

Origins

by
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Chapter 1

Summer 1922, Gotham Orphan's Home

Brother and sister entered Matron's office hesitantly, noticing she had visitors. The children of the home were almost never summoned when she had visitors, since, as she made clear, they were of not sufficient social class to be presented to those who called on Matron. Richard was, as usual, angry inside, Amanda reserved as always. They knocked timidly; stonefaced, she motioned them in.

"Here they are," Matron sniffed. "I still have no idea why you might want to see them, but since you insisted."

Richard looked at the visitors. He recognized the Chief Inspector of Detectives from the Gotham P.D., of course; the man had questioned him through long hours after their parents were killed. The other gentleman was a tall, darkhaired man in a three-piece black suit, evidently one hand-tailored for him from the looks and fit.

"Bruce, these are the sole survivors of the Flying Graysons," Chief Moody said. "May I present to you Richard and Amanda."

"H'lo," Richard said truculently.

"A pleasure," Amanda said without emotion.

"It was Richard's keen observations that helped us break the case of their parents' death wide open," Chief Moody added. "And both children used their agility to escape Zucco's thugs when they took out the rest of the family. Richard, I have some good news for you --Zucco's bully boys and his three lieutenants are locked up, charged with five counts of murder for the death of your parents and older brothers."

Richard smiled for the first time. "Wonderful!" he said. "I've wanted revenge on them since I got here. But you didn't get Zucco himself?"

"No," the Chief answered. "Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, he was killed by a mysterious vigilante."

"The Black Pipistrelle, isn't that what the newspaper called him?" asked Matron.

"Well, something to do with bats would be appropriate," the man called Bruce said. "He operates alone and at night, like a bat."

"I'm glad," Richard said angrily. "That bastard deserves to rot in Hell."

Matron gasped. "Richard, I've told you before we will not tolerate vulgar language here -- and in front of our distinguished visitors, too!"

Bruce spoke up. "Ma'am, I certainly can understand his expressing contempt for the man who had his parents killed."

"I am trying to teach these young urchins respect for their betters, and the proper decorum, sir! Can you imagine, their parents were taking them all over the country, putting on circus shows with them! We'll soon teach young Richard a respectable trade, and Amanda the homely skills to become a good tradesman's wife."

"Not a secretary?" Bruce's mouth quirked.

"I don't hold with these newfangled ideas of employing women as secretaries," Matron answered. "A woman's place is in the home."

"How, then, do you have this job?" Bruce asked.

"Oh, well, that's different," Matron answered. "One cannot, after all, expect a man to devote himself to the care of children."

"As if," Richard said under his breath.

"What was that!" Matron exclaimed.

"Go ahead, Richard. I'd like to know, myself, what you meant." Bruce's expression was anything but stern, and on the side away from Matron, he winked at Richard.

"Just this. We get meals here, and a bed and a change of clothes. But nobody seems to *care* anything about us. One of the staff told us that Matron forbade fraternization between staff and inmates."

"Why, you little ingrate! You get proper vocational training to make you into a skilled harnessmaker, three meals a day, your own bunk. You'll be going to bed tonight with no supper, I guarantee you."

"I don't think so," Bruce said. "Moody, haven't you told her yet?"

"No, I wanted to wait until after you met them, to give you a chance to back out if you chose."

"Fat chance of that, after this little interview!" Bruce said. "I just regret we couldn't keep them together."

"Together? We see each other twice a day, at luncheon and dinner. I'm forbidden to even speak to my sister!" Richard said angrily.

"Is that the case?" Bruce asked Matron.

"Of course. We must keep the girls properly chaperoned," she answered.

"From her own brother?" Bruce said incredulously. He turned dismissively from Matron, and addressed himself to the children. "I want to stress to you two that what I'm about to offer is your own free choice, though from what I've seen and heard since I got here, I suspect I already know what your choi-

ce will be. But what I have to propose is that I will take Richard as my ward, to live with me and my retainers, for as long as he chooses to stay." Richard's eyes bulged. "Amanda, I am sorry but even with the pull I have, the courts would not permit a single man to take a young lady as ward. What I've arranged for you is to be taken by a couple who are close friends. He is a Cultural Anthropologist at the University who has just accepted a position with the State Department, and will be moving to Washington. I will, however, ensure that you and your brother are able to get together as often as possible."

"I shall endeavor to give satisfaction," Amanda said emotionlessly.

"My dear young lady," Bruce said apologetically, "if I have said or done something to offend you, kindly forgive the affront."

"Oh," said Amanda, allowing a thin but warm smile to emerge, "my father taught me to control my emotions. When you're up on the high wire, you need to be completely composed and free of any emotion. He tried to teach Richard that, too, but it didn't take." She smiled at her brother. "Since I came here, I've been practicing it all my waking moments. It's far better than reacting to the behavior of the other girls."

"That's remarkable control for a girl of your age," Bruce said. "I can tell you that Rupert and Lavinia are warm and caring people, who dearly want a daughter. If it's not right for you, though, we can make other arrangements."

"Sir?" asked Matron. "If you don't mind my asking, just how do you propose to dispose of two of my inmates like that?"

"Like this," Bruce said, drawing forth paperwork from a briefcase lying at the side of his chair. "You'll find that everything is made out properly on these except my signature, which I held off on affixing to give the children a chance to choose. Tell me," he continued, again addressing the children, "do you think you would like to give my proposal a try?"

"Anything's better than this place," Richard said. Amanda nodded.

Bruce drew forth a pen and signed the documents, and handed them over to Matron.

"Now, Richard, Amanda, is there one person on staff who has shown you some personal caring, given you comfort, anything of that sort?" he asked.

"I'd rather not say; Matron's firm about no fraternizing," Amanda responded. Richard sat mute.

"You have my word on it that no harm will come to whoever you name," Bruce encouraged.

Richard looked him in the eye, and saw honesty there. "Mrs. O'Brien comforted me the first night I was here, when I was crying, and she gives us quick hugs when nobody's looking and it looks like we're feeling down." Amanda nodded hesitantly, not wanting to get their adult caregiver in trouble.

"I told her to stop that sort of behavior!" Matron exclaimed.

"Would you be a lamb and run get Mrs. O'Brien, Amanda?" Bruce asked.

"It's not your place to be giving instructions to the inmates in *my* facility," Matron said.

"I think you'll find otherwise," Chief Moody spoke up. "Mr. Wayne is Chairman of the Wayne Foundation, your largest private source of support, and President of the Board of Visitors here. He has nearly unlimited authority to do anything that is legal on these grounds."

"Oh," Matron said, wide-eyed.

"And you, madame, should spend the next few minutes retrieving any personal mementoes and things of that sort from this office," Bruce, now revealed as Mr. Wayne, said to her.

"Why?"

"Because as soon as Amanda returns with Mrs. O'Brien, it's my intention to offer her the Matronship of this orphanage, with full authority to ensure that the children are given caring consistent with what you agreed to do when you accepted our funding, and have failed to do," Bruce's voice was low and hard.

"And what will happen to me?"

"Well, Chief Moody here will be escorting you to the street, and I would suspect that thereafter you might find it worthwhile to be looking for work -- in other areas than childcare, I might add, as I plan to ensure you are blackballed from any job having to do with raising children."

Amanda returned with Mrs. O'Brien just then, and Chief Inspector Moody unceremoniously escorted Mrs. Terwilliger, the former Matron, to the street, while Mr. Wayne conferred with Mrs. O'Brien on what he expected to be done at the orphanage.

As they emerged from the orphanage, Chief Moody walked to his police car. "Come with me, children," Bruce said. "Alfred has the Deuzie parked out at the street, since it will not fit through the gates here. I suppose I ought to buy a smaller vehicle, but the size and comfort of the Deuzie suits me." He strode briskly down the walk to the street, accompanied more hesitantly by Amanda and Richard.

As they turned to walk towards the waiting limousine, a burly man clad, incongruously for the weather, in a greatcoat, walked by. "Just a moment, Guv'nor," he said to Bruce as he passed. Bruce looked to see a pistol pointed directly at his chest. "Just hand over your wallet quiet-like and all will be well."

Richard went into a spin-kick that knocked the man's arm to the side and caused him to lose his grip on the pistol, which flew over the cast-iron fence into the grass on the orphanage grounds. He then jumped onto the thigh-high stone wall below the fence, grabbed the fence for balance, and swung his body, feet first, at the man, knocking him off balance onto a nearby car on his back, with the car's hood ornament penetrating a strategic and private part of the man's torso. The man bellowed, a sound like a bassoon trying to transform itself into a piccolo.

Chief Moody pulled up. "What happened, Bruce?"

"This footpad attempted to rob me; Richard disarmed and flattened him, in an amazing show of agility."

Amanda spoke up. "Nicely executed, Richard. You were a little sloppy on the spin-kick, but all in all, Father would have been proud of you."

Richard gave her a wan smile. "Thanks, sis. Can you show me what I ought to have done?"

"Not in these skirts," she answered. "If we're permitted time together and I can wear tights, I will."

"You'll have all the time together we can arrange," Bruce said. "That was amazing, Richard. I believe I owe you my life."

"You don't owe me anything," Richard said truculently.

"Miss Amanda, may I ask where you and Richard learned that?" Chief Moody asked, cuffing the would-be footpad.

"Our father, sir. Beyond the moves we needed for our act, he taught us *la savate* for our self defense." She gave it the proper French pronunciation.

"Indeed? It hardly seems like a ladylike skill," the Chief responded.

"Being raped by a drunken townsperson after a show is hardly ladylike, either. Father ensured we knew what we needed for our own safety, as well as teaching us as much as he could of academic subjects."

"He sounds like a remarkable man," the Chief said.

"He was. I miss him very much," Amanda answered.

They proceeded to the limousine, where Alfred held the door and handed Amanda in. Bruce and Richard climbed in after her.

"To the Tolhursts, Alfred," Bruce said.

"Right you are, sir," Alfred responded.

"Rupert, Lavinia, may I present to you Miss Amanda Grayson? Amanda, this is Dr. and Mrs. Tolhurst, who will be your guardians. Dr. Tolhurst taught at Gotham University, but is now proceeding to Washington to do some work for the State Department."

"And most mysterious work it is, too, Bruce," Rupert said. "I have been trying to get information on what it is they're offering me a rather large retainer for, but the most I can find out is that they have need of an expert in Cultural Anthropology with a broad experience and open mind, and I was selected, I believe by the new President himself."

"Very peculiar indeed," Bruce said. "I have only just made Miss Grayson's acquaintance myself, but from her files and such time as we've spent together, she seems a warm-hearted individual whom her father schooled to emotional control -- a discipline she has had to exercise steadily to survive in that hellhole of an orphanage. I am certainly glad that my investigations into the Zucci mob led me to check out more thoroughly what I was lending my name to. I spent the afternoon cleaning house there."

"Amanda, it is good to have you with us," Lavinia said warmly.

"Thank you, madam," Amanda said emotionlessly. Lavinia looked hurt.

"Remember what Bruce said, my dear," Rupert interjected. "Give her time to get to know and trust us - she has certainly been through things' no young lady should have to experience. Amanda," he said, turning his attention to her, "my wife and I wish to give you a home and family again, to the extent we are able, as long as the court sees fit to maintain us as your guardians. I completely understand your reserve, and I hope you will come to find us as good as our word, and be able to let down your guard with us."

"Thank you, sir," Amanda answered, giving him a fleeting smile.

Bruce then took his leave, and took Richard to a tailor, getting clothing appropriate for his new state in life. Richard remained guarded and sporadically sullen.

When they arrived back at Wayne Manor, dinner was quite late, and the cook left promptly for her own home.

"It has been a rather event-filled day, indeed," Bruce said with a touch of irony. "Alfred, perhaps you would show Richard to a room?"

"Of course, sir," the butler replied, allowing the slightest tinge of humor to flavor his 'correct' attitude. "Come with me, Master Richard." He showed Richard up the stairs and to a sumptuously-appointed bedroom. "I have placed your pyjamas on the bed there, young sir; I'll dispose of your other purchases in the morning, if that won't be an inconvenience." Richard nodded.

Bruce yawned, stretched, walked up the stairs to his own room. Richard poked his head out the door to see him do so, then ducked back in.

Bruce undressed, put on a pair of silk pyjamas, turned back the covers, climbed into bed, and closed his eyes in preparation for a good night's sleep. Moments later, he sensed someone at the door. He opened his eyes to see Richard standing there uncertainly in his pyjamas, his face and posture a mixture of eagerness, fear, anger, and above all stoic acceptance. "Richard? Ready for bed?" he asked, a smile on his face.

"Yessir," the boy bit off.

"Well, go ahead and get into bed, then. Tomorrow we have another full day ahead of us."

"All right, sir," Richard said, and began to take off his pyjamas.

"Wait, son! What are you doing?"

"Getting ready to get into bed, sir. I will try ... try to... make you...." the boy broke down.

Suddenly it dawned on Bruce what the boy was thinking. "Richard, stop right there!" he said.

"You don't want me?" the boy said in tears.

"Did you think that was why I brought you here, to be my bed partner?" Bruce said compassionately.

"Well, that's what the boys at the orphanage said, that rich men would sometimes pick a boy or a girl. I promise, sir, I can make you enjoy it. Please don't send me back!" Richard's expression was now completely fearful, and the tears coursed down his face.

"Oh, God, no, lad," Bruce said. "Richard, I chose you to be my ward because we have a great deal in common -- not because I wanted a boy for sex! Slip those pyjamas back on, come up here, and sit. Let us talk about things."

"But you *did* want me, I could tell. I saw you looking at me earlier!"

"Richard, you are a beautiful, handsome, desirable boy, and between us -- promise me, this conversation goes no further than the two of us and perhaps Alfred...."

"I promise," Richard said, snuffling.

"Yes, I find you very desirable," Bruce continued, "but your body is yours, your private affair, and nobody will ever touch it without your consent, from now on. Ever. Including me." He paused. "Good detecting, by the way, to have noticed that about me. I trust you will keep that confidential between us?"

"Yessir," Richard said.

"I chose you as a possible ward because we share an interest in detecting, and a talent for it, as evidenced by the help you gave the police in catching the gang who killed your parents and brothers -- and because as an acrobat, you're athletic and agile. As you probably know by now, I have an ... avocation ... for detecting, myself. And what you may not be aware is that I lost my parents the same way -- they were taken out by a mob when Father started paying too close attention to what was going on in one of his business ventures. Like you, I helped the police catch the men who killed them."

"If what I hope comes to happen, you and I will not be just guardian and ward, filling the roles of father and son legally, but we will work together to help fight crime, alongside the police. **That's** why I first got interested in you.

Then, when I found out what Terwilliger was doing in that orphanage *in my name* -- because I give a lot of the money that funds it and am officially in charge of what happens there as Chairman of the

Board of Visitors -- and how you and your sister were being mistreated, it got very personal. That could have been me, ten or fifteen years ago.

I want you as a ward, as a son if you come to care for me, as a partner in fighting crime. As a bedmate? Only if some day, of your own free will, you feel the same sort of desire towards me and freely choose to share my bed. Then, and only then. And frankly, I don't see that happening." Bruce finally ran down, hoping he'd made real contact with the hurting boy sitting on his counterpane."

Richard looked up with new hope in his eyes. "Really? You mean you...."

"Yes. Whatever you meant to finish that sentence with, yes. I'm sure I could hire someone to ... procure..." Bruce looked disgusted at using the term. "...a boy to engage in sexual relations with, if that were what I wanted. What I want is Richard Grayson, talented acrobat and Boy Detective, to work with me in business and in detecting ... and, if I can be permitted a dream, to be the son I never will have."

Richard looked up, shyly. "There's something you need to know, first," he said softly, almost inaudibly.

"What's that?" Bruce said.

"Well, there's not much room in those wagons, when we were moving from place to place with the circus. And my brothers and me, we slept together in one of 'em, and we used to..." Richard paused, and drew a breath, then continued more softly, "And I got so I *liked* it. You know what that makes me?"

"A normal healthy boy who's been used by his big brothers and had a normal reaction to it, that's what it makes you," said Bruce. "I guess I need to tell you something nobody else knows, whatsoever. You know Alfred is my butler?"

"Yeah," said Richard, wondering where this was going.

"He's only been the butler here since after my parents died; he was my father's valet before that. I refused to come back here, after my parents' death, until my guardians fired the butler they had before him. Nobody ever knew why I was so adamant about that. But what would happen is when my parents were out at their evening social events, Reginald would come to my room.

So trust me, Richard, I know exactly what you're saying -- the guilt and anger at being used, the guilt and shame that you found out you actually *enjoyed* it... I've been through it, same as you. And, as God is my witness, I would never make you undergo what we have both been through.

Now, we **do** have a full day tomorrow, one I think you will enjoy. So why not slip on back to your room, and try to get some sleep?"

"My room?" Richard was incredulous.

"Well, it doesn't have to be your room," Bruce said. "I asked Alfred to pick out the room he thought a boy might most enjoy, but you get your choice of any of the rooms in this old place, except that if you pick mine or Alfred's, we would need a good argument from you as to why we ought to give up ours to you!" Bruce grinned.

"I thought that was just where he put me to change," Richard admitted.

"No, that's your very own room -- unless you find one you like better," Bruce said.

"Really? Golly gee whillikers, sir, I didn't expect to get my own room!" Richard was suddenly, enthusiastically all boy.

"Okay, give me a hug and head back to your room boy," Bruce said affectionately.

Richard hugged him, then looked up into his eyes. "Um, Mr. Wayne, sir?"

"Bruce -- unless, someday, you feel comfortable calling me 'father'."

"D'you suppose it would be all right if I slept here with you tonight -- no sex, just cuddled up to you?"

"I'd be honored -- son."

Cabinet Room, the White House, some days later

"Did the President give you any indication *why* he was summoning us?" Secretary William McAdoo asked of Secretary Josephus Daniels.

"No, not at all. I'm perhaps the man he's worked closest with, since he was my Deputy back during Mr. Wilson's time," Daniels answered. "But I've learned he tends to play his cards very close to his vest, seldom letting his left hand know what his right hand is doing. All I know is what we each got in that terse message: 'A matter of utmost importance to the nation.'"

The new President strode briskly in just then, his aristocratic chin holding up his trademark cigarette holder. "I'm glad you all could clear your calendars and come to this meeting," he said. "I know for many of you, this has been a busy time. Ever since President Davis died, we've all had a great deal to cope with. I must ask that what is divulged here today remain confidential among us and those I've called in, unless I myself authorize breaking the news to others. This will include your own staffs and advisors."

"Isn't that a bit extreme, Mr. President?" Daniels asked.

"When you've received the full presentation of the information I have to share with you, you may be a better judge of that. In my opinion, this is a matter requiring the utmost confidentiality," the President answered. He stretched his legs, and winced. "It's a good thing that President Davis sent me on that South American trip before his untimely death. I've just received word that Campobello Island, where my mother's summer estate is, has been hit by an outbreak of infantile paralysis. Had I not been visiting Bogota and Lima, I might have been there right at the worst of it, and who knows what might have happened."

"Now, as you all know, this country was very strongly divided about Mr. Wilson's idea of a League of Nations, God rest his soul. It was a very close thing that Warren Harding, and not I, might not be the one presiding over this Cabinet meeting. Only by Mr. Davis promising to submit the question as if it

were a Constitutional Amendment did we eke out the narrow victory we received. But Secretary Lansing was recently contacted by, uh, Diplomatic Visitors, and what they have to tell us may make it incumbent that we revisit that issue again. Robert?"

Secretary Lansing rose. "As you know, gentlemen, foreign dignitaries having business with the United States are expected to present their credentials to me at the State Department. I received a visitor recently in that capacity bearing information of such importance that I immediately contacted the President, and we agreed that it should properly be brought before the Cabinet."

"No stump speeches, please, Robert," the President smiled. "Is Dr. Tolhurst here as I asked?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, then, have him shown in." Secretary Lansing stepped to the Cabinet Room door, opened it, and summoned Rupert.

"Gentlemen," said the President, "I present to you Dr. Rupert Tolhurst, late Professor of Cultural Anthropology at Gotham University, an acquaintance of mine, and, I should hope, shortly to be our consultant on the matters to be brought before us."

"You do seem to be making a great deal out of receiving a Foreign Diplomat, Frank," Josephus Daniels interjected.

The President smiled enigmatically, picked up a device from before him on the Cabinet table, and raised it to his lips. "Mr. Ambassador? We're ready to have you join us now."

"What is that?" McAdoo asked.

"A sort of radiotelephone," the President answered.

"That small? Ridiculous! Where would you fit the vacuum tubes?" McAdoo scoffed.

At that moment, sparkles in a columnar shape began to form at the far end of the table, moments later turning into the shape of a tall gaunt man with dark hair, ears that rose to a point, and a greenish cast to his skin.

"Gentlemen, I present to you Sarek, Head of the House of Surok, Ambassador of the Vulcan High Council," the President announced in a pleased-with-himself voice.

"I greet you all," Sarek said in a grave, emotion-free voice.

"Are you unwell?" Secretary Daniels asked.

"I am in good health," Sarek said emotionlessly. "Why do you ask?"

"Your complexion, sir. It would appear you've been suddenly taken ill."

"No, Mr. Secretary, this is my natural complexion. My people's blood uses a green pigment for oxygen transport."

"I have never heard of any race on Earth for which that was true," Dr. Tolhurst volunteered hesitantly.

"But my people are not of Earth," Sarek answered. "We live on the planet Vulcan, about..." he paused "... about 150 million, million miles from your Sun."

"We came here because our remote sensors detected the operation of a Warp Core somewhere near or on Earth. Clearly on Earth, since you have not yet mastered spaceflight."

"Before this moment I would have said that was Jules Verne folly," Daniels commented.

"On what study we've done so far, we have found things both good and bad about Earth, and we have a proposition for you." Sarek continued. "I note that your major nations have recently fought a great war, supposedly 'the war to end all wars.' And that many people, particularly in the area you call Europe, favor outlawing war. I wish you luck in that, but I fear the idea is futile."

"Do your people too then make war?" McAdoo asked.

"...Not precisely," Sarek answered. "Vulcan has been at peace since the time of my ancestor Surok. But we have found it necessary to keep up defenses. We are one of four Starfaring Races we know of: the Andorians, the Tellarites, the Romulans, and ourselves. It is believed the Romulans are distantly related to my people. But what all these races have in common is a violent, warlike nature. We have brought it in check by a system of emotional control and operating solely on the basis of the logic and ethics taught by Surok. The Andorians have a rigid code of honor governing when and how to fight."

"And the other two?" the President prompted.

"The Romulans maintain rigid isolation -- they do not leave their area of space, and so long as one does not enter it, one has nothing to fear from them. As for the Tellarites, they are rude and boorish, by Vulcan and Earth standards alike, but by the same token they have not the strategic sense to make a winning war, and they have learned not to attack forces of Vulcan or Andor. So we maintain an uneasy peace.

When my compatriot from Andor and I observed Earth, we noted that you had additional tools, of diplomacy, compromise, shared ideals, and the like, that served you in dealing with conflicts. And you have progressed unusually quickly for an emerging race. Few races master positronics until after they ... well, it would not be logical to go into that."

"So what we have to offer is this: let Earth be our 'experimental laboratory' of sorts, where His Majesty's Government, the new Soviet regime, France, Germany, Japan, and yourselves, and others as you see fit, consciously work out new ways to deal with conflict short of war. We will watch, dealing only with the highest echelons of your governments. In exchange, we will take selected men and women you choose, and train them for space, and guide your efforts to produce aircraft and spacecraft to minimize disasters. Eventually, you will make public your efforts to achieve spaceflight, and at that time the xenophobia we note will have been cut down, to the point that we can actively show ourselves, as your equals."

"There you have it, gentlemen. The Ambassador proposes a program of a few decades of subterfuge, in which we actively strive for dealing with international conflicts short of war, and in exchange gives us some advanced technology. How say you?"

"I maintain we'd be fools not to take it," Lansing spoke up. "We've been looking to promote the League for its own virtues; now we have a reason to do so beyond the quest for world peace."

"I am curious," Dr. Tolhurst said. "In all that message, you maintained an emotionless demeanor, though what you proposed clearly is dear to your heart. Would you be willing to tell me about what it is you do?"

"Vulcans are not emotionless," Sarek answered, "but by purposeful biological modifications and conscious control, we have learned to process emotions at a subconscious level that does not affect how we present ourselves to others."

"Interesting," Dr. Tolhurst said. "It reminds me strangely of my ward, a young woman from a performing family whose father taught her emotional control much like yours."

"Indeed?" Sarek said, raising an eyebrow. "I would find it intriguing to meet this young woman. I believe you would call it 'like a taste of home'."

"Would you care to join us for dinner -- with the President's permission, of course?" Dr. Tolhurst asked.

"That would be acceptable," Sarek responded formally.

"Your salads and vegetables were most acceptable," Sarek complimented Lavinia.

"Was there something wrong with the roast, to your taste, sir? I could not help noticing that you ate scarcely any of it." She answered courteously.

"No, not at all," Sarek said. "My people rarely eat anything involving meat; we have adapted away from it."

"Vegetarians?" asked Rupert.

"No, in the sense I can tell you mean, of its being a conscious choice. We have few meat animals, and little area suitable to raise them. So the eating of meat is confined to the nutrition of the ill, children, and certain specific events each year. In fact, we regularly had meat during my father's last illness, as a means of bolstering his fading strength." Sarek changed the direction of conversation. "I would be grateful for some time to confer with Miss Amanda, as we discussed earlier, Dr. Tolhurst."

"Of course, Mr. Ambassador," Rupert answered. "Amanda, my dear, I mentioned your father's discipline of emotional control to Sarek when I first met him, and he was intrigued, as it seems his people do something of the sort as well. He has asked for some time to chat with you, if you don't object."

"Certainly I don't," Amanda said. "It would be my pleasure to speak with the Ambassador."

"Would you care to use the parlor?" Lavinia asked. "It's right this way."

Half an hour of -- well, not animated -- discussion went on, as the seemingly emotionless Vulcan and the daughter of acrobats trained to maintain emotional reserve spoke of the disciplines they had been taught, shared childhood experiences in learning to maintain control, and generally found a surprising number of things in common in growing up on two different worlds, parts of two races alien to each other. At last Sarek noted an unusual tone to Amanda's reserve, and resolved to try something.

"Miss Amanda, the techniques we have just been speaking of are easy to grasp, once you have the basic concepts, but those concepts themselves were very elusive to me. My father used a mind technique peculiar to Vulcans, called the mind meld, to impart it to me. It is very much against our ethics to use the mind meld on another without consent, except in cases of criminal behavior, but if you agree, I could use it to aid you in assimilating those techniques."

"I would be honored, Mr. Ambassador," she responded. Sarek stood, stepped towards her, and placed his hand on her forehead. "My mind to your mind..." he began the formula for initiating a mind meld.

A timeless interval later, a series of emotions flickered across the Vulcan's face. "That, then, is what she would not speak openly of. I must reassure her that I feel the same," he thought, and opened his mind to her.

As he raised his hand from her forehead, her eyes opened. She smiled, and reached out with two fingers, across which he placed two of his own.

"Shall we have coffee?" asked Rupert from the door. Amanda nodded her agreement; seconds later, Sarek did the same.

"I have not yet familiarized myself with many American customs," Sarek said a few minutes later over coffee. "What, for example, are the standard mating customs among your people?"

Lavinia flushed; Rupert chuckled. "We normally do not refer to it as 'mating' though everyone knows that's the goal. 'Courting' is the normal term. I believe generally a young man calls on a young woman whom he believes is receptive to his suit, and they meet in chaperoned circumstances. A more modern trend, decried by the old fuddy-duddies, is for the couple to go somewhere together, a moving picture show or a dance for example --this is referred to, I believe, as 'a date.' In the course of time, the young man will ask the young woman's father for her hand in marriage, generally after ascertaining that she wishes him to do so."

"And how old is the young woman at that time?" Sarek asked casually.

"Oh, anywhere from eighteen, which is considered quite young, to well into her twenties," Rupert answered. Sarek nodded.

"What is the custom among your people?" Rupert asked.

"Marriages are arranged between the Patriarchs of the two houses, to assure that the choice to marry is logical," Sarek said.

"Have the young couple no say?" Lavinia asked.

"Oh, indeed! It would not be logical to arrange a marriage between two people who did not wish it. The custom of arranged marriage ensures that the couple does not act on impulse, but has the benefit of mature wisdom and logic in arranging their affairs," Sarek explained.

Amanda looked up. "Mr. Ambassador, are you familiar with the concept 'orphan'?" she asked.

"No, it's a term I haven't encountered. What does it mean?"

Rupert intervened, "It is a young person whose parents have died. Miss Amanda herself is an example of an orphan."

"Then you are not her parents? What did you mean by 'ward' this afternoon?" Sarek asked.

"Dr. and Mrs. Tolhurst were named by a court to function in lieu of parents. They did not adopt me, but simply serve as guardians for me until I come of age. And while they have devoted every effort to making me feel welcomed and a part of their family, it remains true that a court could remove me from their care and send me back to that hellhole I was in before." Amanda had lost all emotional control, and was fighting tears.

"Is this true?" Sarek asked. "She has no patriarch of her family to defend her rights and assure her emotional and spiritual maturation?"

"As she said, that is my job by appointment of the court, and one I've valued. But no, I am not of her blood lineage, and it remains possible, though unlikely, that a court could reverse our guardianship."

"Sarek!" Amanda said firmly. "You are Pid-Sam of your House, is that not true?"

"Yes."

"And what is the custom when there is no adult male of a house?"

"The senior female of the house serves as Matriarch until a Patriarch qualifies by maturity and wisdom," Sarek answered.

"And is it not true that 'in all things, there must be a first'?" Amanda pursued her line of thought.

"So it is said," Sarek responded gravely.

"My house consists of myself and my younger brother," Amanda continued. "He is barely emerging from childhood, and I do not cede to him the authority of Pid-Sam. It is mine to choose, and I do so choose! Do you find any fault with my logic?"

"I find no fault, T'hy'la," Sarek said, the hint of a smile on his face. "But tell me, there are others like you who have no one to intervene for them?"

"Yes, many, and many dominated by parents who view their children as extensions of themselves as well," Amanda answered.

"In time, you and I will have to take action. Perhaps empowering the children themselves.... It will take time; I must think on this." Sarek mused.

"I believe I am missing something here," Rupert said. "I was following the conversation up through Amanda's revealing of her orphan status, then you began discussing Vulcan custom I am not familiar with."

"It's simple, really, Doctor," Amanda said. "I made Sarek aware of my precarious legal state under Earth law, and then he did me the honor of agreeing with my logic."

"I caught that, my dear," Rupert said. "But what did you prove to him by logic?"

"That he and I should be married," Amanda said triumphantly.

Clan Short Archivist Review Notes:

This is a wonderful piece of historical storytelling, thanks to this story we now have answers to several of the questions that have cropped up regarding the CSU. Thanks to the hard work of D&B we now have a Historical Backbone of the CSU.

D&B are to be commended not only for their creativity but for their attention to detail in this and their other contributions to the Saga that is the Clan Short Universe.

Humbly,

The Story Lover

Chapter 2

The Tolhurst Residence, Washington, D.C., Late Summer, 1922

"Ridiculous!" exclaimed Lavinia to Amanda. "You're but a child! How can you think to contract a marriage?"

Amanda had recovered her reserve. "Mrs. Tolhurst, there are three states in this nation where a girl my age can contract marriage. That battleaxe who was supposed to provide me with a 'proper upbringing' at the Orphanage was insistent that I was a 'young lady,' beyond the age when childish behavior was appropriate. Which is it to be? Am I an adult? Or a child?"

Sarek interjected gravely, "It is my understanding that you cannot guarantee that Amanda will not be returned to that place which she fears most. Logic dictates, then, that you support those who can guarantee that. She has sought the protection of Vulcan, and Vulcan will protect her, even if your world cannot."

"How old are you?" Rupert asked.

"Quite youthful, actually, although I have been elevated by circumstances to a role more common among my elders. I have not yet attained sixty years by Earth measurements." Sarek showed a hint of embarrassment.

"I must say that I find it ... distasteful ... for a man nearing sixty to wed a girl of fourteen. And, begging your pardon, I must forbid it," Rupert responded.

"Why might that be?" Sarek questioned.

"Why, she's far too young to fulfill her marital duties," Lavinia said with a blush.

"Oh? I had formed the impression that our races mature at about the same rate," Sarek answered. "She certainly appears to have developed the attributes of young womanhood. But perhaps you are expecting that we would engage in sexual congress immediately. While Vulcan couples can and do so, as an aspect of their union in marriage, it is only once in seven years that a Vulcan male is driven to seek out his spouse by a mating urge. And I am five years from my next *pon farr*... which can be sublimated by battle or by meditation, if needed, as I have done in the past."

Lavinia was somewhat startled by Sarek's openness about sexuality, but Rupert, with his professional training, listened with interest. "So in essence, you are taking her to protect her, with marital concerns awaiting her maturing?"

"And because he truly loves me and wishes me at his side!" Amanda interjected. "I have seen inside his mind, and I know this more certainly than anything else beyond myself."

Rupert drew into himself for a long minute, thinking back over the varieties of human experience he had encountered in his research and studies, the child brides and how their actual treatment differed

from the dime–novel horror stories, the customs of arranged marriage and how it worked.... At last he spoke.

"Sarek, I honor you for your gesture. Pray forgive my outburst."

"It is only logical to do so," Sarek answered, "since I realize that we were both concerned for Amanda's safety, according to our own customs."

"Then I must give this union my blessing," Rupert answered. Lavinia gasped. "You are clearly acting ethically, Sarek, by your own customs, and it is my duty both to my country and to my ward, as well as my intellectual desire, to learn more of those customs. I do remain concerned, though, that Amanda has made a decision based on an immature judgment that she may come to regret."

"Think back on what she has told you of her father's teaching, and her life at the Orphanage." Sarek's response was compassionate. "She was equipped to learn adult rational control at a young age, by her father's foresight, and then forced to use it by what she was plunged into at his death. Her judgment and maturity are those of a young adult. I have performed mind meld with her; I *know*."

"That is reassuring," Rupert replied. "I would like to know more of this 'mind meld'."

Lavinia was unconvinced, and angry. "Rupert Tolhurst, how can you sit there and barter away a young girl like that? It goes against every standard of proper society."

Rupert reddened, and then visibly controlled his temper. "It is not our assigned task to conform to the neighbors' expectations of proper social behavior, my dear. Our task is to provide for Amanda's safety, comfort, and happiness, to enable her to grow up into a woman capable of dealing with this world.

"Instead, we've been given the chance to guarantee that by supporting her marriage to a man who knows her inside and out and loves her. That is clear from their demeanor, emotionless as they are trying to keep it. I'd expected this day to come, sometime in the future, when some man would ask for her hand — though I must say I didn't expect it to occur so quickly, while she is still fourteen!

"By the customs of *our* society and world, I am the head of this household," Rupert continued. "And I find this totally shocking, but also the proper thing for me to support. My dear," he concluded, turning to Amanda, "you have my blessing."

"Thank you, doctor — father!" she said, allowing a warm smile to emerge.

Amanda accompanied Rupert into the State Department building. Outwardly calm, her inner feelings were a mixture of hesitancy and resoluteness. Rupert approached the front desk. "Rupert Tolhurst, to see Secretary Lansing. He is expecting me." The receptionist looked askance at Amanda. "Oh, and Miss Amanda Grayson," Rupert added. "She will be accompanying me."

Amanda looked up. "Perhaps I should be announced as Amanda, née Grayson, Ko–telsu t'Pi–Maat Sarek," she said. Rupert did a double take. "That *is* my title, as of last night," Amanda clarified.

Rupert nodded. "Please announce us as Professor Rupert Tolhurst, consultant to the Department, and Amanda, née Grayson, uh, Ko-telsu t'Pi-Maat Sarek," he told the receptionist firmly.

"Thank you, father," Amanda said with a slight smile. "How did you get the pronunciation right the first time?"

"Years in the field, my dear," Rupert said. "When the difference between an *ich* and an *ach* means the difference between an honorific and a deadly insult, you learn fast."

The receptionist, meanwhile, had been busy with what appeared to be a telegraph key. As it clattered back to her, she said primly, "Go right up; you're expected."

"Thank you," Rupert said perfunctorily. "Come, my dear."

As they entered the Secretary's office, Sarek rose gravely, and extended an arm to Amanda. She took his hand, and he guided her to a seat next to his.

"Ah, a pleasure to see you again, Amanda," Secretary Lansing said. "But, Rupert, I'm surprised you brought your ward with you for this meeting, of all meetings."

"I'm afraid I had little choice," Rupert said. "Certainly I would not have brought my ward. But the Ambassador specified as he left last evening that he wished to have the assistance of his bride today."

"Oh? When will she be joining us?" Lansing was urbane.

"She just did," said Sarek.

Rupert and Amanda both hid smiles at Lansing's reaction; Sarek's countenance was emotionless as always, but his eyes twinkled as his gaze met theirs.

"I am sure you have important matters to bring up," Sarek said. "But if you will allow me, I want to raise the most urgent issue first. On the long narrow island which juts east from your largest port city, our ships and the Andorians' detected the characteristic pulses of a *tchas-tviyan*. This is a generating device using crystals of twinned atoms of the lightest metal..." Sarek searched his memory... "lithium. It is a source of energy, a source of great power."

"That would be Doctor Zephram Cochrane's and Mr. Tesla's work, then," Lansing opined. "They are inventors of great skill, sometimes given to crackpot notions, but the sources of much of our modern progressive equipment."

"You must stop them," Sarek said baldly.

"For heaven's sake, whatever for?" Lansing asked.

"When the *tchas-tviyan* is operated at low intensity," Sarek explained, "it merely gives off power and the characteristic signature pulses that led us to discover it. But if he brings it to full power, it will ge-

nerate a *tchas-vunai*, a warping of the area around it. It is difficult to say what exactly that does when built on a planetary surface — there was never enough left of the experimental stations which tried it to determine what it was that it created. But I believe it would be logical to say that it is probable it would cause a large portion of that island to be flung into space, largely in small pieces. Although I am reasoning from early experiments on our sister planet, and I cannot be certain. However, a reasonable assessment of the evidence indicates that whatever the results, it would not be pleasant for the persons within the area of the effect."

"How large an area?" Rupert interjected.

"Oh, a circle with radius from one-seventh the width of that island to its full width."

"Between five and 35 miles," Rupert translated.

"And you are certain of this?" Lansing asked.

Sarek paused. "The pulses are characteristic of a *tchas-tviyan*. Of that there can be no doubt. As to what may happen, I rely on logic and prior experience."

Lansing picked up his telephone. "Millie, get me the White House. — This is Lansing, please give me the President. — This is important enough to interrupt. — Frank? You need to give orders to the Secret Service detachment in New York to proceed to Cochrane's and Tesla's laboratory out on Long Island, and instruct them to stop their power-generation experiments immediately. — Yes, it's critical, to prevent a catastrophic explosion. Have them contact my office. — Yes, that's direct from Our Distinguished Visitor." You could hear the capital letters in Lansing's voice. "All right, then. I'll brief you later."

"If the man is insightful enough to develop a *tchas-tviyan* independently, he would probably be an excellent conduit for technology transfer," Sarek observed.

"A wise thought," Lansing responded. "We will need to discuss the specifics of what you have to offer in that regard."

"Vulcans do not bargain with knowledge. 'Knowledge is the birthright of all,' Surok said." Sarek paused. "But it may be wise to time the release of technology, to give the planet's ethics time to catch up. That was Vulcan's problem — we learned how to destroy each other faster than we learned the reasons not to." Amanda smiled.

"First, I suppose, we should go through the formalities of establishing diplomatic relations — recognizing each other as legitimate governments, and so on. Exactly what are you Ambassador *to*, anyway?" Lansing was urbane again.

Sarek looked non-plussed. "You are here, your people express allegiance to you as their legitimate government, there are no rebellions. What recognition is this?"

Rupert picked up on that. "I believe Sarek is saying that for Vulcans, *de facto* **IS** *de jure*. I ran into this in Africa — the common view among the chiefs was that he who holds the power is the one to view as in charge. It seems a refreshingly practical view."

Amanda spoke up. "Perhaps I can clarify the other. If you send an Ambassador to the Tsar, Mr. Secretary, he bears letters accrediting him as an emissary of the United States to the Tsar's court, and would have no power to speak to, say, the new Finnish or Polish republics in behalf of America, is that not correct?" Lansing nodded. "A *kevet* — my husband's rank and duty — is not quite the same thing." Lansing's eyebrows raised at 'husband' but he didn't interrupt. "Sarek's delegated authority is limited to matters relating to Earth, or with the other interstellar cultures as regards matters relating to Earth, but within that scope, he speaks with the full authority of the Vulcan High Council. His word is their word; they trust his judgment and will honor his commitments in their name. He is not Ambassador to the United States, or even Ambassador *to* Earth, but rather Ambassador — Vulcan's spokesman — *for* Earth. What he agrees to, commits Vulcan, if it is related to Earth or to Earth's future entry into the interstellar community." Sarek nodded agreement.

"A refreshing change from men who must telegraph home for instructions," Lansing said. "So an answer from you is as though the Council you represent were sitting here solemnly agreeing to it?"

"Correct," Sarek said.

"So this High Council is, in effect, the Congress or Parliament for your entire planet?" asked the Secretary.

"Not exactly," Sarek responded. "It functions as the decision making body as they do. But it is not elected. It is comprised of the Patriarchs and sometimes Matriarchs of the Houses and Families of Vulcan. All Vulcan Families belong by blood lineage to one of the Houses. The Patriarch of any Family has a seat upon the High Council; any Vulcan can request the right to speak before the Council if he is in logical disagreement with his Patriarch, though such occasions are rare. The High Council nearly always agrees by consensus as to what the logical and ethical action should be.

"As a Vulcan, a person has immediate access to the High Council through the Patriarch of his Family and the Patriarch of his House. Families of common descent are part of a House. And all Vulcans are part of *Ektra-maat T'Khasi* — we are all regarded as sons or daughters of T'Khasi. That is the ancient name for the planet, and in days of myth was the mother goddess of our people."

Amanda interjected, "You might find it helpful to think of T'Khasi as equivalent to Mother Earth or Mother Nature — a personification not 'believed in' as a tenet of religion, but a meaningful construct to conceptualize the common relationship of the Houses and Families." Rupert smiled at Amanda's explanation.

"How do you come to know so much of Vulcan in so short a time?" Secretary Lansing asked skeptically.

A flicker of annoyance wafted across Amanda's face, before she composed herself. "When my husband and I contracted marriage, Mr. Secretary, he equipped me by mind-meld with those things which I would need to know. I have placed what I have learned for the benefit of my guardian and father-in-spirit, for the benefit of both worlds."

"It is the duty of a Patriarch to ensure the safety, welfare, and maturation of the members of his family or house," Sarek said. "I was highly surprised to learn that it is not so here on Earth, that children whose parents meet death are often treated as disposable parts, and that abusive parental behavior has

no patriarchal authority controlling it. This is a matter you should change." Sarek's demeanor was calm, but anger simmered in his eyes.

"It is not so simple as that," Rupert said. "Human cultural traits are ingrained, and many come to see their prerogatives as laws of nature. It will take much time to change any of that."

"And meanwhile, children are cast into workhouses and orphanages, and beaten and abused," Amanda threw in, with a touch of asperity.

"In any case," Lansing said, "this is a matter for the states. Just trying to pass the Child Labor Amendment, to place controls on children forced to work in factories, has strained the Administration's political capital."

"It needs to be dealt with," Sarek and Amanda said simultaneously, then glanced at each other with loving eyes.

"Mr. Secretary?" said his secretary from the office door. "Lord Irwin is here with the gentleman he spoke of."

"Ah yes, show him in," Lansing said.

A tall, spare balding man strode in, followed by a somewhat disheveled bulky man with an air of distraction. "Edmond, Myke, what a pleasure! Myke, I'm surprised to see you here in the States. Let me present to you Ambassador Sarek of Vulcan, Dr. Rupert Tolhurst of Gotham University, who is our consultant, and his ward Amanda Grayson. His excellency Edmond Wood, Lord Irwin, and Mr. Mycroft Holmes of His Majesty's Government."

Amanda bridled at that; Sarek noted it, and corrected, "My wife Amanda, née Grayson, Ko-telsu t'Pi-Maat Sarek."

Lansing and Irwin quirked eyebrows dubiously; Holmes, lounging indolently, merely had the air of noting it as one more datum.

"Mr. Secretary," Lord Irwin said sonorously and with a trifle of pomp, "I have the honor of informing you that His Majesty's Government has, after discussion, taken a decision in the sense that...."

"Oh, get on with it, Edmond," Mycroft interrupted. "Better still... Robert, you know that silly line that my brother's biographer wrote about me?"

"Sometimes he *was* the British government'? That one?" Lansing asked, amusedly.

"The very one," Holmes said. "The King and the P.M. asked me to gather and collate information about our visitors here, and circulate it among the governments who agree to his proposal for experimental 'means short of war' — something of an international information-exchange medium. My brother and I were on our way to the States anyway, and I agreed. Mr. Ambassador, I am at your disposal, your willing and enthusiastic student."

Sarek nodded. "That would be acceptable," he said.

Rupert spoke up. "We were just discussing Vulcan governance, Mr. Holmes. You will recall the clan structures among the Ashanti?" Mycroft nodded. "Vulcan uses that extended-family system of government, with the heads of houses coming together in a lawmaking body, the High Council."

"Not lawmaking," Sarek interrupted. "Except for some ancient statutes, Vulcan does not operate by the making of laws in the Earthly sense. The Council is the *decision-making* body, but they operate according to tradition, custom, and logic."

Irwin and Lansing looked astounded; Holmes simply nodded. "But how then is morality enforced on Vulcan?" Irwin asked. "Pure logic would not lead to necessary moral standards."

"I find it hard to conceive of a logic that does not incorporate ethical behavior," Sarek responded. "And there is no need to enforce morality; what is the proper way to treat others is logically self-evident under *cthia*, and those who transgress it receive swift justice."

"But what of sexual deviants?" Irwin asked.

Sarek raised an eyebrow. "Those who force themselves on others, by physical force or by intimidation, are executed. What other deviance is there?"

"I suspect this discussion could go on for hours," Lansing interrupted. "But unfortunately, I must prepare to receive the Chinese ambassador. May I suggest you adjourn to a salon on the next floor to continue it?"

Nods of agreement met that suggestion

Wayne Manor, Gotham, NY, two days later

A weary Richard and Bruce threw themselves onto the overstuffed furniture in the parlor. "I can't believe you own so much!" Richard said.

"I don't," Bruce answered, smiling. "*We* own that much. And anyway, most of those companies are independent firms; we're just the majority stockholders. The company boards and presidents run the companies; we just fire them if they're not doing a good job." Richard giggled. "Quite a change from the orphanage, eh?" Bruce teased him.

"Sure is! But, um...." Richard looked shy.

"Go ahead," Bruce smiled encouragement.

"Well, I was wondering when I start learning about detecting." Richard said with a little trepidation.

"Sooner than you think," Bruce answered. "I've just been waiting on some visitors to arrive that I think you'll enjoy meeting. They should be here quite soon, based on the wire they sent last night. While we're waiting, tell me what you enjoyed the most."

"Oh, the zoo!" Richard said enthusiastically. "I loved that!"

"Part of that was our gift, you know," Bruce added. Richard looked a question at him. "The big cats exhibit was a Wayne Foundation gift, and so was the chiropteran studies area. I have a special interest in bats, you see. But the most recent gift was the two penguins."

"Yeah, they were cute. Smelly, though," Richard wrinkled his nose. "I liked watching them waddle on land and then swim so pretty. What'd they say they called them?"

Bruce smiled. "Adelie Penguins, from Antarctica."

"No, I mean their names."

"Oh. For some silly reason the keeper thought it was a good idea to name the female Meredith, and the male Burgess. Who'd ever call a penguin that?" Bruce grinned.

Alfred stepped to the parlor door. "Sir? The British gentlemen are here."

"Ah, good, show them in!" Bruce said.

Alfred escorted two men in. The facial features of both showed they were brothers, but one was cadaverously thin and wore a double-brimmed deerstalker cap. The other was the disheveled bulky-looking man who had accompanied Lord Irwin to the State Department.

"Wonderful to see you both again!" Bruce said urbanely. "Please have a chair. Alfred, you know what refreshments we all take, I believe." Alfred nodded and withdrew to prepare them.

"Richard, it's my pleasure to present you to two gentlemen who know more about scientific detecting than I will ever learn: the Holmes brothers. Gentlemen, may I present to you my ward, Richard Grayson? Richard has a keen, observant eye, and was instrumental in putting away the mob which killed his parents and brothers. He looks forward to learning from you as much as I do, I'm sure."

"Well, I'm afraid I will be off on other duties," Mycroft said, "but you will learn a great deal from Sherly."

"Hardly," his brother said. "It's merely a matter of inculcating careful observation, and then the use of reason and logic to draw the proper conclusions from what you observe. And don't call me Sherly!"

"Don't jump to conclusions about what must have happened," Mycroft continued. "Observation of scene and people will tell you much more than they would like to think."

"And maintain a dispassionate air. Keep your emotions from becoming involved in your observing and reasoning," Sherlock added.

"I'm not very good at that," Richard said. "My father tried to teach us to maintain emotional control, but I couldn't do it. My sister is much better at it."

Data had been accumulating in Mycroft's mind. Suddenly it clicked. "You said your ward's name is Grayson?" he asked Bruce, who nodded assent. "Where is your sister now?"

"The courts would not let me become her guardian, so I arranged for her to become the ward of Rupert and Lavinia Tolhurst," Bruce filled in.

"Have you spoken to her recently?" Mycroft asked.

"No, I wanted to, but it'd be a long-distance call!" Richard said with an air of fatalism.

"I wish I had known — it would have been no problem for you to call her!" Bruce said compassionately.

"I think you should; there's some news you need to know," Mycroft said.

"Is she all right?" Richard asked anxiously.

"Just fine, very happy, and planning a new life you will not believe," Mycroft said mysteriously. He pulled out a communicator.

"What in the world?" Bruce asked incredulously. Mycroft asked for Sarek in pidgin Vulcan, then spoke with him quietly. Moments later, Sarek and Amanda materialized next to the grand piano.

"Richard!" she called out warmly, simultaneously with his "Amanda!" Then both echoed "I've got someone I want you to meet," realized what had happened, looked at each other, and giggled. The three adult Earthmen chuckled; Sarek's eyes twinkled in amusement.

"I do believe *this* is going to be an interesting story!" Bruce said. Sherlock nodded agreement.

Clan Short Archivist's Review Notes:

Wow this is a wonderfully inventive chapter; it fills in a lot more details about the First Contact. I guess I haven't made myself clear enough before so I am going to make sure this time that there is no doubt! One of the wonderful things about all of D & B's stories aside from the wealth of detail is their characterizations. All of their characters are 3dimensional; they all have depth and life to them. I am very intrigued by the way that Amanda is being portrayed and how she seems to grow and mature right before our eyes. The wealth of characters in this chapters presages many more rich chapters full of lifelike and wonderful characters along with the wealth of detail we have come to expect from this formidable team.

TSL Clan Short Archivist

Chapter 3

Drawing Room, Wayne Manor, Gotham, NY, August 1922

"Mycroft, perhaps you should explain," Bruce Wayne said questioningly. "If my eyes do not deceive me, Richard's sister, who should be in Washington with the Tolhursts, just appeared next to my piano with a gentleman who -- your pardon, sir -- appears to resemble a goblin out of legend. And I deduce this is in some way connected to that small device you were speaking into as though it were a telephone."

"Elementary, my dear Wayne," said Mycroft Holmes, lounging on an upholstered settle. "Miss Grayson is accompanied by the Ambassador from the Planet Vulcan. I believe they were aboard his ship, and were just transported in from it."

"Mr. Holmes, please," Amanda said. "Though I am proud of my father's name, it is only logical to refer to me by my new, proper title, Amanda, née Grayson, Ko-telsu t'Pi-Maat Sarek." Sarek raised an eyebrow.

"Ah, yes. That translates to Amanda, born of the Family Grayson, Wife of the Family of Sarek, am I not correct? My apologies; I have not yet gotten used to it." Mycroft responded urbanely.

"You're *married*?!" Richard was startled.

"Betrothed, actually, if I understand Terran customs correctly," Sarek said. "We are committed as husband and wife, but will formalize that according to the customs of my people when we return to my world."

"I find this hard to believe," Bruce said. "My understanding was that you are too young to contract marriage. And what did Rupert and Lavinia have to say about it?"

"After we convinced him it was the logical thing to do for my safety, Rupert gave his consent," Amanda answered. "Lavinia -- well, that's a different story. But in fact I am of age to marry by Vulcan standards, and, strange as it may sound, we found ourselves in love the evening we met."

"Well, I was going to tell you that Bruce has become like a second father to me," Richard interjected, "but I guess that's kind of like an anticlimax to *your* news. Are you happy, sis?"

"Very much so," Amanda answered warmly.

"Me too," Richard said. "And that's what really matters."

"'Out of the mouths of babes...'," Sherlock quoted.

Both Graysons turned baleful gazes on him. "It's a proverb from the Bible," he explained, "to the effect that sometimes you can get the greatest wisdom from the young." They smiled.

"May I have Alfred serve you a beverage, Mr. Ambassador?" Bruce asked.

"Tea would be acceptable," Sarek answered. "And just 'Sarek,' please. In view of the fact that you are now collateral members of my Family."

Amanda looked pleased and surprised. She quirked an eyebrow at Sarek, who explained, "The House of Wayne is clearly of some repute; Dr. Tolhurst indicated as much. But your brother is equally entitled to the protection of Vulcan, if he should ever need to invoke it -- as is the man who has taken him as son."

Bruce bowed gravely; as he gestured, Richard did the same. "I am not sure what that entails, Sarek," Bruce said, "but I get the impression that I have been deeply honored by you. Please accept my thanks."

"It was merely the logical thing to do," Sarek said. "You are, after all, the man who rescued my wife and..." he paused, clearly searching the right word "...my brother-in-law from the Orphanage. That was an act in accord with the deepest and most time-honored customs of my people, and deserves reward beyond what I may give."

"I have given orders that the children there receive more caring and respect, and opportunity to choose their own futures in accord with their maturity," Bruce said. "I'm glad that the children's plight opened my eyes to what was happening there."

"Then you have some authority to ensure proper care for children in this nation?" Sarek asked, quirked an eyebrow.

"Only insofar as the money I give to the institutions for their care and education gives me that authority. I wish I could do more. If this is a concern of yours, you should speak with the government." Bruce was apologetic.

"I have done that," Sarek answered with the faintest tinge of anger in his voice. "They had 'more important' things to concern them, like battleships and trade deficits. 'The most important duty of any person is to provide for the care of the young,'" he quoted.

"Surak?" Amanda asked.

"Yes, that was one of his aphorisms," Sarek answered.

"My husband's ancestor is remembered as the founder of modern logical Vulcan civilization," Amanda explained proudly.

"Have you engineers open to learning new technological advances?" Sarek asked Bruce in an apparent change of direction.

"I do indeed," Bruce answered. "Wayne Industries has a fairly large research and development staff; I find it pays for itself many times over."

"My wife," Sarek said to Amanda, "I have committed to you that we will do what is in our power to ensure no other child faces what you and Richard did. Since the government has been unhelpful, well, as the old Terran Proverb goes, 'there is more than one way to remove the pelt from a feline animal.'" Looks of bafflement on the faces of the Earth humans were replaced by chuckles. "Did I misquote?" Sarek asked.

"No, you reproduced faithfully the sense of it, but your translation back into English altered the original phrasing enough to make it amusing," Mycroft explained.

"I must work at learning the human sense of humor," Sarek said, then continued. "Mr. Wayne...."

"Bruce. Please."

"Bruce, I have committed Vulcan to your government to introduce some of our advanced technology at a controlled rate. But I did not make a commitment as to *how* I would do so. Would it suit you that I have some of our leading teachers of Technics, work with your research people to use your businesses as the primary conduit through which I keep that commitment -- and in exchange you would expand your contributions to places which provide care for children?"

"It would be my great pleasure, Sarek," Bruce said. Richard and Amanda were beaming. "Is it possible that you and Amanda would join us for dinner, and, if I may be so bold, for the evening as well?"

"Making the acquaintance of my brother-in-law and his *a'nirih* is an order of magnitude more important than any other task at present," Sarek responded.

Seeing the looks of consternation, Amanda explained, "*A'nirih* means 'nurturing father,' a person who fills the role of father to a son or daughter though not in that blood relationship. Father was your *sa'mekh*, Richard; Bruce is now your *a'nirih*."

Alfred came to the drawing room door just then. "Beg pardon, Mr. Wayne. Chief Moody just dropped off those parcels you inquired about."

"Ah, good -- and wonderful timing, too! With Amanda here, we won't have to express hers to Washington," Bruce said. Both Graysons were giving him inquisitive looks. "I arranged with the Chief to have what could be recovered of your and your parents' belongings brought here. It was my intent to send Amanda hers, and have Rupert bring her by when next he was in town to share out your parents' things. Now she can have them directly."

Alfred carried in two large bundles. "Feel free to look through them; I can see you're eager to," Bruce said. Brother and sister began looking through things, initial excitement turning to sentimental reminiscence as they sifted through their parents' small estate. Then Richard suddenly grinned. "Look, it's our costumes! C'mon, Amanda, let's put 'em on and show 'em off!"

"I believe I'll wait and model mine for Sarek later," Amanda said, reddening slightly. "But go ahead and change into yours!" Richard was out the door and up the stairs in a flash. A minute later, he came running back down. His acrobat's costume was close-fitting and colorful. Below, tights in hunter green; above, a tunic, cinched at the waist, with a short cape. Cape, arms and back of the tunic were also hunter green; the chest area was a bright red-orange. He posed for the assembled group, then turned an ex-

peramental cartwheel on an open area of floor, springing back to his feet and spreading his arms in a bit of showmanship.

"My word," Mycroft said, "in that costume he looks like a little robin redbreast!" Richard executed a theatrical bow in his direction, to light chuckles from Amanda and the adult humans. Sarek's lip twitched in what looked like a fleeting smile; Amanda noticed.

"Mr. and Madame Ambassador," Sherlock interjected, "if you are not pressed for time, I had intended to assess Richard's skill at detection this afternoon. Alfred, if Bruce agrees, please stay with us." Bruce nodded assent. "Richard, note the paperweight here on the table. As you go to change out of your costume, one of us will take that paperweight and secrete it upon his or her person. Your task when you return is to discover who has it. You may use any of your reading and experience to date, anything you can note about this room, and the facial expressions of those here -- but you may not ask any questions of anyone. Are you game to try it?"

"Sure!" Richard agreed sunnily.

"Then go change and come right back," Sherlock said. As the door closed behind Richard, Sherlock gestured to one of the people in the room to take the paperweight.

Richard returned two minutes later, again clad in normal boyswear. He looked around the drawing room, then at Sarek and Amanda, who had emotionless expressions -- and then at Bruce, Alfred, Mycroft, and Sherlock, who were maintaining the same deadpan visage. He glanced around again for a moment, stood in thought, then walked up to Alfred and held out his hand. Alfred drew the paperweight from his pocket, as the humans applauded and cheered him. Sarek gave him a grave, "Well done."

"Would you explain your reasoning?" Sherlock asked.

"It's simple," Richard answered. "You set a specific set of conditions -- we're sitting in a drawing room, I was to use reading, experience, and observation, but no questioning. I had no relevant experience, and observation told me nothing except for the room being the same drawing room as before, except for the missing paperweight. Therefore the answer had to lie in my reading. And it's a commonplace of drawing room mysteries that the butler did it. And you asked Alfred to stay. So I knew it had to be Alfred!"

"Well solved," Sherlock said.

"Do you plan to include Richard in your training program?" Mycroft asked Sarek.

"Training program?" Bruce and Richard questioned.

"It would of course be his own choice," Sarek answered bemusedly, "but I hadn't thought of doing so. Certainly he -- and Bruce as well -- will join us on Vulcan from time to time. But I'd intended the program for boys interested in science, and in space. Richard can do more good aiding his *a'nirih* in what we've discussed already, and preparing himself to someday take charge. I covenant that he will not miss out on any adventure, and can be more help to more children like himself and his sister, helping guide Bruce's efforts."

"What my husband is failing to explain," Amanda said, "is that the Vulcan Fleet will be taking selected human boys and training them in spaceflight, to be the initial cadre of Earth's own space fleet command someday in the future. I said we should include girls too, but a bunch of Washington bureaucrats find it very easy to not hear a 14-year-old girl."

"In time," Sarek said. "The seas did not dry up overnight, as it is said."

A village in White Russia

"My Yitzhak is so smart," the proud mother said to her neighbor. "Only three, and he's taught himself to read and do simple sums. I know he will excel at *shul* and then *yeshiva*, and go on to be a famous rabbi!"

Yitzhak basked in his mother's praise, then wandered off. The sun was setting across the fields to the west; the near-full moon had just risen in the east. Yitzhak looked up at it. 'I don't want to be a famous rabbi, with a bushy beard,' he thought. 'I want to go *there*!'

The Devonshire coast, England

It was a few hours from sunset. Arthur picked his way across the shingle at the sea's edge. Thoughts of the boy he'd seen swimming earlier swirled through his head, and caused an unfamiliar feeling in his abdomen.

To clear his mind, he let his imagination run free. First a warmer sea, in which he was diving and watching the panoply of underwater life. Then deep space, with great blue stars and fantastic worlds with resplendent names like Rhamsandron and Diaspar. But images of the boy's body kept coming back to him.

A small town in Kansas

Robert leaned back in the hammock, carefully setting *A Princess of Mars* down next to him, and began to daydream of Barsoom. The summer heat was making him sweaty, even though all he was wearing was a pair of overalls. A faint squeaking sound resolved, as it became louder, into the familiar noise of Wesley's old bike.

"Hey, Robert, c'mon! Let's go down to the swimming hole!"

Abandoning his book, he jumped up and darted for his bike. "You're on!"

The old truck rattled and rumbled its way across the rickety bridge over the stream. To its right the stream widened and deepened into a pond suitable for swimming. On the bank were two bicycles and two piles of clothing -- but no boys.

Under the bridge, Robert and Wesley hid from the sight of the adults in the truck, not wanting to be caught skinny-dipping. They were pressed up against each other near the one abutment where they could not be seen. They held their breath as the car rattled its way off the bridge and on around the curve, where cornfields would hide them from its view.

"You have a stiffy," Robert said as they emerged. "I could feel it pressed up against my bottom."

Wesley blushed. "Yeah, well, you get 'em too. And I'll bet you play with yours!"

"Yeah, I do," Robert said. "Why not? It feels good."

"Pastor Bunsen says it's a sin to play with your own stiffy," Wesley said.

"Tell you a secret," Robert said. "I don't believe a lot of what Pastor Bunsen says, It's not even in the Bible!"

"How do you know that?" Wesley said.

"I read it," Robert answered. "I like to read stuff."

Looking at Wesley's stiffy while talking had made Robert develop one of his own. Defiantly, he took hold of it and began playing with it, to see what Wesley would say. Wesley giggled.

"Wanna hear a secret?" Wesley asked. "You gotta promise you won't tell anybody!"

"I promise," said Robert, extending his pinky, bent, for Wesley to wrap his own around.

"Pastor Bensen's got a real big stiffy, with black hair around the bottom. And he shoots out lots of -- you know."

"G'wan, how d'ya know that?" Robert scoffed.

"I went to talk to him about getting stiffies, and he got his out, and you know what he showed me to do?"

"What?"

"This." And Wesley knelt in the shallow water and slipped his lips around Robert's boyhood. It felt like an electric charge went through Robert. Wesley moved his head up and down, inducing more pleasurable sensations. Robert felt his legs getting weak -- and something else imminent.

"Wes, if you don't stop, I'm gonna...."

Wesley continued to suck on Robert's engorged young penis, and within seconds Robert had the most intense orgasm yet of his young life. "Wow!" he said when he finally got his breath. "You didn't mind my...."

"Naw," Wesley said. "Can't say it tastes good, but I kinda like the taste anyway." He smiled. Then he looked away shyly, and said, "Do you think you'd be willin' to do me?"

"Sure," Robert said, and knelt down. Sucking on Wesley's slightly smaller penis felt good, felt right. All too soon, Wesley said, "I'm gonna...."

As Wesley had for him, Robert continued sucking, and moments later felt Wesley squirt something salty and sweet onto his tongue.

"That was marvelous," Wesley said. "Thanks."

"Me too," Robert said. "C'mon, that got me all sweaty again; race ya over to the willow!"

It was a balmy night, and Robert took his sleeping bag out behind the lilac bush, where he could sleep out with a little privacy from his sisters. He spread out the bag, stripped to boxer shorts, and lay down atop it, looking up at the stars. 'There's Mars,' he thought. 'Wouldn't it be wonderful if someday I can go there, like in the stories?' And his mind began to wander, remembering the John Carter stories, and placing himself as the hero, clad in a loincloth and leather belt and harness, out to defeat the evil green Martians.

Only in Robert's imagination, his goal was to rescue the handsome prince from unspeakable degradation at the hands of the savage Martians. The only problem, he recognized vaguely, is that the unspeakable degradation he was rescuing the prince from seemed to resemble quite closely the reward the grateful prince would bestow on him for the rescue. Tonight, the handsome prince had Wesley's face, and as he ran the last evil Martian through with his sword, the prince fell into his arms and kissed him "You have saved me, my hero! My lands, my fortune, and my body are yours to command!" And he noticed that the handsome prince's loincloth appeared to be propped away from his body by something quite intriguing.

Without opening his eyes, Robert's hand drifted down into his shorts, to deal with a pressing issue that had arisen there.

Clan Short Archivist Review Notes:

First of all I apologize for taking so long to edit this chapter. There was a wee bit of miscommunication on my part.

I would like to again comment on the direction of this wonderfully inventive story but that would be lying to you as I have absolutely no idea where it is going.

It is a very whimsical chapter yet at the same time a very informative chapter. Amanda seems to have grown a very stiff backbone overnight. She may turn out to be the proverbial "Iron Fist in a Velvet Glove"

I love the way the characters continue to grow and evolve and I am eagerly awaiting then next chapter.

The Story Lover

Chapter 4

This chapter was co-authored by D&B and Ilúvantír, whose contributions made all the difference.

Sarek's quarters, aboard the Va'khen-yon

Amanda walked hesitantly into the room, to find Sarek seated on a low couch. Gravely, he gestured for her to join him. She seated herself delicately, keeping no more than two inches between their bodies.

Sarek allowed himself a small smile. "Be at peace, T'hy'la," he said gently. "I sense through our *Tel-tor*, our Bond, that you desire ... closeness. It is permissible."

She sensed his emotions near the surface, and looked questioningly at him. "I had thought, my husband," she said, "that your disciplines would not allow the open showing of emotion, no matter how much we wish to show it."

"Surak was wiser than that, dear," Sarek said, his eyes twinkling. "Vulcans do not generally **repress** emotions; they **suppress** them. We know ourselves intimately, all the feelings we might express, and then we conquer them, so that they are our servants and not our masters. There is no tradition against the showing of love; the disciplines and traditions are against the expression of violent and hate-showing emotions, not of kindness and gentleness. Because love too can be a strong and powerful force, it must be servant and not master of the individual. But couples, who love in private, are certainly allowed to show that love in tender gestures to each other and to their children -- anything else would not be healthy, for the individual or for the people." He drew her to him.

Reclining against the gaunt figure of the Vulcan who was her betrothed husband, Amanda allowed herself to relax. She raised her hand and gently traced the lines of his face. As her fingers reached his lips, he pursed them and gave them the most feather-light of kisses.

"Sarek, I have something I have to ask; something I found here," Amanda asked hesitantly.

Sarek smiled, "You may ask me anything, T'hy'la."

"T'hy'la, why is there a baby on board?"

Sarek's smile faded with a hint of worry. He sighed. "He is Sybok... my son."

"Your son," she returned slowly. "You are married already?"

"No, not any longer," Sarek sighed again. "It is our custom and tradition to arrange marriages for our children, if the parents choose to do so. My father arranged a marriage for me. She who was my wife and I were logically compatible, but the... love... took a while to grow. For ten years we lived comfortably, and the feelings grew slowly. Then she became pregnant, and an undetectable condition rose up. She lost her senses, and was committed for her protection and that of the unborn."

Sarek hesitated, and then continued, "She died in childbirth, but my son was healthy. I Named him, and he has not been far from me since."

Amanda looked at Sarek gently. "You did love her at the end," she stated, acceptingly.

"Yes. She was a... wonderful person, and would have made a wonderful mother to Sybok. I try to honor that. Does this make you... uncomfortable?"

"No," Amanda smiled. "It was a bit of a shock, but no, I am now comfortable knowing of this. Would you be accepting of me becoming Sybok's new mother?"

"If you consent to it, then you will be his Ko'mekh; his mother in all regards. I thank you, my T'hy'la. You are unlike any other I have met in my life."

Feeling safe and secure for the first time since her parents' death, Amanda relaxed her emotional control. She was not prepared for the surge of desire for Sarek that emerged. Hastily placing those feelings under control, she relaxed in his hold. She allowed herself to dream, and her mind wandered. She saw a small boy, playing naked in a fountain in the open atrium of a home, and knew it for their future son. Then she saw him as a grown man, an officer in a uniform, focused intently on a bank of instruments, and felt a surge of pride. Her mind continued to wander, and she saw the naked body of a newborn boy and knew it to be her grandson. An overwhelming sense of tragedy and soul-searing sorrow came over her at this sight, and she quickly suppressed that vision and those feelings.

To shed herself of those feelings, she asked Sarek, "Tell me of this ship. What, for example, does its name mean?"

"Ah," he said, "the *Va'khen-yon*. A *va'khen* is a bird of the wastes on my world. It is bright blue in color, which hides it from its prey against the sky. It can be a fierce hunter and fighter, though it usually subsists on carrion. But the *va'khen-yon* is one of our oldest legends. The English rendering would be, I believe, "Firebird." It speaks of a *va'khen* that immerses itself in fire, sacrificing itself that its fellows may live. And from the fire it emerges renewed and strengthened."

"We have a similar fable on Earth," Amanda offered. "The story of the Phoenix is so close to that of the *va'khen-yon* that if they had not come from separate worlds, Dr. Tolhurst would probably be seeking out a common origin for them." She smiled.

"The tale of the *va'khen-yon* is tied to my own family, too. It is said that in the days before we discovered metal, combat swords were made of the strong, light bones of the *va'khen*. Later, of course, they were made of steel; and it was my ancestor, S'harien, who made the first ones. There were many metal blades made at that time, but the best, the strongest, were his; and named after him. This was still very long ago, and the *S'harien* blades were treated as mythic by the ancient Vulcans. The last *S'harien* bla-

de, which was also the *first* one ever made, perished just before my ancestor Surak passed away, but the shards of it are kept by my House. Like the *va'khen-yon*, it was prophesied to be reborn from fire and pain."

"So we too have our legends and fables," Sarek said, shaking off the 'Storyteller' mood and returning his attention to Amanda. "But I sensed in you, through our Bond, a series of hopes for the future and then great sorrow. Would you tell me...?"

He was interrupted by the ship's intercom. "*Kevet.*"

"Sarek here," he replied, the single word from the intercom having been his title, 'Ambassador.'

"The one you sent for has arrived," the voice over the intercom said.

"Ah, send her here," Sarek responded.

A young Vulcan woman of perhaps 16 walked into the room. "T'Mura, daughter of Xopak, may I present my betrothed, Amanda Greyson, Ko-telsu t'Pi-Maat Sarek. T'hy'la, be pleased to meet T'Mura. I have summoned her for the project we discussed."

"T'nar pak sorat y'rani," Amanda greeted T'Mura warmly.

"T'nar jaral," T'Mura responded, raising an eyebrow at Amanda's command of Vulcan and of Sarek's introduction.

The corners of Sarek's mouth twitched upward in a momentary small smile. "I believe it would be wise to explain your presence to each other. She who is my wife, T'Mura, is the daughter of Jeffrey Grayson. Mr. Grayson and his family were what humans term "acrobats" -- that is, they developed their agility and coordination to a degree rare among humans, and then performed feats of agility before audiences to earn their sustenance. But Mr. Greyson also developed, and taught Amanda, a rudimentary form of sa'hat-nahr."

T'Mura's face, formerly composed as befit a young Vulcan woman, registered startlement at Sarek's final comment. "Surely this man is honored among humans?" she asked.

"No, kinswoman. Like our ancestor, he faced death and met it bravely. By the greatest of good fortune, Amanda was fostered to the scholar assigned to learn of the Vulcan people by the large nation on the lesser land mass, and I came to meet her at his home. She is Earth's leading exponent of the discipline, and as I conversed with her, and entered mind-meld with her, a tel-tor was formed. Across two peoples, we two are now Bonded."

T'Mura turned to Amanda, inclined her head, and made a graceful, complex hand gesture. Sarek looked on with approbation. "My kinswoman salutes you, T'hy'la, with the gesture of welcome appropriate to a senior female of one's House."

"T'Mura," he continued, "is a distant cousin, from a cadet branch of the House of Surak. Though it is fitting she be present here at Earth as a part of our House, I called for her presence for a different reason. As you know, a Vulcan is able to perform kash-nohv when in physical contact with another, as I did with you in the Tolhursts' parlor. And for those who are Bonded, the tel-tor permits kash-naf, mind touch, at a distance. However, there are limitations. I could not, for example, use my mental abilities to read the mind of your brother down there in Gotham."

"T'Mura can. She is one of a bare dozen Vulcans who are able to make mental contact at a distance. She has spent the last six years training her skills. Now it is time to put them to use."

T'Mura looked at Sarek. "How may I serve Ek'tra-maat T'khasi?"

"I have seen and heard that phrase before, my husband," Amanda interjected. "The time has never been right to ask its meaning, but it appears to be something your people love and give their allegiance to. Is it acceptable to explain it now?"

"It is logical," Sarek said. "Vulcans do not have nations, states, and tribes as do humans. Our allegiance is first to the Family, the Pi-maat, then to the House, the Kalek-maat. This resembles your peoples' ties to their own extended families, and to their clans and lineages. Some far-sighted humans today speak of the 'brotherhood of man' as something to be sought after, beyond allegiance to family and nation. For a Vulcan, though, such a concept is a present reality. All Vulcans are, simply because they are Vulcans, members of Ek'tra-maat T'Khasi, the House of Houses, the children of T'Khasi -- all the Vulcan people. The Vulcan Defense and Exploration Forces swear allegiance to Ek'tra-maat T'Khasi because that oath binds them to the good of the Vulcan people."

"'Who serves my father as a son is surely kin to me,' as the old poem goes," Amanda said in comprehension. "Thank you, husband."

"T'Mura, what my colleague from Andoria and I discovered when we arrived at Earth was ... unexpected. Like Vulcans and Andorians, Earth humans are a violent people. They had concluded a Great War six years before. But they have continued to experiment and develop means of living together and resolving conflict beyond c'thia and sa'hat-nahr, or the Warrior Code of Honor of Andoria. We both saw the potential for both our peoples and for the greater good of all sentient beings in learning from them."

"To this end, we agreed with their governments to adopt a pose of covert observing of humanity as they evolve these tools. We revealed ourselves only to a handful of government leaders in each of the major nations. And they will work with us, and keep our presence secret, if we do two things for them: gradually introduce technological advances to them, and train some of their young people. They seek to catch up with Vulcan, Andoria, and Tellar Prime as quickly as possible -- and that means, among other things, space flight. Your task, T'Mura, is to read young humans, seeking for the ones with stukh-aitlun, the desire for space. In addition, you will guide our scholars as they seek to understand human ways, from what you learn of humanity as you do your readings."

"My wife," Sarek continued formally, "it is my desire, if you find it logical, that you aid T'Mura in understanding your people, equipped, as you are, with unique knowledge of both cultures from having been raised in one and learning of the other through our Bond. Thus our union will not only be one between us as individuals, but also betoken and embody the union of our peoples as time progresses." Amanda nodded assent.

"T'Mura," he continued, "prepare yourself. There is another fact you must know, one which is shocking." She composed herself. "Among humans, the means of protecting the young and assuring their nurture and care is *completely* in the hands of the parents themselves, with no fall back if they fail from House or government. Neglect is common, where children are seen as a nuisance or their own parents are deceased. Abuse is rarer, but not punished as sternly as Vulcan would." T'Mura started, and involuntarily raised her hand to her mouth. "My own t'hy'la and her brother were among those neglected and left without nurture, after their parents' deaths. I have committed to her, with the full promise of our House, that we will change that. It may take a long time, but we will bring an end to that outrage. To this I have committed our House."

T'Mura nodded. "It is acceptable and logical to do so, Kalek-sam."

"Thank you," Sarek said. "I had expected no less." Turning to Amanda, he said, "My kinswoman sees and accepts the logic of our wish to end child abuse and neglect on Earth, and assents to my wish as head of her House. It may take decades for our work to bear fruit, t'hy'la, but it begins now."

"What I need from you, now, Amanda, is your assistance in devising a means by which T'Mura may travel Earth without revealing our people's presence to the general populace before the time is ripe." With that, the Vulcan diplomat and the two teenage girls, one human and one Vulcan, began to brainstorm the question.

"Richard," Bruce said, "I believe the time has come to show you the bat cave." He smiled, and motioned the boy to follow.

They descended to the basement of Wayne Manor; Bruce pressed against a section of wall, which opened, revealing a circular staircase leading down. "Some day I need to arrange to have an elevator installed here. But one thing at a time...."

Richard excitedly followed Bruce down the hidden staircase, which led over 100 yards straight down. At its bottom, they followed a natural rock-hewn tunnel. At its end was a cavern, dimly lit by a natural opening, a cave mouth, at some distance from where they had emerged. Bruce walked over to an area where the cave roof hung low. He gestured to a small brown object hanging from the roof. "Little brown bat," he said. "There are over a million of them nesting in here."

"It's cute!" Richard said. "Like a little mouse with wings! I thought bats were supposed to be ugly."

"Some of them do look that way, by human standards," Bruce said. "But it's a part of what they use to catch insects." He walked down the cavern floor; Richard, fascinated, followed. "Hundreds more bats, roosting up there," he said, pointing at a high area of roof. "I found this when I was ten, and had the staircase put in to be able to get down here from the house, when I inherited Wayne Manor."

After a time while Richard excitedly explored the cave, they made their way back along the passage to the stairwell, and started the climb back up it.

"Sir?" Alfred said as they entered Bruce's study. "I received a call while you were Down Below. The Satos will be in town tomorrow, and would like to call upon you."

"Excellent!" Bruce said. "Ring up Jonathan and see if he can join us! It was thanks to him that we have Mr and Mrs Sato here, after all."

"Can I invite Sis and Sarek, too?" Richard asked.

"If Sarek's willing, I see no reason why not," Bruce said. "Remember that Vulcan wants to keep their presence secret, but you can assure them that the Satos and Jonathan Archer are trustworthy."

Next Day:

Jonathan Archer and his teenage friend and 'brother' Charles 'Trip' Tucker were seated in the waiting room of Wayne Manor talking quietly, while another teenager, Malcolm Reed, was examining a nearby suit of armor.

"Why did Uncle Bruce sound funny when he talked to us yesterday, Jon?" Trip asked his older friend.

Jonathan smiled, "I have no idea, but I know that when he gets like this, it's always fun!"

Malcolm chuckled. "He's as nuts as his collection; that's why I get along well with him," he grinned as he hefted a broadsword down from the wall.

"We don't say nuts; we say mad, Malcolm!" the sixteen year old Trip laughed.

"And in England, that means that you are insane, Yankee!" the seventeen year old shot back playfully.

As they continued to trade friendly insults, a young couple and a four year old little girl entered the foyer. Jonathan looked over at the Japanese family and smiled. He rose, hushed the two playing teens, and moved over to greet them.

"Welcome to Wayne Manor, Mr and Mrs Sato, and welcome to you as well, little one. I trust you had a pleasant trip from Japan?" the twenty two year old asked.

"Very pleasant, Mr Archer. Your travel arrangements and your intercession on behalf of my proposal have been well appreciated," Mr Sato replied, his words only slightly accented. His wife just smiled. "Please forgive, but my wife is not good at learning other languages, which is more than made up for by our wonderful daughter, Hoshi."

The little girl looked up at the larger young man and then moved over to take Jonathan's hand. "I like you. Can I be your friend?" she asked, her command of language far in excess of that of most other four year olds.

Jonathan knelt down and took the tiny girl into his arms. As he rose back up he said, "I would be honored, Hoshi. I would love to be your friend, and my other friends would like it as well."

Malcolm and Trip moved over and they both added their agreement, causing the girl to smile and giggle. Mr Sato grinned, "She has learned all languages, and I do mean all! I cannot understand it, but I nurture it."

Jonathan smiled, but before he could offer a response, Alfred appeared. "Dinner will be served in five minutes, ladies and gentlemen. If you would follow me, I will lead you to the dining room and to Mr Wayne."

The first thing that caught Jonathan's attention as he entered the room was the crib in the corner near the door. Being a sucker for children, he moved over automatically. One of the adults near the table seemed to stiffen momentarily, but the young lady at his side gently laid her hand on his, and he seemed to relax.

Jonathan had started cooing as soon as he reached the crib, but it choked off into a startled squeak when he saw the one year old child contained therein. "Oh, you poor thing," he said after the shock had worn off.

Trip moved over curiously, with Malcolm seconds behind him. They too stopped and looked with sadness at the deformed baby boy. "Can't anything be done to correct those ears?" Malcolm whispered, tears in his eyes.

The man who had stiffened moved over and spoke with understanding and compassion. "He is not deformed. He is as he should be. Look closer."

Looking at the man, yet not seeing due to the grief at the apparently deformed little boy, the young man and two teens nodded then turned back to examine the child closer.

The baby was awake and quite mobile. He pulled himself to his feet in the crib and held out his arms to Trip, who immediately took him into his own arms.

The baby kissed/bit Trip's cheek, bringing laughs from all three friends, but as the child pulled back, Trip noticed his lips, and the tongue that was visible as the baby giggled.

They were green.

Trip nearly fell over, and only Malcolm steadying him stopped him from landing on his arse. Jonathan had moved equally as fast and taken the laughing baby into his arms. This was a good game for the baby, it seemed.

"Green lips!" Trip forced out. "Green blood? What the..."

Jonathan checked as well, and lowered himself to the floor as slowly as he could so as not to drop the baby in shock. Malcolm whistled, "Wow. This... elves? No, wait..."

He looked at the man who had spoken to them. He, too, had green lips, a darker complexion, and pointed ears and eyebrows. "You're... you... aliens!!" Malcolm almost shouted for joy.

Jonathan and Trip stared at Sarek. "Correct. I am Sarek, Ambassador to Earth from the planet Vulcan. I am pleased to see such concern for a child not your own contained within three young men." He reached down and lifted the baby into his embrace, "This is my son, Sybok. I thank you for the kindness you just showed for him with your tears and grief. Even though it was based on misunderstanding, such shows me the goodness contained in your hearts better than any of your words would have done."

"A picture says more than a thousand words," Bruce murmured softly as he smiled with pride at his protégé, Jonathan.

"Come," Sarek continued. "Let us be seated, then we can be introduced properly to one another."

He led the three shaken lads to the table, and they all sat down. The Sato family were also encouraged to sit, and both adults were just as surprised and excited as the three younger lads. Bruce made the introductions, but left out two of the other newcomers. One was a Vulcan woman, about Sarek's age, and the other was completely covered in a robe and hood.

Sarek spoke then, "This is my distant cousin, Sub-Commander T'Pol of the Family of Tolik, House of Surak. She is in command of the Starship that brought us here."

T'Pol nodded at them, then rested her eyes on Trip. The young man blushed, yet he found he was unable to take his eyes off her; she was stunningly beautiful. Her eyebrow rose as she too felt a stir deep within her being at the sight of the handsome sixteen year old.

"The last is Doctor Phlox, from Denobula. He is on an exchange program with the Vulcan Medical Commission and is on this trip to expand his knowledge of the species we are in contact with. Doctor?" Sarek turned to face the robed and hooded 'man'.

"I shall lower my hood; please do not be concerned. I came this way so that you could be prepared slightly. I look more unlike you than my Vulcan friends do." The doctor lowered his hood and removed his robe.

Malcolm started bouncing in his chair, "Oh, wow! This is great!!" The ridges on Phlox' face and his coloration severely set him apart from all the rest of them, and his impossibly wide smile that seemed to cut his face in half made it such that he would never have escaped notice by humanity.

Jonathan could only grin and nod his head in agreement. He did not bounce, though. Not because he was twenty two and that he felt it beneath him; but due to Sybok in his arms playing with his ears and lips, giggling happily.

T'Mura caught the byplay between the children, and saw the looks from her kinswoman, T'Pol, at the young Trip Tucker. She nearly smiled, but held herself in check barely. Amanda was just as observant, and sent a quick message to her husband. Sarek did allow a slight smile.

Richard was no less observant than his sister, yet he was a typical twelve year old; he had a big mouth.

"Trip?" he asked the newly introduced teen.

"Uh huh?" Trip mumbled as he continued to stare at T'Pol.

"My sis, Amanda, is married to the Ambassador already... when are you and the Sub-Commander gonna get married?" he asked with a load of giggles.

Trip's face nearly folded in upon itself, and he started to blush all over again. T'Pol's eyebrows shot up and her jaw dropped open slightly, but no words came. Bruce laid his hand on Richard's shoulder, "That was not the right thing to say in such company, Richard. Apologize, please."

Looking at the contorted face of the blushing teen, Richard grew sorrowful. "I'm sorry, Trip. I shouldn't have said nothin'," he mumbled.

Trip could not reply for he was fighting tears. He had fallen immediately for the Vulcan commander as soon as he had seen her, but he was also aware that she was much older than he. Richard's ill-timed words only served to drive home that he was falling in love with a stranger that would never look at a kid like him that way.

Jonathan reached over and laid a comforting hand on Trip's shoulder, seeming to know what was going on in his younger friend's mind.

T'Mura, however, leaned close to her cousin and whispered into T'Pol's ears, "He has strong feelings and thoughts for you, just as you do for him. I recommend kash-nohv. In fact, I insist."

T'Pol truly showed startlement then. She nodded hesitantly, and rose to walk around to stand next to the young man who was now openly shedding tears.

"Charles?" T'Pol drew the teen's attention to her easily.

"Y...yeah?"

She drew a chair over and sat facing him, "I wish to perform what we call a Mind-Meld with you. I wish to know your heart, and for you to know mine. We will share our minds and thoughts and hearts. Do you consent to this?"

Not understanding much, Trip nevertheless nodded. She wanted to meld with him? A corner of his mind, the teenage part, grew *very* interested.

She laid her finger tips on his face, and together they shut their eyes. The others looked on as they sat there unmoving for nearly five minutes. Just as suddenly as they had shut, their eyes opened. Trip had a tentative smile on his face as he slowly, oh so slowly, moved his face closer to T'Pol's. Trembling, he kissed her lightly.

"Cousin," T'Pol said to Sarek as they broke the kiss, "I have need of your role as House Patriarch."

"Certainly, T'Pol." The Ambassador rose and came around to them both, bringing his chair with him. "Charles," he said as he addressed the blushing teen, "I am Patriarch, or Head, of the House of Surak. As such I can, in such situations, act in the stead of any Family Patriarch that is a part of my House.

T'Pol's father is not here to give his consent to a union between you two, so I shall have to act in his place."

"Union? You m...mean... *married*?" Trip stuttered in shock.

T'Pol smiled hesitantly at the young teen, "Yes... Trip. I wish for my cousin to check and see if we are a logical pairing. Do you consent to this?"

Trip nodded mutely, and so Sarek gently pulled him closer and began a mind-meld. After a few moments, he did the same for T'Pol.

He sat back in his chair for a few moments after finishing both melds before saying, "I find it logical that Charles Tucker the Third and T'Pol, child of Tolik, be joined as one. When you come of age, Charles, you and T'Pol shall be fully married by Ceremony. However, as of now, you are counted as such by the whole of Vulcan." Sarek then rose and took his chair back next to his own new wife, and resumed his place.

"We... we're really... married?" Trip whispered hoarsely, disbelief in his eyes.

"Yes, husband. We are," she replied. "We are also Bonded, and after this meal, I shall teach you how to speak to me in our minds."

"Lucky bugger," Malcolm giggled. "Five minutes in a room, and you walk out with a bit of all right? Damn you, Yankee!"

With a happy, foolish grin on his face, Trip stuck his tongue out at his friend. "Jealousy, jealousy!" he giggled.

T'Pol smiled again, then briefly looked down at Trip's lap. "I will return to my seat, or you will be unable to enjoy your meal, husband. We shall talk later; among other things."

Trip blushed as he also noticed what she had seen. He moved his chair closer to the table in the attempt to hide his problem. Jonathan repressed a laugh and clapped him on his shoulder, "Okay, lover-boy. Mom is going to freak out."

"Yeah," he mumbled as everyone smiled at him (Vulcan's not included), "Aunt Sally will have things to say." His eyes popped open. "Sir?" he asked Sarek.

"Yes, child?"

"My aunt! And uncle! Don't they have to agree? I'm still a child by law," Trip rushed out, fear at loosing his newly found love plainly seen in his eyes.

Bruce spoke up, "Trip, I know your guardians very well, and they are both part of the details surrounding our new friends as of ten o'clock this morning. I shall call them after the meal and ask them to speak to all of us, the Ambassador included. I do not think they would have much of a problem."

Trip sighed in relief as he sagged back into his chair. He raised his eyes to meet those of T'Pol, and then all doubt fled. 'Whether or not I get their approval, I will be her husband! I love her!' he thought to himself, smiling all the while.

Sarek looked at Jonathan. "Mr Archer, Mr Wayne has told me little about you and your friends, and nothing at all about the Sato family. Could you enlighten us, please?"

"Certainly, Ambassador," Jonathan smiled. He cleared his throat, "It's a long story, however, so we should eat while I tell it."

Bruce added his agreement, "That is a good idea, Jonathan. Alfred? If you could tell the kitchens that we would like to begin our meal now, we can all be comfortable for the tale."

"As you wish, Master Bruce," the older man nodded with a smile. As he passed Trip's chair, however, he leaned down and whispered, "Your room is open and ready for you, young sir. I was expecting you and Master Jonathan to stay the night; but I think you really need it for this night."

Trip blushed harder than even before as he cast a long look at his new wife. "Y...yeah... thanks, Uncle Alfred," he whispered back, another foolish grin on his face.

The meal had begun, as had Jonathan's story.

"So, after my father had started working for Wayne Enterprises, we moved into Gotham. Also, Trip's folks moved here too as his father had been employed at the same time. That was ten years ago. We were neighbors and the first time I saw Trip he was skinny dipping in the creek out the back of our two houses."

"Hey, I was six! There was water, it was hot, what do you expect?" Trip giggled in his defense.

"What's your excuse now, then?" Malcolm snorted. "You keep dragging me off to do the same thing, and we're nearly adults!"

"Boo!" Trip laughed. "Get over yourself, Limey. You like it; don't say you don't!"

Malcolm's face grew dignified, "I plead the Fifth."

"As I was saying," Jonathan said through the light laughter in the room, "I met this wet, naked kid who was busy trying to get all the water out of the creek and onto the bank, and we hit it off right away. At least *I'll* be honest and say I joined him skinny dipping. Well, there we were; a twelve year old and a six year old. And we became as close as brothers before that day was done. Just as well, really," Jonathan finished hesitantly, looking at Trip's face.

Trip sighed. "My mom and dad died not long after. Car crash. Aunt Sally and Uncle Henry took me in and adopted me, kinda. I wanted to keep my name, so they let me."

"Yeah. That was a tough few months. We grew even closer then, and I've been there for my little Trip ever since." Jonathan pulled his brother over and hugged him, then continued, "We would keep trying to out do each other, though, which means that even though there's six years between us, we did well at school. We'd be trying to get better grades than each other, and so would end up with top marks each. That is why Uncle... I mean, Mr Wayne offered to pay for my schooling when I was eighteen."

"You have been told, Jon, to call me Uncle," Bruce laughed.

"Yeah, I know, but was just trying to be polite in this situation, *uncle!*" Jonathan chuckled.

He took a few bits of his food before continuing, "So, once I aced my degree two years early, I was at a loose end. Didn't know what I wanted to do, so Uncle Bruce said he would take me in and train me to be a manager at Wayne Enterprises; at least until I figured out what to do with my life. I sort of knew *what* I wanted, but it was impossible... until now." Jonathan looked at Sarek with a hidden something in his eyes. "I wanted to go out there," he said finally, turning his face to the now darkened, clear sky outside the window. The stars above shone brightly. "I wanted... what I never thought was possible. To go out there..."

Sarek and T'Mura shared a long look, and she nodded seriously at the Ambassador.

Jonathan missed that. He carried on speaking, "Trip was also told he could join me here, as his grades were still exceptional as well. He's so into engines and cars; Uncle Bruce started giving him special training to one day be an engineer or ship designer for the navy."

"Love that stuff!" Trip bubbled.

Malcolm chuckled. "That is where I come in," he started, taking over from Jonathan. "I'm from the Empire... British Empire," he explained at Sarek's raised eyebrow. "My father is in the Royal Navy and was stationed here two years ago, so my mother and I came with him. I'm into weapons and defence stuff, and met Mr W... I mean, Uncle Bruce, Trip and Jon as they took a tour of the ship yards given over to the RN crews."

"Even though we love different things, Malc and I were best friends real quick," Trip explained. "We both loved space and Jules Verne stories as much as Jon does, so we three would sit and dream and wonder at it all together."

"Yeah," Malcolm also turned to look out at the night sky. "It's our dream..." he turned and looked seriously at Sarek and the other aliens in the room, "a dream that now seems a possible reality."

Jonathan took over again, "Last of all, is Mr and Mrs Sato. They are amazing scientists and came up with an idea for a language translator when their wonder-daughter was born. And when she started learning languages at a phenomenal rate, it only added to the idea. I learned of it, told Uncle Bruce, and we decided to bring them all to us here so that Wayne Enterprises could throw all its weight into a Universal Translator to aid our diplomats and the prospect of lasting peace on Earth. And so, here we all are."

"I am amazed," T'Pol said, "at how fast things are moving on this planet. We see most of you as fearfully primitive, yet you are making leaps and bounds in technology far beyond where you should be. I

have been told that there are groups who are into Android Construction and Positronic Networking as well?"

"That is correct," Bruce stated. "I have details that most do not on that; however, it is not an area my company works in. I keep track of all technology on earth, though, so all will be made available for review if you wish it, T'Pol."

"My thanks," she said as she continued with her meal. Conversation began between them all as they started to learn more about each other.

Suddenly, their peaceful meal and conversation was interrupted by shouting outside the dining room door.

"Madam! I will NOT tolerate this, nor will Mr Wayne! Unhand that child and desist from this unladylike show immediately!" Alfred's roar of rage was heard clearly.

"Oh, God!" Jonathan said in shock. "If Uncle Alfred is that annoyed, someone is in for it!"

"Get out of my way, old man! I will not have this nigger in my orphanage, and be damned to your precious 'Mr Wayne'," came the ugliest voice as the door burst open.

A remarkably fat woman pushed her way in dragging a terrified little boy behind her. The child was no more than six or seven years old and was certainly of African/American heritage. His upper lip was swollen and his lower split, blood drying on his chin, and an eye swollen almost shut. He was fighting and struggling against the hold she had him in, and had lost control of his bladder in total fear.

Jonathan, Trip and Malcolm were on their feet in seconds, their faces contorted in rage. They were not as slow as Sarek, however. He had started forward before the others could react, save his own kind. Both T'Pol and T'Mura held him back, barely.

"What is this?" Bruce demanded. "Miss Hopkin, what the hell do you think you are doing with that child!"

"Don't you question me, Mr High and Mighty! You waltz in and buy MY orphanage, then send me unacceptable shits like this nigger to 'care' for? I will not have this... this *thing* dilute my orphanage with his presence!" Miss Hopkin shot back, her face twisted in a grimace.

She hurled the terrified child away from her with force, and they all heard the snap of the boy's arm as he slammed into the floor and slid into the cot in the corner. His scream ripped from his throat before he passed out, and the cot tumbled, sending Sybok to the floor.

Sybok's piercing howl as his forehead split open on his violent introduction to the floor made Miss Hopkin look at what she had done, and she started screaming "Witchcraft!" when she saw the green blood fly.

She did not, therefore, see a completely enraged Sarek hurl his cousins to one side and fly at her. All she knew next was that her four hundred pounds of weight was easily lifted by a single hand around her throat. She looked into the frightening face of a totally pissed off Vulcan, and passed out.

Disgust and fury showing in his every movement, Sarek dropped her to the floor and ran over to both injured boys. Amanda was already holding a screaming baby Sybok, and Phlox was scanning and assisting the unconscious seven year old.

"Are they both all right?" he asked the doctor.

"The boy's injuries are extensive but non-life threatening. I will have them repaired momentarily. I will check on your son first, though," Phlox replied as he moved to Amanda, who was lovingly cradling the still screaming infant in her arms.

Five minutes later and Sybok was peacefully asleep, his split forehead completely healed. The seven year old was now awake, and sobbing as Phlox completed work on knitting his broken arm back together with his scanner. The other multiple injuries were gone, and all pain was over, but the visage of an alien over him had made the boy wet himself yet again.

"Jon? Can you and your friends take the child and clean him up, please? He needs your magic touch," Bruce asked.

"At once, Uncle," all three replied, and they led the tiny boy from the room.

Alfred said quickly, "I will find something for the poor child to wear, sir. I'll leave this... this *'woman'* to you."

"Okay, Alfred," Bruce nodded as he looked with distaste at the still unconscious Miss Hopkin.

"Was that a monster?" the boy trembled as they stood in Jonathan's en-suite bathroom.

Trip, who was peeling off the child's soiled clothing, answered, "No, he's an alien! From another world!"

"Really?" the child squeaked, excitement replacing fear in an instant. "Really really?"

"Yup," Jonathan laughed as he laid his own clothes to one side and stepped into the shower. Once activated and at a comfortable temperature, Trip handed him the child. Holding him on his hip, Jonathan started to wash him down gently, and was soon joined by his younger friends. Together they managed to calm the jumpy kid down and start what turned out to be a never ending well of giggles and wide eyed wondering excitement.

"What's your name?" Malcolm asked as he worked in the shampoo to the kid's short black hair.

"Travis. Travis Mayweather, 'nd I'm seven!" he replied proudly. "What's yours?" he asked, giggling.

"I'm Malcolm Reed, this is Charles 'Trip' Tucker and Jonathan Archer," Malcolm smiled down at him.

Travis smiled back, "You gonna be my friends?"

"Forever and ever," Jonathan hugged him closer, "Forever and ever."

Five minutes later, and all four were back out of the shower and dressed. All that Alfred could find for Travis was some of Bruce Wayne's old PJ's. They were well made, warm and comfortable and Travis was half asleep in Jonathan's arms by the time they all got back to the dining room.

There, they saw what was left of Miss Hopkin being swept up and poured into a dustbin....

Meanwhile:

"I cannot believe," Mr Sato stated in horror as the door closed behind Jonathan and the three other boys, "how anyone can treat a child that way!"

Mrs Sato nodded her head as her husband translated what he had said for her benefit.

"Nor can we," Sarek said softly, his fury contained but still present as he cradled his son in his arms. "I must apologize, my cousins," he added, turning to T'Pol and T'Mura. "I should not have thrown you both that way."

Both women raised their eyebrows. "We do not know why you are apologizing, Cousin," T'Mura said neutrally. "You are a father; it was expected."

"Agreed," T'Pol added.

Bruce sat down with an explosive breath. "I want to know why she thought she could get away with even half of this."

Handing his son to his young wife, Sarek answered, "I shall find out."

He lifted the woman up and touched a finger to her forehead. Her eyes shot open and she tried to yell, only to find that she could not make a sound.

Sarek stated, "I am not a demon, and no witchcraft is in use here. You have come perilously close to openly declaring war on Vulcan, and only my decision here and now will decide whether or not I and the High Council complete the offer of friendship with your world, or attack in retaliation. We do not accept attempts on the lives of children, and in injuring *my* son, you have done far more than that. You have attacked who is, in your terms, a Crown Prince."

Miss Hopkin started to silently blubber in fear at the level of anger in Sarek's eyes.

"I shall take what I need from your mind. I am taking authority here, for by the actions of three young people in the last hour I see the possibility for your world. They saw my child and were concerned and loved him. You saw him and denounced him as a demon, and your contempt for children is clear already. I will follow the possibility shown by Jonathan, Malcolm and Charles. I will, however, judge you. Know that your government has no say here, for I am a diplomat, and my word on this world holds the power of all of Vulcan."

He grasped both sides of her head and began his meld, leaving Phlox, T'Pol and T'Mura to explain to the others what was about to happen. "On our world," T'Pol said, "we use telepathy as a means of acquiring guilt and evidence for a crime. It is considered infallible and is checked by an independent telepath. T'Mura is highly trained in that field, and so will be the second to the information Sarek gains from her mind."

"The judgement given is always tailored to the crime," T'Mura completed. "and Sarek alone will decide that. Mr and Mrs Sato. I believe you should go into the adjoining room, for I expect the highest penalty here, and your child should not be a witness to this."

Mrs Sato was briefly told what was said, and immediately got up and picked up her daughter. She moved and closed the door behind her just as Sarek finished with the meld.

Sarek left Phlox to hold the now terrified fat woman while he and T'Mura joined in a far gentler meld.

Five minutes later, Sarek broke the meld and turned to Miss Hopkin. "You are guilty of murder, as well as abuse on multiple levels. Five children, whom you found to be of lesser worth than yourself, have perished by your hands. You have systematically abused most of the others in your 'care'. I find you worthy of death, and I do not say that lightly nor often."

He pulled from his belt what looked to Bruce like a small gun, pointed it at the trembling Miss Hopkin, and fired.

A green beam of light shot out and all that remained of the fat woman was dust.

Alfred, having entered the room just moments before, snorted and turned to leave, "Too kind, I think. I'll get the broom, Master Wayne."

Entering the room ten minutes later to see the remains of Miss Hopkin being cleared away, Jonathan and the others were briefly told of what had transpired. Travis woke up when the smell from the half eaten food on the table reached his nose. His stomach rumbled.

"We need more food, Alfred," Bruce laughed.

"I see that," Alfred replied, smiling. "I shall be but a moment."

The meal was slow to restart, but soon, after having certain fears laid to rest by the Ambassador, they got back to where they were before: relaxed and enjoying the company. The joy in the room, however, was emanating from the excited Travis who was seated on Sarek's lap and sharing the Vulcan's dinner, much to the Ambassador's *very* hidden amusement.

T'Mura spoke as the last of the wonderful meal was consumed, "I have scanned all five of you, Jonathan; Hoshi and Travis included. You all have a desire for space, even the youngest."

She turned to Sarek, "They are the first. They are your Beginning."

"Beginning?" Trip asked curiously.

Jonathan, however, had worked it out. "We're going into space??" he asked excitedly.

Sarek nodded. "The three of you," he pointed at Trip, Malcolm and Jonathan, "shall begin your training at once. Travis and Hoshi shall begin a lighter version of it, but will not be parted from you. In my meld earlier with T'Mura I was shown that the five of you shall work together best, so you shall learn together as well. It will take years before Earth has its first starship, but until then, the Vulcan Fleet shall have you five as members. The first of many more to come."

Bruce looked up at his protÈgÈ, "Well, young man. I think that dreams do come true."

"Yes, Uncle," Jonathan replied, tears in his eyes. "They do."

Sarek turned to Mr and Mrs Sato. "You shall also go with them as they train, for we can assist you with your Universal Translator. We will not build it for you, as that way you and your race will not learn. We will, however, examine what you make, advise and guide. Once you are at a level closer to our own shall we teach you more, rather than let you discover everything all alone. It is the sure way to know you will be careful with the knowledge you gain." He waited for a reply as Mr Sato translated for his wife.

Both of Hoshi's parents then nodded happily, excitement also in them both.

T'Mura turned to regard Phlox, "You and my cousin T'Pol; I sense that your futures are tied to those of these five. The seven of you shall embark on the beginnings of Earth's greatest enterprise."

Trip was looking at his new wife lovingly. Then it hit him. "Can we call our first ship that?" he asked Sarek hopefully.

"Explain, Charles," the Ambassador replied.

Trip giggled, "Our first Earth ship... can we call it that? The Enterprise?"

Jonathan chuckled, "Perfect! I like it!"

Sarek nodded, "I shall keep that name in mind when the designs for Earth's Star Fleet is being created."

"It's a good idea," Bruce added. "And it's a token of the past, too -- a name proudly borne by a line of famous US Navy ships; now being carried out to the stars!"

They all moved from the Dining Room and went to the Lounge. After settling down, and having fresh drinks in their hands, the conversation moved onto what was to be expected with the formation of Earth's Space-Program.

Travis was beginning to tremble in excitement. Sarek had him on his lap in a loose hug, and had to repress a smile at the young child's enthusiasm. "Travis: I gather you are pleased with the idea of going to space," the Ambassador stated.

"Uh huh! It would be so fun!" Travis bubbled. "I liked driving in my go-kart when my dada took me out to play and I always went very, very fast, and I never hit anything, not trees or fences or nuffin! Flying up there in the sky! Wow, I could fly around the moon, and all the way 'round the Earth too?"

Sarek blinked a few times as he assimilated the speed of the verbal delivery. "I believe we have the helmsman for the first starship."

Hoshi was giggling from Jonathan's arms. She and T'Mura were talking quietly and half of Hoshi's words were now Vulcan. "And we have the communications Officer within this child, Cousin," she added.

Trip grinned from his place next to T'Pol. Their hands were linked and a soft, relaxed expression was on both faces. "I know what I'm going to do; engineer!" the sixteen year old laughed.

Bruce stood up quickly. "Almost forgot; we need to call Henry and Sally Archer. I shall return in a moment."

As he moved to leave, Sarek also rose, "I shall go with you. I can arrange to have them here faster than you, I believe."

Half an hour later:

Henry and Sally Archer sat there listening to both their son and foster/adopted son spill out the day's adventure open mouthed.

"I... I'm lost for words," Henry mumbled. "I knew I was in for a treat when I was asked to work with Doctors Tesla and Cochrane on their new 'engine' by Mr. Wayne, I never expected my youngest would get married the same day!"

Trip stood up and moved over, handing the young Travis into Jonathan's arms. "Dad," he said, using the name he rarely called his foster/adopted father. "Dad, I love her. I really do. Please say it's okay? Please?"

Henry's eyes, loving as always, softened even more, for Trip only ever used 'Mom' and 'Dad' when it was a serious heart issue he wanted to talk about. "Son, if you truly love her, and if she does you, then yes, you have my consent to this."

"Mine as well, Trip." Sally rose and pulled the lad into a fierce hug. "Just make sure we get to come to your wedding! I always thought you'd settle down before Jon; he's too much of a wanderer to settle so fast!"

"Mom!" Jonathan complained with a light blush. "Please, I'll find someone soon, okay?"

"It would be illogical to deny you both the right to be there, Mr. and Mrs. Archer," T'Pol stated from her seat. "However, do you understand that by Vulcan tradition, we are married already? The Ceremony is just part of our heritage. We are allowed all rights between married couples already, including children. Do you consent to this as well?"

Henry started chuckling. "Well, well..."

Trip blushed.

Sally nodded, "Just love him, T'Pol. And if you cannot call us mom and dad, then please, use our names." She pushed Trip back slightly from the hug and looked into his eyes, "Just be happy, little man. Just be happy."

"I will, Mom. I know I will," he promised.

T'Pol stood then. "Husband, it is late. Do you wish to retire for the night?"

Down the bond-link that had been explained over the meal to the sixteen year old, Trip felt T'Pol's emotions; and he suddenly blushed again and grew shaky. "O...okay, T'hy'la," he stuttered, that foolish grin back on his face.

The others smiled benignly at him as he was led from the room by T'Pol.

Malcolm laughed, "No sleep for them, I'm betting."

"No," Bruce said, "and I wish them well."

"As do we," Henry said, as his wife returned to his side on the sofa. "For all the days of their lives, may they be blessed."

Watching from the shadows in one corner of the room, Jacyb Shifs nodded to himself. 'Good,' he thought to himself, totally concealed from view by his cloaking field. 'Very good.'

In *another* corner, phase-shifted so that the Moroi-Founder had no way of sensing his presence, someone else was watching the watcher...

Levi.

Author Notes:

When it's time, it's time. Vulcan and Earth now have ties -- let's see what happens. And the storytelling skills of Iluvantir came to bring together the group that was the nucleus for the start of Starfleet. It was a unique experience to sit here and watch him work his magic, a few paragraphs at a time, on my monitor. Thank you, Ilu! Everyone, I hope you have enjoyed it as much as B and I did.

D&B

Co-Author Notes:

D&B handed me a wonderful opener and asked that I put my idea in for the original NX-01 Enterprise Crew (From the Series "Enterprise").

So I delivered. Hopefully, you all enjoyed this as much as D&B enjoyed watching it come together, and as much as I enjoyed writing it!

Hugs!

Iluvantir

Darryl's Notes, if I may be so bold:

I must say that I am impressed. You have taken an existing premise, begun by D and B and fleshed it into a very well detailed and perfectly well adapted tale that will set the stage for many things to come. You have given us the background that explains the connections of the crew of Jonathan Archer's Enterprise and you have given each of them a purpose and the skill level to accomplish the task that has been given to them. I see this as a worthy continuation of the story which D and B began, and I can see that, together, you can bridge this history into the current timeline.

Congratulations, I am speechless. Well, maybe not quite speechless, but close.

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher

Clan Short Archivist's Review Notes:

We now know more about Sarek's earlier life than we did before and now know even more about his character and the being inside.

D&B continue to expand our knowledge of the time before the creation of the CSU which in turns expands our understanding the CSU.

The Story Lover.

Chapter 5

A few days later...

"It is the typical Vulcan/human difference in viewpoint once again," Amanda said to T'Mura. The two teenage women were sitting in a large, comfortable area on board the *Vakhan-yon*, along with the Satos, who were listening raptly. Richard, Trip, Jonathan, Malcolm, and Travis were gathered excitedly around the viewscreen at the other end of the room, which was currently mimicking a window showing the Earth below them. Hoshi was perched happily on Trip's shoulders. "This is termed the *Kebitra*

na'Shom-Ak'shem, the facility for body restoration, and it is regarded as only logical that a crewman should come here at the end of his daily work on board to perform the duty of resting his body in the company of others, so that it is properly functional when exertion is again needed. For humans, such relaxation is seen as a pleasure and reward, voluntarily undertaken when possible. Once again, we do the same things but conceptualize them in quite different ways."

"The keeping of the body to rested fitness is not seen as one's duty to self and House?" T'Mura questioned.

"No, it is an avidly sought after pleasure," Amanda explained.

"How can you sit there talking when we're *in space*?" Trip asked excitedly. "Look, you can see the coast of Africa down there!"

"For some of us, Trip, the world of the human mind is as fascinating as you find space travel," Amanda said with a gentle smile.

Dr. Phlox and Bruce entered just then. "I have what we hope is wonderful news," Bruce said smiling. "Did you all realize that Dr. Phlox is over 140 years old?"

The faces of all five teens registered shocked, incredulous looks. "He looks like he's in the prime of life!" Jonathan said. "I would have guessed him to be in his thirties, no more than forty at most."

"She who is your brother's wife is in young adulthood, 42 to be precise," T'Mura said. Trip nodded with a shy grin.

"Both Denobulans like Dr. Phlox and our Vulcan hosts have markedly longer life spans than Earth humans, I have learned," Bruce said. "Dr. Phlox and three Vulcans, two healers and a science officer, performed tests on me. Dr. Phlox believes that it may be possible to devise a course of treatment to extend our life spans substantially, to slow the aging process. He has asked all of us who are willing to become his test subjects. He believes the process is likely to work best when entered into before or during adolescence, though you and I, Jonathan, should still benefit from it. I intend to do so, and will give my consent if Richard chooses to participate."

"I had already spoken to he who is my husband about this," Amanda said. "We both find it logical that I should volunteer."

"Then I will step up too," Richard said firmly. "If the two people who matter most to me are both going to, I am too."

Jonathan and Malcolm were dumbfounded. "I think I need some time to think about this," Jonathan said. Malcolm mutely nodded agreement with him.

"Really?" Trip asked with excitement. "Count me in!"

"I had forgotten what it was like, to have the Cosmos open up to you," Dr. Phlox said. "I was just a lad of fifty when I first went into space." He smiled that amazing, face-splitting smile at the teenagers. "If you should need to talk with someone about the feelings it engenders to have so many amazing new

things possible all at once, I can remember what it was like. Do feel free to talk with me about them, if you feel it would help."

"Thank you," Trip said. "It's a lot to take in. I'm in space, and best of all married. If you'd told me this last week, I'd not have believed you!"

"Married life seems to agree with you, though, brother," Jonathan said to him, and was rewarded with a bright red blush all over Trip's face.

Richard giggled. "Well, the same could be said for you, my brother," Amanda said to him. His laughter cut off abruptly, replaced by a shocked look. "I can see how you feel about Bruce," she continued, "and I could not be happier for you. Love takes many forms, I've found, and I'm glad you have someone who fulfills you. It frees me, as well, so that I can focus on building a life with he who is now my husband, and not have to worry about your future happiness." She stepped over and embraced her younger brother.

Bruce's expression was nearly equally shocked. "I hope you don't think....," he began.

Amanda cut him off. "I know you would never harm my brother, in any way," she said to him. "That's enough for me. There is far too much hatred and uncaring in the world, without worrying whether someone else's love measures up to some abstract standard. Besides," she continued laughingly, "all those abstract standards come from Plato, and he certainly would have approved."

Jonathan began to ask a question, but before he had had a chance to formulate his thought, Sarek walked in, accompanied by T'Pol and another Vulcan man.

"Ch'mur'yek," Amanda acknowledged him. He made the ritualized response to a senior female of one's House back to her.

"I have come," Sarek said, "to let you all know that all is in readiness. Tomorrow, if none of you object, Ch'mur'yek will assume command of the *Vakhan-yon*, and you who are the First, with Mr. And Mrs. Sato, will go to Vulcan in the courier ship which brought T'Mura."

Trip was shocked and angry. "You are relieving T'Pol of command?"

"Yes," Sarek said emotionlessly.

"Because she married me, she loses her command? That is not just!"

Amanda and T'Mura exchanged glances. "You are regarding it as a demotion," T'Mura said. "That is not so."

T'Pol spoke up. "It is the logical thing to do. Jonathan must be fitted for command, and that as soon as possible, for it will take him several years to learn all that he must know. There are many Vulcans fit for command, including Ch'mur'yek, who has been a worthy second-in-command to me. But only the *Kevet* and myself are Bonded to humans. Only we can know what a human commander of a spacecraft will face by intimate knowledge of a human mind. Therefore I am uniquely qualified to assume the responsibility of coordinating the training of Jonathan, my T'hy'la, and the rest of you for your eventual

duties, and to serve Jonathan as the experienced First Officer he will need when he assumes command of Earth's first starship. It is a great honor to serve both Vulcan and Earth in that way, and I shall strive to be worthy of the trust my *Kalek-sam* places in me, in calling me to that duty."

Amanda smiled. "Humans are often rank- and status-conscious," she said. "Vulcans are not. Do not look on it as a demotion in rank. Maybe the best analogy might be to our own Navy. Imagine a Commander captaining a destroyer, who is taken from that duty because of his unique skills to teach new officers at Annapolis. Would he not see that as an honor, not a demerit?"

"Well said, wife of my Patriarch," T'Mura agreed. "I have already begun to realize how much there is to learn about how humans view the world, and how much it differs from c'thia."

Sarek allowed himself a small smile. "You speak truly, daughter of my house," he said to her.

Back at Wayne Manor that evening, Bruce collapsed in a large easy chair. "The past few days have been one surprise after another," he said. "I'm exhausted." He paused. "About what your sister said..." he began.

Richard found a sense of assurance within himself that had not been there a week previously. Resolutely he stepped over, laid an index finger across Bruce's lips, and sat, balancing half on one of Bruce's legs and half on the chair's plush arm. "You have shown me nothing but love and caring, ever since you rescued me from the orphanage," he said to his guardian. "I know that you will never hurt me, and I've come to love you deeply – just as you had said you hoped, that first night, remember?" He snuggled in closer. They sat, speaking of feelings and enjoying each other's closeness, for a time.

At last Bruce turned Richard's face to him and said, quite seriously, "I don't know if you realize what **you've** given **me**. Before you came here, I was going through the motions, trying to help others escape what fate had dealt me. But with you as a part of my life, it feels like it's been renewed, like sunlight shining in dark, cobwebby nooks within me for the first time since my parents died. If you hadn't come into my life, I might have gone on, hardening my heart, becoming a dark knight seeking nothing but revenge on the criminals who had destroyed my family. With you, now, there's a new hope, a sense that a life of happiness and love is possible."

"A dark knight seeking revenge?" Richard said. "What a batty idea?"

"Yes," Bruce said, smiling. "Thanks to you, I have a happier future."

Two days later: Vulcan Transport, Six Hours from the Vulcan System, 40 Eridani A

"Did you have trouble sleeping, Charles?" T'Pol asked, her eyes still closed.

Trip was on his side and propped up on his elbow looking down lovingly at his beautiful wife. "Kinda," he mumbled happily. "I woke about an hour ago and couldn't get back to sleep. We're nearly there!" he finished, his still boyish face beaming with joy.

T'Pol opened her eyes and regarded her young husband. "I feel your emotions clearly, T'hy'la," she said, smiling slowly up at him. "You will like my homeworld. However, the climate will take you a while to get used to."

"Yeah, it's hot, dry and arid. It sounds both terrifying and exciting! I can't wait!" he bubbled.

T'Pol smiled again, before stating seriously, "I am afraid you will just have to wait, Husband. Time will not speed up for you."

"Oh," he replied, with a shy yet cheeky grin, "I think we could do something to pass the time... since we're awake, that is..."

T'Pol smiled again... and nodded.

"When we land, what will happen to us then?" Jonathan asked the ships Commander.

"You shall be shown to the Academy, where your housing and training shall be. In a few weeks, the Ambassador and his Wife shall return, so you will have familiar faces once more," was the polite response.

"This ship is wild, Jon!" Malcolm said as he entered the Bridge. "Two days and I'm still finding things that are just magical!"

"I assure you," the Vulcan Commander offered, "that there is no magic employed here."

Jonathan laughed lightly, "Well, to any less advanced people, the technologies you have could seem magical, could they not?"

The Commander nodded slowly. "Yes, I see your point."

"Come on, Malcolm," Jonathan said, moving over to the younger teen. "I'm hungry, and I'm betting my brother is too. Let's meet up with the others for breakfast."

"I'd leave Trip alone right now, bro," Malcolm blushed. "I was heading for his room before coming here, but when I got outside... let's say he's 'busy' and leave it there, okay?"

"Ah," was Jonathan's diplomatic response as he led Malcolm off the Bridge.

Soon, they would arrive on Vulcan; and soon, their future would start to get a whole lot bigger than any of them could guess at or dare to dream of.

Wayne Manor, two days later

Sarek, Amanda, and T'Mura joined Bruce and Richard in the drawing room after dinner. "I hope you enjoyed the meal," Bruce said courteously.

"It was most acceptable," Sarek replied. "I am finding the courtesies of Earth culture most interesting; foreign though they are to Vulcan experience, they seem to fill the same role as some of our traditions."

"I would, however," he continued, "like to pursue discussion of what we may mutually do to benefit one another. Jonathan was most helpful, before his departure, in identifying technologies that might profitably be introduced to Earth."

"Yes," Bruce answered, "and my staff are even now determining how best to market them. I thank you for your assistance in ensuring with the government that my companies are sole licensees for them – for now, at least. As we add technologies which my companies are not set to market, I have some like-minded businessmen in mind to introduce to you, who will no doubt be willing to abide by your wishes."

"It was logical to do so," Sarek said, "as you have agreed to aid children in need as we discussed."

"I learned a pithy English aphorism that encapsulates your thought, my Patriarch," T'Mura said. "One hand washes the other."

Sarek raised an eyebrow. "Each acts to benefit the other, and in so doing, ensures benefit to itself. A wise saying; I must report it as an example of Earth's wisdom."

Richard giggled. "What is so funny, brother?" Amanda asked.

"I just find it ... amusing ... to see Sarek, always so grave, intrigued by everyday expressions," he answered.

"It is an example, one among many, of how we may learn from each other," T'Mura said thoughtfully.

"As we have learned the many ways of other races, our own becomes the richer," Sarek said. "Each planet contributes and in doing so receives the wisdom of others. One hand, indeed, does wash the other, across the galaxy. Perhaps someday that diversity will become infinite, with infinite combinations enriching all people beyond measure."

"Infinite diversity, in infinite combinations," Amanda said. "I do like the sound of that."

"Indeed, my wife," Sarek said gravely. "That is, in fact, how my forefather Surak formulated the concept many years ago. It is inscribed on the sigil of our House in just that way."

"To business, then," Bruce said. "I had planned, before any of this began, to take an inspection tour of my business holdings, using my private railroad car. I have moved up the date when I will do this, to next week. Richard will, of course, travel with me. And the public story is that at the request of the State Department, we will be joined by the niece of an ambassador, a reclusive young lady who seldom leaves our car, but who wishes to see America. That will enable T'Mura to pursue her duty to your House with appropriate cover to avoid publicizing the existence of Vulcan as yet."

"That plan embodies much wisdom," Sarek said. "Is this acceptable to you, T'Mura?"

"Yes, Patriarch," she answered. "I trust I will be able to contact you and Amanda for advice if needful?"

"Of course," Sarek answered.

"While I would love to join you, T'Mura," Amanda added, "my place is with he who is my husband, learning what I must know to be an effective wife for him. But I do insist that you contact me as often as you like, for advice and for reassurance. I know what it is like to be young and alone in a strange place, and while you have mastered sa'hat-nahr well, those feelings of loneliness can still become overpowering. That is one thing on which I can speak with authority and wisdom, from my own experience."

"Indeed?" Sarek queried. "Then it is only logical for you to maintain regular contact with she who is my wife, T'Mura, to maintain c'thia in order to most efficiently perform your duties."

"It shall be as you say, Patriarch and Patriarch's Wife," T'Mura said, betraying a tinge of relief in her otherwise emotionless voice.

The train ride was long. T'Mura had never felt so alone. True, Bruce and Richard did their best to make her feel comfortable and welcomed, but the oppression of being away from Vulcan, from her people, grew on her. She found the rich farmlands and forests fascinating. Though, and the great rivers simply amazing. And learning of the people, openly emotional and with tools of courtesy and respect, affection and honor, to cope with their emotions, was even more fascinating to her.

Added to her mood was the lack of any candidates. Though she could have masked herself from the impact of emotions, she – figuratively – dove into the sea of human emotion, priding herself on breasting the waves and maintaining Vulcan control. But though she scanned dutifully, no one presented himself – or herself – as having *stukh-aitlun*, the desire to go to space.

In another compartment, the Naval ensign sat boredly, reading his copy of *Amazing Stories of Super Science* over once again. He had been shocked at being abruptly called to Washington from Norfolk as he was about to report for his first tour of sea duty, even more surprised at being taken to the White House, and still more surprised at his orders. He was to accompany some millionaire, his ward, and some foreigner's reclusive niece on a train trip across country, to let no one but the President himself and an odd list of people he'd never heard of know of his mission and whereabouts, and to hold himself ready to recruit young boys, possibly way below the age for Annapolis, as special cadets, under the same level of secrecy as his own orders – even from their parents. And which boys they were to be? The ones the recluse pointed out. 'Good thing,' he thought, 'I can obey peculiar orders, just like the men on the *Starshine*'. Which reminded him of his story, and he picked the magazine up once again.

On the third day, the train entered Kansas, and began passing through cornfields – seemingly endless cornfields. The weather was Kansas-September hot, and they all suffered. Then, as they left one small town, T'Mura called out "Stop!" Bruce immediately signaled the brakeman, who brought the short train to a halt, and then it backed onto the town's siding.

T'Mura emerged from her cabinette, and motioned to Richard. "Them," she pointed. Richard jumped from the car as it was slowing to a stop, tucked and rolled, coming up on his feet and running towards two boys on bicycles.

Robert and Wesley had been heading for the swimming hole, as soon as school had let out, for a much-needed dip – and also for some badly needed relief. They'd stopped and stood, astride their bikes, as the train braked and backed into the siding. As a boy their age jumped from the train and began running toward them, they panicked and began to ride off.

Richard jumped onto a nearby fence, gauged his distance quickly, and vaulted alongside Wesley's bike. He grabbed the handlebars and said breathlessly, "Hey, wait! You're not in trouble or anything; you're needed for a great adventure!"

Robert's eyebrows went up. "Why should we trust you?" he asked, as Wesley was saying, "Where'd'ya learn to do *that*?" referring to Richard's stunt to catch up with him.

"My father," Richard answered Wesley, then "Hey, Jack, come here!", impatiently motioning Ensign Williamson over to where the boys were standing.

Robert's family were an easy sell, with their military tradition. All Ensign Williamson had to say is that he had been directed by the President himself to offer special youth cadet commissions to certain boys who met special qualifications, and they'd signed off on Robert's enlistment. Wesley's family proved a harder sell, but when Ensign Williamson walked to Western Union and returned, followed ten minutes later by the town's chubby old hotel clerk/Western Union telegrapher, bearing a telegram direct from President Roosevelt himself offering Wesley a cadet commission, they capitulated.

"That's -b-e-r-r-y," Wesley said to Williamson. "And no, my first name is Eugene, but call me Wesley; I hate that name."

"You're interested in motion pictures?" Williamson asked. "Yeah, I used to dream of some day going to Hollywood and becoming a director, making a serial adventure story."

"And you, Robert?"

"Oh, I'd always planned on going into the Navy. That's why this is so keen. It's like everything I ever dreamed of ... except sp-, uh, *astronomy*." Robert was ebullient.

"You might be surprised about that," Bruce said with a knowing grin.

"You two will want to share a compartment, correct?" the cloaked young lady asked. The boys both blushed and bashfully nodded Yes. Out of their line of sight, Richard glanced over at Bruce and grinned.

"I will explain more to you of what your training and duties will entail, once the train is again under way," T'Mura said in her precise English.

"How come you are the one doing the explaining?" Robert asked, half challengingly and half mystified.

"The answer to that is a part of the explanation," Bruce said mollifyingly.

"Space?!?! For real?!" Robert asked excitedly, as the train lurched its way across Kansas. He was nearly bouncing for joy.

"Yes, for real," Bruce answered him "T'Mura, I believe you may uncloak now." The Vulcan girl removed her concealing cloak, showing her lovely Vulcan features, pointed ears, raised eyebrows, and green-tinged lips. She blushed a pale chartreuse under the boys' stares.

"This is under top secret clearance, by direct order of the President," Bruce went on. "You can be charged with treason for telling anyone not authorized to know. But the major nations of Earth have been in contact with extraterrestrial people, including T'Sura's people the Vulcans. She identified you two as likely candidates for training in Earth's venture into space, with Vulcan help."

"How? Why?" Wesley asked. "We're just kids in a nowhere Kansas town. How could she tell?"

"Vulcans have the power to enter into the mind of another, with their consent, while touching them," T'Mura said. "I am one of a very few of my people who do not need to use touch."

"You read our minds?" Robert was aghast.

"Only your desire for space ... and a few other things," T'Mura said.

Wesley was white. "Um, uh...."

"That, too," T'Mura said, bringing forth a smile in an effort to calm these young Earth people. "My people have never found such a form of caring to be illogical or unethical."

Wesley fainted.

Kansas farmland gave way to the High Plains, then the Rockies, then the Colorado plateau and the basin and range country. No more candidates. At last they crested the Sierra and came down into the Sacramento Valley. Bruce conducted perfunctory inspection tours of Wayne Industries plants along the way, keeping up the cover story.

Modesto, California

"Watch out, four-eyes!" the tall blond boy with dark eyebrows called out as he collided with another boy almost as tall, on a trail traditionally used as a shortcut to school. The boy with glasses seethed as he picked himself up from being knocked down. Thoughts of what he could have said, should have said, ran through his mind, if he could only do it over again.

As the train rumbled down the middle of Ninth Street, T'Mura sat bolt upright. "Stop the train!" she called out again.

This time Bruce and Jack emerged from the train, and walked the half mile to the school. The combined magic of Bruce's name, owning as he did two canneries in town, and the Ensign's uniform, evoked cooperation from the Principal, and the boy was called to the office. After a brief and guarded encounter with the Principal present in which the nervous boy learned that he was not in trouble but rather being tapped for a cadetship, they walked back to Bruce's private car, and a fuller, freer discussion of the boy's future

"I'd thought about medical school, and then join the Navy as a doctor," the boy allowed. "But m'dad would never be able to send me. Prob'ly just end up living my life out here growing walnuts like him, and maybe running a store."

"What d'ya like to read?" Robert asked him.

The boy blushed. "Oh, H.G. Wells and Edgar Rice Burroughs," he answered. "My teachers all told me it's nothing fit to read, just adventure stories that could never happen."

"I'm not sure that's how I'd describe *The War of the Worlds* or *A Princess of Mars*," Robert said musingly.

"You read that stuff too?" the boy asked.

"Oh, yeah," Robert answered. "Though I think we'll find the reality is a bit different from what Wells or Burroughs said."

"We?" the boy scoffed. "Maybe someday humans will make it into space, but *I* sure will never see an alien with my own eyes."

"Come out here, T'Mura," Robert called out.

The look on the boy's face was priceless.

"And you swear to keep the national secrets entrusted in you now and in the future a sacred trust?" Ensign Williamson asked?

"I do," the boy answered.

"Now the boring part," the Ensign said. "Paperwork. First, your name."

"Lucas," he answered, then, "No, that's my *last* name. Put George in that blank."

"I believe we can accommodate your desire for a medical career, though not in the way you probably think," Bruce said. "I want to have you write to a physician of my acquaintance, named Dr. Phlox."

Clan Short Archivist's Review Notes:

This chapter is a wonderful jaunt into area previously unexplored in a CSU Story. As in all of D&B's stories the characters all have a wonderful lifelike character to them. I am thoroughly intrigued by this glimpse into history.

Unfortunately D&B have been infected by the new malady that has afflicted other Fort and CSU Authors. The malady causes authors to create a minimum of two new questions for every one they answer.

The Story Lover

Chapter 6

The shuttlecraft burst through the outer atmosphere and plunged down towards the Capital, skirting the edge of the Forge and flying towards the landing zone at the base of Mount Seleya. Amanda for once could not contain her excitement, and she bounced slightly on her seat.

"Peace, my heart," Sarek said gently as he took her hand. "All shall be well."

"I know, I know," Amanda replied, clearly excited. "I'm just looking forward to seeing my new home!"

Sarek repressed a smile as he felt her joy and impatience through their contact.

The shuttle landed and Sarek spoke again, "Remember, my heart. If you feel fatigued, please inform me at once. The air contains less oxygen than on Earth, yet the gravity and air pressure is greater. You will tire easily."

Amanda nodded seriously, trying to stop herself smiling. "I am sorry, T'hy'la, for my emotionalism, but...."

He silenced her with a single finger pressed to her lips, which he then leaned in to kiss. As he broke the tender show of affection he whispered, "You are human. You feel, and it is right for you to show that. Do not feel you need to apologize for that, ever."

Amanda smiled slightly then, "Thank you, but will I be accepted by your Family?"

"Once they see that you know and respect our customs and traditions, yes. Just do not try and be something you are not. Only Vulcans can truly repress our emotions without an adverse biological reaction."

"I will not, I promise," Amanda answer as she kissed him back.

The door hissed open and Trip and Jonathan entered. "Welcome to Vulcan, Amanda Grayson," Jonathan grinned at her.

She smiled at him, then asked, "Why the injection?" pointing at the hypo-spray in his hand.

"Tri-ox," Trip giggled. "Trust me, it'll help."

"What does it do?" Amanda questioned, looking up at Sarek.

He gave her hand a squeeze, "It is a tri-oxygenated compound that increases the oxygenation rate of your blood to compensate for our world. The Denobulans *have* to have it when here, and most Tellarites and Andorians choose to use it as well. Humans, however, are more robust in that regard; but due to your age and natural desire to be 'on the go' as all human children seem to share, this would be a recommended item for you to avail yourself of."

"In a few months, you'll be used to it; least that's what the docs say," Trip giggled.

Amanda smiled and offered her arm to Jonathan, who depressed the spray into it.

"I expected that to hurt," she murmured in wonder.

Jonathan chuckled, "So did I the first time. It's a hypo-spray and uses transporter technology to 'inject'."

"Oh, that's interesting," she said, then glanced at the open doorway. "Can we go out now?"

Trip started laughing glanced at the Ambassador, "Your missus is wanting to see her new home, Uncle Sarek. I'd hurry up and get to showing her!"

"Good idea, my nephew," Sarek replied as he stood and led his wife from the shuttle.

Amanda's first sight in that early morning sunrise was the gleaming red sphere of the sun beginning to shine around the edge of the largest mountain she had ever seen.

Mount Seleya. The site of more history, pride and tradition than could be found anywhere in the Alpha Quadrant. It gleamed, and a dark smudge winding its way from the base to summit took her attention quickly. "What is that?"

"Ish-Ashef t'Ahm-Van Buk Sa'ren. The Steps of Naming, Destiny, and Sa'ren," Sarek responded, profound respect in his voice. "On that mountain, all of my bloodline have been named in the Cavern set aside for us, and all the highest points of History happened here. Here was the final battle of the great war that brought peace to my world. The Battle of..."

'Huff... huff, huff!'

"What is that?" Amanda asked as a large bear came running over.

"It is my pet Sehlat, I-Che..." Sarek began, but the large creature had got to them and pushed him eagerly to the ground to clean and fuss over him.

Amanda started laughing, she just could not help it.

"Thank you, I-Cheya," Sarek managed eventually as the bear finally let him up for air. "I have felt your absence too."

Amanda turned back to look at the landscape before her. It was breath-taking. "Is that the Forge?" she asked, pointing beyond the mountain.

"Yes," Sarek answered as he stood back up with Trip's help. "And the Valley between is..."

He trailed off, for a dark smudge was approaching from that Valley. It quickly drew close and Amanda gasped.

It was another Sehlat, but huge and white and shining in the morning air.

Trip reached for his phaser, "Shall I..."

"No, Charles," Sarek commanded. "It is wild, but known. Lower your weapon." Turning to the largest beast that walked the Sands, Sarek said in formula, "What brings T'Kahr from the Forge; what can this Son of T'Khasi do for you?"

Time Comes. Look to the Steps of Mount Seleya. Look to your grief, your pain, your heart. Climb the Steps -- Name your Son. Climb the Steps -- Regain your Son. Behold It Comes, Need shall bring It Home. Blood of Oldest Blood, Tied to Newfound Brother. Shattered will be Whole. Time Comes

Then the air eddied and swirled... and the White Sehlat vanished.

"Who or what... What was that about?" Trip asked in shock.

Sarek glanced at where the dust eddy had obscured the departure of the largest Sehlat to grace the Sands of the Forge. "He is T'Kahr. Only the fortunate meet him in their Kahs-wan, as I once did. Never does he leave the bounds of his ancient home, bar at times of greatest need. The last recorded sighting of the 'Ancient' outside of the Forge was at the Battle of the Shattered Blade... I am unquiet at what this means."

Amanda smiled, however. "He said 'son', Sarek. We're going to have a son..."

"*The War of the Worlds* is illogical," Sanjak said definitively. The young Vulcan had become a close friend to the four human boys. They were in the lounge/refreshment area of the Vulcan frigate that had been designated as appropriate for their training.

"Why do you say that?" Robert asked. In the days they had been together, the other three boys had come to look on him as their natural leader and spokesman, and he had taken to the role like a retriever puppy to swimming.

"There would be no logical benefit justifying the effort and expense for the people of one world to invade and conquer another," Sanjak replied dispassionately. "Especially would this be true of native in-

habitants of your Mars, if there were any, attempting to conquer Earth, which has 3.28 times their native gravity."

"One world might invade in order to impose its rule or its view of what is right and proper on another," Arthur said speculatively.

"That would not be in accord with c'thia," Sanjak replied.

"True," Robert said. "But remember that not all people follow c'thia. I have learned its value to Vulcans, and I see how it might benefit Earth. But think what makes Andorians fight. They do not behave according to C'thia, but according to their Code of Honor. And as a son of a military family, I have to respect that Code."

Wesley smiled affectionately at his roommate's skill at the Vulcan-style bull session. Sanjak noticed. "Wesley, you and Robert appear to have formed a *tel-tor sa-ka-ashausu*," he said matter-of-factly. "Why do you keep it hidden from us?"

Robert and Wesley blushed deeply. "Why do you say that?" Robert asked defiantly, his mind scrambling for a way to defend his own and his boyfriend's honor that would not deny their friendship and love.

"You treat the bond between you as if it were something shameful," Sanjak said calmly. "That is not in accord with proper c'thia. We are boys whose bodies have begun to prepare for mating, and we have formed bonds of affection. It is normal to share pleasure and release with one's bondmate as you do."

George, who had had the worst time mastering Vulcan, asked, "That phrase you used, '*tel-tor*...?'"

Sanjak explained, "*Tel-tor* is the bonding of love between two people. *Sa-ka-ashausu* defines those two people as loving, *ashausu*, the same. *-ka-*, and both male, *sa-*. It means the bond of love between two boys or men, such as Robert and Wesley share, or I with Arthur."

Arthur giggled. "Like when we kissed after we...?"

"Yes," Sanjak said. "That was an example of expressing our *tel-tor*."

"And what was that phrase you used, when we both kept some, you know, in our mouths, and then shared it as we kissed?"

"Oh," said Sanjak. "I was amused by the idea that we mixed some of yours from my mouth with some of mine from yours. So I coined the phrase. *Rish* is the root for to contain, and *at'ra* is a mixture. So when we tasted our mixed seminal fluids, our mouths were containing a mixture, *rish-at'ra*."

"We need to try that!" Robert said with a grin at Wesley.

"Robert!" Wesley said, scandalized.

To Wesley's relief, the topic of discussion was interrupted by the arrival of T'Kwel. The Vulcan teacher, appearing middle-aged, was of course outwardly emotionless. But her patient and compassionate attitude toward the human boys had endeared her to them.

"Sanjak," she said. The Vulcan boy's attention turned to her. "You understand what we are to do today. Can you explain it to your *sakai-kwel*?"

"As you wish, teacher," he said efficiently to her. Turning to his friends, he said, "You have all expressed a strange paradox - a love of learning, yet a dislike of schooling. My elders have speculated that this is the fault of human education programs - along with the illogical distaste for persons of our orientation. We have all come to the end of childhood, and we have all completed the basics of childhood education."

"Sometime in this year, ordinarily, my parents, the teacher with whom I had formed the closest relationship, and my Family patriarch, would all confer with me. We would take into account my interests, what I enjoy doing, what mile stations lie along that road, the needs of Family, House, and T'Khasi, and together we would arrive at the initial steps toward what I will do as an adult. We call this the *ha'yigal-nahr'wuh*, the first career choice. As I grew to adulthood, we would confer again several times to modify those initial decisions - but that is the point at which I begin to shape my own personal future. When we had arrived at a decision with which I was happy and with which my family, teacher, and Patriarch agreed, my Patriarch would then direct that I be taught in that manner."

Sanjak drew a breath, and looked to T'Kwel, who nodded solemn encouragement. He continued, "I was unusual. I was fascinated by how Andorians and Denobulans thought, and I loved to, how can I say this, make up false legends, stories that did not happen but might have. When Earth was discovered, I was intrigued, and begged for the chance to meet some of you. I met Arthur and we became - loving friends."

"At the same time," T'Kwan interjected, "I spoke to my kinswoman T'Pol. She had been reassigned from command of the *Vakhan-yon* to train the command crew for Earth's first starship, when it is built some time in the future. And she had Bonded with one of the Earthmen, just as young Sanjak has with Arthur. I would have been Sanjak's choice as teacher for his *ha'yigal-nahr'wuh*."

"Shortly after that, I was called to meet with our House Patriarch, who is also *Kevet* for Earth. Do you understand that term, boys?"

"It means Ambassador, I think," Wesley said slowly.

"Yes, he speaks for the High Council in all matters relating to Earth," T'Kwel agreed. "T'Pol was there. I was asked to become your teacher, and to assess your skills and career interests. At my suggestion, he spoke to Sanjak's parents and his Family Patriarch, and so he joined me."

Sanjak looked eager to go on; T'Kwel held up her hand in a silencing gesture. She turned to Robert. "Robert, what do you think will happen now?"

Robert had been following the two Vulcans' short speeches intently. He paused, then said firmly, "You are going to tell us what you think we need to do for training, and find out how we feel about it."

"And what leads you to this conclusion?" she asked equably.

"What has been explained so far, by Sanjak and you, leads logically to that conclusion," Robert answered.

"And what will your reactions be, you and your friends?" T'Kwel probed.

Robert felt put on the spot by this, but he rose manfully to the occasion. "We will agree to it," he replied. "First, because it is our duty, to Vulcan and to Earth. Second, because it will be things we enjoy doing - Sanjak made that clear. And third, because it is the logical next step."

T'Kwel raised an eyebrow, then allowed a slow smile to spread across her face. "It is as you say. Today we discuss your futures informally; Patriarch Sarek and his wife will join us to make it a formal *ha'yi-gal-nahr'wuh* sometime in the next few days. He will function as your Patriarch, and they together will stand in for your parents."

Wesley demurred. "How can a Vulcan couple know how human boys feel?"

T'Kwel appeared amused. "The Patriarch's wife is human, and young. Her brother is your age, she told me."

She drew herself together, assumed her teacher aspect, and asked, "What is the main reason we have not revealed ourselves to Earth?"

Arthur spoke up. "Xenophobia," he said. "Human beings do not deal well with that which is different, even within our own species. Aliens? Vulcans, Tellarites? There is a climate of fear."

"Exactly," T'Kwel said. "And you five are our secret weapon there. Arthur, you understand communications, both the technical and the personal aspects. And you have a far-ranging imagination. Sanjak, on Earth there is a thriving industry called 'fiction' - the telling of stories that might be true yet are not, and it helps shape people's thinking. Your understanding of alien cultures and your penchant for such stories fits with these others. George, you understand social behavior, apparently better than many human adults. And you have a keen interest in medicine - one that Dr. Phlox wishes to discuss with you. Both you and Wesley are interested in the skill of bringing story to life in audio-visual form. And Robert, you are the most unusual of all. Not only do you enjoy fiction, both the reading and the creation of it, but you are from a family with a military tradition, and you are a natural leader, as you just proved when speaking for your *sakai-kwel*."

"What both Earth and Vulcan need is to foster an emotional climate on Earth where we non-Terrans are seen as friends; where differences are seen as enriching and not threatening." T'Kwel's voice was almost passionate for a Vulcan. "You have the talent and interest to create that climate, the five of you. I propose we equip you with the skills and knowledge you will need to achieve that goal. A full training in science as we know it, guidance in writing, and a vehicle to get your concepts out to Earth's public, in both written and audio-visual formats. George, you will learn Vulcan healing and be equipped to practice medicine. Now, the four of you discuss this among yourselves; I need to speak to Robert privately."

She drew him into an adjoining chamber and said, "You will be needed with them, writing this 'space fiction' - but another destiny awaits you as well. While Jonathan Archer will make an excellent captain for Earth's first starship, his leadership skills are not the same as yours. If you are willing, we have a

challenge for you. You will go through the same training as your friends, but also the leadership training through which Vulcan puts those who have the skills to lead an organisation. If all goes as we foresee, we expect to have in you someone devoted to his duty to Earth who is also a friend to Vulcan, and already a superb untrained natural leader. You would be challenged, put to the test, but our expectation is that what you would become is the leader suited to command Earth's space forces. I will not deceive you; such training will be difficult for you. But the Ambassador and I are convinced that you are the man for the job. I ask you to think about it, privately, and let me know your decision whether to undertake it."

Robert's eyes were shining. "It is both my duty and my greatest dream. I need not think about it; I accept!"

Phase-shifted to remain invisible and unheard, the three Mikyvis looked on. "I wanted you two to see this," Kyle said. "Those movies you like, Levi, the books you read in the hospital, Peter - these boys and the ones who came after them started that tradition. And Robert did go on to become the founding Admiral of Starfleet."

"The only tweak it took," Levi added, "was for me to subtly influence an Andorian crewman to notice Earth's prototype warp core undergoing its first tests, a few months back. And my Friend guided me to do that."

"If we did anything overt to influence this, we could throw Destiny off," Kyle continued. "This all needs to play out as people's individual motivations lead them. Here, look...." He abruptly shifted the three of them to another Universe.

"Woah!" said Peter. "That's a weird feeling!"

"Get used to it, bro," Levi said. "We aren't going to unlock your full powers yet, but one thing you're going to need is the ability to 'port to wherever one of us is, in any place in space, time, timeline, or Universe. Daddy'll unlock that for you soon - you won't be able to go everywhere, just where there's already another Mikyvis."

"Kewl," said Peter.

"We're hopscotching around this Universe so I can show you some stuff," Kyle continued. They made a rapidfire succession of hops in space and time, then jumped to a tropical beach before humans had found it. After a quick swim, Kyle explained, "Okay, I showed you the fate of the guys you were watching in this Universe."

"Lotsa stuff different," Peter said.

"That's an understatement," Levi giggled. "First, Robert went to Annapolis and joined the Navy. But he got sick, was discharged and went into mining and politics, and finally started writing for a living."

"Same as our world," Peter said.

"No, this time he supported himself by writing, and basically inspired the U.S. space program - such as it was. This is the world the Farnsworths came from. And here he came from Missouri, not Kansas, and died about the time Justy's boyfriend Dean was born." Kyle ticked off the changes. "Wesley's family moved from El Paso to California, not Kansas, he never met Robert until late in their lives, and he ended up producing a TV program called Star Trek."

"That's an odd name; why that?" Peter asked.

"Well, it was about the voyages of a starship in the 23rd century," Levi giggled. "The U.S.S. Enterprise, commanded by Captain James T. Kirk, with a first officer named Spock, a Vulcan...."

"You're kidding!" Peter said. "How'd he know about that?"

"...//Truth tends to come out as fiction where it is not reality//...", Levi channeled the Guardian.
"...//**Thus are people guided to wisdom**//..."

"George inherited his father's walnut farm, and ran a store as well," Kyle continued. "He never got the chance to go into either medicine or films; his son was the one who made those movies you like, Levi."

"Ooooh, strange world those films showed!" Levi giggled in a Yoda voice. "I want a Wookiee!"

"You're friends with Sehlats," Kyle said, tickling his son. "Aren't they big and hairy enough for you?"

"Okay, I saw Arthur working on radar in that war, then inventing the communications satellite. But what was he doing with those houseboys?" Peter asked.

"You're too young to know," Kyle said firmly.

Wayne Mansion, May 1926

The sight of his sister and brother-in-law materializing in the drawing room did not surprise Richard - he had received a transmission that they would be arriving. But their expressions did. Amanda was stoic; Sarek, in contrast, seemed distressed. And another Vulcan was with them whom Richard had never met.

"Richard," Amanda said, "Bruce is here?"

"Yeah, he's in his study working on some business deals while we waited for you. I'll get him." And he was gone.

"Bruce, Richard!" Sarek said as they returned. "I fear we may have done you some serious harm, from the best of motives."

"Calm thyself, T'hy'la," Amanda said to him, wrapping her arm around the Vulcan's waist. "It may not be so with them, just as it was not with me."

"What is this about?" Bruce asked.

Amanda looked at her brother and his guardian/father figure. "Do you recall the longevity treatment you underwent when you visited us?" she asked.

"Of course," Bruce said. "That was truly amazing, that your scientists could isolate a way to extend our lives so quickly."

"Vulcans and humans share similar DNA," Sarek said. "It was only logical to extend the fruits of our science to you. But I fear we have erred gravely in doing so."

"How so?" Bruce was surprised.

"You will recall there were seven of us in that initial trial experiment?" Amanda asked. "You, Richard, myself, and Jonathan, Charles, and Travis from the crew training, and also Pedro Camisaroja?"

"That's the boy from Venezuela who wanted so much to go to space?" Richard asked.

"That's him," Amanda answered sadly. "Pedro had a very negative reaction to the treatment. In the two years since he had the treatment, he has aged the equivalent of forty years. He is sixteen now, in the body of a sixty-year-old."

Bruce and Richard gasped in shock. Amanda continued, "When we returned to Earth, we made sure to bring along Xomak here, from the Longevity Institute, to test you two."

"Would you be willing to undergo a test from him, to determine your reaction to the treatment?" Sarek requested formally. "It would set my mind at ease."

"Of course," said Bruce. "Xomak, there is a dressing room to my suite at the head of these stairs that should serve as examining room for you."

"That would be acceptable," Xomak said tonelessly.

"Richard, if you would go first, I'd like opportunity to talk to Sarek and Amanda," Bruce said, in a tone of polite instruction. Richard nodded, and led Xomak to the stairs.

"Now, tell me what we can expect," Bruce said seriously.

"We have terminated all tests of the longevity treatment on human subjects, as soon as Pedro's reaction became obvious," Sarek said. "Fortunately, no other results were as dire."

"Jonathan shows only a minimal reaction," Amanda expanded on Sarek's statement. "Trip and I are aging at a rate of two years physiologically for every three years on the calendar. With Travis, it appears to have tied to what is governing his, uh, growth to manhood."

"That is to say, we will not know for sure the effect on Travis until he reaches puberty," Sarek explained. "Whatever effect it has on him will not come into play until he begins the transition to manhood."

Richard came back downstairs, and motioned for Bruce to go up. Brother and sister chatted quietly, bringing each other up to date on their respective lives, until Bruce and Xomak returned.

"It is well," Xomak said neutrally. "The boy has had the same reaction as his sister, the three-for-two effect. Mr. Wayne appears to have the same minimal reaction as Mr. Archer."

Sarek breathed a sigh of relief. "It would not have been acceptable to have been the agent of harm to the family of my t'hy'la." Xomak gestured his agreement.

"Your services are accepted with gratitude, Xomak. Peace and long life," Sarek said in dismissal.

Xomak nodded and said, "C'thia called for my efforts. Live long and prosper, Sarek, Amanda, Bruce, and Richard." With that, he called for transport and was gone.

"There is another matter I wish to inform you of, Bruce," Sarek said. "May we be seated?"

"Of course, Sarek," Bruce said. "This is your and Amanda's Earthside home whenever you choose to honor us with your presence."

"There has been some ... resistance..." Sarek began "to the arrangements I have made with Earth's governments and with you. I have informed the President, the King in London, the Tsar's People's Ministers, and so on. You too should know of it."

"As you know, Vulcan is a somewhat barren world, and we husband our resources. Not merely keeping clean places for plants and animals, ensuring wise use of ores and fertile soil, but also our greatest asset, our children. Siprak, the heir to Great House Suvak, has spoken out against considering Earth as civilized, despite your technical prowess, for the waste in your mines, your forests, your rivers, and particularly in how children are treated. There is by and large no one with authority to intervene when a child is left without love and nurture, as you did for Richard and Amanda. The Patriarch of House Suvak and I have established a, what is the phrase, *modus vivendi*, where we can work together despite disagreements, but his heir is one who eats fire and breathes flame, as the saying goes. And he denounced Earth in the High Council for its wastefulness - including its wastefulness of children."

"For now, I am supported by the other Great Houses, but I find it difficult to impress on your President and the other leaders the importance of care in the use of resources, and the importance of child nurture. Those who call for such improvements are deemed 'do-gooders' and their words discounted, it would seem."

"How can I help?" Bruce was quick to jump to Sarek's aid, since the Vulcan's concerns echoed his own, from his time as an orphaned youth and what Richard had been through.

"Continue what you are doing, to the maximum extent possible." Sarek ticked off the answers he had given much thought to. "Do not hesitate to ask for my aid, as I can bring much to bear to help you as you may need it. Let us all seek for ways to maximize Vulcan's influence, for the benefit of the children. Our family system may be useful, since we can stand a'nirih and m'aih to children as you did to Richard. Earth looks at political, military, and economic power as paramount - Vulcan logic sees things differently, and puts family foremost. T'Mura tells me that accords with an underlying human attitude - find ways to foster that attitude."

"It shall be done, my kinsman," Bruce said in one of the few Vulcan phrases he knew.

Sarek smiled and nodded. "I expected no less, and am gratified."

Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, July 1926

Eyes closed, Bruce and Richard relaxed in their swimming togs on the beach of the exclusive seaside resort, drinking in the warm sun after a refreshing ocean swim. It had been a busy couple of months, endowing new orphanages and identifying people who truly cared about children to run them, keeping Bruce's businesses running smoothly, helping the police on two strange and complex cases, and the vacation was badly needed by them both.

Abruptly, their reverie was interrupted by a man's voice calling out "Aimee! Stop!" Richard's eyes jerked open. A tiny girl was headed for the ocean, a few feet away. He jumped up and retrieved her kicking and screaming.

Bruce stood up and turned to where the man's voice had come from. A self-assured man of about 30, dressed in an expensive summer suit, was descending the steps from the seaside terrace restaurant, clearly the little girl's father. He began to walk towards the man, motioning Richard to follow with the little girl, who was now smiling at his fussing with her.

"Aimee! You bad, bad girl!" the man expostulated toward the toddler. "I've told you never to run off like that."

'Sure, a two year old is going to listen to reason,' Bruce thought to himself.

The man reached out for his daughter, saying, "Thank you, youngster," to Richard in a tone that made it seem like his due to have strangers retrieve his daughter for him. Richard looked irritated; Bruce flashed him a wink on the side of his face turned away from the man.

"No! *Wike* him!" said little Aimee, clinging to Richard.

Richard shrugged. "I'll carry her up for you, sir. Probably easier than trying to pass her over to you if she's going to fight it."

"Good," said the man. Then, belatedly showing some manners, "Thank you again..." obviously fishing for Richard's name.

"Richard. Richard Grayson, sir," he filled in.

Judging the man a bit too bossy for Richard to handle alone, Bruce stepped in, offering his hand. "Bruce Wayne, sir. Richard is my ward."

"Wayne? As in Wayne Industries?" the man asked.

"That would be my company, yes," Bruce replied.

"Ah, an honor, sir. I am Zebulon Whatley, of Whatley Cottons and Fabrics and Whatley Chandlers of Charleston. And that escapee you are holding, Richard, is my daughter Aimee." A pause, with a calculating look running across Whatley's face. "Won't the two of you join my wife and I for a pre-dinner drink and the evening meal? Sarah is just up there on the restaurant terrace with my son."

"It would be a pleasure, sir," Bruce said urbanely. And they followed Whatley up to his table, little Aimee clinging tightly to Richard. Bruce chuckled.

Sarah Whatley, also dressed in summer finery, proved to be a bit abstracted, preoccupied with the small baby she was holding, "Oooh, you are just momma's snookums, you are," and other comments in the same vein that, being merciful to our readers, we will omit recording here.

"Sit wiv *him*" Aimee announced as they seated themselves. Richard grinned and held her on his lap.

"Bourbon and branch for me," Whatley told the young black waiter. Bruce chose a dry white wine the sommelier recommended, which Sarah Whatley then decided to try, and ordered Richard a Coke.

Whatley then proceeded to talk business with Bruce, declining all attempts to divert the conversation to another topic, while Sarah fussed over her son. However, Bruce observantly noticed Whatley's eye follow the waiter whenever he passed in line of sight, which was often.

Suddenly "Gaah!" came from Richard. They looked over to see the teenager blushing and the little girl with a relieved expression on her face, as around her on Richard spread a telltale wet spot.

"Oh, for pity sake!" said Whatley, followed by "I'm sorry, boy" to Richard. He reached for his daughter.

"Don't be silly," said Bruce. "Richard, it'll wash right out - take her down to the water and wade out; there's a whole ocean there to wash it away."

"With your permission, Mr. Whatley...?" Richard asked, and, getting a nod, picked up the little girl and headed for the shore, holding her body in front of his lap area as he went.

On their return, Bruce made a point to excuse himself and Richard, promising to meet Whatley later and exchange business cards.

*With this chapter, **Origins** will end the chronological developments of the earliest days of Vulcan-human contact. Beginning with chapter 7, we will jump forward to the 1992-2003 period. If you are a CSU fan, you know some of the developments of that time, but in the old Paul Harvey line, now you'll get **the rest of the story**.*

Many thanks to Iluvantir for the initial scenes depicting Amanda's arrival on Vulcan, and to ACFan and Ilu for advice and guidance in this chapter. Also thanks to Boudreaux for the guest appearances of his characters from Dear Diary (though all but Aimee are only from a flashback there.)

Chapter Seven

February 2nd, 1992, 2:32 pm - Location Des Moines, USA, Earth, Capital Planet of United Federation of Planets

"This is a Federation Wide Urgent Broadcast. Repeat, this is a Federation Wide Urgent Broadcast. All channels are now going on hold. Please stand by for a message from the President of the United Federation of Planets and Fleet Admiral Mayweather of Starfleet Command."

"Teri! Get in here quickly!" Cheri called towards the bathroom.

The bathroom door opened and Teri poked her head out, "What? I feel like I'm going to throw up any second, Cher!"

"It's the President of the Federation and the Commander of Starfleet! It's an Emergency broadcast; you've got to see this!"

"Shit, I'll bring a bowl with me then," Teri called back.

Cheri held in a brief laugh, "Did your better half get you into trouble again?"

"No; although a daughter might be nice," Teri half laughed as she came into the living room carrying a small bowl in her hands. "I don't know what that was. I've been feeling odd for the past hour."

"Shhh, they're coming in now!" Cheri pointed at the TV.

"Mama! He's doin' it again!" the four year old Mikey cried out as he pointed to where an eighteen month old blond haired Cory was trying to give a kiss to the eleven month old Sean lying in his crib.

"All rise for the President." came an off-screen voice.

The Andorian President of the Federation came to the podium, and Commander Starfleet, Admiral Mayweather was behind him.

"Ladies and Gentlpersons, my fellow citizens of the Federation; I come before you at this time with distressing news. An accident took place an hour ago with the launch of the first test ship for the well publicised TransWarp Experiment. As we have been made aware of by Starfleet and the Vulcan High Command, this experiment is meant to provide an accelerated version of the Warp Engine, decreasing transit time between the Member worlds and colonies, help expand our discoveries of the surrounding space, and give us more power to our ships in a clean, risk free method.

"I am grieved to say that we were wrong. When the Test Ship engaged their TransWarp Engine, an unforeseen event took place, and the entire ship was lost in the largest explosion registered by Starfleet to date. At first, the only loss was material, for the ship was unmanned for it's maiden voyage, and spacial, for many subspace rifts were formed in the area around Mars Orbit. The Enterprise and the Lafayette were on monitor assignment and were the first on the scene to deal effectively with the resulting subspace anomalies. However, what they found less than twenty minutes ago raises the 'cost' of the

Great Experiment to a level we never expected. Admiral Mayweather is now going to explain what has occurred."

Teri looked at Cheri as she picked up the giggling Cory and cuddled him on her laps, "An hour ago? That was when I was first feeling sick. Are they sure that something to do with the explosion didn't affect Earth?"

"Too far out to happen that fast, Ter," Cheri shook her head as Mikey decided that since Cory was on *his* mother's lap, he should take *Cory's* mom's lap. "Aww, you're a little angel!" Cheri said to Mikey.

"Mmm," Teri murmured as they both turned back to the TV as Admiral Mayweather began to speak.

Wayne Manor

"Richard." The peremptory tone of the intercom roused Richard from his work. Reviewing business plans was not the most exciting thing he could think of to do, but keeping the various divisions of Wayne Enterprises running smoothly, without bad choices by managers without the perspective he and Bruce had gained over the years, was an unpleasant necessity.

He stretched as he started walking briskly through the mansion. Hair nearly all gray now, he looked the part of a business executive in late middle age – in his fifties to all appearances, belying his actual age of nearly 82 years.

Sitting in the easy chair that dwarfed him, Bruce looked haggard, pained. Richard went to him and ran his hand tenderly down the side of his face. "Are you in pain, *père-aimé*?" he asked. The French phrase, 'beloved father,' and its reverse, *filis-aimé*, had served them for nearly 70 years as a term of endearment they could use publicly and privately without worry. He looked. "You have your calcium-iron feed disconnected," he added reproachfully.

"Dr. Groman said I'm stabilizing, and that I could disconnect it for a few hours a day when it becomes uncomfortable. I'm still following doctor's orders," Bruce said back, a wan smile on his face.

"But why I called you is something you need to see. Slip in here," he continued. With the skill of long practice, Richard settled into the chair next to Bruce, wrapping his arm around the older man's wizened form. Using his remote control, Bruce swung the monitor screen around to in front of them, and wordlessly called up the news story.

Richard tensed up.

"I called Vulcan," Bruce said. "They're all devastated: Amanda and Sarek, Sanjak, Jonathan, and the others...."

Richard began weeping softly; Bruce held him close.

Admiral's Ready Room, U.S.S. Enterprise

Kirk looked dispassionately at the three men sitting at the conference table with him. "I need status reports, gentlemen – of the ship and also of *him*. You all know what decisions I need to face here; I expect your unbiased, *logical*" – a look as if of inner pain ran across the Captain's face as he used the word – "advice, on both."

Ensign Darryl Freeman looked nervous, not least because of the disheveled state of his uniform. "Speak up, Ensign," Kirk said. "I know you're new to Starfleet and the ship, but we have a policy: rank only matters when it's time for orders. In a way, the Enterprise is like an extended family, and you were there when you were needed. That's why you're in this conference."

"Well, sir," Freeman said, worry evident on his face, "he reacted violently the moment we came into scanner range of the 'Zhuk'Fasek', as you saw. It took both myself and Lt. Tavak to restrain him. But," he continued, not wanting to damage the reputation of an officer already a legend in Starfleet any more than necessary, "I got the sense that at some level, he was holding back his full strength. Even in his pain and rage, he seemed to be taking care not to cause lasting harm."

"That fits," McCoy interjected analytically, "Jim and I have seen him go through a lot over the years, and even in extremity, his training never completely leaves him." Turning to the Admiral, the Doctor added, "He's under sedation, Jim – heavy sedation. I won't know until he comes out of it whether he's salvageable, but my guess is that his consarn emotionless Vulcan state will be back in control when he wakes up. I don't believe you've lost him."

"Scotty?" Kirk prompted.

"Aye, Admiral," the Engineer said. "We have extensive repairs to do after closing all those rifts but they are mostly minor. What yon Vulcan caused with his wee bit of damage to the Bridge is also minor. Despite his grief, he managed, by accident or design, not to destroy anything we canna replace from Ship's Stores. My men should have the Bridge back to normal operating state within six hours – four if you should be needin' it. The rest, though - that will take dry-dock, sir."

"What I don't understand," Freeman said hesitantly, "is why a Vulcan, of all people, would lose control like that."

A look went between Kirk and McCoy at that question. Kirk responded carefully, "The Patriarch of House Suvak, his eldest grandson and three great grandchildren were on the 'Zhuk'Fasek', Ensign. The grandson, Sopak, and his three children were kin to Captain Spock, and he was close to Sopak. They were in the Vulcan Academy of Science together as children."

Freeman nodded with understanding, "Family. Yes, I have read about that, sir. Vulcans can lose control when... I understand."

Scotty also nodded, his eyes forming tears at the news.

Freeman added in a muted voice, "I still can't see how the rifts and explosion went out so far. That Vulcan ship was outside the asteroid belt, for God's sake."

"Transwarp is far more dangerous than anyone expected, Mr. Freeman. It is now in the hands of the scientists and engineers to find out why it happened," Kirk said quietly.

Scotty then added, "We have also had the final scan reports in, Admiral. 213 crew and passengers on board, and no survivors at all. 36 completely unaccounted for; totally vaporized or torn to subatomic particles by all those damned unstable rifts. Of the remaining 177, we have managed to identify them - including all six children on board, two of which were new born bairns in arms." Scotty slammed his fist into the table as tears fell freely from his eyes.

Kirk looked on with equal grief. "Scotty, Ensign; if you could go back to duty now, please. I need to confer with the Doctor."

The two men got up and left quietly, while Kirk and McCoy watched. As soon as the door closed, Kirk hit a button on his desk; sealing the room from all entrance, and also dampening the sound.

McCoy stood up and flung his tricorder into the door as hard as he could. "Damn and fuckin' blast it, Jim! How can I do my job when... that.... DAMN IT!"

Kirk ground his teeth together as he tried to hold in his screams of rage and pain.

"Spock NEVER EVEN SAW HIS SON! I... I cannot imagine... I just..." McCoy collapsed to the ground weeping profusely. "He... His wife... his son... our god-son, Jim... our beautiful little baby god...son..."

Kirk stood and moved to the window. He stared out at the stars that winked back at him. "I know, Bones. I know," he too started to weep. Then, softly and quietly, he started to recite from memory, "Thus says the Lord; He who created you, O Jacob; He who formed you, O Israel:..."

Together, both weeping men completed the scripture...

"Fear not, for I have Redeemed you; I have called you by your Name... You are mine... When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned.... "

Sarek and Amanda's Home, on Vulcan, 1995

Ensign Hassan looked nervous as they approached the entrance to the Ambassador's home. "Stop jitters," Uhura said to him. "The Bridge Crew of the Enterprise is always welcome here. Sarek and Amanda have been friends to the ship and its crew since Spock was assigned to it many years ago."

The party entered. "Greetings, Sarek!" Kirk said, making the Vulcan salute of greeting, then bowing to the Lady Amanda. Wordlessly, the others followed suit with salute and bow.

"Nonsense, James!" Amanda said. "You know you and your crew are always welcome here. Save the formalities for public appearances; you'll have enough of them, after that last exploit you and your men pulled off."

Kirk smiled. "As you wish, Amanda. At ease!" he said to the party with him.

"I see some new faces here, son," Amanda said to Spock. "Perhaps you could introduce them?"

"Of course, Mother," Spock answered gravely. "You know the Admiral, Lt. Uhura, and Mr. Scott, of course. This is Ensign Hassan al-Misr, who works the Beta shift under Lt. Uhura. And the other gentleman here is Lt. Charles Dodds, our new Helmsman for Beta shift – and his son Justin." Spock's gesture pointed out a ramrod-stiff officer in his mid-twenties holding a five-year-old boy.

Sarek raised an eyebrow at the small child, but said nothing.

Spock continued, "Chip here accompanied Jim and myself on the groundside mission, Father. It was partially his doing that the mission was successful."

"Indeed?" Sarek said. "Congratulations. Your Family must be intensely proud of you."

Amanda noted the touch of pain that came across Chip's face at Sarek's compliment. "Charles? May I ask what is wrong?" she said solicitously.

"Nothing, ma'am," Chip responded stoically.

"In my days in the circus, the appropriate term for that began with bull-" Amanda said. "I saw the look of pain on your face at what should have been a compliment. You *will* explain."

"When the Lady Amanda speaks in that tone," Kirk said with a rueful smile, "one hastens to obey. But do not worry, Chip; she will understand perfectly."

Chip looked dubious. "Sir?"

"Trust me, Mr. Dodds," Kirk said. "You are among friends here, and you can speak of your private life without fear."

Chip squared his shoulders and obeyed. "Well, ma'am, my family has disowned me, because I am gay. My husband was killed in a car accident earlier this year. My only family is my son here."

Sarek looked sternly at him. "The boy has no family other than yourself?" he asked.

"No, sir," Chip answered, nervous at Sarek's expression.

Sarek gathered Spock's and Amanda's eyes to his own, and a wordless communication passed between them. Then Spock nodded assent, and Amanda slowly developed a warm smile.

"We are agreed," Sarek said. "Charles, my Family consists in its entirety of my wife and son. There are matters of which I cannot now speak which make this act in accord with the Way of Surak. Amanda and I have long been devoted to ensuring no child of Earth is left without Family." He paused. "Will you and Justin consent to becoming our son and grandson, with us standing a'nirih and m'aih to you, and fa'sa'mekh and fa'ko'mekh to Justin?"

Kirk, Scott, and Uhura's jaws dropped. Chip looked stunned.

"This also means that both you and your son have a Family and House, a heritage, to fall back on. You have support and those who will care and look after your needs if required," Amanda added.

Spock completed, "Should the worst happen, for a Starfleet officer's life is not safe, then your child shall have a Family to fight for his rights, to protect him, and bring him up as you would want."

"I gets a Grandpa and Grandma and an' Unca?" Justy pipped up excitedly.

"You are serious?" Chip said.

"Very much so," Spock told the helmsman. "No Vulcan would ever joke about Family. It was a solemn and serious offer."

"You wish me to become your son?" Chip asked.

"Yes, and little Justy to become our grandson," Amanda replied.

There was a pause. "I'm shocked – but I accept!" Chip answered Sarek.

Spock whispered briefly to his father, and Sarek drew himself straighter.

"Then I, by the traditions and laws of my people, accept you into my Family and into my House," Patriarch Sarek intoned formally. "Charles Bryant Dodds. You are now Charles, child of Sarek of the Family of Sarek of the House of Surak of Vulcan."

Sarek then knelt down and extended his arms for the child. Chip lowered Justy to the floor, and watched as his little boy ran and jumped into Sarek's arms.

"Justin Lafayette Dodds. You are now Justin, child of Charles, child of Sarek of the Family of Sarek of the House of Surak of Vulcan," he said softly into Justy's hair.

"You REALLY my grandpa?" Justy asked with excitement and wonder as he touched one of Sarek's ears.

"Yes... and I... I would be honored if you would call me 'Fa'sami'," Sarek murmured, a catch in his voice.

Amanda closed her eyes in pain for a moment, then. "And I am 'Fa'komi', if you would like, Justy," she whispered.

"Come here, you little angel!" Amanda then said warmly, reaching out her arms to Justy.

"I ain't no angel!" Justy giggled as she drew him into a hug.

That evening

"How does it happen that you have Justin on board the Enterprise, Charles?" Sarek asked. "I was under the impression that that was generally against Starfleet regulations."

"My doing," Kirk interrupted decisively. "I must beg your pardon, Sarek, but that question places Chip on the spot. It was not long after Chip reported to Sulu, while we were still 'in port' around Earth, that Chip's husband Ben died – and we were due to break orbit within a few days. He had no caregiver whom he could trust lined up, and very little time to find one. Rather than leave Justin for six weeks with someone he did not know, after losing one of his fathers, I gave Chip orders that he was to bring the boy with him. You'll recall Starfleet regulation #314?"

Sarek thought, then nodded. "Logical."

"I don't recall what that is," Hassan nervously commented.

"It's not something you're likely to come into contact with, in Communications," Kirk explained to the nervous Ensign. "When a child of a Federation member species requires nurture from its parent and the parent enlists or is commissioned in Starfleet, the child may be carried as supernumerary crew for the period required for its nurture."

"So when Chip had inadequate time to find a reliable, caring caregiver for Justy, it became necessary for Justy's nurture that he remain with Chip?" Amanda asked in a tone of comprehension, as she bounced Justy on her lap.

"Exactly!" Kirk said.

"Unka Jim is really nice, except that sometimes he gets bossy," Justy explained. "Daddy said that's his job, and he's teaching Daddy how to be bossy like him." Kirk and Chip both blushed; a chuckle ran around the others at the table.

"So do you like being on the Enterprise with your Daddy?" Amanda asked him.

"Yeah, it's lots of fun. Everybody's real nice, even when they're busy. But I wish there were other kids around to play with."

A chime announced an arrival just then. Spock rose and left the room, returning minutes later with McCoy.

"Unka Bones!" Justy called out delightedly.

"The Lady Amanda hasn't been giving you sweets, has she?" McCoy asked the boy.

"Leonard, a treat won't harm the child," Amanda said. "Besides, it's my prerogative to spoil my grandson!" McCoy looked startled as her comment sunk in; he glanced quickly at Spock.

"My parents have stood as *a'nirih* and *m'aih* to Charles," Spock said calmly. "Even you can follow the chain of logic: Justin is now their grandson."

McCoy shot Spock a baleful look, then, "Congratulations are in order. Sarek?"

"The Way of Surak called for it," Sarek said with reserve.

"What's 'the Way of Surak,' Grampa?" Justy asked. Sarek held out his arms to take Justy onto his lap, and began to explain.

"Mr. Scott, will you please take charge of beaming the other bridge crew back to the ship, along with yourself?" Kirk said quietly to Scotty. "Mr. Dodds and his son will remain here for the night, as of course will Mr. Spock; the Doctor and I need to remain here for a short time.'

"Aye, Admiral." Scotty proceeded to follow his orders as efficiently as always.

"Is the child settled?" Sarek asked.

"Yes, T'hy'la. Chip and I took turns reading him a story until he fell asleep."

"Good," Sarek answered gravely. "Let us be seated for this."

"Chip," Kirk said intently, "as a member of Sarek's family now, you deserve to know the full facts here. For reasons that will become evident, this cannot be told to another soul other than those in this room."

Chip nodded his head seriously.

Spock said, turning to his father, "I believe that it would be appropriate for me to remove myself for the briefing."

"Nonsense, Spock!" Amanda said sternly to her son. "I have respected, and continue to respect, your decision to pursue your Vulcan heritage. But you need not, and should not, hold yourself to a higher standard than either half of your heritage."

"Your mother is correct, Spock," McCoy said compassionately. "Vulcans grieve as passionately as do humans. I would spare you if I could. But your father and I are agreed that Chip should know, for several reasons."

Spock dispassionately nodded assent. "It shall be as you say, my mother," he said to Amanda.

Sarek spoke up. "My offer to adopt you and your son was and remains genuine, and you merit it on the basis of your own family status, or lack thereof. But there are other factors influencing Amanda and myself that you should know."

Kirk and McCoy walked over to Spock, and each placed a hand on the shoulder of the stoic Vulcan, as McCoy picked up the discourse. "You will recall, about twenty years or so ago, that incident regarding the Captain and the Admiral?"

"When he was compelled to fight the Admiral? Yes, I remember," Chip answered. "The tabloid newspapers made a big deal out of it. I was just a kid then."

Kirk nodded gravely. "What is not public knowledge," he continued, "is that in 1990, Spock *did* marry. His wife was perhaps the most brilliant woman I have ever known, whether we speak of Vulcan or of human women." Spock was tensed up and began to close in on himself.

McCoy went on. "In early '91 we learned that she had become pregnant."

Chip raised an eyebrow suddenly. Gravely, the Admiral drew a deep breath. "She gave birth on Vulcan while Spock was with us at Utopia Planitia working on the Great Experiment. She arranged for transport a little after the birth to bring their son to Spock so that he could Name him." A pause. "The ship they traveled on was the Zhuk'fasek."

"The Transwarp Disaster," Chip breathed. "Did they...?"

"As you know, none survived," Sarek said solemnly.

"Spock never saw, never held his son," Kirk added compassionately.

"This is what you need to know," Amanda said warmly. "Though Justy needs to have a Family, and though you are a man grown, so do you, Chip, our motivations were not totally altruistic. Sarek and I got to hold our baby grandson before they left for Earth – a gift that was denied our son. All three of us have grieved deeply, in the Vulcan manner."

A rasping sob interrupted her, and she rose and walked quickly to her son, who was now weeping openly, in deep, agonizing sobs. She wrapped the Vulcan man in her arms and held him gently, in a near-Pieta pose.

"Justin will be for us the grandson we lost," Sarek said. "It was primarily for him and for ourselves that we made that choice, if choice is the right word for something dictated by logic, by c'thia. You deserve Family, Justin deserves Family, but he and you will fill a gap torn from our ... hearts ... three years ago. My only request beyond your acknowledging Amanda and myself as mother and father, is that you allow Spock to fill the role of uncle to Justy. For it will be a gesture that will help bring healing to him. Normally, he would stand as A'nirih, but..."

"But I cannot bring... bring myself to be a father to..." Spock started to say, but his mother gently silenced him.

"I understand, Captain," Chip murmured softly. He then looked at Sarek, "Why is this a secret?"

"Many reasons, and not least of which was the child was Unnamed. He has no Name in any record held on T'Khasi. He never lived. He is 'Forsaken'. That is a grief the Family and even the House hold, but should not be spoken of to the Outside World."

"All I can say is, you do me and my son great honor," Chip said formally to Sarek and Amanda. Justy is a boy with no family other than me; you are a Family with no grandchildren. *I follow the logic. Let it be as you have said, my parents,*" he concluded in a formal Vulcan phrase.

"I thank you, my brother," Spock breathed as he pulled himself slowly back together.

"You will spend the night here," Amanda said to Chip, "as befits a new son joining a House. I wish some time to play with Justy, anyway, before the Enterprise must return to Earth."

They all continued to speak for another hour while Chip sat next to his new brother and helped comfort him, as well as to learn more about his new Family.

Once they had finished, Admiral Kirk and Doctor McCoy both stood to take their leave.

"Your orders, Mr. Dodds," Kirk said with a sad twinkle in his eye, "are to enjoy your new family until we finish the necessary briefings about the negotiations." Raising his communicator, he said, "Scotty? Two to beam up."

Chapter Eight

San Francisco - August 2nd, 1996

Sarek was seated in the reception room of his San Francisco home, staring out at the Golden Gate Bridge as he waited for his son and Captain Kirk to arrive. All that he had been told by Admiral Morrow is that they would personally debrief him on the most recent mission that the Enterprise had been involved in.

He knew from long experience when a human was nervous. He also knew when a human was trying to find the words to spare him or others their feelings. Something was wrong, and the Admiral did not want to hurt him. Sarek pondered quietly - when would Terrans learn that very little could 'hurt the feelings' of a Vulcan? Never, it seemed. Yet that simple fact, that 'empathy' that seemed to be so common to the Human Race, was a beautiful thing.

Most Vulcans did not understand it, and would even grow frustrated at times with the Human need to 'be careful', but Sarek never did. He, if he had to be honest, 'loved' that about his Human friends and family. They cared, and were not afraid to show it.

Just then, he heard the front door open as his security personnel allowed the two expected Starfleet captains to enter.

"This way, Jim," he heard his son saying quietly as the two 'brothers' came closer to the reception room.

The Ambassador stood and faced the entrance to the room: if there was a bad report to be given, then he had better prepare himself to receive it. He tightened his control over his emotions, and waited passively.

"Greetings, Father," Spock said formally as he raised his hand to salute the Ambassador.

Kirk echoed him, while attempting the same salute.

Sarek nodded in acceptance, and gestured to the chairs, "Please, be seated, my son; Captain Kirk."

Once they had taken a seat, Sarek also sat, asking, "What is the report that the Admiral did not wish to relay himself? It must be something he would consider 'bad news' or he would have simply sent me the written version."

Kirk looked at Spock quickly, then squared his shoulders, "Yes, it is, Ambassador. As you are no doubt aware, there was an incident on Nimbus III, and the Ambassadors from the Federation, Klingon and Romulan Empires were held hostage by an unknown group of assailants."

"I had been made aware of this, yes, Captain," Sarek acknowledged with a brief nod of his head.

Kirk took a deep breath. "Their leader was a Vulcan, and on arrival at Nimbus III, he proceeded to take control of my ship; and even did so over the minds and will of my crew."

Sarek's eyes widened. "The Sharing?" he asked, looking at Spock intently.

Spock nodded, then rose and sat by his father.

"Then that can only mean..." Sarek trailed off, his voice losing its strength.

"Yes, Father. It was Sybok, for only he at this time has the knowledge of the Sharing outside the Masters of Kolinahr," Spock said, a hint of sadness in his voice.

Sarek bowed his head and whispered, "You were banished for this, my Sybok; for this and your lack of respect for logic. Why would you do such as this against Starfleet? Why would you risk alienating yourself yet again?"

Kirk waited quietly, and with great respect, while the elder Vulcan regained his composure.

"I take it that my eldest son is now in custody, and that the Federation Council will be given this report?" Sarek asked finally, raising his eyes to look at Kirk.

"No, on all counts, Sarek," Kirk said quietly, sadly. "Admiral Morrow has placed this information under the highest levels of security, and Spock asked the VSO to add the cover of Red One to this."

Sarek's eyebrow raised. "I will abide by that; however, what of my son if he is not in custody?"

Spock placed his hand on his father's shoulder and started to explain. He told of the destination towards the Great Barrier at the Corewards point of Federation Space, and he told of the meeting with the 'being' that dwelt within. "To give us the chance to escape, Sybok sacrificed his life, Father. He threw himself into a meld with that being, and gave us the time to flee to safety."

Sarek looked down at his motionless hands, and the sadness that had been on his face when the first mention of Sybok had been made was now replaced with peace. "He made right what he had made wrong in that action," Sarek whispered. "I am content now. For all that he did, he did what was right at the end."

Kirk's face was mirroring his confusion as he looked questioningly at Spock.

"My brother had a good life, Jim. He was raised well, and his childhood was filled with love and peace. He learned well, and his accomplishments brought honor to our House. It was in my teenage years that he chose to live by emotion rather than logic. That was acceptable; it is a free choice for all who live on Vulcan. However, he did not just forsake all logic, he started to teach others to hate it and turn from it. Such is not acceptable. One can live by emotions, and even enter into conversation based on why they decided such, but you must keep tolerance on both sides. Sybok did not, and he went so far as to misuse his gifts and powers to rip other's minds from the path of Logic. He was banished from Vulcan. He became almost outcast to us all."

"Yet," Sarek finished for his son, "as you humans say, he redeemed himself by his final act. He learned that what he had been seeking had misled him, and then paid the highest price to make a way for you to live."

"But why do you not grieve, Sarek?" Kirk asked gently.

"I do, but our grief is not as yours, Kirk," the Ambassador said peacefully. "For those with a life lived, and with a death that has meaning, we who remain do not grieve their loss as you Terrans would. We take solace in the life we shared with them, and remember them."

Spock then said, pain filling his eyes, "Unlike when a child dies in the womb, or as an infant or even an adolescent. They had no life, and we shared very little or n...none with them. Our grief then is worse than any other. You humans grieve most for what was, and is no more. We Vulcans grieve most for what might have been, and now cannot be. The pain of Sybok is the loss of what had been, yet that which we had shared in. Our grief in this instance is... eased by memories shared." He ruthlessly repressed the pain his human side was feeling; of grief for his big brother now lost.

"I see," Kirk nodded with understanding. "Ambassador, I shall make all records of this mission available to you without limit. Including the reasons for Red One. That, however, is something Admiral Morrow is fully aware of, not I."

Sarek nodded seriously, "I believe I know why. If I am able, I shall bring you in on this as well, Captain. Until then, I thank you for the information you have brought me. I must now meditate... and 'grieve', although as Spock has said, your message allows me to think better of my son, so my grief you have lessened. Thank you, James... son."

The Ambassador rose and left the room quickly. Spock also stood, "You did well, Jim. Come, brother; we must leave him alone, now."

Kirk nodded, stood, and together with his friend, he left Sarek's home.

Studying a copy of the most ancient star-map of Vulcan, Sarek placed a finger on the image of his world: T'Khasi. He traced a line to the world of Earth: Sa'kai-T'Khasi. He then traced it down, towards the centre of the Galaxy, to where something was printed; something that made his spine become as ice: 'Panu Ket-cheleb' - 'World Destroyer'.

He closed his eyes. "Can this be accurate? Ancient legends from a thousand worlds?" he whispered to himself.

He looked back at the map, and then looked at the far side of the galaxy from Vulcan. One more world was labelled large, making four in total on the map that stood out from the rest. "Ish-Hassu, where is your assistance? You said of old that when 'the Destroyer' is found, you would come to the Aid of T'Khasi. Are you coming?"

He sighed, and looked again at that distant world that 'no longer was': 'Panu Pon S'haile', the 'World of the Time Lords'.

"Where are the Lords of Time, Doctor?" Sarek murmured as he again ran his hands over the picture before him, "Where is 'Gallifrey' now that the 'Destroyer' is found?"

He then added almost as an afterthought, "And where is 'It' -- the Blade Reforged?"

Richardson home, Lexington KY, August 15, 1996

"He's 32 today, Jackie," Anne Richardson said sadly to her younger sister-in-law.

Jackie Littrell nodded sympathetically at the stately 56-year-old woman sitting across from her. "You still haven't located Jeremy and Sarah?"

"No; they moved with no forwarding address. Jerald and Jeremy had grown apart after they moved to Iowa, but you'd think they'd at least have let us *know*." Anne seemed despondent; Jackie noticed.

"Dear, they were there for the two of you when things were so tight. We just have to trust in the good Lord that there's a reason behind all this. Whatever He's got in mind for your little Daniel that involves keeping him away from you, it's all for the good. And you can be sure that he's making good for himself - we come from good stock, and so do the Richardsons."

"I wish I had your unquestioning faith, Jackie," Anne said to the feisty smaller woman. "But what about your search - any luck?"

"Not a thing," Jackie said. "When little Harold brought him back with him from camp for a visit, it was just like he was another of my own kids. I could have wrung Arthur's and Martha's stiff necks when they threw him out. I found out he was living with that Wilson boy I told you about, but then he got killed in that accident and my Little Duck just seemed to vanish from the face of the Earth."

"Maybe he did, Aunt Jackie," Anne's youngest son Tim said as he walked into the dinette. "Remember how he was always so interested in Starfleet? Did you check the Internet?"

"The Internet? Whatever for?" Jackie looked up at Tim with question. Tim rolled his eyes.

"There's all sorts of information available online at a moment's notice," he replied. "Good thing I didn't tear my computer down yet to take with me to college. C'mon up to my room; we'll run some searches."

"Here it is!" Tim said as his mother and aunt watched over his shoulder. "Charles Bryant Dodds, born June 2, 1968, entered Starfleet Academy in 1988, graduated class of 1991. Commissioned Ensign, assigned to Helm duties on board the Yorktown. Promoted to Lieutenant and transferred to the Enterprise last year." He chuckled. "That sounds like Chip; Adm. Kirk only takes the best in the fleet for his crew, and he's ruthless in skimming the other ships for the cream of the crop."

"But why would he have cut us off like he did?" Jackie asked sadly.

"Mmmm," Tim temporized. "Aunt Jackie, can I be blunt?"

"Of course, darling."

"Well, anyone who knows you and Uncle Harold at all knows how strong Christians you are. And you've seen the news, all those preachers speaking out against homosexuality. I've got a couple of gay friends at school..." Anne registered surprise "...and they none of them have any use for church, not after all that stuff. 'Why go where you're not wanted?' one of them said to me, and I couldn't answer him. He probably thinks you'll reject him just like his parents did."

"He ought to know better!" Jackie said. "Jesus never turned anybody away, and neither would Harold or I."

"What he 'ought to know' is one thing," Anne said, "but, Jackie, I think the ball is in your court. You need to get in touch with Chip, and let him know you're still on his side. For all he knows, you agree with those hellfire-and-brimstone preachers. You've got to tell him different."

Jackie was taken aback by that. Then a glimmering of resolve started in her eyes, and grew across her face. "I'll do it!" she said firmly. "Thank you, Tim; I hadn't seen it from his eyes, and you made me do that. Can I use your phone, Anne?"

"You know you can, silly," Anne said with a warm smile.

"Brian?"

"Mom! Thanks for calling! I was going to call you tonight - good news!"

"Wonderful! If I remember what you told me about your tour right, I have something I want you to do for me. But what's your news?"

"We won the suit! Pearlman has to pay all the back royalties - and we got creative control, too! We can do the music that talks to the fans, not the pre-packaged teeny-bopper bubble-gum stuff. Kev and I are getting together with Nick and the other guys and the backup band to figure out what we want to do - just as soon as the concert dates we're contracted for are over. And Pearlman gets a flat fee for what he did to set them up - no more skimming his cut off the top! You were right - we kept the faith, and it worked out!"

"That *is* good news! Now, you're supposed to play San Francisco on Labor Day, right?"

"Yeah - a concert in Candlestick."

"And you get in there the day before, to look over the site and rehearse, am I right?"

"That's right. Why?"

"Good. We're flying out for the concert - your father and I, and your Aunt Anne, if I don't miss my guess." Anne was smiling and nodding delightedly. "What I need from you is, can you free up a couple of hours in late afternoon the day before?"

"Sure, if it's important. What's going on?"

"Well, your computer geek cousin did some research for me." Tim looked mock-offended; Jackie chuckled. "The Enterprise makes orbit that morning, and the command crew will be on leave starting at about four o'clock San Francisco time."

"And this is important to me why?"

"Because as soon as you've told your mother that you're doing it, I'm going to make a call to Starfleet Command, and have a message left for Lt. Charles Dodds that his 'little brother' Brian will be meeting him at the spaceport when his shuttlecraft lands - and that he'll be having a late dinner with his Uncle Harold and Aunt Jackie that evening."

"Chip? We haven't seen him in years - what's going on all of a sudden?"

"That's right, Brian. But did you ever wonder why he hasn't been around to see us? Your little cousin Tim..."

"Aunt Jackie! I'm eighteen - I'm not 'his little cousin' anymore!"

"...Your *little cousin* Tim was smart enough to figure it out. He's been avoiding us because he thinks we're going to condemn him for being gay. Any fool can tell you that that's just the way some people are, and can't help it... they just need to live a moral life as gay men, or women, to stay right with God. But Chip probably thinks we feel the same way as those TV preachers, and you know better than that. Family comes first, and Chip's been family for years."

There was silence at the other end of the line. "Brian? Are you still there?"

"Uh, yeah, Mom. That is good news. I'll go meet Chip, sure."

"All right, Brian. Tim says he'll send you some sort of instant mail thing giving you Chip's schedule. I'll talk to you later; I need to call Starfleet now. Bye."

"Bye, Mom! You have no idea how good news this is! I'll call you tomorrow, okay?"

"Okay, son. Bye now."

As she hung up from her call to Brian and rummaged through Tim's notes for the phone number for Starfleet Command, Jackie mused, "I wonder why Brian went so quiet when I was telling him what Tim figured out. That's not like him."

Tim smiled and excused himself. "Gotta get back to packing." As he headed back upstairs, he thought, "That was close. But it's Brian's place to tell her, not mine."

San Francisco, September 1, 1996

"Coffee and desserts all around," Harold said to the waiter, "and bring little Justy your Mount Selaya Sundae, if you please." Justy was all grins at the prospect of the giant dessert.

"Very well, sir," the waiter said primly, and turned away to fill the order.

"Chip," Harold said, "we have all missed you greatly. Jackie and I could not understand why our son's best friend, the boy who was our son in all but name, abruptly turned away from us. It took Tim to figure it out and explain it to his mother and aunt, and it's clear to me that we all failed you. I need to make this fast, since Kevin and Brian need to get to rehearsal. But the bottom line is, when your parents rejected you, we should have sought you out and comforted you, and we did not do our Christian duty by you. Even more, we owe you an apology, in the name of our Lord, for those who have turned His message into a bludgeon to hurt people like you."

Chip was stunned. "I knew Aunt Jackie and you were pillars of your church, and I thought, when I told my parents the truth about me, that you wouldn't want anything more to do with me. So I tried to make a life with Ben, and tried to forget what I'd lost."

"You're family, Chip," Jackie said warmly. "You always have been, and we've missed you. Maybe not by blood, but you're chosen family, and that counts above anything."

"That's what Grampa Sarek always says," Justy piped up. "Family's the most 'portant thing. When I grow up, I'm gonna have lotsa friends, and make 'em all my brothers."

Harold chuckled. "Just like Harold Junior did with your Dad, eh? But who's Grandpa Sarek?"

Chip looked abashed. "Last year, we were on Vulcan, and Captain Spock invited us to his parents' home for dinner. His father is the Ambassador for Earth and to the Federation, and his mother is from here on Earth. Her brother is still alive, back East somewhere. Anyway, when they found out that Justy and I had no family besides each other, they offered to stand as my father and mother, to give Justy grandparents. So I am now Charles Dodds, son of Sarek, of the Family of Sarek and House of Surak, of the Planet Vulcan, and Justy is Justin son of Charles, of that Family and House."

It was Kevin's turn to look startled. "That's like, um, being adopted by royalty or something! The House of Surak is some kind of Big Deal on Vulcan, right?"

"Yes," Chip said. "There's something like twenty Houses on Vulcan, and every Vulcan who is not out-cast belongs to one of them. The House of Surak is the senior house, the one the rest of them look up to

in respect. And my adoptive father is Pid-Sam, that translates as Patriarch, of that House." Chip smiled with a touch of pride, then recalled his good manners. "But it sounds like I'm not the only one famous here. From the news, it seems you two" - he glanced at Kevin and Brian - "have been making a name for yourselves too."

Brian grinned. "You could say that. I didn't figure, when Kevin called me last year to audition for a singing group, that I'd turn into an instant celebrity. But Backstreet has taken off."

"I'd sort of hoped, with Brian's voice, that he'd get into recording some of what they're calling contemporary Christian music," Harold said. "But their group has been really successful, and it's good music, close harmony love songs, like barbershop music brought forward to, what are they calling it, the Electronic Age?"

"Right, Uncle Harold," Kevin interjected. "And it's a nice change from heavy metal music of rebellion. There's several other groups being formed in our wake now, one called N*Sync, O-Town, Ninety Eight Degrees, a whole new genre."

"We made friends with a couple of the guys from N*Sync," Brian added. "It's kind of the story of Kevin and me all over again. They recruited a guy named Justin Timberlake that used to be on the Mickey Mouse Club, and he brought in a friend he'd grown up with that was also a Mouseketeer with him, a jazz musician named Joshua Chases. And they're really nice guys, people you can grow close to real fast."

"I'll have to meet your bandmates sometime," Chip said. "Depending on what the Enterprise's schedule is, of course."

"So tell me about your ship," Harold said encouragingly. "The Enterprise is of course famous, Captain Kirk and all that. What is it that you do, anyway?"

"Well, I'm a helmsman," Chip said.

"That's kind of like the pilot?" Jackie asked.

"Exactly!" Chip answered. "The Captain is of course in command of the ship. But the job of keeping it flying to the right place at the right speed is done at the Helmsman's station. I was made Chief Helmsman for Beta shift, the evening shift, after proving myself to the Captain. And Commander Sulu is in line for promotion to Captain and a command of his own next year, and it looks good for me to become his replacement as Chief Helmsman for the ship."

"Really?" Brian said. "Congratulations! I knew you were interested in space, but I never expected that."

Chip looked over at his six-year-old son, who was wearing enough ice cream and hot fudge on his face to make a small sundae. "You're a mess, kid!" he said affectionately.

Justy looked innocent. "Me, Daddy?"

"Yeah, you," Jackie said indulgently. "Come with me, and I'll clean you up"

"Okay, Daddy?" Justin asked, not quite sure who this older woman was.

"Of course, she's your Aunt Jackie; you just hadn't met her yet," Chip answered his son. "Aunt Jackie, you need to be forewarned - when he's had sweets, he gets kind of hyperactive."

"Now, Chip, I raised two boys of my own, and had Anne's four and you around most of the time as well. I do know how to take care of little boys," Jackie said mock-teasingly to him.

Something about that little tease, matching what he remembered from his days visiting Harold Junior and being a part of the Littrell household, touched Chip deep inside. The tension seemed to melt away.

Harold noticed. "It doesn't matter where you've been, or what you've been doing; you're back with family that love you," he said to Chip.

"Hmmm," Kevin mused. "Unconditional love. I bet we can turn that into a love song for the group. 'I don't care where you've been or what you've been doing...' ... something like that."

"Needs a little work," Brian replied. "But I see where you're going with it. 'I don't care where you've been...' Pick up on that 'it doesn't matter to me' thing."

"And that," Kevin said, "is a couple of budding songwriters at work. 'It doesn't matter what happened in the past, as long as you love me...' - try working with that, Bri."

"I'm hearing it in my head now," Brian answered. "But we've really got to leave, Chip - rehearsal for tomorrow's show. You and Justy are coming with Mom and Dad and Aunt Anne, right?"

"Tickets are already arranged," Anne threw in. "And Chip knows better than to argue with Jackie or me!"

Orlando, December 31, 1997

"Look, Chip," Brian sounded disgusted. "I know now that when Ben was killed, a chunk of your heart died with him. And all this intense always-in-officer-mode stuff is just your reaction to dealing with that. But you do need to let go. He's dead, Chip; bury him, and try to get on with your life. For Justy, if not for yourself or for your family."

"I would be the wet blanket at that party, and I'm just going to stay here and watch the ball drop on TV," Chip answered.

"Look, you promised me you'd meet the people I work with, our backup band, our roadies, the guys in the other bands. This party is for us - Backstreet, N*Sync, O-Town, and the guys who make it possible behind the scenes. And I want my 'big brother' there with me tonight. Now, you're coming along with me, and you're going to have fun, whether you like it or not!" Brian grinned.

Chip sighed. "What about Justy? I can't leave him alone!"

"Covered," Brian answered, motioning his parents in. "Ever since they met the little guy, these two have had an intense attack of Frustrated Grandparent Syndrome. Junior and I keep getting asked when we're going to marry and give them some grandchildren."

"There's a thing at SeaWorld designed specifically for younger kids, early in the evening," Harold said. "We're going to take Justy to that; I've got tickets already. Then we'll take him back to our suite and bed him down, and by that point we'll want to relax some ourselves."

"You are going to go and have a good time, Little Duck," Jackie said in a voice that brooked no argument. "You need it; you know that inside, even if you don't want to admit it. Now get up off your behind and start getting ready!"

"Yes, *mother*," Chip said with a grin. "Have I told you how much I missed you, Aunt Jackie?"

"Only a couple dozen times, but one more doesn't hurt," Jackie said. "I'm glad to see you'll still behave when you get told what to do. Now move!"

"It's just a New Years Eve party; why's everyone acting like it's something that will change my life?" Chip groused as he walked back with Brian to get ready for the party.

Next Morning

"It worked - better than we hoped," an ebullient Brian told his mother over the phone.

"*Oh? Tell me the juicy details*," Jackie replied.

"Remember me telling you about Curly's childhood friend - that's Justin Timberlake; I forgot you don't know the guys by nicknames - that he recommended for N*Sync the way Kevin did me? His name's Josh Chalez - JC is what he uses for a stage name. Well, he and Chip met each other last night, and it was a case of love at first sight."

"*Oh, good!*" Jackie exclaimed. "*I gather you approve of this boy?*"

"Yeah, I do. Josh is a caring sort of guy, and not someone who would play Chip. I don't know him all that well yet, but I did get a handle on the kind of guy he is, and Curly, who's known him since they were eight, called me - worrying about the opposite side of the coin: would Chip hurt Josh?" Brian paused. "Gotta go; he's making noises like he's stirring. Talk to you later, mom!"

Vulcan Embassy, San Francisco, November 30, 2001

"You asked to meet with me, Mr. Burgess?" Sarek said.

"Yes, Mr. Ambassador. I wanted to brief you on a few measures to be brought before the Federation High Council that I have introduced." Burgess gave what he hoped was a properly ingratiating smile.

Doing practical politics with these aliens was a challenge, when he couldn't rely on them to react properly to his tactics like normal people.

"I have reviewed all pending bills," Sarek answered equably. "I found the one mandating Starfleet to buy from only approved vendors to be unacceptable. This is especially so as you state no logical criteria for granting or withholding this 'approval'. The one relating to restrictions on warp drive is unnecessary but unobjectionable. But what is the purpose behind the proposed Family Protection Act?"

"Oh, that," Burgess said dismissively. "I introduced that at the request of a Member of Parliament in the U.K., with the support of two American politicians. It's purely unworkable."

"Then why did you introduce it?" Sarek asked, puzzled.

"I owed my friend the M.P. a favor, and also one of the Americans, for past support. They're quite aware it will be voted down." Burgess essayed another thin smile. "The bill is quite frankly just plain unworkable."

"If it has no chance of passage - and I agree that requiring the diverting of Starfleet crew to handle all family disputes is a misuse of resources - then why introduce it in the first place?"

"My friends are quite liberal, with strong liberal constituencies. The M.P. for Fulham and the Congressman from Iowa are really concerned that their countries aren't doing enough to protect children. I've made a public statement that I've introduced it at their request," Burgess explained in a condescending tone. "This way, they can go back to the family advocacy groups that supported them, and say that they tried, but they cannot get the support to pass it. It looks good for them, they're listening to their constituents, and for me, showing that I'm supportive of their issues. It's all been arranged - it will be voted down in the High Council, and we'll just look good in our constituents' eyes. Certainly you can see the logic of that?"

Amanda walked in at that point. "Here, t'hy'la, review this for me, if you would," Sarek requested, handing her the draft Family Protection Act.

"I'm surprised you bother the little lady with matters of business," Burgess said, nodding politely to Amanda.

"My wife has assisted me for many years in understanding the motivations of Earth humans," Sarek responded. If Burgess had been a bit more observant, he would have noted the slight cold tone Sarek allowed to enter his speech, and Amanda's reaction to the draft law - but he didn't. "I am afraid that I have quite a bit of work to attend to," Sarek continued, adopting the 'human-politeness' mode he had mastered in dealing with Earthmen, "so I must ask you to excuse me."

"Certainly," Burgess answered. "If I can be of any help in understanding the importance of the other two bills, do not hesitate to contact my office." He hefted himself up from the easy chair and made an exit appropriate to the importance he saw himself as having.

Amanda burst into laughter. "That pompous twit!" she said as the sound of doors closing indicated that Burgess was gone. "Lecturing you like you had no clue how humans behave!"

"I find the attitude of some human leaders that others are pawns to be manipulated to be quite... distasteful," Sarek replied. "But did you see what I saw in that bill?"

Amanda's eyes were shining. "At long last!" she said. "This will never work, of course, but with proper modifications, it could serve.... Can you bring Vulcan behind it, though?"

Sarek gave his wife a smile. "I believe I know a way that is in accord with c'thia," he said gravely.

He picked up his communicator from where it had been lying on his desk. After a few short exchanges, he was connected to the High Council's presiding officer. "Skarg," he saluted the Tellarite abruptly, as was their custom. "The Earth humans have proposed a bill called the Family Protection Act, which is to be voted on when next we convene. I wish to have that matter tabled for six months, as is my prerogative."

"It shall be done, Sarek," Skarg responded. "Will you and Amanda join us tomorrow night? There is to be a drinking bout and grand argument. It should be a jolly time!"

Inwardly amused, Sarek excused himself and his wife. Thanking Skarg, he ended the call.

Family Seat, House of Suvak, City of Gol, Vulcan, February 2002

"Sarek." Patriarch Siprak's acknowledgement of his fellow Patriarch was cold and formal.

"Siprak." Sarek returned. "It is long since we have spoken save as opponents. I come today for your aid."

"Indeed? What logic would indicate I should help a friend of the *Qom'i-katur*?" The term, intentionally rude, conveyed that Earthmen were naturally devoid of logic.

"I bring you a draft of a measure which a human introduced into the Federation Ruling Council," Sarek responded evenly. "It would be logical for you to give it initial review while I await you."

Siprak made a gesture acknowledging the logic. Sarek handed over the draft Family Protection Act, and calmly waited.

"The Qom'i would tell us how to protect our Families?" Siprak said steelily. "They would send their Starfleet in to enforce this law?" He would not permit Sarek to see the rage within him at the effrontery of the race who had killed his family nine years before.

"It must not be permitted to pass in its present form," Sarek said. "This proposal goes too far, and affronts Vulcan commitment to Family."

"For once we see as one," Siprak said. "I had feared association with the Qom'i, and above all your wife, had turned you from the path of c'thia."

"Never," said Sarek. "But just as a child must learn his own emotions in order to master them, I have needed to learn of human emotions to deal properly with them."

Siprak nodded. "You spoke of needing my help."

"To replace this unacceptable bill," Sarek said, "I consider it logical that Vulcan propose an alternative, an Act that stresses the need for member races to assure the safety and nurture of their own young, but enables intervention by the Federation when they fail to do so - as Earth far too often does."

"That is in accord with my thinking," Siprak said.

"To carry the necessary weight in the Federation Council," Sarek continued, "such a proposal would require the united voice of Vulcan. To be blunt, you and I, as leaders of the two factions at odds, would need to bring our supporters together to support what is proposed."

Siprak paused in thought. "That is acceptable," he said at last. "How do you see that we should proceed?"

"I had in mind co-opting **T'Sel, of the House of Mazak**, to compile the initial revision. I will need to thoroughly rewrite it to correspond to Human ideas of how a law should be written, but I will ensure you are kept apprised, both of the draft version and of what I change and why it is necessary. Are we in agreement?"

"We are," Siprak replied. "The Qom'i cannot presume to tell the sons and daughters of T'Khasi how to raise their young. It is gratifying to know you agree, Sarek."

"As it is gratifying to know that our enmity has not turned you from the paths of c'thia, my brother," Sarek said gravely to his fellow patriarch.

Sarek and Amanda's home, later that day

"Did he buy it?" Amanda asked excitedly.

"He did," Sarek responded, a twinkle in his eye. "I merely told him the truth - a choice selection of the truth. He drew his own conclusions, and therefore logically was forced to agree with me."

Amanda broke into a broad grin - a grin mirrored, once he had confirmed they were alone, by Sarek.

Meeting Hall, Federation Ruling Council, San Francisco, Earth, June 12, 2002

Skarg let roar the ceremonial bellow with which Tellarite meetings were called to order. Amid some chuckling, the delegates quieted and turned their attention to him.

"The first order of business today," Skarg said in his abrupt manner, "is the Family Protection Act introduced in November by Delegate Burgess of Earth." Burgess preened himself. "Is there debate or argument" - Skarg grinned at the prospect of a good argument - "about this bill before we put it to vote?"

Sarek rose. "I move that we strike the title and contents of the proposed bill in full, and substitute for it the following measure, which was adopted unanimously by the Vulcan High Council to serve in its stead." He began to read. "The title of this measure shall be the Safe Haven Act. The United Federation of Planets Ruling Council hereby adopts the following. The purpose of The Safe Haven Act is to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children who have been victims of Physical, Sexual or Emotional Abuse. The Safe Haven Act empowers Starfleet as its enforcement arm. This Act will encompass all children in The Federation and supersede all Local and Planetary Regulations regarding these Children. The Federation Safe Haven Act allows for the immediate removal and placement of minor children because of imminent danger to said minor." Sarek continued through the full text of the proposed law.

As he concluded his reading, the Ambassador from the Andorian Star Empire was on his feet. "Andoria believes that Honor calls for the protection of the young. We support this measure." Sarek's grave countenance gave no indication of the inward smile he felt as his old friend from Andoria backed his play.

Burgess was on his feet. "Wait, you can't...."

Skarg cut him off. "You proposed the original law, Burgess. How can you object to changes." He smiled, seeing a fight in the offing. "Tellar supports this bill," he announced.

A Rigellian stood. "All four founding races stand for this bill, and Rigel is behind it as well. I call for its adoption by acclamation."

Skarg grinned. Seeing Burgess caught in his own webs amused him. "A call for adoption by acclamation has been made. All agreeing, please so indicate." A loud roar from the delegates answered him. "Are any opposed?" Burgess looked around for help. No one spoke up.

Skarg seemed disappointed that no fight would break out. "The measure is carried by acclamation," he announced formally.

Authors' Notes: We are indebted to Iluvantir, for writing the initial sections dealing with Sybok's fate, and to both him and ACFan for review and critique of the contents.

Chapter Nine

Authors' Note: As everyone is well aware, the characters in the CSU who are analogs of real-world celebrities do not have the same characteristics as their real-world counterparts. Nick and Ashley, for example, are not a gay couple, nor is Aaron Carter gay and David Gallagher's boyfriend. This becomes important here as past story canon requires playing Jane Carter, Nick and Aaron's mother, and her second husband as evil persons. Needless to say, this is not intended to condemn the real-world Jane Carter, and Aaron's CSU stepfather was made up of whole cloth for story needs, and in no way is intended to characterize his real stepfather.

May, 2002

"A cast party?" Kevin Richardson was incredulous.

"Yeah. It's not quite as bad as it sounds," Nick Carter answered. "The Spelling organization's been a lot of help to us getting us bookings on shows they produce or invest in. And the cast and crew of 'Seventh Heaven' are professionals - it's not like some rich man's teeny-bopper kids wanting to book Backstreet for their birthday party. We're ending a tour in L.A. the day after they shoot the last episode for the season. And the kids that play the Camden children like our music, and asked to meet us."

"So what our liaison with Spelling suggested was that we show up, with family and friends, do a couple numbers as Backstreet, then relax at a party with other pros. It makes them happy, pays a debt we sort of owe Aaron Stallings, and gives us a chance to chill out with other pros." The lead roadie, who had brought it up to Nick, was firm in his demeanor. "I'll bet you Kristin would love a chance to socialize with people who aren't oohing and aahing about how her husband is in Backstreet, who are as much celebrities as we are."

"I'm planning on bringing the twins too. It'll give Aaron a chance to hang out with other child stars around his age, and Angel has a bit of a crush on David Gallagber." Nick added.

"Who?"

"The boy who plays Simon Camden on the series. He's about her age, and a very cute kid."

"You know, crazy as it sounds, you may have a good idea there." Kevin was unconvinced but warming to the idea. "After that tour we all could use a break, and from what I know of end-of-season parties, they're the perfect thing to unwind at."

A.J. spoke up. "I'm willing to give it a try." Howie and Brian nodded their assent.

The Richardsons were relaxing at a table with the senior members of the Seventh Heaven cast. Nick and Ashley came strolling by, with Nick's sister Angel talking angrily to them. As they passed out of earshot, Kristen asked, "What's that all about?"

A.J. spoke up. "You know that Angel - that's Nick's little sister, Aaron's twin, who was yelling at him just then -" he explained to the two Seventh Heaven stars - "had a bit of a crush on David?"

"That's not surprising," Catherine Hicks (who played the role of David's character's mother) said. "I helped him with some of his fan mail. Half the 13-year-old girls in America seem to want to drag him into bed, and aren't ashamed to say so in writing, either." She laughed. "David is, um, not interested."

"I kind of got that vibe," Brian said. "Kris, the answer to why Angel is so upset is right over there." Eyes followed his pointing hand to where David and Aaron were sitting on a bench together, talking animatedly, eyes lost in each other's. "Looks like they're becoming good friends."

"To say the least," Stephen Collins interjected. The actor in real life exuded some of the same calm compassion he invested in his clergy character on Seventh Heaven.

"Uh-oh," Kevin muttered.

"What?" several people said.

"Well, Jane Carter and her new husband are very down on Nick about Ashley, for starters. Not much they can do about it; he's a legal adult. But if they get wind that Aaron's gay as well, there could be hell to pay."

"David went through some tough times himself," Stephen said. "One of the nice things about Seventh Heaven is that the plotline of the show kind of helped shape the cast and crew's attitudes. We're family. We helped David deal with it, come to terms with his sexuality - do the right thing for him. If this turns into what it surely looks like it's going to turn into, we'll help protect them and their relationship."

"Backstreet will, too," Kevin said decisively. "Only Brian and I are related by blood, but we're family of sorts too - the same thing you were saying. I know we can count on Howie and A.J. and Nick, and they know they can count on us. Dwayne from our backup band has a blonde girlfriend, and that caused some issues - though oddly enough it was his family, not hers, that had problems with an interracial romance. We stood by them, and we'll stand by Aaron - as Nick's little brother and a star in his own right, he's been on tour with us as often as not, anyway."

Catherine watched the two boys lean toward each other. "No doubt about it - that's young love in the works!" she said, smiling. "We'll stand by them - the Camdens may be fictional, but the cast and crew are real, and we feel the same way. And I'm so glad to hear your group does too!"

November 2002, Vulcan Embassy, San Francisco

"Look at these!" Amanda said to her brother disgustedly. "News accounts from 41 states of children being abused or neglected, only coming to light by accident, or when the abuse is too great to ignore. And this government study - they paid \$150,000 to get an estimate that there are three-quarters of a million kids without homes! Imagine if that money had gone to providing shelter for even a few of them!"

"We're doing what we can, you know that," Richard said calmly.

"I know - I don't mean to blow up at you. But it frustrates and angers me that so few seem to care - and those who do, get branded with insulting names."

Richard nodded ruefully, remembering the last set of rumors about himself and Bruce. "I thought that law that Sarek got pushed through would help."

"Having the law in place is one thing, Richard," Sarek said gravely. "Getting someone to actually **use** it when it's needed is a quite different matter."

"I made sure that both Spock and Chip are aware of how much we want to see it used to help save these kids," Amanda said.

"If the adults will not act to defend the children," Sarek said, "then it may be time to equip the children themselves to help themselves and each other."

"Let me know what I can do," Richard said.

"I shall," Sarek responded, "but I intuit that it will not be a matter of money and prestige, but of equipping them with the legal power. Vulcan's coming-of-age traditions may be of use - if we can somehow make human children the sons and daughters of T'Khasi. I must think on this."

April 25, 2003

"Can I get you anything, Josh? Chip?" Kristin was enjoying being hostess at the little two-couple dinner party.

Abruptly the early evening quiet was interrupted by the loud slam of the front door, followed by an irate, weeping Nick storming in.

"God damn it, I can't even *talk* to him - my own little brother!" he shouted angrily.

"Whoa, Nick! What happened?" Kevin asked with a sinking feeling.

"My mother is a real bitch!"

"All right, I sort of figured that. But what happened."

"I went to call Aaron - he and David were going to meet Ashley and me after his next concert for a weekend together. Mother intercepted the call. It seems Angel decided to spill the beans to her about David and Aaron. They have him on house arrest. They've been spending what he makes on concerts and records on their new home, anyway. Well, he now is not to go anywhere except his concerts. He's locked in the house, sees no one but family and his tutor. She told me 'the reason he thinks he's gay is because he's been associating with you and all your faggot friends.' I could hear that a-hole stepfather of ours berating him as a pansy boy in the background while she was reaming me out for having the effrontery to call my own brother."

"Oh shit! Now what?"

"Nothing we can do," Nick said. "She has legal custody of him until he turns eighteen. It sucks, but that's the law."

Josh had been listening intently. "Love?" he said. "Wasn't there something in your training about laws protecting kids?"

Chip thought. "Well, the Federation leaves most internal operation to the member planets or their nations, tribes, or whatever they're broken down into. They adopted the Safe Haven Act last year - Ambassador Sarek was behind that, I think. But that's mostly been used to get member worlds to tool up their child protection laws to a civilized level. In theory any Starfleet officer can invoke it to remove a child from an abusive environment. But it's never been done."

"Why not?" Kristin asked. "That's what the law is for, isn't it?"

Chip paused. "Nick? You're certain they're taking his money for themselves?"

"Yes. I told them it was illegal - they said he's their responsibility, so they're entitled to it."

"And this house arrest thing?"

"That too. I heard our stepfather tell him he wasn't 'prancing his fancy-boy ass anywhere without him or Mother there with him, to make sure he stays on the straight and narrow.'"

"Do you have any way to help him?"

"Nope. I looked up state law before when there was a close call. She's got sole custody, and what she says is binding until he's of age."

Chip pulled out his communicator.

"Dodds to Enterprise."

"Uhura here, Chip."

"You're supposed to be on leave."

"They installed the new communications protocols and upgraded the software. I wanted to be here to run the tests myself, not delegate it."

"You've got to learn to relax on your time off, Nyota."

Uhura laughed. *"Look who's talking!"*

Chip blushed. "Is the Captain available?"

"Yes - switching you now."

A pause, then *"Kirk here, Chip. What can I do for you?"*

"Captain, am I correct that any of us can invoke the Safe Haven Act when a minor is in an abusive situation and local law is not protecting him?"

"That's what the law says. We've never had occasion to use it that way publicly."

"Well, sir, I'm sitting directly across from the older brother of a child star who appears to be in precisely that situation - owing to his sexuality, for what that's worth."

"You believe it's appropriate to invoke it, Chip?"

"I do."

"Then the Enterprise will stand behind you. Let me know what you need."

"Beam me up, sir. I'll get in uniform aboard ship, and I'll want two security men with me."

"I'll send Lt. Thompson and Ensign Masterson, to meet you in the Transporter Room."

"Thank you, sir." Chip drew a breath. "Make sure Masterson has clear directions to the transporter room."

Kirk chuckled. *"He's getting much better at finding his way around ship, Chip. Scotty's Petty Officer will be expecting your call to beam up. Kirk out."*

"Dodds out." Chip turned to Nick. "Give me the precise location of your mother's home." After Nick did so, Chip looked at Josh. "Babe, nobody has ever played out what happens after Safe Haven is invoked like this. I think it would be best if I legally retain custody after I invoke it. We can talk to a court afterwards if Nick wants to take custody of Aaron. But for Aaron's own safety, I think it's best for us to be the people who keep him for now - if you're willing."

Josh smiled. "I love having Justy as a son. And Aaron's been a part of our lives ever since we met. Bring him home, love."

Flanked by Brady Thompson and Paul Masterson, Chip beamed in to the patio area behind the sprawling Carter home. At his nod, all three advanced to the door.

"Here, now, who are you and what are you doing here?" an angry man said as he pushed the door open, a baseball bat in one hand. Brady and Paul drew their phasers.

"I am Lt. Cdr. Charles B. Dodds of the U.F.P. starship Enterprise, and my companions are Lt. Brady Thompson and Ensign Paul Masterson, also of the same ship. Are you Fred Bagwell?"

"I am, and this is my home," Bagwell said in a hostile tone. "What business do you have here?"

"Chip!" Aaron called out from the door, as his mother grabbed him and pulled him back.

"Jane Carter?" Chip addressed her. "Would you and your son be so kind as to step out here?"

"Take him back inside," Bagwell ordered.

"That was not a request," Brady said. "Step out here, please, ma'am, and you too, young Aaron."

"Is this your property, Mr. Bagwell?" Chip asked, his arm gesture taking in house and grounds.

"It is, not that that is any of your business," Bagwell answered. "You still have not answered my question, why armed Starfleet officers are trespassing in my yard."

Ignoring the question, Chip continued, "And title to this property is in your and Mrs. Carter's names - not in her son's name?"

"Yessir, it is. Now explain your presence or leave."

"Of course, Mr. Bagwell. Mrs. Carter, where did the money come from to buy this large and expensive house and grounds, in a high-priced area?"

Jane Carter stood mute. Aaron mumbled something.

"What did you say, Aaron?" Chip asked. Aaron looked terrified. Chip smiled at him, and said, "You're not in any trouble, Airboy. Just repeat what I thought I heard."

"She said I didn't have any choice, that she was saddled with me and deserved a nice place," Aaron said in a low voice.

"So it was money you earned?" Brady asked.

"Yes," Aaron said. Jane slapped him across the face.

"Aaron, why haven't you come to visit me and Josh, and the other guys in the bands?" Chip asked.

"You're that queer guy that's shackled up with the singer from N*Sync!" Bagwell blurted out in recognition.

Chip reddened with anger, controlled himself, and said, "Answer my question, Aaron."

"They won't let me leave here unless one of them is with me at all times," Aaron said.

"We're keeping him away from you queers - he's been picking up bad ideas from you perverts," Bagwell said belligerently.

"Articles 12 and 17," Chip observed to his escorts.

"I concur," Masterson said.

"I concur, and note the slap as evidence under Article 68," Brady added.

"Recording, Nyota?" Chip asked. A beep from his belt acknowledged that she was. "Then as authorized by Article 9 of the Safe Haven Act of the United Federation of Planets, I, Charles Bryant Dodds, an officer of Starfleet, hereby assume custody of the minor human child Aaron Charles Carter II, and terminate all custodial arrangements heretofore held over him by Jane Carter Bagwell."

"I, Brady Thompson, an officer in Starfleet Security, bear witness," Brady added.

"I, Paul Masterson, an officer in Starfleet Security, bear witness," Masterson echoed.

"You can't do this!" Bagwell shouted, reaching to grab Aaron.

"Freeze!" Masterson ordered, aiming his phaser. Bagwell froze.

"Charges may or may not be brought against you for violation of the Safe Haven Act," Chip addressed Bagwell and Mrs. Carter. "Taking one step to restrain him now would force our hand to arrest you immediately." Then, to Aaron, "You're coming with us. What happens after that is your decision. But if you like, you can stay with Josh and me. Nick's waiting to see you, and he was arranging to get David there by the time we get back."

A slow smile and wide eyes came across Aaron's face as he realized that his nightmare was over.

"If you leave with them," Jane said to him, "you are no son of mine. Go party with your pansy friends, but don't expect to ever call me mother again."

Aaron reacted as if he'd been slapped again.

"Get us out of here, Nyota," Chip said disgustedly. "Four to beam up."

Chapter Ten

"The Search for Short"

Starfleet Headquarters, San Francisco, October 23, 2003

Sarek nodded gravely as he concluded reading the synopsis of the Joint Maneuver Exercise of the previous month. "All appears satisfactory," he commented. "I therefore seek the logic behind your wishing me to review it."

"That is precisely why I wished this meeting," said Harrison Morrow, Admiral Commanding Starfleet. "The interactions went off perfectly, even the mock sector crisis scenario. The protocols functioned without any repercussions. And we have you to thank for that. Earth is of course proud of what we have achieved, but it took Vulcan being prepared to bring its fleet under Starfleet command in an emergency to produce the integrated force that can effectively defend the Federation if a real sector-wide crisis should erupt."

"It was merely logical, in accord with the Way of Surak," Sarek responded. "Earth designed Starfleet to be open to all sentient races. By contrast, the forces of Vulcan and Andoria are single-species, nor do the Tellarites welcome others to their command. Perhaps one in eighteen Vulcans who have made space their career serve in Starfleet, not the Vulcan Defense Force, Earth has made its protocols flexible and multi-species, welcoming other peoples." Sarek allowed himself a small half-smile as he glanced at the portrait of Admiral MacDonald on the far wall. "A far cry from the xenophobia rampant when I

first arrived here. Therefore it was logical that Starfleet have command when unity is called for. 'The needs of the Many...'"

"...outweigh the Needs of the Few, or the One.' But it took you, sir, to show that to a proud naval tradition, and I do not believe anyone else could have done it. Starfleet is grateful ... as am I." Morrow was effusive.

"Acknowledged," Sarek said. "But let us turn to other matters. What will Starfleet need in the coming year? Show me your plans."

"Very well, sir," Morrow replied. "The present exploration schedule can be continued without any supplement. The *Endurance* and the *Lafayette* are out on six-month cruises now; the *Yorktown* and *Excelsior* just completed theirs. By rotating ships between 'milk runs' for colony supply, defensive patrols, and the longer voyages of exploration, I am trying to keep consistent readiness and morale levels. Jim has met with other captains whenever they are in the same port as the *Enterprise*, and he concurs that the system is working effectively." Sarek nodded.

"On scientific research, I'd like to step up the pace a bit. Here are current and projected figures," Morrow said, handing over a spreadsheet printout. "We are prepared to support all current and planned colonization efforts, including the likelihood of four new colony proposals during the year, that being the number that were proposed two of the last three years. If a fifth new colony is proposed, as in 2002, I have a set-aside for unforeseen projects subject to the Supreme Council releasing the funds." Morrow continued detailing his plans, with Sarek nodding or making brief comments in the way they had evolved over a decade if working together.

At last they came to law enforcement. Starfleet had for decades provided law enforcement to new colonies until they were large enough to provide for their own police, and in theory it was the supreme law enforcement body anywhere in the Federation, either through being called in by local police needing help or intervening unilaterally under the dozen or so laws binding on all the Federation. "As you can see, Sarek, I forecast no significant change in our needs."

Sarek did not nod or gesture approval this time. He said nothing, but picked up the synopsis of the Joint Maneuver report. Morrow got the message: if humans set store by gratitude, Sarek was 'calling in his chips' now.

"Amanda wished you to review these," Sarek said calmly, handing a folder of printouts and clippings to Morrow. One glance was sufficient: they were cases of child abuse and neglect, mostly on Earth. His mind drifted back to two nights before: dinner with his nephew, who had told him he was resigning as deputy chief of police for a major California city and accepting an offer of the chief position in a smaller city, after a scandal in which his old department had failed to act on a number of abuse complaints involving influential people.

"This is ... difficult, Sarek," he said. "I can and will make sure we give every bit of support to locals trying to combat child abuse and neglect. And we can bring some influence to bear to make sure more gets done. But you know Earth: if I order Starfleet in every time there is a report, we will be seen as outside meddlers and forfeit a lot of good will we've built up over the years. Nonetheless, I realize something needs to be done, and the places that are not working on it locally are where it's most needed. Let me think." He turned and began pushing numbers on his computer, pausing and scratching his chin. Sarek waited impassively.

"Here is what I can do," he said at length. "I'll set aside an allocation for a new youth services bureau, and keep my eyes open for the right person to run it. As I see it, neither of us wants a career professional doing it - we need someone thinking in terms of helping the kids by whatever means are available, not someone with a bureaucratic mindset. I won't start it until I've got someone I think is competent to run it. He or she will have Starfleet Security at his beck and call, but we'll distance the new agency from Starfleet in the public eye - Federation Youth Services, perhaps? Put a competent civilian in charge, not a Starfleet officer or a bureaucrat, but a father or mother who's shown he can reach out to help other kids than his own. That will spike the cannon of anyone with an axe to grind about 'outsiders coming in' ... it will be a parent whom people can relate to, acting to help kids. Meanwhile we'll continue publicly backing Starfleet officers taking action as they encounter such problems, like the incident last month on Mu Tucanae IV or what Cdr. Dodds did here on Earth for the Carter boy. That will keep the issue in the public eye while we find the right person to run the new agency. I know this is not all you have a right to expect, but what is your reaction to this as first steps towards combatting the problem effectively?"

"It is acceptable," Sarek said. "Vulcan too may be able to bring some influence to bear. Let us be agreed, then." And with that the two men turned to other issues affecting Starfleet's future.

December 27th, 2003 - San Francisco, Sarek's Residence

"I am troubled by this Crest young Jason saw, my son. I am of two minds regarding such knowledge." Sarek said, as he sat back in the armchair once the children had left.

Spock nodded agreement, "A 'Clan Short', and judging by the IDIC, linked to our House. It means that your design is about to take place, and not involving these children; at least not at first."

Sarek remained silent for a while. After ten minutes thought, he asked, "My son, when does Enterprise come in to start her refit?"

"Late July, Earth time. Once here, I shall keep in close contact with my nephew, Justin. It is likely to be a link either from Charles' family, or via myself. When are you returning to Vulcan?"

"In March. There is a gap period. We will need cover."

"Can Jason and the others assist there, and keep watch?"

Sarek nodded his head thoughtfully, "Maybe. We shall see, my son. 'Clan Short'..."

"Would it also mean having two Clans in our family? Can Earth adapt to that form of intervention?"

"That remains uncertain," Sarek said, a hint of worry in his voice, "for it has taken many years to bring Earth to this point. There are options open, however, should two Clans come into existence. Two options."

Spock nodded as he recalled the old traditions, "Yes. There is precedent for both. We shall have to advise both Clans at the correct time as to the correct course of action. They can choose to disregard the two options and remain independent, however, as would be their right."

"All in good time, Spock. All in good time. This visitor may not be from our plane, as he so succinctly put it. He made a mistake with time, so a mistake with dimension may also be viable. We know right now that a Clan Evans will arise anywhere from ten to eleven Earth months in the future. Let us plan for that eventuality and prepare for the possibility of the other."

Spock stood and walked to the window. He stared outside silently, and Sarek watched impassively for a few moments. Then, the motion of his son's shoulders prompted him to move over quickly. "My son, are you certain of your decision to place yourself as A'nirih to Jason and his siblings?" Sarek asked softly as he turned and pulled his now weeping son into his embrace.

After a brief pause, Spock nodded, "I am, my... I am, Sa'mi."

Sarek increased his hold on his now emotional son, for the childlike name for 'daddy' raised in the elder Vulcan many worries.

Again, a slight pause, and Sarek felt Spock's emotions being brought under control again. "Father," Spock said, his face returning to its normal, impassive state, "I do not believe we have a cause for doubt over this 'Clan Short'. Forgive me for saying so, but it 'feels' right. Something I cannot explain makes me just accept it as so."

Sarek nodded quietly, and pulled Spock back to the sofa, and sat him down. He then seated himself alongside his son, and started to quietly talk to him. A minute or so after, Jason and Nathan Evans reappeared and ran over to them...

From a corner, two children were watching. One was small and had caramel blond hair. The other was slightly taller, armoured, but very, very thin.

"See Uncle?" the blond haired child asked his companion.

The boy in armour nodded, "You help him there, Levi?"

Levi nodded. "They need to stay focused on Uncle Cory and Sean."

"Thanks, Levi. Now I understand those records I just read," Levi's companion giggled.

Both boys vanished...

As they did, Spock's eyes darted to the corner that they had both been standing invisible in, for a slight touch on his senses had alerted him.

...Something that called to him...

Friday, August 20, 2004

"Jason Evans to Enterprise."

"Why, hello, Jason!" came Uhura's voice. "How can we help you?"

"Is Uncle Jim or Uncle Spock there please?"

"I'll call for Captain Spock now, or do you want me to relay you to his quarters?"

"Relay please. Oh, and thanks for those cookies, Aunty Nyota! Nath' and I loved them!"

Jason heard chuckles followed by a beep as his call was relayed. "Spock here, my son. You have news?"

"Yes, Poppa. You know what grandfather set us to seek out, of course. Two of the most likely candidates are two boys named Cory and Sean."

"What makes you believe these are the ones?"

"They have already gathered a large group about themselves in brotherhood, and they are continuing to rescue more. However, I need your help, and this logically falls in your sphere. When we were sorting out the backgrounds of those around this Cory, I discovered that his psychologist was adopted as a baby." As Jason paused for breath, he could sense his a'nirih's eyebrow quirk across the vast distance separating them. "This makes it a Family matter, of sorts. Dr. Richardson believes himself to be the bio-son of Jeremy and Sarah Richardson, who adopted him, but Draco discovered that he is in fact the son of the late Jerald Richardson Sr. and his wife Anne, who has been searching for him. Why this becomes a family matter is that Mrs. Richardson's in-laws are Harold and Jackie Littrell, who stood a'nirih and m'aih to he who is thy brother by adoption."

"And since you may not, under Red One, reveal your relationship to Charles unless it proves essential to your mission, the duty falls on me to have him contact she who is his aunt. You have done well, my son." Jason beamed at Spock's praise.

"There is one more thing, Poppa. Tony 'Sees' a death impending affecting them... one that would make their getting back in touch logical at that time."

"Acknowledged," Spock said. "Live long and prosper, my chosen son."

"Peace and long life, my chosen father." They disconnected. As always, Jason felt warmed to the depths of his being by the affection Spock allowed to show, even in his more Vulcan choice of words.

Vulcan Embassy, San Francisco - August 24th

Sarek was reading quietly when a beeping went off on the console at his desk. He raised his eyes to look at the flashing signal, and to his surprise recognised the code of the VSO.

"Ambassador Sarek. Go ahead," he said as he pressed the button to receive the call.

"Voice of the Dragon here. It has happened, Grandfather."

Sarek stiffened slightly. "Please confirm: the Short boys have declared brotherhood with Justin Dodds?"

"Confirmed. Our search for Short is over, Grandfather. Clan Short now exists... you have only to let THEM know it now!" came the laughing response from Voice as the signal ended.

Sarek sat back in his chair, and permitted the smallest of smiles to play over his face for an instant...

Captain's Ready Room, U.S.S. Enterprise, Evening of Wednesday, August 24, 2004

The viewscreen showed Admiral Morrow making short work a dish of Almond Gai Ding. "You gentlemen have something that requires my attention?" he asked.

"Spock asked for this conference," Kirk said. "I am present solely as his Captain, and for any evidence he requires. While Starfleet always tries to honor the loss of crew and officers' relatives, I thought it was a trifle unusual that we responded as we did to the loss of a wife of a long-lost cousin of Chip's ... Commander Dodds' ... other adoptive family. Spock, however, was insistent that we pay full honors to the late Mrs. Richardson."

Spock looked grave. "Admiral, it is not permitted that I speak publicly of my motivations, even in front of Jim. Suffice it to say that this incident was brought to my attention in relationship to Temporal Anomaly #74, which I believe my father briefed you on under Red One." Both Kirk and Morrow looked startled, for different reasons. "However, that is not the reason for this conference."

Spock's measured tones beat out his evidence. "I have forwarded to you and to my father a file detailing the recent activities of Mrs. Teri Short. Last year she lost a son in an automobile accident caused by a drunk driver. The traumatic impact of that loss caused near-complete amnesia in another son ... whom she had adopted after the death of his birth mother, a close friend. Her connection to Dr. Richardson is through that incident - he was her son's psychologist. That boy is back home now. During all this, which would have caused extreme emotional distress in most women, she continued to stand as mother figure to a neighbor boy, Tyler, whose parents were unloving and for whom she was babysitter. When they abandoned the boy, she immediately adopted him - and also his half-brother, whose abuse was discovered on the same day, last Monday. When Mrs. Richardson died, she immediately reached out to her two boys to provide a nurturing parent figure. And on that same day, she and her sons rescued twin runaway boys. That was Monday. On Tuesday, she met Aaron Carter, immediately saw past his celebrity status to see the hurting motherless boy, and offered him her maternal nurture. And my adoptive brother and his husband adopted the twins whom Mrs. Short and her boys had rescued. This of course makes it Family business for me."

Morrow had been nodding, leafing through the transcript Spock had provided, as the Vulcan detailed his observations. "So you are recommending...?" he asked.

"It is by right your sole judgment," Spock said. "But it does seem the logical choice. She has been 'tested under fire', as the human expression goes, and no limit is evident on the maternal love she appears able to give. Logic dictates her as your proper choice, in my opinion."

Morrow paused in thought, reviewing Spock's words and the transcript before him. After a minute he looked up again. "Jim," he said, "stand by for orders." He turned to his computer, opened a file, and began keying in data.

"Begging the Admiral's pardon," Kirk began, "but I have committed to taking the Short boys on a tour of the Enterprise, and making the two with aspirations in Starfleet Acting Ensigns under your recruitment program. Will these orders disrupt those plans?"

"Not at all," Morrow said warmly. "You will be acting in my stead, at timing you see as appropriate, to recruit me a director for a new bureau." He smiled. "This Mrs. Short is exactly what we have been looking for to head up the new Federation Youth Services. Agree to any reasonable terms she places on accepting the position, and ensure she realizes that it will give her power equivalent to your own and the resources to reach out to kids in need as she has been doing on her own dime already. We need her more than she needs us." Turning to Spock, he said, "Let your father know, I have kept the commitment I made to him. And I thank you for finding her."

"Acknowledged, Admiral," Spock said. A smile crept across his normally stoic face as he added, "She seems like an amazing woman." Morrow and Kirk looked at him startledly.

Vulcan Embassy, San Francisco, Evening, Thursday, August 26, 2004

"New grandsons?" Amanda asked with a delighted smile.

"Yes, mother. Charles and Joshua have assumed custody of James and Jacob under the Safe Haven Act., and will be moving towards adopting them formally." Spock's emotionless delivery failed to mask completely a clear sense of pleasure. "More: they are telepaths after the human mode, as twins often are, and of high potential. I have undertaken to train them in the Vulcan manner, including witness techniques."

"How did Justy react?" she asked.

"It was his idea, at first. He naturally bonded to them, as is his nature. And he has vowed brotherhood to Teri's and Dan's sons, who had taken the twins as their brothers," Spock continued.

"Remember, t'hy'la," Sarek stated peacefully, "Remember what we have planned for Jason and his brothers and sisters once Red One stops covering their existence?"

"The Than-Sakai-Maat," Spock said, as Amanda echoed in English, "The Clan of Brothers by Vow."

"Indeed," Sarek said. "Justin is at law a son of the House of Surak, able to act as befits any son of T'Khasi."

"And under Vulcan tradition," Amanda said as full realization struck her, "whoever he vows brotherhood to is therefore also counted a part of the House of Surak and the Family of Sarek. We now have a Clan that is 'in the open'."

Spock nodded, his own face also peaceful.

"Come, we have much work to do, and little time to do it." Sarek's attitude was purposeful. "Amanda, please begin drafting an amendment to the Safe Haven Act empowering... Spock, who is leader among them?"

"That would be Sean and Cory Short," Spock responded. "The information we had been given prior to this recent event is that they are both adoptive brothers and lifemates as you know, Father. Now, we have received an update from Jason. Cory is the older and the guider, Sean the enabler and the foundation on which Cory builds. He is also the memory for the group, the one who enables them to bond by sharing their pasts."

"It is only logical for Cory to become Pid-Sam, and Sean to be his Archivist. Spock, please retrieve the unfinished Charter for Clan Short that we drafted six months ago. We now have names that can be added."

"What is this Charter going to cover?" Amanda asked.

"Much. I will charter them with broad authority. If human adults will not protect their children, then Vulcan will!" Sarek said with force.

Amanda's eyes were shining. "The Safe Haven Act?" she prompted.

"An amendment empowering both Federation Youth Service and Clan Short to do what Earth's governments and Starfleet should have been doing all along," Sarek answered. "I will call the Speaker of the Federation Supreme Council and the Vulcan High Council. The amendment should pose no problems. As for Vulcan, since it is House-internal, my authority cannot be gainsaid, but because it commits Vulcan to a course of action, the High Council must ratify it."

"Will Siprak cause difficulties?" Amanda asked.

"Of course. Where humans are concerned, he has left the path of logic. When Solak chose to continue his researches on Earth for his son's sake, Siprak pulled his funding, and Great House Surak took over what the Academy of Science was not underwriting in memory of his lady mother. But I can count on at least two of the other three Great Houses, and at least eight Houses Minor - in matters affecting House internal affairs, the tradition has always been for the High Council to ratify the Patriarch's judgment." Spock was nodding in agreement as Sarek completed the explanation.

"Will the fact this is a Vulcan clan operating under Vulcan tradition and logic on Earth sway him?" Spock asked.

"Logic would suggest that, given Siprak's mindset. But the fact that the boys are Earth humans will probably lead him to oppose it, so far as I can forecast his logic." Sarek replied, then said, "To work, then."

Tuesday, August 31, 2004

"They were made to do *what?*" Sarek's visage was restrained rage as he completed review of the information relayed him by Justy and the twins regarding Sammy and Jeffy Taylor, now Martin.

He glanced at his incoming messages, two of which had identical headings: "It passed." One was from Amanda at the Federation Supreme Council's offices, the other from his deputy on Vulcan.

He reached for his communicator, and punched in a number he had gotten from his son. "Ambassador Sarek to Ensign Cory Short."

"Ambassador, this is Ensign Cory Short. Please proceed."

"Ensign Short; I have just completed a disturbing call from my son-in-law and grandsons. The information I received suggests that two recent additions to your family have suffered grievous wrongs at the hands of their previous caregivers. I must insist you provide me with confirmation and scope of these allegations."

There was quiet at the other end of the line before Cory drew a deep breath and answered. "Ambassador, the information you have received is accurate. The Taylor twins were rented out for fellatio and filmed for profit doing the same. Preliminary information shows both their primary caregiver and those he trusted them with while away profited from this enterprise. At this time we are preparing to investigate further into the expanse of the damage done."

"The information I received then was accurate. Is my information correct that my grandsons swore an oath of brotherhood while visiting your residence?"

"Yes it is, Ambassador."

"Have the Taylor twins sworn that same oath?"

"Yes they have, Ambassador."

"That is as I hoped. I must chastise young Justin for failing to disseminate the implications of his swearing of the oath to you. I am aware that my two most recent grandsons were already under the same oath. When Justin responded by swearing the same oath as his brothers, he placed your group in an interesting legal position. Due to the size of your group, you qualify as a Clan pending approval by the Vulcan High Council. I have been in communication with the Council, and based on the positive effects of your actions your Clan status has been confirmed. By your actions, Ensign Sean and yourself have proven yourselves as the leaders of the Clan in the eyes of the Council. Under Vulcan law, as the senior leader you are responsible for ensuring these wrongs to the members of your Clan are righted as required by Vulcan law. In one Earth hour a technician from the Vulcan Embassy will be at your resi-

dence to install the terminal required at the Clan Leaders' residence. I must insist these transgressions be righted with dispatch. You have the resources of Vulcan at your disposal."

Cory sounded shocked as he responded. "Thank you, Ambassador. Your assistance has been most welcome. I will review the applicable Vulcan statutes and ensure they are followed to their fullest extent. I shall await the technicians' arrival."

"That shall be acceptable. Live long and prosper, Cory."

"Live long and prosper, Ambassador Sarek."

Authors' Notes: Eighty-two years before, an orphaned brother and sister were rescued from an uncaring orphanage by a millionaire bachelor and the planet Vulcan. What this set in motion comes full circle with this chapter, as Earth's young people are enabled to protect themselves. Portions of this chapter were contributed by Iluvantir, and the final section echoes chapter 26 of Memories Part One, by ACFan. We hope you have enjoyed a peek behind the scenes of what led to the formation of Clan Short.

Chapter Eleven

New York City, Fall, 1926

The grand old Duisenberg pulled smoothly up to the curb outside Pennsylvania Station. Richard bounded out, his youthful exuberance on full bore. Bruce stepped easily out behind him. The porter retrieved their bags from the limousine's capacious trunk, pocketing the gold double eagle Bruce handed him with effusive thanks. Alfred pulled easily away, headed back uptown to Gotham.

Richard forestalled the porter's attempt to take their baggage by picking up two suitcases himself. "You don't need to do that, young sir!" the porter exclaimed. "Your father has paid me to carry them."

"That won't be necessary," Bruce said, hefting the other two. "We're to meet others in the V.I.P. lounge upstairs, so we'd need to take them from you shortly in any case. But thank you for your kindness." He slipped the man another \$10 piece, the gold glistening in the sun. "But if anyone should ask, you escorted us to our private car; understood?"

"Of course, sir," the porter agreed with a wink and a nod. They entered the cathedral-like railroad station. Bruce paused at a newsstand, flipped the proprietor a dime, and took a *Herald Tribune*. Then they proceeded up a flight of stairs.

"It'll be great to see Sis again!" Richard burred. Bruce nodded with a smile. Down a corridor and into the V.I.P. lounge, where they met an unsmiling government bodyguard. They exited the lounge through a rather unremarkable side door set behind an array of potted plants, and proceeded down an empty corridor. The agent unlocked a door and stepped aside to let them in, coming to guard rest outside as Bruce closed the door behind them.

Inside, the room was Spartan – almost no furnishings save a table with an odd-looking device lying on it. Setting a suitcase down, Bruce picked it up, keyed it on, and held it to the side of his head as if it were a telephone handset. "We're ready," he said.

"Acknowledged. Acceptable" came from the device. Bruce set it down and picked up his suitcase, moving to stand alongside Richard. Moments later, they turned into flickering columns of light, and then vanished.

As they materialized, the unsmiling Vulcan at the transporter stage controls said "Good day, Mr. Wayne, Master Richard," in a clipped British accent.

"And a good day to you as well, Xupar," Bruce responded. "Your command of English is improving greatly, including the idioms of polite speech that are alien to Vulcan custom. My compliments to you and your teacher." Xupar made a half-nod of acknowledgement.

They proceeded to the passenger lounge and viewing area adjacent to their cabin. Richard set his suitcases outside the cabin, took Bruce's and placed them with his own, and hurried to the viewport. "I never get tired of seeing the Earth from space," he said.

Bruce stepped up beside him and placed his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Me too, son," he said. "And to think we owe this to your sister and brother-in-law." He paused pensively. "I often wondered what my life might have been like before you came into it, if you never had. Would I have become a miser, a veritable Scrooge? Would I have been content to use my money to help the police fight crime, and help children? There was a time when I thought of turning into a vigilante, you know – imagine: a millionaire playboy who disguises himself to fight crime at night. Who would ever believe such a wild story!?"

"Holy sehlats, Bruce!" Richard laughed. "What a strange idea!"

Together they watched the beautiful blue world below them for a few more minutes, until the signal came that they were breaking orbit. As the ship rotated away from Earth, Bruce unfolded his newspaper and began reading. Richard reached into his suitcase and pulled out a digest-sized magazine entitled *Thrilling Science Stories*.

'Senator Denounces League Pact' ran one headline. *It figures*, Bruce thought. *A senator in the opposition party up for re-election is getting publicity by claiming the recently ratified League of Nations treaty would give away U.S. sovereignty.* After skimming the rest of the article and making mental notes of things that might affect his investments, he went on.

'Munich Trial Ends; Riot Leaders Convicted'. *Well, it took them long enough*, he thought. A 1923 riot in Munich, started by members of one of those lunatic right-wing fringe parties, this one calling itself the National Socialists, had tried to foment a riot against the Bavarian government. The Federation of German States had taken the threat seriously, and held a full public trial of the leaders: Anton Drexler, Ernst Rohm, Josef Goebbels, and someone named Adolf Hitler. All had been found guilty by their peers and sentenced to death. Bruce nodded; riots were no way to effect change.

'Czechs Agree to EuroFed' was the headline of another article. Bruce took notice. Maybe it was safe to invest in Europe again. After the bloodletting of 1914-16, there was a movement afoot in Europe to bring an end to the national bickering. The German Federation was firmly behind it; the young Austrian Emperor had signed on avidly, as his dominions collapsed around him. The French Army favored it, but many French politicians were fighting it, especially as George V of England was prepared to guarantee it by establishing protectorates over any country that joined, backing the locals with the might of the Royal Army and Navy. The smaller countries were on the fence, fearing Germany without France as a counterpoise. For the Czechs to endorse it was an unexpected gain, and meant maybe long-term peace in Europe was now possible.

A silvery laugh from his ward, and son in spirit, distracted his attention. "What's so funny?" he asked Richard.

"The letter column," Richard giggled. "Listen: 'The third part of *War of the Raptor* was excellent. Maxwell and Stenson have a sure way with words. The scenes in the Forge make it seem almost like the authors have actually been there.' I feel like writing and telling them that Arthur and Sanjak have!"

"You can't, of course," Bruce answered. "But I certainly understand the temptation!" He chuckled. "How does it feel to know two published authors?"

"More than two," Richard said laughing. "Wesley did a spaceport-bar story that is hilarious. And the next issue will start serializing Robert's *Space Cadet*."

"You do realize, don't you, why Sarek is underwriting this whole thing?" Bruce asked.

"I'm not naïve, Bruce!" Richard was amusedly emphatic. "It's the perfect way to condition Earth humans to accept contact, when they finally go public. Father told us that when he was a boy, nobody trusted anyone in Europe, and most of them didn't trust each other. The Germans were all warmongers, the Russians... well, look what the People's Ministry has done to reform and modernize things there. Imagine if that had gone on a few years, radical Marxists might have overthrown the Tsar instead."

"That would never happen!" Bruce scoffed. "The Tsar's armies were always quick to put down rebellions."

"I wouldn't be too sure," Richard said, with the easy confidence of his 16 years. 'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings.' What if the Army wanted the reforms just as badly?"

"You have a point," Bruce conceded. "As it was, when Thulan of Andoria ran his extrapolations and then the Vulcans applied their logic, Nikolai had no choice but to see the benefits of bringing in popularly elected ministers that would make the changes he needed to stay competitive with other nations. But you're missing the bigger picture. Remember how I reacted to Sarek when I first saw him?"

Richard giggled. "I was getting to that. What Robert and Arthur and the rest are doing, is to turn the idea of extraterrestrial aliens from dangerous monsters to friends with common goals. It's Surak's philosophy: IDIC. What it did for Earth, bringing international peace, is a side effect. But the eventual result will be a world that welcomes Vulcans and Andorians as our friends."

"I was hoping you'd see that," Bruce agreed. "Which brings me to something I plan to do, and with you as my heir, you deserve a say. I've talked with old man Reynolds at Gideon, the Dysons, and so on.

Even got Zeb Whatley on board, kicking and screaming as usual." Bruce picked up the newspaper and pointed to the article about the Senator. "The President wants to saturate the country with the benefits the League has brought. We're going to play up Vulcan technology as the benefits of economic progress – though, of course, not admitting where it comes from. He turned to us major campaign contributors to back the idea. I think it's a good one."

"You want my opinion on it!"

"Of course. I've been making sure you're educated to take over when I'm gone, *fils-aimé*. You know what Wayne Industries can do. I want your opinion if making a contribution like this is the right thing to do."

"No doubt about it!" Richard was firm. "Go ahead; not only is it the right thing to do ethically, but Sarek will be pleased, and you can leverage a bit more technology from him as a result." He smirked in a mercenary way.

Bruce laughed. "Exactly what I was thinking." He drew Richard into a warm, deep hug.

Buckingham Palace, Late 1926

The King's drawing room had a slightly threadbare understated elegance to it. King George smiled warmly as he welcomed his visitors: From America, the President and Secretary of State, and Bruce; from Russia, the round-faced People's Minister for Foreign Relations and Science Minister; Sarek; and his own Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. The Minister of Mines of Bolivia seemed to feel badly out of place. Over in the corner sat Richard and Amanda, and one other.

"Thank you all for coming," the King said. "As agreed, we are gathered to hear the results of Mr. Wayne's mission in our behalf."

"The Tsar wishes to again register his objections to having an American capitalist represent Earth," the Russian Foreign Minister bluntly interjected.

"Thank you, Your Majesty," Bruce replied. "Maxim, I doubt we will ever see eye to eye on this, but let me say to you again that in this matter we are on the same side – the long-term welfare of the people of Earth, yours as well as us Americans. In any case, it's your own objection, not Alexei's." He smiled at his old sparring partner.

"Señor de la Paz, I must ask your word of honor as a Bolivian and a gentleman that you will not divulge the results of our deliberations here, beyond the list of people you will be provided who know Earth's greatest secret."

The Bolivian gentleman seemed taken aback at this. "I must act, sir, as seems to me right for the benefit of my country."

"I am confident you will see that giving your word will do just that," Bruce said. "But we must insist." The other diplomats and leaders around the room solemnly nodded agreement.

"Then, sir, you have my word, contingent on that reservation," the slender Bolivian Professor turned Minister responded. "One must always act as seems best for oneself and for those who have put their trust in one."

"On that principle we are, I think, all agreed," the President smiled. You are now joining a conspiracy whose goal is to help our whole world." The Professor grinned; this was the sort of thing he enjoyed. "Four years ago, the leading governments of Earth were contacted by extraterrestrial races. After demonstrating their good faith, they proposed an exchange of knowledge. The fruits of that exchange have already begun to benefit us – consider the gift my government gave yours, of the new hospital in LaPaz, and the advanced technology we provided in it. Bolivia will be the first of several nations besides the Big Three to be brought in on the secret. And that is because you have a resource needed for the common good. Bruce?"

"Let me brief everyone on what I learned at the Academy of Sciences, and then I hope a plan of action will fall into place. I confess that there are serious objections to every scenario I have devised for implementing it."

"Vulcan's experience has been that giving technology to other races has a debilitating effect on them, making them dependent on Vulcan science instead of advancing their own. As you all know, Dr. Cochrane independently devised the warp core that is the basis of interstellar flight, hoping to use it as an earthbound power source – which would have had disastrous consequences. It was, of course, his experiments that alerted the Andorians and then the Vulcans to Earth. If he'd been simply handed the plans for a warp core by a Vulcan, instead of developing the theory and implementing it himself...." Bruce trailed off, allowing them to finish the thought for themselves.

"Instead," he continued, "what they propose to do is what they've been doing with my research people the last four years: ask leading questions that enable the human researchers to find the answers for themselves, along with pointing out the flaws when humans start going down a blind alley." Sarek was stoically nodding as Bruce spoke.

"In particular," he went on, "they have found that encouraging spaceflight has an excellent effect – the technologies needed trickle down into the planetbound side of things at just the right rate for social acceptance and the evolution of new social norms to accommodate them. For that reason, they have been training an internationally selected crew to man Earth's first spaceship and others to advance the diffusion of such knowledge at an acceptable rate throughout humanity."

"Yes, yes, go on, we know all this," the Prime Minister said.

"The good Professor from Bolivia and Maxim's associate for Science do not, sir," Bruce replied equanimously. "I wanted to be sure they were up to speed, so to speak, with the rest of us." The Prime Minister grumpily conceded the point with a gesture with his cigar.

"What they propose," Bruce went on, "is that you come up with a cover story about using missile-launched space probes, getting man into space, and use this to disguise the actual program. The League would build, first, a small prototype starship, and then a full-scale one for exploration. The cover story is that it will be a series of international space stations, which would actually be the drydocks for building them. They will also aid us to start one colony, around Alpha Centauri. It was their thought that Britain take the lead on the colony, and America on the starship. Russia's share of the first phase of development will be basic weather control to better develop Siberia. Each Great Power and several pro-

tectorate states would contribute people and equipment toward the projects, Bolivia is needed because of its lithium deposits, and will receive access to technology on a par with the Great Powers in compensation."

The assembled leaders contemplated this series of proposals. Maxim spoke up. "Russia accepts, on condition we receive equal benefits from the second phase."

The Prime Minister motioned the rotund Foreign Secretary over to confer with him and the King. "We can consent to this, provided that sovereignty is vested in the King until the colony is ready for Dominion status, like Canada and Australia."

"I was empowered to speak for Bolivia by the Generalissimo; I wondered why," the Professor said. "The offer is generous; we will want a small share in the colonization effort, but otherwise we agree."

The President was shaking his head from side to side. "The other party is still largely isolationist," he said. "For our share to be the *International* Space Station would not be something I could get through Congress." The Secretary of State dolefully nodded agreement.

"Cannot this be resolved?" King George bluntly asked. A lively discussion followed, without any useful results. "Cannot you assist us?" the King asked Sarek.

"No, it would be seen as favoritism if Vulcan were to propose a solution," the Ambassador said.

Finally from the corner with Richard and Amanda the man who had been sitting with them stood, resplendent in his tweed greatcoat and deerstalker hat.

"It's quite simple, really," he drawled, Cashmere pipe in hand. "Present it to the world as the United States building an International Space Station. But take your Senate into your confidence, Mr. President, and present it to them as a secret U.S. project, to help keep the peace through American power. It will also help explain why the so-called space station is highly maneuverable."

The President nodded in pleased acceptance. "I believe that could work. However did you come up with it?"

"When you have eliminated what is not possible, then whatever remains, however improbable, is the answer you seek. It's elementary, really." And he strode from the room.

Sarek looked over at Amanda. "Remind me, t'hy'la, to find out if one of our ships called here before official discovery."

"Why is that, sir?" the heavyset British Foreign Secretary asked.

"Well, *you're* clearly not Vulcan, Mr. Holmes, but I suspect that *he* might be."

The Foreign Secretary grimaced. "Sometimes I hate my brother."

Spring 1950: The White House

After over 25 years, Richard felt comfortable as he and Bruce were escorted to the Oval Office. But every so often, the sense of 'how did the son of a circus acrobat get to be *here*?' still had the power to move him.

Sarek and Amanda were there, waiting for him. He rushed over and planted a kiss on his sister's cheek. He looked around. Four cabinet secretaries, the Andorian ambassador, a rather pugnacious-looking Tellarite in uniform, two Vulcans in formal robes, and several men he didn't recognize were present. Standing in the room was a large viewscreen, of obvious Vulcan make.

The President rose from his desk with a warm smile. "So glad you could join us, Bruce, Richard! Please have a chair." He nodded at Sarek.

Sarek activated the large screen. Three windows opened on it, one showing the King and Prime Minister in London, one the Tsar and Tsarevich and the People's Premier in Moscow, and the third displayed the Captain's Ready Room on the Enterprise, with Archer, Trip, T'Pol, and Robert in full uniform.

"My people's history tells us that reason must always be the master, not the servant, of emotion," Sarek said. "Accordingly, we have for 28 years given the peoples of Earth logical reasons to take their place among star-faring races, and done it in a way that would appeal to their emotions. The logic of this approach has borne fruit." He gestured at one of the robed Vulcans.

"Our study of Terran social trends," the Vulcan said haughtily, "suggests that from a barbaric attitude of fearing the other, Humans have made tremendous strides towards IDIC." The Tellarite snorted at the Vulcan's attitude.

"Our sociological researches at the Tolhurst Institute," one of the suit-wearing stranger Humans added, "support our Vulcan colleague's conclusions. Assuming a standard error of 4%, our studies suggest that 54% of Americans, 56% of British and Europeans, and...."

He was interrupted in mid-analysis by the Tellarite. "What he's sayin'," the bluff pig-snouted alien blurted out, "is that you Humans are as peaceable as we are." The Andorian reacted strangely; in a less august setting, Richard would have interpreted it as suppressing a laugh. "You are as ready as you're ever going to be, to end the masquerade."

Tsar Alexei nodded. The frail, hemophiliac ruler of Russia smiled wanly. At his side, Tsarevich Travis grinned. After a glance at the Premier, the Tsar said, "Russia concurs."

The Prime Minister waved his cigar. "You called this meeting to seek consensus the time is right, Frank?" The President smiled agreement at his longtime friend. "Very well, then. The Home Office Statistical Service forecasts concur with the Vulcans and the Tolhurst men. Your Majesty, your Government advises agreement."

The King smiled. "Advice I am personally pleased to receive. Mr. President, consider the British Empire in agreement with you."

The President looked at Robert. "Your opinion?" he asked in a no-nonsense tone.

Robert's thin mustache and balding head were eclipsed by a joyful, almost boyish smile. "It worked, then? Mr. President, I recommend going public." One by one, the Cabinet Secretaries gestured thumbs up.

"Who are these uniformed men?" the Tsarevich asked.

"Your Royal Highness, may I present to you Capt. Jonathan Archer, commanding the flagship of the United States space force, the Enterprise, with his second in command Trip Tucker and his wife T'Pol of Vulcan, and the Chief of Space Operations, Admiral Robert Anson MacDonald." The three men smiled at Travis; obviously thrilled to see actual men in space, he waved happily.

"Would you like to tour the ship, Your Highness?" Trip asked with a smile.

"*Oh, da! Buzhet, Papa?*" he asked his father. The Tsar of All the Russias smiled indulgently at his son, and nodded okay.

"I asked Bruce Wayne and his ward to be present for the decision today, as he has been instrumental in introducing Vulcan technology covertly on Earth, in our campaign to make space and aliens acceptable, and because his ward is the Lady Amanda's brother," the President said.

"It is then agreed," Sarek observed. "How will it be announced?"

"You may leave that to me," the President said.

Fireside Chat, 1950

My Friends,

Back in 1922 the handful of bank failures led my advisors to recommend we put some regulatory brakes on the free market. Because such an idea was shocking to much of America, I used radio to explain the idea to Americans as being like a powerful locomotive. You do not, I said, try to limit the power of the locomotive, which needs to be powerful enough to pull us up and over the hills. But it does need a brake, so that when it goes downhill, it does not go careening off the track and wreck. Some pundits credit those brakes with having kept us out of a panic in 1929, one they believed would have been worse than the two which happened last century. Later, we took decisive action, with our friends in Britain and Russia, to prevent aggressor nations from taking over neighboring smaller nations, and I reported to you on our joint actions there – actions that I feel sure kept us out of war.

That began a tradition of these chats with the American people. When television came along, we moved them to television.

This is a historic chat, for tonight I do not only come before the American people as their President. Rather, I am speaking to all the peoples of the Earth as the chosen spokesman for the entire League of Nations. Along with the American people, I am speaking over the broadcast facilities in Britain, Cana-

da, and Australia. Translators are rendering my speech into French, Russian, German, Mandarin Chinese, Arabic, and several other languages.

I said we began these talks in 1922 about market regulation. But something else happened that year, something with even more earthshaking consequences. For reasons that will come clear as I explain, we agreed to keep that event as secret as a general's strategic plans to win a war – until the day that secrecy was no longer necessary.

I ask my older listeners to remember what things were like in 1920. Everywhere on Earth, there was a general fear of The Other, as someone sinister, not to be trusted, someone out to harm me and mine. My younger listeners, those under 30, can scarcely remember those days if they can at all.

One of the ways in which that fear of The Other was played out was in the science fiction and fantasy of the time. Other races were bug-eyed monsters bent on conquering Earth and kidnapping our women – which, if you think about it, makes no sense, since our women would be no more desirable to bug-eyed monsters than a female spider would be to a man.

In point of fact, we *were* contacted by aliens, and they *did* want something from us. But they were not monsters, and they proposed to give far more than they got. What they wanted from us was to learn how we could live together in peace. What they offered was the advanced technology that we have been slowly introducing: fusion power, electronics, things we might have developed on our own but not for many years yet.

What they asked of us is time to observe as we conquered that fear of The Other, and learned to live together in peace. This benefited them because, from three civilizations at swords' points in an uneasy peace, they learned from us how to become true friends.

To show their goodwill, one of the first things they did was to warn us of the danger in Dr. Cochrane's energy-generating experiments – something that if we had not stopped it, would have blown half of Long Island off the map. And they built us a starship, and trained people to crew it, the foundation for Earth's own fleet.

At the President's gesture, the camera panned back.

Peoples of Earth, allow me to present to you Garav, of Tellar Prime; Ermon of Andoria; and my good friend Sarek, son of Skon, of the planet Vulcan. With him are his wife Amanda Grayson, of Earth, and their young son Spock.

These people have proven to us that they are our friends. Today the time has come to remove the secrecy from their original contact, and proclaim that for Earth, it is time for the stars!

Thank you and good night.

The results of the President's announcement were predictable: the news media had spontaneous orgasms. It was a tribute to how well Robert, Arthur, and their friends had prepared the way that most of the public accepted it as 'something that was going to happen sooner or later, anyways' – newsworthy to be sure, but to be accepted as the next step in Our Conquest of the New Frontier of Space. Robert, now

Admiral MacDonald, went back to visit his native Kansas to a hero's welcome. The Lady Amanda charmed America by taking her husband, the Vulcan Ambassador, to a wide range of diners, museums, and libraries she proved she was intimately familiar with. She didn't bother explaining that she'd visited them 30 years before with her father, on breaks from their act when the circus came to town.

There were, of course, some sour notes. A couple of conspiracy theorists took it as a way to denounce the League. A few fundamentalists decided that Vulcans were devils – or maybe, they were the Andorians or Tellarites. The aliens-are-devils convocation dissolved in arguments over which Scriptures 'proved' which alien race to be devils.

What was the final convincer, though, was the results already achieved. Cure of five forms of cancer, reasonably cheap electrical power from fusion plants, four extrasolar colonies were good enough. But two starships, the little Phoenix and the Enterprise, and an actual drydock/space station, the Phoenix II, ostensibly belonging to the U.S. but actually the League's, made virtually everyone feel that Earth had indeed come of age, as the equal of any of her older mentor/partners.

National Geographic, Popular Science, and Astronomy Monthly were featuring article after article about the new worlds – the homes of the other races, and all the colony worlds of all four races. Nature went into paroxysms over the physics of warp drive. Many of the small protectorate nations rejoiced to find they had played important parts in bringing Earth up to this point, such as Bolivia and her lithium.

Sarek smiled inside, never letting on that one reason for all this was in the prophecy that called Earth the Brother of T'Khasi.

Chapter Twelve

Southern Alberta, June 1898

Beth turned a cartwheel – flawlessly, as usual – as she hurried home from the library. It had been three days since school let out, and her spirits were still quite high at the prospect. She had finished eighth grade and graduated from grammar school – no more boring rote memorization. High school was going to be *interesting!*

Take Latin, for example. New vocabulary was fine, especially since a lot of English words were derived from it. And the rules were complex, but they followed patterns. When you learned something, it fell into place in what the world was like with almost an audible thump! *Mens sana in corpore sano*, a healthy mind in a healthy body, or *Ipsem cognosce*, Know thyself.

Biology: the whole deal of how animals and plants were related to each other, who depended on what, and how their bodies worked, fascinated her. History, mathematics, civics – they all fascinated her.

As she came to a graceful stance at the end of the cartwheel, those two things on her chest – her *bosom*, she thought with a blush – jiggled briefly. She was not averse to becoming a woman – far from it! – but the timing was all wrong! She had just finally convinced the boys she was not one of the girls-that-have-cooties-ewww! by competing with them, being the friend who stands by them, all the tricks boys learn for making and keeping friends, and now they were starting to look at her different. It was all too soon. She wanted to be one of them for a while longer, before she had to cope with the whole role-play of courtship and marriage. And she was so looking forward to one last summer of freedom and fun!

And to make things absolutely perfect, next week the circus was coming to town! Elephants, ballyhoo, and acrobats! Especially acrobats....

Picking up the seven books she'd checked out of the library – all they'd let her take at one time – she set out for home at a brisk jog.

At home it was chores, first, last, and much of the time in between, it seemed like. "Peel these potatoes, Beth. Mackenzie, go draw some water., and then set the table."

With a noticeable lack of enthusiasm, she and her brother set to their tasks. And her father noticed. "Ye'll do as yer mother says, you hear me?!"

"Yes, Pappa." She did her best to keep the sullenness out of her voice, and either she succeeded or he was willing to overlook it, this time at least. 'Kensie trudged out the door.

"Seems like I *always* have to slop the hogs."

"Well, I always have to milk the cows, and besides, tending the hogs is boys' work."

"Why?" 'Kensie asked petulantly.

Beth opened her mouth to answer, realized she did not have a good answer, and pulled the stool over to Thora, who looked back at her placidly, an inquisitive expression on her pale-brown bovine face. She'd have to think about this.

It was late morning out on the prairie a few days later, and the temperature was already heading towards 80. In a compromise between temperature and propriety, she and the three boys who were her friends and agemates were partially stripped for the impromptu acrobatic competition, they in summer-weight union suits and she in camisole and petit-pants, to imitate the tights real acrobats wore as best they could.

Benny fell out of his handstand after only a second or so. Embarrassed, he tried for an aerial somersault, and landed flat on his butt. He got the usual teasing as he stood, and challenged Beth.

"Sure," she answered; "it's nothing someone with *talent* can't do," rubbing it in a little in a tease-your-friend way. She turned two cartwheels in one smooth motion, then stood, took one measured step, and did a mid-air somersault, landing gracefully on her feet. But as she did it, her camisole came untucked, flipping up and treating them to a momentary flash of her bosom.

As she turned to them, they cheered, but William turned partially away from her, Benny sidled right one step to behind a low bush, and Jack sat down abruptly. She knew why; they'd gone stiff down the-

re, and were embarrassed about it. Her own nipples stiffened up in response. This whole rebellious-body thing was not something any of them wanted to deal with yet.

She cherished her time in the library. What with chores and the librarian's hours, she could never be there as often or as long as she'd like. She was choosing what she would check out this time carefully, and looking up the things she'd noted in her mind she needed to find in the reference area.

The tap on her shoulder startled her. It was Miz Bright, the librarian. "You're interested in those big lizards they're digging up the bones of down south of us, do I recall correctly?" the older woman said quietly in her prim way.

Beth nodded and smiled a 'Yes' at her.

"Come with me," Miz Bright instructed her.

Beth followed her to a desk in the corner of the library. Miz Bright drew a volume out of a drawer. "I set this aside for you," she said in a conspiratory way, "but I need your word of honor that you will not let your Pappa know you have it. Dr. Huxley is involved in their study, but his books are considered somewhat – controversial."

"Oh, *thank* you," Beth replied. "I'll not breathe a word to him."

"See you don't," Miz Bright instructed, but Beth could tell from her smile that she didn't mean it harshly.

Half an hour later, as the sun was westering and casting long shadows outside, she was ready to leave for home. As she walked out, she saw the row of grain elevators along the railroad to the south, and nearby on the library lawn, the green-toned bronze statue of the lame old Roman smith god for whom the town, and by extension the library, were named. She chuckled at the seeming pretentiousness of a little farm town, halfway between Lethbridge and Calgary, hundreds of miles from 'civilization', naming itself after a Roman god. Why, there wasn't even a volcano closer than Seattle!

Off she ran, towards home and the usual round of chores.

Circus Day! It seemed like the morning chores and the making of lunch would never get done. But finally they were, at long last, and Beth and Mackenzie hied themselves off to the field outside town where the circus was set up. There would be a show this afternoon, then the big top would be struck. The sideshow and games would continue in the evening, and then they would finish taking things down and packing, their caravan leaving in the morning.

And it lived up to expectations. Mackenzie laughed himself nearly sick at the slapstick of the clowns, and was entranced by the dancing bear. Beth adored the elephants. How anything so large and ponde-

rous could be so graceful captivated her. And she loved the big cat trainer's act, the graceful pointy-eared creatures doing his bidding.

But what hit her hardest was the acrobat. He was a solo act, which she knew was rare for acrobats. The things he made his body do – she knew how hard they were; some of them she was herself able to pull off, and others, well, they needed work. And he made it all look so effortless and graceful!

He looked to be maybe 20, slender and lithe, his costume skin tight (except where concessions to propriety required a bit of padding). His muscles rippled under the satin, his hips were narrow and dimpled, his abdomen tapered... With a start she realized that she was reacting to him much as the boys had reacted to her. It was *not* a bad feeling, she decided, just one she'd have to deal with when it came time.

It was over all too soon, and she and the other kids were full of comments as they scarfed down food from the two stands in the (rather small) midway. Mackenzie took off with two of his friends, and Beth decided that, with the extra freedom of Circus Day, she'd end it with another visit to the library. She made the rounds of the midway and sideshow, unable to spend anything but drinking in the sights, then walked into downtown.

She walked by the frame building that served as the county courthouse. The county council was trying to attract business again, she noted, as she saw the broadside posted on the side of the building. It featured a drawing of the statue in front of the library and the slogan, "Forge a Future in V-." She laughed out loud at the tortured wordplay. She saluted the statue ironically as she walked into the library.

Inside, she quickly retrieved *An Introduction to Positronics*, then pulled down a Wells novel she'd been planning to read, and went to retrieve the library's only reference on kinesiology. It was missing, which surprised her, as it didn't circulate, and only she and the local M.D. made any use of it. Shrugging, she pulled down another reference she'd been planning to use, and headed over to the research table.

There was someone there she did not recognize, a young man with bushy sideburns, wearing a business suit and eyeglasses. She seated herself with well-mannered demureness; he equally properly ventured a polite greeting to her.

"Might I share your table, sir?" she asked politely, inwardly thanking God that she was living in the liberated Nineties, when young women could be so forward as to express their wishes instead of waiting politely to be asked.

The young man seemed startled, looked around, then smiled warmly. "Of course!" he said. "You must forgive me; I'm not used to being 'sir'-red, and so at first I thought you were addressing another."

Beth could not help it; she giggled at that. "Oh, forgive me!" she said. "That was most improper of me."

"'Proper' is something else I'm not used to," he returned. "You did me no offense, and to be frank I found your laugh entrancing."

Entrancing! Now there's an adjective Beth was not used to having applied to herself. She began to warm to this mysterious young man.

She glanced at the books he was using. "I see you are interested in the Dinosauria," she ventured, feeling a bit daring at making conversation with a stranger like this.

"Oh, yes, the discoveries people are making in the field fascinate me," he answered easily. "Have you had opportunity to see one of the great sauropod skeletons mounted? I saw a Diplodocus at the Marshall Field Museum in Chicago; it was truly humbling to stand before such a giant skeleton."

He had been to Chicago? Wild horses could not have torn Beth away from this conversation. They continued on about dinosaurs for several minutes, and Beth realized they were getting a bit loud for the sacred confines of the library. Glancing over at Miz Bright, she gave her a sheepish, apologetic look, and was surprised to see the older woman return a broad, approving smile.

The young man steered the conversation around to Beth's own interests adroitly, and she offered a bit of what had recently interested her, concluding with, "And I had intended today to find out what muscle groups are involved in a successful back flip, but someone has taken the kinesiology reference out."

"Oh, here!" the young man said, pulling the book he had been looking at from the table in front of him. It was of course the kinesiology volume. "What you're looking for is about page 64, if I recall correctly."

"No, no, you were using it; I can look things up another time!" Beth answered. "But how do you come to be interested in kinesiology? I would know if Doc Milburn had taken on an apprentice to read medicine with him."

"No, I'm not in the medical sciences, though I do use kinesiology professionally," the young man replied, seemingly a bit more reticently than he had been.

"Oh? How so?" she asked.

"I had rather not say," he answered, a touch sadly.

"And did you have a chance to see the circus?" she asked, trying to change the subject smoothly.

He let out a bark of laughter. "It's nice to know my disguise, such as it is, did work. I had wondered why a well-bred young lady such as yourself felt comfortable striking up a conversation with me."

Beth's face must have expressed her confusion, because he smiled and removed his glasses, which she now saw were only clear glass. "My name, my dear young lady, is Jeffrey Grayson. And I have the dubious privilege of being the sole member of The Flying Graysons, since my parents retired from the act. I will, of course, completely understand when you now realize that you must be somewhere else." He looked sad.

So *that* was the mystery man's story – he was the acrobat she had watched. Admittedly she hadn't focused in on his *face*. But she still felt embarrassed she had not recognized him before that moment. She resolved to find a way to let him know she had loved his performance, and that the pariah status "good society" placed the circus performers in mattered not a whit to her.

At that moment, Miz Bright came over to them. "I'm sorry," she said, "but it is time for me to be closing up the library for the evening. I regret that I must ask you to take your departure." She looked at

Beth appraisingly, and then added, "Beth, do be very cautious on the road home. There are some rather dark areas between here and your home, and the Metis have been raiding up around Flin Flon."

This did not make a great deal of sense to Beth, as Flin Flon was over 100 miles away. And it put her on the spot; if she asked to be escorted, that would mean he could expect.... She thought back on how she had felt watching him perform, the *comfortability* of conversation with him, as though they'd known each other far longer than that one evening, and reached a decision.

"Mr. Grayson, I should be grateful for an escort to my home, if you are free to assist me." *Alea iacta est!*; the die is cast. She felt a tremor of mixed nervousness and excitement at having taken so radical a step.

They began the journey home. The first few minutes were spent with Beth drawing Jeffrey's attention, at his request, to the town's points of interest, such as they were. Besides the row of grain elevators, the library with its statue, the county courthouse, and the Lutheran church, there wasn't much.

"So what brought about your interest in kinesiology?" Jeffrey asked Beth. She flushed in the dim light; surely he would think she was demeaning his act if she spoke of her own acrobatic efforts. She temporized. "I like to know what muscle groups are involved whenever I exercise or try a stunt, like turning a cartwheel. So I started reading in it, and found myself intrigued by the subject." Was that too much? She hoped not. He raised an eyebrow.

"It's unusual to find a young girl interested in that sort of thing," he commented.

"I'm hardly the usual young girl," she said with just a touch of asperity. "I love to learn; I hope someday I can leave here and go to a college back East."

Jeffrey missed a step, and caught himself. In the moonlight, she caught a glimpse of his face, and his expression was pinched, like someone in pain. "Did you hurt yourself?" she asked solicitously.

"No, it was nothing, just a stray thought," he answered.

"I saw your face, sir, and you were in pain," Beth rejoined. "I know I should not pry into your personal affairs, but I must ask: why did what I said pain you as it did?"

Jeffrey looked at her in a new light then. It was clear on his face: she was not the young girl he had agreed to escort home, but a young woman who was sincerely concerned about how he felt. He walked silently for a few moments.

At length he began to reply. "I had the same dream, Beth," he said, calling her by name for the first time. "With the circus, you are always on the road. There is no school. You study, or not, as your parents choose and then as you see fit to continue."

"I had the dream to become – I don't know, something more than a circus acrobat. I'd decide after I got there and found out what my choices were. I thought myself well prepared. I sent off letters of inquiry to college after college. Nobody would admit me without a high school degree. I've kept studying; learning is valuable in itself, its own reward. But I know now that I can never make my hopes into reality." He drew a breath. "Perhaps you will have better luck. If you do, when the circus plays where you're attending college, do come and let me know." He smiled a rather wan smile.

Beth knew that in unveiling his secret hurt, Jeffrey had laid his soul bare to her. And she was deeply touched.

She glanced ahead. The lights were dimly visible through the farmhouse windows in the distance, and they were about to pass the last stand of cottonwoods. She slowed her gait, then stopped.

Noticing she was no longer beside him, he glanced back and paused. "Is something wrong?" he asked.

"No, it's just that this is the last stand of trees giving cover before my home," she replied.

His look asked a question he didn't put into words. Beth blushed. "Did you not realize?" she asked. "It is the custom, when a young man escorts a young woman home, that they stop at a suitable secluded place on the way, and he is entitled to collect a kiss. Or sometimes more. I am not one of those girls who can be had for little or nothing, but I did realize what the toll would be when I asked you to escort me home."

"Beth, I would not take advantage of you like that!" Jeffrey said, though a glint in his eye said that given his druthers, he might like to.

"You would not be taking advantage," she said, her voice quavering despite her best efforts to keep it steady.

She took his hand and led him into the small stand of trees, and turned her head upwards to meet his.

Their lips met. He broke it, sighed, and drew her to him, kissing her more firmly. Her legs became weak, and butterflies were doing barrel rolls as they flew across her stomach.

Jeffrey broke off the kiss. "Beth," he said. Then, "We stop now, while I still have the will power to stop." Another pause. "I don't know when I will be able to come back, but I *will* be back. You have my word on it."

"I know," she said, unsure how she knew but certain of it.

With emotions in turmoil, they walked the few hundred feet to the farmhouse, and Jeffrey took his leave, holding her hand one last time. He walked away, and she turned and went inside.

"Git in 'ere!" her father called out from the parlor. Nervous, she walked in. "Yer late," he said.

"Yessir," she answered, knowing better than to offer an excuse, let alone to argue with him.

"We'll start it with tomorrow," he said to her mother, as if for confirmation.

"Yes, I think that would be best," her mother said.

"Ye've finished grammar school," her father said, "and you're getting too old to be running with the boys, missy. Your mother and I have decided the time has come for you to settle down and make something of yourself."

"Starting tomorrow, ye'll not be out running with the boys. Ye'll be here, working alongside your mother, learning how to keep a home, and the woman's share of how to run a farm." He glanced at the library books, sitting alongside her where she had set them when she came into the parlor. "Ye've had enough book learning. It's not like you'll ever do anything with the sort of things they teach in high school. You need to learn how to be a practical woman, and your mother and I have determined that that is what you will now do. It is our duty to you, and we have been remiss in giving you free rein and not doing it sooner."

"I'll do no such thing!" Beth rejoined in a rare stance of rebellion.

"Ye'll do as your father says, young lady," her mother said sternly. "Now get on up to bed. Morning comes early."

With a sob, Beth went to gather up her books and do as she was bid.

"Leave them books here," said her father.

Beth rushed out of the parlor and up to her own room.

Beth lay abed, taking stock of her situation. To say it was not good was very much an understatement. When her father made up his mind about something, it was nearly impossible to get him to change it. She and Mackenzie had only been successful when they were able to convince their mother to not only take their side, but to commit herself so decisively to their viewpoint that she would use her influence to attempt to change her husband's mind. Her mother had never liked her being a tomboy, and she recognized from her father's word choices, the repeated "your mother and me," that probably she was at least as much set on the future they had planned for Beth as he was.

Gone was her planned summer of fun: field hockey, stickball, skinny dipping, running, working on her acrobatics. Instead she would be confined to a hot house, learning to cook, can foods, sew, knit, clean, do laundry and ironing, proper manners for entertaining, and all the other womanly arts.

And to twist the knife, she was forbidden high school in the fall as well. Not only was she stuck training for a future she despised, but the door to the one way out of that future was slammed in her face as well.

The more she thought about it, the more she began to realize, she couldn't stay. She needed to leave. But where?

None of her friends had parents who would go against hers to house her. Pastor Meier was a bad joke; he was worse than her parents on propriety. Her teacher from the year just finished was cut from the same cloth. Miz Bright at the library cared about her, and did have a slight rebellious streak, but she'd never stand up to the community for Beth.

At last it hit her with the inevitability of a freight train: the circus. Yes, it was a cliché of dozens of adventure stories, but the reason it was a cliché was that kids had been doing it for decades. She had no delusions about the glamorous life it was; the last run of books had been 'realistic' and showed the boys shoveling up behind the elephants and working to pitch the tents. And she knew it wouldn't lead to the

future of her dreams – but she could leave the circus somewhere in a city and find work while finishing high school – if only she could convince them to take her on. Jeffrey's story had underscored that for her.

Jeffrey! She let herself remember the few stolen minutes in the cottonwoods, and the feelings she had felt. And how *he* had reacted. *He* would help; she knew she could count on him.

Out of bed and dressed – except her shoes. She'd put them on later, outside, where the noise of them on the floor would not wake anyone. She made up a pack of her clothes, the daguerrotype of her parents, the two books she owned herself... but not her Bible. At last, satisfied she had everything she owned and could carry, she slipped out the door.

And saw Mackenzie's room. She slipped in, saw her little brother asleep, walked quietly over and kissed him gently on the forehead.

His eyes opened. "Whazz that for?"

"I love you, little brother. I don't show it a lot, but I do. I just had to show you that I do."

"You're leaving, aren't you?" he asked quietly.

A cold chill went down her spine, but she'd never lied to Mackenzie. "Yes."

"Take me with you!"

"I would if I could, but I can't. I don't even know for sure what I'm going to do. You're a boy, and younger. You'll have your freedom a bit longer. Wait until you need to run. I promise you we'll connect up, somehow."

He thought this over. "I don't like it, but you're right." His eyes watered. "Take care of yourself, sis!"

"You too, little brother." She hugged him and hurried out the door, before she too burst into tears.

The circus grounds were relatively quiet when Beth got there. A number of people were moving purposefully from various wagons to other wagons, and the roustabouts were finishing up the last of the dismantling of the various tents and other movable enclosures. She scanned around for Jeffrey's wagon, and found it: pine green with ochre lettering and trim and dark gray shadowing making the pictured acrobats look almost three-dimensional.

She went to its door and knocked.

"Come in," he called out from inside.

She opened the door and stepped up into the wagon.

"Beth!" he breathed, standing and stepping forward towards her. She slammed into his arms, holding him tightly. He embraced her back just as fiercely.

"What are you doing here?" he asked. She told him what had happened when she got home. She was careful *not* to ask the question she most needed an answer to: "Can I stay?"

Jeffrey suddenly seemed to realize that he was naked above the waist, and wearing only a thin cotton undergarment covering him from waist to mid-calf. "Just a moment, and I'll slip some clothes on."

"Don't bother," Beth said. "This is how you'd dress if someone else from the circus came to the door, right?"

"Well, yes, but...."

"I will be asking the man who runs this circus for a job in the morning. Do not let it worry you." Beth was blushing too.

"You know I will do all I can for you, Beth." He turned and methodically began to remove piles of boxes from what appeared to be a shelf, stacking them neatly on the wagon floor near it. "But what will happen if your father comes looking for you? Legally he is in authority over you."

"I don't know," she said. "I would have to go with him, I suppose – if he finds me. But I know his attitudes, as well as a daughter can. I turned against his authority and what he sees as his duty to provide for my future, and in his eyes, I am probably no longer a daughter of his. Whatever future I have now is what I can make for myself, without help."

"Never without help," Jeffrey said forcefully. "You will stay here as long as you choose, no strings attached."

Those words were what Beth had hoped to hear. She collapsed in tears of relief. Quickly Jeffrey was at her side, holding her up and letting her cry it out.

As he wiped away the tears, she turned her face up to his, expecting a kiss. "No," he said. "If I kiss you now, it will lead to other things, and I may not be able to stop. I said I would provide for you, not take advantage of you."

He gestured to the bed. "You may sleep there. I have cleared off this pallet for myself." And there was a thin mattress beneath where the boxes had been. He pulled a sheet and a thin blanket from a chest.

Beth turned to the bed, stripped to camisole and petit-pants, and slipped into the bed. "Thank you, Jeffrey," she said with deep emotion behind it.

"I need to take care of you," Jeffrey replied with a catch in his voice.

Beth would have said more, but the emotional impact of the whole evening hit her, and she quickly fell asleep.

Jeffrey watched her for a few minutes, and then drifted off himself, a smile on his face.

Beth awoke in a strange place. Step by step but all too quickly, it all came home to her – meeting Jeffrey at the library, the kiss in the cottonwoods, her father's edict, running away in the middle-of-the-night. In the sober light of morning, in Jeffrey's wagon, she almost had second thoughts. Almost.

'I'll do what I have to,' she thought to herself.

A loud knock came at the door. "Yes?" Jeffrey called out from his pallet-bed.

"Ten minutes to pullout," came the gruff voice of one of the roustabouts.

"I'll be ready," Jeffrey said. He rose from his pallet, winced as he stretched, and proceeded to slip on traveling clothes. "You should wait in here until our first stop," he told her. "No sense tempting fate."

"We'll eat down the road, and it will be a pickup meal, pre-prepared things only," he went on to say. "Just lie low in here until then." And he was out the door.

Two hours later they stopped to break their fast. Beth had tried to read but had drowsed off. Jeffrey jumped down from the wagon and soon returned, with a light breakfast for the two of them, and shortly thereafter joined by the circus's business manager.

"Ah, good," Jeffrey said. "Wilfred, this is Beth. Beth, allow me to present Mr. Wilfred D'Angelo, who owns the circus together with his brother." Beth's first impression was of a grey man, someone quiet and self-effacing, the farthest cry from what might be expected in a circus owner. Jeffrey seemed to be on fairly close terms with him, based on his expression and gestures.

Wilfred studied her. "You're fourteen?" Beth nodded. "Can you cook?"

"Not very well."

"Then that eliminates the food wagon or the food stands on the midway. And you are much too slight to work as a roustabout."

"I shall do whatever I need to, if you give me a chance," Beth declared, realizing that this was a classic Moment of Truth.

"I'm not here to tell you No," Wilfred said. "Jeffrey asked, and he gives me a lot of good advice, and asks little in return. So when he does ask, I hasten to find a way to meet his request. But I'm not seeing it. Jeffrey? What did you have in mind?"

"I was hoping you had something, Wilfred," he answered. To Beth he said, "Don't let Wilfred's mousy exterior fool you; he's an excellent businessman, and a good loyal friend. His brother is everything he's not: bombastic and outgoing where Wilfred is quiet and reticent. But he knows Wilfred is far better than he is at meeting a payroll or making sure the elephants have their food awaiting them. They make an excellent team, and we're fortunate to have connected with the D'Angelo Brothers."

"Oh, pshaw! You give me too much credit!" from Wilfred.

There was silence for a few moments. All three were engaged in the same mental exercise: trying to come up with a place where Beth could fit in, and aware the other two were doing the same.

Finally Jeffrey spoke. "You mentioned looking up the muscle groups in a back flip at the library, and then spoke of cartwheels and trying stunts on the walk home. What sort of stunts?"

Beth felt put on the spot. But if Jeffrey would give her a chance.... "How if I *show* you?" she asked.

At Wilfred and Jeffrey's nods, she led them outside and stripped down to camisole and petit-pants again, turned a triple cartwheel, did a handstand and walked on her hands for a dozen paces, then leaped up, scurried over to the wagon and shinnied up the back. Arms out for balance, she walked the 2x4 that framed the right side of the wagon roof, jumped down onto the driver's bench, dove forward from its right edge, executing an in-the-air somersault with one hand touching ground to guide her momentum, coming up on her feet. She dropped a curtsy of sorts to the men, who applauded. "I haven't mastered the back flip yet," she said, "and I don't want to try it without suitable padding to come down on if I misjudge my landing."

Wilfred was smiling. "Jeffrey?"

"She'll do," he said with a matching smile. "That's nearly as good as I could do at fourteen. You're a natural, Beth!"

"What are you saying?" she asked.

Wilfred was musing. "I don't think there is one girl in a thousand who would have stripped to undergarments in front of strangers, not coquettishly but merely naturally, because what she needed to do called for it. That's circus mentality!"

"Agreed," Jeffrey said. "Beth, what I'm offering is to make you my partner, working my act with me, turning the Flying Graysons back into the family act it was before my parents retired. It will mean being in front of crowds wearing tights, but somehow I don't believe that will bother you."

"Really?!"

Jeffrey's smile was warm now. "Absolutely. You have the talent and the brains to make this work. Are you interested?"

"Oh yes, I accept!" Beth's heart was close to bursting with joy.

"Any problems, Wilfred?"

"No, I'm happy for you, Jeffrey – for you both."

"Then here's what we'll do. You lie low in the wagon until we stop for lunch, to be sure your father doesn't come after us. Then come up, meet our horses, and ride with me. Tonight you sit with Wilfred

and watch my act, figuring out where what you can do will fit into it. We'll have a day's layover before we play Calgary to rehearse the new act. Does that suit you?"

"Oh! Very much so!"

As the circus closed down after that night's show, Beth was on top of the world. There had been no sign of her father; the afternoon's ride with Jeffrey had been a joy, with the two of them talking easily about anything and everything as if they had known each other for years, not just less than a day. She had again felt that tingle from seeing him in his tights doing his act, and had filled two pages of a notebook with possible routines she could do or they could do together.

Wilfred's brother Orlando had welcomed her heartily, with a big bear hug, almost as if he had been expecting her. "It'll be good to have a pretty young thing in tights in the ring," he said, watching her reaction intently.

She had smiled and nodded, "I just hope I can pick up enough new stunts to make it worthwhile to add me to Jeffrey's act," she had said.

"Don't worry about that; the men will gobble you up," Orlando had boomed. She was amused by the three little boys sitting near her and Wilfred, one with red hair, one with caramel-colored hair, and one with brownish hair with a purple cast, who seemed to be having a good time, and had turned and waved to her with giggles.

She climbed into the wagon and set out the post-show supper the food wagon had provided for them. Jeffrey came across the lot in his tights, and stepped up into the wagon. "I brought you some food," she said.

"So I see," he replied with a smile. "Come, sit and eat."

They shared a meal, their eyes darting at each other regularly through it. At length, full, he leaned back and noticed she had piled the boxes back on the shelf with the pallet.

"I'll need a place to sleep," he chided her, not unkindly.

She looked at him, slender and handsome in his tights, he who had kissed her under the cottonwoods the night before (and how long ago that seemed now!), and who had gone out of his way to make sure she had a future with the circus.

She stood and walked around the table to him. "Did you not invite me to be your partner in your family act?" she asked.

"Well, yes..."

"And why have you not kissed me since the kisses among the trees last evening?"

"Because we... you... I might...."

She ended his stammer by moving in, kissing him firmly, and sitting on his lap. "You offered me a future with you, and I accepted. I love you, Jeffrey Grayson. I want you as much as you want me."

"But... ungh!" Her hands disposed of some of his arguments, her lips on his took care of the rest.

Afterward, he gently stroked her face. "Beth, I never realized...."

"Are you happy, dearest?"

"Very."

"And so am I." She giggled. "Look at it this way: the audiences will never get to see *all* our acrobatic moves."

Jeffrey laughed, long and hard. And Beth with him. They both knew this was the start of something that would last.

Epilogue – Hagerstown MD, 1910

As baby Richard stirred in his sleep in her arms, Beth roused from her reverie. She still remembered that eventful day twelve years before as if it were yesterday. With a mother's trained ear, she listened, and heard the two older boys playing outside the wagon with their agemates the clowns' sons. Little T.R., 4, was asleep in the boys' bed already, and Amanda, 2, was sleeping in the crib she already found beneath her dignity as a two-year-old.

The years had been good to them. Jeffrey was off discussing plans with Wilfred. She'd agreed with alacrity when he suggested investing some of their savings to buy a share of the circus, and with Wilfred and now Jeffrey's good management, the investment had paid off. She had to drop out of the act five times for her pregnancies, but didn't begrudge it a bit. Her children were the apple of her eye, and Jeffrey's too. Especially their only daughter. Amanda was destined for big things, she could tell.

Neither of them had ever gotten a college degree. But they had kept up their studies in the way Jeffrey had devised, and both had submitted papers to several professional journals, listing themselves as 'privately educated'.

She called the boys in and got them settled, putting Richard into his cradle. Sitting back down with a cup of tea to wait for Jeffrey, she thought back again to her home, the farm, the town, the grain elevators, the library, the statue of the old Roman god for whom the town was named.... 'Thank God,' she thought, 'my kids will never have to have anything to do with Vulcan.'

Chapter Thirteen

"In 1930, Israel Aharoni, a zoologist and professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, captured a mother hamster and her litter of pups in Aleppo, Syria. ...all domestic golden hamsters are descended from one female, &ndash probably the one captured in 1930 in Syria." – Wikipedia

The countryside outside Aleppo, 1930

Peter flicked into existence next to a scrub bush alongside a *wadi*, a serious look on his young face. His heart ached for the kids he'd left behind, almost 12 thousand years before. The centuries-long strife of the Factions War was climbing to its inevitable end. Leaders were confronting other leaders with unacceptable demands; peace feelers were rejected with hostility and paranoia. He'd wanted so much to intervene, to change things, and yet....

That far back in time, he could again see into the future, at least from when he was looking – he still couldn't see anything much past what his family considered the present – and what he had seen horrified him. Terrible as the cataclysmic end of the Faction Wars and the Third Cycle had been, preventing that from happening led to an even greater disaster for everyone, everywhere, in the alternate timeline his actions would have caused to come into existence – and nothing, anywhere, would survive the wrath of the Mad Guardian. The formula Timmy's blood father had taught him came back to bite Peter: "Sometimes bad things have to happen so that good things can happen afterwards." So that the whole Universe had a chance to survive Vae'Za, Peter had to keep hands off and let the Third Cycle suicide. "Sometimes it really sucks to be a Mikyvis," he thought to himself.

Well, at least there was one thing he could do. Several species of wild hamster had survived the holocaust that ended the Third Cycle, but they were all drab brown or gray, skittery around people, and mostly ill-tempered. He looked down into the little box in his arms.

Mahti looked up at him, wiggled her nose, and chittered. When the kids he'd met, and given random hugs to, back at the end of the Third Cycle were being evacuated from the city they'd lived in, they were not able to take along their beloved pet. And the pretty, affectionate little golden hamsters had not survived the great final war.

This was one thing, at least, that he could change. He looked down under the bush, and, as expected, saw the baited hurt-free cage-trap there. Peter scratched Mahti's head and back, and she stretched under his gentle touch; her belly, distended with the litter she was close to term, twinged. He took a quick glance at the future: the Israeli scientist who had set the trap would take her for a lab animal and be charmed by her. Some of the pups would go to England, and some of their descendants to America. Biologists' kids would fall in love with the affectionate little rodents, and want them for pets.

It wasn't a big element in the grand scheme of things, but it was one more small way in which Peter could bring a bit more happiness into the lives of a lot of children. All in all, he was content.

He reached down and set Mahti in front of the little cage trap. She saw the grains and cheese inside, and scurried in.

Peter smiled, and disappeared. A Mikyvis's job is never done.

Somewhere, about 1916

The room was cheery and warm-feeling. A deep forest green, redolent of pine boughs, provided the background color. The hearth picked out the bright cherry-red and gold accents. What appeared to be a

jovial old man, bewhiskered and a bit overweight, sat in the sumptuous easy chair that was the center-point of the room's décor, almost thronelike in its appearance. In his lap was what appeared to be a young red-headed boy, cuddled in and feeling warm and loved to the tips of his elfin ears.

"They've made peace," the jovial one said. "I had worried that it would be renewed hostilities, the sort of thing we have seen far too much have. But now, maybe *nation shall not lift its hand against nation, neither shall they study war any more*," he quoted from a book no older than he. "You are good, Myrton, at making friends, and at learning from listening. I would like you to go out and make some friends, get a sense of how people really feel, especially the children who, when grown, will shape the future. The Fourndieri see a crux in the near future. Learn what you can."

The boy smiled up at him, with a wisdom and alertness that belied his apparent years. "I will do as you ask, Father. Thank you for trusting me with this."

"You are a good boy, Myrton. I would not ask anything I was not confident you could do." The old man smiled. "Come, shall we share a sweet treat? Honey muffins?"

"Yeah!" the boy agreed enthusiastically. They arose from the chair and walked out in search of the proposed snack.

Riverside Park, NYC

The boy sat on the swings, bored. A short ways away, his mother and two of her friends had their easels up, painting views of the river. It's probably a bit of an ethnic slur to say he looked Jewish, but in point of fact, with his long thin face and skinny build, he came very close to the stereotype of the European Jewish immigrant to New York, eight-year-old boy edition.

Down the gravel path came a red-haired boy, who spotted him on the swings and waved a cheery greeting.

"Hello," the first boy ventured, a little nervously.

"Hi!" came the response from the redhead. "My name's Myrton; what's yours?"

"Julius, like my father. But I usually use my middle name: Robert, so's people can tell us apart by name."

"Nice to meet ya, Robert. Whatcha doin'?"

"Just sitting here, waiting for Mother to get through painting."

"Okay. Want a push on the swing?"

"Gosh, that'd be super!"

Myrton got behind Robert, gave him a small push, then stepped back and gave him a harder one as the swing came back. About three pushes, and Robert was moving good. Myrton hopped on the second swing, alongside him. "Watch; here's how you pump your legs to keep swinging."

"Neat-o! Thanks!"

And for the next hour or so, they swung together and talked. Or rather, mostly Robert talked about his life, and Myrton listened.

At last Robert's mother finished what she was doing, folded up her easel, and called him. "Hey, it was great to meet ya! I hope I see you around!"

Myrton smiled. "Count on it," he said, just before Robert ran to join his mother.

Some Months Later

Robert was overjoyed to see his friend coming up the slope to join him. The slight elevation topped by the bedrock outcrop he was exploring would not have qualified as a hill in the Catskills or Poconos, but here in the City, on the banks of the Hudson, it would do until a real hill came along.

Over the past few months his friendship with Myrton had blossomed. The young redhead was not always around, but had shown up every couple of weeks, meeting Robert at the park or visiting him at home. Robert's parents entertained, and their social circle meant their parties were a heady mix of artsy aestheticism and left-wing politics mixed with the realities of his father's textiles-import business. The conversations that came out of this were meat to the burgeoning intellectual growth of both boys. Robert remembered Myrton sitting in his parents' salon, intent on the Columbia professor as he spoke of the need for peace, the practical aspects of politics and diplomacy, and his hopes for the future.

Being boys, however, they were more interested in the natural world, Robert had developed an interest in minerals – the reason he was up on this outcrop. "Hey, Myrton, c'mon up here!" he called out.

"What'd you find?" the redhead asked.

"A vein of marble here," Robert said, pointing. Myrton arrived at the outcrop and bent to look.

"I brought you something," he said as he stood back up. Robert was beginning his growth spurt, and was nearly a head taller than his friend. Myrton smiled at Robert's eager expression, and placed a bright blue rock in his hand.

"It's azurite," he said.

"Wow! Where'd you get that?" Robert asked.

"Oh, my Father had it lying around; he said I could give it to you."

"Hey, that's terrific! Thanks a million! C'mon over here; there's an inclusion I think is serpentine." And with that, the boys were scrambling across the outcrop.

Back Somewhere Again, 1922

"The Fournieri are predicting gloom and doom," Ardell said.

"Yes, and my extrapolative routines suggest they're not far from right," the chubby bearded old man said. "The discoveries of radioactivity and atomic structure will lead Earth governments right down the same old disastrous path. The new League will help, but there's still distrust."

The group gathered around them were silent for a while. They had had such hopes....

"Did they say where the problem will likely first show up?" Myrton asked Ardell.

"Yes, America."

"Then I may have a way to head it off. Listen...."

Los Alamos Boys School, NM, 1922

Robert, now 18, rode out from the school's stables with a song in his heart. Harvard had finally confirmed that they would accept him for the class of 1926. He had excelled in his high school studies, finishing a year ago with high honors, a year early. But on his graduation-present trip to Europe, he had been laid low in Czechoslovakia by an attack of colitis that had prevented his entering college. He had been sent west to this ranch-school to recuperate.

He remained more or less involved with his parents' liberal political circle, but his interests had grown more and more into science: first chemistry, then physics, and particularly the fascinating new discoveries in atomic physics that were following on Roentgen's and Einstein's work. He still enjoyed mineralogy, though, and that was what he was doing today – a good leisurely ride to help his recuperation that would feed his interest in the minerals of the American West.

As he crested a ridge and started down a valley, a glint of reflected sunlight drew his notice to something interesting up on the side of the next ridge, and turned his horse to climb up there. He dismounted and investigated.

It turned out to be an outcrop of iron pyrites – "fools gold." But as he was looking....

"Hey, mister!" the voice belonged to a boy in dungarees, plaid flannel shirt, bandanna around his neck, boots, and broad Western hat, scrambling down the slope to meet him. "You're new 'round these parts, aren't'cha?"

"Why, yes, I am," Robert said. "I'm from New York, out here to recover from being sick, and studying rocks while I do."

"That's neat," the boy said. "I like rocks." He took off his hat and wiped his brow with his bandanna.

Robert gasped; his new acquaintance was close enough to his childhood friend Myrton to be his twin – if the twins had been born a decade apart, that is. "I'm Robert," he said, offering his hand.

"Pleased t'meet'cha," the boy said. "I'm M...m...martin." Inwardly Myrton kicked himself for forgetting that his own not aging would seem strange to Robert.

"You look just like a boy I knew when I was a kid, ten years ago – and you even have a similar name!" Robert exclaimed.

"Coincidences are funny like that," Myrton said. "I saw a man in the toy department of a store when we went to Albuquerque for Christmas that looked just like my Father." He adroitly changed the subject. "C'm'ere; I'll show you some interestin' stuff."

For the next few hours Myrton, prepared with a mineralogical survey of the area, showed Robert a variety of minerals, being careful to mix things that would catch a boy's interest with others of more interest to an adult professional. Finally....

"Isn't this galena?" Myrton asked.

"Looks like it," Robert replied. "Hey, here's some pitchblende!"

Myrton visibly recoiled from it. In fact, he made it a point to have Robert notice his recoiling. "That's nasty stuff," he said. "We have to keep the cattle well away from any outcrops of it, or their young come out – wrong: deformed, sickly." He watched Robert's face as his agile mind processed this: *uranium ore is radioactive. Radioactivity causes birth defects in cattle.* Though outwardly impassive except for avoiding the pitchblende, inwardly Myrton was exultant. *One seed planted.*

A few minutes later, Myrton again took off his hat and wiped his forehead. "Sure is hot," he commented. He glanced up at the Sun, then commented, "Y'know, sometimes I think about how important that thing up there is. It gets real cold around here at night, then hot as Hades in the daytime. And it's sunlight that makes plants grow. And the science books say that all the coal and oil comes from decayed buried plants." A pause. "Wonder how it works...."

Click! Robert, who was well aware of astrophysical theory, started to think. A short time later, Myrton excused himself, and called for transport.

Berkeley, CA, 1932

Professor J. Robert Oppenheimer, Research Fellow in Physics at the University of California, sat on the bench in the little park opposite his offices and research facilities, enjoying the sun and reading. The thank-you note from Pauling about the lead he had passed on about the impact of radioactivity on germ plasm was a kind gesture. He set aside the monograph of "Theoretical Considerations in Warp Physics" by Zephram Cochrane for a more thorough review later. Old Zeph might be getting along in years, but

he still had it! His own recent work had been on using sub-atomic reactions to generate power, and he was stymied. Perhaps the fresh air and time to think might help.

The flash of motion in the corner of his eye caused him to look to his right. A red-haired boy riding a bicycle came his way, and waved a breezy "Hiya, Mister!"

Robert did a double-take. The boy was, once again, identical to his memories of Myrton, or for that matter the Martin he'd met in New Mexico a decade before. "Hello there!" he said as the boy skidded to a stop in front of him.

"Whatcha doin', mister?" Myrton asked.

"Just reading and enjoying the sun, and thinking about my research," Robert answered. "I'm Robert; don't I know you from somewhere?"

"Hi, I'm Morton," Myrton replied, glad he'd thought of a name ahead of time this time.

"Sure it's not Peter Pan?" Robert asked with a grin.

"Huh?"

"You know, the boy who decided never to grow up."

Now *that* was hitting a little too close to home. "That's silly," Myrton giggled, realizing too late how well Robert knew his giggle. "What're you researchin'?" he asked, to try to change the subject.

Robert was far from stupid – a quick study, and open to new ideas. That this might be his childhood friend, unchanged, who had always asked the right leading questions that had led him to the path his life had taken... well, unlikely as it seemed, make the most of it!

He drew a breath. "If you are Myrton, your secrets are safe with me. You've always been a good friend, helped me. So let me tell you what I'm doing, and then I'll listen to what you have to say."

Myrton looked him in the eye, saw honesty there, and nodded.

"I'm working on the problem of generating power," Robert said, "from sub-atomic reactions. There are two possible routes that could go: fission of uranium atoms, or fusion of hydrogen. But in both choices, I'm up against what are basically engineering problems beyond the current state of the art." Myrton looked on with interest.

Robert went on. "With uranium, most of the atoms are normal heavy uranium, with 92 protons and 146 neutrons in its nucleus. But one atom in 114 is actinouranium, five times as radioactive, and with only 143 neutrons. If a neutron gets jarred loose in radioactive decay, it can react with another atom. If it hits normal uranium, it gets absorbed, and any reaction just damps out. But with actinouranium, it starts decay that causes more neutrons, meaning it breaks down, causing more breakdowns, a chain reaction that can produce a great deal of energy. We just need to find a way to enrich the amount of actinouranium in a given sample."

A Navy plane flew overhead on its way to Sunnyvale Field. Man and boy watched it for a moment. Myrton then spoke, slowly at first. "During the Great War airplanes much more primitive than that one worked a great deal of havoc with the little light bombs they could carry. Do you remain committed to peace?"

"Yes," Robert said simply.

Myrton went on, "Abdullah ibn Ali al-Libani told us a story from his homeland once." The Arab professor at Columbia had been a part of Robert's mother's social circle; in mentioning it, Myrton was silently confirming Robert's guess. "He told us of a man who found a magic bottle with a djinn confined inside it. He pulled the stopper and the djinn emerged, and offered him the traditional three wishes. The man thought, and then made his wishes. The first was for long life, youthful vigor, and love. The second was for wealth and power. And the third was for the wisdom to keep what he had been given in the first two, and live a long and happy life. 'Done!' the djinn said, and laughed heartily."

"'Why do you laugh?' the man asked. And the djinn replied, 'The wizard who ensorcelled me into the bottle pulled the stopper many times. His wishes were always the same: first, for renewed youth, then for renewed wealth. And the third was always that I return to the bottle. Now I am free, to do what *I* wish!' And the man was aghast that he had released wild magic upon the world."

"There are two simple ways to enrich the actinouranium content. I'm not going to tell them to you. And you're not going to look for them. In fact, if you're wise you'll exaggerate the difficulty of them. Because the same process that will enrich it to critical level, and allow you to generate power, will also enrich it to supercritical level, and build a bomb – a bomb small enough to be carried by one plane that would destroy an entire city and make its site unlivable for generations. Once you've let the djinn out of the bottle, you've lost control of him. Don't do it, Robert."

The man was taken aback by the earnestness and the pleading in the boy's voice. He let what Myrton had said sink into his consciousness, then slowly nodded. Myrton offered his hand, angled for the 'secret handshake' they had shared as boys. Robert solemnly joined his own hand to the boy's.

"Now what's your problem with fusion?" Myrton asked sunnily.

"Well, after we worked out the energy curve, and discovered that a hydrogen-to-helium reaction is on the steep slope, producing more energy than any other conceivable sub-atomic reaction, I took your hint about the sun from New Mexico and studied solar physics. It turns out that the math predicts what seems to actually happen: when you get hydrogen as hot and dense as the sun's core, it fuses naturally. The problem with using that for power is getting that kind of heat and pressure using only a relatively small volume, and keeping it confined."

"Gee," Myrton said, "it sounds like you need to warp space to the conditions you need." He grinned.

Robert was wearing his 'Eureka' look. "And this won't set up the bomb scenario?"

"Nope. Only two ways to use fusion in a bomb are to use a fission bomb to produce the conditions for fusion, or to shoot the warped ultradense ultrahot hydrogen off in a burst of light at relativistic speeds before it has a chance to expand – kind of a torpedo propelled by photons."

"I don't want to pry, Myrton. But wherever did you *get* all this cutting-edge knowledge."

"Oh, Robert, I know we have been friends for a long time, and I would love to stay and talk, but, honestly, I *can't* say any more, except to say that I got it from Santa Claus."

As he spoke the final sentence, he hopped on his bike and rode off, calling for transport as he passed behind a tree.

Robert sat there stunned for a few minutes, then got a determined look on his face and picked up the Cochrane monograph.

"That did it," Ardell reported. "The danger of atomic war has receded to below margin-of-error figures."

"I concur," the jovial bearded figure said, cuddling the little redhead on his lap close. "Good work, Myrton."

Myrton was beaming. "Thanks, Father," he said.

The End - or is it?

Editor's Notes:

Gee, I am a bit stymied at this point. I want to make some comments, but, if I were to do so, it could be so much of a spoiler that I don't dare say anything of the sort.

I will say that I certainly do like Myrton. I would say that as someone trying to make up names, to hide his true identity from Robert, he leaves a lot to be desired.

That is not to say that things turned out badly.

We have learned a few valuable lessons. We know why, in the CSU, there was no atomic bomb dropped, or maybe not even invented. We also see the Genesis of Warp technology.

In other words, studying origins can be a very good thing.

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher