

THE DIARY OF ELENA

A Novel

by

DAVAN KYLESBREAU

“I would rather have thirty minutes of wonderful, than a lifetime of nothing special.”

— Julia Roberts in *Steel Magnolias*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

**From imagination to the printed page, writing a novel is an odyssey.
Once the words start spilling out, the quest to tell a story is underway.
Releasing them to paper finally completes the journey.**

**Blank sheets of paper cry out for words.
Elena's story seemed to fill them as quickly as I could type.
Nuances of character, location and history became the building blocks.
Ideas were found in the history of people who dared to live in the face of
overwhelming oppression.
Tantalizing as it might be to claim originality, Elena's story has been lived, in part
or in whole, by untold numbers.
And they should take the center stage of heroism.**

**– Davan Kylesbreux
January 25, 2002**

Captain James T. Kirk is lost.

The Captain physically is in the sick bay of the *U.S.S. Enterprise*. It is his mind, his personality, his soul that is missing. The victim of a savage people, they have tortured and tormented him until only his body lives, and that thanks to another of Leonard H. McCoy's medical miracles. But neither Dr. McCoy's skill, not Commander Spock's attempts with the Vulcan Mind Rules have been able to find Jim Kirk.

Their only hope is a young woman from the same savage world, but she died twenty years before Captain Kirk reached her planet. All the officers of the *Enterprise* have is her handwritten diary. And it may not be enough.

Historian's Note:

These events occurred during the fourth year of original five year mission of the *Starship Enterprise*.

THE DIARY OF ELENA

I was 19. He was 43. But for 19 months, 9 days and 14 hours the difference in our ages did not matter. Now that he is dead (and I will soon join him), I remember that it never did matter. And I remember, too, that he was the only man who ever loved me for myself. There were men before him and there were men after him, but they – including my father – only used me. The ones who came after him were much more fully rewarded because of what his love taught me – not about the physical ways, but about myself. One of those men loved me, and I cared for him, but the memory of the first man to ever care about me, just for me, is the strongest, happiest memory of all.

For 19 months, 9 days and 14 hours he sacrificed his life, his world for me, to love me. I told him to go away and never return, and I still remember the hurt which filled his eyes.

But I know he never stopped loving me. He often said, "I love you. I will always love you. There will never be a day when I will not love you. With my last breath, Elena, I will speak your name." He kept his promise.

And I betrayed him. I betrayed us both. He would have said, "Princess, it does not matter. I love you." Perhaps when I meet him in death I will be able to ask his forgiveness.

CHAPTER ONE

The Isaac Newton, Stardate: 5901.4

“Captain, cruise configuration is five by five. Course steady on 2-1-2 Mark 27.”

“Thank you, Mr. Shelton,” Captain James T. Kirk answered. “Maintain.”

The Captain leaned back in his left-hand seat, the traditional seat for a flying craft’s master since the days of the early wing-supported, combustible fuel-powered flying machines. He was satisfied with the progress of this mission, although he had initially objected when the Admiralty suggested Starship Captains could use their shuttlecrafts as training vehicles for command candidates. He had always viewed the small, fragile crafts as merely tools for exploration and then avoided them as often as possible.

Jim Kirk would not have admitted it, but the shuttlecraft was a little too tame, a little too safe for his style of exploration.

“Give me a phaser and let me jump into the transporter beam,” he thought.

If he had voiced those feelings, someone, surely Spock or McCoy, and perhaps both in tandem, would have said, “Fools rush in,” and not have completed the quotation. Besides, considering the Doctor’s well-known aversion to having his “atoms scattered all over space,” the transporter was Kirk’s revenge against his Chief Surgeon for the endless physicals exams and diets of green plants.

“If McCoy lives to be 137, he will never like transporters,” Kirk mused.

The *Newton's* mission parameters were simple. Kirk, plus one or two junior officers and occasionally, but rarely, enough enlisted personnel to complete the shuttlecraft's seven person crew, would board the shuttle on the *Enterprise's* main docking bay, and while piloted by one of the officers, fly a short distance from their ship. In that position of relative security, they would test the maneuvering and safety capabilities of their vessel. When the Captain was satisfied, the *Enterprise* would withdraw, just out of standard safety range – although between Mr. Spock and Mr. Scott, very little was standard on Kirk's ship – and return at a prearranged time.

This feeling of isolation was meant to heighten the realism of the test. Kirk wondered at the wisdom of the maneuver, but when Scotty installed an unauthorized, but extremely powerful emergency transmitter, the Captain withdrew his objections. It was, he thought, a justifiable precaution.

* * * * *

“Captain?”

The tension in the young navigator's voice had James Kirk's immediate attention.

“What is it, Mr. Shelton?” Kirk answered matter-of-factly. It was a tone of voice calculated to inspire calm and confidence in junior officers.

Lieutenant Jackson Shelton's ancestry was decidedly human, but somewhere in the family lineage, perhaps not in a direct branch, but there nonetheless, had been an Orion. It had been a fairly recent ancestor, because his skin, especially around his eyes, had a pale emerald tint. Most people mistakenly thought his eyes were black.

They were, according to Jackson Shelton, “two shades lighter than ebony and one shade darker than mahogany.”

The navigator was short, barely 60 centimeters tall. Jackson often thought that if he'd had flat nose, his great grandfather could have been a Tellerite, a decidedly porcine species.

Born and raised on Mars Colony Alpha, Jackson had stepped foot on Terra for the first time the day he arrived at Star Fleet Academy in San Francisco. He was immediately captivated by the lure of the city's three antique and very well preserved trolley lines – in the late 20th Century they had been designated national monuments. What little free time he had was taken up with a clandestine job at the trolley barn on Mason Street. His joy at tinkering with the old electrical motors, capacitors and reducers almost caused him to switch his major from command to engineering. Almost. But the stories, indeed the legends, of men like Robert April, Christopher Pike and James Kirk had kept him focused on the command track. At graduation he was assigned to their ship, the *U.S.S. Enterprise*.

Now sitting an elbow's reach away from Captain Kirk, Jackson readjusted his long range sensors for the third time in the last few seconds. He knew that their training area was outside of the usual ship traffic lanes, so he was interested when a ship's signature appeared on his screen. The fact that its configuration matched nothing from his training or any signature in the computer's data banks was cause for immediate concern.

“Captain, a ship has just appeared at the extreme range of our sensors.”

“Identification, Mr. Shelton.”

“Unknown, Sir. It matches no records in our computer.”

Kirk instinctively started to order the young ensign seated at the security board to raise shields, but stopped before he spoke. The *Isaac Newton*, like all other Federation shuttlecraft had navigation deflectors only – they kept the craft free of contact with micro-size space dust that might damage the small craft at its near light speed. *Newton* had no defensive screens.

Instead Kirk said, “Ensign K’Yle, increase power to our navigation shields. Make the rating 110 percent.”

“Aye, aye, Captain. Shields are at 110 percent,” the Antosian replied.

Bakor K’Yle was a native of Antos IV, a race of beings who centuries earlier learned the secrets of cellular metamorphosis. The discovery allowed them to assume any form they chose. Like the Chameleons of Earth or the Greetoth Avians of Sigma Tau Gamma who changed their color for protection, the Antosians used their talent similarly.

More importantly, the secret, once learned, could be used for cellular healing instead of mere metamorphosis. They had once taught this ability to legendary Starship Captain, Garth of Izar, who had then nearly destroyed them. When Antos joined the Federation, and its inhabitants later became members of Star Fleet, they were required to adopt one humanoid appearance and to maintain that persona at all times while on duty.

Off-duty, K'Yle enjoyed using his ability for the amusement of himself and his crew mates. Members of the *Enterprise's* crew frequently wondered whether the chair on which they were sitting was actually made of plastiform, or the rearranged molecules of Bakor K'Yle which could quickly change to vapor and drop them, in a most undignified position, onto the deck.

Once, while on shore leave, K'Yle and several companions were relaxing in a steam bath when they were joined by a boisterous and braggadocios native. Mating rituals on that world judged an applicant's worth by the appearance of certain private attributes. The new arrival to the bath boasted of his conquests and outlined plans for seducing a newly discovered victim. He dressed and went to meet the young woman. At a most inopportune moment, his one-piece garment – K'Yle – dissolved, revealing that the braggart was really quite small in stature.

When Captain Kirk heard of the incident, Ensign K'Yle received three days confinement to quarters and an official reprimand for mistreatment of indigenous personnel. For several months afterwards, however, the Captain always ordered new garments from the synthesizer before undertaking to entertain a female crewman.

“Anything new on the Unidentified, Jackson?” Kirk asked.

“A little, sir. She is approaching at just over Warp One. The matter-antimatter signature indicates she has been traveling at sustained high warp and only recently powered down. And Captain, although that ship is still too far out to get specific readings, it is larger than almost anything in our records,” Lt. Shelton concluded.

“Do they know we are here?” Kirk asked.

“I have analyzed the ion trail from her warp engines and it appears that as soon as they powered down, they altered course directly toward us. They definitely know we are here,” the navigator answered.

Kirk pushed a button in front of him and accessed the same information Shelton was receiving. In a low almost whisper, Kirk said, “That ship is almost twice the size of the *Enterprise*.” Then at a normal level, “All right, people, I need hard information. Studied speculation will also be appreciated.”

“Captain!” It was Ensign K’Yle at his security station. “A high energy beam of a type unknown has been launched at us. Impact in less than 15 seconds!”

“At this distance?” Kirk said. “From still at the outside edge of our best sensor readings? Evasive, Mr. Shelton! Pattern Alpha. Execute.”

Bakor K’Yle was wrong. From his mark, impact with the beam occurred in 11.3 seconds. If they had twice as much time, the results would have been the same. The beam was too fast and too powerful for the Shuttlecraft’s impulse engines to avoid. In the instant of contact, all of the craft’s computers were knocked off line. Restart occurred automatically, but by the time all systems were back on line, the intruding vessel had completed a full sensor scan of the *Newton* – for that was the beam’s primary function. It was not a weapon. If it had been, Captain James T. Kirk and his three member crew would have been dead. The sensor beam was followed by a tractor beam and the little ship and its occupants were helpless.

A secondary result of the sensor beam was that it momentarily incapacitated the shuttlecraft's occupants. They could all hear and see, but could not move. As soon as Kirk's vocal chords responded to instructions from his brain, he scratched, "Mr. Berek, do your engineering computers show us anything we can use to combat this tractor beam?"

The third and final member of Kirk's training crew, Berek was from the planet Delcaltor III, the second planet in a binary star system. Like Andorians, Delcaltors had twin antennae. Unlike the Andorians' those on Berek and all members of his race were highly attuned to detecting radio and light energy. In the darkest confinement, Delcaltors could discover light sources that others needed sophisticated sensors to see.

Because of its distance from its two suns, more than two A.U.'s, the planet's inhabitants survive the intense cold thanks in large measure to their hairy body covering. Jokingly called an overgrown tribble by some of his shipmates, Berek was not the first of his race to enter Star Fleet Academy, but he was the first to seek assignment to an exploration vessel. He had been a member of the *Enterprise* crew for less than two months.

"Mr. Berek?" Kirk asked when no answer came from the station immediately behind him.

When James Kirk turned around, he saw Berek's still form slumped over his panel. Before Kirk could move from his seat, the tractor beam's power was increased and the resultant force jostled Berek from his seat. The young ensign was dead. His

golden brown hair glistened with absorbed energy. The tips of his antennae still flared red with the traces of the unusually powerful energy beam which had killed him.

K'Yle opened a compartment just aft of his station and withdrew a medical scanner and tri-corder. A quick sweep of the instrument revealed what the three men already knew.

"He died instantly, sir," K'Yle said. "The scanner beam's power seems to have overloaded every neural circuit in his body. He felt no pain."

"Let's hope we have time to mourn him, Mr. K'Yle. Transfer his engineering readouts to your station and analyze. We need a weapon or at least an effective countermeasure," Kirk said, his voice showing the pain of losing a member of his crew.

"Aye, sir," K'Yle replied. And then spoke what Kirk already knew. "Sir, their beam is simply too powerful for us. The *Enterprise* would have difficulty against them."

"The *Enterprise*!" Kirk snapped. "Lieutenant Shelton, activate command sequence Alpha Two Alpha."

"Sir?"

"Scotty's emergency signal! Do it now, while we still have time!"

Jackson Shelton responded at once, punching in the proper progression. "Sir, that system is as dead as Mr. Berek. In fact, every system on the shuttlecraft is compromised. Life support is only available because of batteries, and they will not last long. Artificial gravity has been compromised and will fail in 90 seconds."

Kirk turned back to the forward view screen. “With the speed at which we are approaching our captor, they won’t need to last long. Initiate security protocols and prepare to be boarded.”

I met Anatorr two years before he knew who I was. I entered his place of business one wintery day and remarked that I had lived in the city of Zenyuk all of my life and had never seen his shop. He responded with laughter. It was not an unkind sound, just a warm knowing laugh that said he had heard my comments before.

“We hear that frequently,” he replied. “Actually, we have been here 11 years. Our white and scarlet tabersk gemstones are highly sought by young couples seeking the marriage rituals. The fact that we are hard to find only adds to their value. But surely someone as young as you has not come seeking tabersk.”

It was a statement, not a question, and for reasons I still cannot understand, I was embarrassed by it.

“No, I’m not!” I answered sharply and immediately left his shop. As I pulled the door hard behind me, I heard his warm laughter again. That day it infuriated me. Later it would charm and soothe me.

During the last year of my studies at the University I found myself in need of employment. My father, Veresh, was a veteran of the War of Vengeance against the Chekart, and so I was entitled to a small scholarship. What remained after instructors were compensated left me precious little for living expenses. Since my mother, Meena, had only two weeks earlier packed all of my belongings and told me I was no longer

welcome in her home, I needed to find support. And quickly. I looked at my father for a rebuttal, but he only looked at the floor.

Our world was suffering through desperate times. The victory over the Chekart had been almost as costly as defeat would have been because the victors ruled with cruelty. Anyone who spoke out quickly disappeared. Rumors of the horrors of the imprisonment camps, the yachenka, persisted, although officials of the victorious Bolskars denied them all. For the moment, no one at the University seemed to be threatened. There was actually a feeling of hope, that perhaps the worst was over and the promised freedoms would begin.

I walked into Anatorr's shop a second time, and without ever planning it, asked for a job.

"You may not remember," I began. "I came into your shop two years ago and you said I looked too young to be a buyer of tabersk stones. I ran out, angry and embarrassed. Now I need work, and I remembered the warmth of your smile. I learn fast. Will you hire me?"

Anatorr laughed again.

"I will on one condition," he said.

I pursed my lips tightly and folded my arms against my chest so he would not see my hands tremble.

"And what is that condition?"

"Only that you tell me your name."

“Elena,” I answered so softly I wasn’t sure at first he had heard me.

He held out his hands, palms up, motioning for mine, and said, “I am Anatorr.

Welcome, little Princess. Welcome.”

Three months later, when I lay in Anatorr’s arms for the first time, he told me that he determined during the first moments of our relationship to win me to his heart.

CHAPTER TWO

First Officer's Log: Stardate 5902.5

It has been 24 hours since Captain Kirk boarded the shuttlecraft Isaac Newton, along with his trainee crew of Lieutenant Shelton and Ensigns K'Yle and Berek. The Captain handpicked the crew for this training mission, as he does for most away missions. Evidently he sees promise in each of the three young crewmen.

The mission does not hold significant danger, although any mission into space is not without reasons for caution. Nevertheless, the Newton has not reported in with her first status report which was due at the end of the first standard day. There are no indications of other vessels in the area and there could be any number of reasons for the delayed report. Still I am concerned – a human emotion, Dr. McCoy would no doubt say.

I am moving the Enterprise back into sensor range.

* * * * *

“Lieutenant Uhura, raise the Isaac Newton,” Mr. Spock said.

“Hailing frequencies, open, sir,” the communications officer replied. “Enterprise to Isaac Newton, come in please. Enterprise to Captain Kirk, come in please.”

Uhura readjusted her board and repeated the message.

“No response, Mr. Spock. I am rebroadcasting on all Federation subspace channels.”

Spock, in command of the *Enterprise* during the Captain's absence, rose from the center seat and stood behind Uhura. He watched as she adjusted frequencies, boosted gain and repeated her hail. Before she could again report negative results, Spock had crossed to the science station.

"Mr. Chekov, standard sensor sweep of the area being patrolled by the *Newton*."

There was a moment's pause and the young Russian officer said, "Completed, Mr. Spock. The area is empty of all vessels. There is no sign of the Captain's ship."

Spock turned to the helm.

"Mr. Sulu, set course 1-2-7 Mark 49. Execute at Warp 4."

"Plotted and laid in, Mr. Spock. Turning to 1-27 Mark 49," the helmsman said. He punched several controls and the starship disappeared in a rainbow of color.

Four seconds later, Mr. Sulu said, "Course is 1-2-7 Mark 49. We are at Warp 4. We will arrive at the Captain's patrol area in 73 minutes, Mr. Spock."

The Vulcan addressed the science station again.

"Mr. Chekov, repeat sensor sweeps, maximum frequency on all sensors. Continue repetition at standard intervals until contact is established, or until we arrive on site."

As the young Ensign acknowledged, Spock was already opening a communications channel to sickbay.

"Dr. McCoy, to the bridge."

McCoy's voice came through the speakers almost at once.

“Problem, Mr. Spock.”

The doctor was aware of the Captain’s mission parameters and knew it was time for a report.

“The Captain has not reported in. He does not answer our hail, nor is he within standard sensor sweep of his assigned patrol area. We are underway at Warp 4.”

“I’m on my way, Spock,” the Doctor answered.

* * * * *

The reason the *Enterprise* could not raise Captain Kirk or his shuttlecraft was simple. They were no longer at the coordinates where they had been stationed. Four hours earlier their craft had been disabled by an unidentified starship.

Lieutenant Jackson Shelton replied to Kirk’s order to dump all logs and computers.

“Captain, the memory core of the security section has already been compromised, and with only the batteries there is not enough power to do a complete dump and still maintain life support. I can, however, protect all Federation protocols and make them inaccessible to our attackers. I will need your command password.”

“Execute,” Kirk replied, punching in the required parameters.

Behind the Captain, Bakor K’Yle laid the body of Ensign Berek gently onto the floor of the shuttlecraft. The tips of his antennae still had a faint pink color, the remaining residue of the energy blast which had killed the Delcaltor. With only a few seconds of hesitation as a gesture of respect, K’Yle moved into the empty engineering section.

“Sir,” K’Yle said, “all of our systems should be operational, but the beam which traps us has an energy dampening effect on all electrical and computer circuits. While I do not look forward to capture, I hope they turn the beam off soon. Our brains are essentially electrical generators and prolonged contact with the beam may prove fatal. If the beam had been targeted at all electrical energy instead of only that which is artificially produced, we would already have been overcome.”

“So our choices are capture or death,” the Captain said. “I vote for capture. We can always escape a detention cell. I don’t think we have much chance of getting out of death alive.”

“That is encouraging, Captain, but it does not appear that our choice has been established by democratic franchise,” Ensign K’Yle said with the Antosian version of sarcasm.

The *Isaac Newton* jerked to a violent stop, throwing its three living occupants to the floor. As Kirk, Shelton and K’Yle regained their footing and looked out of their view ports their forward field of vision was completely dominated by their rapidly approaching captor.

The unidentified star craft was essentially two parallel cylinders connected to each other by tubes half the diameter of the cylinders. The port cylinder had a uniform diameter throughout its length. Its starboard mate had a bulge which dominated one-third of its central core, expanding the circumference to more than twice the size of either end. There were no external projections coming off of any surface. The front of the port cylinder had a concave surface that was apparently a sensor grid. The aft

ends of both cylinders were open, revealing enormous propulsion chambers. There were no illuminated observation ports and no outboard running lights. With only reflected starlight for amplification, the color of the approaching ship was essentially black, blending into the void of space.

Even in the weightlessness of space, with their artificial gravity down to .17 of Earth normal, Kirk, Jackson and K'Yle could feel the upward acceleration of their crippled craft as it was drawn into an opening docking bay on the starboard pod of the ship. Just forward of the enlarged portion of the pod, the docking bay looked like a giant maw, sucking them to an uncertain future.

When the docking bay doors closed, the beam was turned off and the *Isaac Newton* fell unceremoniously to the deck below. Almost immediately their captors accelerated into warp and within seconds the star system had fallen light years behind.

The collision with the deck was sufficiently strong to break the connection between the craft's batteries and their inboard lights. Jackson Shelton lost his balanced and pitched into the port bulkhead, opening an ugly gash in his forehead. As the shuttlecraft's three occupants were plunged into total darkness, Shelton was already unconscious.

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Five hours after the unidentified starship with its captives from the *Isaac Newton* warped out of the area, the *U.S.S. Enterprise* entered the farthest edges of the system, identified on their charts as Beta Tarnopol.

“Go to sublight, Mr. Sulu,” Spock ordered, and then added, “Mr. Chekov put a schematic of this system on the main view screen.”

The system had one Type G star, slightly bigger than Sol and was orbited by five planets. Chekov identified Beta Tarnopol III as Class M, capable of supporting human life.

“Now mark the spot where Captain Kirk and his shuttlecraft were originally stationed.”

Chekov flashed an indicator on the screen and commented, “They were right there, Mr. Spock. Point two light years outside the orbit of Beta Tarnopol V. The position was chosen for its isolation and so that the standard radiation from Beta Tarnopol itself would not be an interference to emergency communications between them and the *Enterprise*.”

“Very well, Mr. Chekov. You and Mr. Sulu begin standard sensor sweeps. Lieutenant Uhura, does background radiation reveal any new information?”

“Mr. Spock there is a signature I do not recognize. I am analyzing it now. It’s a subspace pattern I have never seen before. Residual radiation suggests a probe of extraordinary intensity. That’s all still a guess, though.”

“Advise me when the guess has become a certainty, Miss Uhura,” the First Officer replied.

Spock punched a button on the command chair and said, “Mr. Scott, a preliminary search has not revealed the Captain’s whereabouts. We will next be searching the region for any unusual radiation signatures. Please accommodate

engineering with the helm in order to give us the widest possible search pattern. Tie in with Lieutenant Uhura to analyze a subspace pattern she has already located.”

The Scotsman’s burr was thicker than normal, showing his anxiety about his missing shipmates.

“Aye, Mr. Spock. It’s as ye ordered.”

Standing at the railing behind the command chair, Dr. Leonard McCoy spoke for the first time since the *Enterprise* dropped out of space warp.

“I haven’t heard any comments about life signs, Spock,” the Doctor growled. The strain in his voice was also evident.

“Dr. McCoy,” Spock said. “Have you ever noticed that under conditions of strain or anxiety, certain human accents become more pronounced? For instance, Mr. Chekov’s speech amplifies the differences between his native Russian and English – the letter “V” is prominently pronounced as a “W,” even though there is no corresponding “W” sound in Russian. As in “wessel” instead of “vessel.” Mr. Scott sounds like Robert the Bruce. And you cease projecting the clear, precise sounds of a Starfleet Chief Surgeon and become very much the country doctor from Georgia.”

“Dammit, Spock,” the doctor snapped, “this is no time for your Vulcan reflections! And just what would a Vulcan sound like under pressure, assuming a Vulcan would ever admit to such a – heaven forbid – human emotion?!”

“Precisely the way he would sound at any other time, Doctor. But instead of debating linguistic patterns with references to local origin points, you could better serve

the Captain by manning the biological sensors and searching Beta Tarnopol III for signs of human life.”

McCoy was about to remind the Vulcan that it was the Science Officer and not the Chief Surgeon who had started the conversation in the first place, but then thought better of it. With an exasperated sigh, he turned to the science station, peered into the viewer and adjusted it to the correct setting. The blue light reflected more calm in the Doctor’s face than he was, in fact, feeling.

Minutes later, McCoy looked up from the scanner and said, “Mr. Spock, I have swept Beta Tarnopol III as well as Beta Tarnopol II, IV and V. I ignored BT-1 because it is essentially a planet of liquid rock, its orbit being too close to its central star to sustain any kind of life. I have located the indigenous life forms on Beta Tarnopol III, discovered a previously unknown life form on BT-4, but outside of the *Enterprise* there is no human life in this system. I have even scanned you and while you are not human...”

“Thank you, Doctor.”

McCoy continued without missing a beat, “...you are indeed warm-blooded and alive, assuming that green fluid is blood. And the sensors show, that despite your protestation of having no emotions, you are indeed worried about Jim!”

McCoy folded his arms across his chest and glared at the Vulcan with as much challenge as he could project.

“It is as I surmised. The Captain, his crew and their ship are no where in this system. We will have to concentrate our search outward from their last established position,” Mr. Spock said.

And then he quietly added, “And even if I had run-away emotions, which I do not, the ship’s sensors could not detect them, just as it cannot detect your alleged leaps of logic and obvious torrents of sentiment.”

McCoy would not give up. “That’s not what *my* instruments show, you, you blasted Vulcan! You are as worried as the rest of us!”

For the slightest part of a second, the Vulcan’s eyes showed agreement. Then he turned back to the view screen.

Anatorr patiently trained me in the details of the tabersk and other gemstones. Although I was sometimes slow in learning, he was never impatient, never made me feel stupid, unlike the way professors at the University often treated me. When I had a small success, he made me feel as if I had conquered the Chekart single-handedly. When I made a mistake, his correction was only with additional instruction as though it were his lack of details which had caused my error.

One evening, after the end of my third month in his employ, Anatorr asked me, as we were closing the shop, if I would like to join him for refreshment at a public house nearby. I accepted without hesitation.

When we were seated, I ordered a salad of setawbar roots and a glass of cold kvasale. He said he was hungrier than that and ordered a salad, a bowl of vegetables and a large leg of latt-beast. He drank only mountain water.

“Why did you accept my invitation?” he asked suddenly and without preamble.

Just as quickly, I answered, “I wanted to learn your motives for inviting me. I couldn’t very well do that if I turned you down. Besides, I’m hungry. And I am not a good cook.”

Anatorr smiled, a gesture which involved not only his mouth, but his eyes as well.

“My motives?” he asked. “Elena, I have a daughter older than you.”

“And a wife, too,” I said, with instant regret because the tone of my voice was sharp and disapproving.

Without a suggestion of reproof, he nodded his head slowly, “Yes. And a wife, too.”

We ate in silence, glancing only occasionally at each other and then looking away. Anatorr paid for our meal and we walked outside. He started to turn towards home, when I reached out and touched his arm.

“I know it may be shameless, but I would accept another invitation to share your table,” I said.

“Shameless?” he said and looked at me quizzically, his mouth turned upward in the slightest hint of a grin.

“Shameless?” he said again, and then continued, “Elena, we each bring our past into this very moment. All that has gone before has combined to make us what we are today. There is no shame. There is only promise. All that you have experienced has made you the woman you are today. If you remove any of it, you remove part of yourself. And that subtraction would remove part of the woman I love.”

As he turned to walk away, I brushed my fingers against his arm and said, “Love? What do you mean?”

“Whatever love is, whatever it can mean for us, I give as much to you as you will receive. I will give to you as much as I can. I pray it will be enough. If the day ever

comes when it is not, I hope I will have the grace to accept your word and quietly walk away.”

Thinking back now to that night, I know I did not understand it, but without hesitation I said, “Anatorr, I will never let you go.”

With that, he took my hand. It was completely engulfed in his. We walked without another word to a quiet place just beyond the edge of the city. Without embarrassment, and as he had said, without shame, we undressed and lay beneath the twinkling stars. As if we had been created for each other, our bodies became one, our hearts became one.

I have already written that there were other men before Anatorr. They rushed through the coupling, satisfying only themselves – indeed, thinking only of satisfying themselves. With patience which excited me and with care which touched me as no one ever had, he brought me to fulfillment. My first. Only then did he give in to his own body’s urgings. And we were one.

CHAPTER THREE

Captain James T. Kirk, capsuled in a dead shuttlecraft, captured by an alien starship, caromed off the control panel in front of him and fell onto his unconscious navigator. Whatever battery power had been generating charges for control lights on the *Isaac Newton* was exhausted. The Captain and his two surviving crewmen were surrounded by total darkness. Fading starlight had given Kirk the impression that the docking bay into which they had been drawn was, like everything else about the unidentified starship, several times larger than the corresponding structure on the *Enterprise*.

“Survival,” Kirk thought. “Then escape. The three of us. Nothing else matters.”

He spoke softly into the darkness. “Mr. K’Yle? Are you all right?”

The Antosian replied from the rear of the shuttlecraft where the violent landing had tossed him.

“As far as I can tell, Captain. We Antosians have a self-defense mechanism that protects us from such violent crashes as we just experienced. Other than being slightly disoriented, I am fine.”

“Lieutenant Shelton is unconscious. His pulse is strong, but even in this darkness, I can tell that the wound on his forehead is messy, but probably not life-threatening. I’m applying direct pressure to the site,” the Captain said.

“Captain, the systems have been totally off for only a few seconds, but it may have been enough to recover sufficient power for emergency lighting,” K’Yle said.

“Give it a try, Ensign.”

There were several scraping sounds in the darkness and then a soft red glow emanated from the control panels which had been functioning before their capture.

“Mr. K’Yle, get me the medi-kit and then find four Type 1 phasers,” Kirk said.

“Type 1, sir?”

“I know they are not as powerful as when they are attached to the pistol grip for Type 2 use, but their smaller size may keep them undiscovered. For a while at least. Hopefully, long enough to help us escape,” Kirk explained.

“Aye, aye, Captain.”

James Kirk selected a sterilizing and anti-bacterial setting on the hypo-spray and gave Shelton a standard dose. As the satisfying “whoosh” of the spray sounded in the shuttlecraft, Kirk thought drily, “Bones would probably charge me with practicing without a license.” He next put a steri-pressure bandage in place and leaned back.

“That will have to do for now, Mr. Shelton,” Kirk said.

Bakor K’Yle held out four, small Type 1 phasers to the Captain.

“Keep one for yourself and one for Mr. Shelton. Give me the other two,” Kirk ordered, placing one phaser onto his service belt and sliding the other into the top of his boot.

“It probably won’t escape detection there, but it’s worth the chance,” he said.

“Agreed, sir.”

“Your analysis of our situation, Mr. K’Yle.”

“We are in total darkness with an injured crewman. Our life support systems are all but off-line. Chances are poor that we can even open the escape hatch, assuming that the atmosphere in the surrounding docking bay is a breathable oxygen-nitrogen mix. Security systems outside would certainly detect our presence if we were to exit our craft. Once outside we will still be in total darkness and very probably unable to operate any controls we might find, thus negating any possibility of escape. One advantage which we do have is my ability to alter my molecular structure and change shape. However, I would still describe our situation as nearly hopeless, sir.”

The Captain frowned at the Antosian’s analysis, which unfortunately agreed with his own.

Kirk quickly smiled and said, “It sounds as if you’ve been spending too much time with Mr. Spock. All you’d need to do to complete the impression is to quote me the odds.”

“I estimate our chances at 3,724.9 to one against our escape, even higher against our survival, sir. Of course, Mr. Shelton’s recovery would improve both of those estimates.”

As if on cue, Jackson Shelton moaned and opened his eyes.

“Lay still, Mister,” Kirk said. “You have an ugly cut on your forehead, and if I read the tricorder correctly, a mild concussion. Mr. K’Yle, bring Lieutenant Shelton current on our situation. I’m going to try the escape hatch.”

Without waiting for a reply, the Captain walked to the engineering crawl-way in the aft compartment and lifted the cover off. From the top of the panel inward, the escape hatch control was the first one at hand. Kirk felt for it in the darkness and toggled the switch. His efforts were rewarded with a screech as the hatch scraped against its slide rails, stopped and then slid the whole way open.

“Lower those odds, Mr. K’Yle,” the Captain said with satisfaction. “The first obstacle is overcome and since I feel no immediate ill-effects from their atmosphere, you could say that’s two down!”

The relief the *Newton*’s survivors felt ended as quickly as it had begun. Powerful tri-silicon-halogen lights flashed on, illuminated the docking bay and temporarily blinding them. Seconds later, interior doors slid open and an armed detachment of their captors rushed inside. They were a race totally unknown in Federation records.

* * * * *

“Mr. Spock, I have located two distinct ion signatures in this star system in addition to our own,” Chekov said. “The first is the relatively low power sub-warp signature of a Federation shuttlecraft. It matches exactly with the computer’s records of the *Isaac Newton*.”

“And the other?”

“Totally alien. Completely unknown,” the helmsman said.

“How does it read, Mr. Chekov?”

“I first located it at a point several light years further out from where we entered this system, and on an opposing plane. Ion traces show that a vessel traveling at speeds we are unable to achieve dropped out of high warp and still traveling at over Warp One overtook the *Newton*. At that point the shuttlecraft’s signature completely vanishes and the intruder warped out of the Beta Tarnopol system on a course 145 degrees off of their original line of travel.”

“145 degrees,” Spock mused, “but now on a trajectory away from us and away from Federation space. And now nine hours ahead.”

Scotty spoke from his engineering station.

“Mr. Spock, I have locked onto Mr. Chekov’s signature of the alien, and directed the pattern through our subspace sensor array. Assuming they continue using the same propulsion system, we can track them all the way to hell and back.”

“I hope we won’t be going that far, Mr. Scott,” Spock answered.

“Ah, you know what I mean, Mr. Spock,” the chief engineer replied.

“That I do, Mr. Scott. That I do.”

Mr. Spock next addressed the communications officer.

“Open ship-wide channels, Miss Uhura.”

“Open, sir.”

“This is Commander Spock. Our Captain, his shuttlecraft and his crew appear to have been taken aboard an alien starship, type unknown and destination unknown. We have located their propulsion signature and are ready to give chase. I want all engineering personnel at maximum readiness and the entire ship on Yellow Alert, Level

1. We will attempt to overtake them and rescue the Captain and our shipmates. For the time being, we will maintain regular duty rotation. Spock out.”

Spock turned back to Lieutenant Uhura.

“Lieutenant, please transmit all current log entries relative to this situation to Star Base 17. Advise them we intend to leave our assigned patrol sector to execute a Priority One rescue mission.

“Mr. Sulu, tie navigational systems into Mr. Scott’s augmented tracking system and execute warp speed at my command.

“Mr. Chekov, at what rate of speed did the unidentified leave this system?”

“At Warp 6, Mr. Spock, but judging from their energy signature, they can probably double that.”

“Warp 12? Fascinating. Let us hope they do not do so, Ensign,” Spock said.

“Mr. Sulu, execute predetermined course. Come to Warp 8. If they do not change speed, we should overtake them in less than two Standard days.”

Dr. McCoy, who had been silent throughout the exchange of orders walked to the command chair.

“How would you rate our chances of finding Jim and the others, Mr. Spock?”

“There are too many variables at this point to make an accurate assessment, but with this ship and this crew, I give us a favorable probability, Doctor.”

“Coming from you, that’s almost a lead-pipe cinch, Spock,” McCoy replied and turned to watch the stars melt into warp as the *Enterprise’s* engines leaped forward in search of their Captain.

* * * * *

Standing in the doorway which led from the vessel into the docking bay was a humanoid biped, height just over two meters. To his right and to his left a detachment of guards stood at attention. Each guard gripped the handle of a holstered energy weapon, ready for combat.

Obviously a military commander, the humanoid wore a dark, metallic uniform which resembled battle armor from ancient Earth, although it moved fluidly against his skin and seemed to have none of the binding disadvantages of conventional body armor. His hands were covered with gloves made of the same material, but his boots reminded Kirk of Klingon combat wear, minus the upturned toes. A single insignia, a bladed weapon of an unknown type, was the only decoration on the garment.

His tan skin was dotted with irregular shaped mottles, decidedly darker in color than the surrounding surfaces. Jet black hair fell backwards from the middle of an otherwise bald skull and hung past his shoulders. He walked like a warrior, his hair swinging, keeping time to his steps. A pronounced horizontal brow-ridge shadowed his deep set eyes, but their fiery red color could still be clearly seen. Breathing holes and sensory slits appeared to take the place of a nose and ears. When he spoke, his voice, sounding very much like the death cries of a Rigilan Garnbeast, easily filled the cavernous docking bay.

“I am Organ Moss-Kuib, commander of the star-vessel *Repelator*, flagship of the Vargon Sovereignty. You are all guilty of encroachment. The sentence is execution by physical torture. Sentence will begin at the initiation of the next time cycle. Your

existence will not be terminated until we arrive at Vargon. You will not be allowed to die until you have been presented to our Sovereign. There is no appeal.”

The guards withdrew at Moss-Kuib's signal. The Vargon spoke to a communications panel just inside the door. “Activate security systems. Lights, extinguish.”

He immediately turned and marched from the room, his heavy boots ringing against the floor's metal grillwork. The doors slammed behind him, plunging the bay and its human occupants into darkness.

I do not know how Anatorr and I found such happiness when our world was enveloped in such sorrow. The civil war which, for a time, threatened to destroy our civilization ended before I was born, but the repressions continued. Sometimes there was quiet, but there was never any real peace. If anyone could count the number of the dead, they did not say. Neither was there anyone who could speak for the missing, the displaced, the tortured or the terrified. Of course, that number would be the total inhabitants of our world.

The Chekart were hereditary rulers who dominated Resenka for generations. It seems as soon as the first Resenka struggled for life there was a Chekart to rule over him. History tells us that until a century ago that rule was benign, even kind. I do not know if we can trust the record of history. So many other records have proven to be lies. The victors usually rewrite history to suit themselves; they become the gods, the vanquished become the demons.

But chains, even if they are made of the precious yellow metal, dzhhunk, are still chains. At least that is what we decided 100 years ago. The first revolutions against the Chekart were insignificant. They were little more than protests. My ancestors marched for more liberties, the right to choose where their children could go to school, the right to select their own vocations.

Later the protests were directed at recognized institutions. The first violence was focused against the Chekart run agricultural system which forced all village farmers to work for the Chekart, leaving little land and even less time to provide for their families. Public transportation was often sabotaged, the railcars being an easy target.

Then an attempt was made on the life of the Ryssart's son. The boy, the heir to the Chekart throne, was not hurt, but the ruler was vicious in his reprisals and the rebellion took full and bloody birth.

Finally, about 20 years ago, the Ryssart and his family were captured and executed. The victorious Bolskars set up their own government and set about subduing our world. I say "subduing" because they, too, had much opposition. Many people saw them as little better than the Chekart. Many said we were only trading chains of dzhhunk for chains of steelakite. Chains were still chains. For as bad as the Chekart may have been, the Bolskars were worse, doubling or tripling the previous atrocities. The forced emplacement of the ways of the Bolskars caused much suffering, much poverty and much death.

It began with the night time arrests. Everyone lived in fear for no one knew when a knock would come at their door and the Security Force would demand entrance. At first the only crime was opposition to the Revolution. Later citizens were arrested simply to fill quotas. Railcars rolled through the countryside to the always expanding yachenka. Usually the prison wagons were loaded outside of the cities so the population would not guess their cargos. But we knew. We always knew.

Many of my generation asked, "Why did you not resist?" The response most often given was, "In the middle of the night, with sleep still in your brain and your trousers still on the floor, what resistance could you give? Besides, we hoped that if we went with them quietly, they would leave our families unharmed."

Anatorr had spent ten years in one of the yachenka – it was the longest sentence which was given at the time. He had been a decorated officer of the Bolskars, winning many campaigns, but in one battle, ill-planned and sloppily executed by his superiors, he was captured. At the end of the civil war he was released from a prisoner of war camp and promptly arrested by the Bolskars. His crime: failing to fight to the death against the Chekart. The verdict was pronounced on the spot and the sentence was immediately carried out. He was not even allowed to tell his wife goodbye.

For as long as I knew Anatorr, he spoke little about his imprisonment and never mentioned the terror of the journey to the yachenka. He only said that he thought he would die before the railcar was unsealed at their destination.

CHAPTER FOUR

As soon as the docking bay's interior doors locked behind Moss-Kuib, Jim Kirk began to plot their escape from the Vargon ship. "At least I know what to call this place," he thought.

"Mr. Shelton, are you with us?" Kirk asked.

From the forward section of the shuttlecraft came a weak, but welcome voice, "Barely, sir. But I will make it."

"Good, Jackson. Can you move?"

Kirk could hear a groan escape the lieutenant's lips as he put one hand on the console and the other on the shoulder of Bakor K'Yle. The Antosian used his own strength to help Jackson Shelton stand.

"I'm standing, sir. I'll be ready to go as soon as you give the word."

"He is overly optimistic, Captain," K'Yle said, but it was with satisfaction, not reproach. He righted a fallen chair and lowered Jackson into it.

Feeling his way along the wall Jim Kirk reached the equipment locker, retrieved two hand-held magna-lights and keeping them switched off, made his way back to his crewmen. In the darkness he bumped against the still form of Ensign Berek, promising himself he would not lose any more men.

"Mr. K'Yle, that green glow behind you suggests that the chronometer is still working."

“Yes, sir. It is Stardate 5902.6. We have been gone from the *Enterprise* for slightly longer than one Standard day.”

“Well, if I know Mr. Spock, he now has our ship at the point where we separated and is actively searching for us. Hopefully the propulsion system of the *Repelator* will leave a standard ion trail that our ship can follow,” Kirk said.

“The *Repelator*, Captain?” Lieutenant Shelton asked.

“The *Repelator*, Lieutenant,” Kirk answered. “That is the name of the vessel which currently holds us captors in what is apparently its docking bay. They call themselves ‘Vargons.’ They are taller than we are and may have a corresponding strength advantage, although that has yet to have been demonstrated. They are giving up their secrets grudgingly, as would I. Do you remember our abduction, Mr. Shelton?”

“I remember. Their gentle handling is what has given me this enormous headache.”

Kirk smiled at the humor in Shelton’s voice. It was a good sign. They were going to need more of them, a great deal more, he wagered.

“Gentlemen, I believe it is safe to assume that our shipmates are searching for us. I believe it is also safe to assume that it may be sometime before they reach us. They may not reach us at all. In either case, we need to escape from here as quickly as possible. Then we can try to signal the *Enterprise*. The three of us are certainly no match for an enemy starship and a full crew compliment.

“Here is my plan.

“Mr. Shelton, I want to leave the shuttlecraft and discover a way to open the outer docking bay doors. If you are able to move, I want your help. The Vargon commander spoke into a comm-panel located beside of the door. Perhaps other controls are there as well. Their systems are obviously not Federation Standard, but I have learned from Mr. Scott that there are certain engineering constants. We will be able to use that knowledge to our advantage.

“Mr. K’Yle, you will attempt to repair the *Newton*. Your scientific and engineering skills make you the best choice. Your priorities are life-support and then propulsion and guidance. We will need other systems, but those are enough for our escape. If the Vargons catch Mr. Shelton and I outside of here, turn yourself into a chair or something else that will allow you to escape detection. In that event, you will become a one-Antosian rescue party.

“Questions, gentlemen?”

There were none.

“Very well, let’s begin. Jackson, let’s get out of here. Bakor, work only by emergency lighting,” Kirk said, handing Jackson a magna-light. “I’ve set our hand-helds to the lowest illumination, it is barely more than a shadow. Let’s go.”

Kirk and Shelton climbed through the emergency hatch and out onto the roof of the *Isaac Newton*. They lowered themselves onto the starboard nacelle and then Kirk gingerly stepped onto the docking bay’s deck. Shelton reached back for the utility kit K’Yle extended through the open hatch and then joined the Captain on the deck. They

flipped their lights on, oriented themselves and headed for the comm-panel on the far wall.

“Sir, should we turn these lights out, now that we have oriented ourselves?”

Shelton asked.

“If they have sensors to detect a secondary, alien light source in here, it’s already too late. We’ll need them at the panel at any rate,” Kirk said.

Jackson Shelton directed his magna-light at the comm-panel and the Captain examined its edges, looking for a way to remove it. He selected a flat-bladed tool from the utility kit, slipped it under the top edge of the panel and twisted the tool. The panel popped off and dropped into Shelton’s hand.

For the next few minutes the Captain and his Lieutenant examined the components on the panel’s interiors and tentatively identified several systems. One was obviously communications, the circuits which traced to the speaker grid made identification of that one easy. Closer examination of the area indicated a larger panel that could be removed only by triggering the proper release circuit.

They studied in silence and finally Shelton pointed at an array. Kirk nodded agreement and using an activator probe from the utility kit, opened the second panel.

Both men nodded in approval. The more complex circuitry here was almost certainly for the doors leading to the *Repelator’s* interior and for the bay doors which led to space and freedom. Lighting for the interior of the bay, they had already determined, was accessed by the smaller comm-panel.

Using the activator's test configuration, they finally separated the two mechanisms and located the activating relays. They made one final adjustment to the activator, converting it into ten second delay timer – the amount of time they judged they would need to race across the deck, reenter the shuttlecraft, seal the emergency hatch and power up before the docking bay was exposed to the vacuum of space. If they were too slow, they would die.

For the first time in the ten minutes since they had emerged from the *Newton*, Kirk spoke.

“Mr. Shelton, I hope this equipment is not reminiscent of Dr. Richard Daystrom's M-5 computer.”

“I've studied the *Enterprise* mission logs. That was the computer which Mr. Scott tried to disable while all the time M-5 was feeding him a diversionary signal. You finally had to convince the M-5 of its moral failures.”

“The thing tried to commit suicide and would have taken all of us along with it. No, Jackson, this appears to be a normal engineering layout, although we are going more on guess than on certainty.”

“Agreed, sir,” Shelton replied. “Are we ready to go?”

“As soon as Mr. K'Yle gives us the signal,” Kirk said.

“Which of these circuits will activate the docking bay doors? The red or the blue?” Shelton asked.

“The red,” Kirk answered. “Always go with the red.”

“And if you’re wrong?”

“Hope you have time to activate the blue circuits. If not, seek shelter where you can ride out the explosion,” Kirk said with a smile. “Come on. Let’s get back to the shuttlecraft.”

Back inside the *Isaac Newton*, Ensign Bakor K’Yle had removed the entire section of the starboard wall panels and had uncovered two more floor grids, in addition to the one Kirk had accessed when he had activated the escape hatch.

“Captain,” Ensign K’Yle spoke as soon as Kirk and Shelton were back inside. “I took the liberty of giving Mr. Berek a more dignified resting place, although it is only the aft storage locker. I did not think you would mind the brief delay.”

Kirk shook his head and motioned K’Yle to continue.

“The life-support system is stable. The hard landing to the deck damaged one of the main circulators. I had to use coolant from the navigational grid to repair a breach in the oxygen cyclers, so we will have to steer by dead reckoning.

“Full propulsion will be restored as soon as I finish discharging the remaining phasers into the power couplings. I have already attached my Type 1 phaser to the hand-held pack and emptied every other weapon in the shuttlecraft. I will also need Mr. Shelton’s and the two I gave you,” K’Yle reported.

“Make do with two, Mr. K’Yle. I want an ace-in-the-hole,” Kirk replied.

“As you wish, sir. However, the resulting power loss may reduce our safety margins should we be forced to land the *Newton* under less than ideal circumstances,” K’Yle said.

“Understood, Ensign. Nevertheless, I am keeping one phaser.”

K’Yle worked without further comment as Shelton and Kirk waited. There was not enough room in the engineering crawl-way for either of them to help the Antosian.

Finally, K’Yle raised up, stretched his stiff shoulders and said, “Ready, Captain.”

“All right!” Kirk said. “Shelton, take the command seat and bring our logs up to date, use my security code. Prepare for launch. Mr. K’Yle, stay here in engineering. I’m going to kick open a door.”

* * * * *

“Organ,” the Vargon security chief Aireb, said looking up from his displays, “two of the beings we captured have left their space vessel and have crossed to the interior doors. Shall I activate the stun field?”

“Monitor their actions only, Aireb. If it appears they may escape, then you may disable them,” Moss-Kuib replied. “I wondered how long it would take them to make this maneuver. It was easily predictable. I am afraid the Sovereign will gain little pleasure from the punishment of these beings. But no matter. Sentence will be carried out.”

The commander of the *Repelator* moved down from his elevated command center to stand behind his security chief. He could easily have accessed the

information by transferring it to his own security grid, but he was restless. All punishment cells were secured. All scheduled executions were in progress. There was nothing for him to do and inactivity made Moss-Kuib irritable. Besides, it would give him the opportunity to look over Aireb's shoulder, find some small flaw in his work and issue him a reprimand.

It was a satisfactory way to maintain discipline without inflicting bodily harm. Torture was most effective, but sometimes the mere suggestion of it brought greater pain and correspondingly, greater satisfaction to Moss-Kuib.

Aireb knew this, of course. As security chief it was his job to know such techniques. Knowing it, however, did not make him rest easy in his position. He had, after all, assisted the Organ in the removal of the previous security chief. He knew the consequences of failure, and his predecessor's mistake had been a comparatively minor one.

There was simply no way to judge Organ Moss-Kuib's mood. Terror was indeed, an effective method of control, Aireb mused. Well, he would monitor the small craft and its inhabitants. When the time came, he would be ready. They would not escape.

Anatorr returned to Zenyuk by a twist of Bolskar logic. Convicted felons were forbidden to return to former cities – they might find sympathizers who could assist them in further rebellion. Repatriated prisoners of war were “sentenced” to return to their homes. It was part of their “shame.” He opened the door to his apartment and found his wife sitting in the living room, staring out into the growing dusk of evening. The red from the setting sun gave her pale cheeks their only color. The faded green wallpaper had not changed. The brown blanket, thrown over the sofa showed a little more wear than he remembered, and there was a growing tear in the arm of the room’s only chair.

His wife scrambled to her feet and embraced him.

“I never gave up hope you would return,” she said. “Even when they told me you were dead. Even when they tortured me for refusing to denounce you. I never gave up hope that you would come back to me.”

Anatorr held her at arms length and looked into her blue-grey eyes which were now a sea of tears. His hands tightened fiercely around her thin arms, crushing the soiled material of her dress. Tears spilled uncontrollably down his own face and he stammered, “I am a traitor. I am a citizen of the yachenka. I can no longer be your husband.”

He turned away from her and until I sent him away, he never touched her. She pled with him, crying that whatever lies they had accused him of did not matter, shouting only that she loved him and nothing could ever change that.

But his heart was cold and he would not let her words penetrate the frozen wastes. He would not let her caresses thaw his hardened feelings.

“I have waited faithfully all of these years, Anatorr,” she said. “Can you not even give me a smile?”

“The fault was not hers,” he later told me. “It was never hers. I steeled myself against her. She quietly bore her pain. And waited.”

CHAPTER FIVE

First Officer's Log: Stardate 5903.3

We have been underway, following the abductors of the Isaac Newton and its crew for four hours. Their course is unchanged, away from Federation space, away from all previously explored territories. Only twice do Federation data banks give references to unmanned probes launched into this part of the galaxy. Those results show star systems with possible Class M planets, but until we, or another starship, do actual exploration, the data is limited. Therefore we are plunging into unknown dangers with precious little caution and at extraordinary speeds.

Because of what we have already learned, it is safe to state that we, or rather Captain Kirk and his shuttle crew, have made first contact with a race of beings previously unknown to us. Their motives for taking the Newton and its four man crew may simply be the perceived protection of their territory. Or it could be something more ominous. We simply do not have enough facts for a proclamation.

We have encountered many races during the first three years of our five year mission. We have seen a decided predilection of all species to erect boundaries around regions they claim as their own domain and then to defend them with force.

Hopefully there will be great opportunity for discovery, diplomacy and the expansion of knowledge on this mission. Our first priority, however, remains the safe recovery of Captain Kirk and his trainees.

* * * * *

“Mr. Spock, I have a priority message from Commodore Alexander at Star Base 17,” Lieutenant Nyota Uhura said from her communications station. “Do you wish to take it in privacy, sir?”

“Priority, but not encoded?” Spock asked.

“Correct, sir,” Uhura answered.

“Put it on screen, Miss Uhura.”

The graphic symbol of the United Federation of Planets appeared briefly on the ship’s forward view screen, faded and then was replaced by the golden face and piercing green eyes of Commodore Sear-Rock Alexander, the first citizen of Regulus V to achieve flag rank.

“Commander Spock,” the Commodore began, “we have received your log entries and have sent them on to Starfleet Command. Our scientists agree with your assessment of the unidentified ship’s warp technology. If they have succeeded in breaking the Warp 9 barrier without fatal damage to ships and crews, it is an advancement we very much desire. Your current course will soon put you too far from us to communicate rapidly.

“Therefore, your orders are as follows: (1) Continue pursuit and establish contact with the aliens; (2) Begin negotiations for friendly relations and the exchange of information, particularly their warp capabilities; (3) All previous exploration orders to NCC-1701 are hereby superseded this Stardate; (4) Starfleet Command deems this

mission of sufficient importance that it has labeled the crew of the *Isaac Newton* expendable – contact must be established.

“You have your orders, Mr. Spock. Commodore Alexander out.”

And without waiting for reply, the view screen went blank.

After a time period measured by a single heartbeat, the bridge crew of the *Enterprise* exploded with expressions of disbelief. Spock sat quietly in the command chair. His index fingers steepled and pressed against his lips. Even his Vulcan control could not hide his own very un-Vulcan-like response to the word “expendable.”

McCoy’s voice raised above the others and demanded attention.

“What the hell do they mean, expendable? Dammit, Spock, don’t just sit there. They can’t get away with this!” McCoy raged.

And the tumult began again.

Finally, Spock rose and walked past the helm controls, standing between it and the forward view screen. He waited until the only sounds on the bridge were the familiar sounds of sensors and computers. Then he spoke.

“As the ranking officer aboard this vessel, and temporary commander due to Star Fleet regulations and Captain Kirk’s absence, I state now and for the record, the Commodore’s orders will be carried out.”

What other words he spoke were drowned out by shouts and curses from the rest of the bridge crew.

Spock said, “If you will allow me to finish.”

When he repeated himself quiet returned.

“As I was about to say, Commodore Alexander’s orders will be carried out, but no one, and I repeat, no one, will be *expended* under my command.”

“Well, why dinna ye say so in the first place?” Scotty asked.

“You did not give me time, Mr. Scott. And now, Engineer, can you increase speed?”

“Why dinna ye say so in the first place, Mr. Spock?” the chief engineer repeated, this time with a broad smile. “I’ll nurse my bairns by hand, if I have to.”

“I trust that will not be necessary, Mr. Scott. Best possible speed.”

Scotty turned to his station and then turned back to the Science Officer.

“What safety factor shall I maintain, sir?”

“I believe the Captain might phrase it – run her flat out for as long as you can, Scotty.”

“Aye, Mr. Spock. That I will.”

The engineer made several adjustments at his control board and then addressed the helm.

“Mr. Sulu, you have Warp 8.95. I’ll keep an eye on the temperature settings and the control valves at the blow screen. If she heats up past critical levels, we may have to drop out of warp. And we dinna want that.”

“Warp 8.95, Mr. Scott,” the helmsman said.

Chekov walked to the science station and did some quick calculations.

“That should drop our overtake time by a factor of 24 percent, Mr. Spock,” Chekov said.

“I had calculated it at 23.9874 percent, Mr. Chekov,” Spock answered, his Vulcan control firmly in place.

“Only a pointed-eared Vulcan would quibble about a tenth of a percent,” McCoy grumbled, but there was no anger in his voice, only relief.

* * * * *

Security Chief Aireb had just finished viewing the recorded images from the *Repelator's* cavernous docking bay for the third time. He had examined all possible implications of the activities of the three aliens his ship had captured. He could not get an accurate reading of events occurring inside the tiny shuttlecraft, but it was obvious that the two beings who were working in the docking bay were planning an escape. He marveled at their cleverness in locating and then isolating the controls which would open the outer bay doors. It made him promise not to underestimate these creatures, in spite of their inferior size and obviously inferior technology.

“Organ Moss-Kuib,” Aireb said, “if it would please you sir, I think you will find my analysis of the security images to be interesting.”

“Proceed, Aireb. And be sure you do not waste the Organ's attention,” Moss-Kuib said, the threat obvious to the entire bridge crew.

“The two aliens who were working outside of their ship have placed a device on the outer bay door controls. It is my evaluation that they are preparing an escape.”

“Of course they are preparing an escape, you degenerate offspring of a crippled Abakractor Beast! Only a blind Lozotoc would miss that! Is this the total result of your long and diligent study,” Moss-Kuib roared.

The tremble in Aireb’s reply was obvious. Everyone else on the bridge hoped that they would not be the first Vargon to cross the Security Chief’s path when he was out of sight of the Organ. That hapless individual would almost certainly have his dashnack torn from his body.

“No, Organ. They have installed one of their devices which I believe will act as a delayed timing switch when they activate it. That way they evidently hope to be able to return to their ship, seal it and escape,” Aireb answered, confidence returning as he reassessed his studies and knew that he was correct.

The Organ did not comment on Aireb’s tone, although he most certainly noted it for future discussion. He only said, “And how do you intend to stop them?”

“I have programmed the security computers to send a signal through the alien device which will make it appear their circuits are intact. It is actually a diversion. The bay door controls have already been locked down to be opened only under your voice code or mine. When they activate their device, we will enter the docking bay and begin their execution.”

“Very well, Aireb,” the Organ said, “but see that all goes as you have stated it. If it does not...”

The Organ did not finish his threat. There was no need.

* * * * *

James Kirk crossed the docking bay with as much speed as he deemed prudent. "I wish we could have used a radio-activating device," he thought. "That would have given us an almost instant escape window, but the risk of jamming was too great and to have tested the circuit would almost certainly have given us away."

He reached the panel, rechecked the work he and Lieutenant Shelton had completed and then reached inside, holding the activator control in his left hand and grasping the twist ring on top with his right.

"Well," he said out loud, "the red circuit. Now!"

Kirk gave the ring a twist, saw a green indicator light go on and with satisfaction, raced for the open hatch of the *Isaac Newton*. He made it half way.

Kirk had taken only a half dozen steps toward the shuttlecraft with the interior bay doors exploded open behind him. Not looking back, he burst into a run, but before he had taken two full strides, an energy beam struck him in the middle of his back. The Captain was immediately slammed to the deck.

To anyone who had been watching his motions with a view to analyzing the weapon's effectiveness, it would have seemed as if the captain's skeletal system had been turned into liquid. He collapsed onto the floor and rolled over once.

Conscious, but unable to move, James T. Kirk stared at the docking bay's ceiling and thought, "Just like the M-5." Thinking was all he could do. He could not even blink his eyes. Only automatic responses like breathing continued. He could not even scream at the pain which seemed to assault every nerve ending in his body. The paralysis was complete.

He heard a second, more powerful beam strike the *Newton* and knew that all hopes of escape were gone. "Spock, hurry," he thought as he finally lost consciousness.

Less than one kaalobar from the edge of our city, the Wikfa River flows by, forming the northern boundary of Zenyuk. At the westernmost edge of the city, the Wikfa is intersected by the River Zenyuk, and then turns almost immediately to the south. It was here that Zenyuk was founded more than 1,000 solar annuals ago.

At first Zenyuk was a fort, an outpost on the midpoint of the Wikfa River's 3,000 kaalobar journey to the Great Sea. It seemed a logical stopping place in the trek which took months, beginning at the capital, Megin, and ending at the pleasurable warm sands of the Divinitar Region.

The first two businesses to be established at the confluence of the Wikfa and the Zenyuk Rivers were a tavern and a serkor. They were started by the same man (Anatorr joked that they were relatives of his – I never knew if he was serious or not). He advertised "rest for the body and rest for the soul." Today his tavern has many cousins in Zenyuk, and in all of Resenka, too many. His serkor has only a few – many of the buildings still stand, but they no longer have any resemblance to anything spiritual.

Those serkor buildings which were not destroyed in The War of Vengeance, were seized by the Bolskars (along with almost everything else) and turned into businesses, offices, libraries, museums and even stables.

Population centers of less than 500,000 were allowed to keep one, but only if the citizens paid for the maintenance of the serkor and the salary of the Keeper – an amount equal to the sum of both of those figures was levied as a tax on nonessentials. Because of the taxation, most serkor in the smaller villages were closed. Cities like Zenyuk were permitted two. Only in Megin are there more than two and they have seven, one building for each one million souls in the capital.

I write of that part of our history because Anatorr and I were strangely drawn to the serkor. We were not integrals of either of the two practicing serkor in Zenyuk, few people are. It was something intangible, almost a physical refuge more than anything else. The first time we actually entered a serkor was two days after “our night of discovery” (that was what Anatorr called our first coupling, he had a thorough dislike for popular vulgarities; I simply thought it was romantic).

After he had walked me home that night, or rather that morning – because the first gray-pink fingers of dawn were just appearing far to the east of where the Wikfa River turned and swept west on its lazy descent to the Great Sea – I had not seen him for almost two days. The store was closed and I could not call his home on a resting day. I was beginning to fear that he was just one more user when I heard a rustling in the tall flowering plants that surrounded the front of my flat.

From my second story rooms I could see him through the weather-glass as he stooped and picked several bright blossoms. The tiny blooms seemed so small in his hands, just like my own hands did as we walked two nights ago.

I ran down the stairs and entered the lobby just as he stepped through the front door.

With as disapproving a look and tone of voice as I could generate – it was impossible to totally mask my joy at seeing him – I said, “Sir, you are on private property, and you have stolen living plants which belong to another Resenka.”

“I apologize. I did not mean it so,” he said, light twinkling in his eyes. “These are meant as a gift to the most beautiful woman in Zenyuk and only such a gift could be given to one such as she. I am afraid, however, that even these exquisite blossoms will pale next to her grace and charm.”

“If you mean those words, sir, you are a poet. If you are less than sincere, you are a rouge,” I said.

“So I have a choice of being a light-headed writer of verse or a reprehensible person utterly lacking in principle?” he asked.

“Sir,” I said, as formally as I could, “you do have other choices. You can be my lover. You can become my husband.”

He crossed the lobby to where I was standing, took me in his arms and before I could protest that it was broad daylight and my neighbors might come along, he kissed me. When he finally stepped back he said, “I accept.”

“Which?” I asked, catching my breath. “Poet, rouge, lover or husband?”

“All of them,” he answered. “All of them.”

It seemed then that a cloud passed in front of his eyes as he added, "But each in its own special time. Will you wait?"

I knew he was speaking of marriage. I knew he was considering his wife – before our "night of discovery" I had heard him say of her, "She is a good woman, who loves me more than she loves her own life. It would be better if she did not love me at all, because I cannot return her affection."

I knew all of that, but without hesitation, I answered, "What I said our first night, I say again: Anatorr, I will never let you go!"

He took me in his arms again and held me. For a long time we just stood there, clutching each other as if there would never be another moment like this.

Finally Anatorr said, "I called a kafe which makes great btopoi, they even pack it in a woven basket complete with a checkered cloth for spreading on the ground. There is a wooded place near the Confluence, just past the historic settlement that would be perfect. Hungry?"

"For more than food," I answered. "I can't tell you the last time I went on a btopoi. I don't know if I ever did. Let's go!"

As we walked toward the old part of Zenyuk, a quick summer rain came up. First it was just a light shower and we enjoyed the warm mist. Then the skies opened up in torrents.

"Hurry," Anatorr said, "the abandoned serkor!"

What had once been a beautiful gathering place for the faithful, was now a trembling shack, staggering against the summer rain. The door had fallen off or had been removed and most of the windows were broken out. The holy relics had long since been carried off into private sanctuary, or destroyed, if the Bolskars had found them first. In the back of the building, behind what had been the altar, we spread our cloth and ate our btopoi. Then as the late afternoon sun cast disjointed shadows behind us through the only remaining intact window, we fell asleep.

Later, I imagined the Holy Ones watched with approval when we awoke and renewed our joining.

CHAPTER SIX

“Lights!” Aireb ordered and tri-silicon-halogen lights snapped on almost before the echo of the security chief’s voice reached the farthest end of the docking bay.

Aireb pointed to a team of guards on his left.

“Secure their craft. Remove the occupants for my inspection.”

To his second in command of the security section, Yakub, Aireb said, “Guard the sleeping one,” pointing at Captain Kirk, “and search him for weapons.”

Weapons drawn, six Vargons, in full body armor, advanced incautiously on the *Isaac Newton*, confident that their paralyzer beam had even penetrated its tritanium hull. Nevertheless, maintaining proper formation, four guards positioned themselves, one at each corner of the shuttlecraft.

A fifth guard, the team leader, moved to the port side of the shuttlecraft and searched for a control to activate the entrance door. Some years earlier, that control had been moved to the security panel at the rear of the craft, guarding against what the Vargon was attempting. The engineers deemed their approach fool-proof. They had never met the Vargons.

The Vargon grunted, studied the aperture for an indication of its opening restrictions, slid his hands along the door’s starboard edge and pulled. The locking mechanism held.

Motioning for the last guard who carried a supply pouch, he stepped aside. An electronic device was fitted to the side of the vessel and activated. The locking mechanism protested and then released, revealing the *Newton's* interior.

The team leader stepped inside.

“Chief Aireb,” he said. “It is as you said. There are two beings in here. One is dead. The other is injured.”

“Dead?” Aireb questioned. “The beam we used should not have been fatal. We saw no indications on our security scans of possible life-threatening injuries. Fool! What did you do to him?”

Aireb knew the guard had done nothing. However, a scapegoat must be found to deflect Organ Moss-Kuib’s anger at finding only two surviving prisoners for the Sovereign’s amusement. The guard would do nicely.

“Idiot! Report immediately to detention area 349. You are relieved of duty. Invoke the Spirit of the Great Pateetsa that I do not relieve you of your miserable life,” Aireb growled.

Trained to obedience, the guard dropped his weapon to the floor and marched out of the docking bay to an unknown fate.

Aireb motioned at the guard team and two of them entered the *Newton*, and removed the unconscious form of Lieutenant Shelton and the dead body of Ensign Berek. They paid no attention to the crew chairs which were scattered about the interior. If they had counted they would have discovered eight chairs, with places for

only seven. Ensign K'Yle had taken James Kirk literally and metamorphosed into a chair when he heard the blast which paralyzed his Captain.

Captain James T. Kirk was not accustomed to being helpless. With the greatest of willpower he finally was able to blink his eyes. The Vargon Security Chief was amazed to see his captive overcoming the effects of the force beam so quickly.

Before Kirk could make any more improvement against his paralysis Aireb withdrew a hand weapon, leveled it at Kirk and fired.

“Yakub, remove this one as well,” Aireb said with satisfaction.

* * * * *

Jim Kirk had no sense of how much time had passed. When he finally came to, he found he was lying on a flat surface, an examining table, he guessed. He could feel no obvious restraints, but he was unable to move from the table. He was no longer paralyzed, but he was a prisoner of a security force field. More disquieting still, the comfortable pressure of the small phaser he had secreted in his boot was gone.

Kirk was able to roll his head and look to either side. The body of Ensign Berek lay to his left. Jackson Shelton was on the Captain's right and was looking at him.

“Good to see you, sir,” Shelton said. “I heard one of the Vargons say you had been given a second application of their neural paralyzer. As near as I can guess, you've been out an hour longer than me.”

“The bastards have killed Berek,” Kirk said, giving a warning to Lieutenant Shelton.

“His Delcator nerve patterns were supersensitive to whatever energy weapons they hit us with. His external receptors, his antennae, evidentially channeled all of that power to his brain. The first beam dropped you. The second stunned me and killed Berek,” Shelton said. He had understood Kirk’s message – K’Yle has escaped detection and capture. They had a chance for rescue.

The doors to the detention cell opened and Organ Moss-Kuib entered, followed by Aireb, Yakub and two other Vargons.

“Who are you?” Kirk snapped. “What do you want with us?”

Moss-Kuib stepped to Kirk’s table, deactivated the force field and jerked the Captain to his feet as if Jim Kirk had been a child’s toy – the very small toy of a very small child.

“I’ve already answered both of your questions, Earth Man.”

Earth Man! The surprise was evident on Kirk’s face. The Vargons had been able to access their records. He wondered if the personal logs they had tried to secure were safe.

“To refresh your defective memory patterns, I am Organ Moss-Kuib, commander of the *Repelator*, the flagship of the Vargon Sovereignty. For crimes directed against our Sovereign you have been sentenced to death. That sentence is already underway.”

“Listen, Moss-Kuib, my name is James T. Kirk. I am the Captain of the *U.S.S. Enterprise*. We are members of the United Federation of Planets. We were on a training mission when you intercepted us. We did not realize we were trespassing

against the Vargon Sovereignty. We do not even know who or what this 'Sovereign' is, but if you will release us and let us return to our ship we will depart the way we came."

"You will depart, Earth Man," Moss-Kuib said, a sadistic smile curling across his face, "but definitely not the way you came. So that you may clearly understand your death, I will explain: the Sovereign is the hereditary ruler of our world and neither the Exalted One nor I care how you came to be in our space. The outcome will be the same."

Moss-Kuib motioned to the two Vargons who were standing behind the Organ and the two security men.

"Executioners, begin."

One of the executioners moved behind James Kirk and gripped the Captain's arms in his hands. Kirk struggled, but the vise-like grasp of the Vargon's hands did not lessen. Kirk twisted his legs and planted the heel of his boot into the instep of the Vargon's foot, a move that would have disabled almost any other being. If the Vargon felt the blow, he made no sound of response.

The second executioner stepped in front of the Captain and launched a massive fist at Jim Kirk's stomach. When the blow landed, Kirk thought he had been torn into two pieces. That was only the beginning. As he struggled for breath, his tormentor landed blow after blow which Kirk was unable to resist. He felt muscles tear and ribs crack. Then his face was pummeled by three sharp blows. Kirk tasted his own blood and tried to scream as his jaw was shattered. The breath he tried to suck into his lungs

was driven out by two quick blows to his mid-section. A final blow which instantly caused his left eye to swell shut also plunged the Captain into unconsciousness.

They repeated the procedure with Shelton. Their handling of Kirk had taught them a lesson and they gave the young Lieutenant no chance to resist. They continued beating Shelton long after he had ceased to struggle.

“A good beginning,” Moss-Kuib said. “Aireb summon the healers. Yakub, stand guard. Let nothing prematurely fatal happen to these two. I want the Sovereign to see our first captured Earth Men. When they have recovered sufficiently, I will introduce them to the Time Chamber.”

* * * * *

Chief Engineer Montgomery Scott was off-duty. Even though the ship was still at Yellow Alert, Mr. Spock had allowed the crew to maintain normal eight hour duty shifts. The primary bridge crew unanimously said they would stay at their posts. The Science Officer told them when the time came for action, he wanted them at their best level of proficiency.

“Spock, do you really think any of us will be able to rest?” McCoy protested.

“Understanding human nature as I do, I doubt it, Doctor. Nevertheless, that is my order,” Spock replied.

Each officer stood immediately and left the bridge when their Beta shift counterparts spoke the required words, “I relieve you, sir.”

Alpha shift had not been gone from the bridge five minutes before the Vulcan returned and stood behind Commander DeSalle.

“Are you relieving me, sir?” DeSalle asked.

“No, Mr. DeSalle. Vulcans require less rest than humans. And I can better relax here,” Spock answered.

Five minutes after that, Scotty returned to the bridge, Doctor McCoy at his side.

Spock’s face showed the slightest trace of amusement as he said, “Gentlemen, I assume that the others are only a few minutes behind you.”

“Blast it, Spock,” McCoy said, “that’s Jim out there.”

“I had not forgotten, Doctor, but I repeat, we will best serve the Captain and our shipmates if we are at our best possible level of performance.”

“What’s good for the goose, Mr. Spock,” Scotty said.

Spock started to reply and then said, “Very well, gentlemen. I shall accompany you to the officer’s deck.”

Eight hours later when the Chief Engineer returned to the bridge, one full duty shift ahead of time, he found the Science Officer bending over his scanners, the Gamma shift officer quietly watching from a few meters away.

Spock took notice of the engineer’s presence and returned to his observations.

“Mr. Spock, we need to reduce speed,” Montgomery Scott said. “We have been running at Warp 8.95 for 16 hours. There is a slight fluctuation on the inverse power sensor on engine level three. We will need to drop to Warp 5 so I can recalibrate.”

“Very well, Engineer,” Spock said. “I do not believe that our rapid pace is any longer necessary. Ion patterns indicate that the ship we have been following has accelerated to Warp 10. Therefore, we shall not overtake them until they slow down or

stop. Since we will undoubtedly need full power at a later time, your caution is justified. Make your adjustments as quickly as you can and then return to Warp 8.”

“Aye, aye, sir. Helmsman, reduce speed to Warp 5. Warp 8 will be available in approximately 15 minutes,” Scotty said.

“Thank you, Mr. Scott. But with their advanced warp technology, we cannot even keep pace. Our Captain gets farther away with every passing minute and the laws of physics prevent us from doing anything about it,” Spock said. Even with his Vulcan control, the frustration was evident in his voice.

“Aye, Mr. Spock. If it would help, I’d get out and push.”

“I am confident of that, Mr. Scott. If it would help, I would give you such an order.”

Suddenly selling tabersk stones and shiny yellow dzhhunk bracelets became more exciting than I could ever have imagined. It was no longer just a job, it was a chance to be with him. Anatorr and I were constrained to be discrete – sometimes we were successful, sometimes we were suspected (we did not embrace and kiss in the lobby of my flat again, that is for certain). Anatorr once told me that if he were an outsider, he would never suspect me, but he would immediately be suspicious of himself. When a man has steeled himself against affection and later falls in love, he said, it is difficult for that man to conceal his feelings.

Anatorr's shop was basically a long, narrow room, divided into two sections. The front was the showing room – there were two clear glasstrite cases, one for the stones, the other for dzhhunk. The back was his office and a reserve room. We tried never to be alone in the back during business times or when any of the other workers were present. It was possible we might become careless and give someone an opportunity to speak against us.

You must understand – there was a constant atmosphere of distrust and suspicion in every sector of Resenka. The great historian, Denikin, once wrote: "The only Resenka who ever lived in freedom was Aldan, the first man whom the Holy Ones created. When the second man appeared, one of the two became a vassal, the other became an overlord. The overlord became suspicious and the vassal lived in fear."

I do not know if Denikin was cynic or not, but in that brief statement he explained the temperament of our entire world. When the Bolskars overthrew the Chekart the situation worsened by a factor incomprehensible.

If an activity forbidden would advance the Bolskars, then it would be forbidden and those who indulged could be denounced, imprisoned, exiled or executed. If an activity allowed would advance the Bolskars, then it would be allowed and those who abstained could be denounced, imprisoned, exiled or executed. That is why our entire world lives in constant fear. That is why Anatorr and I attempted discretion – we knew of no law against our love, we simply tried to be circumspect.

I remember our first major careless moment.

The business day had finally been concluded. The day had been hectic, but profitable. We had entertained a city official and had satisfied his wishes with an unusual dzhhunk bracelet. The shiny yellow metal delicately supported five small, round tabersk stones. He chose it as a gift for his wife. Such purchases were infrequent, the piece was expensive.

There were four of us working that day – Kerrioff, Anatorr's longest serving worker and a great busy-body, Mitork, Anatorr's bond-brother from their boyhood days, and Anatorr and me. Kerrioff had asked for and received Anatorr's permission to leave early – she often asked, he always granted.

When we were ready to leave, Anatorr said, "Mitork, you may go. Elena, would you set the secure-system as soon as I close the vault?"

Mitork waved a cheerful farewell and went out, locking the door behind him. I stood by the inner door, while Anatorr went to the vault. When Mitork went out, I followed Anatorr and jumped into his arms. We did not hear Mitork reenter the store. As Anatorr held me and kissed me, Mitork discovered us.

"I'm sorry," Mitork said, his embarrassment obvious, "I forgot my hat."

I immediately stood between the two men, as though my small body could protect Anatorr.

After a few awkward moments, Mitork smiled and said, "I was right. I had hoped I was."

Before either one of us could say a word, he continued, "It shows old man, it shows. I have known you so long and I did not think I would ever see that look in your eyes. I congratulate you both!"

And with that, he hugged Anatorr and then me, turned and left the store. Mitork became our only confidant.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Lieutenant Jackson Shelton thought he was dead. But then he had always believed that death stopped pain and the way his body hurt, if he was dead, someone had discovered an existence worse than death. The sounds around him were like the sounds of sickbay – the muted hum of diagnostic instruments, the occasional whoosh of a hypo-spray, the quiet voices of the medics.

Somehow, when he had passed out, Captain Kirk had worked another of his miracles and they were back on the *Enterprise*, in Doctor McCoy's sickbay! The nightmare of the Vargons was over.

A dryness in his throat caused him to cough. "A drink of cool water would be the greatest thing in the world right now," he thought. "Maybe that new nurse, Marina Anichkova, who came on board at Starbase 17 is on duty."

She had soft brown hair cut close to her head, he remembered, the short style was definitely Jackson's favorite fashion for a human female's tresses. Her eyes were ice blue, flecked with gold, the irises rimmed with a thin circle of black. Even though Starfleet regulations allowed crew members to wear cosmetics which altered the natural appearance, to achieve what the wearer always perceived as enhancement, Marina did not need any, Shelton believed.

And the way she spoke with a trace of her native Russian accent, was definitely exotic. Just a glimpse of her would bring healing to his mind, if not actually to his body.

Shelton imagined her soft hands touching his bruised forehead, adjusting the sterile field around his chest. A pretty nurse is the best medicine in sickbay. And if she wasn't on duty, Christine Chapel was sure to be there. Sure, she was sweet on Mr. Spock, but she was a looker, too, that one.

"Nurse Anichkova," Shelton said, his voice barely a whisper. He waited a few seconds and then called her name again, slightly louder this time.

He could not control a smile that crept across his face as he imagined her tender care. Mr. Chekov is certainly a lucky man to come from a place with such lovely women, he thought.

When Miss Anichkova did not come, Shelton decided she was not on this duty shift. "Oh, well," he mused, "I'll be here a while, he mused, so I will get to see her later. There is nothing like an injured hero to gain a lady's sympathy or attention."

"Nurse Chapel," he said, his voice gaining strength with use. "Nurse Chapel, I'd appreciate a glass of water."

From behind him a voice, it was definitely not the head nurse of the *U.S.S. Enterprise*, answered, "So would people in nakazitvat, Earth Man."

"What?" Shelton asked, not comprehending.

"Nakazitvat! The place where the dead are tormented. Surely even an Earth Man knows about nakazitvat," the Vargon laughed.

The fog in Shelton's mind faded. Now he understood. He was not back on the *Enterprise*. He was still a captive on the *Repelator*. And the Vargons had promised to execute him and Captain Kirk.

"Hell!" Shelton swore.

"Is that what Earth Men call nakazitvat?" the medic said with obvious scorn. "It sounds so weak. Just like Earth Men."

The Vargon walked to the front of Shelton's bed, overhead lights sharpening his features, accenting the brow ridge.

"I will teach you about nakazitvat, Earth Man. It will make you beg to be sent to the soft place you designate as hell. We trained the creatures you call demons," he said.

He started to walk away, stopped and returned. He laughed as Shelton struggled against old-fashioned binding restraints.

"Stay here, Earth Man. We will begin again soon."

* * * * *

Captain James T. Kirk had no illusions. The sounds were those of a medical facility, but they were not the sounds of his ship. He may not be as intimately in tune with every minute sound of the *Enterprise* as Montgomery Scott claimed to be, and that was a matter for argument, but this was not Leonard McCoy's sickbay. This was not his ship.

Although he was held in the bed by restraints, he could move enough of his body to know that, while he was still in considerable pain, he had no broken bones. That was strange considering the beating he had taken, but he remembered Moss-Kuib saying he and Lieutenant Shelton would not be allowed to die until they had reached the Vargon home world.

“Evidentially,” Kirk thought, “they have fixed me up just enough so I’ll remember the last beating before they begin the next one. Well, let’s get on with it. If I’m not held in restraint, I can look for a means of escape.”

The Captain did not have long to wait. The same two executioners who had punished him earlier, entered the sickbay.

“Release him,” one of them said to the medic who was standing nearby, “we will resume in the detention area.”

Kirk did not move while the straps which held his arms and legs were released. When the Vargon told Kirk to stand, he still did not respond. When the executioner moved to the bed, Kirk launched himself at the Vargon with all the speed he could rally. A satisfying crunch could be heard as Kirk’s fist connected with the area just below the Vargon’s right eye.

As the Vargon staggered, Kirk dropped to the floor, planted his left foot and kicked upward. The Vargon’s height advantage caused the blow to land in what Kirk assumed was the executioner’s stomach. As his tormentor doubled over, Kirk quickly landed a satisfying kick to the Vargon’s groin. “Good thing everyone has their genitals

in the same place,” Kirk thought. A third kick caught the Vargon in the temple and he dropped as though he had been hit with a phaser blast.

In the seconds it took for Kirk to fell one of his keepers, the other executioner and the medic moved to block the Captain’s escape route. The executioner kept his weapon holstered, and moved in to join the physical combat.

“Earth Man, this will just make this session more satisfying,” the second executioner said, as he circled to his left, forcing Kirk closer to the medic.

As the medic reached for an energy weapon, the executioner shouted, “Kortach!” The medic dropped the weapon and sprang at Kirk.

Jim leaped to avoid the medic, but just as the Captain thought he had avoided his attacker, the Vargon swung his arm and knocked him off balance. The executioner moved in and pummeled his victim with repeated blows before Kirk could defend himself. The two Vargons coordinated their next move, backing Kirk into a bed.

The executioner Kirk had successfully fought a few seconds earlier raised up from behind the bed and slipped a strangle-noose over Kirk’s head. One hand held a metal handle with the opposite end curved to fit the shape of its victim’s neck. With his other hand, the Vargon tightened the noose.

Kirk’s reaction was automatic. His hands went to his throat but there was now no escape. As the bloodied executioner held him in a strangle-hold, his partner held Kirk’s feet so the medic could attach restraining chains.

The noose’s handle was long enough that the Vargon could avoid further blows, while giving him total control of his captive.

“Move, Earth Man,” the executioner said with satisfaction. “We will resume in the detention area. I hope you enjoyed your moment of freedom. Your next will come when we free your life from your broken body.”

“Just as soon as your broken jaw heals, I’ll bet,” Kirk said with equal satisfaction.

“Let’s see if you can speak without any air in your body, Earth Man,” the Vargon replied, tightening the noose with near-fatal pressure. As James Kirk gasped for air, his captors propelled him out of sick bay, sometimes pushing, sometimes dragging him along the corridor.

* * * * *

As the two executioners herded their prisoner toward Detention Area 443, they were joined by two other Vargons with Jackson Shelton in tow.

“Well, Jackson,” Kirk croaked, forcing speech from near-strangulation, “you haven’t done any better than I.”

The Lieutenant was held with similar devices, his face showing the redness and puffiness of a recent beating.

“At least I drew blood,” Shelton said. “I see you did, too, sir.”

“They may be our last victories for a while,” Kirk said, “but I promise you, Lieutenant, they will not be our last victories.”

The Vargon pushing Kirk by the strangulation device laughed, “We are glad to hear of your courage, Earth Man. Courageous men die slowly. It is much more enjoyable.”

Before they could reply, Kirk and Shelton were pushed through an open security door. Its only identification was the number 443 stenciled on the left-hand side. When Jim was paralyzed on the docking bay floor, he had heard Aireb tell an unfortunate guard to report to detention area 300-something.

“How many of the infernal places do they have? Is this entire ship a detention area?” Kirk wondered out loud.

“Maybe in death you will learn the answer, Earth Man,” Security Chief Aireb said, turning to face the men from the *Enterprise*, then adding, “I see you have both been anxious to begin today’s procedures.”

To the four executioners he said, “And I see you were careless. I hope the taste of your own blood has taught you not to underestimate these two again. If it has not, there are other ways you can learn.”

“Let us loose, Aireb, we still have a few lessons we can teach them,” Kirk said.

It was one thing for Aireb to humiliate his men. It would not do – at least not at the moment – for their captives to do it. Aireb barked an order at the two who were holding the strangulation devices and the nooses were yanked tight around the necks of the helpless men.

The degradation of the day was more than Shelton’s guard could endure. There was a sickening snap as he tightened the noose with a quick jerk and yanked the device upward, lifting Jackson Shelton off of the deck, breaking the Lieutenant’s neck cleanly.

As the dead man dangled and then was dropped to the floor, Aireb bared his teeth at the executioner, drawing his energy weapon at the same time.

The executioner let the strangle-noose fall to the deck and straightened his shoulders proudly.

“You can only kill me once, Aireb,” he sneered.

“Yes, but I can do it extremely slowly,” Aireb said as he changed the setting from destruct to stun and fired. “And you will beg the Great Pateetsa for someone to do for you what you have done to this Earth Man,” he said to the guard’s crumpled body.

“Get this pile of Groyskorth excrement out of here,” he snapped.

His trembling partner asked, “Where shall I take him, sir?”

“To the nearest empty cell, idiot, and then lock yourself in the one adjacent.”

“Tough day for executioners,” Kirk mocked. It was his only weapon. He would not show grief for his friend, at least Lieutenant Shelton’s murderers would not see it.

Aireb advanced on Kirk without a word and began to beat the Captain without mercy. Finally he stopped and shouted, “Medic! Restore him! Do it here! Quickly, while my rage still burns!”

* * * * *

As badly as James Kirk was hurt, he could still think with analytical clarity, “This animal knows how to administer a beating. And their medical staff restores potentially fatal wounds without eliminating the pain of the damaged nerves. Bastards!”

Through swollen lips the Captain mumbled, “Jackson, I will not forget what they did to you.”

If the Vargons understood, they showed no sign of it.

* * * * *

First Officer's Log: Stardate 5905.5

We have been following the ion trail left by the unidentified star vessel for two days, seven hours, eleven minutes. When our instruments determined that they increased speed beyond our warp capability, I agreed with Mr. Scott's conclusion to decrease our own speed and effect adjustments to the matter-antimatter controls. It was a task which the Chief Engineer completed in record time. We are once again under way at Warp 8, a speed Mr. Scott feels we can sustain without reduction for another Standard day.

I ordered the launch of a Class 2 Warp Probe along the projected course of the unidentified ship. Even though Starfleet engineers have not been able to build manned vessels which can exceed Warp 9 – the limitations created by the artificial gravity field and the other constraints of life-support systems making greater speeds impossible for long durations – the Class 2 probe can achieve Warp 14.

At that speed, the probe should be able to catch and even overtake the starship which holds Captain Kirk and his trainees prisoners. Logic dictates that they are still alive. If it had been only their intent to eradicate them, they would surely have destroyed the Isaac Newton, rather than taking it aboard their own vessel.

Our probe is locked into the ion trail so even if they change course, it can still follow. If the intruder does not change speed again, we will have a report back in

another eight hours, twenty-seven minutes. The data should give us some idea about who these beings are and a possible destination for the termination of their flight. With that information in our own computer's data banks, we can facilitate plans to rescue our shipmates and our Captain.

End log entry. First Officer, out.

I remember the first present I ever gave to Anatorr. We had conspired to spend a few precious hours alone walking through the streets of a nearby city. Ingal-Karbe was two hours north of Zenyuk by train, six hours by bus.

The train was for people in a hurry or people with a great deal of elbur to spend. The crowded buses were for everyone else.

An average working person, like me, might earn 25 elbur each month, a shop owner like Anatorr could earn 60, a pol, sitting in his office, controlling the affairs of an entire city, 150, and a member of the ExComm – short for Extraordinary Commission for the Maintenance of Social Order, the death squad police who enforced the Bolskars' terror, as much as he could steal from his hapless victims.

When Anatorr would take a commission from a sale of dzhhunk or tabersk stones he would keep that separate from his regular salary. The first time I saw him drop those elbur into a small box in his desk, he explained, "That is our money." When I could, I would add to our small account – we called it our bank. Then when we planned a special day, we would "go to the bank and ask for a withdrawal."

That particular day Anatorr withdrew ten elbur from the bank for the train, for food, and for what he called "souvenirs." Every time we took such a trip, he bought me a little remembrance of the day.

“Since I cannot be with you always,” he said, “you can look at those souvenirs and remember each special day.”

“My darling,” I said, “I press each day into my thoughts, my book of memories, where they are always safe and where I can always reach them. The souvenirs will be illustrations for my memory.”

On that day in Ingal-Karbe, the first of many trips we took to that city – we called it a magical city because it hid our identities from everyone and allowed us to behave like husband and wife – we were eating in a tavern which had a few tables placed outside. Customers could watch the Wikfa River flow past.

Anatorr was quietly sipping a mug of kvasale, watching me eat. The intensity of his gaze caused me to blush.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“Taking photographs for my book of memories,” he said.

I pushed my plate back and withdrew from my carry-bag a small package, wrapped in ordinary store paper and handed it to him.

“What is this?” Anatorr asked.

“My first present to you,” I said.

“Princess, the first present you gave me was your love on our night of discovery,” he answered.

“You know what I mean,” I said, trying to sound fierce. “Open it!”

“What is it?”

"You'll know when you open it, won't you?"

Anatorr held the package for a moment, turning it slowly in his hands, as though what was inside would reveal itself to him.

"Anatorr, open it," I said with great deliberation.

Smiling, he lifted first one corner of the paper and then the other, rolled the paper back and took out a small box I had taken from his store. He opened the lid and took out a shiny brass key.

"To your heart?" he asked.

"Close," I replied. "To my flat."

I hesitated for a moment and then added, "To our flat."

For more heart beats than I could count, Anatorr sat without speaking, rolling the key between his fingers, running his thumb across its rough grooves. I could not read his face. And then he cried, not with sobs, but with tears that washed the dust of the streets off of his cheeks.

"I have wanted to ask for this, but could not raise enough courage. It is a precious gift," he said.

Then he smiled and said, "The second best I've ever received."

"If you will ask the master of this place to rent us a room, I will give that present to you again," I said.

CHAPTER EIGHT

“Mr. Spock, data is incoming from the probe,” Lieutenant Uhura said, her excitement obvious to the entire bridge crew.

“Make a back-up as it comes in, Miss Uhura,” Spock said, “and route the primary transmission to the science station. Send the back-up to the helm and engineering consoles. Also, please notify Doctor McCoy, although I doubt there will be much medical information available from this probe. And Lieutenant, your familiarity with subspace fields will undoubtedly be most valuable with this exercise.”

“Thank you, Mr. Spock,” Uhura said and then added, “Sir, although I can’t read it at this speed, judging from the signal strength, the quality of this data appears to be superb.”

Chekov spoke next. “Now, ve vill find the Kepten,” sounding more like a Russian than ever.

“That is indeed the purpose of this exercise, Ensign,” Spock answered.

“Mr. Spock, I want to get a look at that data,” Scotty said, “but first, if ye agree, I will recalibrate the matter-antimatter flow dampers and the power sensors again. Tis my guess we’ll need maximum warp soon.”

“Agreed, Mr. Scott,” the First Officer said. “Proceed.”

“Warp 5, Scotty?” Sulu asked.

“Aye, lad. Warp 5,” the Scotsman answered.

Mr. Spock looked at the bridge crew with satisfaction, if, that is, a Vulcan could show satisfaction – a fact Doctor McCoy would have raised for “discussion,” had the doctor been on the bridge.

* * * * *

Inside the dark interior of the *Isaac Newton* one of the chairs slowly dissolved and reformed as Ensign Bakor K'Yle. Although the transformation had denied the Antosian of most of his sensory capacities, he could feel vibrations as the Vargons tramped around in his small vessel. His time sense was no where near as good as that of a Vulcan, especially in a mutated state, but the shuttle craft had been empty for sufficient time to give him a margin of safety, he judged.

The transmorph process was effected almost instantly, but K'Yle lay still on the deck for more than 30 seconds. There was no danger inherent in the transformation, in or out of a specific shape, but the amount of energy consumed was equal to the most strenuous physical labor or prolonged athletic competition.

The small, red emergency lights still illuminated the cabin. Outside of the shuttlecraft all was in darkness. When the Vargons removed the other members of the *Newton's* crew, they had switched off the tri-silicon-halogen lights and sealed the docking bay. When they removed the electronic device which had allowed them access to the shuttle's interior, the exit panel automatically closed. Ensign K'Yle would be able to work with a small degree of safety.

“For now,” he thought, “I will use only the emergency lighting. If I have to do sensitive repairs, I will need more illumination, but I can do an evaluation with what luminescence I have.”

K’Yle signaled the shuttlecraft’s computer to run a self-diagnostic examination. He would use its analysis to organize his repair procedures. Priorities were still propulsion and life support.

The self-diagnostics would take approximately one minute to complete. As he waited, Bakor K’Yle gave thought to escape maneuvers. Could they exit the docking bay undetected? Doubtful – their previous attempt had obviously been monitored. Could he organize a diversion? Not without more data. What were their chances for success? Unable to calculate at this time, but judging from their recent history, definitely higher against success than the last odds he had cited for the Captain.

As a green light flashed, indicating diagnostic routines were complete, K’Yle shook himself. In a voice so quiet as to be almost inaudible he said, “Priorities. Propulsion and life support. Propulsion and life support. Remember that Ensign!”

He smiled and answered himself, equally as quite, “Aye, aye, sir! But who died and made you Captain.”

His humor faded as he glanced to the rear of the shuttlecraft where Ensign Berek’s body had lain. He wondered about the fates of Captain Kirk and Lieutenant Shelton. He could not know that Jackson Shelton was already dead and that the Vargons were working hard to encourage James Kirk to join him.

“Propulsion and life support,” he whispered a final time and began to work.

* * * * *

“Hungry, Earth Man?” Organ Moss-Kuib asked as he entered Detention Area 443, carrying a tray of food.

Jim Kirk was determined not to answer, but his stomach chose that moment to remind him that he had not eaten in over two days. “I’d even be glad for some of Bones’ green vegetables,” he thought.

Aloud he said, “No, but thanks for asking.”

“Pity,” Moss-Kuib replied and he walked to the wall and threw the entire tray into a small disposal aperture.

Moss-Kuib walked back to Kirk and without warning launched a fist at Kirk’s stomach, doubling the Captain over, dropping him to his knees.

The Organ turned to Aireb and said, “It is as you said. They are incredibly soft. That should make your work enjoyable.”

Aireb smiled in agreement, bowing slightly.

“Well, Earth Man,” Moss-Kuib said, “we will now continue with your execution. We have a special device with which you will become very accustomed. It is our most impressive apparatus for effecting execution. You will know it well before you die.”

James Kirk stood slowly, but raised himself to his full height, squared his shoulders and assumed an attitude of total command. It was as if he were standing on the bridge of the *U.S.S. Enterprise*, directing the Federation’s flagship on a mission of urgent importance.

“Organ Moss-Kuib, I know that you have searched the records onboard my shuttlecraft. Therefore you know that I have a name. It is James Tiberius Kirk. I am Captain of the Federation Starship *Enterprise*. I may be your prisoner, sir, but you will address me with the respect of my position, one at least equal to your own,” Kirk barked, his hazel eyes burning with anger and indignity.

“Earth Man, do not dare to speak to our Organ with that voice,” Aireb said, moving towards Kirk.

“Kortach,” Moss-Kuib said, the power of the command evidenced by the Vargon’s tone, not the volume of the word.

Aireb stopped as if he had reached a force field.

Moss-Kuib closed on Kirk, stopping only centimeters from the Captain. With his superior height, he forced Kirk to look up, placing Kirk at a decided physical disadvantage. “Judging by what we know about this one,” Moss-Kuib thought, “this position is more psychological than physically threatening. I believe he would spit into an open antimatter chamber.”

“Earth Man. That is your name now. You have no other. You are a condemned prisoner awaiting the Sovereign’s pleasure,” Moss-Kuib said. “You are captain of nothing. You have no other life, no other existence outside of this punishment chamber. If you do not understand that by now, Earth Man, you soon will.”

“My name is James Kirk,” the Captain replied. “Someday, Vargon, you will speak it with fear.”

The insult was more than Aireb could bear to hear hurled at his commander-in-chief, the personal representative of the Sovereign onboard the *Repelator*.

“Organ, this indignity must not go unchallenged,” Aireb said with obvious fury.

“Challenge him, Chief Aireb,” Moss-Kuib said.

Aireb motioned to two executioners who crushed Kirk’s arms to his sides and prevented the Captain from making any further movement.

Next the Vargon whipped a small rectangular device from his utility pouch and attached it to a metal collar. He quickly fastened it to Kirk’s neck and motioned for the executioners to release their captive.

Aireb removed a control implement from his pouch, dialed a setting and pointed it at Kirk. Glancing briefly at the setting, he pushed the activating switch. Instantly, the neck device emitted a piercing wail. Its volume was exceeded by the sounds it ripped from James Kirk.

As Kirk fell to the floor, twisting in pain, Moss-Kuib said, “A most satisfactory answer, Aireb. Discontinue now.”

Aireb extended the control, toggled a switch and the torture device went silent. A heartbeat later, so did Captain Kirk.

Kirk fought to control his body, and although he recovered only partially, he rolled to his knees and then fought his muscles as they disobeyed what his brain said. From there he pushed himself unsteadily to his feet. He brushed the back of his hand across his mouth and looked at it, covered with his blood. He fumbled inside of his mouth with

his tongue and felt the ragged edge where he had gnawed his cheek, trying to stop his screams.

He wiped his hand onto his uniform shirt and spat blood onto the deck.

“Kirk,” he said. “My name is James T. Kirk.”

“Astonishing,” Moss-Kuib said. “Again Aireb, and double the standard intensity and duration.”

When the second “application” had ended, Jim again fought for control of his body and got only to his knees, his arms extended in front, shaking noticeably. He tried to speak, but his brain would not respond. He communicated with his eyes, it was all he could do.

“Earth Man, it is time you discovered the Time Chamber,” Moss-Kuib growled. “It should change your attitude.”

Motioning to the executioners, the Organ said, “Bring him,” and walked very deliberately out of Detention Area 443. A small parade of three Vargons and James Kirk followed him down the passageway and into a turbo lift chamber.

As the doors closed behind the unlikely quartet, Moss-Kuib motioned to Aireb who addressed a speaker panel, “Level Alpha-3C, Section 41, Deck 9.”

* * * * *

Imagine a place where time passes without effect on the people who live there. “Live there” may not be the best choice of words. Imagine a place where time passes without effect on the people who are its captives. Imagine a place where you can stay for an hour or a year and when you return, it will only be seconds later than when you

began your journey. Imagine a place where terror is defined. You have just experienced, not imagination, but the ultimate, primal nightmare – the Time Chamber.

The Time Chamber was constructed of a metal alloy stronger than the tritanium hull of the starship that surrounded it. The black metal did not shine, rather it absorbed all light projected at it. No sounds could be heard coming from inside the device and it was equally soundproof in its interior. If the Vargons' ship exploded due to a sustained photon torpedo attack, disintegrated upon entering a planet's atmosphere or was pulled apart by the gravity well of a Black Hole, the Time Chamber would survive. It was problematical that a breach in the ship's matter-antimatter core would damage the Chamber.

The Vargons had tried, without any success at all, to duplicate the material which comprised the Time Chamber's outer hull. They had similarly been unable to learn how to duplicate the equipment, to the point of failing to understand how or even why it worked. These failures, however, did not stop them from using the Chamber.

A photo-energy panel on the outside of the Time Chamber was the only control. Individuals could enter the Chamber by simply walking through the force field. Once inside, they could be seen, if they approached the glow of the force field, but they could not see out. Nor could they leave unless the photo-energy panel was activated to allow egress from the interior. Equipment, as well as personnel, could be stationed inside.

The Time Chamber was fully the largest individual section of the Vargons' ship. 200 meters long and 125 meters in width and height, the *U.S.S. Enterprise's* entire engineering section could have fit completely inside, even allowing for the fact that the

walls of the Time Chamber were more than 20 meters thick. The actual part of the Chamber into which living beings could penetrate was less than one third its total size. The remainder housed the power source and control mechanisms.

The Vargons had discovered the Time Chamber, as they now called it, on planet 4214-Alpha, a once inhabited and advanced technological world at one of the farthest reaches of their Sovereignty. If 4214-Alpha had not already been a dead planet, interaction with the Vargons would have rendered it so. The fact that civilization had perished there more than 100 centuries earlier, allowed them conquest without the cost of battle – a small consequence, since they would gladly, and without hesitation, have entered into a battle.

Recovered records about the Chamber indicated that it had been designed as a medical device. When the Vargons translated the data, they learned it had been created as an active suspended animation chamber. An individual, with a medical condition incurable at that moment in history, could enter the chamber, live comfortably in the quarters provided and then emerge for successful treatment, once such a treatment became available.

There were two obvious advantages of this device.

First, the individual could live a fairly normal life, not being subjected to the deanimation of standard chambers. Standard suspended animation processes could be invoked if the patient's condition was imminently life-threatening.

And secondly, while time passed at normal speed inside the chamber, the individual would step out only seconds after he entered it – according to chronometers

on the outside. Regardless of the amount of time which may have passed inside, he would not have aged. It was therefore, an Eternity Machine.

The Vargons immediately saw other possibilities: the ultimate device to prolong and save life became the ultimate torture chamber. No matter how long a prisoner was incarcerated inside the Time Chamber, no matter to what indignities his body had been subjected (if he survived those indignities), he could in real time, step outside moments after entering the Chamber, and having aged only a few seconds, he could then be returned to the Chamber for further “treatment.”

The unique properties of the machine negated most of the ill-effects inflicted upon the body. Death was the major exception. The Vargons, after much practice, learned to stop just short of that point. The mind, however, remembered.

This was eternal life on the most horrible scale, where the degree of terror was limited only by the imagination of those who controlled the Time Chamber. And in the case of the Vargons, they were capable of creating endless scenarios of torture. They could, in few minutes of time, administer an eternity of anguish and pain.

All of this Organ Moss-Kuib explained to Captain James T. Kirk. He obviously enjoyed the telling.

“And now, Earth Man,” he said, “experience the ultimate death.”

Terrors dominated my earliest memories, from the time I was just a little girl. I do not remember when they began, but I remember the horror of my tenth birthday.

I also remember the day the terrors stopped.

Anatorr and I had met in the forest just south of Zenyuk. I had prepared a small btopoi which we ate and then walked through the woods, stopping frequently to lie next to each other, to embrace and to kiss.

The tops of giant Folta evergreen trees seemed to reach toward the sky like a yawning man stretching stiff muscles. Under their heavy branches tiny Crystal Plants made a blanket of white, pink and red blooms. The air was heavy with their scent. Frequently we could hear the songs of birds, although we almost never saw them as they darted high up in the Foltas.

During one such "intermission" I said, "You said you wanted to go for a walk. We haven't done much walking."

"I lied," Anatorr said, holding me closer.

I laughed, my heart full of joy, "Sir, you can lure me into the woods anytime."

Then I stiffened in his arms and started crying.

"What is it?" he asked. "What's wrong?"

"There is something I have not told you, and I am afraid that if I say it, you will stop loving me. What I have done is so horrible."

“Whatever it is,” he said, “it is part of what has made you the woman I love. I will always love you. There will never be a day when I will not love you. Tell me. Whatever it is.”

He held me close and I sobbed silently for a long time.

Finally I said, “The day I became ten years old, we had a festivity. After my friends had gone, my father followed me into my bedroom. I had started to change my clothes. My dress was lying on the bed, I was wearing only my slip and my bottom covers – that is what my mother always called them.

“My body was beginning its changes which signaled I was becoming a woman. Body hair was growing. The front of my slip was pushed forward by two small bumps.

“I heard the door open behind me and turned around to see my father come in. He walked over to me and without a word, slid my slip off of my shoulders. It seemed as though my heart had stopped as he stood there looking at me.

“My little girl is becoming a woman,” he said. “I want to watch you grow up.”

And he left the room.

A few minutes later he came back. I was still standing there naked, trembling from the experience. I did not understand it, but instinctively I believed I had done something wrong.

My father stood there staring at me and then said, “Your mother would not understand it if you told her. She might even leave me.” And he walked out.

“Anatorr,” I said, “this has gone on almost every day for nine years. That is why, when my mother put all of my belongings into four paper sacks and told me to leave, I went without protesting.

“The last occurrence was the day before I asked you for a job. Mother had invited me to come home for the evening meal. When she was in the kitchen, Daddy said, ‘Elena, give me a kiss. I so seldom see you any more.’ When I leaned over to kiss his cheek he held my shoulders and stared down the front of my dress. ‘My little girl is growing up,’ he said.

“Anatorr, I am so ashamed. How can you love anyone who has done such terrible things?” I said, beginning to cry again.

When I looked at Anatorr his face was filled with such rage that I was frightened. Then he pulled me close and almost crushed me in his arms.

“Princess, I am so sorry,” he said. “Such filthy treatment! Never again feel ashamed. There is blame to be fixed, but it will not attach itself to you!”

“Do you mean you still love me?” I asked.

“Always,” he answered.

And I cried myself to sleep in his arms, free of the terror for the first time.

CHAPTER NINE

First Officer's Log: Stardate 5906.3

Lieutenant Uhura has received a transmission from our Warp Probe. The data has been downloaded to other stations for analysis. The quality of the incoming data is excellent. I believe we will soon make progress towards locating and eventually rescuing Captain Kirk and his trainee crew. I have called a meeting of the senior bridge crew to discuss our findings.

* * * * *

Doctor Leonard McCoy walked into the briefing room and looked around. Seated at the oval-shaped table were Spock, Scott, Uhura, Sulu and Chekov. A stack of data-tapes were in front of each officer. A star scene appeared on each officer's tri-view screen.

"Well," McCoy said with his best Southern drawl, "if we're all here, who's mindin' the store?"

"If you mean by that question, Doctor," Spock answered, "who is on the bridge of the *Enterprise*, as soon as Mr. Chekov and I had completed primary analysis of the Warp Probe's data, I ordered Beta shift to assume their duties early. Mr. DeSalle has the conn."

"You know that is precisely what I meant, Spock," McCoy snapped, no trace now in his voice of the Southern gentleman.

The other officers looked at each other and laughed. The fact that Mr. Spock had risen to Doctor McCoy's bait was a good sign. That reaction indicated that the Science Officer was pleased by what the probe had learned.

"I hardly believe that Mr. DeSalle being stationed at the conn is cause for amusement," Spock said.

"Of course not, Mr. Spock," Uhura said.

"Absolutely not," Sulu commented.

"Certainly not," Chekov added.

Spock gave a questioning look to the Chief Engineer, waiting for his denial. Scotty only folded his arms across his chest and looked at the Vulcan with a look of total innocence.

When Spock raised his eyebrow in annoyance, all of the other officers burst out with laughter, the tension of the last days broken by the prospect of good news.

"If the jocular has concluded," Spock said, "perhaps we could proceed with our analysis of the data."

"Of course," Uhura said.

"Absolutely," Sulu commented.

"Certainly," Chekov added.

Scotty and McCoy were silent.

"Very well," the Science Officer began, "the trajectory of the Warp Probe clearly indicates that the unidentified starship is on course for the constellation Taurus, specifically for the Pleiades Cluster, also known as M-45. Because of the electron-

radiation distortion of this reflection nebula I am, however, unable to determine which of the primary stars may be their final destination.”

Chekov continued the briefing, “Each of the six primary stars is surrounded by a cloud of dust particles. From Earth telescopes, the clouds show up as an impenetrable reflection. It was only within the last 50 years astronomers were able to determine with certainty that any of those stars had a planetary system.”

Still feeling the good mood in the room, Sulu asked, “Pavel, who were those scientist who made this most important discovery?”

“Why Russians, of course,” Chekov responded, the tone of his reply indicating that he was astonished his friend was ignorant of that fact and missing the point of Sulu’s gentle ribbing. Even in the 23rd century, it was still a Russian trait to claim originality for every major invention or discovery.

Not to be left out of the discussion, Uhura pitched in, “The galactic star cluster is also named ‘The Seven Sisters’ after seven nymphs of Greek mythology, although only six of the stars are normally visible from Earth with an unaided eye.”

“Greek mythology?” Chekov questioned.

“Greek,” Uhura said firmly.

“Well, undoubtedly it was Aleksandr Sergeyevich Pushkin who made them famous in his Fairy Tales,” Chekov responded.

“If we have covered that topic sufficiently,” Spock said, using a tone of voice that was completely free of irritation, but revealing the Science Officer was indeed experiencing irritation.

“Miss Uhura, you have been studying the telemetry. Has the starship sent or received any communication?”

“There appeared to be one rapid burst incoming, Mr. Spock. At least there was a possible subspace transmission which intersected with their course. With all of the background radiation from the Cluster, I am not positive as to its origin,” Uhura replied.

“Your best guess, Lieutenant,” Spock said.

“Alcyone. It has a brightness of magnitude three. It would appear to be the most logical choice,” she answered.

“Very well.” The Vulcan continued, “Mr. Sulu, notify Mr. DeSalle to lay in a new course. Make headings to Alcyone. Continue at Warp 8.

“Mr. Scott, direct the launch of a second Warp Probe along Mr. Sulu’s course projection. Set maximum speed. We can use our position and the data from the two probes to triangulate further data.

“Doctor McCoy, I know the data the probe was programmed to collect was limited as to its bio-medical content, but were you able to make any judgments?”

“The occupants of the ship are probably humanoid, although that conclusion could be made without the data,” McCoy answered. “Only a very few of the species we have encountered, such as the Horta, the Companion and the Medusans, are not humanoid. We have also met beings from outside of our galaxy, like Korob and Sylvia, who are definitely not humanoid. So that deduction is probably of little value. Spock, there is just not enough data to work with. Maybe from our second probe.”

“Agreed,” Spock said. “Engineer, add the additional programming to the probe before launch.”

As Scotty nodded compliance, Spock pushed back his chair, stood, looked at each of his fellow officers and said, “Carry out your instructions. Dismissed.”

* * * * *

The diagnostic tests of the *Isaac Newton* showed the craft was in remarkably good shape. The hurried repairs K’Yle, Shelton and Kirk had made when they first tried to escape had taken care of most of the problems. Mr. K’Yle was relieved to see that his estimates of power utilization were better than he had projected. Even without the power from the phaser Captain Kirk had kept, all systems were available. The computer rated total onboard energy efficiency at 84 percent.

In order to maintain maximum thrust in the shuttlecraft’s impulse engine, Ensign K’Yle had to sacrifice efficiency in the subspace communications grid. Once they eluded their captors, he planned to use their inertial dampers to maintain forward momentum. Then they could power up the radios and signal for help. K’Yle was satisfied that their vessel was as ready as he could make it. Now to find the Captain and Mr. Shelton.

Bakor K’Yle reasoned that since his shipmates had been captured, the Vargons would have no reason to continue with their scans of the docking bay. It seemed logical. Regardless, he decided to proceed from that point of view. In order to facilitate their escape, he had to move outside of the *Newton*.

The shuttlecraft's main door opened silently. K'Yle paused briefly at the top of the step and stepped quietly out into the cavernous darkness. K'Yle smiled and remembered an ancient Earth story of a prophet who had been swallowed by an enormous sea creature.

I wonder if Jonah felt like this, K'Yle thought.

Reaching the comm-panel where Captain Kirk and Mr. Shelton had worked, K'Yle found that the changes they had made had not been reversed. The activator probe now glowed red, indicating the circuits were closed. When the Captain activated the switches that would release the outer bay doors, the indicator light would have changed to green. K'Yle had been able to watch from the darkened interior of the shuttle craft for only a few seconds, but he had not seen the Vargons touch the probe or the panel.

That must mean, he thought, that they routed a diverter signal through the system, fooling the Captain.

The red indicator should mean that those circuits were now switched off. If all docking bay sensors were off, he could open the interior door without triggering the alarms. Standing in the darkness, K'Yle studied the activator probe and the exposed circuits, and decided on an escape plan.

Because of "The Articles" everyone on Resenka lives in fear. Drawn up by the victorious Bolskars after the War of Vengeance, "The Articles" were designed to strengthen their advantage over the population of our world. Every thought, action or lack of action could be punished by one of "The Articles."

As I have already written, whatever activity advanced the Bolskars position by being permitted was permitted; whatever advanced their position by being forbidden was forbidden. And those requirements could be changed tomorrow, or even this very afternoon. The great terror of "The Articles" was their uncertainty.

One thing was certain: the yachenka on Resenka multiplied like the Scarlet Flowering Langweer, one of our most prolific plants. Just as a few of their seeds could quickly cover the ground with blossoms, so the Bolskar prisons spread, not like flowers, but like choking, deadly weeds. And always the yachenka were filled with our own people.

Our world is one people and one language. There is only one habitable land mass. Our civilization grew up around the fertile Wikfa River basin where it empties into the Great Sea. Fierce climatic conditions kept our ancestors in that small area for centuries. The divergences which developed on many worlds as their populations scattered, did not occur on Resenka. Therefore when war raged on our planet, we

were killing only ourselves. Our differences were ideological, we could not hate because someone had different skin color – in that effect, we were all the same.

In the years immediately after the Bolskar victory, the yachenkas were filled with the vanquished. When their terms expired, the survivors were released and they slowly made their way back to their former homes. When they crossed the formal boundaries into those cities, members of the ExComm arrested them and processed them for resentencing.

A few asked what crime they had committed, most simply accepted their fate. Those who asked were told “The Articles” made it illegal for convicted felons to live in the same cities where they had perpetrated their crimes. Since they had entered those cities, they obviously intended to live there (the ExComm were masters at determining what was obvious, frequently seeing what no one else could see, often what no one else knew existed). Therefore they had violated “The Articles.” Returning home was proof of their crimes. They were returned to the yachenka, their new sentence was simply their original sentence – doubled.

There is an old Resenka saying, “To live a life is not so simple as crossing a field.” At least I am told that is an “old Resenka saying.” It may well be, we appear to have many of them. One thing about our lives is simple: our apprehension is constant.

Some things were in obvious violation of “The Articles” – sabotage of Bolskar property (and what was not Bolskar property?), murder, theft and all activities deliberately calculated to thwart their Victory. But what was deliberate? The fact that

the Bolskars controlled the entire legal system and that only the Bolskars could therefore determine premeditation was a most effective means of control.

If you said to a Bolskar, "Drop dead!" it was obvious you were planning some heinous crime against him and you were sentenced to the yachenka. If two citizens complained against a new tax, they were guilty of forming an organized gang and were sentenced to the yachenka. If you had lived in one of the Chekart controlled states during the War of Vengeance you were obviously a collaborator and could be sentenced to the yachenka.

Being only 19, I knew about the Dark Times solely through the whispers of those of my parents' generation. The Cleansings were now a part of the past, except for those who still lived in the yachenka or who still waited for a family member to return from them. And those two groups comprised nearly half of our total population.

By now a sullen atmosphere had settled over Resenka. Few people acted with kindness, there was no example from the Bolskars to exhibit such behavior. Fewer still even smiled in public – expressions of joy could be reported to the ExComm.

The historian, Denikin, wrote, "The further back into the decades one goes, the fewer the eyewitnesses who are left. The light of common knowledge has gone out and darkness has set in. The written chronicles either do not exist or are kept under lock and key."

Anatorr was an eyewitness.

CHAPTER TEN

Two executioners put leg binders on James Kirk and then marched him into the Time Chamber. He pulled at the metal collar which was fastened tightly around his neck. It did not move. The Vargons had stopped its positioning just short of strangulation, but tight enough to always be uncomfortable.

The Providers of the planet Triskellion had put a similar device on Kirk, Chekov and Uhura, intending to train them for gladiatorial combat. When the combination of a violent ion storm and a transporter malfunction swept Kirk and three of the *Enterprise's* crew into an alternate universe, he had witnessed the use of a punishment device called "the agonizer."

"How many races like this exist in the universe," he wondered, "always trying to force someone to do their bidding, using torture and death if simple persuasion was ineffective." The Vargons had already used the collar on the Captain twice. He had no doubt that its application would be repeated.

The entrance to the Chamber was not through standard doors, but rather through a force field. One of the executioners adjusted the settings on the photo-energy panel. His companion stepped through, seeming to dissolve centimeter by centimeter as he stepped through, pulling James Kirk behind him. Kirk staggered slightly as his body completed the passage. He felt slightly disoriented, like the first

time he had passed through a transporter beam. Evidently the guard felt no such effects.

The layout inside the Time Chamber was simple – a wide central corridor with parallel compartments lining the walls. Each compartment was square in shape and illuminated inside by a dim light, unless there was a being inside. Those compartments which were occupied were uniformly well lighted. Because the original designers of the Time Chamber had not fashioned it to be a prison, the Vargons had to install small force fields on each compartment. The sound of the activated force fields reminded Captain Kirk of a hive of Amberian bees. A pattern of blue lights rippled constantly across the doors, indicating which force fields were turned on. As they passed the second set of parallel compartments a form lunged at the force field. As its body made contact with the field, the blue glow changed to red, then orange, yellow and finally white as the creature stayed in contact with the field. The changing color of the lights indicated the increasing intensity of the field's strength. The only sound was the creature's screams, until he was rendered unconscious.

Security Chief Aireb saw Kirk watching the demonstration.

"He will recover, Earth Man. After a time he will attack the force field again. We keep him alive because we find his actions amusing, a pleasing diversion from our work," Aireb said.

Before Jim Kirk could suggest that Aireb's parents had never been married, the Vargon activated Kirk's collar, dropping the Captain to his knees.

“Were you about to say something, Earth Man?” Aireb asked with sarcastic pleasure.

Kirk struggled to his feet, but did not respond.

“Answer me!” Aireb shouted, hitting Kirk with a second jolt.

Again Kirk did not reply.

When the pain of a third application subsided, Kirk hissed, “You bastard!”

His answer was rewarded by yet another neural assault.

“Pity you can’t learn to keep your mouth shut, Earth Man,” Aireb laughed.

Aireb motioned to the two executioners who yanked Kirk to his feet and threw him into an empty compartment. Aireb entered the compartment and kicked Kirk twice in the stomach. The Vargon lowered himself to his knees, grasped the front of the Captain’s shirt with one hand and pulled him forward. Kirk made a move as if he would attack his tormentor and Aireb landed several blows to Kirk’s face and chest. When Kirk sagged in Aireb’s grip, the Vargon dropped him to the floor.

“We’ll let your pain argue with you for a while, Earth Man,” Aireb said. He walked out of the compartment and activated the force field.

* * * * *

When he regained consciousness, Kirk tried to move, but could not. His muscular system was paralyzed. He looked up at a medic who said, “The collar can be adjusted to various settings. This one is effective for administering medical treatment. It can of course be set to kill. There is even a pleasure setting on it, though I doubt that you will ever feel that, Earth Man.”

The medic ran a hand-held scanner over Kirk's body, inspecting the work of his Security Chief. When he was satisfied he had found all of the physical damage, he switched it off and selected another device. The new apparatus was Y-shaped with a small electrode on each of the Y's arms. The medic held it upside down and touched an activator button. The electrodes emitted a soft hum.

"You have one broken rib, Earth Man. The Security Chief must like you to have inflicted only slight damage," the medic said as he inverted the device and placed the electrodes over the area of the fracture. He watched indicator lights change color and position on the handle and selected a second setting. The hum grew louder and as it did, Captain Kirk felt the area of his injured rib become warm, then hot, although not uncomfortably so. Finally satisfied, the medic switched the device off.

"Now Mr. Aireb can break it again," the medic laughed.

"Doctor McCoy would like to get a look at that," Kirk thought. "Maybe I can liberate one when I escape from this hell."

The medic pushed the arms of the device closer together and dialed a lower setting and proceeded to heal the Captain's split lip. Then he gathered his devices into their kit and activated a communicator.

"The Earth Man is ready Chief Aireb," he said.

"Understood," came the reply.

The medic stepped out of the compartment and activated the force field. Only then did he release the Captain from the collar's paralyzer setting.

“Lie still and rest, Earth Man,” the medic said, surprising Kirk with a hint of compassion in his voice, “you will need it.”

If Aireb or Moss-Kuib had been present, Kirk would have exerted the energy, stood and challenged them. As it was, it was not difficult to take the medic’s advice. Lying on the floor of his detention compartment, he closed his eyes and immediately fell asleep.

* * * * *

The sound of the force field being switched off woke Jim. Whether he had been asleep for minutes or hours, he did not know. The uniform lighting inside the Time Chamber gave no clue. But the rest, however long, had been healing.

Kirk scrambled quickly to his feet as Aireb entered followed by the two ever present executioners. Kirk looked into the corridor and saw Organ Moss-Kuib standing beside a large box-like object. Two other Vargons stood behind Moss-Kuib, one on either side of the box. At a signal from Aireb, the two technicians activated anti-grav handles and lifted the box. They waited for Moss-Kuib to step aside and then maneuvered the device into Kirk’s compartment.

When the technicians positioned the box at the rear of Kirk’s compartment, he realized it was not a box in the common sense, but a force field frame. The top and bottom were one meter square and solid. The two pieces were approximately three meters apart, separated by thin parallel braces. The bottom section was thicker indicating that the power supply and controls were located there.

“Stand in the center of the ak-borok, Earth Man,” Moss-Kuib ordered.

“My name is James...” the Captain began, but could not finish.

As Kirk began to speak, Moss-Kuib motioned at Aireb who activated the collar. Kirk’s mind ordered his body to fight the device, but the effect of the torture collar was instantaneous. Screaming in pain, the Captain fell to the floor, his hands fighting to tear the device from his neck. Throughout his body, sensor nerve endings seemed to explode in waves of increasing pain.

Aireb deactivated the device and Kirk rolled to a kneeling position, his gaze focused on Moss-Kuib.

“T. Kirk, Captain of ...” he persisted before a second onslaught of pain threatened to tear his sanity away.

When the collar was deactivated for the second time, Kirk was slower to rise, but he finished his speech: “the *U.S.S. Enterprise*.”

Organ Moss-Kuib breathed in silent fury. “This one is dangerous,” he thought. “More so than any other creature I have ever encountered. It may be prudent just to kill him now. But no, my duty to the Sovereign is clear.”

“Paralyze him,” the Organ ordered.

Aireb obeyed immediately and Jim was frozen in place, still trying to stand, still clawing at the smooth floor for support.

“Prepare him,” the Organ barked at the two executioners.

The executioners knelt beside the Captain and pulled his legs out straight, then they placed his arms at his sides. To a casual observer, he was lying at attention. Next they lifted Kirk to his feet and positioned him on the center of the bottom pad. As they

withdrew their arms from inside the ak-borok one of them knelt and touched a switch. The four rectangular areas of the device glowed a soft blue, much like the door of the isolation compartment.

Satisfied that Kirk was oriented properly inside of the ak-borok, Security Chief Aireb activated another control. This one caused the top and bottom panels of the force field box to shrink in size, while the height remained constant. When he switched the control off, the box was no longer square, but rather a rectangle whose walls were only five centimeters away from Captain Kirk's shoulders and five centimeters away from his chest and back.

"Earth Man," Moss-Kuib said, "all that is required of you now, is to stand there. You will not be permitted to recline. Oh, you will try to rest, but you will learn the disadvantage of such a posture."

"At the conclusion of this time, you will be permitted to take liquid. You, yourself, will determine the amount you will receive," Aireb said.

He motioned to the executioners who placed a container of water at eye-level in front of the Captain.

"There is one liter of liquid in this container, Earth Man," Aireb continued. "Each time you touch the field, and for as long as your body is in contact with it, liquid will be removed from your supply. Try to save enough to at least dampen your tongue."

Aireb deactivated the paralysis field which held Kirk upright. When he did, the Captain immediately staggered forward and touched the force field. The jolt of energy

threw him to his left, causing him to strike the force field again. He recoiled, but did not contact the walls of the ak-borok a third time.

“I am sure you were not observing the effects of repeated contact, Earth Man, but every time you touch the sides of the ak-borok, the power level increases. And you lose ten centi-liters of liquid,” Aireb said, his voice not quite as dispassionate as he had wished. The execution of this one was definitely more pleasurable than most of the deaths he supervised for the Vargon Sovereignty.

At a signal from Moss-Kuib everyone withdrew, leaving him alone with his prisoner.

“The standard duration for the first time in the ak-borok is six of your hours, Earth Man, but for you we are going to make an exception. Four complete cycles,” he said, turned and left the compartment.

Anatorr was an eyewitness to the darkness of the Bolskars.

Only a few months after he was released from the yachenka for the “heinous” crime of being captured by Chekart soldiers and not fighting to the death during the War of Vengeance, he attended a celebration in honor of the day the Leader of the Bolskars was born. Attendance was not compulsory, but if Anatorr had not freely elected to appear, he would have been executed. Indeed, that fate awaited any invitee who dared to be absent from a celebration in honor of the Leader. As it was, more than half of the audience voluntarily chose to enter the hall. The remainder just wanted to stay alive.

The very captive audience was made up of select citizens of Zenyuk, obviously not everyone could receive such an honor – the honor of honoring the Leader. Only shop owners like Anatorr, managers of large factories, the Pol and all of his underlings, members of the local Security Force, and, of course, the ever present ExComm could attend.

The Security Force saw to it that “invitations” were delivered. The ExComm recorded everyone’s presence – or absence; they also took diligent note of everyone’s behavior, particularly their enthusiasm towards the Leader.

One of the ironies of this celebration was that our Beloved Leader was not in attendance. Zenyuk was too small a city for him to notice, except when it came to

delivering money to support his campaigns and projects, and soldiers and workers to fulfill those enterprises.

Speeches noting the glories of the Leader droned on and on. Self-congratulatory pronouncements fell from the lips of the Pol and his underlings. Finally, the Pol walked again to center stage and said, "Citizens of Zenyuk, let us bring this evening to a close by rising to an ovation for the Leader," as if that was the first time that night when anyone had risen to an ovation.

With those words, he began to smile and applaud vigorously. Everyone in the hall immediately joined him, some accenting the hand claps with whistles and cheers. The tumultuous ovation continued for two minutes, three minutes, four minutes. Palms were becoming sore and arms were starting to ache. Many of the older citizens were actually now short of breath. But still the ovation continued.

Even those who genuinely adored the Leader were feeling that they had given sufficient honor. But who would be the first to stop?

The Pol could have done it, after all it was he who had suggested this conclusion to the meeting. But he was afraid his position was not secure enough in the Bolskar pantheon, so he continued to applaud. And members of the ExComm were watching to see who would stop first.

Five minutes, six minutes, seven minutes, it continued. Eight minutes, nine minutes. Now everyone was clapping for fear. They could not stop unless their hearts stopped. At ten minutes into the ovation one elderly factory manager did keel over,

dead of a heart attack. But when the ExComm called for a stretcher, everyone else continued to applaud the Leader.

Eleven minutes, twelve minutes. The celebrants began to look, very carefully at each other, pleading for relief, but not daring to stop. Thirteen minutes, fourteen minutes. Finally the Pol allowed his arms to fall to his sides – it was agony keeping them raised – and sat down. The hall was instantly silent.

That night the Pol was arrested. He was sentenced to ten years in the yachenka. The charge on his arrest papers was for allowing corruption in his city. But Anatorr heard that when the Pol was led to the prison wagon, a member of the ExComm whispered to him, “Never be the first to stop applauding!”

Strangely, when the story was repeated all over Zenyuk, no one laughed.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

First Officer's Log: Stardate 5907.8

We have received our initial data from the second Warp Probe. We have been able to determine that the unidentified ship which holds Captain Kirk, Lieutenant Shelton and Ensigns K'Yle and Berek prisoner is, as Lieutenant Uhura postulated, on course for Alcyone in the Pleiades Cluster. We are still too far out to determine the presence of Class M planets, but their course change would indicate that such a world or worlds may exist.

Other information from the probe has not been encouraging. The unidentified vessel has accelerated to Warp 12. Our course change to Alcyone and this second speed acceleration make it clear we cannot intercept them. We must hope that once they have entered the Alcyone's planetary system, they will proceed to a base or to their home world, and terminate their journey.

Accordingly, I have instructed Mr. Scott to take the Enterprise to Warp 9 and hold that speed for as long as he deems it prudent. He is then to decrease speed only to Warp Factor 7 and make realignment to engine components as quickly as possible. He has already completed this task once, but even being at Warp 7 for only 9.452 minutes has cost us more than four Standard days in our chase. Each time we recalibrate, we will lose a similar amount of time.

I estimate that it will take 24.997 Standard days to reach the outer limits of the Pleiades Cluster. Once there we will have to examine the Alcyone system for Class M worlds. The presence of a space dock or other orbiting structures will certainly facilitate our search. However, with their increased warp capacity, they may also have the capability to land their vessel, rather than using transporters or shuttlecraft as we do. That will make our task increasingly difficult.

End log entry. First Officer, out.

* * * * *

Captain James Kirk had only forgotten once and tried to rest his abused body against the frame of the ak-borok. The shock from the force field refreshed his memory quickly. The size of the ak-borok had been reduced sufficiently that he was unable to even turn around. That meant that his only view was forward and to the water container, tantalizingly close, but effectively light years away.

Outside of his forward field of vision, Captain Kirk became aware of movement. He squeezed his eyes shut and reopened them, looking past the water container. The faces of Organ Moss-Kuib and Security Chief Aireb came into focus.

“Earth Man,” Aireb said, “the Organ has a few questions for you.”

Every time he had felt his mental strength weakening, every time they called him, “Earth Man,” Kirk regained control by speaking his name. He knew that to speak it would bring punishment, but it was his key to survival. “As long as I maintain my identity, they will have to kill me to defeat me,” he thought.

Aireb was ready for the response. Before the Captain could say, "James," the neck collar was activated. The setting was higher than any previous assault. Instead of collapsing or writhing in pain, Kirk stiffened, totally unable to move, unable even to scream. When the collar was switched off, Kirk thought to himself, "Don't fall, don't touch the force field." His muscles had been held unmoving for 24 hours. Now when he summoned his strength, his body would not obey. Kirk pitched forward into the force field and was staggered backward. He tightened the muscles in his legs and waist and willed himself to lean slightly forward and pulled his torso erect.

Against the pain of the electronic assault he screamed, "My name is James T. Kirk!" forcing the words as though they were torn from his body.

Finally, the pain stopped. The Captain moved his lips, but no sound would come. A lip reader would have recognized the familiar litany. Evidently the Vargons were not lip readers.

"Earth Man," Moss-Kuib said, "that last exercise has depleted your entire supply of liquid. It will be four more cycles until you are offered more. In the mean time, I have a few questions."

* * * * *

Satisfied that the escape device which Captain Kirk had placed in the comm-panel was still functioning, Ensign Bakor K'Yle returned to the *Isaac Newton* to collect a weapon and a medical kit. When he reached the equipment locker, he studied several implements for possible conversion to weapons use. All but one of their phasers had been drained and that one was in Captain Kirk's possession when he was captured.

K'Yle rejected most of the medical gear as being unreliable weapons. He selected two hypo-sprays, dialing their indicators to powerful drugs he hoped would incapacitate the Vargons. Given enough time and the opportunity for appropriate staging, a weapon could be created from quite a few of the devices onboard the shuttle craft. As Ensign K'Yle considered those options, he discarded several because they required hand-to-hand combat, and others because they could not easily be concealed. The Vargons superior size placed the *Newton's* crew at a decided disadvantage, and stealth, he believed, would be vital.

The rubindium crystals inside the subcutaneous transponders could be fashioned into a crude energy beam not unlike the phasers, but they need a power source similar to old-fashioned incandescent light bulbs. Lighting panels delivered illumination, but not the heat required to generate the beam.

"Wait a minute," K'Yle thought, "the telemetry probes! They amplify signals by passing the data through a relay of paired-energy cells. I can adjust them to generate heat by reversing their connections. One of the discharged Type 1 phasers will hold the rubindium crystals, and its focusing crystals will help amplify the beam. I'll need the Type 2 handles to hold the energy cells. There are enough rubindium crystals to construct two devices each capable of producing three phaser blasts. I hope they will be sufficient."

Working in the subdued illumination of the *Newton's* emergency lights, K'Yle maintained a steady pace. It took him almost an hour to complete each weapon, taking

special care that all of the frequency adjustments were correct. The phasers' focusing crystals were, by nature, tuned to a slightly different power variance than the telemetry cells, but using the tricorder and one of the bulky engineering spanners, the Antosian made the required changes.

"The tricorder says this will work," K'Yle observed silently. "If my creation fails, my rescue attempt may also fail."

* * * * *

Organ Moss-Kuib asked questions. Captain James Kirk refused to answer. Security Chief Aireb activated the punishment collar. The sequence was repeated continually for two cycles. When Moss-Kuib and Aireb tired physically, two executioners took their places and the torture of James T. Kirk continued.

Dr. Roger Korby had attempted to replace Captain Kirk with an android duplicate using equipment the scientist had discovered on Exo III. As the android was being created, Kirk fixed a message in his mind that his Science Officer would not fail to detect. Now, a prisoner of the Vargon Sovereignty, secured inside the Time Chamber, Jim Kirk kept his sanity through another mental device – the declaration of his name. Even though it brought immediate punishment from the Vargons, he held onto the tactic.

Inside the Time Chamber, day followed endless day without any way for James Kirk to mark their passage. He was kept awake inside the ak-borok for 48 hours – when exhaustion forced him into sleep, the force field jolted him awake. Five days after he had been captured by the Vargons he was finally given water. It was another three

days before he was permitted to take solid food and then because of the combination of his weakened state and the physical torture he could not keep the food in his stomach. A healer was summoned who provided suitable liquid nourishment.

The smell of food, when it was brought to him the next day, caused waves of nausea, but he fought them down. "Eat," he said to himself. "Survive."

The Vargons had condemned the Captain to death. Torture was the means of accomplishing that sentence. Physical and psychological means were used, discarded and used again. They assaulted the Captain's body with fists, his nerve endings with electron-neural devices and his mind with chemical hallucigens.

Organ Moss-Kuib was no longer content to merely execute that sentence.

"Before this Earth Man dies," he told Aireb, "we will break his will. When we kill his body, his mind will already have been ripped from him."

On his 18th day inside the Time Chamber the Vargons had returned to physically beating James Kirk. If Joseph Stalin, Kodos the Executioner, and the Imperial Inquisitor of Capella III had jointly compiled a manual of interrogation by torture, it would have been a small volume when compared with the techniques the Vargons had refined by centuries of experimentation on thousands of hapless victims.

The beatings assumed a pattern – beating, healing and rest. Then it began again. Periods of rest would be lengthened, then shortened. Nourishment would be withheld, then provided. The condemned man would not be given the comfort of a routine.

On James Kirk's 24th day inside the Time Chamber, a healer spoke quietly to Moss-Kuib.

"Never before, Organ, have we kept a prisoner inside of the Chamber for such a sustained time. I recommend that he be removed from here and be allowed to return to his normal time progression. If this does not happen, the Earth Man will not survive until we reach Vargon."

With the finger tips of his left hand, Moss-Kuib gently rubbed a blood vessel just above his brow ridge. He curled his fingers into a fist and continued the rubbing motion across his lips. His pulse could be seen in the blood vessel. His subordinates believed, but would never express it openly, that the Organ was obsessed with the execution of this prisoner. They recognized the hand movements as signals of great tension and subconsciously stepped away from their commander.

Moss-Kuib broke his gaze away from James Kirk and raked the healer, the two executioners and Aireb with his burning red eyes. He jammed his fists to his sides and strode toward the outer force field and walked through its glowing wall. As quickly as he had disappeared through the force field, Moss-Kuib returned to the interior of the Time Chamber.

"Agreed," he snarled. "Release him."

* * * * *

James Kirk had twice traveled backwards in time – once when the gravitational field of a black star put the *Enterprise* into a time warp, and once when he and Mr. Spock had pursued Doctor McCoy through the Guardian of Forever. The effects of

passing backward through time and then returning to their present had been accomplished without any ill-effects on the time travelers.

Captain Kirk staggered when he came out of the Time Chamber. The effects of the sensory and physical deprivation of the past twenty-four days immediately vanished. In his actual time stream only a few seconds had passed. Instead of being starved, he was well fed. Instead of a zombie-like condition from lack of sleep, he was well rested. His body had never been subjected to the ak-borok, or more than three weeks of beatings. His mind had never been scrambled by Vargon hallucigens. The restoration totally overloaded his system and he collapsed to the floor.

Security Chief Aireb stopped a passing healer.

“Take this prisoner to Med-Terminal Two,” he said. “He is suffering from reconversion syndrome.”

“At once, sir,” the healer answered.

An anti-grav stretcher was secured from inside the Time Chamber. As the healer placed the unconscious man onto the stretcher and headed for the turbolift, he said, “Security Chief, we will restore him.” Then he spoke to his patient, “You will not die today, Captain Kirk.”