

CODA

By Lynda Carraher © 2017

Notes

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“Coda” is the conclusion of the “House of Mirrored Faces” collection, and takes place immediately after the events depicted in Star Trek: The Voyage Home

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

Sometimes, there are no happy endings.

Lara Merritt considered this as the plates of the transport grumbled and howled with the stress of going to warp. Sometimes all you got were beginnings, some hopeful, some laced with resignation. But endings, in her experience, were seldom perfused with the rosy glow of fairy tales.

Behind her were the shattered dreams of building a life and a family with Spock, in front of her this time was a life she was carving out by herself, for herself – an assignment as physician on a planetary settlement team. It was an assignment she'd begged, bartered, and badgered for with a tenacity that surprised her after it became obvious that the planned posting in San Francisco was not going to work, and that her presence there opened the door to questions Starfleet definitely did not want answered in the public press. Coming back after being dead – or even after being presumed dead, which was how Starfleet had decided to play it – was tricky stuff, especially when it involved the creation and destruction of a manmade planet via a project that wasn't supposed to have existed at all. As far as they were concerned, Captain Spock was on indefinite medical leave and Mrs. Captain Spock was an extraneous complication best returned to the status of Lt. Commander Lara Merritt, M.D., assigned somewhere way the hell out at the other end of the sector.

She'd hoped to return to the children's hospital on Hadrian, but that spot had been filled. And she wouldn't have landed this one if Meas Nol, originally named as physician for the Dorvan settlement project, hadn't taken his ultralight glider up for one more flight and disappeared without a trace somewhere over the Mekong River.

She definitely had mixed emotions as she settled into her cabin. Foremost was the unavoidable but still painful fact that Spock's restored memories did not include her. Did not include the life they had shared, the emotions to which he had finally opened himself, the plans they had made for a very different future. And sharp on its heels was regret that her leaving Vulcan had been marred by a very acrimonious debate with Amanda.

Lara clearly remembered the panic she'd felt when she was summoned to Spock's home the morning after seeing him in the garden. She had been sure Amanda had suffered a setback, that the newly-regenerated lungs had failed, that Spock's tenuous recovery had somehow collapsed.

But she hadn't seen him at all as she flew up the stairway to Amanda's room, preparing herself mentally for a weakened, perhaps dying patient, only to be met by a furious woman, blue eyes snapping.

"How dare you withhold information my son needs for his recovery?" She flung the accusation with a force that stopped Lara cold.

"I beg your pardon?" Her defenses were already up as she crossed to the bed.

"Spock told me at firstmeal this morning that he had met a woman here last night, and he was sure he should know her but she said he was mistaken. How could you lie to him like that?"

Lara set her medikit on the floor and bit down on the quick retort that was boiling up her throat.

"I didn't lie to him," she said.

“No, you just didn’t tell him all the truth. He’s going to figure it out, you know. Someone will ask him about you, or he’ll come across something that brings it back. I think it’s a mistake to postpone it.”

“If it is, it’s my mistake to make. He obviously has no memory of me, of our bonding. Both Sarek and I think it’s unwise to add that complication to his recovery.”

“I’d hardly call you a complication. You’re his wife.”

“Under Federation law, yes. Vulcan law says the Sundering ended that relationship. We’re in new territory here and nobody knows exactly—”

“How can he recover completely if you’re hiding part of his own history from him?”

“Then why don’t you tell him, Amanda?” Her temper was rising.

“Because you need to.” She made a dismissive gesture as her daughter-in-law started to speak. “Lara, if he had come back to us with his body broken but his mind intact, would you have abandoned him?”

“Of course not!” she snapped.

“Then how is this different? His body is whole, but his mind was shattered. He lost everything – his life, his memories, his career, his sense of who he is in his culture – everything.”

“Not quite everything, Amanda. He gets a child out of the deal. Actually, when you think of it, everybody wins.”

Amanda’s raised eyebrow was entirely too much like Spock’s, Lara thought, but refused to be distracted.

“Look – Sarek gets an heir to the line without having to do the deed himself.” She put up a hand to ward off Amanda’s objection. “You get a grandchild to love. Saavik gets Spock – and trust me, she’s wanted him, as much more than a mentor, for years. Spock gets the child he wants.”

“And what about Lara? What does Lara get?”

Lara gets to avoid having her heart ripped out by the roots again, she thought. What she said was, “Lara gets to avoid a boatload of painful and potentially dangerous fertility treatments that had very little chance of succeeding anyway.”

“So you were considering children.”

“I never said we weren’t. Just that it was unlikely.”

“You really are your father’s daughter, aren’t you?”

“Let’s just say there are some lessons you never forget, Amanda. No matter how much you’d like to.”

They’d left it at that, finally, and the bitterness of it gnawed at her, despite her attempts to convince herself that she had done the only thing she could do. The Sundering was complete, and she had a long, long time to think about it as the miles unspooled behind her.

* * *

Spock stood in the center of the apartment’s living room, once again trying to pin down the sense of uneasiness that haunted him every time he entered the space. He still couldn’t remember renting it; couldn’t remember why he had moved out of BOQ on

the Starfleet campus, but apparently he had done so, just days before his last voyage on the *Enterprise*.

He knew that humans who sustained traumatic injuries often had no memory of the incident itself; indeed they commonly lost the hours and sometimes even the days immediately preceding the trauma. But he remembered every detail of his own death – the tearing in his soul as he transferred his *katra* to McCoy and the echoing emptiness that replaced it; Jim's voice growing fainter and fainter in the blackness that surrounded him; the sensation of his palm pressed against the plasteel barrier as he said goodbye.

But this – this living space where his personal effects occupied closet and drawer and cupboard? The lease agreement and payments duly rendered that held it for him though he had been declared dead? Of this, he had no memory, though he had prowled the living space and prowled the corridors of his own mind in the weeks between their return to Earth in the stolen Klingon ship and the trial that had, only hours ago, finally cleared the reputations and saved the careers of his friends.

What he did remember, as his eyes roamed over the neat galley kitchen, was that he was expecting a guest, and that she was due in a very few moments. He shook off the uneasiness, relegated the unanswered questions to the back of his consciousness, and set about preparing the Terran coffee for which Saavik had developed an inexplicable liking.

The rich aroma filled the small rooms, and Spock remembered how disappointed he had been in the bitter, oily beverage when he had initially tasted it as a student at the Academy. It may have been the first time he truly understood the axiom that having a thing was seldom as pleasing as wanting it. He was pondering that notion again when the door chime sounded.

It was the first time he had seen her since their brief and formal farewell on Vulcan. He was mildly surprised to see that she wore not her uniform, but rather an acolyte's robe, not unlike the one he had discarded after returning to Earth.

She ignored his gesture toward the chairs where the coffee tray sat, bowing her head and templing her fingers in a supplicant's gesture instead.

"I seek thy forgiveness, *Savensu*."

She had not addressed him as Teacher for many years, and the unexpected return to that status surprised and disturbed him as he gave the ritual answer she sought. Only then did she sit, still not meeting his eyes.

He studied her in the silence, waiting for her to confess whatever transgression she thought she had committed. Her face was softer, he thought, her figure rounder than the template in his memory. He was still constantly having to readjust what he remembered – or thought he remembered – with the shifting realities that faced him every day.

Finally she began to speak, her tone so soft that he had to lean forward to hear her at all.

"I have willfully withheld information to which you have a right. I have violated your trust by not offering a full and true accounting of my actions on the Genesis Planet."

"It is my understanding that you saved my life. That can hardly be a violation of trust, *Saavikam*."

"David protected you from the Klingons. But he could not protect you from the Awakening. I did what was necessary, *Savensu*. And now I carry your child."

He pulled back from her, as if she had struck him. From the sudden chaos in his mind, he grasped the first anchor he could reach. “You were my student. A bonding between us would have been inappropriate.”

“There was none.”

A dark eyebrow went up at that. “An unbonded mating?”

“Yes.”

He reached for control and clamped down on his rioting emotions. “I have no memory of this. Please provide the specifics.”

Her voice was flat, her words uncolored by feeling as she spoke of the frightened, soul-less boy, born of a dying planet, buffeted by urges he could neither understand nor control, seeking only relief from the fever in his blood and the drive in his loins. She did not speak – did not need to speak – of the young woman who suddenly found herself intimately serving this person who had been savior, teacher, mentor, father-figure, and very-nearly-god in her world, who was suddenly within her reach in a way she had never acknowledged desiring. There had been no admission then, was no admission now, that there had been anything in her actions on the Genesis planet beyond the need to save a life.

She finished her story, not quite meeting his gaze, defiance in the tilt of her chin.

He templed his fingers, rested his chin on them, using the time to further calm his turbulent thoughts. “I am in your debt, Saavik.”

“No more than I have been in yours from the moment we met. We are, I believe, on an even footing for the first time.”

He inclined his head in acknowledgement. “When do you wish to formalize our joining?” “I do not.”

A flash of something jiggered across his mind like a lightning bolt and for a microsecond he felt an emptiness where none should have been.

“Such an action is most unusual. May one ask why?”

Her eyes, green as *ha'yar-kur* stones, flashed at him. “When has either of us taken the usual path, Spock? I do not wish to be anyone’s consort. I wish only to be in control of my own destiny – a desire I think you understand better than most.”

“Your path is your own, Saavik. But the child...” Again, that lightning flash, and this time he understood it as a craving for a child of his blood, too deep to be new but too surprising to be something he consciously remembered.

“She will be of your house, of your clan. She will honor me as birth-mother, but you will be her parent.”

A girl child. Yes. With eyes like blue-grey thunderclouds in Terran skies. And he would protect her this time, would keep her safe— The incongruous thought vanished as quickly as it had formed, leaving only a deep unease behind it. Saavik was still speaking, he realized, outlining her plans to return to Vulcan when it came time for the child to be born.

Then she was standing again, inclining her head over her templed fingers. “I am honored to serve thy House,” she said.

Rising, he returned the gesture with the response. “Thy service honors us.” Then, as she turned to go—“Saavik?”

She lifted her face to him and he realized how very young she was, how frightened under the controlled surface she had presented.

He touched her face and she leaned her cheek into his palm, eyes closed for a moment, reaching for his other hand and guiding it against the mound of her belly. They stood for a moment, utterly open to each other, sharing only a wordless togetherness, with the child's nascent awareness twining around them both.

"Tan taluhk," she said, and stepped away, slipping through the door before he had time to decide what precious gift she was referring to and who had given it to whom.

* * *

"C'mon, Spock," McCoy urged. "It'll be fun."

The slowly turned head and elegantly raised eyebrow answered that even without the oneword response: "Fun." It was not a question.

"What he means," Kirk put in, "is that it'll give you the chance to field-test the computer system modifications you recommended after the V'Ger incident."

Spock wavered, and Kirk's grin said he saw it. "Thirty days, max," he promised. "And your classes have all been reassigned to other instructors for the rest of the term, so if you should decide to sign up for a longer mission—"

"I have other responsibilities that preclude that possibility," he said flatly.

No one had an answer for that. Both Kirk and McCoy were aware of Saavik's pregnancy, and though neither man fully

comprehended the complex social structure that would define the child's place in the clan, they understood Spock would be the primary caregiver.

"So consider this our last hurrah," McCoy urged, unaware that the issue had already been settled between Spock and Kirk. "We'll go out there and zoom around the galaxy one more time before you settle down to terrorize another generation of cadets and raise a passel of baby Spocks." He crunched the ice from his drink and gave a mock shudder. "My God, that's a terrifying thought. Dozens of pointy-eared Vulcan rug rats, crawling around and spelling out sophisticated ninth-dimensional space-time theories with their little alphabet blocks..." "Bones," Kirk warned.

But Spock seemed quite capable of defending himself, giving McCoy a withering look. "Really, Doctor," he said. "It is one child, not a dozen, and it is a girl. So your prediction, as usual, lacks not only logic but common sense as well." He reached for Kirk's padd and pressed his thumbprint to the request for a TDY assignment on the shakedown cruise of the latest incarnation of the *Enterprise*, wondering even as he did so why it felt somehow inappropriate.

* * *

Although, he had to admit to himself as the first week of the assignment drew to an end, it had probably been the correct decision. It was . . . pleasing . . . he decided, to have structure and purpose again. He felt comfortable in his surroundings and with his crewmates, and was sure he would no longer feel that odd disorientation that had haunted him in San Francisco. His duty shifts had been productive and his personal time allowed careful study of the test results and minor adjustments to the systems as necessary.

Then why, he wondered, had he again found himself standing in the middle of his quarters in the middle of the night, with absolutely no memory of getting there? He looked around the room. Nothing was out of order. No message light blinked on his console. No unusual noises signaled imbalance or malfunction in any environmental system. His uniforms hung in the small closet with his boots precisely aligned beneath them. His personal grooming tools were squared up on top of the dresser below the mirror, and the small crystal decanter next to them intensified and refracted the dim light, throwing amber diamonds on the wall.

He picked the decanter up and almost absently removed the stopper, inhaling the spicy-sweet aroma with its undertone of musk. He knew that if he spilled a few drops onto his hands, the scent would bloom from his body heat and his skin would begin to tingle. He had no idea what it was, why he had brought it with him to the ship, or indeed how it had come to be in his planetside apartment to begin with. Another mystery to be investigated, along with the mystery of the apartment's very existence, when he returned to Earth. For now, it was enough to know the decanter was important to him somehow, carrying a memory that danced just beyond his reach, a tickle in his mind that reached into his groin and set off an annoying lowkey buzz of sexual arousal.

Carefully, he put the container back on his dresser and lifted his meditation robe from its hanger, knowing sleep was going to elude him and hoping a few hours of meditation would suffice.

Serenity also eluded him, and his mind skittered and circled around some dark pit at the center of his being, disturbed by the emptiness and unable to approach it. The closest resolution he had been able to obtain had not been reached in private meditation but, to his astonishment, in the very public fern grotto

of Golden Gate Park. He had found himself drawn back there, time after time, especially on the sleepless nights like the one before the current mission began.

He stood very quietly in the grotto, breathing in the scent of green and growing things, relishing the calm in the center of the city's beating heart and discovering with some surprise that he was going to miss visiting the spot and the inexplicable feeling of completion that it gave him.

"Looking for a party, Sugar?"

The voice yanked him around; he saw only a woman's silhouette and noted with a strange pang as she approached him, that the top of her head would fit neatly under his chin.

"No." He turned to leave.

"Hey, you're a Vulcan, ain't ya?"

"Yes." He started to brush past her, but she caught at his sleeve.

"I never believed what they say about Vulcan men, ya know." Astonishingly, she reached her other hand out and pressed it against his groin. "Come on honey, I'll do ya for half price. Seein' as how you're from out of town, and all."

She stepped against him and in fact her head did nestle exactly where he thought it would. Instinctively, his arms came up to embrace her and then he realized it was wrong – she was wrong. Her scent, her voice, the shape of her breasts against his chest. He pushed her away with more force than he intended, and

she fell back with a screech, her plump bottom smacking against the leaf-covered ground.

He turned and strode away with her imprecations ringing in his ears, realizing too late what she was, what she had been offering, and furious both at her brazen invitation and at his own momentary desire for it.

That anger spilled forward to circle around him now and shatter even the pretext of meditation. He dragged the meditation robe off roughly, tearing a neckline seam, and flung it across the room, only to be immediately abashed at his loss of control. He gathered up the robe and hung it in his closet, paced the narrow confines of his quarters, and ultimately gave up on either sleep or meditation, showering and dressing and seeking out the place which for most of his adult life had been sanctuary and fortress – the bridge of the *Enterprise*.

One night of lost sleep – even the several nights of missing or poor rest he had experienced recently – should not have affected him so strongly, he thought, as the next day wore on interminably. But he knew his attention was wandering; he made several minor calibration errors at his station, snapped at a yeoman who brought him a systems status report, and ended the shift with a raging headache and a rope of knotted muscles at the base of his neck that refused his best efforts to relax them.

A long sonic shower, he thought. Perhaps a workout in the gym and a post-workout sauna. Or a massage. Yes. Small, strong hands kneading the muscles in his shoulders and back, loosening the knots as she—

His mind stuttered to a halt, and his body stopped dead with one foot inside the turbolift.

She?

Uhura bumped him from behind, unaware that he had stopped, then grabbed at his arm to catch herself. “I’m sorry, Mr. Spock, I didn’t realize—”

He put his hand on the small of her back to steady her. “It was entirely my fault,” he said. “I apologize.” His hand urged her to precede him into the lift and he wondered idly when and how he had become comfortable enough with her presence to not only tolerate but initiate the casual contact. Had there been something between them in the past, something he could no longer remember, that made him think *female/comfort/touch* as he sought to ease his own pain?

He studied her covertly as the car carried them toward Deck 5. She was humming softly under her breath but not exhibiting any other courtship behaviors.

She became aware of his gaze and looked up at him. “Is anything wrong, sir?”

“No, Miss Uhura.”

Why was the lift so slow?

He cleared his throat uncomfortably.

“It occurs to me ... that we have served together for many years.”

“Yes. We have.” She was smiling at him, but not flirtatiously.

“And have we ever... Has there been a time...” The lift stopped and the doors opened, releasing him from the morass into which he had stumbled. He pulled himself together, resisting the urge to tug down his uniform jacket. “Your performance has always been most commendable.”

He left the car with as much haste as he could muster, short of bolting in panic, leaving a bemused communications officer shaking her head as she observed his retreating form.

* * *

The command crew and department heads sat around the conference table, eyes on the information that scrolled across the display screen, making notes on individual padds.

They had diverted course hours ago in response to an automated distress beacon from the Dorvan system, and contact with Starfleet Command revealed that a settlement team had made planetfall there three weeks ago. It was obvious that something had gone wrong – something serious enough to make direct communication with the colony impossible – and the *Enterprise* team was reviewing information from Starfleet to help them prepare for a rescue or resupply mission.

Roughly a third of the 102 colonists were known, either by reputation or personal connection, to one or more of the *Enterprise* officers. Settlement commander Sharon Walkingbird had been XO on Peter Kirk’s first shipboard assignment, and Jim had been rock-climbing with their doctor, Meas Nol. Spock was acquainted with the agronomist Sakeen and his wife T’Koll, an exobiologist. Three of the colonists had been Academy classmates of Chekov; Scotty knew half a dozen of the settlers in the various engineering specialties; Uhura had met their communications manager, Don Betts, at a conference in Mumbai.

They pieced together what they knew of the strengths and weaknesses of team members, reviewed the equipment known to have been sent with the colony, and made their best guesses at what kinds of specialists and equipment should go in the first beam-down.

By the time the meeting broke up, it was dinner time. McCoy waved away Kirk's invitation to join him, and stepped out from the conference table as Spock started past.

"I need to see you in Sickbay," he said softly.

Spock nodded brusquely, without even a token argument, which surprised McCoy somewhat. Granted, the Vulcan knew he was technically still on medical leave and therefore required close monitoring. But he usually objected, for the sake of form if nothing else.

He arrived moments behind McCoy, stripped off his jacket and lay down on the diagnostic bed without comment, remaining silent as McCoy studied the readings.

"To what do I owe this particular inquisition, Doctor?" he asked at last.

"Well, to start with, your dietary record popped up yesterday morning on a routine alert. You haven't been eating."

"Synthesized food is no more palatable than it ever was."

McCoy ignored him. "And I'm seeing elevated metabolic toxins, which means you're not sleeping, either. Your stress hormones are off the scale, and the dolorimeter says you're in pain. From your vascular reading, I'd guess it's a killer headache, but why you're not controlling it yourself with biofeedback or coming to me for medication, I won't even guess."

“I shall deal with it, Doctor.” He sat up, but McCoy moved to block him from getting off the table.

“And then there’s your general behavior.”

Spock lifted an eyebrow at him.

“Ensign Morgan complained to the captain yesterday.”

“The report she gave me was incorrectly prepared. I reprimanded her.” “She knows that.

But what she complained about was sexual harassment.”

The other eyebrow joined its mate.

“She said you were ... ah ... dammit, Spock, she told Jim you were ‘undressing her with your eyes’.”

Spock took a deep breath and composed his expression. “An interesting telekinetic skill, I am sure. But one which I do not possess.”

“She’s a pretty girl, though. Don’t you think?”

“I had not noticed.”

“Especially her eyes. Unusual color – that bluish grey.”

He looked away, and McCoy watched the stress indicators rise again. “She may have misinterpreted... Perhaps I was ... I shall apologize to her tomorrow. She reminds me of someone, but I cannot remember who.”

“Really.” McCoy had seen the resemblance as soon as Talia Morgan reported for duty. So had Kirk, and they had discussed whether or not to adjust her duty schedule to minimize her contact with the First Officer.

McCoy was having more trouble than he had anticipated in keeping his promise to Sarek. But he hadn’t promised not to nudge Spock in the direction McCoy felt he needed to go. And if the Vulcan’s missing memories triggered a health crisis, that promise was out the window.

“Then last night, I had a visit from Uhura. She said you had an interesting conversation in the turbolift. You told her that her performance was commendable.”

“Is that inappropriate?”

“No. But she also said she had the definite feeling you were trying to ask her if the two of you had ever been sexually intimate.”

Spock’s posture became even more tense. He twined his fingers together and looked down at them, visibly collecting his thoughts.

Here it comes, McCoy thought, and felt a heavy weight lift off his chest.

“I believe I misled my father.”

Of all the things McCoy had been braced to hear, that was not one of them. “What?”

“I told him I ‘felt’ fine. That is not precisely correct.”

McCoy waited for the rest of it. When nothing was forthcoming, he prompted, “Because?”

“I ... You are correct that I am not sleeping well. And I find it increasingly difficult to meditate. I seem to be ... looking for something, but I do not know what it is. And interactions with women seem to trigger it. It is ... as if I were reaching for a tool, but it is not where it should be. But then I cannot even remember what it is, or why I wanted it.”

Again, McCoy waited. And again, nothing else came.

“Must be frustrating as hell,” he offered.

Spock nodded absently, not even bothering to deny that Vulcans could feel frustration. He twisted around until he could see the monitors, then frowned at the readings.

“You know, I’d strongly suggest you extend your medical leave. Put in for parental leave, or a teaching sabbatical. Whatever it takes. Go back to Vulcan for at least a year. Be there for Saavik when the baby comes, figure out this single-parent thing. And make some kind of arrangements for yourself.”

Again, the raised eyebrow.

“I’m making an educated guess here that your reproductive cycle is totally disrupted.” He rolled over Spock’s attempted objection, refusing to be sidetracked. “We took you off Genesis five months ago, in realtime. Subjectively, your body has aged more than forty years since it reached sexual maturity on that planet. You’ve either had five or six of the quickest, quietest pon’farrs in history or you’re way the hell overdue for a humdinger. Now, that may be what’s causing your problems. Or not. But in any case, you need to acknowledge it and make whatever arrangements are customary for unbonded males.”

“There are no unbonded Vulcan males.”

“Really.”

“I assure you, Doctor—” He stopped suddenly. McCoy saw the widened eyes, the sudden loss of color. He pushed gently but firmly on Spock’s chest.

“Lie down. Do NOT talk. Do NOT move. And do NOT get up. Do you understand me?”

Spock gave a terse nod. His breathing became ragged. Every indicator on the monitor went off the top of the scale, and McCoy reached over and shut off the alarms.

“Just lie there for a minute. I’ll be right back. DO NOT GET UP.”

He went into his office and punched up two cups of hot tea from the synthesizer. Nasty stuff. Why the hell couldn’t Spock drink bourbon, like any ordinary man? At that thought, he pulled out his stash bottle and topped off his own cup. Stood looking at Spock’s. Put the bottle away. Went back into the treatment room.

Most of the monitors were calming down, but Spock’s pulse still raced, and the stress level – not surprisingly – was still maxed out. McCoy crossed to the bed. Spock’s eyes were shut, but McCoy knew it was simply for concentration. Deep breaths. Hands relaxing, letting go of the fabric that covered the table. Pulse level coming down. Stress level down – no, back up again. After five minutes, McCoy decided that was as good as it was going to get without intervention. And he didn’t want that. Wanted Spock to work through this without chemical barriers.

“Can you sit up?”

Spock rose smoothly as McCoy continued to watch the monitors. He handed Spock his uniform jacket. "Come into my office. We need some privacy." Wordlessly, Spock followed him. "Sit down," McCoy ordered, and pushed the now-lukewarm tea across the desk. "You need fluids. Drink that."

Spock complied. He still hadn't spoken. McCoy felt the minutes ticking by. He decided he was going to have to start the discussion.

"How much do you remember?"

Spock shook his head. "I must have been bonded at the time of my death. No other status is possible. But I have no memory of it. Of ... her."

"And you probably won't, as long as you continue to stress about it."

"Doctor, have you any idea ... No. You could not."

McCoy sipped at his tea and waited, but Spock apparently intended to wrestle this demon in solitude. And it was a battle, McCoy feared, that he was foredoomed to lose.

He flipped a holoframe around on his desk, and when Spock looked at the image, McCoy identified the laughing child.

"My grandson – Christopher. When he was a baby, he loved those little puzzles – you put the pieces together and it makes a picture. But he got to where he'd take a piece or two and hide them away, just so he could look at them or play with them after the box was put away. I don't know if it was the color or the shape or what... but he just loved those pieces so much he wanted to keep them to himself. And of course the next time he wanted to play with the puzzles, some of the pieces were gone.

And it frustrated the hell out of him, because he *knew* there was more to the picture than he was getting. But at two, he couldn't really tell us what the problem was, let alone remember that he had the missing pieces all along."

Spock looked at him in mild puzzlement, and McCoy stalled for time by calling up another cup of tea.

"I don't mind telling you," he said, as he handed it across the desk, "that until Sarek explained what was going on, after you ... died ... I sure thought I was going crazy, having your memories inside my mind, popping up at random times. Scared me to death.

"But after I understood it . . . as much as a non-Vulcan can . . . it got me to thinking about . . . well, about my legacy, I guess. Most humans, once they get it through their thick heads that they really aren't going to live forever, begin to think about what they want to leave behind. Things they're proud of, for people to remember them by. Things they learned, to maybe help the next generation take a step or two forward without having so many hard knocks. Things they still wonder about, that somebody else will maybe figure out. Those are the things we want to leave behind.

"Then there's other things. Things you don't want to share with anybody else, maybe because they don't show you in a real good light, but mostly things that are yours. Personal things. Just for you. Memories, feelings, dreams... And if I had to vacate house real quick—" He tapped his skull with his knuckles. "—and send my legacy on ahead, the way you sent your *katra* to the Ancestors ... those are the things I wouldn't send on. Things I'd want to hold onto and take with me to ... wherever it is we go." He sipped at his drink and waited for the bourbon's warmth to spread through him.

Spock looked into his own cup. “You think ... I did not transfer those memories.”

“That’s my best guess. And that’s what’s chewing on you now – those memories you wanted to keep, and now you can’t find them. It’s like Christopher and those puzzle pieces.

“But you’re not two years old,” he said. “You’re one of the most intelligent, articulate beings I’ve ever known, and you’re surrounded by people who consider themselves damn lucky to know you – and a few who feel incredibly blessed to call you friend. People who’ll help you find those missing pieces, if you’ll just let us.”

“Did you know her?”

“Yes.”

“And yet you said nothing.”

“I promised your father. And ... your wife. They thought you needed to recover those memories on your own. To make your own decisions about your future.” McCoy considered himself psi-null, but even he could feel the thousand questions that must be reverberating in Spock’s mind. Anger. Need. Curiosity.

McCoy decided he didn’t want to play Twenty Questions. He was tired of trying to balance a promise to one man against another man’s pain. He slid the desktop console’s control panel in front of Spock.

“You’re entitled to look at your own personnel record,” he said. He thought of his ex-wife, before it all went to hell. How she looked on their wedding day. What it was like the first time they made love. Her face as he handed her their daughter, still wet from the womb, before he cut the cord. Thought about having

those memories taken away from him. He got up from the desk. “Take your time,” he said, and left the office.

When he came back, nearly an hour later, Spock was still sitting at the desk, the tea untouched at his elbow. The monitor displayed Lara Merritt’s face. Spock had done precisely what McCoy had assumed he would do – pulled her serial number from his own personnel file, where she was listed as his spouse, and followed that link into Starfleet’s general roster.

It gave him the statistics – her place and date of birth, entry into the Academy, her service history, the date of their marriage, her current assignment in San Francisco. But nothing personal. Nothing that said whether she loved her husband. Why she hadn’t acknowledged their relationship. How she felt about his having a child with another woman. The depth of her pain when she realized he had no memory of her.

How do you feel? his mother had asked him.

Tell my mother I feel fine. Secrets. Lies. Evasions.

McCoy cleared his throat softly, and Spock turned to him.

“How many other people are aware of this?” The very flatness with which he asked the question told McCoy how tightly he was controlling his distress.

“Half a dozen, maybe. Your parents. Lara, of course. She told Jim you had no memory of your bonding, and he told me. Uhura, maybe, but she’s not gonna be talking about it. Saavik, probably, but she’s not here, so—”

“And may I ask whose decision it was to conceal this relationship from me?”

“Split vote. Sarek and Lara asked that we say nothing while you were recovering. Jim and your mother thought you had a right to know.”

“And you?”

“I don’t have a dog in this fight. You know I have to monitor you very closely – Starfleet had to suspend your medical leave to get you on board, and they’re not about to leave their backsides hanging out if you go rogue on them. So I don’t get to make the tough decisions. Just write things up when the dust has settled.”

Spock drummed his fingertips on the desktop.

“I saw her,” he said. “On Vulcan. She said she was there to treat my mother.”

“I believe that was the truth.”

“It was part of the truth. Why would she conceal the rest of it?”

McCoy shook his head. “You’ll have to ask her.”

“I intend to, Doctor. Just as soon as we return to Earth.”

* * *

The first thing Kirk thought as the transporter beam released him was how beautiful the landscape was. And then the ground dropped out from under him and he went down, tumbling and rolling and tangling with the other members of the landing party, sliding down the heaving earth toward a huge river, turbulent with trees and boulders, chocolate-brown and churning with deadly velocity.

The ground gave a final shudder and subsided as they reached the riverbank. Karen Takagawa went in with a shriek, and Spock reached out and grabbed a handful of her long black hair. The medikit was ripped off her shoulder as she clawed hand over hand up the Vulcan's arm, and Scott grabbed Spock by the calves to keep him from sliding into the water, too.

By the time the three of them had hauled themselves to safety, a tall, grey-haired woman in Starfleet-issue coveralls had run down the slope toward the *Enterprise* group.

"Everybody okay?" she asked.

"I think so." He stepped forward. "I'm Captain James Kirk of the *Enterprise*. That's one hell of a welcome you laid on."

She grinned ruefully and returned his handshake. "Commander Sharon Walkingbird of Shakeytown. I think you can see what our problem is."

Kirk introduced the other members of the landing party as they walked up the slope. As they neared the small collection of tents, he looked around. Saw the twisted solar panels and rubble-covered building on the far side of the river, noted that most of the tents were damaged and missing pegs or guy ropes. A small collection of metal that had apparently been a working machine of some kind until the earthquake was still settling with clangs and squeals.

"The initial survey seems to have missed the fact that they chose a settlement site on top of a very large faultline," she was saying as they walked. "We had one hell of a tremblor just two days after we got here, and have been having aftershocks ever since." Even as she spoke, another hiccup of the ground sent them all lurching for balance. "But the biggest problem is that." She

pointed back at the river, walking backwards as she spoke. “Would you believe that was a pretty little fishing stream? Apparently there was a major channel blockage up the mountain. When it broke through a week ago, we had several million cubic feet of water come through here at dawn. We lost almost a third of our people – still haven’t recovered all the bodies. It took our equipment shed and all our heavy machinery, including the instream hydro plant. Wiped out our seedbed, destroyed most of our food stockpile and fouled our water supply.” She continued to the metallic scrap pile and wrenched one large piece free. “This was a solar still until about five minutes ago.”

She led them into the largest of the tents, heaved a tumbled table upright and began picking up small pieces of equipment. “Welcome to colony headquarters,” she said. “I’d offer you coffee, but our coffeemaker is somewhere downstream. Along with our water purification system.”

McCoy was looking around from just outside the tent. “What’s your medical situation?” he asked. “Was Dr. Nol able to handle the injuries?”

“Nol didn’t make launch,” Walkingbird said, shaking her head. “We got a last-minute replacement, and she’s been able to keep things on a pretty even keel. The earthquake damage was mostly bumps and bruises. A few broken bones. The tents and the prefabs weren’t heavy enough to do much damage. But we lost two people when the rockslide came down on the comm building. Don got the distress beacon activated, but he bled out before we could get in there. T’Koll was apparently killed instantly when the building collapsed. Her husband...” She shook her head, and McCoy could see the pain she was keeping under tight control.

A lanky redheaded man excused himself as he stepped past McCoy, lowering a communicator from his mouth and clipping

it to his belt. “Away teams just checked in,” he said. “Everyone’s okay.”

“Thank you, Rudy. Get back to them and tell them to start back for Shakeytown. Tell them the cavalry’s here.” She gave Kirk a bitter grin. “May my ancestors forgive me for that.”

“You know we’re here to do whatever we can,” he said. “What’s your preference – resupply or evacuation?”

“I hate to give up so soon,” she said, “but I think we’re going to have to evacuate and let the Settlement Council take a long-term look at whether Dorvan is really suitable for colonization. In less than a month, we’ve gone from over a hundred well-trained, wellsupplied settlers to about sixty wet, hungry Boy Scouts equipped with not much more than flashlights and nail clippers. Not a real promising start for a colony.”

“It’s your call, Commander,” Kirk said. “We can start evacuation as soon as you’d like. We’re running a shakedown with a skeleton crew, so there’s plenty of room and a flexible schedule.”

“I can’t expect people to stay here under these circumstances. So, yes, the sooner the better. And if you could pick up my away teams from where they are? Not much point in them trying to find good water or native foods now.”

“Not a problem. We’ll send my transporter chief your communicator frequency, and he can use their signals to beam them directly to the *Enterprise*.”

“Thank you, Captain. And ... one other thing?” Kirk could see the grief behind the woman’s dark eyes. “We could really use some extra manpower to help us recover those missing bodies. I’d like to be able to take everyone home.”

* * *

It was nearly midnight by shiptime before Spock could return to his quarters. His uniform was stiff with the mud it had accumulated in his slide toward the river, and hauling Takagawa out of the water one-armed had left him bruised and aching in half a dozen places. Part of his mind was still circling around the problem of extracting the maximum amount of information from the computer equipment he had salvaged from the collapsed communications building and the rest of it rang with the psychic remnants of pain and terror that had clung to the crumpled walls. Walkingbird was wrong in her assumption that T’Koll’s death had been instantaneous.

He was therefore extremely unhappy to see two unfamiliar duffel bags in the middle of his living quarters. Apparently someone had decided that the addition of 64 passengers was going to require the sharing of space, which was ridiculous. There were ample accommodations without such an imposition on his privacy.

“Sickbay to Spock.” McCoy’s voice interrupted his thoughts.

“Spock here.” He hoped McCoy was not going to drag him in for yet another examination. He still felt torn between gratitude he did not want to feel toward McCoy for pointing him toward the source of his emotional turmoil and shame that the doctor had witnessed his intensely personal struggle to deal with it.

“I think you better come down.”

“Doctor, I—”

“There’s someone here you need to see.” McCoy broke the connection without waiting for any response.

Spock looked longingly at the shower stall and at the clean, dry uniforms hanging in his closet. Then he stepped around the duffel bags and started for the turbolift.

Sickbay was emptying out as the last of the colonists – rehydrated, examined, evaluated, inoculated, and certified whole – left to find the quarters they had been assigned. McCoy came out of his office, motioned Spock toward the interior, and left. Spock watched him go, mildly curious at the doctor's actions, then stepped through the door.

He would have known, he told himself, even if he hadn't had that scene with McCoy barely 24 hours ago. Should have known, as soon as he set foot on Dorvan. But he hadn't known. There was no resonance in his mind then, and none now. There was only a distant acknowledgement that this was the woman in the picture. The woman to whom he had been bonded for over a decade.

He shut the door and pressed the privacy lock, stalling for time more than seeking to avoid interruption. She didn't speak, and he wondered briefly how long she would sit there without looking at him.

"Dr. Merritt," he said formally.

She looked up at him then. "Small galaxy," she offered shakily.

He had no patience for games or attempted humor. "Why?" he demanded.

"I was with one of the away teams," she said. "I didn't even know it was *Enterprise* until they beamed us up and I saw Mr. Leslie. Believe me, Spock, if I'd had any other choice—"

"No. On Vulcan. Why did you lie to me, that night in the garden?"

At least she didn't attempt to play word games this time.

"I told you once before, I'm a coward. But you don't remember that, either, do you?"

In truth, he didn't. Didn't remember the telling and didn't remember any action she had or hadn't taken to prove or disprove the statement. In any case, she still hadn't answered the question.

"What did you fear?"

She looked down at her hands again, and he thought she was going to refuse to answer him. The minutes ticked by.

"Pain," she said at last, so softly he could barely hear her. "Loss. Losing myself in you. And then losing you again."

Something turned over in his chest, something he couldn't identify.

"I ... do not understand," he said, and sat across the desk from her.

"The Sundering. I thought I was dying. And when I realized what it was, I wished I had. How can you – how can any people – embrace something as terrible as that?"

He had no answer for her.

"Sakeen died, screaming in agony, without a mark on him. Did you know that?"

"No."

"When he was Sundered from T'Koll. We were in the mess tent when the first quake hit. He fell and started to moan. I thought

he'd been injured, but I couldn't find any trauma. Then someone came running for me – to help them get Betts and T'Koll out of the communications shack, and I knew. I knew it was too late for her. So I just held Sakeen in my arms while he screamed and convulsed and died, and by the time the others got in there, it was too late for Betts, too." She swung her chair away from him and looked up at the overhead as if there might be some answer there. "I can't ... I won't ... open myself to that again. I'm sorry." He considered the shape of her back, the set of her shoulders.

"Not all couples bond that deeply," he said. He could think of nothing else to offer her.

She swung back around to face him. "Apparently, *we* didn't," she said. "Lucky us." She rubbed her hands over her face, and he knew somehow that it was a gesture he had seen many times.

She breathed tension out, shook it off her hands as if it was water.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean for this conversation to get so intense. Mostly I just didn't want to run into you for the first time in a public place. And to ask you if my gear ended up in your quarters."

He nodded to himself in understanding. "The duffel bags."

"They had my Starfleet ID tags on them. The materiel transporter probably read the tags and just automatically sent them to our – your – room."

He rose and opened the office door, relieved that the conversation appeared to be over. "I shall have them delivered to your billet."

She also rose, coming around the desk. “It’s late. Don’t bother anyone else now. I’ll pick them up on my way to Deck 4. If that’s okay.”

He realized, as they walked out of sickbay, that she intended to accompany him to his room. The prospect was ... disturbing, and he consciously increased the space between them as they entered the turbolift.

She glanced at him with a cynical grin. “It’s okay, Spock. I don’t intend to jump your bones.”

Alarmed, he looked at her, and then decided there was no appropriate response he could make. He straightened a bit and stared at the doors, willing them to open on Deck 5. His mind still refused to produce a single real memory, but his body seemed to have its own recall, and he clasped his hands behind his back to keep them under control.

After an eternity, they reached the door to his quarters, and she brushed past him to enter. The top of her head, he realized, would just fit under his chin, and her scent – not perfume, just her essential, unique scent – coalesced into almost-memories. He was mildly surprised to see his own hand reaching out unbidden to catch her arm just above the elbow.

She turned at his touch and pulled back for an instant, surprised, then stepped forward to meet him, bringing her hands up to clasp the nape of his neck and pull his face down to hers. The intensity of it surprised them both – lips parting, tongues dueling, her breasts against his chest and her belly against his stiffening sex. He moved his hands up her face, seeking the psi-points, but she pulled away and looked at him, shaking and white-faced.

“No,” she said. “Just ... no.” She grabbed the larger duffel and started for the door.

“Lara—” he said, surprised at how easily, how familiarly, the name rolled off his tongue.

“Stay.”

For the barest instant, she froze, and then plunged past him through the opening doors and into the corridor. He reached for her again, then pulled his hand back abruptly as the doors cycled shut, and stood in the suddenly too-empty room looking down at his hand, wondering why it had betrayed him.

* * *

It was all she could do to keep herself from breaking into a run for the turbolift. She knew she couldn't outrun him anyway, should he choose to come after her, and even though the corridors were empty, she didn't want the humiliation of having some late-working crewman come across an undignified wrestling match.

But the door to his quarters remained stubbornly shut, and she felt her face flaming as she stepped into the turbolift and requested Deck 4. Had she really expected he'd come after her?

So much for promising I wouldn't jump his bones, she thought as the lift doors opened on her deck. Ten seconds in private and I practically raped him. He's probably hiding under his bed.

No, she decided, stepping into her own quarters. True, *she* had kissed *him*, but he'd started it by touching her like that. And his voice ... that deep, hoarse tone as he'd asked her to stay was a timbre he used only in their most intimate moments.

Dammit, dammit, GodDAMMIT! She flung the duffel across the room. It whacked into the bulkhead and bounced back, spilling open and dumping its contents on the deck. She burst into tears and kicked at an errant boot as someone pressed the door buzzer.

“Who is it?”

“Sharon. Are you okay?”

She swiped away the tears. “Yeah,” she said, damning herself for not remembering the quarters next to hers were occupied. “I’m sorry I woke you.”

There was a moment of silence, and Lara knew Walkingbird was trying to decide whether to pursue the matter.

“You’re sure you’re all right?”

“Yes. Thank you. Goodnight, Commander.”

Through the doors, she heard the muffled acceptance, then sighed and began picking through her scattered belongings in search of a toothbrush and something to sleep in, calling herself a dozen kinds of fool. *You can’t have it both ways*, she told herself. *You can want to make love with him or not; you can want to bond with him or not. But it’s a package deal.*

And she knew it was a package she couldn’t accept, no matter how much her body urged her to do so. That was a done deal. No discussion necessary. The only problem now was figuring out how to get through the voyage back to Earth without seeing Spock again, and the quickest way to get offplanet once more as soon as they got there.

* * *

Many hours later, Spock gave up yet again on the notion of being able to achieve the deep state of meditation his body craved. He rose from his knees, hung the robe away, and lay down on his bed, but neither his body nor his mind would relax.

He still had no conscious, sentient memory of Lara Merritt. He could not have said whether she had siblings, what her favorite color was, how they had come to be bonded. But something deeper than sentience, and older, and stronger, remembered her.

It knew the shape of her breasts under his hands, knew the sound she made when she reached release, knew what it felt like to be sheathed in her flesh at that moment. It knew the heat of her mouth on his sex, knew the sweet spot on her neck just below her left ear, knew her rhythm and thrust and where she most wanted to be touched.

And as he turned, tumescent and uncomfortable on the narrow bed, he knew something else. He knew he had to arrange to spend as much time as possible with Lara Merritt on the voyage back to Earth, and develop a way to keep her there, and in his life, once they arrived.

* * *

"I thought you didn't like her," Kirk said.

"I don't, especially," McCoy replied. There was no reason for him to elaborate; both men understood McCoy's feelings toward Lara Merritt, and both acknowledged that the basis for it was over and gone like snow melted away from a mountainside. "But I feel like I have a vested interest in Spock now. And he apparently wants -- no, he *needs* -- to put their relationship back together, but being Spock, he doesn't have a clue how to do it."

"You realize if either one of them figures this out, they'll kill us."

“Oh, I think I can whip Dr. Merritt, if it comes to that,” he said.
“I’ll let you deal with Spock.”

“Gee, Bones, thanks a lot.”

* * *

Lara Merritt dragged herself into Sickbay. After the night she’d had, she felt like she should be checking in as a patient, not as a practitioner. But McCoy had asked for her help, and she knew that the unexpected passengers had put a strain on the stripped-down medical staff.

“In there,” McCoy said, gesturing toward one of the private treatment rooms.

She ran her hands under the sterilite and waited for the door to cycle open.

Spock sat on the treatment table, stripped down to just his black briefs. They stared at each other for an instant, and then she whirled and stalked back to the open bay, where McCoy was busy with another patient.

“What is this all about?”

“Medicine, Dr. Merritt.”

“You know what I mean,” she hissed at him. “I can’t treat my own husband.”

McCoy gave her an annoyed look. “For God’s sake, Lara, I’m not asking you to perform brain surgery on him. He’s torn a ligament in his shoulder. Take care of it.”

She shot him a deadly look and stalked back to the treatment room. Wordlessly, she ran the Feinberg over Spock's upper body, noting the location and extent of the damage to his right shoulder, then selected an anabolic protoplaser and began moving it over the injured area. She also noted the brown bruises on his chest and torso and the scabbed abrasions on both knees.

"Where did all this come from?" she asked.

"There was an aftershock on Dorvan just as we beamed down. Everyone fell and slid down the slope toward the river. Lieutenant Takagawa went over the edge, and I pulled her out."

She considered that for a moment, then readjusted the Feinberg and ran it over his belly and groin. "Did you get any river mud on you?"

Spock shook his head. "On my uniform. Perhaps a bit on my hands and face."

"Which you didn't clean off."

He raised a questioning eyebrow.

"We found a nasty little parasite on the riverbank. The oospores probably stay dormant in the soil, but once they get wet, the larvae emerge and burrow under the skin of any host animal that picks them up with the mud." She had put the other tools away and pulled a sterilite wand from its clamp behind the monitor.

She began passing the wand over his body, looking for signs of infestation, starting with his scalp. "I didn't see anything in your blood, but I'll give you some cinaprox in a minute anyway. Along with a general antibiotic and some anti-inflammatories for that shoulder. Meantime the sterilite will take care of

anything that got through your uniform. Arms up.” She moved the wand over each armpit, then down his chest and belly.

“Take the briefs off, please, and lie back.”

Wordlessly, he complied. He could feel the slight warmth from the sterilite as she passed it over his groin, then the touch of her hand on his genitals as she combed through his pubic hair. They both pointedly ignored his erection as she continued passing the wand over his legs. “Roll over.” He complied and she moved the light up the backs of his thighs, parting his buttocks to allow the sterilite to reach the perianal area. She finished with his back and made another quick pass over his scalp.

“Sit up, please.” She clicked an aerosol head to a container of regatril and smoothed the foam over his scraped knees. “Anything else?”

“No.”

“You can get dressed now. Leave the jacket off.” She busied herself with the spray hypo as he complied and then pressed the instrument to the side of his neck. “You’re off duty the rest of the day.” She pulled a wrap from a drawer. “I’m going to immobilize that shoulder and give you an icepack to put on it. Here, or in your quarters?”

“I would prefer my quarters.”

She finished her work and gave him the gelpack from the refrigeration drawer.

“Come back tomorrow and have Dr. McCoy look at the shoulder again. He should release you for duty at that time.” She turned away from him to dictate her notes. She reached for the intercom, intending to call Takagawa in for a similar examination when

she felt the heat of his body at her back and his breath on the nape of her neck. She froze.

“Lara, I should like to speak with you.”

“I have patients to see.”

He lifted a lock of hair from her neck and she clenched her muscles to stop the trembling.

“We need to discuss our future.”

She turned around, then stepped away from his disturbing nearness, realizing too late that it put her back against the wall.

“*I* have a future,” she said. “*You* have a future. *WE* do not have a future.”

He stepped closer and she felt herself falling into the depths of his eyes. He moved against her; she could feel the length of his erection pressing against her belly. He tilted her chin up with his left hand and lightly touched his lips to hers, tongue flicking out and then retreating. Her knees went to jelly and she sagged against him as his hand trailed down her chest, fingers dipping inside the neckline of her scrubs to trace the swell of her breasts. His tongue tapped at her lower lip again and she opened to him, his tongue invading her mouth as his leg urged her thighs apart. Her hands dropped, one cupping his groin as the other fumbled at his waistband.

He stepped away, and she staggered half a step forward.

“I think we do,” he said, and left while she was still trying to regain her balance.

McCoy watched him go, noting the flushed face and tented front of the uniform pants. He turned away to the next patient, whistling, as he wondered how long it would take Lara to pull herself together and come out of the treatment room.

* * *

Lara walked into her quarters and leaned back against the doors as they shut behind her. She'd started the day exhausted and it had gone downhill from there. McCoy had kept her hopping – mostly with what appeared to be busywork – and she hadn't had so much as a cup of coffee for 12 hours. All she wanted was a bowl of soup from the replicator in her room and a chance to take her boots off.

She pushed herself away from the doors and crossed to the replicator. It beeped at her and proceeded to extrude what appeared to be toothpaste, but no bowl. The substance oozed through the overflow grate and disappeared for recycling. She gave her order again, but the machine remained stubbornly silent.

End of a perfect day, she thought, then remembered she had some field rations and a chocolate bar in her duffel.

Her other duffel. The one that was still in Spock's quarters. *Damn.*

She crossed to the intercom. "Mr. Scott? This is Lara. I can't get my replicator to work."

"Sorry, Lass. Ye'll need to file a trouble ticket. I'll have someone up there tomorrow."

As Lara cut the connection with a grumble, Scotty reached out and flipped a switch on his console, which started a meticulously-planned subroutine in the turbolift system. He also

pushed an intercom button, and when Kirk answered, said “Dinner is served.” His technician looked up from her board. “Mr. Scott,” she said, “all but one of the turbolifts to crew quarters just went offline.”

“We’re conservin’ power,” he said, and returned to his study of warp core schematics.

Lara walked to the turbolift and pushed the call button. Waited. Pushed it again. Waited. Pushed it a third time and was seriously considering giving the doors a swift kick when they finally opened. “Deck Nine, Officer’s Mess,” she said, grasping the control. The car moved smoothly downward, then stopped and the doors slid open.

Spock stood in the corridor. “Good evening,” he said, and stepped in. He was wearing his uniform jacket open, left arm through the sleeve and right shoulder pulled over his bound arm, the sleeve hanging free. It was a rakish look, Lara thought. Like some brave but wounded warrior. Then she remembered she didn’t want to see him. She started to push out, to catch another car, but the doors slid closed.

“You’re supposed to be resting,” she said.

“I have rested. And now I shall eat. The captain invited me to dinner.”

He looked down at her, all deadpan innocence. She started to move away, then remembered her error in sickbay. He reached across her for the control.

“If you lay a hand on me, Spock—”

“Deck Nine,” he said. “Officer’s Mess.”

“I mean it.”

He assumed parade rest with just his left hand behind his back and stared wordlessly at the doors. She was beginning to relax when the car groaned and stuttered to a stop. The lights went out and only the emergency glow panel lit the interior.

“I don’t believe this,” she muttered, and pounded on the intercom. There was no response.

“Do something,” she demanded.

“What do you suggest?”

“I don’t know, dammit! Do you have a communicator with you?”

“No. Do you?”

“No.”

They stood in the dimness and she fidgeted her hands against the tops of her thighs. “*Hey!*” she shouted. “*Hey! HELP!*” There was no response. She worked her fingers between the center seals and pushed. “Come on, Spock. Help me out here.”

He reached over her head, braced, and pushed. The door moved open grudgingly, by perhaps a meter. They could see the floor of the deck above them, roughly half a meter below the roof of the car.

“Well?” she said, looking at him expectantly.

“I am injured.” He dipped his bound shoulder to her by a fraction of an inch.

She glared at him, measured the distance, and jumped. One hand gained the rim of the floor, then slipped off and she fell, landing

on her backside with a resounding thump. He continued to stare at the narrow opening. She got up, wiped her hands on her uniform, and tried again with the same result.

“Are you just going to stand there?”

“Yes.”

She looked up at the ceiling of the car with its access hatch.

“Boost me up.”

“You specifically told me not to touch you.”

“I changed my mind, dammit!” She put her hands on his shoulders and raised one foot. “Now boost me up.”

He squatted and she put one foot on his bent knee, reaching up. “I feel this to be an illconsidered move,” he said against her belly, which was brushing his face. Actually, he felt it was rather an interesting posture, and he pressed his left palm firmly against her rump. He felt her sharp gasp, and then the car lurched and she fell, sliding down the length of his body and pulling him down.

He landed with a grunt on his bound shoulder and lay still for a moment, until he could subdue the pain. When he levered himself upright, Lara was sitting across the car from him, her back pressed against the car’s wall, shoulders hunched forward.

“Are you injured?” he asked, moving toward her.

Wordlessly, she shook her head. He could not see her face in the dimness.

“I think our best option is simply to wait for assistance.”

She nodded, then turned her face away from him. He relaxed back against the opposite wall. Hydraulics moaned somewhere and the car shuddered, but did not move.

They sat in silence for some time. He could hear her stomach growling. Finally, she said, “Why are you doing this?”

“Because I am hungry.”

“No. Last night. And this morning. Why are you ... pursuing me?”

Because I am hungry, he thought, and the truth of it surprised him. He could not tell her that, though.

“I require a bondmate,” he said.

She made a wordless sound freighted with half a dozen emotions, none of which he could accurately identify. “Perhaps you should be discussing this with Saavik,” she said.

“She does not wish to be bonded.”

“So you *did* ask her.”

Spock could not comprehend the anger that simmered in his wife’s voice. First she directed him to do something and then was displeased when he said he had already attempted it. “At the time,” he said, “I was unaware of your existence. Of our relationship.”

“We have no relationship,” she insisted.

“You are my wife.”

“I’m your widow.”

“I am not dead, Lara.”

“Not any more. But I’m still Sundered.”

Somewhere deep in Engineering, a subroutine finished its run. Relays closed, systems reset themselves. And midway between decks six and seven, a turbolift door opened all the way, closed again, and the car began to move.

The lights came on in the car and Lara scrambled to her feet, ignoring Spock’s outstretched hand. The car glided to a smooth stop on Deck Nine, one journey finished, another interrupted.

Jim Kirk stood at the landing, flanked by McCoy and Scotty. “There you are!” he said with a grin. “What took you so long?”

Spock stepped out of the car. “We were delayed,” he said.

* * *

Lara flexed her knees, letting the ground roll under her, and wiped the sweat off her face for what seemed like the hundredth time that day. Ahead of her, Spock acknowledged the checkin calls from the other ground parties as all reported no injuries from the latest aftershock.

This was not an assignment she would have sought, but she hadn’t had the heart to object. Not when Sharon Walkingbird was so obviously devastated by the losses to her colony project. Not even being assigned to a team with Spock could make this day any worse.

They knew going in that there would be no survivors, not nearly a week after the deadly flash flood had roared through the camp in the pre-dawn hours. This was strictly a recovery effort for the bodies of the 23 team members still missing. It was backbreaking,

soul-shattering labor. Without the body heat of a living organism to track, the sensors couldn't locate the bodies. The best they could do was to set the instruments to detect the byproducts of decay at a much lower level than the olfactory senses of the searchers. Sometimes even that failed, and they watched for signs of carrion birds or the scavengers the settlers called the wolfpigs, or used the instruments to reconstruct the most probable path of the floodwaters, looking under brush tangles, beneath rockslides, and even in trees for bodies or – worse – parts of bodies.

Over here,” Rudy Krause called, and the rest of the team climbed over the jumble of rocks to join him. He was kneeling when Lara saw him, head down, shoulders shaking, and she knew it would be bad.

The two bodies, a man and a woman, lay entangled against a granite outcropping, most of their clothing torn away. Lara knew by the curly black hair of the man that it was Caz Volenski, and that meant the woman with the disheveled dark red braids was Rudy's sister Amalie. Their wrists had been lashed together with Caz's belt in what must have been a frantic last-minute effort to keep the couple from being separated.

Lara broke two body bags from her pack and handed them to another team member, kneeling next to Rudy and putting her arms around him for whatever wordless comfort she could impart.

Looking over his shoulder, she could see Spock approaching. “Amalie was Rudy's sister,” she said. “She and Caz were married just a few days before joining the expedition.”

He nodded brusquely, then started to turn away before Lara's hand caught at his pants leg. She gave him a look, then tilted her head slightly toward Rudy.

“Lieutenant Krause,” Spock said, “would you provide the honor escort for your sister and her husband?”

“Yes, sir,” he choked out, scrubbing the tears off his freckled face.

“And consider yourself relieved.”

“Sir?” Krause came to his feet. “Request permission to rejoin the recovery team after...” He took a deep breath and swallowed. “They all deserve to go home, sir.”

“Permission granted.” He reached down and helped Lara to her feet as he called *Enterprise* for transport. For the tenth time that morning, the team stood at attention as the bodies and escort dissolved in the transporter beams.

He noted the slump of her shoulders as she broke the stance. It had been a brutal day for everyone, beginning at 0300 ship’s time so they could commence the search at planetary dawn. That had been nearly fifteen hours ago, and now the long slanting light said their day was drawing to an end.

“Thank you,” she said softly.

Spock began to remind her that one did not thank logic, but admitted to himself that his actions toward Lieutenant Krause had been prompted not by logic but by her unspoken request. He simply inclined his head in acknowledgement, wondering how much of his new awareness had come with simple maturity and how much was a direct response to her influence on him.

Lara had turned away and was once again moving along the riverbank, continuing her search as the team spread apart. “How many more?” she asked.

He consulted the list on his tricorder. “Two. Tsin Chao and Thomas Bryan.”

“Ryan,” she said crossly. “His last name is Ryan. ‘B’ is – was – his middle initial. Somebody at HQ fatfingered his assignment paperwork and he spent most of the trip out here trying to get it corrected.” She dashed impatiently at the tears that welled up, kicked at a stone, and muttered a comment that was lost in the beep of Spock’s communicator.

Commander Walkingbird, whose team was searching along the other side of the river, reported one more recovery, whose identity was “unconfirmed” – a euphemism, Spock had realized early in the day, for describing partial remains which could no longer be identified without a cellular scan. Before he could respond, he heard shouts in the background and the whine of phaser fire.

“Stand by,” Walkingbird said, and when she came back, her voice was roughened with emotion. “Preliminary scans indicate we have two recoveries here. Call your team in and let’s go home.” She ended the communication abruptly, without waiting for his confirmation.

Spock snapped the instrument shut and looked at Lara, noting the fatigue in her face and the white lines of tension around her mouth.

“You heard?”

“Yes.” She sank down on a fallen log as he relayed the information to his team members. “Why was there phaser fire?” she asked when he had finished.

“Unknown. But the logical assumption is that there were scavengers in the area.”

“Logical?”

He tilted the tricorder screen so that she could see the readings. “Several large life forms have been shadowing us for the last hour.”

She came to her feet as if expecting an attack. “Wolfpigs?”

“I believe that is what you have been calling them. Commander Walkingbird indicated earlier that no attacks on live prey have been reported.”

“Yeah, and we’ve been here so long that we know all about them.” She continued to look around, trying to locate the scavengers.

“Each team member has a phaser.”

“This damn planet has been trying to kill us ever since we got here. Nothing about it would surprise me.” As if to punctuate her words, a sharp aftershock rattled the rocks under them and Spock grabbed Lara’s arm to keep her on her feet. “How soon can we beam up?” “I will request beamup when the other team members have returned to the ship.”

She gave him a sharp look. “Unless Mr. Scott can come up with some unexplained transporter malfunction in the meantime, that will keep us down here alone, together, overnight.”

He sighed, realizing she had come to the same conclusion he had reached earlier.

“They have not been particularly subtle, have they?”

“*They?* You’re not in on this little conspiracy?”

“No. In fact, I thought perhaps you—”

The sound she made was not a laugh. “No. I’m just trying to get through this with as much grace and as little pain as possible.” She dropped back to the fallen log, rolling her shoulders to work out the stiffness. Spock’s hands flexed as if he were massaging her back and neck, and he stilled the incipient motion to do so.

“I regret that their actions have caused you pain,” he said. “I doubt that was their intent.” He sat beside her on the log.

“I know that.” She leaned against him, whether from exhaustion or affection, he could not determine, and did not care. “I suppose someday, this is all going to be funny.”

He still struggled with the concept of humor, so chose not to comment on that, moving instead to the topic foremost in his mind.

“They are my friends,” he said. “Their attempts may have been misguided, but they were sincere. Dr. McCoy said—”

“You talked to *McCoy*? About *us*?”

He felt her stiffen and pull away from him; filed away the fact that she and McCoy had conflicts.

“At the time,” he said, “I was unaware of your existence. Of our bonding. I only knew something important had vanished from my life, and the search to identify it was consuming me.”

His communicator chirped, and he seriously considered ignoring it, but lost the battle, reporting “Spock here,” in a terse voice as he came to his feet.

Scotty's voice was not unexpected, and Lara shot him an I-told-you-so look as the engineer began to speak.

"We're havin' a wee bit o' trouble wi' the transporter, sir. It may be several hours before we c'n bring ye up—"

"Mr. Scott," he snapped. "Dr. Merritt and I have no potable water left. No food. No shelter. We are in a seismically unstable locale subject to landslide and flash flood. We are rapidly losing daylight, and there are large predators in the area. I strongly suggest that you recalibrate your instruments, rebalance the matrix, and be ready to beam us up in precisely five minutes. Spock out." He returned the instrument to his belt and caught the traces of amusement on Lara's face.

"You just ruined his whole day."

"I shall offer my condolences. *After* we return to the ship."

She stretched her legs out in front of her and braced her hands on the log. "I'm surprised at McCoy. Sarek specifically asked him to let you find your memories at your own pace."

"And he kept that bargain. He only allowed me to see that I must have been bonded at the time of my death. Once I consciously acknowledged that, it did not take long to identify you as my wife."

"But you really don't remember me, do you." It was not a question.

He was unsure how to respond. How could he tell her his body responded to her as a familiar partner, but his intellect refused to provide any other details? Once again, he took refuge in McCoy's theorizing, but purposely avoided mentioning him.

“When I sent my *katra* to the Ancestors, I may have retained certain ... personal memories. And when that body died, I believe those memories were lost with it. I am sorry, Lara, but the only way I know to regain our personal history is to re-establish the marital link and try to access your recollections.”

She was looking at him in wonderment, slowly shaking her head. “Spock, I don’t know how Genesis restored you, but I do know that the body you’re walking around in now wasn’t grown from scratch with your DNA. It was built, somehow, on the original template that died on the *Enterprise*.”

He looked at her in puzzlement, and she threw up her hands impatiently.

“Haven’t you looked in a *mirror*?”

“I fail to see—”

“Exactly. You’ve *failed to see* it. You still have a mark on your face where that scar was repaired, and half a dozen other dings and dents you’ve picked up over the years. I’ll bet money that if I put you on a body scanner, it would show fracture lines from every broken bone you’ve ever had. For godsake, Spock, you’re still *circumcised*. That’s not going to happen with a genetic clone. And the memories stored in your original brain may well have been reproduced in the replacement.”

The notion was so utterly astonishing that it physically rocked him back on his heels. He was still struggling with it when he felt the beginning of the transport process. He reached for his communicator to ask Scott to give him just a few more minutes, but by the time his hand closed over the instrument, he had rematerialized on *Enterprise* and was looking at Lara’s back as

she stepped quickly off the transporter pad. He nearly called out to her, then realized they were no longer alone.

Scotty stood at the transporter controls wearing a carefully noncommittal expression.

Spock straightened his uniform jacket as he stepped off the platform. "Mr. Scott, I compliment you on the speed with which you effected repairs to the transporter." "Yes, sir."

"And I am confident we will have no more infortuitous malfunctions in any ship's systems." "No, sir."

* * *

The notions planted in his mind by Lara's analysis continued to niggle at the back of his brain as he finished the day's chores. He successfully extracted colony medical records from the damaged computer – records he knew Lara and Commander Walkingbird were awaiting in order to positively identify the remains they had recovered; continued with analyses and administrative matters which had accumulated while he was planetside; and was called away toward the end of shift to examine a vague sensor image which might or might not have been a ship.

Neither he nor anyone else who reviewed the distorted images and scrambled data had been able to come to a definitive conclusion. They were so far away from Federation space that it seemed unlikely to have been a ship whose origins they would have recognized, yet there was an equal probability that this region might be claimed by or under the influence of an as-yet unknown spacefaring race.

All in all, it had been a disturbing, nonproductive day. Except for his work on the colony's computer records, much had been left unresolved – including his own questions.

Finally, when he was able to retreat to his quarters and a sonic shower, he donned his meditation robe for what he feared would be another frustrating and incomplete quest for the serenity and equilibrium he so desperately needed. He templed his hands and was distracted by their appearance.

You've failed to see it, she had told him. And she had been correct, he realized. These were not the hands of a newly-generated being, but those of an adult man who had led an active, often physically demanding, life. The long, flexible fingers had callus pads from the strings of the lyre; the smallest one on his left hand bore a small but undeniable bump where a broken finger had gone too long untreated. The skin was weathered, darkened by exposure to countless alien suns, becoming perceptibly lighter at the point where his uniform sleeve normally fell.

And if she was correct in the assumption that this body was an exact duplicate rather than a regeneration of the original ... then she was doubtless also correct in her allegation that the memories he sought were also there – buried, unacknowledged, but there. Although why he couldn't summon them...

He thought of McCoy's theory that the missing memories were too personal, too treasured, to have been shared with the Ancestors. But there was a second possibility, too, and it was also something the doctor had mentioned in passing – that the memories had been withheld because they brought him shame. Because he had acted dishonorably in some way where his bondmate was concerned. That could be a logical motivation for her refusal to re-establish the marital link. Though how that squared with her behavior when she had visited his quarters that

first night, he could not ascertain. She was human. And female. Her motivations were doubly opaque.

He tried to push the notions aside, to concentrate only on bringing body and mind into balance, but his thoughts wriggled and squirmed out of confinement, bringing distraction and agitation. Reluctantly, he acknowledged that the only way to get the answers he needed was to confront Lara. Once that decision was made, he moved so swiftly that he didn't realize until he pressed the call button outside her quarters that he still wore his meditation robe and nothing else.

He might have left at that moment, astonished and embarrassed at his inappropriate attire, but Lara's response released the latch instead of asking who was there. Reflexively, he stepped into the room. "Do you feel it prudent to admit unidentified visitors in that manner?"

She looked up at him over the rim of a short, wide glass. "And good evening to you, too, Spock." She was barefoot, clad only in a short, silky robe of palest blue.

"I wish to know—" He stuttered to a stop, realizing what the glass held. "Are you intoxicated?"

"Not yet. Getting there, though." She lifted the glass in his general direction. "Care to join me?" Before he could decline, she shook her head slightly. "Oh, I forgot. The very proper Vulcan doesn't pollute his body with alcohol." She reached for the bottle which had been standing on the floor and topped off the glass. "But then, the very proper Vulcan hasn't spent most of the last day scraping up pieces of friends and trying to match them to medical records." She shut her eyes for a moment, tilted her head back. "Thank you for pulling that data."

He nodded acknowledgement, realizing as he did so that she couldn't see the gesture, then decided to add a comment. "I also inserted a worm in the program," he said. "When Starfleet uploads the records, it will seek out all references to Thomas Bryan in the main database and correct them to Thomas B. Ryan."

To his astonishment, her eyes welled up with tears and she swiveled her chair away from him. An unpleasant thought floated to the surface of his mind. "He was ... important to you?"

She turned the chair back toward him, scrubbing at the tears in an angry gesture. "If you're asking me whether he was my lover, the answer's no. He was just a good man – a gentle man – who offered me friendship when I was feeling very much in need of it." She sipped reflectively at the drink and he realized she was using the time to pull her emotions back into control.

"So ... you came all the way up here in the middle of the night – in your jammies, no less – just to lecture me on personal security?"

He started to respond to the remark, then realized she most certainly recognized the meditation robes for what they were. Which mean she was attempting to distract him.

"No. I came..." And found himself suddenly reluctant to ask it. "I wanted to ask you if you were—" What? *Happy*? Happiness was not something he had been taught to seek, or even to acknowledge. "To ask if you were ... contented ... in our bonding."

She looked up at him, somewhat blearily, and he realized she had been awake and functioning under extreme stress for over 24 hours.

“Contented? That’s an odd way to phrase it.” She drained the glass, refilled it again, and waved him to the guest chair. “Siddown,” she said. “This may take a while.”

As he sat, she lapsed into silence, turning the glass in her hands and taking an occasional drink. He thought she might not intend to answer him at all; then, finally, she emptied the glass, put it down on the desk, and turned to face him.

“I’m going to paraphrase an old Earth nursery rhyme to answer that question. When it was good, it was very, very good. And when it was bad ... it was horrid.”

“Horrid.” That was a concept he had not considered. “Then, that is why you do not wish to renew our bond? Because you fear it will again be ... horrid?”

“No.” She let him mull that over for a moment. “It’s because I fear it will be very, very good.” She pushed herself out of the chair, swaying a little. “Now, if you’ll esscuse me—”

“That is not logical.” He rose and reached for her arm. “Humans do not run from pleasure – they seek it.”

“And grieve when they lose it. The price is too high, Spock.”

“I did not die purposely.”

“*Yes, you did!*” She struck out at him and he grasped her wrist, holding her as she tried to yank away, kicking out in anger and frustration, tears flowing freely. “You *chose* to go into that compartment, knowing the radiation would kill you. You did it for Jim, for the ship, for those kids in the crew. And if you had to make the same choice t’morrow, you’d make it the *s-same damn way!*”

He had no answer; could not deny the truth of what she had said, so he merely held her close, absorbing the blows she rained on him, letting her release the fury and sorrow until finally she sagged against him and drew a ragged breath. Spock felt the combination of exhaustion, alcohol, and emotional storm taking her over the edge. He pressed his lips softly against her temple, felt an almost-memory surface and then flash away like a minnow, and let it go without regret as he bent slightly, slipped an arm behind her knees and lifted her up.

She stirred, surfacing for a moment with a weak push against his chest and a wordless protest as he laid her on the bed, and then she was gone again, drifting and boneless.

* * *

Spock heard her stirring and rose from the meditation position, feeling the twinge in his knees that told him he had been kneeling on the hard deck far too long. He had attained a measure of balance, but knew he was still far from *krilan-vo'ektaya*. He programmed a pot of tea from the room synthesizer and handed her the cup as she sat up, pushing the hair out of her eyes with an almost-inaudible sound which he nevertheless recognized as a soft curse.

She took the cup and glared at him, but drank. He followed her gaze to the soft blue robe, draped over the foot of the bed, saw her mouth harden.

“All right,” she said. “Did you get what you wanted?”

“I believe I told you it was imprudent to invite a guest into your room without first ascertaining his identity.”

“Fine. Are we done now?”

He crossed to sit beside her on the bed and she swayed away from him a bit. "Lara," he said, "think of this. I have been in your mind many times. We have made love many times. Why does it make you angry that you would not remember one of them?" He traced the line of her fingers, twined his own between them and turned her hand palm up.

She jerked her hand away from him. "Because it was a rotten thing for you to do."

"It makes you angry."

"Yes."

"To know the person, but not remember the act. You find that disturbing?"

"Yes!"

"Would you prefer to remember the act, but not know the person?"

She looked at him, puzzled, then repelled. "No!" she said, and he felt her shudder.

"The bond is not renewed. We did not have sex last night."

"You lied to me?"

"I did not. I simply allowed you to make an erroneous assumption."

"Why?"

"Because I know no other way to explain myself. I remember making love with you in the past. All the sensations, all the mechanics, all the pleasure. But not the person. Not who you are."

Not who *we* are together. That is what I have lost. And I need to have it back. I need you to help me find it.”

He reached for her face and she scrambled away from him, as far as the cramped space would allow. He realized she was crying, silent tears tracking down her face.

“I can’t,” she said. “It hurt too much.”

“The Sundering?”

“Yes. And after ... You died, and I didn’t, and then you came back and I thought – *yes*. We’d get something no one else has ever had – a second chance. And then you came back from Mount Seleya, and you walked right past me. You looked at me. You looked *through* me.

And you kept walking. It was as bad as a second Sundering. You died – and maybe you did what you had to then. But after the refusal, you chose ... you *chose* to keep walking.”

He shut his eyes, shut his mind against the pain in her voice. Pain he could feel even without the link.

“I ... am ... sorry,” he said, knowing it was inadequate. “Everything I was ... everything I had been ... had been poured back into my mind. But I had no framework yet, no reference points. I walked ... because I was walking. *I knew how to do that.*”

He looked up at her, reached out and wiped the tears off her face. “And after the framework was built, after I had all those memories and skills and disciplines put back, I still felt an emptiness in my soul. I knew only that something vital was missing, and that I could not survive without it. Lara, I need you to help me find the rest of myself.”

Her voice was so low he had to strain to hear it, and then only heard one word—“...afraid...” He moved closer to her, his own voice barely a whisper.

“I cannot promise you a life without loss, without pain. I can only promise you I will not be the willing cause of it.” He canted his head forward until his forehead touched hers. “Lara, if you refuse to embrace something for fear of losing it, it is already lost.”

She leaned into him, and he could feel her trembling, could almost feel the instant when she yielded.

“You really want this?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“I’m human.” She brushed her lips across his jawline, fingers parting the front of his robe.

“I know.” He shrugged the cloth off his shoulders.

“And illogical.” Her palms mapped his ribcage.

“Redundant.” He cupped one breast, feeling the flesh rise to meet his touch.

“And barren.” She pulled away to study his face.

“Irrelevant.”

“And--”

He put a finger to her lips. “You are what I seek. I cannot be complete without you.”

He put both hands on her face, pure instinct guiding him to the psi-points, and plunged into her mind without preliminaries. He felt her gasp and move as if to pull away, and he captured her mouth with his own, tongue invading, inhaling her essence and her will. He surrounded and tasted her anguish at Sakeen's death, the tearing of her soul when he walked past her on his return from the *fal-tor-pan*, the agony she felt at the Sundering. Again she twisted, sobbing into his mouth and he tightened his grip on her face, wrapping her in his own darkness and loss as his *katra* floated free of his dying body.

He drove past their singular and separate pains, still tasting and sorting her memories of him, of them, of partings and separations and reconciliations, of sadness and exhilaration, of intense lovemaking as they moved and soared together, and he felt her relax again and open to him. He tipped her back until she fell under him, and slipped into her musky darkness, slick and wet and clutching at him.

As he moved within her, he felt his own memories beginning to stir in brain and bone and flesh, twisting and straining to break free. Her recollections of them together began to resonate with his own buried memories, vibrating like a wineglass to a specific frequency, and like the wineglass, shattering, the shards tearing through him as long-suppressed images began to break free. This one tore through a chrysalis and he understood at last how he had come to be on the wrong side when Vulcan withdrew from the Federation; that one clawed its way out of a stony grave and he remembered finding her in the Romulan Empire, lost in madness and murder; others exploded like lava vents, scalding through the corridors of his mind as he recalled choices he had made, invitations to intimacy he had ignored or misunderstood, failed attempts to keep her safe from the violence his life-path and their bonding had exposed her to. He strained and moaned and split like a woman giving birth, bringing forth that life he

had hidden from himself, and cried out with the pain of it; would have broken the link in self-preservation, but now Lara held him and cradled him, rocking him in her flesh and in her spirit.

The two sets of memories, two viewpoints, two resonating subtexts, twined and coiled and knit together, spreading wide to heal the rents of their emergence. Mind and body, spirit and substance, coiled and turned and melded, friction and resistance, thrust and counterthrust, flesh on flesh, mind on mind, until he erupted into her body and into her essence, leaving both seed and imprint, marking the path where mind and soul could meet and dance and call to one another without voice.

Spent, he relaxed into her embrace, burying his face in the juncture of neck and shoulder, finding the sweet spot below her left ear, and she stroked his back and made wordless shushing sounds and simply held him until he was whole again.

He dropped his hands from her face and rolled away from her, shaken, voiceless. She came up on one elbow and looked at his profile in the darkness. Felt the touch of his mind.

//Adun 'a?//

//I am here, husband.//

“Then I am home,” he said, and slept.

##

End Notes

For those of you who have come along on this long and twisty journey -- thanks for the company. I hope you found it worth your while.

I really, honestly believe this is the end of the HMF series, at least with Spock and Lara at the core. There's a tickle in the back of my mind that wants to know what would happen if Saavik, after the birth of her child, should decide to investigate the Romulan half of her heritage ... but at this point, it's just a nagging little itch.

Your comments, as always, are much appreciated. May you all ... Live Long and Prosper!