised the head of the bed, gave Nadine a drink, then settled cautiously on the edge of the bed to face the anxious brown eyes.

"You want to know about Scotty first," she guessed. "He has a skull fracture, and some minor injuries. He hasn't regained consciousness yet, and the doctor is still with him."

"Now you. Five broken ribs, now mended. Irritated eyes, soothed. Burned throat from inhaling those fumes, but it didn't reach your lungs. You'll have to spend the rest of the day, and tonight, in sick bay; then you can return to your quarters. One day off-duty, then you can go back to work."

Christine looked at Nadine doubtfully; the woman still hadn't relaxed. Engineers were strange people. Maybe she did need to hear the rest of the news. "Lieutenant Kyle came to check on you and Mr. Scott. He said to tell you that only minor damage was done to the ship. And he'll be back later." Christine's eyebrows rose in mild surprise. She had apparently done the right thing. Tears were running down Nadine's face, but she was also smiling.

Nadine dozed away the afternoon, partly from the aftereffects of shock, and partly from the medication. Once her roommate's voice roused her, another time Garrovick waved from the doorway before being shooed away by Nurse Chapel. Dr. McCoy breezed through twice, stopping briefly to study the diagnostic panel and nod approvingly. Recognizing the pleading look in her eyes, he reported on Scotty's condition. Improving, but still serious.

In the haze between her naps, Nadine had gotten around to considering the effect this incident would have on her career, and had done some serious, if incoherent, worrying. She was only partially awake when Captain Kirk entered the room at the end of the day shift. She stiffened,

then realized it was ridiculous to try and lie at attention, and relaxed.

"I promised not to stay too long," Captain Kirk said with a smile. "Dr. McCoy doesn't want you disturbed. I just wanted to say, you did a good job. We have the reports from the Fabrication Room and from crewmembers who were nearby when the explosion occurred. It's action like yours that makes me proud to be a part of Star Fleet."

The bewildered look was still on Nadine's face as the captain turned and left. Then she figured it out. "Promised not to disturb." Of course he wouldn't question her about her negligence while she was flat on her back. There would be plenty of time after they knew exactly what she had to answer for. And she *had* crawled back and closed the broken line. That, at least, she could be proud of.

Captain Kirk's visit helped put the accident in better perspective, and eased her worry. She would not be facing some remote, uncaring authority when the inquiry took place. It was Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock she'd be talking to. Their judgment would be fair.

Susan brought her supper tray, a collection of liquids in attractive containers, all tasty, cool, and soothing to her dry scratchy throat. While Nadine sipped, Susan related all the latest gossip, but didn't say a word about the accident. Kyle arrived a few minutes after Susan left, bearing an orange *lazmeth* bud in a tiny vase. Its spicy odor was there as a reminder of the enduring quality of friendship each time Nadine woke during a restless, dream-ridden night.

She welcomed the brighter lights and bustle of morning. The night had stretched between her dreams until she had wondered if it would ever end.

Dr. McCoy, heavy-eyed but content, was her first visitor. "Mr. Scott was conscious briefly," he reported. "He doesn't remember anything about the accident, yet." He studied the panel, checked the medical scanner he had run over her. "As for you, young lady, you may get up, but no talking until the Accident Review Board meets this afternoon."

Nadine was surprised to see only Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock seated at the table when she entered the briefing room. She reported her presence in a hoarse whisper that sounded worse than it felt, then took the seat opposite Kirk.

"We already have the testimony from the others involved: Lieutenant Calmer in Fabrication, Ensign Langley, who was in the corridor when the accident occurred, and Ensign Washburn of Damage Control. Dr. McCoy says Mr. Scott may never remember exactly what happened, so your commendation will have to depend partly on your own story." Kirk smiled. "A little unusual, but not without precedent."

Nadine was staring wide-eyed, comprehension suddenly beginning to dawn when Mr. Spock said, "There are some questions, Ensign. What called your attention to the problem?"

"A low reading on the flow gauge, sir," she answered automatically.

"We know you notified Fabrication, but after that we are unsure of your actions."

Nadine ignored the prompting and asked a question. "Sir, what did Washburn say caused the accident?"

Spock raised an eyebrow, but answered. "Mr. Washburn concluded that a weak seam in the pipe had given out, releasing vapor into the room. Mr. Scott remembers entering the room with a hot welder, which would have been sufficient to raise the vapor to its flashpoint, but does not remember any of the subsequent events."

Crawling back into that room hadn't taken any courage, Nadine suddenly realized. *That* had been a conditioned reflex. *This* would take courage. If she kept her mouth shut. . . . She'd been down to the scene of the accident; there'd been enough damage in the explosion that only fragments of the pipe were left. There was no chance that the true cause of the accident would ever be discovered from studying them. But to build her future on a lie, to live in perpetual fear that someday Mr. Scott would remember the true events, would taint everything she achieved. That she knew, from youthful forays into the devious pathways built by lies. The accident could be forgiven; lying about it couldn't.

"Sir, a mistake has been made." Her face was stiff, and she suspected very white, but she forced her lips to form the words clearly. "I caused the accident. I left the fitting loose while I went for a new filter. Mr. Scott, not having been notified of the work in progress, opened the valve. That's how the gas was released."

They drew from her a step-by-step report of what had happened, then dismissed her while they considered what she had told them.

Nadine, remembering Christine's injunction to rest, lay stiffly on her bed and waited. Her fate was in other hands. Compassionate hands, she told herself fiercely. Hands that were juggling what was best for the *Enterprise*, for Star Fleet, and for her, her mind whispered in reply. And those hands had already made one mistake.

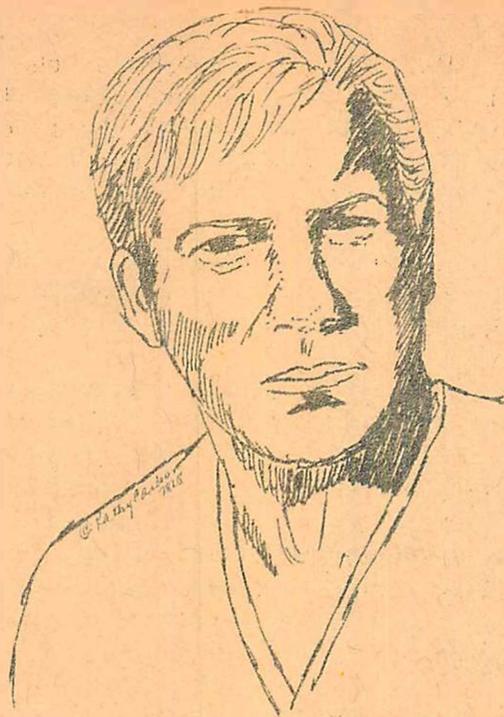
A glance at the chronometer showed that two minutes had crawled by since she lay down. Too restless to remain still any longer, she prowled around the room. Why was this wait so much worse than the first one? Part of it, she guessed, was the simple fact that the drugs Dr. McCoy had given her to let her rest calmly while she was healing had completely worn off. And part of it, she thought rebelliously, was that before, she had been blindly accepting authority's right to control and order her life. Now. . . . Now some attitudes had shifted, and she admitted to herself that she wanted what was best for her, not what was best for the *Enterprise*, or Star Fleet.

It was her life, her career, and she had worked hard to get where she was. What could they do to her? A reprimand, a black mark on her

file, a drop to the bottom of the promotion list. Those were nothing. Finally she forced her real fear to surface.

They could ground her.

Star Fleet was a pyramid, and only the tip of it actually served on ships in space. The ground positions were important; the people filling them did vital jobs. Some people actually preferred ground assignments and asked for them, but the number of applications for service on the ships was always higher than the number of openings. Once grounded for a disciplinary reason, you had little chance of ever getting another assignment on a ship.



There was a mirror in front of her, and she paused in her nervous pacing and studied her reflection. When had she ruffled her hair? That habit had been broken years ago. Mechanically she restored the hair to its usual neat waves as she tried to see deeper into herself, to remember facts once known but not thought of recently.

Why was she in Star Fleet? It was years since she'd actually asked herself that question, but she instantly remembered the answer.

Once she had left shrouded Beta and seen the stars, only vaguely remembered from early childhood, she had decided to work in space. A job working on one of Martian Forge's freighters had tempted her. Then she had compared the sameness of that routine job with the call of Star Fleet's "Boldly go where no man has gone before" recruitment tape. On the day she was legally of age, she had rejected Martian Forge's offer of more training and a permanent job, and filed an application to the Academy, the necessary recommendations being furnished by three of Forge's top planetary engineers.

It was space she wanted, preferably free-ranging space as Star Fleet could offer it, but space before a ground job with any outfit. With a sudden peace, she knew she would have just that, even if it meant working for one of the scruffy little freighting lines that eagerly hired Star Fleet's meticulously trained castoffs. She grinned at the melodramatic thought. She had a firm offer of a job with Martian Forge anytime she chose to accept it. They lost more employees to loneliness than to any other cause, and they knew she could stand isolation.

The intercom buzzed and she swung to answer it.

"Ensign Nallet, report to the briefing room."

With her decision made, the walk back seemed much shorter. She felt free. For the first time since entering the Academy, she had stopped letting other people run her life. Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock could close one possible segment of the future to her, but they could not tell her what she must do. Her future was her choice.

To Nadine's surprise, Dr. McCoy had joined the board. In her state of euphoria, she barely managed to keep from grinning at him, a totally inappropriate action in this setting.

"Ensign," Nadine fastened her gaze on Kirk's face and tried to read the decision, "the purpose of this Board is to determine the cause of accidents, and to take steps to prevent their reoccurrence. The shortcut you took, even though contrary to safety regulations, would be safe 99 times out of a hundred. But, as you discovered, that one time can endanger lives and ships. A notation to all personnel to review safety regulations had been logged, and a reprimand entered on your record. But we are still left with one problem. What do you do with you, Ensign?"

McCoy took up the explanation. "Your psychological profile, studied in the light of this accident, indicates that this will be a recurring problem." He shook his head at the denial forming on her face. "Oh, not soon, not while the memory of the accident is fresh in your mind, but all memories fade. You'll take shortcuts again that will endanger anyone serving on the same ship with you."

Nadine tried to utter a denial, but it froze in her throat. She tightened her lips and nodded acceptance of the assessment. Most safety regulations were designed to protect idiots, wasted time, and irked her to tears. When enough time had passed, she would return to the work habits she had learned on Beta.

"Early in your career, before you left the Academy, you filled out a preference sheet. Do you recall your first choice of duty?"

He expected an answer, Nadine realized. All of those forms, and he expected her to remember one certain one at a time like this. Preference. . . . "Yes, sir," she said, amazement tingeing her voice, "I requested training for service in a one-man scout. My advisor laughed at me, and told me to fill out another, listing a more realistic first choice." She remembered the anger-frustration-she wasn't certain which it had been, that had kept her from complying with the suggestion.

"If that is still your wish, we are ready to recommend that you be given a chance at this job." Kirk saw the dawning of joy on her face and warned, "There will be a lot of tests to be certain you can handle the isolation, but McCoy thinks you can do it, if you want to try."

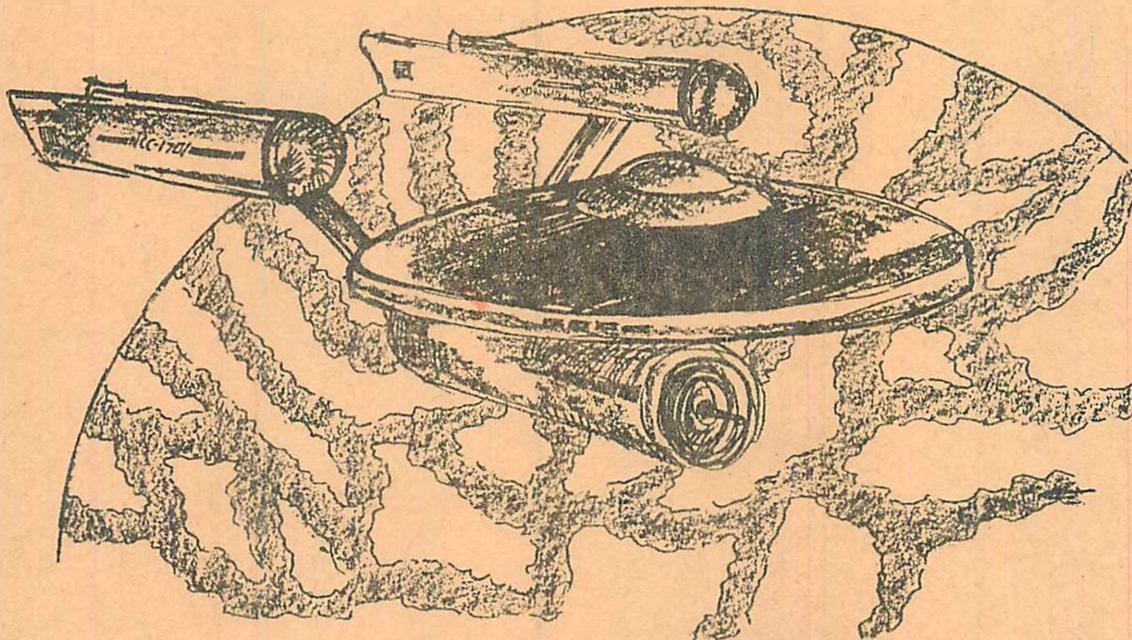
"Yes, sir!" Nadine said, her husky whisper fading completely on the last word.

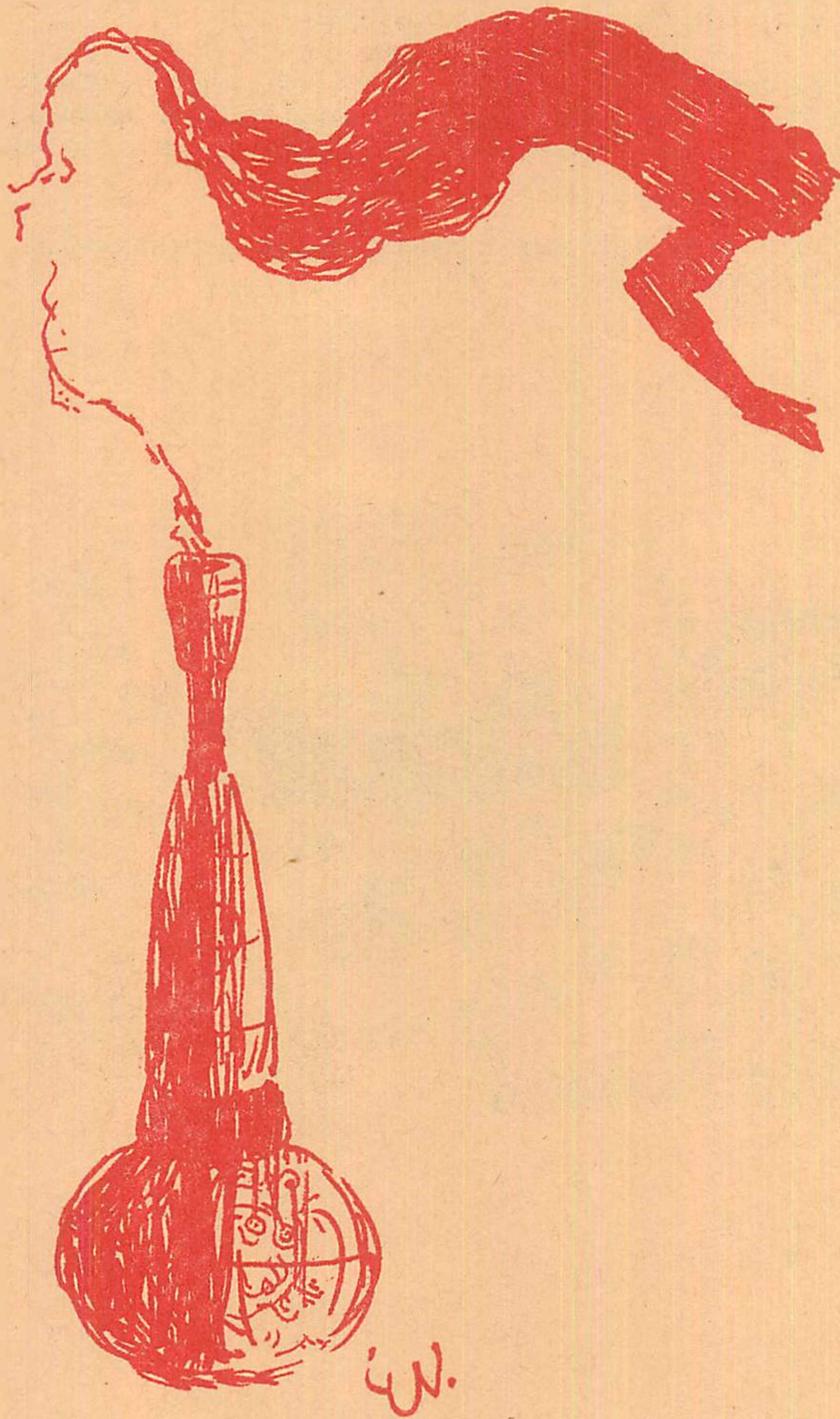
"Tomorrow will be time to begin filling out forms and making arrangements," Kirk said. "Dismissed, Ensign."

Nadine turned and started out, then looked back. "It doesn't seem right, to be rewarded for making a mistake and nearly killing Mr. Scott and myself. I should be punished, not rewarded."

"We are not rewarding you, Ensign," Spock explained. "We are attempting to find a way to utilize your training without endangering other Star Fleet personnel. The fact that this job is what you want is coincidental."

Nadine smiled. "Whatever your reasons, for me it's a reward. Thank you, all of you."



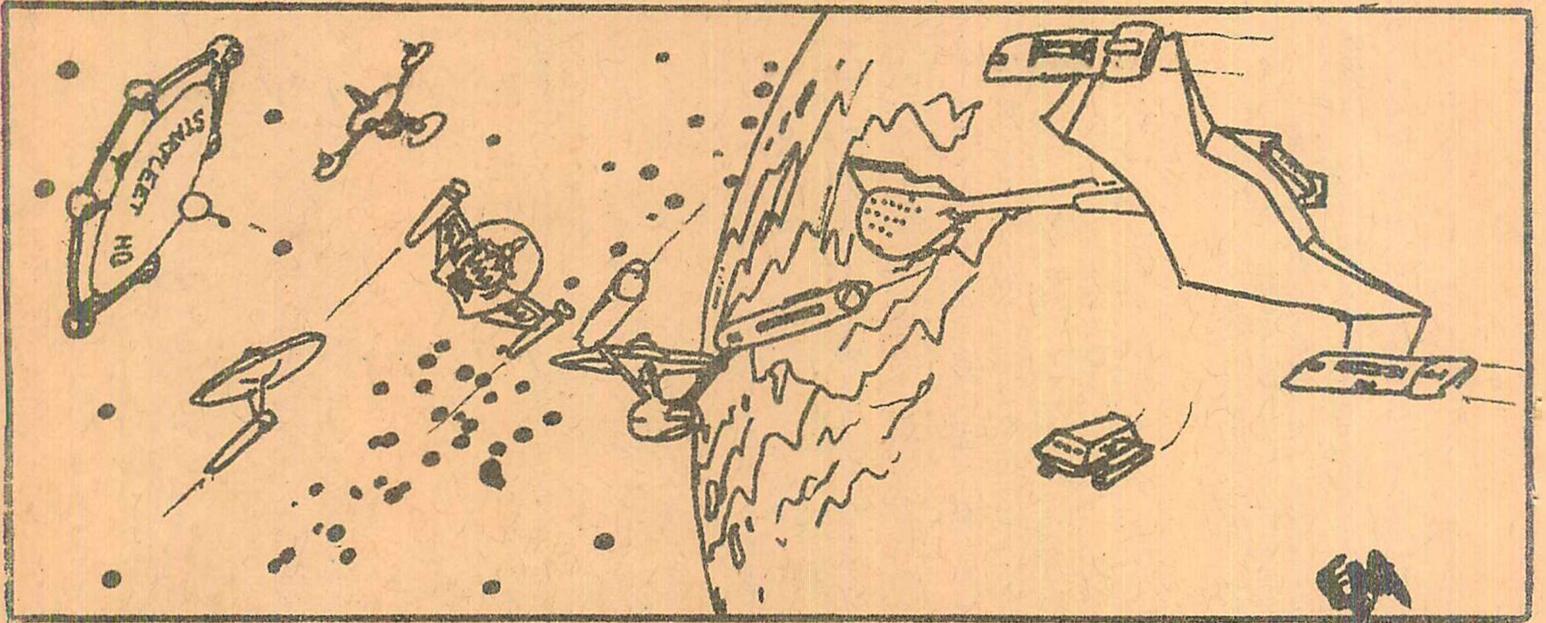


W.

# Bottle Casting

BY NANCY GIUDICE

I write poems the way  
stranded sailors  
throw out bottles to be found.  
They stuff them with  
the most important thing.  
"I am here! Come and  
find me," they say.  
And perhaps directions  
or a map.  
So I too throw out my poems  
in hope and despair,  
waiting, waiting,  
for the contact with another;  
saying, "I am here,"  
and sometimes telling where.  
Oh, language is so fragile  
a raft, and bottles  
not much better,  
to carry the hope of a whole life.  
Find me, the sailors  
pray in their hearts.  
Know I am here.



# ... And Comfort To The Enemy

by

Barbara Wenk

By the time the Treaty Negotiation and Disarmament Conference had dragged into its third week, Kate had become both bored to tears and disillusioned with the whole conference. It was all right for the top Klingon and Federation diplomats, who had the money to enjoy themselves when not ostensibly conducting delicate negotiations.

But for a junior lieutenant . . . it was bad enough being forced to use up accumulated leave time. Kate knew why, too. What did Star Fleet care if she couldn't afford to do anything on this expensive resort planet except catch up on her reading? It was saving *them* time and money.

Kate settled, only slightly uncomfortably, on the broad branch of a large tree, frowned, and then turned back to her book. She was spending a cheerfully lachrymose afternoon rereading *LITTLE WOMEN* as a specific against her total irritation. *Maybe some of the saccharin acceptance of tribulation will wear off on me.*

By the time she was damp-eyed over Beth's tragic demise, it was, as a glance at the sun told her, high time she headed back to the town. Kate began to work her way down the tree, quickly discovering that it is a great deal easier to climb up a tree than down. Malevolent elves had cleverly replaced the original well-placed, firmly supportive branches with fragile substitutes from a completely different tree.

She lowered her full weight onto a branch. It bent sharply. Kate dropped her book, grabbed at a limb that retaliated by slashing her across her face, and slithered through far too many bushy, pointy bits of wood and leaves to the ground.

She landed on her feet. There was a popping feeling in her right ankle just before she fell, with a heavy thud, to a sitting position. She knew instantly that she'd sprained the damned ankle.

"Oh, shit!" She touched her rapidly-swelling ankle gingerly, and blinked back tears. Now she'd have to try to hobble all the way back to her hotel.

"You may not have noticed," said a helpful voice, "but you've dropped your book."

Kate's head jerked up, and she twisted around. She found herself facing a uniformed Klingon, his blaster in his hand. As she stiffened, with a quick intake of breath, he holstered the gun, bent to pick up the book and shake the leaves out of it, and held it out to her.

Kate eyed him warily, and carefully stood up. Her hair felt full of twigs, her face had a stinging welt from the vicious branch, blood from a skinned knee was oozing down her leg, and she had broken off several fingernails down to the quick. She also felt like a damned fool.

The Klingon gravely offered her the book. Kate, irrationally annoyed by his temerity in sneaking up while she was falling out of trees, in addition to scaring the hell out of her, *and* having the bad taste to be impeccably neat and polite as well, practically snatched the book from him.

"Thank you!" she snapped.

"Not at all." His voice was carefully courteous. He regarded her for a moment with what Kate suspected was suppressed amusement. "I suppose that you managed to injure yourself?"

Kate decided that she would be damned if she'd let this Klingon think she was crying because she was hurt. "Beth died. *Everybody always* cries when Beth dies." She noted with satisfaction that the Klingon's incredibly irritating expression of suave amusement was now overlaid by bafflement.

"I can't imagine why you should think I was hurt." She turned, intending to walk off, if possible without limping. Her ankle nearly gave way.

"My apologies," the Klingon said. "When you fell, I assumed--but you Earthers *do* indulge in the most peculiar hobbies."

"Just what I needed, a Klingon smartass," Kate muttered, painfully reseating herself on the ground.

A malicious grin on his dark face, the Klingon also sat, and watched Kate viciously dissect a piece of moss.

"Now is that any way to 'contribute to mutual understanding and galactic brotherhood'?" he said, in wounded, reproofing tones.

Despite her annoyance, Kate was forced to clamp her lips tightly together to prevent a grin. That was one of the more fatuous lines in

this week's conference newsletter. "How about contributing to galactic goodwill by sending a medtech out this way?" she suggested, after a short pause.

He rose to his feet. "I gave during the last war."

Kate looked up at him. "You're going?" The unspoken 'I hope' was almost audible. She liked neither the impression that she was providing him with mild amusement, nor the nagging feeling that she really ought to recognize him. Being towered over did nothing to eliminate her unease, so she attempted to stand again.

As she began to push herself up, the Klingon grasped her hand, pulled her easily to her feet, and swung her up into his arms, unnerving her completely.

"Put me down!"

"Certainly--when we reach the medical office."

Kate began trying to struggle free. The Klingon tightened his arms, pinning her against his chest. "Don't wriggle," he said. "Isn't one fall enough for you?"

Her temper now irretrievably lost, Kate made one more effort to free herself. Failing, she lapsed into a rigid silence.

To her considerable surprise, the Klingon actually was able to carry her all the way back to the infirmary. And if it weren't for her growing conviction that she'd made a fool of herself, coupled with an even firmer conviction that the Klingon was being helpful only to harass her, Kate would have considered the expression on the doctor's face worth all the previous aggravation. Unfortunately, Kate couldn't fully appreciate it at the moment.

The Klingon deposited her on an exam bed. He took a rather lingering time to remove his hands. Kate glared at him. He gave her a mocking smile.

"What--what happened?" The doctor sounded dazed.

"I walked into a door!" Kate said through gritted teeth.

There was a slight choked sound from the Klingon. Kate turned a venomous gaze on him. He raised an inquiring forked eyebrow, a look of bland innocence on his bearded face.

"And you," said Kate, "are without a doubt the most annoying human being I've ever met."

"Permit me to point out that I am not a human being." He nodded to the doctor and left the room while Kate was still recovering from this remark.

Kate was forced to admire the strategic withdrawal, which neatly and unfairly left him with the last word. She had to concede that the man had a truly rotten sense of humor.

"Well, of all the over-dramatic--" Kate began, staring at the door through which he had vanished. "And he obviously has a perfectly fantastic opinion of himself, whoever he--" She broke off abruptly as the doctor poked at her swollen ankle.

"Starship captains usually do." The doctor frowned. "I hope you didn't offend him. The last thing we need now is more trouble with those people."

"Oh," said Kate. So that was it. She conjured up a faint recollection of a listing in one of the early issues of that dull newsletter. In the 'Know Your Enemy' section, as the junior officers irreverently referred to the delegation biographies. Captain Ktalgar, of the Klingon Imperial Battlecruiser *Felemir*.

*Why do I have the horrible feeling that a Klingon starship captain would have more pull than a Federation junior lieutenant if he decides to continue his fun by complaining that I insulted him? This would teach her to go climbing trees at the age of 26.*

"Now," said the doctor, still probing sadistically at Kate's ankle, "what happened to you, Miss?"

"Lieutenant Mullaine," Kate said. "Ouch."

The doctor finally announced, looking self-satisfied, that Kate was to remain in the infirmary overnight, "for observation", after which her ankle would require several days of complete rest.

Early the following afternoon, Kate was sitting in bed in the infirmary. Spread out over the covers were several booktapes, a pack of cards, a puzzle of a black hole, and the conference newsletter.

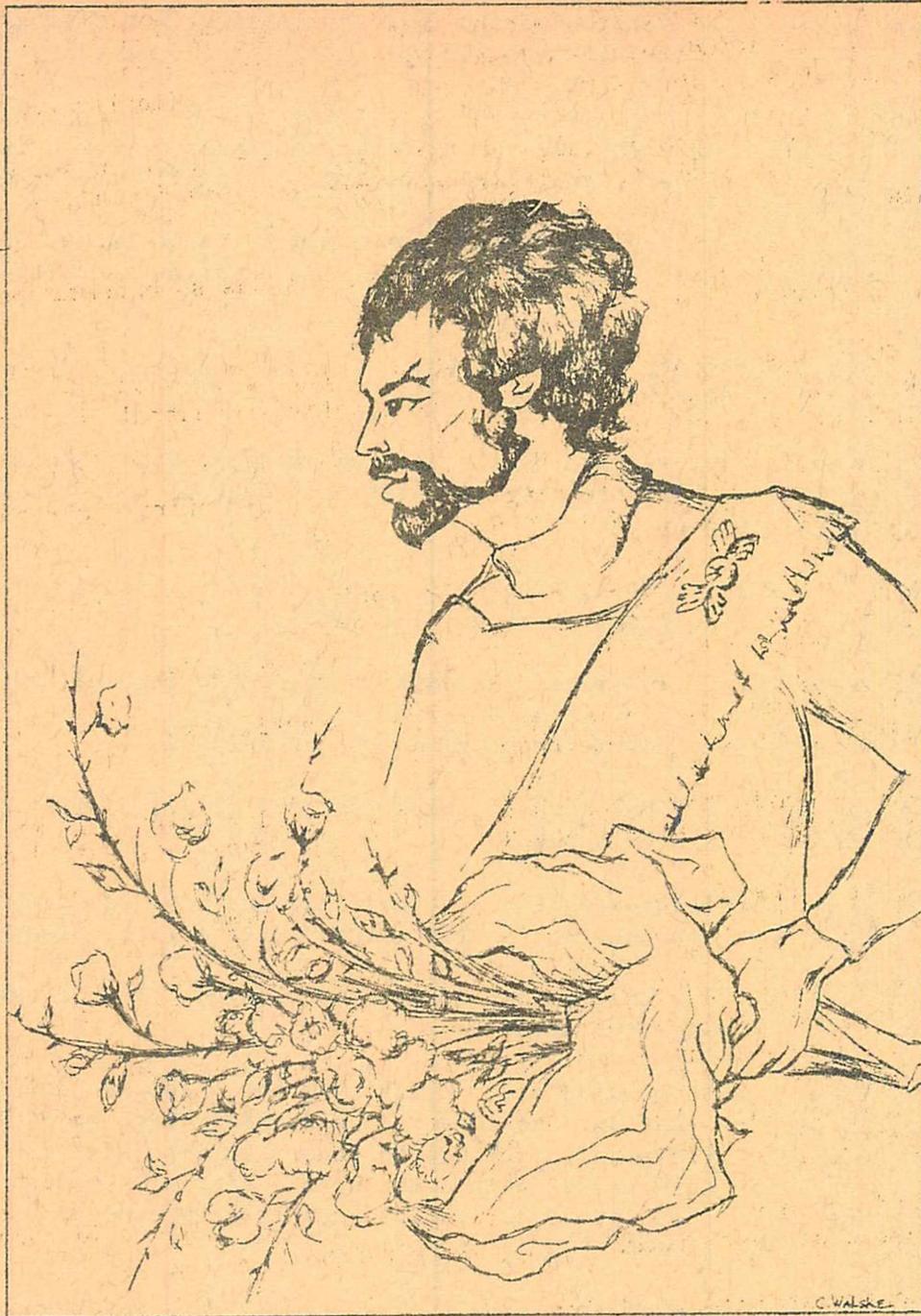
She was staring longingly out of the window when a nurse poked his head into the room, announcing that she had a visitor. Kate, who was still feeling stiff, sore, and scratched, leaned forward in careful interest.

Almost immediately, she fell painfully back on the pillows in disbelief. Captain Ktalgar strolled into the room. He was carrying a massive bunch of flowers--Kate strongly suspected it of being an entire rosebush, roots and all--and a large box.

The Klingon held out the box, which Kate, stunned, automatically accepted. The box fell through her fingers and landed on her stomach, almost knocking her breath out.

"What the hell is that?" she said, massaging her fingers.

"Candy. And flowers too, of course." He set the bush on the foot of the bed.



"Don't you feel you're overdoing it a bit?"

The Klingon grinned. "Nonsense. The proprietor of the confectionary concession assured me that Earthers will swallow anything. Of course, I may not have the quote absolutely correct. Alien languages are always difficult."

"Are they really?" said Kate, eyeing him with fascination. Suddenly realizing that she was undoubtedly about to become insulting again, she

resolutely ignored the numerous sharp-edged comments at her disposal for response. "Uh, Captain--thank you for your assistance yesterday."

"That's not what you said at the time." He pulled up a chair and sat down. He regarded Kate, who had, among other souvenirs of her sylvan outing, a large bruise across her face. "And what *did* you finally tell the doctor?"

Kate eyed Captain Ktalgar closely for a moment, then succumbed. She favored the Klingon with her nastiest smile. "I said you assaulted me, of course."

"I'm glad you didn't disappoint her. It was so patently what she really expected to hear."

There was a brief silence as they looked at each other. Kate began snickering. Ktalgar kept his face comparatively neutral, but the corner of his mouth twitched up.

"Well," said Kate, forcing herself, with an effort, to stop laughing, "it was nice of you to come, Captain. I think."

"I'm never nice. I'm merely attempting to combat terminal boredom."

"And long walks randomly shooting at things helps?"

Ktalgar smiled. "That book of yours startled me. I dislike projectiles whistling by my ear. Even books."

Kate's smile faded somewhat as she realized that she was probably lucky the man hadn't shot both her and *Little Women*. With a little less control . . .

"That's right," he said as her expression changed. "But I never shoot at random. It's a dangerous habit."

"How true." Kate studied him. Klingon or not, Ktalgar had a charmingly barbed style of conversation. No longer tree-ruffled, Kate enjoyed it. And if a hotshot starship captain chose to honor her with his company, who was she to object? Kate tried, with a noticeable lack of success, to control the slow smile that lit up her face. *Particularly since I haven't got anything to do either. . . .*

"And you have no dangerous habits, I suppose?" Kate said, abandoning as a lost cause her attempt to keep a straight face.

"None," Ktalgar said firmly.

"How dull."

The ensuing conversation was anything but dull. Ktalgar stayed for another fifteen minutes or so of amusing verbal fencing. After he'd gone, Kate shook her head in disbelief. That man was not in the least like her idea of a Klingon. He sure as hell knew how to break monotony.

However, he didn't show up again while she was stuck in the infirmary. The rest of her stay seemed even more boring in contrast.

About a week later, Kate's name finally came up on the list of junior officers to be favored with the rare treat of attendance at one of the almost nightly cocktail parties that seemed to be the principal activity of the peace conference participants.

*And I suppose if I really had any pretensions to true academic diligence,* Kate thought, surveying the crowded, glittering room with a jaundiced eye, *I'd be taking notes. I wonder if I could interest THE 'FEDERATION JOURNAL OF APPLIED SOCIOLOGY in a study of 'Interactional Patterns in Dull Diplomatic Circles'?* She sidestepped to avoid a seemingly-enthralled group listening to one of the young Klingon athletes holding forth on some martial art form or other.

*God,* Kate thought, continuing her unabashed eavesdropping on random snippets of conversation. *That sounds almost as dull as General Herrera's efforts to talk his secretary into--*

"How's your ankle?"

She turned to see Captain Ktalgar, in the full glory of dress uniform, standing beside her. He held a glass in each hand.

"Do you always insist on sneaking up behind people?" said Kate, staring at him in some admiration.

"My primary aim in life," he said firmly. "I'm a very cautious man. Have a drink."

Kate gratefully accepted the glass. "Tell me, Captain, just how long do *you* think this conference would have dragged on somewhere else? If it had been held on a nice, barren border asteroid, say?"

"Don't be cynical. I'm sure the luxury of the accommodations has nothing to do with it. Bored, are you?"

Kate regarded him suspiciously. "Yes. But then, *I* don't get to while away the evening insulting the brass-brained military morons running this thing."

"I don't know what you mean," Ktalgar said blandly.

Kate took a sip of her drink. "It just so happens, Captain, that I overheard part of your conversation with Undersecretary Grovin. So your 'humble command of our language is of the poorest', is it?"

Ktalgar smiled. "Idiomatic fluency in alien dialects is so difficult to acquire."

"Right," Kate said. There was a slightly awkward pause. "Well, Captain," Kate said tentatively, "thank you for the drink. . . ."

"As long as we're going to be insulting each other anyway, I suggest you call me Ktalgar."

"Why?" said Kate without thinking.

"It's my name."

Kate took a deep, choking breath, trying not to wince. And she'd walked right into that one, too. She stared at the Klingon in not entirely simulated disbelief.

Ktalgar shook his head. "I wouldn't," he advised kindly. "Too many witnesses."

"It would almost be worth it," Kate said. "Of all the *rotten* jokes--!"

Ktalgar acknowledged this tribute with a sardonic half-bow. As he straightened, his eyes met Kate's. They stared at each other, the brief pause gradually stretching out.

Ktalgar raised one dark forked eyebrow and smiled at her over the rim of his glass.

With a rising feeling of reckless exhilaration, Kate lifted her own glass, and let her mouth curve into an answering smile.

When she woke the next morning, with her face pressed into the pillow and Ktalgar's arm resting heavily across her back, Kate's first thought was that the third drink had been a colossal mistake. She exerted a considerable effort and rolled over.

Her action caused Ktalgar to open his eyes. "Good morning." He sounded quite appallingly cheerful.

"I swear to God, I'm going to cut it all off," Kate snarled, pulling strands of her dark hair out of her mouth and unwrapping them from her neck. Having succeeded in removing most of the hair from its stranglehold on her neck, she turned her head to look at her companion. "Oh. Hello."

Ktalgar, propped up on the pillows, regarded her with what she could only regard as a wolfish grin. He was obviously in far better shape than she was.

Kate looked at him rather bitterly. "I suppose debauchery just takes practice, like anything else. *I* feel half-dead. It *is* morning, isn't it?"

"After all, what with one thing and another, we didn't get to sleep very early."

"Don't be reasonable at this ungodly hour. *I* call 3:30 *very* early." Kate shut her eyes and rested her arm across her face. "Those goddamn full-dress uniforms should be banned by law. They completely warp the judgment."

"Any complaints?" Ktalgar's voice held an edge of irritation.

"I shouldn't imagine you get many."

"True."

"Modest as all hell, aren't you?" Kate said, through a yawn.

"I've always felt that one should have a proper appreciation of one's talents."

Kate stretched, opened her eyes again, and flung herself into a more or less upright position. She wrapped her arms around her knees as an aid to remaining sitting up. "It's the gold braid and glitter. Gets them every time, I suppose?"

"In conjunction with my charming personality."

"In *my* case," said Kate with dignity, "the motivation was scientific curiosity. Sociological research into alien, uh, customs."

Ktalgar raised an eyebrow, looking skeptical. "*Vulgar* curiosity, in other words. That's all right. I've never slept with a human before, either."

"Must have been a real thrill for you."

"Now, don't start being polite at this late date," Ktalgar said earnestly.

Kate pushed herself to the edge of the bed and stood up. "In that case, I get first crack at the bathroom."

Somewhat later, as they consumed the breakfast Ktalgar had ordered sent in, an atmosphere of relaxed comradeship prevailed.

"Would you say that you've completed your sociological research?" Ktalgar asked, passing Kate the salt. "I know research usually involves repeated experimentation."

"You wouldn't know a sociological research technique if it came up and bit you on the nose," said Kate, narrowly avoiding dropping butter on the overlarge dressing gown Ktalgar had loaned her. "And if you're working up, in a rather more subtle and sophisticated fashion than getting me drunk--"

"On one drink?"

"Probably drugged as well . . . where was I?"

Ktalgar, watching with interest as his robe slid down the curve of Kate's shoulder, said, "Either research or biting. Before you completely lose yourself in that tangle you seem to think is a sentence, let me say that you're quite correct."

He stood, walked around the table to stand behind Kate's chair, and laid his hands on her shoulders. "Will you come back tonight?"

Kate leaned back, resting her head against him. "I'll most certainly be here *until* this evening."

"What?" he said.

"I'm not on any duty today, so if I don't show up, no one will miss me. But I will be damned if I'm going to go back to my hotel at high noon, still wearing my dress uniform. Not to mention the little awkwardness of trying to explain where I've been."

Ktalgar's mouth twitched to a rueful smile. "I hadn't thought of that."

"Of course not. But I have to. I do hope you weren't planning on having other company today."

He took her hand and pulled her to her feet. "I'll see you later, then? Unless, of course, the novelty value's worn off?"

In answer, Kate pulled Ktalgar into as passionate an embrace as she could manage, considering that it was still breakfast time. As Ktalgar was once again wearing his regular duty uniform, complete with knife and gun, Kate's enthusiasms brought her into painful contact with his blaster. She released him to rub her hip.

"May I take it your answer is in the affirmative?" Ktalgar put his hands on her waist.

"You may," she replied, glaring at the gun. "But only, you understand, as an alternative to, er, 'terminal boredom'."

Ktalgar smiled. "Understood. He leaned forward and kissed her lightly. "Get some rest," he advised in solicitous tones as he turned to the door.

Kate's face lit with an only slightly malicious grin. "Just remember, Captain, *I* can sleep all day."

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*Wouldn't you know it,* Kate thought crossly as she wrapped the book. *Just when I started enjoying myself here, the ship gets ordered out-system.* She sat back and looked appraisingly at the parcel. On the other hand, it was probably just as well.

This brief fling with an exotic alien had been fun, particularly since he had a needle-sharp mind and a way with acid-etched comments. *Among other talents.* Kate's lips curved in a smile. But it was infinitely better to have a clean cut-off like this than to try for an unembarrassing end to the affair when one or the other of them got bored.

*Which we would have. Look how long this stupid conference has gone on already, with no results.* Kate inserted a blank tape into her recorder and flipped the machine on. After a moment's thought, she said, "Uh--Captain: I'm afraid my ship will be warping out today. I really enjoyed--

"Cancel that last, restart recording from 'today'.

"If you're really that interested in researching Terran customs, you may enjoy reading the enclosed book. It should at least keep your mind occupied for a while."

She tucked the message tape under the package's ribbon, packed the whole thing into an official Star Fleet envelope, and headed off for Ktalgar's hotel. She'd leave this with the front desk personally. There was no sense risking losing it in the communications network.

That Klingon wasn't going to forget her in a hurry. *Little Women* should just about drive him crazy. It was really too bad she'd never find out what he thought of it.

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As a matter of fact, it was a mere three months before she saw Ktalgar again.

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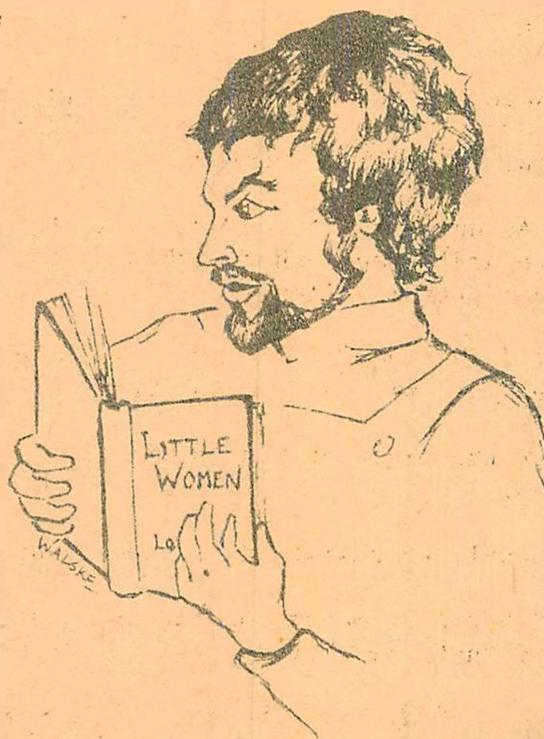
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"Oh, damn." Kate stared morosely at the message from the ship. *Why do they insist on bothering me with this junk? I'm on vacation.*

And, not being on of those hot-headed and weak-minded members of Star Fleet who regarded the presence of Klingons on the same station as a personal affront, Kate saw no reason for the ship to interrupt a pleasantly solitary breakfast in her hotel room with a stern admonition about restrained and civilized behavior. It was most unlikely that any trouble would be allowed to arise. Everyone knew that the corporations controlling these major civilian space stations ruled them with a solid-neutronium fist. The threat of being barred from the station, combined with the highly-



visible and efficient private security forces, resulted in extraordinary and unaccustomed courtesy and quiet. Disturbances were bad for business.

"And I could not possibly care less about the arrival of that stupid Klingon ship!" Kate said, prudently switching off the communicator before she did so. It was the arrival of the message that irritated her, not the contents. But of course the ship had to be able to reach her, just in case. Damn it.

Telling herself not to let it ruin the rest of the morning, all five minutes of it, Kate headed for the shower.

After showering and donning a casually-draped rose-pink tunic and matching tights, Kate went for a leisurely stroll through one of the main shopping levels.

Leisurely, but not random. Kate stood and surveyed the bookstore with a wry grin. The people in that store must think she was planning to rob the place. But she *needed* new books.

And although there were other bookstores scattered throughout the levels of the spacestation, Dalden's was the only one that bothered to import bound books as well as tapes. Expensive, but worth it. Besides, what else did she have to waste her salary on?

She was contently browsing through the recycle-section, coming to the reluctant conclusion that they really hadn't gotten in any fresh titles since she'd been in yesterday, when she heard a vaguely familiar voice.

"Excuse me--"

Kate turned. *Well, I'll be damned*, she thought. *I sure as hell never expected to see him again.* "Why--Captain Ktalgar? How nice to see you," she said tentatively.

"An unexpected pleasure." Ktalgar's dark face was stiffly polite. They regarded each other with mutual, and visible, wariness. There was an uncomfortable silence.

*I'll bet he doesn't even remember my name*, Kate thought suddenly. *How awkward for him.* Her mouth curved in a hastily-repressed grin.

At the sight of Kate's smile, Ktalgar's attitude lost some of its tension.

Unable to resist, Kate said, "And *did* you like *Little Women*?"

"That book makes absolutely *no* sense," Ktalgar said. "I refuse to believe that even Terrans act like that."

*Oh my God*, Kate thought. *Do you suppose he thinks it's a current novel?* She choked, and bit down on her lower lip. Controlling herself with an effort, she said, voice only a trifle unsteady, "Would you like a copy of the sequel?"

"If it's all the same to you, *no*," Ktalgar said. "I have enough problems as it is."

"I suppose the Klingon ship we were warned about is yours. Business or shoreleave?"

"Leave. I usually find myself in Dalden's almost immediately. Amazing how books can bring people together."

"At least I didn't drop one on your head this time," said Kate.

"At least I didn't almost shoot you this time. I was passing this aisle, and caught a glimpse of you. I thought your back looked familiar--"

"So you said to yourself, 'I know her'." Kate smiled evilly, tilting her head. "'Let's see, is it Meg, Jo, Beth, Amy--?'"

"Now, Kate. I always make a note. Besides, it's so much easier to remember the exotic aliens."

To Kate, accustomed to considering herself of average, not to say dull, appearance, this was an idea of charming novelty. "Thank you." She replaced the book she held on its rack. "Well. . . ." There didn't seem to be anything else to say. She had the distinctly nasty feeling that she and the Klingon were trapped, wondering how to extricate themselves gracefully.

*If you're so damned suave, you think of an unembarrassing end to this little scene, Captain,* Kate thought, almost resentfully, as she looked at Ktalgar. She was strongly considering the merits of simply saying, 'Well, goodbye', and walking off.

Ktalgar, sounding surprisingly diffident, said, "Perhaps, if you have no other plans, you might care to join me for lunch? Or a drink?"

Kate stared at him, trying vainly to decide whether this was a real or a polite invitation. "I--oh, hell. Look, Ktalgar, are you just being polite? If you are, say so, or we'll spend the next couple of hours wishing we could get out of each other's hair."

Ktalgar returned her measuring stare, then grinned. "Polite? I'm not polite, either, Kate."

"Bored again, then?" Kate said.

"Not at the moment." He put out his hand to brush a strand of hair from her cheek. Kate stiffened. He dropped his hand. "Novelty value worn off?"

"I don't know," said Kate.

"I see." There was withdrawal in his tone.

"Anyway, I just had breakfast."

They stood looking at each other. The increasingly-remote look on Ktalgar's face was replaced by the sardonic amusement Kate remembered from their previous encounter several months ago. "At this hour?" he said.

Kate's self-conscious stiffness vanished. "Damn right. I hate, loathe, and despise getting up early."

"I remember. Kate--do come and have a drink."

"I'd love to," Kate said, flinging any remaining reservations to the winds. "After all, why not?"

Ktalgar smiled. "Why not indeed? And I happen to know a charming--"

"And secluded?" Kate was beginning to enjoy herself.

"But of course."

"That figures." She was well aware of the other invitation implicit in Ktalgar's offer of a drink. She suspected that she'd just tacitly accepted it. But she'd liked him, Klingon or no. And as they had both just said, why not?

"I must say, this has been one hell of a shoreleave." Kate sat on the edge of the bed, pulling on her uniform boots. "The wrong companions can make any vacation so much more enjoyable."

"Don't you mean the *right* companions?" Ktalgar ran his nails down her spine to her belt. "Are you going to put on any more clothes--don't bother on my account, of course--or is that the new Star Fleet uniform of the, er, day?"

Kate, wearing only the red slacks and black boots of her uniform, twisted to face the grinning Klingon lounging beside her on the bed. "Don't give them any ideas. We *just* got rid of those ridiculous skirts and stockings. How about handing me that hairbrush?"

Ktalgar obligingly tossed the brush to her. "Too bad you have to leave so soon."

"Ships that pass in the night." Kate began vigorously trying to browbeat her wavy hair into submission. "Well, it's been a nice--"

"Break in the monotony?"

Kate stopped brushing and looked down at Ktalgar. "Damned telepath!" she said, flipping the brush at him.

"Wrong species, I thank the gods," he said lightly. "But how exciting can--what's your ship supposedly doing, starcharting?--be?"

"And that's *all* we'll be doing for God and Fleet Command only knows how long. I think the captain wound up in hot water, and is being given kindergarten refresher work for a while."

Ktalgar shrugged. "At least you're stationed in a sector well-supplied with pleasant leave-points. How'd you like to be patrolling along the Neutral Zone?"

"Not much." Kate got up and went over to collect her bra from the chair. "I'll gladly concede that 'honor' to the glory hunters." She slipped into the bra and began to fasten it.

Ktalgar leaned back on the pillows, watching her closely. "Nice sector, all things considered. The *Felomir* will probably be patrolling the border here for quite some time."

"That's nice," said Kate absently. Then her fingers closed over the bra fastening. She looked over at Ktalgar.

"It's just possible," he said. "I'm interested. Are you?"

"A ready-made companion?" she suggested. "So to speak, that is?"

"Only with a certain amount of luck, my sweet viper. . . . Well?"

Kate, frowning, shoved her arms into her shirt and ran her hand down the front-seam closing. "Well . . . let me put it this way. *If* we wind up in the same place at the same time--"

Ktalgar swung himself off the bed and walked over to her. "Yes?"

Kate looked up at him. "You can always try buying me a drink. That seems to work every time."

Ktalgar laughed, caught her head in his hands, and kissed her. Kate swayed toward him, then pulled away.

"And now, would you please get out of here so I can finish packing and check out?" she said.

Ktalgar pulled his hands away, sliding his fingers along her cheeks. "Goodbye, Kate. And if we ever happen to be in the same place, at the same time, with the same inclinations . . ."

Kate smiled. "It would be damned nice. But I wouldn't count on it. Goodbye, Ktalgar."

She stood looking at the door after he left, and then shook her head with a rueful smile. The odds against ever seeing him again were now so high as to make it an impossible occurrence. All the luck had been used up on this second unexpected interlude.

But it's nice to be asked, just the same. Even if it didn't cost him anything to say it. Still smiling, Kate turned to the mirror and began twisting up her hair.

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"As long as we're being absolutely frank, I never believed that bit about seeing you again," said Kate several months later. "Once was the most incredible coincidence--but twice? The odds against it were just about impossible."

"So they were." Ktalgar ran an appreciative hand along the curve of her hip. "I cheated. The privilege of rank, you know."

And nothing easier than for a captain to alter a station-stopover by a few days one way or the other. Or to keep track of the transmissions and itinerary of a Federation ship for *non-military* reasons. If he cared to.

"How incredibly flattering," Kate said, inordinately pleased. "Diverting a starship's the biggest thing anyone's ever done for me."

"Is it indeed?" Ktalgar's hand paused. "Well, so long as *you* divert the ship's captain. . . ."

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". . . 'By-the-bye, what became of the baby?' said the Cat. 'I'd nearly forgotten to ask.'

'It turned into a pig,' Alice answered very quietly, just as if--"

"Where do you find these books?" Ktalgar said. "I think you're writing them yourself, just to drive me insane."

"Well, I like that," Kate said, twisting around in his arms to fix an accusing gaze on him. "Didn't I spend yesterday afternoon listening to that incomprehensible pre-imperial Klingon epic you dug up?"

"If you can call it listening to make hypercritical remarks about every minor plot flaw--"

Kate settled back on his shoulder again, and turned back to the book. "Alice is a classic," she said, with a superior air.

"A classic what?"

Kate promptly dug her elbow into his ribs.

"When will you learn that you can't win?" Ktalgar said, after a brief but interesting struggle. "You're the worst fighter I ever saw. I can't imagine how you pass your competency exams for Star Fleet."



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"I'm not in Combat or Security, and stop sounding so damn smug. Now cut that out."

Ktalgar laughed, and lifted his hand from Kate's back. "You started it."

Kate pushed herself back to a sitting position. She picked up her book. "Do shut up, or you won't get to hear about the Mad Tea Party." She began trying to find her page.

"I'll try to survive the disappointment," Ktalgar said.

"That's all right. I'll *loan* it to you."

"Too generous," he said. He twitched the book out of her hand. "Come back over here, will you? You're out of reach."

Kate moved back to sit in the curve of his arm. She rested her arms on her knees, staring with half-closed eyes at the placid view spread out before their favorite spot on the grassy hillside. The silence lengthened. She let her eyes close, savoring the air and the sun, Ktalgar's arm a familiar comfort across her shoulders.

"I love planetfalls," he said idly. "Sometimes I wonder how I stand spending my life inside metal and wire."

Kate, voice drowsy, said, "You adore it, or you wouldn't do it. To make you quit, they'd have to drag you out of your ship with pliers. Like a crab. Cheer up, you'll be back to it--" She broke off, fully awake again.

"Tomorrow," he said.

"Damn." What had happened to that long vacation? The last day, and the golden stretch of shared time had vanished. Kate put her hand to her shoulder to curl her fingers around Ktalgar's.

"I'm going to miss you, Klingon." She tried to keep her tone light.

Ktalgar lifted his other hand to Kate's cheek. "You don't have to. Come with me."

"What?" said Kate, turning her head to stare at him in blank surprise.

Ktalgar put his hands on her shoulders and pulled her around to face him. He smiled. "Marry me, Kate."

"Are you out of your mind?" she said, staring at him.

Ktalgar's eyes narrowed. His fingers tightened. "That's a flattering response," he said with cold irritation.

"You're not joking."

"I am not. I've been thinking about this. Why should we go from leave to leave, with the odds against meeting increasing each time? I want you to come with me. Well, my love?"

Kate had a warming, treacherous urge to nod her head and throw herself into his arms. It would be so easy. . . . *And later?* She looked at him intently. "Ktalgar, you *didn't* think. The nasty problems involved?"

"I don't consider them insurmountable."

"Leaving aside the fact that I don't want to live in the Klingon Empire and that the way things are going, I'd never be able to come home, even to visit my family--" Kate could hear her voice rising, and stopped. She pulled away from his grasp, catching his hands, holding them hard.

"Dear God, Ktalgar, do you know what your High Command would have to say?"

"I don't care about their comments."

"You'd care fast enough when they took your ship away," Kate said grimly.

His hands turned hard and cold in hers. Kate bent her head, throat tight.

"Others have married aliens and kept their careers intact," he finally said.

"Not a battleship captain who brought home an enemy alien," said Kate. "Even I can see that. And when they start investigating, and they will--" She raised her head, meeting his eyes squarely. "You're forgetting, my darling. This affair isn't *areal* secret."

He nodded, reluctance evident. "No. Only for so long as no one wonders, and then looks."

"It would be about 10 seconds before your superiors found out all about our constant coincidental meetings. And then--"

Ktalgar interrupted. "Adjusting arrival and leave times is not a crime."

Kate just looked at him. "And then they'd *crucify* you. You'd never be let near a ship again. Your brilliant career would be in such shreds--" She dropped her head to their hands.

"For the gods' sake, Kate, don't cry," he said, his voice suddenly sounding tired.

"And there we'd both be," Kate went on, her voice muffled. "Trapped."

"Kate--"

She lifted her head. "It's impossible. Why did you have to bring it up at all?" She jerked her hands away, and pressed them over her eyes for a moment. "Damn you, anyway."

Ktalgar sighed, and rose to his feet. "All right, Kate. I don't think it impossible, but I can't deny the difficulties." He held out his hand.

After a moment, Kate took it, letting him pull her up.

He caught her head gently between his hands, bending his head to kiss her damp eyes. "But the offer stands. Think about it." His voice turned bitter. "You'll have plenty of time. We can't expect to see each other again for quite some time. The *Felcmir's* next stop will be home for an overhaul."

"Reassignment?" said Kate, her hands clenching.

Ktalgar shook his head. "It's not going to be that easy for you, Kate. I damn well intend to see you again. *Felcmir* will be given different paths to prowl eventually. But not yet."

"It was not kind of you," Kate said, feeling infinitely weary, "to put the idea into my head." Not to have to wait weeks or months for the glowing shared hours . . . "It wasn't very kind, when you know I can't." Her shoulders sagged. She turned her head away.

Ktalgar put his hand under her chin, forcing her to look up at him. "But I'm not kind, Kate." His voice was very quiet. "Whatever made you think I was?"

It *was* a long time before she saw him again. And it seemed longer.

Her initial relief at not having to face Ktalgar on her next shore leave quickly vanished, overwhelmed by the irrational and lonely feeling that, somehow, she had no one to talk to. Just as if there weren't any number of solid Federationers around, several of whom would have been quite pleased to have provided her with company.

By the time, several months later, that her ship's circuit of the sector brought it arcing back to the principal commercial station, Kate had half-convinced herself that she wouldn't see Ktalgar this time, either. This cold comfort lasted only until she ever-so-casually asked about the current docking list.

Looking at the list on her viewscreen, Kate had a craven desire to skip leave altogether. Not that the MedPsych Department would let her get away with that. They practically kicked everyone off-ship at every conceivable opportunity.

Kate switched off the viewer. After staring at it for a moment, biting her lip, she slowly got up and began to change into her civilian clothes. She dressed with somewhat unusual care. Then she glanced around, threw a few remaining odds and ends into her suitcase, and headed for the exit dock.

As usual on her longer leaves, she planned to stay in a hotel, rather than commuting to the ship. After checking in, she went off to wander around the main malls of the station, absently peering into store windows.

When her feet began to protest, Kate walked back to the central mall, and sat down under some decoratively flowering trees to watch the fountains. She pulled off her sandals and rubbed her foot. *I knew it, damn it, a blister. I should have just gone to the message--*

"Hello, Kate."

Kate straightened, pulse leaping. "Hello, Ktalgar."

He sat down beside her, face sober, eyeing her with cautious questioning. Kate began twining the sandal ribbons around her hands, her eyes on Ktalgar's face.

*Damn it, why don't you say something?* Kate thought angrily after a moment that seemed endless. If he didn't, she'd have to; they couldn't just sit here all day like total strangers-- Her nervously fidgeting fingers suddenly stuck. She looked at her hands. She'd managed to completely imprison her fingers in the ribbon-straps of her sandals. "Oh, for--"

Ktalgar's amusement was plain in his voice. "Allow me."

Kate shot a glance at him, and her wary anxiety dissolved. She let him unwrap the tangle of straps. "God damn it, I was wandering around here looking positively elegant for hours. Why don't you ever show up when I have all my clothes on properly?"

"It's so much more rewarding when they're off--improperly," Ktalgar said, with an answering grin.

Kate began to laugh. "Ktalgar, I am glad to see you. Although the way my subconscious sets me up for your snide remarks--"

"Klingons never make snide remarks," he said gravely.

"Is that like the 'Vulcans never tell jokes' routine?" said Kate suspiciously, bending down to put on her sandals. "And if all you have planned for today is sitting around making nasty remarks . . ."

Ktalgar held out his hands. Kate placed hers on his, and he drew her to her feet. "Come." He smiled. "There must be some more secluded areas on this station."

"And if there aren't, you can always lodge a complain, I suppose."

Ktalgar raised his eyebrows slightly. "Of course."

*And he would, too.* Kate choked. At his questioning glance, she said, "Dear Sirs: It has come to my attention that your otherwise well-

appointed station is inadequately supplied with areas suitable for amorous dalliance. Please see that this situation is corrected immediately--"

"Stop giggling," Ktalgar said in severe tones.

Kate stopped snickering, grinned at him, and glanced around. She encountered a hostile stare from a human walking by. And the combination of human female and Klingon male in sociable conversation was drawing other unfriendly looks.

"Let's get out of here," she said abruptly.

Ktalgar looked at the passersby and then at Kate. "An excellent idea. What time is it for you?"

"Almost evening."

"How fortunate. I happen to know an interesting restaurant on the next level."

"Private and discreet, of course?"

"Certainly," he said, mild surprise on his face.

"Sometimes I think you must practice those expressions of yours in front of a mirror. . . . Were you ever on leave in a place that *didn't* have a 'private and discreet' little place that you just happen to know?"

"Once," Ktalgar said reflectively. "But that station *did* generally cater to methane-breathers."

They walked through broad shopping corridors to the lower level, picturesquely winding lower halls. The restaurant, when they finally reached it, was so complacently successful that Kate would have passed it without noticing its modest entrance.

Once past the front door, decorous restraint was abandoned. A waiter escorted them through intricately paneled halls and ushered them into a small private dining room. There was a soft click from the lock as he left.

"Good Lord," Kate said, in stunned but admiring tones. "How--how decadent!"

The room was furnished with a large couch composed of oversized pillows. The couch was covered with darkly velvety material. Deep red tones predominated. The thick matching carpeting was almost up to Kate's ankles. Almost as an after thought, a small gilded table and two matching chairs stood in a corner.

"How in God's name do you *find* these places?" Kate said.

Ktalgar grinned. "I admit it's not very subtle, but the food is good."

"Food, huh?" Kate regarded him with extreme skepticism. "Talk about *vulgar--*"

"So we were," said Ktalgar, reaching for her.

"Very true," said Kate with an air of surprise. "So we were." She wrapped her arms around him, kissing him with a fierceness that rather surprised her.

Ktalgar pulled her closer. Kate relaxed against him, ran her lips along his neck, and breathed softly into his ear, her tone low and seductive, "Get rid of the damned gun before I stuff it down your throat. Side-ways," she added. "Don't you ever remember to take the thing off?"

Ktalgar grinned again, unfastened his gunbelt, and tossed it over to the couch.

"It's not funny." Kate rubbed her hip. "I might just as well have the outline of that blaster tattooed on."

Ktalgar sat next to the gun. "You don't feel that would be a trifle more difficult to explain than a bruise?" He pulled Kate down beside him.

She directed a pointed look at the blaster. Ktalgar obliging pushed it out of sight under the nearest cushion.

"Thanks," she said. "I always feel that it interferes with the mood of unrestrained passion."

His grin faded. He ran a finger, with great and delicate care, down the curve of her throat. Kate caught her breath, and, with equal care, placed her hands on his shoulders, tightening her fingers on his shirt. She let herself fall back on the cushions, pulling him down into a close embrace.

There was a diffident buzz from the door intercom.

Ktalgar pulled his mouth from Kate's. "*Arkvash!*" he said savagely. "Has that waiter *no* sense of timing?"

"Don't answer it," Kate said, looking up at him through half-closed eyes. "He'll come back later."

"Now I know why I love you." Ktalgar kissed her eyebrow. "It's for your brilliantly logical mind."

Kate laced her fingers behind his head. "Shut up darling," she said, and pulled his mouth back to hers.

A great deal later, after they had finally gotten around to eating dinner, Kate sat leaning her head on her hand, absently swirling the contents of her wineglass.

"The idea, I believe, is to drink it," Ktalgar informed her kindly.

Kate looked up and smiled at him. Her smile gradually faded. "Ktalgar? What is it?"

"I've missed you. Very badly."

Kate sighed. "And God, did I miss you. I never intended to, you know, damn it."

"I know. Kate--do you feel you could change your mind on the subject of marriage?"

There was a dead silence. Kate's fingers tightened on the stem of the wineglass. "That isn't fair."

Ktalgar reached across and took the glass from her hand. He set it down, jolting wine onto the table. "It wasn't supposed to be. Why not, Kate?"

She shook her head slowly.

"We'd--"

"Be miserable, and you know it. You know I'm right. You're just too stubborn to admit it."

"As stubborn as you? We could try."

"And your career? You seem to think you're willing to throw over everything you've worked for. To have *me*?" Kate was suddenly shakey. "How long before you started looking at me and thinking, 'If it weren't for her, I'd still have my ship. . . .' And then you'd hate me."

He stared at her, mouth tight.

Kate went on. "'Try', you say. Ktalgar, we *can't* just 'try'. They're already talking about cutting diplomatic ties, after that last asinine incident. If they do, they'll freeze the borders. It's a one-way trip. No backing out."

"Oh, Kate," he said, his face softening. He held out a hand. "Does it frighten you that badly? You'd think I were asking you to live among primitive cannibals."

Kate laid her hand in his. "I'm sorry. I can't."

"Won't," he corrected.

Kate pulled her hand back. "All right, Ktalgar my love. *You* come and we'll live in the Federation."

"What an amusing idea. Can't you ever be serious?"

"You see?" There was hot pressure behind Kate's eyes. "I don't want to spend my life as a stranger among a bunch of aliens! And neither do you!"

Ktalgar stared at her, his face drained of its customary urbane amusement. He looked cold and savage, and Kate drew back in her chair.

After a long moment, he relaxed. Kate didn't think his smile was quite convincing, but it was infinitely better than his previous expression.

"No. You're quite right." The tone of his voice was mild, and Kate did not like it at all. "You are quite right, and it would be a great deal more pleasant if you weren't."

"Cheer up, darling." Kate made a valiant attempt to defuse the tension in the room. "Wed, no. Bed, however, is something else again." This time she was the one who held her hand out, palm up, across the table.

His eyes on her face, he placed his hand over hers, closing his fingers to grip her wrist. The tension subtly altered and intensified.

His hold on her wrist tightened as they stared at each other across the table. He began to rise, slowly, pulling Kate with him. With equal slowness, she closed her own fingers around his wrist.

There was a sharp, clipped beeping from Ktalgar's communicator.

"Oh, shit!" Kate said, on an almost sobbing breath. Ktalgar reached for his communicator, keeping his hand on her wrist. She shut her mouth firmly, waiting as Ktalgar carried on an acerbic conversation with his ship.

When he snapped the communicator shut a few moments later, he looked exceedingly annoyed.

"What was that all about?" Kate asked.

"Some idiot forgot to fill out three lines of a report in triplicate that was submitted to our local consul." He released her wrist, and went to collect his gun, strapping the gunbelt around his waist. "I, of course, have to straighten out the resultant mess." He drew a deep breath. "Bureaucrats!"

From the tone in which he said it, Kate couldn't feel that whoever had loused up was in for a particularly pleasant evening. She also couldn't feel much sympathy for the unknown. Why they couldn't have waited until morning. . . .

"Call me when you finish," Kate said.

"I will. It may be late."

"I don't care." Kate laid her hand on his chest. "A whole week-- I don't want to waste it."

"Only a week." He bent and kissed her. "I'll see you later."

With that initial exception, it was a week of uninterrupted enjoyment. Kate rather suspected that after the first time, Ktalgar's crew would much prefer *not* to call their captain to handle any little problem that might crop up.

Kate and Ktalgar spent a happily companionable time, in and out of bed. But after the first morning spent combing the bookstores with Ktalgar, Kate decided to wear a veil when she was in public with the Klingon.

"Why?" Ktalgar watched with puzzled interest as Kate anchored combs in her hair and hooked on the veil. "On a station like this, you have to make a concerted effort to *attract* attention, not to avoid it."

Kate tilted her head, examining the effect in the mirror. "I know-- but I don't like the looks we've been getting this time." All they'd need would be for some hotheaded human to take exception to a Klingon and a Terran woman fraternizing, and they'd be sunk.

She turned, her grin hidden by the veil. "What's the matter? Don't you like it?"

"It's a little disconcerting. But I see your point. You could be any species under that."

"Now you can just tell everyone I'm a terribly modest woman from one of your planets--"

"Not modest. Conventional. Come on, unless you want to be dramatically late for the play. . . ."

"You never think about anything but sex," said Kate severely. She propped herself up on one elbow and looked at Ktalgar lying beside her.

"And my ship. I do think about my starship."

"Occasionally."

Ktalgar grinned. Kate slid her hand down his bare chest in a leisurely fashion.

Ktalgar caught her hand, and lightly ran his thumb over her palm. "Sometimes I think you really enjoy this affair because you know your Star Fleet would have a spasm if it found out. Why you're in the military at all, considering your low opinion of it, is beyond me."

"How else could I afford to travel? And the tuition benefits?"

Ktalgar looked at her, raising his eyebrows. "That's not--"

"Besides, I'm sure part of the pleasure for both of us is the lure of forbidden fruit." Kate's mouth curved in a slow grin. "After all, look at *your* position--figuratively speaking, of course," she added hastily. "The Empire must be full of nice Klingon girls. And you know *your* superiors wouldn't take a much brighter view than mine." Kate flopped back on the pillows, pulling free and clasping her hands behind her head. "Of course, I at least have a legitimate excuse for fraternizing--"

"Is that the current technical term for this activity?"

"--with the enemy."

"Mental deficiency, I suppose?"

"I'm conducting primary research into the effects of role models in military leadership selection processes."

Ktalgar regarded her skeptically. "Oh?"

"Consider the typical starship captain," Kate said. "Suave. Debonair. Dashing. Sex on wheels. A type that transcends species differentials. Question: Is it due to a process of deliberate selection for type on the part of the authorities, or do individuals possessing the operative qualities gravitate to the role because they're naturally flamboyant? This behavior is undoubtedly reinforced by the image the existing role-models project. In short, do people become starship captains because they're the type who's attracted by the image, or are they attracted by the image because they're the type?"

"Now wait a minute--" Ktalgar shook his head slightly. "Never mind. And what conclusion have you drawn? Based on your extensive personal research."

Kate looked at him with innocent surprise. "Oh, that's as much conclusion as anyone will ever arrive at. It's already nine times as definitive as most sociological conclusions. Of course, in its final form it will be a 500 page monograph. With charts."

Ktalgar pulled Kate over to him. "I think you'd better stick to the insanity story." He trailed his fingers across her face and down the curve of her throat.

Kate closed her eyes, relaxed her body against Ktalgar, and let her own fingers wander to his ribs. Ktalgar promptly abandoned his attentions to grab her hand, pinning it hard against the mattress.

"You," he observed sharply, "are a fiend."

"And you have a nasty, suspicious mind. You know perfectly well I wouldn't tickle you. It's too damn dangerous."

Ktalgar released her hand.

"Paranoid," she added.

"Sensible precaution. Humans are inherently untrustworthy."

"Thanks a lot." Kate lay resting in his arms for a moment, then sighed, pushing herself away. "I hate to say it, love, but I'd better get moving."

She swung herself reluctantly off the bed and began collecting her stray items of clothing.

Ktalgar watched with amusement as she dressed. "If you'd put all your clothes in one place, you wouldn't have so much trouble finding them."

"Humph." Kate sat next to him on the edge of the bed to pull on her boots.

"See you next time we both happen to put in at the same station."

Kate twisted to look at him, surprised by his bitter tone. At the sight of his face, she stood. "Don't."

Ktalgar's hand shot out as she stepped back. He jerked her back down beside him.

"Please," Kate said.

"How long this time?" Ktalgar said. "I'm tired of having you only when our ships cross paths. And it's getting ever-harder to arrange. A month? Six? Never?"

"Ktalgar--" Kate tried to pull away.

His grip held her down. "Stay," he said, voice cold. "I haven't finished."

"I thought we finished this discussion long ago," Kate snapped. So he hadn't given up after all. "Why can't you stop this 'be reasonable, do it my way' routine?" She looked at the hand tightening on her arm. "I would like to retain the use of my left hand," she added. "Let me go."

There was a brief, tense pause before Ktalgar's grip slackened. With a distinct feeling of relief, Kate rose and backed off.

He looked at her for a moment. Then, smiling grimly, he reached for his uniform and began to yank on his clothes. It took him an amazingly short time to dress. He walked over to Kate, fastening his gunbelt.

"Haven't you forgotten something?" she asked.

Ktalgar's expression was wary. "What?"

"That obligatory casually tousled hair." Kate took a hasty step sideways toward the door. Ktalgar moved faster. She found herself pinned against the wall, his hands on either side of her body.

"What a nasty tongue you have," he said in the mild tone that usually indicated intense irritation. "Stop trying to change the subject and introduce your obligatory note of levity."

"I'm sorry," said Kate. She felt rather desperate. "Ktalgar, I have to go. I'll be late. I've left it to the last minute as it is. If anyone notices . . ."

Ktalgar regarded her thoughtfully as her voice trailed off. "Very true." He dropped his hands and stepped back a pace. "Goodbye."

*Just once, Kate thought with sudden longing, I'd like to be able to say a less final farewell. No assurance, no guarantee. "Goodbye," she said. "Oh, hell."*

They looked at each other for a minute, and then she stepped forward, hugging him tightly. After a moment, she felt his arms around her. He held her for a few seconds, then bent his head to press his mouth hard on hers.

Kate finally pulled away. "I didn't really mean it about the hair."

Ktalgar touched her cheek. She thought he was going to say something else, but he turned away and left the room without another word. The sliding door gave the distinct, impossible, impression of being slammed.

Kate let out her breath in a shuddering sigh and sagged back against the wall. This had originally been a lighthearted, casual affair. How the hell had it turned into this heartwrenching mess?

\* \* \*

It was a question Kate asked herself with increasing frequency during the next few weeks. As the political situation between Federation and Empire slowly worsened, and the date by which she would have to decide whether or not to re-enlist grew closer, she spent too many nights staring at the ceiling, unable to sleep.

*And even if I were crazy enough to re-enlist, Kate sat upright in the dark, hugging her knees. The very thought was enough to bring an instinctive 'No' to her lips. Even if I could stand to, and I'm awfully tired of Star Fleet life, there's still no guarantee that I'd ever see Ktalgar. His ship would be transferred. Or hers. Or, with re-enlistment, she might very likely be assigned to another ship entirely. . . .*



No, she had no intention of staying in Star Fleet. She'd go home. *And never see him again? I can't stand that, either.*

"Be sensible, Kate," she said. "A man you really know nothing about? A man you've seen half-a-dozen times in almost two years?"

She twisted around, flinging herself down and burying her face in the pillow. *I won't, I can't,* she thought frantically. *Wrong, no matter which way I choose. Damn you, Ktalgar. Why did you have to do this? You should have let it go, the way I did. . . .*

When the query about re-enlistment came, Kate said no.

It was a relief to have the decision made. She hoped, or thought she did, that she'd be lucky enough to see Ktalgar one last time before she went home.

\* \* \*

She was lucky. And fortunately, Ktalgar seemed to have abandoned his frightening intensity of emotion, keeping their relationship on its

earlier, lighthearted footing. It was Kate who found herself trying to cope with an impossible desire to possess and hold.

But she knew it was really the last time. He didn't. And Kate couldn't bear to tell him.

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*You can't leave it any longer. Kate lifted her head and looked at Ktalgar. Tomorrow's the last day. You can't just say 'Goodbye forever, my love' as you walk out. You have to tell him.* She took a deep breath.

"Ktalgar . . ." her voice trailed off.

He smiled, and walked over to curve his arm around her. "Yes?"

Kate looked at his face. Then she buried her head on his chest, gripping his arms tightly. "Oh, God," her words were muffled in his shirt. "Why did I ever let it get this far?"

He ran his hand over her dark hair. "Kate, what is it?" Then he put his hands on her shoulders, pushing her back to look at her. "This far?" His voice was full of questioning hope. "Kate--you aren't pregnant?"

"Am I--" Kate stared at the dawning eagerness on his face. "You'd love that, wouldn't you?" she said slowly. "You think that would force me to--" With a surge of anger, she twisted out of his hands. "Well, I'm not. I'm not quite *that* stupid. You know perfectly well at least 75% of all accidental pregnancies are inter-species. I don't care if you'd like it--I'm not leaving something like that to chance."

Ktalgar's arms dropped to his sides. "Yes, I would like it. Not only would I like your children, but Kate--I'm tired of going on like this."

Kate clenched her hands, nails digging into her palms. "Ktalgar--" she hesitated, eyes on his bronzed, intent face. "Ktalgar, there's just no easy way to say this."

His brows drew together. "To say what?" He took a step toward her.

"My term of service is almost up. I'm going home. I'll be getting my degree next year, and I've been offered an instructorship at--"

"What?" His voice was almost inaudible.

Kate spun around to gaze, unseeing, at the wall. "I'm saying good-bye, Ktalgar. I shouldn't have put off telling you. But I couldn't stand to ruin the last time."

Ktalgar jerked her around, his fingers clamped on her arm like a trap. He stared at her, his face blank, for a stretched moment of silence.

Kate turned her head away from the pain in his expression. Her throat hurt. *I will not cry.*

"No." He slid his hand over her cheek and forced her to face him. "Kate, come with me."

Kate put her hand on his wrist. "Ktalgar, I can't!"

"*Why, Kate?*"

"Ktalgar, I won't spend the rest of my life as an enemy alien, living with--" Kate shut her mouth suddenly.

"Living with me?" He moved his thumb over the curve of her lips. "I think you could manage. I love you, Kate."

"And I love you. But Ktalgar, love isn't enough." She looked at the tautness of his unconvinced face, and added, desperately, "Your ship? Your command?"

His mouth thinned. "Kate," he began slowly, "I'll simply be booted upstairs to a desk command. A promotion, really."

"The dashing captain, without his glamorous starship?" Kate gave Ktalgar a brittle smile. "How long before you hated me for chaining you to that desk?"

"No," he said. "My choice." He tried to pull her close.

She stiffened, resisting the comfort of his embrace. "But not mine."

He let her pull away, his face darkening. "As you love me, Kate, *why?* What do you have to give up that--"

"Oh, nothing that could possibly match your sacrifice," Kate said. "I'd only have to defect, throw over *my* career, *my* family, *my* friends, *my* people, to go live with a bunch of Klingons."

Ktalgar's voice was soft. "I'm a Klingon."

"But I know you." Kate's voice took on a note of trapped panic. "I don't even speak the language. And you know what's happening with the political situation as well as I do. I could never come back."

"You mean you couldn't walk out."

Kate crossed her arms and said tensely, "I'd be trapped there, Ktalgar. If it didn't work out, you'd be able to walk off. I will not wrap on chains and throw away the key with my own hands. Not even for you."

Ktalgar's face had been freezing into lines of cold anger as she spoke. "You prefer to throw away our happiness with your own hands, rather than take that risk." His voice was distant.

Kate looked at him, and turned to the closet. "I *should* have waited until the very last second to tell you," she said bitterly. "I can see being fair was a mistake. I might as well leave now."

Ktalgar took a long stride forward and swept her backwards with his outstretched arm. Kate landed on the bed, staring up at him, shocked.

"Perhaps I should remove the choice from your hands."

Kate half-lay on the bed, still staring in cold disbelief. "Keep me here? You're crazy, Ktalgar."

"I think not."

"What are you going to do? Knock me out? That would be just like your charming people. All you military geniuses understand is brute force."

Ktalgar smiled, unpleasantly. "It has the advantage of simplicity, which is all an Earther comprehends. You will stay with me, Kate."

"No. I'm going home. I won't let myself ruin my life for--"

Ktalgar's hand went to the hilt of his knife, his eyes fixed on Kate.

The skin chilled on her arms. "Do you want to start a war? Ktalgar, I'm not worth a war."

His fingers fastened on the knifehilt. "So you say. Then the Federation doubtless will not concern itself with your loss."

Kate drew in her breath sharply. She'd been afraid to tell Ktalgar. But she had not anticipated unleashing this kind of emotional danger. Looking at the Klingon, she knew without any doubt that he was quite capable of abducting her. Or . . . Kate pushed herself cautiously toward the pillows.

Ktalgar came slowly toward the bed. "*You* have made *your* decision. *This* is *mine*. I say you will not leave."

Kate slid her hand under the pillow. Her fingers closed on the cool hilt of Ktalgar's gun. She whipped it out and pointed it steadily at Ktalgar.

He halted, staring not at the gun, but at her face. "Kate--"

"Let me go, Ktalgar," she said. "Let me *go*."

Ktalgar looked at her. His hand left the knife, and all the savage tension seemed to drain from him. He sighed, and walked over to her.

Kate's hand began to shake, and her vision blurred with hot and painful tears.

Ktalgar quietly took the gun from her unsteady hand and placed it in his belt beside his knife. Kate stared at him, frozen, unable even to cry.

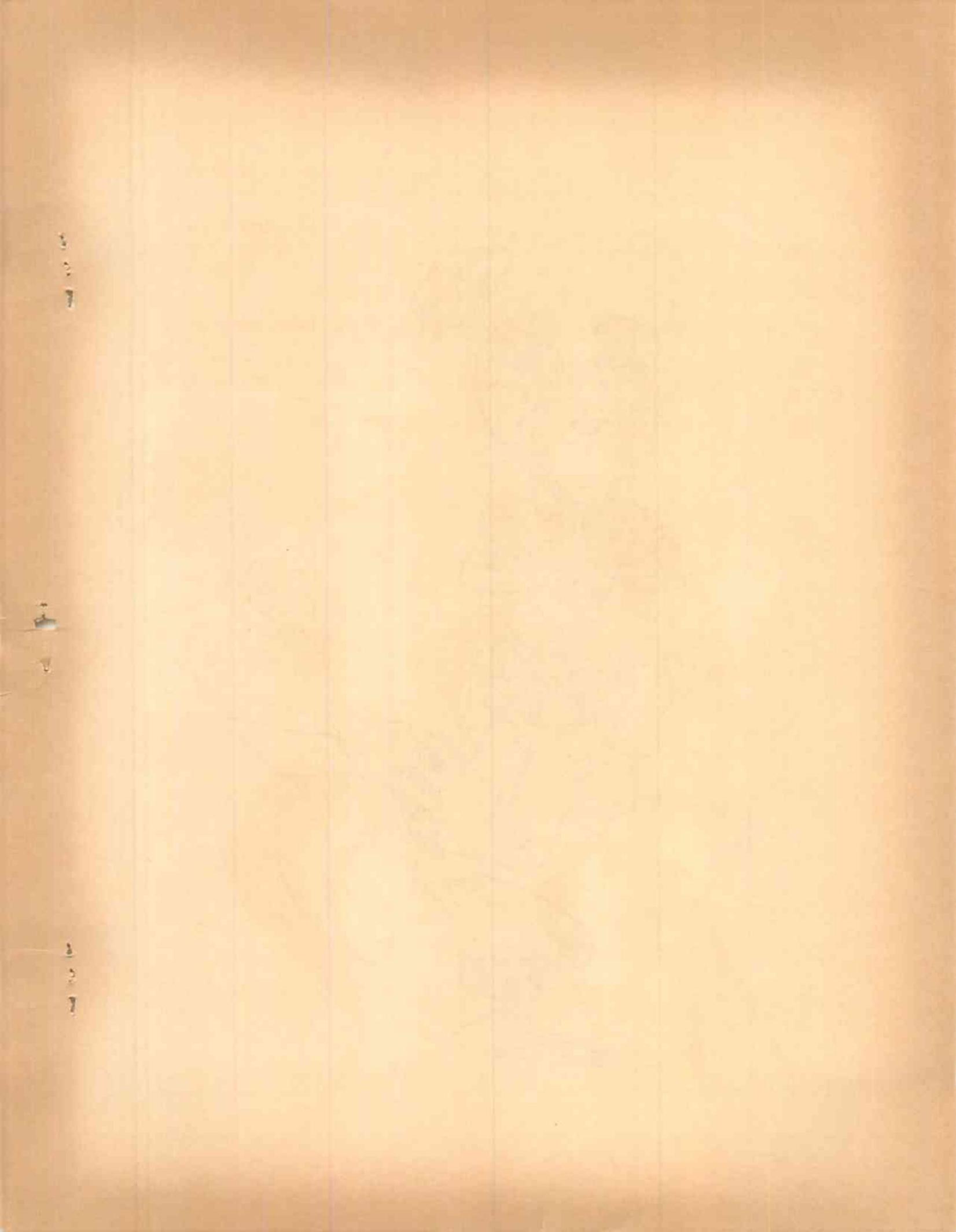
Ktalgar, moving very slowly, took her hands in his. He looked tired, and older. He lifted her hands, bending to kiss each palm. Then he took her head between his hands and kissed her trembling mouth. He straightened and stepped back.

Kate bent her head. When she looked up again, Ktalgar was gone.

*But I was right.* Kate stared at the door, cold pain in her heart. She looked down at her hands, and closed her fingers protectively over her palms.

*God damn you to hell, my love, I was right. Wasn't I?*







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