

Two lives, two deaths

Another piece of shameless K/S melodrama
Now with pictures! and endnotes!
by mazaher, 2009-2010



ST III, *The Search For Spock* (Leonard Nimoy, 1983), scene 292

summary

part 1. Waiting
part 2. Stardate 8556.84
part 3. Meditations (After fal-tor-pan)
part 4. The proposal
part 5. IDIC
part 6. Absolution
part 7. What's in a name
part 8. Divination
part 9. Vulcan love poetry
part 10. Final exit
part 11. Thereafter
part 12. And beyond

::

notes to the series

1. The series is set to begin in the time after Spock's death fixing the engine reactor in *The Wrath of Khan* (directed by Nicholas Meyer, 1982) and his resuscitation, begun on planet Genesis and later completed through fal-tor-pan on Vulcan, in *The Search for Spock* (directed by Leonard Nimoy, 1984).

2. A shameless K/S melodrama is the comically self-deprecating subtitle for Killa's beautifully serious, deeply-written story *Turning Point*, originally posted to the *alt.sex.fetish.startrek* newsgroup in 1995 (also appeared in «T'hy'la», 18), now at <http://seacouver.slashcity.net/killaturnpt.html> and at <http://ksarchive.com>, together with the sequel *Full Circle*, originally posted in 1997 (also appeared in «T'hy'la», 20). I like the turn of phrase so much that (shamelessly) I robbed it.

3. *Fal-tor-pan*: Ancient, difficult Vulcan ritual of rebirthing the deceased, by reuniting the elements of a whole composed by the body (cellular matter, or protoplasm), the soul (life, functioning metabolism), and the katra, or spirit (personal individuality, including experiences and memories). The Vulcan concept of this triad shows some similarity with Terran alchemical philosophies in the early centuries a.D.

4. The series becomes AU in part 9, in a way opened by Elise Madrid with *One particular harbour*, originally published in «T'hy'la», 23, October 2003, and its companion piece *Duty's Call*, originally published in «Legends», 3, November, 2003, both now at <http://ksarchive.com>. Be forewarned (further warnings in due time).

5. Most Vulcan words and phrases come from The Vulcan Language Institute Reclamation Project (see in particular the page at http://www.stogeek.com/wiki/Vulcan_Language_Lesson_19), the Vulcan Dictionary at <http://members.tripod.com/~tshala/vul-dict.html> and The Vulcan Information Centre for Extravulcanians at <http://www.marketaz.co.uk/StarTrek/Vulcan/Vulcan.html>. The others are personal knowledge.

6. Working on this took me the best part of a year. The endnotes have been a way to keep part of my mind at safety distance, while the rest boldly went where I'd never gone before. The endnotes used to be footnotes, but it seems the posting voodoo can't pick them up as such.

7. Copyrights for text and images are duly mentioned wherever possible. The webpages mentioned are those where I first read the stories I quote; many of them have now also been posted at <http://ksarchive.com/>.

::

part 1. Waiting

summary

Part 1, in 3 chapters, of the *Two lives, two deaths* series. Three people and their thoughts about life and death and what's in between, while Spock is recovering after fal-tor-pan.

notes to part 1:

1. *I'm not sure about the sense in this rambling, jumbled collection of thoughts. It seems to mirror much of what is making out my own life in the last year-and-a-half... Spock, the witness, as my view from the still inner centre of meditative awareness; Kirk, the doer, as the way I interact with the outside world, taking initiative; Amanda as the other pair of eyes, a view on myself from the outside, that I lack and I miss.*

2. *See the endnotes to each chapter for translations, explanations and references.*

::

1. Amanda

I wait.

It's never been so hard. Yet I should be used to waiting. I feel like I've waited most of my life for something good to happen to him.

Sometimes I wonder if really his life has turned out to be as much of a gift for him as it has been for me, and for his father also.

But that is something not to be talked about.

::

As a kid, he let his enthusiasm show. He smiled back at me when I showed him one of my precious Terran plants in bloom. I saw him watching with fascination the looks I stole at my husband when he stood regally among his peers at Vulcan ceremonies. I relished taking part in his make-believe games, when he would impersonate some brave explorer or skilled warrior from the Terran tales I read him.

I was so proud, seeing that in this at least he resembled me, his human half.

I was naïve.

I could afford to ignore the chides uttered behind my back and the shocked glances when I passed. He could not afford to ignore his teachers reprehending him, or he would be punished with five blows of the sh'lak, and he could not ignore his schoolmates chanting "Human, human, he enjoys being human" after him in the corridors.

Along the years, I have witnessed how he got used to being stared at. Doesn't mean it doesn't disturb him.

I still can't forget the first time he was injured. He had been lured by older boys into joining them in a game of lag'r, similar to Terran snatch-the-kerchief, but involving rough physical contact. He was lighter and smaller than his opponent; he was shoved, he fell, and he skinned his knee badly.

He limped back home on his own, green blood dripping in his footsteps.

The first thing he said was asking my pardon for soiling the floor. The next, faulting himself for having been careless. "Vulcans are never careless". He stood tense and frowning when I hugged him tight and told him it was not his fault. He didn't utter a sound while I cleaned and bandaged his knee. The next day he insisted on changing the medication himself, alone in the bathroom.

I began to understand then.

He was no more than four.

::

I remember him as a young boy. Grooming himself, keeping his room in order. Folding clothes, making the bed, at an age when Terran children still must be reminded to wash their hands before their meals.

I know now that even then he saw it as a duty. Not a pleasure. Never a pleasure. He didn't allow me the pleasure to care for him, nor himself the pleasure to relieve me of the need to do it. Forever in competition with himself, and his own standards. Not with his peers— a long time since, they had made it clear they didn't judge him worth competing with them. He was so lonely. He'd take my inevitable affection with willing politeness, but always with a hint of shame: for himself, allowing it? for me, offering? I tried to hold it back as best I could. Sometimes I watched him sleeping. He slept with the same intense concentration as when busy with some assignment, curled on his side, one arm across his throat, half-closed fist resting on his cheekbone, as though protecting his face. It broke my heart, watching him.

::

I gave him tasks. The act of putting the world in order always seemed to give him a measure of peace. I hoped he would in time be able to find his peace within, and not feel guilty for his final inability to defeat disorder outside, for how many small battles he might win against it. That he'd make his peace with entropy. I hoped for too much. I knew he never would, when he began taking his lonely trips through the desert and to the mountains, against his father's prohibitions and despite his punishments. This desert so barren, these mountains so bare, as though the Creator had been moved to compassion for the pain of the living-to-be, and had changed Her mind, and left Her work unfinished. He loved that emptiness without life— without sorrow.

::

He grew up. It was time for his kah'swan. Most Vulcan kids nowadays survive the trial. I denied my fear that he, a hybrid, wouldn't. But even if he did, it would never be the same anymore. He would be considered as an adult, although under tutelage of the head of his house until the time would come for his marriage to his pre-bonded mate. He did come back, and he was not my child anymore. I had to learn how to behave, and how to feel, like a mother cat when her kitten has been weaned. She gives him food, protection, instruction for those few weeks... and then she sends him on his way and goes on with her life. Vulcans, for all their elegance, are like that: unsentimental, realistic, tough, uncomplaining. But cats are masters in finding and enjoying the pleasures of life. Vulcans deny pleasure. No, it's even worse: to deny something, you must first acknowledge its value. Vulcans don't acknowledge pleasure as a concept. It was hard to teach Sarek how to allow himself to feel it, harder still to teach him not to feel guilty in front of Vulcan mores for the pleasure he took. Maybe he only learned because I, his wife, am human. And he loves me. I know this is a great gift I gave him, equal to the one he gave me by accepting it. I hoped so much my son could find someone who would teach him pleasure. Even if it be a human. My hope was shattered by the clan's choice of a bondmate for him. But I kept wondering in secret if maybe, one day... The final offer from the Vulcan Academy of Sciences to join the research staff angered me. All his life he'd been kept apart, he the half-breed, despite his excellent marks and some really original research he'd volunteered. He declined the offer. He'd quit striving for such an unattainable praise a long time before. Now it didn't mean anything to him anymore.

::

My fellow humans seem so fond of their feline simile for Vulcans that they don't get another point of difference... Vulcans don't like issuing orders; they are much better at obeying them, which makes them not catlike at all.

However, they don't obey to personal authority, like dogs would, but to impersonal logic.

Their style of command is based on statements, the result of calculus of probabilities. If two possible solutions dead-heat, they choose neither: choosing is a subjective activity involving emotion, or intuition, or chance, all of them taboo. They refine the grid, add a few decimals, and recalculate.

Even their laws are declarations of the obvious. They would have subscribed to Leibniz' idea of a law system; they would have loved Frederick the Great's plan for a Prussian common law.

That's why I could not but be inwardly proud that my son took such an unexpected stand when it was time for him to enter a career, and was so bravely steadfast in pursuing it.

I was silently happy when he chose Starfleet Academy and a life off-world, once more against his father's wishes. Vulcan could never welcome his talents or placate his need.

::

And now he has been dead, and now again he is alive, and both his death and his life hang in the hands of these few comrades of his. Humans, like me. Who seem to know him, and love him, in a way I was never allowed.

I was jealous.

Then I remembered. I am the mother cat. I have finished my function. He is on his own, and he has done good. He is alive, and he is not alone anymore, although he had to fly to the other end of the galaxy to find his own people.

And there is one, who has moved Heaven and Earth to bring him back to life.

I wonder, may he be the one?

Jim Kirk accepts the universe as it is, entropy and all, and he does know about pleasure— I can see it in his smiles, as much as in the very depth of his grief.

But can the unspoken connection with my son, the link I can see and feel like a living thing breathing between them, be enough? Can his presence beside him make his life be one of happiness for him?

Or is it too late?

Was it too late already when he died?

::

endnotes to chapter 1

1. Sh'lak: a very flexible, thin metal strip, about two feet long, used in some old-fashioned Vulcan schools to discipline impertinent pupils.

2. Kah'swan: initiation trial, undergone by Vulcan children at seven years of age and consisting in surviving alone in the desert for ten days, then returning home unaided.

3. Frederick the Great's plan for a Prussian common law: the instructions he issued to his Chancellor in Terran year 1746 a.D. asked for a precise definition of each legal term, precise grammatical rules combining them into statements, and exhaustive wording in the law texts, enacting Leibniz's scheme of a scientific law system modeled on Euclidean geometry.

::

::

::

2. Spock

Praeterita considero, et futura.

"I consider the things of the past and of the future".

It sounds like an epitaph.

My epitaph.

But I am alive again.

After the dark, the cold, I see once more the light of Omicron Eridani.

Red waves of visible light, redder waves of warmth seeping into my chilled bones.

The world of my birth welcomes me and I welcome the familiar smell of it: dry, hot, clean, lifeless.

I do not find it in me to welcome these persons wearing robes, who surround me.

The places and objects seem somehow more real than the people.

I see, I hear, I taste and touch and smell every inanimate detail, but the people of this planet I seem unable to put into focus.

They shimmer around me, coming, going, sometimes speaking.

They don't matter to me.

I have a vague recollection that the reverse was true, a long time ago. That they couldn't, or wouldn't, focus on me. That **I** didn't matter.

In my mind's landscape, there is only one other in sharp focus, and he's not from here.

Jim. A human.

I'm not allowed to see him yet.

Later, they say. Maybe. Wait.

I'm too tired to fight them. I'm too tired to even hate them. So I wait. I suspect I have a long experience in waiting.

Waiting for what?

::

While I wait, I slowly make an inventory of the memories and thoughts passing across my mind, like gusts of wind across the desert I can see from this window.

Logic tells me they must be mine, or rather of the one that died.

I try to sort them into a logical order.

There is one solid certainty: I was (am I? I am) a Starfleet officer. When I pick this item up, all the rest come to hang neatly on it, like a row of tubular bells on its shaft.

I left my parents, my clan and my planet to join Starfleet.

I graduated from Starfleet Academy.

I served on the USS Enterprise.

I found my place and my home there.

I found my people.

Who are they?

I can't yet remember.

::

I feel different shades of energy in my memories of them.

I try to pair those with the names which float in my mind.

I find that I can recognize them, tell them apart, orient my awareness individually to each of them, but I'm surprised to find that I don't really know any of them. They remain a mystery to me, a mystery as deep as myself.

There is one as hard as granite, but softened by passion like a rock is covered in moss. One who can conjure the most powerful movement from something that is standing still, and is proud of that. He has a solemn name he doesn't like others to use... Montgomery Scott.

Scotty.

There is another who wields that movement in space like a fencer wields his rapier, millions of tons of thrust at his fingertips in effortless cavorting through space and time, while his beautiful long eyes watch on in innocent wonder. One who comes from a birthplace of discipline like I do. Sulu, Hikaru.

And the one who rarely speaks, the one so very young and serious, the one who knows where to go. One with three names, all sliding liquid semi-consonants and soft gutturals, flowing down like a cup of hot tea with sugar... Pavel Andrejevitch Chekhov.

And the solid strenght of the woman, the one who connects people and allows information through. The one who never tires and never quits. Who won't solve the crisis herself, but will enable those concerned to solve it by communicating with one another. The mediator, Nyota Uhura. I remember in a flash, an evening in the mess after alpha shift; somebody at the next table calling her Penda. Daughter of a warm place. Matching her male colleagues point for point in competence and courage, and when the duty of the day is done, being strong enough still to curb her desire to mother us all, both younger and older than herself... But she knows we can't afford being so weak as to allow ourselves to feel like the children we all are, within the great black void where there is no up or down.

Then there is the Keeper, and he looms large and dark in my mind but I am shy of naming him yet, because my body is still frightened by what passed.

The hard certainty of my near death, two steps away, beyond the air-tight door.

The advantage I ruthlessly took of his trust in me, my fingers sharp on his neck, then pressed on his face.

Then, the pain growing...

The Keeper, he is disquiet. Never in the here-and-now, never peaceful. When it felt like I had found my own peace on the ship, in my life aboard, out came he with something that would break my balance. I could never relax. He teased me, I learned to do the same. We never took our masks off. His heart's vibrations are too similar to mine to allow resonance between us. He has seen so much pain, so much death. Death is sometimes a regrettable part of my appointment, but he's the one who has to clean up the mess afterwards.

I hurt him, pouring my katra into him. I hurt him too with the process of my death, that he witnessed and was powerless to stop.

I had no choice.

I am sorry.

Doctor McCoy, Leonard, I am so sorry.

Only one sorrow is greater than this. My sorrow for the grief my blinded sight never saw in Jim's eyes, on the other side of the glass which separated our hands, our palms pressed to the smooth surface that I could not feel anymore while I died.

And this one I do know. Admiral James Tiberius Kirk, my Captain, who knows me better than I know myself.

The one I cannot stand to think about, for some reason I can't remember, yet fills my mind now and at all times.

The one whose name is the first knowledge I regained.

::

I can't remember what it is that doesn't let me access my memories about him.

What I remember is a frame of logical thought I built around them, like a box with a complicated puzzle as an opening system.

I know there must be something precious inside. Memories we share. Shared?

It would be terrible if I found my memories and his are not the same.

Some time I must solve the puzzle and open the box, but not now. Now I am too tired with this waiting.

::

I remember the lyrics from a song by an almost forgotten XX-century Terran composer. At the time when I first heard it —one evening, while playing chess in the Captain's cabin— I was so taken by the quiet desperation in the words that I missed the trap being readied for me on the checkerboard and had to surrender to an inevitable checkmate.

How can I have feeling when I don't know if it's a feeling?

How can I feel something if I just don't know how to feel?

How can I have feelings when my feelings have always been denied?

You know life can be long

*and you got to be so strong
and you got to carry on
sometimes I feel I can't go on...*

I wondered at the time how could a XX-century Terran musician know so much about Vulcan.
His voice felt like that of a brother.

::

Robed people come to me, speak for a while, then leave.

Often they speak to me of logic.

Logic I remember well, like a pet sehlat knows its name.

Knowledge of logic, I remember, has served me well in my other life.

Logic is a method of reasoning which leads along a chain of relevant elements to one and only one correct conclusion.

I remember I never quite understood the equanimity with which my schoolmates employed logic.

They learned it well in order to have good grades, be praised by teachers and not be shamed in front of the clan.

They didn't seem to care about the most fascinating character of logic: given enough data, logic allows to foresee the future with quantifiable precision.

But they didn't care about the future, as though no danger lurked within it. As though they were safe.

I remember that I never felt safe.

I worked hard at my logic and mastered it with more than average proficiency, but I saw again and again that each perfect, airy, symmetrical structure was built on unproven postulates.

"What happens if you assume different postulates?"

The one time I asked this question in 3rd class, I was whipped with the sh'lak. I never got an answer.

From then on, I studied even harder, and was more careful with my questions.

Someone (I must look it up) once defined the universe as "A morally neutral causality of unimaginable violence". What I was learning in Physics, in Biology and Xenobiology, and in History (both Vulcan and Federation) made very clear to me that I could not dispute either the moral neutrality nor the violence.

I clung to Logic, trying to disprove the causality.

I needed to believe that what happens, happens for a reason which logic can unravel, and not as a result of chance, or of randomly assumed postulates.

It was the only way for me to make peace with kaiidh.

::

I remember when I was a child. I scrupulously behaved as I was instructed. I followed orders to the letter: those explicitly stated, as well as those that logic allowed me to consider implicit. I pursued such obedience to a degree that made my mother sometimes frown and my peers laugh at me when adults weren't looking.

I didn't understand.

I doubled my efforts.

Only later I would learn how my very effort was the reason for my failure, and what it was the point that I missed.

I didn't realize that Vulcan discipline, Vulcan reserve, Vulcan austerity are only the main text; I was missing the footnotes.

It came to me in a flash when I saw a reproduction of an ancient painting by the Terran René Magritte. It depicts an obsolete instrument used at the time to intoxicate oneself with fumes from burning leaves of *Nicotiana tabacum*. Under the instrument, a line of words in the script of the era: "Ceci n'est pas une pipe", "This is not a pipe".

It is a representation of a pipe.

Vulcans don't behave: they act a behavior. They represent something which is not there. There is always a double meaning and a double intention to their acts, nor do they often fit with each other. Their pose is not to be taken literally, as I did.

Terrans call this hypocrysy.

::

I remember kindness, and compassion.

Kindness, when one's little easy gesture makes someone else's life a little better for a moment.
Compassion, when one sacrifices something to ease the pain of another, which he feels as his own.

I learned them from humans, both from the times they acted on them, and from the times they didn't.

Vulcans know neither.

::

I have been informed that some time ago I underwent Kohlinahr novitiate at Gol, but I didn't pass the final test.

After my mind was addressed to the topic, I have found I do remember much of the time I spent there and much of the disciplines I mastered, although in truth to myself I must admit I now can't see their usefulness.

What I don't remember is the time before, and what event, or events, brought me to the decision to enter Gol.

It is all closed in the locked box. I haven't the courage to try and open it. I listen, and something is buzzing within, like bees on a Terran jujube tree in bloom.

(I wonder from what corner of my mind such a memory is surfacing. I remember a country house on Terra, a wall warm with sun, and a slender tree with small oval leaves, very green. The tree itself seems to hum and sing lowly, but it's the voice of the bees feeding on the tiny greenish flowers. It is not cold. There is somebody with me. Who?)

What I remember is my need for cleansing. I had lived so long among humans, that I wanted to purge myself from humanity, as though I feared I would contaminate my people.

I know somehow from Terran history that upon release, Christians who had been slaves of the Moors were kept in spiritual quarantine until they had gone through a refresh course of religious instruction.

Perhaps what I truly feared was the fear of my people for mental contamination.

The thought makes something click in the puzzle locking the box where my memories of the Captain are sealed. One piece of the puzzle slips loose. I pick it up and stare. It is indeed a memory about him.

I remember now one thing (one of the things?) that made me take the choice to come to Gol. Logic.

Postulate: given the situation at the moment and its developments in the foreseeable long-term future, there was nothing I could do to help the Captain keep his ship against the will of Starfleet.

Data: I knew for sure my staying would make my own pain worse.

I knew for sure this in turn would make his pain worse.

I considered communicating this to him and saying goodbye, but concluded it would have been illogical: the reason for my leaving was a situation of useless and undue emotion, goodbyes would have only made it worse for both.

I find I am sighing. I slipped yet again!

"Vulcans don't sigh and Vulcans don't yawn". So my teachers used to repeat, glancing meaningfully at me, the half-blood.

Sighing means one has disrupted the regular rhythm of breathing, so as to need replenishing the lungs with a deeper breath.

It seems that I am still in a situation of useless and undue emotion.

It will not get worse than it is already, if I admit that in his heart of hearts, each of us believed we would have more time.

::

It is fascinating how my slips into emotion unlock one at a time more pieces of the puzzle.

I recall vividly an episode from one shore leave on Terra. (I notice most of the memories which float up spontaneously seem to be of Terra, or somehow linked to Terra. But I also remember my self-image to have always been Vulcan. Now I have no self-image, only fragments. Is this why Terran experiences are seeping through?)

The Captain and I were on a visit to a horse-breeding farm. Two colts escaped out of a gate left open, bucking and galloping past us along the drive toward the open main gate and the danger of the public road, stopping just inside to taste some white clover on the edge.

I remember how he stepped up to them, showing his intention in measured movements, careful not to push them into another fit of bucking and out of the gate.

How surely he put his hand on the farthest one's halter: the bravest one, the one the other followed, then turned him gently around and caught the one more shy, neither even raising their heads at the contact, while he murmured to them quietly.

How he led both back, one on each side, their faces relaxed and happy as though coming to his hands had been the best part of their escapade.

How far he'd come from the tense Admiral Kirk who had boarded the Enterprise at the beginning of the V'Ger crisis, unable to let go of his confrontational attitude toward Captain Decker. As though now he had finally made his peace with his weaknesses and limits as well as with his power.

::

I know there is more.

The box of memories is heavy in my mind, the buzz is loud.

The box is warm. I imagine myself holding it tight to my chest.

It makes my heart beat faster.

One bee seems to fly out of the box. I follow its flight in my mind's eyes. It circles my head, buzzing. "The bees know", they say on Terra. This one knows something I knew myself, once. Something about logic, again— something about Gol. What was it?

I see fear, and uncertainty.

Is that another reason why I went?

What was I afraid about?

Images slip and turn in my mind, until, there, they snap into place.

I was afraid of uncertainty.

I was hungry for an upgrade in my logic, which would enable me to leave uncertainty behind.

I needed to reach a provenly correct conclusion about something vital, something so important that my whole existence turned around it as on an axis...

And now the sense of the question is returning, and it feels like a devouring black hole at the centre of my brain.

My guardian, the bee, flies in a golden circle around it, exorcising its hunger.

I wanted to be certain of the time, and the place, and most of all the reason, for the future, inevitable death of someone who was very important to me.

Who?

I wanted to know how I could ever prepare myself to live through it, or how to die.

It is clear that I was not successful in my endeavor while at Gol. Chasing my elusive answer, I reached out for the stricter logic of V'Ger. I remember that even V'Ger didn't have the answer. Yet I know that after my encounter with it, I didn't search anymore.

Had I found my certainty elsewhere? Or a reason to abandon my quest?

The bee now leaves me, flies away in a straight line and I can't follow, but there are many more inside the box.

Soon I may be able to pick the puzzle completely open, and the whole swarm will pour out like flying drops of golden honey, and I will know what they know.

Soon.

I wait.

::

endnotes to chapter 2

1. 'An epitaph': it is indeed an epitaph, graven on an early XVI-century a.D. stone coffin in the Archaeological Museum at Este, Italy, Terra.
2. The song quote makes reference to John Lennon, his solo album *Imagine*, and the song *How?*
3. The quote about the nature of the universe is from the philosopher on TV, in *September*, directed by Woody Allen (1987).
4. Kaiidth: "What is, is": the concise expression of the Vulcan principle of acceptance of the inevitable.

::

::

::

3. Kirk

I didn't see the miracle.

I had quit believing in miracles such a long time ago... On Tarsus IV, when at fourteen I asked for one with all my childish faith, and no god bothered to answer.

Then, in those terrible, wonderful five years on the Enterprise, every day was a miracle. He was there, sharing my duties, my choices, and my fears. An everyday miracle isn't a miracle at all. I came to believe it would last forever; that fate, or the universe, owed me that.

Five years are so short.

When it all came to an end, nothing felt right anymore.

::

I have always been fond of pleasure. I know I can thank my mother's attitude as well as my own nature for this propensity of mine to enjoy things without reserves. Simple things: good food when I'm hungry, a good stretch between freshly ironed sheets, a good fuck, a good workout, a good hot shower... My work ethics, for what it's worth, is the result of a deliberate effort, begun after my father died and I found that I wanted a career in Starfleet. Even then, for a long while it only covered my time on duty. It was not until I was appointed captain of the Enterprise that I discovered a captain is never off duty.

Once I was dirtside again, caught between a desk and a wall, I could have unbent after office hours. I could have had fun, enjoyed life. Yet nothing seemed to be a pleasure anymore.

I learned to know only too well the pain that lurks in corners like a small animal, biting me wickedly when I passed by.

I missed my ship. I missed my bridge crew, and Bones. I missed Spock at my side, and it was like one of those aches you get used to, adjusting your range of motion, until the time when you reach for a once-familiar movement and the piercing stab reminds you suddenly:

nevermore.

::

I am haunted for some reason by an ancient song by John Lennon, from a collection which I used to play often at one time during the five-year mission.

*How can I go forward when I don't know
which way I'm facing?*

*How can I go forward when I don't know
which way to turn?*

*How can I go forward into something
I'm not sure of?*

*You know life can be long
and you got to be so strong*

*and the world is so tough
sometimes I feel I've had enough...*

It describes very well how I felt as a grounded Admiral in Ops.

It describes very well how I am feeling just now, waiting for Spock to be himself again and for my crew of renegades and myself to face our trial.

Loneliness is the sudden feeling that he is not there anymore to watch my back.

That's how selfish I am.

::

Grounded. Dirtside. Ground-hog. There's a whole vocabulary for the place where I was stuck.

I took a lot of showers (how cliché!), but it didn't help. I always knew where to find my orgasms, anything as long as it is consensual and, hopefully, fun for all involved: female, male, neuter, other, human, alien, or myself. But now I missed the nearness, even the few times when Lori came into the shower with me.

I was touch-starved, yet I didn't dare to let my soul be touched.

I would come, and still feel cold in my spine, and for the hundredth time in as many weeks, I would thank whatever god may be listening that I was not on the Enterprise.

The thought had come to me suddenly, surprisingly, the first time I'd caught myself staring for minutes on end at the paperwork on my desk.

I couldn't be the Captain anymore in the state I was in— I'd ruin everything, bring the mission to grief and destroy all the purity the past still preserved.

I never liked to think about my medals: too much blood dripping from each of them. But now they had a use. I would look at them, and be reminded of all the things that I would— no, that I could not do anymore.

The only way I could hope to survive and not erase the very memory of what had been, was staying there, landed. Caged.

But did I really wish to survive?

After showering, I itched all over for hours.

::

Sometimes I forgot for a moment, when I was deep into some manual work, or a book— at those times I slipped into thinking *I must show him this...*, *I want to talk to him about this*, and then my heart would give a nasty little squeeze, and I would remember. He was not there anymore to share my enthusiasm. (Oh he feels it, he does, I can always see it in his eyes, and in that quiver of his lips, tightening to keep the smile inside).

I found enthusiasm had disappeared: "The great Pan is dead". The sky was empty, and so was the earth.

Bones came sometimes to visit, more often after Lori left— but even when talking to him, I sounded to myself as an answering machine in an empty apartment.

::

I'd wake before the alarm in the early hours and just stare at the window or the ceiling, my mind a blank. Only the habit of a lifetime made me finally get up in time for work.

I could not listen to music without crying.

Sometimes I felt a dull ache to my stomach, like I was famished, even when my belly was full. Everything tasted like sawdust.

In the evening, I'd pick the mushiest holovids, shameless melodramas I'd never wish Lori would catch me watching, and tried to drown my pain with someone else's. I'd fall asleep sitting on the floor with too many beer cans strewn around, wake up all cramped in the middle of the night, and drag myself to bed. I knew I couldn't afford to look for comfort in anything stronger than beer, if I still wished to pass for normal the next morning... Or under Bones' scrutiny.

::

I had not loved him enough, and he had left.

::

His IDIC pendant was gone, only the thin chain remained. I picked it up when I left the ship and brought it home, hung it on the bathroom mirror in my apartment, a memory that I had served with a Vulcan— my Vulcan.

I couldn't drink tea anymore.

When my marriage ended, I took to sleeping across the bed, my back pressed to the header, missing a hotter-than-human body embracing me. Missing the memory of something that had never happened. I was not brave enough to acknowledge it for the desire it had always been.

::

I dreamed.

There we were, he and I, knowing we would make love soon.

The intimacy not yet there, but shimmering beneath the surface, waiting only to be warmed by gentleness.

He hoping for it to be good, I knowing it would be.

There was a fondness, and the prospect of joy.

When I woke up, I remembered the joy.

::

I tried to forget him, but I couldn't. I stepped around each memory of him, careful not to look, yet scared stiff that I would, in the end, forget. But that's not how it works. I found that if I could not have him, I would at least hold on to my grief, as the next best thing.

I have too much to forget, a lifetime won't be enough.

In my desperation, I punished myself by thinking about what it was that had pushed him away. I think he had felt trapped— *I* was a trap. He realized it before it was too late, and bit his own heart off so he could escape.

::

What sort of trap was I?

I am quite sure dominance was not a factor: he had never resented my power as his captain.

I feel fear must have been involved, but fear of what? He's the most physically brave person I know, so it could not be fear of danger to his life.

Fear for me, for *my* life? We both know that even sitting behind a desk doesn't make one safe from the Reaper... but how could he doubt his own ability to protect me, after the countless times he saved my hide?

Fear of hurting my sensibilities? That, he never did. I don't think he ever could. He must have known.

Fear *of* me...? Fear that in my recklessness I would hurt him when he was most open to me, and vulnerable?

I wish I could say that I'd never trampled on his emotions— they were so dear to me, like the sight of a wild animal surprised in the woods. You try your best not to scare him away and waste such a blessing.

But I knew I had: that terrible day when I found no other way to take him back from Leila Kalomi and keep him with me than lashing out at him with insults he should have killed me for. Yet he didn't. He forgave me, even as he acknowledged the purgatory I was calling him back to.

That's how selfish I was: I wanted him for me, no matter that the cost was his new-found happiness, and I wanted him without even giving myself in exchange... not in the same way or in the same degree as, even then, I knew he was willing to give himself to me.

No wonder he chose to bury himself alive at Gol, rather than suffering through such a double bind.

::

Then V'Ger appeared at the edge of the galaxy. I was again on the Enterprise, and my jealous love for my Lady made me grab at command with ruthless desperation.

I am ashamed now of the way I acted up to Captain Decker. "Acted" is a proper word: I behaved as an old outmoded actor, all wrapped up in my plans for a come-back, with no idea at all about how far behind reality had left me.

But *he* appeared on the bridge, and the miracle returned, like a comet gone to the edge of the system, out of sight, forgotten, frozen, comes around the narrow tip of its orbit and inevitably, fatally, comes back in view in all its golden glory.

It felt like a resurrection. He'd been given back to me, and being alive suddenly felt good again.

He brought me up-to-date with the refitted ship.

He made the difference that allowed us to communicate with V'Ger and answer its need, somehow.

And *he* brought about the miracle of a future for us both.

A miracle worth a lifelong commitment: I saw it in his eyes and felt it in my fingers when we met in Sickbay after his attempted meld with his brother-machine.

A miracle I knew was worth changing my whole life for, as I did when we bonded. I know I changed my life more than he did his: he had already pledged me his trust such a long time ago.

A miracle he knew was worth dying for, and he did.

A miracle for which I murdered my ship, my Lady, my first love.

Now I'm waiting for him to regain his memory, with as much fear as desire, as much hope as despair.

It would be terrible if his memories were not the same as mine.

I wait, and it's killing me.

I wait.

::

endnotes to chapter 3

1. 'The great Pan is dead': PLUTARCH, *De defectu oraculorum* (The Flaw of the Oracles), 419b.
2. 'I have too much to forget': for those who may remember such old stuff, it's a song quote: "Ho troppo da dimenticare / la vita non mi basterà", I NUOVI ANGELI, *Anna da dimenticare* (1973).

::



Credit & Copyright: Wally Pacholka (Astropics.com)
(Astronomy Picture of the Day at <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap050808.html>)

::

part 2. Stardate 8556.84

summary

Part 2, in one chapter, of the *Two lives, two deaths* series. What happened when Kirk was finally allowed to visit Spock after fal-tor-pan.

note to part 2:

This part is where all this stuff really began. It started as a slightly different, less bloody take on plotline 1 in TLC - The Learning Curve by raku (1999), at <http://www.alternateuniverses.com/tlc>. As I began reading raku's hypertext and following the first alternative offered at each step, I found myself reading (passionately) a sequence of events which turned out to lead to the inevitable, irreparable, death of Kirk, version 1. Heartbreaking: Kirk grooming himself for his own funeral. Illogical: the death he chooses is indeed a messy one.

When he began shaving, I began feeling trapped into a replay of the no-win Kobayashi Maru test... so I followed his own lead and tampered with the settings a bit farther upstream in the timeline, at the only point in raku's otherwise totally compelling story where things didn't read quite right to me. I am old sheepdog... And after all, doesn't TLC also stand for "Tender Loving Care"?

All other parts centered for a long time on that short and marginal rewrite of mine, fanfiction on fanfiction. Only at the very end of the process, when I was beginning to feel I had nothing more to add, this belated communication from Kirk came in, insisting he'd tell this part of the story himself. And we know he (almost) always gets his way.

::

Stardate 8556.84

Bones,

I really should have told you about all this much earlier. Fact is, there was —there is— a little bit about the whole affair I'm not proud about at all, and it took me until now to make some sort of peace with myself over it.

Thank you for not pressing me to speak before I was ready. I could see you were out of your skin with curiosity. Thence my frowns when I felt you were on the brink of asking... But I know you knew, even then, how grateful I was for your silence.

So, here it comes at last, all that happened the first time I was allowed to visit Spock after fal-tor-pan. You've earned the right to know, and maybe by now I've earned the right to tell.

::

The Seleya complex is larger than it looks from the outside. You saw the building, putting the rocky, uneven terrain to such good use that it somehow seems to complete the steep slope, a natural formation on top of the ancient volcanic backbone of the mountain. Inside, it looks and feels like a more austere version of the Mount Athos monastery. I had been instructed to step up the five steps to the door, ring the bell, then step back down and wait in silence. I waited for about forty minutes before the door creaked open. (I'd never have believed any door on Vulcan might do anything as sloppy as *creaking*, for Surak's sake, but I swear that one did). A priestess beckoned me in, one of the white-robed ones with the Isis-like crescent on their head-dress. She didn't speak a word, just turned on her heels and I followed.

We went down halls, and corridors, and empty rooms and then on to more corridors, all wide and low-ceilinged and flooded with too-white light from the fixtures. All looking the same to me. I tried to keep tabs on the twists and turns, but after a while I got confused. I think I was expected to. The pace was fast and soon I was breathing more heavily than I'd wish.

The priestess stopped abruptly next to a small dark door along one of the narrowest corridors. She gestured for me to enter, then walked on and left.

I hoped knocking was the correct procedure at this point.

"Come," I heard Spock answering.

He was standing in the almost bare cell next to the only window, a small square looking out on the coppery sky. He turned to me, and his face was like the face of a stranger. There was recognition in his eyes, but it was the recognition one may have of a casual acquaintance, met years ago at a science seminar or a concert or at a café during a less-than-exciting shore leave.

Do you remember when he joined us on the Enterprise during the V'Ger crisis? This was worse. It reminded me rather absurdly of a row of strawberries, real Terran wild strawberries, that I saw once in Amanda's orchard. The precious plants had traveled so far, had been carefully interred, lovingly tended, but they were all dying in the dry heat, their promise of growth and fruitfulness unachieved.

I didn't know what to say. I so wanted to touch him, in all possible ways, and yet he had never felt so unreachable. I found myself muttering the stupidest opening.

"Spock. It's good to see you. How do you feel?"

"Thank you, Admiral, my rehabilitation is proceeding well, both on the mental and the physical level. I trust you are adequately lodged and provided for...?"

"Why 'Admiral'? You know I'm just Jim for you".

"Admiral, although your nickname was the first memory that came back to me, I don't wish to sound disrespectful toward a higher officer, to whom I am indebted for my very life".

I felt like my heart was paper and someone was beginning to slowly tear it down the middle.

"But, Spock, we're bonded. Don't you remember? Didn't they tell you?"

He raised his eyes in mine, and then I knew. They didn't tell him. He didn't remember. He didn't even believe me, not really, not even knowing I was the one who'd brought him here to be revived.

"Tell me," I asked. "Have you been allowed to talk to the Lady Amanda? to Ambassador Sarek? They know of our bond. The whole crew knows, and Starfleet. Komack is still seething about it".

"I have been allowed to briefly confer with my mother in the presence of the High Chapter representative. My recovery is deemed too fragile yet for a longer conversation with her".

"But they must have told you about your status. You are still a Federation citizen and a Starfleet officer".

"Admiral, you forget I am still legally dead on both the Federation's and Starfleet's records. My anagraphical status on Vulcan is that of a newborn. As you understand, there are no recent precedents for my current situation".

"Then Spock," and I tried not to let my voice break, "meld us. Look into the matter yourself". I stepped nearer.

He shifted back.

"Please..." I sounded a little desperate even to my own ears.

He stared at me for a moment, bewildered, diffident. Then he resolutely raised his fingertips to my face. I closed my eyes, expecting the familiar feeling, like plunging together from a clifftop into a lake, but none came. I only felt a faint buzz, a skimming on the surface of my face and of my mind. When I opened my eyes again, his hand had already left the meld-points.

"I see that your assertion is indeed truthful. The information may possibly have been misguidedly withheld from my knowledge during my re-education, as irrelevant to my current status on Vulcan. However, such status is in its turn irrelevant with regard to my formerly entered obligations to you. I will resume my role in our bonded life as soon as practically feasible".

He wasn't happy about it. If anything, he sounded resigned.

I felt a decision, small dark and heavy, suddenly drop down to the bottom of my stomach, releasing ringwaves of pain.

//I can't accept this,// I was going to say. //I don't want you to force yourself to stay with me if you can't remember the love. If you don't feel the love//.

I'd tell him, and then I'd die.

But I stopped before uttering a word.

Spock had raised his two fingers, reaching out toward me and slightly trembling, as though his bones and muscles were remembering something his brain yet didn't.

Faster than words, thoughts—or half-thoughts—suddenly crowded my mind. //Oh God, but he's trying. He's offering me what he can— all he has, really, and I almost refused him out of my stupid pride. As though having been chosen *once* by him was not enough for my ego! If

he was my human mate, and he was recuperating after a stroke, would I leave him just because he can't remember we're married? A bond is so much more than a marriage. 'Through good times and bad...'. This is one of the worse ones. It must be even harder for him than for me: at least, I do remember. He doesn't. Yet, he's ready to stand by me... to trust me and his former self. To trust *me*, blindly, in the name of his ethics. It's what brought him to face death for us, and now it brings him back to me. What a coward was I going to be, abandoning him in the hands of a clan and a people he fought so hard to escape. How would he feel if I was to deny him the right to do what his ethics demands? I would join the crowd of those who rejected him since childhood, never even trying to understand...//

I raised my hand in turn and touched his in a Vulcan kiss.

This time he didn't move away, but neither he looked at me.

I moved nearer.

He still smelled the same, like hot metal and pure flame. I felt his thoughts quiver under his skin and I ached to hug him, you know the way I am. It was hard to stop myself at touching fingertips. I had to remind myself how my human thoughts, my very scent and touch must have been faintly disgusting to him... too damp, too cold. I wanted him to want me, and I knew he couldn't, just as I couldn't stop myself from wanting him. So I thankfully took what he could give, that small, restrained touch, so much more than he was really ready for, so much less than I really needed.

Finally, he let his hand drop and his eyes focused on mine, questioning. I had barely missed hurting him so deeply, and I was terrified that I'd still manage to mess everything up. I don't know where the words came from in the end, but this is what I said.

"I am honored by your offer of resuming our bond. I cherish your reasons, although they are not the same reasons we shared when we bonded. I promise I will not demand of you anything you don't feel comfortable with. And I promise I will do all I can to help you remember, if you wish to. But please, Spock, one thing I need to ask you. Help me learn how to love you in a way you can find ...acceptable now."

And then, can you imagine? He smiled. Not the open-mouthed smile that beamed on us so wonderfully and briefly when he saw me alive after the koon-ut-kalifee. His other smile, the ghost-smile, when only the thinnest creases form at the corners of his eyes. You know the one, when he allows himself for a moment to feel pleasure, or hope, or when he feels safe. He still didn't remember. But we both knew then that our road would take us out of that labyrinth of a monastery, that we'd leave Vulcan side by side, and that the rest of our lives would be ours again.

::

What followed, you know already.

You were there for us.

You said to us, both separately and together, all the right things at all the right moments, all along the time it took for Spock and me to disentangle ourselves from that sticky catchy cloying Vulcan bureaucracy and get him permission to leave for Terra with us. And we'd still be there waiting if not for your trick of subtly threatening the Chapter with a three-years joint Terran-Andorian research program on molecular regeneration during fal-tor-pan. That was a neat trick, you so straight-faced, bouncing on your heels in front of the High Priestess and about forty-eight robed dignitaries, talking of taking samples of seminal fluid from randomly selected Vulcans for mitochondrial DNA analysis. That was *brilliant*. It took my all not to whoop and cheer when they suggested that the paperwork for our departure may be finished earlier than expected.

I know you're embarrassed as hell reading this, which is why I'm writing you (with the old-fashioned brass-and-bakelite fountain-pen you gave me eight years ago at Christmas, the one which had belonged to your grand-grand-whatever-grandmother) instead of calling you by vid. So you can blush to your heart's content.

Truth be told, I'm a bit hot above the collar myself just now, for quite different reasons.

Because I've been a hair's breadth from making a cosmic fool of myself, and what's worse, from wrecking Spock's heart.

Because I've taken so much to get round to telling you.

And because, even though Spock's being at me since quite a while about this, I'm only now getting round to discussing with him some way to show you how thankful we are for the sort of friend you've been to us.
Thank you, Bones. Bless you.

Jim

::

::

::

part 3. Meditations (After fal-tor-pan)

summary

Part 3, in 3 chapters, of the *Two lives, two deaths* series. Spock tries to remember the bond with Kirk, and discovers the wisdom of the body. Kirk tries to come to terms with the outcome of fal-tor-pan, and finds unexpected help.

notes to part 3:

1. *I wrote this as an immediate sequel to my Kirk-rescue job on plotline 1 in TLC - The Learning Curve by raku.*
2. *The Meditation of Blood is a story by Laura Jacquez Valentine, at <http://www.squidge.net/blts/archive/v/valentine-echoes3.txt>, or <http://www.dementia.org/~jacquez/writing/trekfict/voice03.html>.*
3. *The word k'harai is found in the (sad) story Golden Boy by Jungle Kitty at http://www.invisibleplanets.com/kirk_spock/goldenboy.htm.*
4. *Bajoran words come from the Bajor Language Project at <http://www.tc.umn.edu/~joela/cgi-bin/bajor/index.cgi?HomePage>.*
5. *Klingon words come from The Klingon Language Institute at <http://www.kli.org> and from MARK OKRAND, The Klingon dictionary, New York: Pocket Books, 1992, as quoted in the Klingon Database of the Klingon Imperial Diplomatic Corps at <http://www.klingon.org/database/empire.html>.*
6. *See the endnotes to each chapter for translations, explanations and references.*
7. *Additional note below.*

::

1. Spock: Cold

Lights: off.

Temperature: 38°8 C.

Firepot: burning.

Sitting: cross-legged.

Hands: position, relax.

Breathe.

Breathe in.

I breathe in sensations, both from without and from within.

They fill me with confusion.

Breathe out.

The confusion recedes. My mind quietens.

Death was quiet.

I remember.

So quiet.

I let my thoughts fall, one at a time, like pebbles in the still waters of a pond.

Each one makes a small ripple.

::

Cold.

I've been cold since I first left Vulcan.

Terra is a place of crunching snow, of chilling winds and rain, of scorching ice and damp fogs.

A Sun too young. It touches my skin but I'm still cold inside.

Cold in the artificial heat of my quarters on the Enterprise.

Chilled while I burned in the haze of radiation that was killing me.

Cold on Genesis, inside the pod. Terribly cold when the pod broke open.

Cold even on Vulcan, inside my heavy white cloak, when memories began seeping back to me like rain filling dips in the ground after a dry spell.

I'm cold here, now.

But I remember the cleanliness of fire.

The flame rising hot along my spine, warming me up. Making me alive.
I found it, once.
I went to it.
I remember.

::

On the Enterprise, behind my set face, my controls, I used to feel protected.
Now I am seen as even more controlled and shielded.
Like coming back from Gol, when I had forgotten how I would greet friends. (I was ashamed).
They think fal-tor-pan was the same thing, only more so.
It wasn't.
Untouchable I appear, but I'm not. I'm utterly konar.
They think I can't be hurt, but I simply can't react.
They do hurt me, unwillingly, unaware. Even Doctor McCoy.
Then one day he looked at me a little closer, after one of his quips, and he realized.
He has good eyes, the Doctor.
They go straight down to his heart.

::

Jim... almost didn't see either. He almost left me.
I still wonder what it was, that turned him back to me and made him allow himself to allow me back.
When his expression changed, he was watching my hands.

::

I am seeing myself now as a detail of reality.
My hand on the comm button is not the concept of my hand anymore, but a bundle of skin, sinew, muscle and bone that chance has for a moment put in front of my eyes.
It's the same for the memories crowding my mind.
They are clearer, more material than they used to be.
I can pick them up, study them like they were artifacts from an alien civilization, trying to discover their functions.
I find that I can look back at my former self as though it was the life of another.
He and I touch in death and in death only.
His end is my beginning.
This is what I see.

::

Spock cha Sarek, trying to forget he is also Spock cha Amanda the Terran.
His lack of compassion for his physical self.
His deep regard for the well-being of others.
Vulnerable living beings, abandoned to chance and blind hope in a devouring universe.
Spock cha Sarek always below his duty, never feeling he's earned the right to pleasure unless it's the mere satisfaction of need as the price of survival.
Only once he followed his desire and went willingly toward the warmth.
This is what brought him —brought *me*— to face the cruel blinding white light of the machine which alone could save the ship and the humans aboard —nay, one human aboard. K'harai, Shining-One. My Sun, my warmth.
I had left behind my Vulcan heritage in order to go to him. It was only logical that I tried to keep alive what had cost me so much. What I prized so much more than myself and the concept of myself.

::

James T. Kirk.

Captain. Admiral.

Jim.

He's hard on himself also, all the more so as he knows his self-discipline is hard-earned and could easily slip.

But he values pleasure as such, for its own sake.

Because life is dangerous, and short, and all too often painful.

Fueled by the inner paradox of doubting himself, yet knowing his own worth.

I find he frightens me. He always did.

Pthak svi'zherka — dan-karik heh dan-khrashik.

More than of a Klingon bird-of-prey I am afraid of him.

Now suddenly makes sense to me what Song of Songs 6:4 meant with "Beloved, you are as terrible as troops with banners, arranged for battle".

But he's warmth, and light, and the life of me.

I want to face my fear.

I already did once.

::

I need to remember the bond.

I know it is there. I saw it in the mind-meld. But I can't feel it.

The warm feeling I miss but I can't yet remember.

How can I find it again?

I need to remember, or I'll die in this cold.

::

My meditation proceeds by statements.

But now there is a question.

Among the round, opaque pebbles of my thoughts, a shiny, cutting shard of glass.

Sharp.

I raise the knife in my left hand. I cut along my right arm, then change hand and cut my left.

I cut neat parallel lines across my thighs.

I cut small circles around the inside of my knees and of my ankles, then draw crosses through the circles.

I reach behind me and trace the line of my spine with the tip of the knife, from hips to neck and up to hairline.

The Meditation of Blood.

I feel drops trickling down.

The bond is open.

And through the bond, from wherever he is now, comes back to me his sudden shock, feeling the hot dense liquid dripping across my skin.

And the feel coming from him is not killing-cold.

It's my hot flame.

Now I remember.

Now I am whole.

Now he is whole.

I'll face my fear, and let the blood sing.

::

endnotes to chapter 1

1. Konar: feeling of being completely exposed.

2. 'Pthak svi'zherka — dan-karik heh dan-khrashik': "Fear amongst-emotions: most-strong and most-violent".

::

2. Kirk: Safe

I've been summoned by T'Pau.

The Vulcan matriarch. Spock's great-aunt on his father's side.

The message came through unofficial canals, but there was nothing unofficial in the wording.

No explanation of the reasons.

I thought they were calling him back. Catching their chance to reabsorb him into their stifling way of life. Making the wrong-shaped peg fit in some hole at last.

When I left, I was ready to fight for him, to keep him.

I didn't expect what I found there.

::

T'Pau stood very erect in the exact center of the empty hall, majestic in her black robe and white stole. Alone.

I felt my heartbeat get faster as I walked on to her and stopped at the correct distance of 5.76 feet.

I had not forgotten that Aliens, when alone, are expected to be the first to address Vulcans of whatever rank. I hoped I would also remember the right pronunciation for all the words I'd need.

"Oko-su, live long and prosper. I have come. What is thy reason for calling me here? My bondmate and I have been told that the rites after fal-tor-pan have been performed completely. Is thou wanting anything more from us?"

"Odu, do not be troubled. Thou is in the right that this summons regards thy bondmate, but thou has no reason to prepare for a confrontation. I have used my power to call thee to me, because I have not the power to do what is needed for him. Thou has it".

She stared at me for a moment, her eyes searching.

"I want to tell thee a story. I don't know how, or even if, what I will tell thee will make any difference for the better between thee and thy bondmate. I am shooting my arrow to the sky, trying to make the wind bleed".

"Oko-su, I am honored that thou chooses me to listen. I am very much concerned with the bond I share with thy nephew, and very uncertain of how to proceed in order for him to fully heal. How does the story thou wants to tell me touch on our bond?"

"It is not my will that this very old story be known by any Vulcan in this time. For this reason I called thee to me and I did not tell thee why. Thou and I are alone here. Now I will tell. I want to tell thee why I am the matriarch, the Kl'atch-ka, the last of my generation. It is a story about love. In our species as well as in thine and many others, love and reproduction often go together, but they remain two separate things. This is a story of love between t'hy'la gone wasted. It does not matter that it was not between bondmates. T'hy'la is the same whatever the nature of the relationship".

She slowly, carefully, lowered herself to sit on the floor, helping herself with her long bronze staff.

I'd never seen a Vulcan sit down in public before, much less on the floor. I was so surprised that I didn't even move to help her.

She crossed her legs.

"Will thou not sit with me?"

I did, trying to keep my back conveniently straight and my belly in. I didn't know what to do with my hands. I folded them in my lap.

"I wish to tell you my story in common Standard, because it is not a story that can be told in Vulcan, neither I want such language to contaminate what I am going to tell".

She sighed. After a moment she went on:

"In order for you to understand, you must know some things that are kept from the eyes of out-worlders. Things that only Vulcans know, and also the Ri'hannsu, the Romulans. You must know that both our ways of life are still male-dominated. You see Vulcan women in eminent positions, like myself, but even they enact male concepts. Vulcans are passionate about ideas, but they believe having compassion for the flesh and blood, their own or other people's, is a weakness. It is still as foreign to Vulcan culture now as it was in the ancient times. Vulcan females still can't change male ways and minds. Most of them don't even wish to. Separation

between genders has created two separate subcultures, as I believe they are called by Terrans. Little transpires to aliens about the male culture, almost nothing about the female. Many years ago, you were compelled to witness the male pon-farr rites. But even Vulcans never speak about female pon-farr. It can be equally lethal, yet there are no rites, no regard for the female who happens to suffer from it outside a bond, and even the mention of it is a crime. If my age and rank didn't protect me, I should be punished for speaking to you now. There were legends in the times before Surak, of females who had survived pon-farr alone and then had given birth to monsters. We don't believe in legends anymore, but only one female has survived pon-farr alone in the last 936 years. Such is the power of the mind". My back was beginning to hurt, a stitch running all the way down my right leg. I let go of my abs and slouched a little.

"I'm going to tell you this because many, on Vulcan and also Terra, when they suffer can't help wishing for others to join them in suffering. Many can't acknowledge in themselves this need for some sort of revenge. It is not the way of Surak. It is not my way. And it is not the way of my nephew, Spock cha Sarek, the Reborn. I want to avoid others to suffer as I did and still do, and because of this I tell you my story".

For a long moment, she remained silent. She lowered her eyes.

//It must be hard for her to speak of this// I thought. I spread my silence around us in a circle of protection and hoped it could help. When she spoke again, her voice was different. Much younger. And this is what she said.

"There was a Bajoran girl. When she was little more than a child, she fell into the expanding wave of the Cardassian slave trade. On the merchant ship, she developed an infection. Being of limited value, she was left to fend for herself. She was still alive and partially recovered when they unloaded her at the Orion biannual fair. She was frightened and sick, and she tried to fight whomever came near her. The stouter, more performing Disaurians were in fashion at the time. The merchant used to send in prospective clients to tease her, trying to build her a reputation as a fun girl for Klingons before the auction so as to make some more money out of her".

I saw her fingers tense, but her voice did not waver.

"I was there on a visit with my father the minister, on one of my early tours of instruction as a young adult preparing for involvement in politics. I saw her, curled in a corner of the stall they had shut her into. We locked eyes. 'BinE,' she said, as though she had lost me and now had found me again. 'KaxE,' I answered, and she smiled".

She took her breath then, holding fast to her faltering voice, and I knew how deep this blade of pain was piercing her, even after decades.

"I asked him to buy her and save her life, or at least to put a bid on her while I arranged for some good person to take her. He said, 'No support to the slave trade from our noted family". The next day, a Klingon inn-keeper bought her at the auction. I have never allowed myself to bond and I have never wanted to be with child. I had had a child for a short time. My own father had let her be sold away for thirty huch. I survived, alone. I didn't breed monsters. They made me the Kl'atch-ka. I have spent my life trying in vain to make Vulcans recall Surak's hardest rules: Control is not enough without compassion. It is illogical to let love go wasted. Logic is a tool for developing the spirit from thought to compassion, from abstract concept to the flesh and blood. Nothing like love brings out the best of one's spirit".

She breathed in, sharply.

"I met the Klingon 32 years later at an art exhibition. He had closed the inn and now sold Ferengi artworks for a living. 'Do you remember that funny Qay'wI Baj?' he asked me, as though she had been a toy".

"I grieve with thee".

"Until now, no-one did".

She took a moment to compose herself.

"The miracle of love is realized and saved in one perfect moment. If the moment is missed, so is the miracle. Kaiidht. What is, is. But it still hurts. I believe there is a saying on Terra, 'Time heals'. I know it is not true. I want my nephew to be spared the pain of wasted love. He already carries more pain than his share".

Again she paused. Then she raised her eyes to mine. She suddenly looked tired, and worse: defeated.

"I wished to call him here too, but I didn't want to bring him where he doesn't want to come. He would have come to me, but he may not have been strong enough to leave again. I know I'll see him no more. Sanu, kre, don't miss your moment and let my nephew's love be butchered. Don't let this planet hold him prisoner. Better for him to be a k'torr skann than let his beautiful katra be slowly stifled inside his k'war'ma'khon. Keep him with you. You found a way to let him come to you before. Let him come to you again. It will take time, but he will come, because his feet remember the way his mind has forgotten, and it is his way home".

"Oko-mekh, I will. I came here believing I'd face an enemy, but I have found an ally. I was confused, my resolve wavered, until I saw my t'hy'la inside this person who is reborn. I believe the moment has already come for us, and we did not miss it. Now you give me the strenght to do what more is needed and to wait as long as needed. We both have reason to be grateful to you, Oko-mekh".

She struggled to rise to her feet and this time I helped her up. Her elbow was thin and hard under the heavy brocade of her robe, and she as light-boned as a bird.

"Thank you, Kirk-kam", she whispered. "Thank you for listening to an old woman's story, and for loving Spock cha Amanda. Live long and prosper, Kirk-kam".

She turned from me and left without looking back.

::

I'm coming home.

No, I'm flying home as fast as I can, because on my way to the shuttle I felt the bond open wide, like the shutters in a room after a mourning wake has been held, and through the open window of the bond I've felt blood —Spock's blood— dripping hot on his skin... or on mine?

I am frightened by the blood, yet I feel he is safe, in more ways than one.

We are safe.

I feel his mind in mine and it is clear and quiet. No pain, no fear, no confusion.

I can't wait to see him. Touch him, if he will allow.

I'm surprising myself, finding I can live without sex.

But I can't live without love— without loving him.

I'm coming home, safe.

::

endnotes to chapter 2

1. Oko-su: lady/madam; literally, "honored woman"; Oko-mekh: honored Mother; Odu: you, to a superior or honored person; literally, "honored you-singular"; 'Sanu, kre': "please, son"; K'torr skann: outcast; without family; literally, "out-of-a-clan"; K'war'ma'khon: clan, extended family; -kam: suffix of endearment

2. Trying to make the wind bleed: "Tirai una freccia al cielo / per farlo respirare / Tirai una freccia al vento / per farlo sanguinare", FABRIZIO DE ANDRÉ, *Fiume Sand Creek* (1981).

3. Kl'atch-ka: literally, "old barren dam".

4. T'hy'la: friend, brother-in-arms, beloved, lover (between persons unrelated by blood); sibling, ascendant, descendant (between blood relations). Literally, "my one". Note that blood alone is not enough for two relatives to be t'hy'la; such a relationship is the rare result of a deep affinity between kattras.

5. Pon farr: Pon = period, time; farr = bonding, joining, i.e. the mating season for Vulcans, showing similarities with the musth in the Terran species *Elephas maximus* and *Loxodonta africana*. Vulcan pon-farr however occurs only once every seven years.

6. Surak: ancient reformer and philosophical leader, whose influence transformed Vulcan culture and society from passionately warlike to (passionately) logical and pacifist.

7. BinE: mother; KaxE: child, daughter; Huch: Klingon money unit; Qay'wI: small; literally, "little finger".

8. 'I had had a child for a short time': "Qualcuno le aveva prestato un bambino e gliel'aveva ripreso", FABIO TOMBARI, *L'agnello di Pasqua*, in *Il libro degli animali* (1935).

::

3. Kirk: One word

As soon as my feet touched ground coming out of the shuttle, I knew he was waiting for me.

As soon as my hand touched the front door, he opened it.

As soon as I stepped inside, his hands were on my shoulders and his eyes were searching mine.

As soon as he touched me, I knew joy. Mine, and his own.

I quit a long time ago believing in any god.

But now I'm here, holding my beloved, being held by him, and there is only one word for how we feel.

Hallelujah.

::



ST V, *The Final Frontier* (William Shatner, 1989), scene 267

::

additional note:

Footnotes not included, part 1 runs 107 paragraphs, 1003 words, 4303 characters and 892 spaces, with a word-per-paragraph ratio of 9,3738 (approx. by defect).

Part 2 runs 56 paragraphs, 1922 words, 8096 characters and 1853 spaces, with a word-per-paragraph ratio of 34,3214 (approx. by defect).

Part 3 runs 7 paragraphs, 94 words, 363 characters and 87 spaces, with a word-per-paragraph ratio of 13,4286 (approx. by excess).

While Spock's inner dialogue may seem rather more facund than expected, T'Pol turned out surprisingly to be quite talkative, to the point of almost being carried away, even taking into account the solemn, detailed Vulcan style of address that leaks into her Standard.

Kirk knows enough not to out-talk a verbose Vulcan lady of high rank, but he does get to say the last word on the matter =)

::

::

::

part 4. The proposal

summary

Part 4, in 2 chapters, in the *Two lives, two deaths* series. Spock and Kirk remember their first time.

::

1. Vulcan-style

He said: "I cherish your reasons, although they are not the same reasons we shared when we bonded".

It is true: at the time when he said this, they were not.

It may be that they are the same again now.

I do remember the unmistakable feel of the bond, which flowed upon me together with my own blood.

It is indeed enough for us both.

But I want him to have more. I want him to feel secure of my present commitment, as he did in the time before my death.

I want to declare to him once again my will to be bonded. As if it was the first time.

He deserves this.

But I don't know how to proceed.

I only remember how I approached the problem in my other life.

::

What would a Vulcan do?

Ask.

What would a Terran do?

Arrange things so as to get asked.

What would the Captain do?

He'd probably find a way to ask, careful not to hurt my feelings. Even if I shouldn't rightly have any.

Which makes him rather Vulcan actually...

(A fascinating perspective, which warrants further exploration).

What would *I* do?

Ah, that is the question.

I see no other possibility than to act in a properly Vulcan manner.

I must find an acceptable way to ask.

I need to construe my speech according to a logical sequence of steps. In my past inter-species contacts with aliens provided with speech-based reasoning and communicating abilities, I have gathered the most useful results through recourse to the Fifth Mode of Rhetoric as defined in Surak's (attributed) *Syntax of basic verbal logic*.

Statement of topic. Definition of mode of expression and context. First argument. Second argument. Third argument. Fourth argument, from the general to the individual. Statement of request.

As follows.

Statement of topic:

"I wish to ask you..."

That's wrong. No roundabout verbosity, the Captain deserves a most direct approach.

"I ask you to consider the possibility that you and I instaurate a bond between us."

Definition of mode of expression and context:

"I am aware that between Terrans the analogous request to enter marriage is usually accompanied by both ritualized and unritualized displays of emotion, the lack of which is liable to negatively affect the answer. As a Vulcan..."

No, I must be completely truthful.

"As a half Vulcan, I am both unwilling and unable to perform such displays. However, please be assured that if I were completely Terran, I would indeed in this particular occasion give proof of a considerable amount of suitable emotion."

First argument:

"I wish you to be informed that I am far from being what Terrans define as a virgin. As you may know, Vulcans do not regard sexual activity, as such, to be endowed with the almost mystical properties Terrans attribute to it, but rather as one quite ordinary bodily function, however privately practiced. Young people are indeed encouraged to engage in a variety of sexual pursuits well before their first pon-farr, and also in the subsequent period unless a bond is already established at the time, in order for the practicalities of sex not to unduly impinge on the development of an adequately deep personal relationship between bondmates."

Second argument:

"I may add that the anatomy and physiology of our respective species are similar enough for a number of the most common modes of mating, customary to both, to be performable. I have confidence that any further technical issues which may arise will be easily solved."

Third argument:

At this point I should support my individual suitability. But I have no arguments to advocate it truthfully. I will say nothing of that.

Fourth argument:

That I love him, he knows already.

"That said, my question is: "Is Thou Willing To Bond With Me?"

Yes, this should be fitting.

::

And it was.

::

2. Terran-style

How well he knows me. Better than I know myself.

I hadn't realized fear still lurked in the dark corners of my mind, even after the bond was revived by the rainfall of his blood. Fear of not having *him* back, not really.

After all, I am used to the feeling of fear. Command is frightening.

But he saw it, and his love is such that he found a way to free me of my fear.

He didn't answer the question I never asked— "Do you still love me?"

Instead he fixed his eyes in mine and asked me permission to love me still.

They say I'm a man of action, but in the two most important moments in my life it was Spock who acted for me.

::

I remember the time before we bonded, how long I fought with myself about how to find a way to ask for... What? I didn't even know that.

I wished for a chance to meld and show him what was inside me.

The Vulcan way.

The easy way out for me, but for me only.

He would have found himself face to face not with a cool logical statement of intent, but with the hot turmoil of my feelings, without even the buffer of my verbal expression, and then he would have had to put them into words, for both of us.

I couldn't do this to him.

I knew, even then, that I could never become Vulcan enough to keep up my end of a relationship in a purely Vulcan way.

Whatever was and is between us, it must be fifty-fifty, or it will never work.

I wanted to find a way to ask that was Terran, *and* acceptable.

::

"There's reason to believe that one's life may well be a mere biological chance. Despite this, Terrans have always strived to make some sense of it... Making one's own life into a story".
"I think it is an attitude Vulcans also share, given the value they tribute to katra and the need to preserve it, as witness to the life experience of one particular individual".
"But what purpose does a good story serve if there is nobody to listen?"
"Spock, my friend, our stories are unfolding together. Will you listen to my story and allow me to listen to yours?"

::

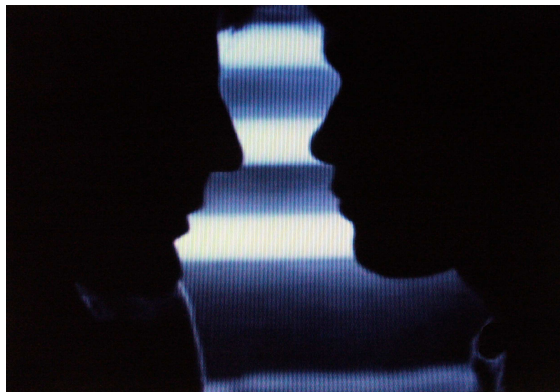
But then he came to me, and all I had to say was "Yes".

::

Then I remember we were alone, together, in the low blue nightlight of my quarters.
Nothing anymore between us, no Starfleet uniforms nor Starfleet duties.
We faced each other, sitting cross-legged on the bed, and again I didn't know what to do.
I wanted this to be so good for him. I wanted to give him pleasure, and more, I wanted to give him happiness.
I knew he was giving me everything, his past, present and future.
Such power.
I was afraid to make a mistake.
So I raised my hand and touched the point of his shoulder.
"What if I do this?"
He was hot and my fingers must have felt chilled, because he shuddered imperceptibly. But, "Yes" he breathed.
"And is it all right if I do this?"
I put my other hand on his wrist, circling the tip of the radius with my fingertip.
I felt, more than saw, him lean a little toward me, then back again a fraction. His lips without voice said my name, as if to say "I'm putting myself in your hands, and, please be careful with my heart".
In that moment I knew my own heart would never be mine anymore, and when my hand slid all along the slope of his shoulder and down his arm and came to nest in his palm, I knew it would be safe there.

For a time I let myself be afraid again, but I shouldn't have.
I have him back, and he still holds my heart safe.

::



from T'Gin's fanvid on Jeff Buckley's *Hallelujah*
at <http://www.youtube.com/user/gin1119#p/u/25/fIBhaFfoX0Y>

::

part 5. IDIC

summary

Part 5, first interlude in two chapters in the *Two lives, two deaths* series. Signs of love in the bathroom.

note to part 5, first interlude:

1. There is a half-quote below from Kevin Reynold's film *Robin Hood* (1991), when a child asks Morgan Freeman's character, Azeem, why his skin is so dark, and he answers with a smile "Because Allah loves wondrous variety".
2. This part takes root in a passage of the great trilogy by JENNA HILARY SINCLAIR, *Sharing the Sunlight*, 1, *Sharing the Sunlight*, chapter 8.

::

1. Kirk

On the mirror of our bathroom
your IDIC pendant hangs.

Infinite Diversity

which the Creator loves
in *Infinite Combinations*
which fascinate us both.



2. Spock

On the mirror of our bathroom
mist from the shower reveals
the ghostlike shape of your hand
pressed in a Vulcan salute.

*Live long, my friend,
and, my love, prosper.*



::

part 6. Absolution

summary

Part 6, in one chapter, of the *Two lives, two deaths* series. Old sins cast long shadows..

note to part 6:

Warning: acts of violence remembered. Read at your own risk.

::

I told him what happened on Tarsus IV.

I hadn't meant to, in the beginning. Even after we bonded, I tried to keep the melds clear of that particular place in my mind.

But in the end I had to.

It's difficult to find words, human words, for what happens in a meld. The images sound all wrong...

He would go ahead, swift and trusting, letting himself go for once, and then he would bump into that thing and startle back, like a yearling galloping into an electric fence.

He never once complained, but I couldn't stand it anymore.

::

He told me what happened on Tarsus IV.

There was something inside his mind, black and cold and hard, which made us stumble during the melds.

It felt to me like a sharp-edged block of black basalt, knee-high, planted in the middle of a room.

The surface polished, reflecting.

The mass beneath, invisible.

The whole building of his mind seems disposed around this... thing, arranged so that he can move around without ever touching it, or even just passing too near.

He is so used to ignore it, that he doesn't even look at it anymore— mostly.

But when, time after time, I collided with it when we were melded, the pain we both felt became his frustration.

He could not move it.

He could not bury it.

He tried until his hands bled, and then I felt his fear.

::

"Spock, what can I do? I can't push it out of the way. Could you try by any means to avoid it?"

"T'hy'la, it's unlikely that I can. The Vulcan meld proceeds along straight lines, and the thing is at the hub of your mind. You are used to curve around it, but in order to reach and follow you, I must pass through the center".

He snorted in anger and punched the bedhead hard.

"What is it?" I asked. "What is this thing around which all your life is built? The thing which stands behind all your choices? Which defines so radically who you are, but which you don't want to look at?"

He took a breath, like he was going to speak, but then he didn't. He passed his hands in his hair, then sat down on the bed next to me, elbows on his knees, and covered his face with his hands.

"I wish you to tell me. Whatever that is, it made you who you are. T'hy'la, please".

It is true that nothing is more frightening than oneself. I had never sensed him so scared before. But he didn't surrender to his fear. Without raising his head, he spoke, very softly.

"It's a sorrow. It's what happened on Tarsus IV".

Again he took a deep breath, joined his hands between his knees, and went on, his unseeing eyes pinned on the floor.

"You have read my personal file. You know I was fourteen when Kodos upturned the government. Everybody knows about the massacre... Those who didn't swear obedience were executed, butchered, shredded and given to the faithful as food during the famine. One solution to two problems. And I..."

He stopped for a moment, closing his eyes, then he opened them again and went on.

"You see, everybody seems to believe I was sexually abused in some way at the time. I was not. Nobody even touched me. It was much worse than that".

I felt him tremble and I put one hand on his shoulder until he quietened.

" 'No need to force them, let it become their own idea', they said. 'Then praise them, and they'll love you'. But I hated them. They took us, all the kids. They passed us through a mind-sifter to sort out the virgins. Then they brought us to the killing-yards. They made us watch while they worked. That's what they called it... work. They would begin with the kids who were impure, so they said. We, the virgins, were kept there, in a barred pen, watching, for days. Nothing as clean and quick as cutting throats. They went for torture. I'd never thought before about how many horrible things one can do with the most common low-tech tools. They had drills, and wrenches, and spoons, and tape, and ziplocks, and a lot of imagination. When they tired of that, they did quartering with tractors. After a week we were beyond terrified, even if we had been fed and watered and not even a finger had been laid on any of us. Then they gave us phasers. They said 'You see how they suffer before dying. If you press the trigger, thus, they die at once. You can help them, while helping us. Who is brave enough to be the first to try?'. And we did".

He turned to me then, desperation in his eyes.

"A few of the younger children were so out of their mind with fear that they didn't even understand what was said, and just stood there trembling, phasers in hand. They were raped in front of us, then they made us kill them. They made executioners of us all. Of me. I agreed to kill for them. I wanted to spare suffering, but I was also hungry for their praise, and I never even thought to shoot them, or myself, instead. That's what they did to us. What I allowed them to do to me. I passed my days killing and my nights crying, and I never imagined, until much later, that I could have done anything else. I wanted to stay alive. What's worse, I wanted them to approve of me".

I took his hands in mine, raised them to my lips and kissed them.

"These hands have killed".

"These are the hands of my t'hy'la, whom I honor. I understand now why the black rock is so immovable and why it is so central in your mind. You can't move it because you want it there".

"I do. I need it. I need to remember what I did, so I won't do it ever again".

"You haven't, and you won't. But you are not guilty. It was not your fault. You were only fourteen, and had no power of choice. So much not guilty you are, that you have chosen to keep such pain with you and learn from it, instead of forgetting, or trying to forget. You have not blanketed it with self-pity. You have not painted it white with the relief of survival. The black rock is the death you didn't choose then. And look how much life has come of it. I have seen you give life much more often than death, and to many more beings than you can ever have killed on Tarsus IV. Keep the memory, keep the pain, if you feel you must, but do not, t'hy'la, keep the guilt".

He released a long breath then, and leaned his head on my shoulder. Then he cried quietly. I had never seen him cry.

When he finished, he passed his hands on his eyes, looked at me, and asked:

"Would you meld us now?"

::

When I asked him to meld us, the first thing I saw was something like the steady light of a candle through my closed eyelids. Comforting in its small warmth, like watching a lighted window and knowing that, for however dark and cold it may be outside, soon one will be in, safe.

Then in we were, the both of us.

The place was again circular, paved with gray slabs of rough stone, but the center was different this time.

There was a square of fine white gravel, raked in whorls like in a zen garden, and a young white pine grew in the middle, its needles grey-blue in the muted light. The black rock was at the foot of the tree, and it was not polished anymore. It was opaque, and rounded by time, and partly covered with dark green moss. The sharp scent of the pine and the soft scent of the moss sweetened the dull, choking scent of charcoal the stone gave.

Spock stepped forward and crossed into the gravel square.

//Come,// he said, and extended his hand. I took it, and followed.

We stood together under the tree.

//You see, it is a thing of beauty,// he said.

//You made it so,// I answered.

//No, you did. I only made you see.//

::



::

::

::

part 7. What's in a name

summary

Part 7, second interlude in one chapter, in the *Two lives, two deaths* series. A cross-linguistical take on Spock's other name, the one which allegedly cannot be pronounced.

::

"Spock."

"Yes, Jim?"

"Have a look here. I think I finally managed to learn how to write your full Vulcan name."

"Hmm. Almost. You left out the third 'h' before the third apostrophe. The rest is correct."

"And you say your mother can write *and* pronounce it, twenty-one letters, four apostrophes and all...?"

"It would be highly illogical for a parent to give her son a name she can't correctly use both in written and spoken form."

"Oh, I'd not be so sure. Among Terrans, there's a long tradition of name misuse. The masculine Andrea or Vania given as female names, for instance, or foreign names spelled wrongly. But where does this name of yours come from? What does it mean?"

Silence.

"Hey, come on, it can't be worse than Tiberius."

"Your dislike for your middle name is perplexing. It's a historical name, although opinions about the Roman emperor who made it famous were and are rather conflicting... My own complete name runs in the family since pre-Surak times and its meaning reflects now obsolete living conditions, whence my reluctance to mention it."

"Is it anything to do with war or violence? I'll understand if you won't..."

"No, nothing of the kind. It harks back to the ancient Vulcan pastoral economy and to the management of flocks of the horned, hooved herbivores called *tchare* for their wool and, regrettably, their meat."

"Well, Vulcans haven't eaten meat since forever. There's nothing to be shy or ashamed about, is there now? And I'd really like to know. I won't tell anybody, promise."

"It is an adjectival idiom. It means... 'The one who is carried on the herder's shoulders like a *tchare* kid'."

"Oh. Oh... A little bit... emotional, maybe? But I like it actually. Here, let me try again... Spock cha Sarek 'A'Kkhodhdh'i'Tcharedhdhu, right?"

"Correct."



note to part 7:

The word used here as Spock's surname belongs, with the same meaning (*tchare* = *capra* = goat) to the dialect spoken in Messina, Sicily; the whole phrase translates literally as "a collo di capretto". The fake-Vulcan spelling is, I believe, phonetically accurate, the first apostrophe marking a mute guttural semi-consonant (rather like a thick spirit in ancient Greek) and the following ones marking the sections of the agglutinative word. The accents are grave and fall on "o" and "e".

And no, I couldn't put this note before the text without spoiling all the fun.

::

part 8. Divination

summary

Part 8, in one chapter, in the *Two lives, two deaths* series. Kirk yields to temptation. Crisis management, Vulcan-Terran style, with the aid of a good friend and an illogical procedure.

note to part 8:

1. *Nobody's perfect.*
2. *See the endnotes for translations, explanations and references.*

::

Oh, memories.

After fal-tor-pan, I stumble on them often.

Most times, if I'm otherwise engaged, I just ignore them.

Sometimes I stop and pick them up.

I am content to find that only a few of them remind me of something I miss.

Others remind me of something I could have missed, but I didn't.

These fill me with joy.

Each is a defeat for entropy.

::

We had been bonded for years.

We were happy.

It was illogical of me to discount what sometimes I felt through the link.

An otherness: the perception that my bondmate was as much a part of myself (and I of him) as he was an alien. Totally visible in the link, yet undecipherable.

What I felt was not really part of his species' common characters, not even of gender dimorphism in *Homo sapiens*. It was something his very own, very personal, like the peculiar shade of color of his eyes or his individual smell.

Something like... a wistfulness for something else.

As though, somehow, he couldn't accept that choice means renounce.

He had chosen me, instead of any other...

But he hadn't stopped wishing for the others, too.

::

She was blonde, petite, and beautiful.

She was brave, athletic and competitive.

An Ops officer who had unusually pursued perfect combat training and nourished an ambition to taste battle.

He couldn't resist.

There was that evening when we were on Terra for debriefing. He'd stayed on late at Starfleet Headquarters. An unexpected meeting, he'd said. I'd been busy with searching bibliographical data for a paper on late-XX century drug testing methods, so illogical and sickeningly cruel.

When I finished, it was past 2300. I saved my file, shut down the computer and touched the link superficially, so as to know whether to wait for him at home, join him out when he'd finished, or go to sleep.

I followed the heat leading to the center of his being... And I found my Sun was indeed flaring, toward another planet.

I slammed shut the link.

I slammed shut my eyes.

For 5.7 seconds, I couldn't breathe.

At that point, I began reciting first numbers.

When I got to 727, I breathed again.

I opened my eyes, but I saw only my grief.

It would be illogical to deny that a part of me wanted to commit the indiscretion of reopening the link and being witness to what was happening.

I needed to meditate, but I found I couldn't in my customary place on the bedroom's carpet. I went outside on the balcony, wrapped myself in the comforter, and managed —with some difficulty— to reach second level.

I couldn't go deeper.

I was distracted by faint waves of unease, coming from the outside and weakly breaking at the edge of my mind. Like sea waves ruffled by the breeze on a Terran ocean, they became slightly stronger. They took the rhythm of his footfalls.

And then, the doorlatch clicked open.

I didn't turn to look. I listened in silence.

He stopped just inside. His breath was ragged. He stood there for a long time... 37.2 seconds. Then he took a step, then another, across the dark room. He stopped again on the doorstep to the balcony. I heard the palm of his hand being pressed on the doorjamb.

His grief touched mine, piercing the comforter and my mental shields.

I was ashamed of my weakness.

I was ashamed of his.

I could not speak.

"I... I'm sorry" he said finally. He drew a breath, and went on. "I forgot myself. What's worse, I forgot you".

He stood there, waiting for me to do or say something.

After a while, he went on. "I know this is as bad as it can get. I wish I'd realized in time, but I swear I do realize now. Is there any way you could..." His voice broke, he stopped briefly, composed himself. "...you could allow me to try again to make you happy?"

I found I was unable to form words at the moment. I had to calculate 119 decimals to n before I could speak.

"I am currently unable to formulate an answer to the request because of lack of essential data. I need a short term in order to gather and elaborate them. I will attempt to conclude my enquiry within 1.2 days from now at the longest. I confide the delay is not unacceptable. I also trust you to have taken a courteous leave from the young lady. She is indeed an admirable person and a competent officer".

A surge of almost-despair came from him through the link, crashing on the closed door of my mind. //oh no no no no no, what have i done, i'm losing you...//

His pain and his shame made mine worse. I could not stay there. I stood up, unwrapped myself from the comforter and stepped inside. I had to pass beside him. I couldn't look at him. He didn't move while I folded the comforter, put it on the foot of our bed, took my Starfleet regulation suitcase and arranged a few items in it. Without thinking, I took my ka'athya and put it on top of the few clothes before closing the zipper.

When I was at the door, I turned to look at him. Again I couldn't speak, so I only raised my hand in the salute he had learned to perform so well when we were not yet lovers. I didn't stay to see if he'd perform it now.

::

It's fascinating how complex organs, like e.g. a Vulcan brain, react in unusual circumstances. Almost without conscious decision, neural routines take over and plan a course through stressful times, mapping the fastest way out. An occasionally logical Terran named René Descartes, many centuries ago, suggested that, if one is lost in a forest, the best way to solve the difficulty is walking on in a straight line. This is what I did for 2345.9 yards, allowing for the 4°46' average deviation of the road from the parallel of the doorway.

What Descartes didn't account for, is where I found myself.

There was a garden in front of me on the other side of the road, surrounding an ancient, carefully restored 10-storey building of apartments. The tall trees scattered on the well-tended lawn didn't reach so high, and the waxing gibbous Moon behind me was reflected in the panes of the uppermost south-eastern corner window.

I listened to the crickets singing their brittle song in the late Spring night.

I knew where I was. I knew that window. I knew who lived there, whenever Starfleet duty took him here for a while.

Doctor McCoy's apartment.

The corner window was dark, but the one next to it shone with a faint glow.

I'm not sure, even now, if the cause could be deemed sufficient for such reckless behavior, but I found myself reaching for the old-fashioned doorbell.

The comm's speaker and monitor croaked alive.

"Who's down there? ...Spock?! What happened to you? Or is it Jim? I'll be down in a moment..."

"No, Doctor, neither of us is hurt. I..."

"Then come on up. You remember, first lift on your right in the hall. Top floor".

::

"He did it, didn't he? What an idiot he is, sometimes. I saw it coming for a while, but I thought it was none of my business. What an idiot *I* am, sometimes".

He poured himself what I calculated was the fourth bourbon since early evening. He made a move to take another glass, stopped himself, put his glass down, and went instead to the kitchenette where he started making what turned out to be a quite acceptable herbal infusion. For me.

Given I had not been able to meditate deeply, I was at least trying to think, but even that seemed unusually difficult. The logical processes seemed slower than average. At least, slower than the Doctor's. While I was struggling with what to say in justification of this importune late-night visit of mine, he seemed to possess a quite adequate control of the facts and some precise ideas about how to manage the situation.

"A shocked bond, that's what you're suffering from. I guess you're finding it rather hard to think clearly just now. I read up on that... No, there's no need to explain. It's all right. You can crash here for the night, or a few days, if you wish. Do you think you can sleep it over, or do you want to talk about it?..."

"I... don't know, Doctor. It's most generous of you to allow me your company at this late hour and in this regrettable situation. I find that my thinking is indeed somewhat impaired. As I have been asked to answer a delicate question and I have promised to do so within a few hours, I would appreciate your counsel".

At this point he did something I had never seen him do before. He blushed. In embarrassment? or in pleasure...?

"Beads and rattles, isn't it? You've come for beads and rattles. Quite shocked you must be. Well, here is a sample for you. An old technique for putting an answer together when you can't seem able to think one out. Rather illogical, actually... But trust me, surprisingly effective. I use it myself at times, although I wouldn't care for my patients to know. Or Starfleet for that matter". He took a deep breath, raised his blue eyes into mine, and said it. "I-Ching. Ancient Chinese divination".

"I see... Counting yarrow sticks or tossing coins, to form one or two of 64 signs representing typical situations. If I remember correctly, it involves belief in the possibility to establish communication with some form or emanation of the divinity".

"Not at all, unless the divinity involved is another part of oneself. Divination is not asking One-Who-Knows-Better. Divination is a way of tricking your mind into shutting up and letting the gut feelings give an answer for a change. In your case, it's sure to require a whole lot of tricking... I'd suggest the longer method counting sticks, rather than the simpler one tossing coins. You should try it".

"Vulcans don't recur to divination".

"Neither they have to do with a cheating bondmate... usually. I suggest this exactly because you're stuck in a most un-Vulcan situation. Try, it may not help but it won't hurt you. And I won't tell anybody".

"Thank you, Doctor, but I'd rather try to meditate here, if you allow. I may be more successful than..." I was going to say 'at home'. "...in the Captain's apartment".

"You're welcome. Go ahead... But humor me, do I-Ching when you're finished. My book and set of sticks and coins are on that upper shelf. By the way, they say it's easier to get a good hexagram with the sticks than with the coins. I'm going to bed. The guest bedroom is over there, make yourself comfortable if you wish. Good night... and good luck".

"Vulcans don't believe..."

"...in luck, I know, I know. Good night, all the same".

::

I found meditation was indeed possible here, even without a firepot. I witnessed myself detaching from the events of the evening, until they became like the dunes of the Vulcan desert, moving under the wind, and I looked down at them from Mount Seleya. They shifted, forming shapes. Long bars which split into short ones, short bars which joined into long ones, forever in motion under the everlasting wind and my watchful eyes. Like I-Ching hexagrams... The wind sang his thin song.

"Four great Gates has the city of Damascus... / Postern of Fate, the Desert Gate, Disaster's Cavern, Fort of Fear... / Pass not beneath, O Caravan, or pass not singing. Have you heard / That silence where the birds are dead / yet something pipeth like a bird?"

Like the caravan in Flecker's old Terran poem, I had passed the gate to the desert, there was no turning back, and I was afraid. Fear made me confused. I saw patterns in the dunes of sand, but ignored their meanings. Maybe there was merit in the Doctor's suggestion after all. I emerged slowly through the seven levels of meditation, took the ritual thirteen full deep breaths, and stood. My decision made, I picked the book and sticks from the shelf, sat myself down on the floor in the center of the room, and began counting and separating the sticks into bundles.

::

I was plucking the lyre, trying to capture the elusive sound of the wind on the dunes in my meditation a few hours earlier, when the Doctor emerged from his bedroom, wearing a yellow and white striped pajamas, a burgundy silk robe, and tousled hair.

" 'Morning, Spock. *Psallite sapienter*... Did you get your answer?"

" 'Play the lyre... proficiently/cleverly/wisely...'? Latin vocabulary is fascinating. Yes, Doctor, I have the answer to my question".

"Good. Want some coffee? No, I'm sure you'd prefer tea".

He shuffled to the burner and came back shortly with a chipped Starfleet mug of coffee for himself and a carefully arranged tray with teapot, cup and saucer, spoon, napkin and sugar bowl for me.

"Sorry, nothing to eat in the house, apart from some crackers so old and dusty even beetles passed on them". He sat on the couch sipping his coffee.

"Doctor, beetles don't reach so high above street level".

"Ah, that's why then... Well, won't you tell me what the answer is?"

"The answer is eleven, Doctor. Ttai, The Peace. No moveable lines. And indeed I ascertained that using sticks instead of coins reduces the probability of an undesirable moveable weak line to 1 out of 16, instead of 2 out of 16 with coins".

"I knew I could trust you to untangle the numbers. But what does The Peace mean in your case?"

"It means yes, Doctor".

"Oh. Good. 'Yes's turn out generally to be luckier than 'No's. And what was the question?"

"The question, as the Captain put it to me at 2357 hours last night, was 'Is there any way you could allow me to try again to make you happy?' And, Doctor... I wish to thank you". Then he smiled.

::

The Doctor was right on many accounts.

Divination helped me, that time.

And 'Yes' turned out to be illogically, but effectively, a better answer than 'No'.

::

endnotes

1. Ka'athya: the traditional, asymmetrical Vulcan lyre.
2. 'Walking on in a straight line': a more recent version is due to Sir Winston Churchill: "If you're going through hell, keep going".
3. 'Flecker's old Terran poem': JAMES ELROY FLECKER, *The Gates of Damascus* (1900).
'*Psallite sapienter*': Psalm 46/47:8.

::



::

::

::

part 9. Vulcan love poetry

summary

Part 9, third interlude in one ni var in the *Two lives, two deaths* series. What they like about each other, and what they love.

notes to part 9, third interlude:

1. "Ni var literally means 'two form', and it is basically a piece comparing and contrasting two aspects of the same thing" (DOROTHY JONES, notes to the text of her poem *The territory of Rigel*, «Spockanalia», 1, 1967; I quote from JOAN MARIE VERBA, *Boldly Writing. A Trekker Fan and Zine History, 1967-1987*, Minnetonka, MN: FTL Publications, 2003², e-book downloadable at www.ftlpublications.com/bw.htm, pp. 1-2).

2. "I'll have to lend you some Vulcan romantic poetry. It'll knock your socks off" (McCoy to Kirk in *RAE TRAIL*, Another country beckons, now at <http://ksarchive.com/viewstory.php?sid=4820>).

::

You-I-Us

*A Vulcan/Standard ni var for two voices and ka'athyra
Vulcan part translated into Standard by Penda Nyota Uhura*

First Voice: baritone, Second Voice: tenor

::

*I like the fair translucent skin on your groin,
where my fingertips follow the faint blue
trace of the veins, from one delight to another.
I love reaching my hand up for your golden curls.*

*I like the bridge of your nose. I like to stroke
upwards between your eyebrows to the place of
deepest thought deepest sight deepest feeling.
I love how your pupils dilate.*

*I like the smell I catch behind your ear,
under the lobe, after you've had a workout,
salt and water, and you.
I love licking you dry until you shiver.*

*I like how your skin seems to slide
on the muscles beneath,
liquid silk on tough rubber.
I love how your trapezium twitches
when I blow on your shoulder.*

*I like the tight whorls of your fingerprints
like galaxies spiraling unique patterns
on whatever you touch.
I love carrying their imprint on me.*

*I like kissing the palm of your hand
when your fingers are splayed in the grace-giving.
I love the dry texture of skin
and the creased line of life.*

*I like the hard rim of your orbit
under my hand when we share our thoughts
and you look in the distance*

*and then your eyes close as you plunge with me.
I love how you sigh when we part.*

I like the fine creases at the corners
of your eyes, almost-invisible, revealing
the smiles nobody sees but me.
I love to see you blink.

*I like the feeling of your body charged
with the electrical current in your dampness
which only I can feel
I love closing my eyes and touching you
until I shudder.*

I like the fine hair on the nape of your neck
so smooth I can't grasp in my hand.
I love the thick furrow below and the vertebral snake
holding up your proud head.

*I like it when you count the vertebrae in my back,
right thumb and little finger meeting, parting
along each of my ribs while the other index
touches the spine between.
I love listening you count.*

I like how you dry up after a shower,
the methodical sequence of your movements
the towel patting and stroking
making me jealous that it's touching you.
I love the way you dry up me.

*I like the dip between your throat and collarbone,
hollowing more as the years are going by.
I love watching your life pulse bold
and naked in the jugular dip.*

I like the heavy bones of your long calves
and your toes, elongated, Egyptian.
I love to slide my fingers in between
and touch the delicate hollows.

*I like the alien way your knees tie in with your thighs,
and the popliteal mound
between the tendons at the back.
I love the silky skin there.*

I like to finger the slack skin on your elbow
docile as clay, and I feel like a god
giving shape to new worlds.
I love the soft touch of your alien hide.

*I like the way you eat, like every morsel
was what it is, one step away from death,
to be enjoyed and cherished.
I love it when you burp.*

I like the hard and shining rows of your teeth
whiter than human, sharper, their enamel
as smooth as glass on my tongue when we are kissing.
I love it when you bite me.

*I like the way you run, your compact body
bounding upon collected energy
like a short-winged fighter.
I love that I can't reach you.*

I like how you undress, every move an epitome
of order and perfection, until the greater
perfection of your body is revealed.
I love the long curve upwards from your hips.

*I like it that you like sitting, or squatting,
or laying on the naked earth,
with boyish ease despite your years
and human custom for one of your rank.
I love it when you stretch.*

I like the bony structure of your hands
the base of thumb so neatly angled
from the other four fingers, as the lateral branch
of a fruit-tree pruned espalier.
I love the pale green half-moons on your nails.

*I like how you do battle when you must,
holding back nothing, putting yourself at equal
risk with the enemy, endeavouring always
to win for a hair's breadth. I love the fairness
you keep, and credit them to keeping.*

I like how you do battle when you must,
how you deny your enemy the terrible
intimacy of combat and only your hard
fingertips touch, without hate. I love
the peace upon your face when it is over.

*I like the way you at times forget your hands
when you're daydreaming and I hear a whisper
of images across your mind. And then
I love your half-smile when you catch my eyes.*

I like to feel that you are always there
aware and watching me, so that I can afford
sometimes to be absentminded for a moment
or two. I love the way you look at me.

*I like the round hard tip of your malleolus
when with my tongue I trace it all around
writing my secret symbols on your skin
for all the gods to see.
I love knowing that you are mine.*

I like the secret place, the sacred place, on the
underside of your upper thigh where I press
my hand when I swear that I love you.

I love how your breath catches
when I touch you.

*I like remembering your look of surprise
and your delight when we made love the first time
and you discovered how Vulcans "make the knot".
I love remembering my relief that you didn't feel
caged or trapped. I kissed you in thankfulness.*

I like the Vulcan way to "make the knot",
and we remain, i-within-you-within-me
until the meld ends and lets our bodies free,
sated and full with each other. I love
how then you always kiss me.

I like the way you scratch your nose.
I like it that you never seem to sneeze.

I love to hear your laughter.
I like the way you say my name.

I like to see you walk before me.
I like to listen to your steps beside me.

I love the thick scent of your breath in the morning.
I love how you breath on my face.

I love the way you yawn.
I love the way you slowly fall asleep.

*I love
I love
you. you.*

::



::

::

::

part 10. Final exit

summary

Part 10, in one chapter, of the *Two lives, two deaths* series. One day must come, which will be different from any other.

note to part 10:

1. *Warning: Shit happens. Read at your own risk.*
2. *Parts 10 and 11 dedicated to the memory of my own t'hy'la, Alias.*
3. *See the endnotes for translations, explanations and references.*

::

"Spock".

"Yes, James".

"May I ask you something?"

James T. Kirk is curled on his side in bed, blinking in the soft light from a single, shaded lamp on the side table. He shouldn't be here at all; he should be in hospital, an IV dripping in his arm, biobed equipment humming and faintly bleeping, monitors pulsing. But neither old age nor illness have taken the edge off his persistence. In his opinion, hospitals are places fit for getting well in (and out of), not for dying in. He could always talk the legs off chairs by quoting regulations. Since the onset of this exhausting illness, he has made a point of doing an in-depth study of the legal fineries of living wills, applicable to Federation citizens. And he's not alone in his fight for dying at home. By the time the doctors declared him unfit to choose for himself, Spock had full, documented power of attorney to take decisions on his behalf, and Spock hasn't betrayed him.

Even now he's laying behind him on the mattress, stretching an arm around his hips. His hand snakes under the rim of the thermal t-shirt Kirk has got into the habit of wearing at all times to ward off the nagging, drug-induced chill. Spock's fingers press lightly on the soft round belly, rubbing gently, stroking, skirting carefully the drain tube inserted in the liver.

"You may," he answers.

Spock talks less these days. Kirk doesn't complain; they touch a lot more instead. Besides, his oncological pain seems to respond best to old-fashioned opiates, and morphine tends to make him talk enough for the both of them whenever he's awake. So he goes on talking, his thoughts a little scattered.

"You are so beautiful. Long, strong and square, and light all the same. *Beau comme Beaubourg* in Paris, that ancient experiment in architectural happiness... Or like our best dairy cattle in Iowa. The first time I saw you, that's what I thought. A stout structure of bones, like a steel tube scaffold, and all the organs neatly suspended within. All those beautiful angles".

Spock's fingertips touch his brow, testing for a fever, then stroke back around the curve of the ear.

"You wished to ask me something," he whispers.

"Yes. Yes, I do". Kirk sighs. "At the time of your recommission after fal-tor-pan, I read all the medical and psychological reports. It seems it never occurred to anybody to ask you the one question mankind never could get an answer for... What was it like, being dead?"

A slow sigh ruffles the hair at the nape of his neck. A buzz along the bond, but no spoken words.

One heartbeat, two, three. The arm circling him tightens fractionally.

"I am unsure whether my answer can have any objective value. My memories of the state of death are unavoidably biased by my memories of the process of dying, which precede them."

"And how was it, dying?" Kirk asks in a whisper.

"I am compelled to admit that in such a situation, it was... painful. My whole body warning me to get out of the radiation. Its spontaneous, useless attempt to enter a healing trance. Lungs slowly dissolving in burst cells. Oxygen-starved brain shooting random impulses to failing organs. Then I suddenly discovered I didn't have a body anymore. Nothing hurt me further..."

"There's a triumph of flying banners where the pain reaches its end". But I missed you".

Kirk slips his hand on Spock's, slides two fingers on his in the gentlest Vulcan kiss, and he feels something warm and molten run down to him through the bond like honey dripping from a comb in the sun.

"I missed you too. It was like I was standing still, trapped in a dream where everything was rushing on too fast toward destruction. I felt feverish. I felt I was never really awake. I felt I was never really alive".

Spock leans forward, places a small kiss on Kirk's shoulder, remains within nuzzling distance from the back of his neck. The breath from his next words makes Kirk shiver.

"Later on Genesis, when my body was alive once more, I felt cold. I didn't know what I was feeling, but I was so cold. When the Keeper and my body were reconnected, and the katra restored, at once I searched for warmth, like a newborn sehlat orienting to its mother's body. I saw, but I didn't know what I was seeing... until I saw *you*. Then I was cold no more." He pauses for a moment. "On the whole, being dead was not completely unpleasant. Lonely. But very quiet."

Kirk snuggles back against his bondmate, letting himself be wrapped between his inhumanly hot body and his encircling arm like in a blanket. How strange, how humbling in a way, that his cooler human body may ever have appeared as a source of warmth to his Vulcan.

He's almost falling asleep, when Spock talks again.

"There is something I wish to ask you too— about the many times when you were injured during missions. It never stopped you from being willing to face the next danger, and what I felt coming from you at those times was first and foremost your concern for the safety of the ship, the crew, and myself, drowning everything else. But I wonder... Did you ever feel in your body such fear for yourself?"

"I know what you mean... When the question is not 'Will I die?', but 'How much will it hurt?'" Kirk frowns, thinking. "I guess part of the trick was not to ask myself *that* question. But I'd say, yes. I was afraid. I didn't want to, but I was. There were times, just before beaming down, when I'd remember the bleeding bodies, the burned bodies, the torn, the mangled and the.. eaten, and it was like they were my own. The fragile flesh and blood. The busy delicate little cells, unaware of the danger. My heart pumping steadfastly, trusting life would go on. Then I was scared, and I hated it. A hair's breadth from asking... somebody, anybody, to please let me be. Let me stay whole this one more time. Then the transport would buzz, my brain dissolved in molecules with the rest of my body, and when I came to I'd be too busy to keep thinking about that."

Spock presses his face in the dip between shoulder and neck.

"And now, t'hy'la? Are you afraid now?"

"No. Yes... Not quite. This time it's different. This time we, you and I, t'hy'la, can be stronger than pain and faster than death. We are in control this time, not chance or some sort of... fate. We know we can win. Strange how I always thought I would die alone. I rather liked the idea. But I feel better being here with you. I am not personally acquainted with Death, for how many times I've seen her at work. I don't trust Death. But you I know. I trust you. I know you'll make things easy for me and keep me safe. Won't you, lover? When I'll know it's time?"

"Yes, James. I will keep thee safe."

"Here I am doing it again, huh? Trying to keep things under control. Even death, under control... For so many years, we lived in the belly of the Beast, The White Lady, that all-powerful mother. Controlling everything, taking the decisions. Day by day, moment by moment, giving air, climate and food to four hundred plus people. Dictating times for work, and sleep, and meals, and feelings. Giving life, and sometimes giving death. Disposing of everyone as needed for her purpose, without a thought for one's hopes, fears, plans, joys. Such a hard mistress. And I was her voice. I was in command. *I* was the Beast. But you were the true anarchist. You never truly wished for command, did you? I saw you after the incident with the Galileo on Taurus II. You were ashamed, but you shouldn't have. You felt you had failed us, but you hadn't failed yourself. I was...". He falls silent, riding a stab of pain. As soon as he's breathing again, he goes on as though nothing has happened: "...proud of your integrity, because there are no right answers, only honest ones. Spock, tell me, between us... if you were in command now, and could give me any order... what order would you give?"

"I think... I would make into an order to you the request one Terran deity is written to have once pleaded with his father. 'If you will, put this cup away from me'. However, now as in that instance, 'Not my will but yours be done', my t'hy'la".

"I'm sorry to leave you alone. I so hoped I wouldn't, but we both knew this would happen sooner or later, didn't we? You taught me to look at dying from a different perspective than that of humans. No rhetorics, no last speeches, above all no apologies for the inevitable. What is it that Surak said? 'Death is a flood tide sweeping the desert. It doesn't wait for you to say goodbye'".

"During one of my trips in the desert as a boy, I once found the dried-up carcass of a le-matya". Spock's voice is soft, dreamy. "Curled up on itself with its back to the stone wall in a dip of the rock facing west, almost on top of a granite spur. It had chosen for itself a comfortable place to die, warmed up by the last rays, with a magnificent view of the sunset".

Kirk turns over with an effort, looks deep into his eyes, blinking tears off before they fall.

"I am also enjoying the most magnificent view". He sighs. "Want to know what I'm going to miss the most?" he blurts out all in a breath.

"Tell me, Jim".

"I'll miss your scent," Kirk mumbles, and he's already falling asleep, his head on Spock's shoulder.

There is an array of color-coded hyposprays on the table next to the bed. Spock looks at them for a moment, frowning, then rearranges himself around Kirk's body, careful not to wake him, and lays there, breathing him in.

::

The next morning, all hyposprays are empty. All but one.

An hour ago, Kirk has slipped back to a brittle doze.

He wakes up now with a slight start, and Spock can see the pain in his eyes. Pain, and love, and trust, and wonder. Gratitude and regret. And finally, acceptance and peace.

"It's time, you know. I can't go on. I won't go on and become something else. I won't become this pain within me. Please... Don't let me face this defeat". He stops to catch his breath. "Can you forgive me for what I'm asking you, my love?"

"I will not forgive thee, t'hy'la. There is nothing to forgive. I will thank thee instead. I have been honored to be allowed to share thy life. I am honored now, being allowed to attend to thy death. Thee has given me such joy."

Spock's hand moves as if of its own volition, grazing the meld points on Kirk's face. He feels the increased electrical charge in the slight sheen of cold sweat. His eyes are closing, his lips chanting the ritual words, but with an effort Kirk grabs his wrist, tries to push him back.

"Please, I don't... don't want to take you down" he pants, his voice broken.

Spock's fingers hover on his face, unmoving, a fraction of an inch from contact.

"There is no place I would rather be," he states.

"No". Kirk's voice is again the voice of command. "You were ready to die for each and everyone of the crew. Please... be willing now to live for me".

Spock's hand falls back in his lap, his eyes follow.

"I... Captain, I don't know if... After all the years, I still do not know. It's so difficult. One's life is so much longer than one's death... I can only promise you I will try. For a while. As long as I can".

"Thank you. It is enough to ask you".

Spock picks up the last hypo, warms it in his hands. He closes his eyes for a moment, preparing, concentrating. Then his fingers stroke Kirk's pale cheek in a human caress, while he presses the hypo to his neck. Kirk reaches up, covers Spock's hand on his face with his own. His eyelids are drooping already, but still he finds the strenght to speak.

"I see them... I see the banners."

He smiles. Then he's gone.

Spock puts down the empty hypo, stretches next to him, and keeps his body warm until the morning.

::

endnotes

1. 'There's a triumph of flying banners': "C'è un trionfo di standardi / dove termina il dolore", IVANO FOSSATI, *L'angelo e la pazienza* (Macramé, 1996).
2. 'I always thought I would die alone': ST V, *The Final Frontier* (William Shatner, 1989), scene 42, Yosemite, campfire, night.
3. 'The incident with the Galileo': TOS, episode 14, season 1, *The Galileo Seven*, when Spock's rigidly logical decisions as commander of a scouting team during an emergency meet with strong disagreement from his human crew.
4. 'The dried-up carcass of a le-matya': See MARY OLIVER, *I found a dead fox* (*White Pine*, 1994): "I found a dead fox / beside the gravel road, / curled inside the big / iron wheel / of an old tractor / that has been standing, / for years, / in the vines at the edge / of the road. / I don't know / what happened to it - / when it came there / or why it lay down / for good, settling / its narrow chin / on the rusted rim / of the iron wheel / to look out / over the fields, / and that way died - / but I know / this: its posture - / of looking, / to the last possible moment, / back into the world - / made me want / to sing something / joyous and tender / about foxes. / But what happened is this - / when I began, / when I crawled in / through the honeysuckle / and lay down / curling my long spine / inside that cold wheel, / and touched the dead fox, / and looked out / into the wide fields, / the fox / vanished. / There was only myself / and the world, / and it was I / who was leaving. / And what could I sing / then? / Oh, beautiful world! / I just lay there / and looked at it. / And then it grew dark. / That day was done with. / And then the stars stepped forth / and held up their appointed / fires - / those hot, hard / watchmen of the night".

::



::

::

::

part 11. Thereafter

summary

Part 11, in one chapter, of the *Two lives, two deaths* series. Last day alone.

notes to part 11:

1. *Warning: Shit happens. Read at your own risk.*
2. *Parts 10 and 11 dedicated to the memory of my own t'hy'la, Alias.*
3. *The four horses who were believed to draw the chariot of the Sun were said by the Greeks to bear the names of Erithraeus, the Oriental (sunrise, pure white), Acteon, the Doer (morning, golden chestnut), Lampros, the Shining (afternoon, bright bay) and Philogaeus, the Lover of the Earth (sunset, dark bay).*
4. *See the endnotes for translations, explanations and references.*
5. *Additional note below.*

::

It is oh-four-fourteen AM in the desert, due South from Shi'Kahr on Vulcan, the third day in the month of K'ri'lior, "the Bright One".

The month I dedicate to remembering my t'hy'la.

I am laying supine in a West-East direction on a flat slab of cool rock. Hands knitted on my sternum. Knees up and joined. Feet on the ground, 0.33 meters apart.

The back of my head resting precisely on the dip made by the lambdoid suture between the occipital and parietal bones.

My vertebrae aligned.

The Meditation of the First Shaft of Sunlight.

I wait for Omicron Eridani to rise.

::

My t'hy'la, Jim, is dead. Three thousand, five hundred and thirteen days, twenty hours, eleven minutes dead.

I killed him with a lethal hypo.

He asked me to.

He was dying of a cancer, aged ninety-three years, nine months, eight days.

Why am I still alive?

He also asked me not to die, but that is one request I did not promise him to grant.

Truly, I didn't believe I could.

I knew that when the bond would break, I would lose the definition of myself, and so it was.

I am now someone else.

Half of my spirit gone, the other half rebuilt to stand alone.

But the memories, I have not lost.

They are one gift he gave me.

After fal-tor-pan, I remembered everything, even my birth, but not the sense of what I was seeing. I had to learn again. He taught me how. I am still learning.

One thing I learned in these past nine years is how to balance grief with joy.

I learned with surprise that they do not erase each other, like elements in an equation or posts in an account. That's not what happens with emotions.

It does not matter that most of the grief is in the present and most of the joy is in the past.

I find the joy we had together to be the equal of my grief since he died.

He would say "You can stand the bad, even if it's so bad, because the good was so very good," and he would smile, and I would feel loved.

I watch the depth of time and let the two opposites touch.

I live on the spark they make.

My survival honors the deceased more than my death would have.

It declares that the joy was worth this grief.

My pain, I owe him.

::

There is one thing I never told him.
Before I met him, I thought I'd never want to entrust my katra to anyone.
I wanted it to dissolve with my physical body and my life.
Who would have wanted it preserved? There is no place for a half-blood in the Hall.
But he changed that... as much as Dr. McCoy may have regretted it at the time of my death.
Jim broke through the shell of human conventions and greeted me as a sentient being, his equal.
Neither Terran nor Vulcan mores, despite well-meaning principles, really promote such equality.
He didn't care. He saw me, at a time when I barely could see myself.

::

The sun is now rising.
The shadows recede, night animals scared by the light, and disappear at the foot of the rocks which surround me.
The first shaft of sunlight is deep red, like human blood, but clear and lively as it washes over me.
It warms my skin.
I stretch my arms straight out at my sides and splay my hands palm up on the ground, receiving gratefully the gift of a new day.

::

Now that memories are all I'm left, I turn back and reflect often on our missions.
This is also a way to honor him. His name is on history textbooks already, but I'm not sure he would have enjoyed being made into a monument to himself.
I regret we had not enough time to think together over our time in Starfleet service. Maybe we were too busy with our happiness.
I miss sharing my thoughts with him. It still pains me that he didn't allow us to meld when he passed.
He was afraid for me. He may have been right; there is no record of survival after a death-meld. But had he allowed, I would have rather died than leave him go alone.
Even so, I felt the shadow of his spirit flee, light as a startled bird. But he was smiling.
There is so much I would like him to know. There is so much I wish I could discuss, developments of thoughts he planted in my mind. I wish I could show him how they took root and grew, and ask him if they are what he expected... if he can recognize their species and variety as coming from the garden of his spirit.

::

Sunrise is over. Omicron Eridani is shining brightly now in the part of day called in ancient times D'har'khaj, The Time of Action.
The vessel of my peace is not yet filled.
I will proceed to the Meditation of the Long Light.
I lower my knees, join my feet, my legs two narrow parallel lines.

::

I have come to doubt the criteria adopted by the Federation with regard to assessment of sentience and consequent treatment of living beings.
After my death and before fal-tor-pan, I was alive, but I was not sentient. I had a complete physical body and I had life: the body was functioning and growing. But I had no spirit: my individuality was lost. I had no thoughts, no memory, no feeling of myself as alive in a defined space and time.

Fal-tor-pan gave me back my spirit and I was Spock again, but still I was a stranger to myself. I had to learn again to know this stranger; to understand that he was me. It all began when I saw myself in Jim's eyes, and recognized myself in his acknowledgment.

This made me think.

They all had risked their lives for one who at the moment did not even fit Federation standards for sentience. What made my living, unaware body different from any other living being on any planet we had visited in our missions, and thus worthy of being saved at such cost?

Even a Terran amoeba is alive; it is surely sentient enough to effectively assess environment; it can learn from experience and take decisions; it is probably more of an individual than I was at the time, yet it is for me that they did it.

What logical principle then can orient behavior (choices and decisions) with regard to beings who are alive, and we know nothing about?

We knew nothing about the Horta. She didn't even at first sight come within the class of living beings. According to Federation standards, nothing prevented us from making assumptions about her and dismissing her rights to being left in peace. What a fail in respect! We thought we knew her and felt free to disregard her.

I have been meditating about the roots of such Federation policies with regard to extra-Federation beings. Unsurprisingly, such roots grew in Terran cultures.

Humans are a compassionate species, despite their equally acute propensity for dogmatic hate. Both characters have been instrumental to their success as a species in the last few millennia.

However, the two inclinations are contradictory in themselves. Therefore humans have always tried to define limits to their compassion, based on as wide a consensus as possible, in order to more easily silence their individual consciences while pursuing the enforcement of dogma.

Christians used to limit compassion to humans. Eastern religions based on the idea of reincarnation solved the problem by linking present pain to faults in past lives...

And I? After all I saw, after all that happened to me, now that I am not bound anymore to Federation directives, what standard do I choose?

What standard would Jim choose?

I find myself inclined, time after time, to the simplest benchmark of survival. It has the advantage of satisfying equality. A life for a life: if no other choice is open, I think I feel justified in taking another life to save my own, or the life of someone I love more than myself, for the same reason as I cannot fault another being for doing the same to save his own.

I wish I could know what Jim would think about this.

It seems to fit with how they all saved my katra.

::

Choice. That is the question.

Vulcans hate choosing.

I have realized in time that the whole structure of tradition, ritual, discipline and control, the whole system hinged on public shame for those who violate the rules of Vulcan mores, is an elaborate and finely-tuned machine which makes choosing redundant.

The encounter with our mirror counterparts made startlingly clear to me how right the old XXth-century shaman, Jung, was about the fact that inside each one of us a whole universe of possibilities is forever seething.

What then makes each individual different from any other, if each has in himself the same infinite number of possible realities?

I learned the answer from Jim Kirk: what makes each of us unique are his choices. Among the infinite possible shapes of one's life, the one s/he chooses for himself, moment to moment.

Vulcans try to avoid choosing, so as to be undistinguishable from each other. Infinitely substitutable. Individuality is suspect. No personal development, only conformity to one model of logical, alleged perfection. Logic as a safe way to avoid responsibility, through mere verification of rule-abiding.

Jim has taught me that choice and responsibility go together, and that no preconceived rule of law or custom can exempt a person from responsibility for his actions and omissions.

"If one is responsible anyway, s/he may as well choose of what".

This is what he said, the first time we happened to touch on the topic during one of our early chess games.

How perfectly logical. How perfectly un-Vulcan.

I was surprised. I was fascinated. My Vulcan prejudices (I used to call them principles) began to crumble. The deeper I studied him, the faster the crumbling, until nothing remained, and finally I saw he was, simply, right.

::

In the beginning, at the time of my first assignment, I was seeking for my self-awareness a solid, permanent center of gravity. I thought I had found it in Captain Pike. He commanded the Enterprise wisely and prudently, one thing at a time, in an order logical enough for me to follow.

He was a teacher for me; more, he was a master, and my debt to him remains. I wish I could have done more for him than the neural illusions I later managed to afford him in his disability. Then James T. Kirk became Captain, and all order and logic seemed to be blown up at once. He was so quick in his command decisions that I sometimes felt left behind, trying to retrace step by step the logical passages he'd flown over.

Instead of orienting myself to a clear-cut, immovable North, I was now trying to locate a moveable East, sunrise dancing around according to the season and, apparently, the mood of the day.

I had to learn how to shift my center of gravity and follow him in his own gait, mentally as well as physically.

I was suddenly faced with taking many more choices than I had been used to, and he didn't choose for me like Pike often did.

In order to function, I had to purposely recall in meditation, and reenact in the course of my duties, the feeling of the choice I had made when I had left Vulcan for Starfleet. It had been the first time I had felt sure of what I wanted and of what it would cost me, if utterly unsure of the outcome.

Choice after choice, I was becoming more and more myself.

::

The sun has climbed up, seemingly slower as the burning disc left the line of the horizon behind.

Then it has reached its zenith, perching there as though forever.

I am hot under its flames.

Now its balance on the cusp of the sky is broken, and the plunge down has begun.

::

He taught me a whole new meaning of the intimacy of touch.

Strange that it took a human to teach that to a touch-telepath.

Touching, one becomes one with whom he touches... "Like water comes to the hollow of your hand". In a meld. In a casual touch between friends. Brushing against someone in a Terran crowd. Making love.

But this also holds true of fighting.

Vulcans have perfected the martial arts so as to avoid touch as far as possible. The nerve-pinch as well as the deadly tal'shaya aim at only brief touch with one's opponent. It is not coincidence that in ritual koon-ut-kaliffee combats the long-handled lirpa is the first weapon used. It keeps the distance. Only in the following phase is the ahn-woon provided, the strip of leather with weighted tips, and even then the fighters try to strangle each other using it as bolas or a garrota, with minimal contact of the other's body.

Touching another means touching one's boundaries and testing them. It requires exacting knowledge of who one is; where "I" ends and "you" begins.

I never felt sure enough of myself for that.

I used to believe it was because of my mixed ancestry. Now I wonder if Vulcan control is not a mere disguise for fear of contact.

::

Jim was different. He liked to touch. His crewmates, other humans, aliens. Dogs, horses. Sehlat. (I never saw any trace in him of the instinctual alarm most humans show when confronted with animals bigger than they are themselves). Such propensity to touch looked to me, in the beginning, like a mere, childish lack of control, sometimes of decorum.

I was wrong.

I realized how much, when I first saw him in battle.

He held nothing back. He gave himself fully to hand-to-hand combat, sharing himself with the enemy and accepting the same in return. He put himself at risk in the same measure as he made sure to be a risk for his opponent. I understood then: he was so much himself that he didn't fear even that terrible nearness.

Along the years, we trained together at a variety of fighting techniques. He taught me tai-chi and Greco-Roman wrestling, I taught him the first five levels of suus mahna.

Every time we practised, I felt him pushing against the limits of my katra, but never appropriating any part of myself. This in turn allowed... no, compelled me to better map my own boundaries.

It is thanks to him that I could meld with so many different beings, without losing myself in them.

It is thanks to him that I finally understood the meaning of the ancient Terran maxim, "Know thyself".

::

Omicron Eridani is low on the western horizon.

In the ancient times, they used to say the setting sun is in love with the earth. He leans down to kiss her one last time before the long night.

I turn my palms down, pouring back out on the ground the light and warmth I received.

In this gesture I finally understand something more of what has called me in this place at this moment in time.

What song the vibrating arc of the sun has sung to me from rising to setting today.

My sunset is also near.

::

T'hy'la was never quite alone in his mind, even before we bonded. There was always company with him, in the thoughts or the memories of those he knew and loved; sometimes also of those who had hurt or angered him. The first few times we melded, I found myself in a crowd. Yet he soon learned to make room for *us*, to keep all others in separate compartments and allow intimacy to our bond. When it happened in later years that someone shared our bed, it was Leonard we invited with us ("in the flesh, blood and Bones" as Jim would joke), not thought-images of intruders— nor of family.

Despite telepathic contact, I was always alone instead, until we bonded. When we did, I learned at last how lonely I had been.

I wonder if he feels lonely now. If he feels at all.

I do.

::

The sun is almost set.

The last slice of flames still clings to the line of the farthest sight.

A le-matya calls from afar. Another answers, more near.

My peace is perfect. No pain, no regret.

Kaiidh. What is, is. What has been, has been.

Ours have been good lives.

Like the sun, I finally give myself up to the stream of entropy.

I hope it will float me to wherever Jim is now.

I feel warm.
And I do not feel alone anymore.
The darkness comes.

::

endnotes

1. 'The Horta': TOS, episode 25, season 1, Devil in the dark: "Dispatched to the mining colony on Janus VI, the Enterprise is tasked to investigate rumors of a strange, subterranean creature responsible for destruction of equipment and the deaths of fifty miners. Kirk and Spock discover a silicon-based life form, a Horta, which lives in the surrounding rock. After wounding the creature, Spock performs a mind meld, discovering the reason behind the Horta's attacks", summary in List of Star Trek: The Original Series episodes by Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Star_Trek_TOS_episodes.
2. 'Our mirror counterparts': TOS, episode 33, season 2, *Mirror, mirror*: "A transporter mishap slips Captain Kirk and his companions into a parallel universe (and their counter-parts into our universe)", summary as above.
3. A 'permanent center of gravity': "Cerco un centro di gravità permanente / che non mi faccia mai cambiare idea / sulle cose sulla gente": *Centro di gravità permanente*, in the Vulcan musician Franco Battiato's album *La Voce del Padrone* (1981).
4. 'The neural illusions I later managed to afford him in his disability': TOS, episodes 11-12, season 1, *The Menagerie*. "After claiming to receive a subspace message, Spock diverts the *Enterprise* to Starbase 11 in order to visit the ship's previous captain, Christopher Pike, who has been severely injured (...) Spock continues his deception by secretly transporting Pike to the *Enterprise* and uses falsified orders to take the ship to the quarantined world Talos IV (...) Kirk realizes that Spock intends to return Pike to the planet, where he can resume a normal life. Starfleet officially sanctions Spock's plan, and Pike is transported to the surface where his injuries appear completely healed"; summary as in note above.
5. 'Like water comes to the hollow of your hand': "Come vien l'acqua al cavo della mano", GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO, *Consolazione*, in *Poema paradisiaco* (1891-93).
6. Koon-ut-kalifee: "Marriage-or-combat", a ritualized, but deadly, ceremonial fight between a pre-bonded mate and a challenger chosen by the other pre-bonded party, in the almost unheard-of case that s/he wishes to dissolve the pre-bond. Such a contingency happens in episode 30, season 2, *Amok time* ("Mr. Spock shows evidence of starting to lose control over his emotions. When he insists that he needs to return home to Vulcan, despite being engaged in an important diplomatic mission, Kirk forces him to admit that Vulcan biology requires him to take a mate. After diverting to Vulcan against Starfleet's direct orders, Kirk finds himself in a life-or-death struggle against Spock, at the instigation of Spock's wife-to-be", summary as above).
7. Suus mahna: See definition and background in the *Memory Alpha* encyclopedia at http://memory-alpha.org/en/wiki/Suus_Mahna.
8. 'It was Leonard we invited with us': AU with regard to both canon and fanon, but done beautifully, if rarely, by such writers as GayleF (*Between friends*, part 4 of the unforgettable *Cosmic Fuck* series, first published in the print fanzine «Obsc'zine», 3, May 1978, now at <http://ksarchive.com>), and Jane Carnall (*The Three of Us*, at <http://hjc.akicif.net/ThreeofUs.html>). A different AU with a similar development is written by Liz in her Trinity series at <http://www.allslash.org/tos/trinity.html>.

::

::

::



from picture 18462327.jpg at <http://fotocommunity.de>

::

additional note

This part didn't seem at first at all inclined to slip in the direction it eventually took, I swear. It began like a normal Remembrance Day story. Not even an anniversary! But at some point in the afternoon Spock touched my mind and asked me whether he may go... How could I refuse him?

::

part 12. And beyond

summary

Part 12 (last), in four chapters, of the *Two lives, two deaths* series. Sometimes the end is not the end.

note to part 12:

For those of you who read parts 10 and 11, and survived.

This part is loosely rooted in CARL GUSTAV JUNG, Memories, dreams, reflections, chapter 9, On life after death.

::

1. Kirk

The first thing is a hand.

Fingers clutching the armrest of a swivel chair.

I see the fingers, I see the back of the hand, and I feel the worn-smooth surface beneath.

They are **my** fingers, my hand.

Then I hear a voice which is not a voice...

"He used to do that in a crisis. Then he would give his orders, and start tapping with his middle finger as he waited for the outcome. Nails always short and spotless".

It is the voice of a woman... Someone I know well.

All of a sudden I know who she is, and I know who **I** am, and I also know —oh how well— him who used to stand next to me, but I can't recall the names.

(Names? what **are** names?)

I don't know where I am, or whether I am at all.

There were things like space, and time, once.

Me, in them.

There were events following each other in a string.

Now I'm not so sure.

The more I stop and muse on this, the fainter my perception.

All around is fog: a luminous, thick, pearl-gray fog, pressing forward around what — provisionally— I know is me.

An island of terse awareness surrounded by utter nothingness.

The fog comes nearer, awareness is slowly wiped out from existence.

If I wait any longer, this chance will be lost.

I lunge to catch it, and the gesture is fluid, like I have a lifetime of practice catching chances.

Taking risks.

I call out to her-who-is-a-voice.

"Uhura!"

There is a jolt and the fog rolls back. I feel... ground... under my feet.

Somehow I know she is concentrating on my call.

Her attention is an anchor for my own.

I am certain I would forget myself once again, should she let her attention wander.

I don't want this to happen.

I hunger for acknowledgment.

I need to touch...

I need to touch the part of me that is missing.

I need to touch... Spock!

His name sparks into my mind at the same time as it reaches Uhura's.

It is not enough. There must be words.

Which words?

"Ask Spock if he remembers the red-and-white jackets".

::

2. Uhura

It was frightening. And wonderful.

I'd never believed in ghosts. I saw no need to: the universe is filled with enough terrible, beautiful things. Was there really room in all that void for the remains of numberless past lives?

I doubted it.

I am an old woman with too much time on my hands. I enjoy losing myself in my memories. When it happened, it began just like any of the many other times I have slipped into a daydream. And after the first shiver of chilly surprise, it really felt the most natural thing in the world.

Was it a ghost? Was it my memory of him?

It didn't seem to matter somehow. It still doesn't.

What I am sure of, is that *it* was nothing like I could ever dream of calling "me".

He was something —someone— else completely.

Someone I could instantly recognize: his voice, the feel of him.

He called me.

He called Spock.

He could feel he wasn't there.

He asked me to tell him something.

He said, "Ask Spock if he remembers the red-and-white jackets".

But Spock is dead.

He disappeared six years ago, in the Shi'Kahr desert on Vulcan.

The search team found the remains of a Vulcan male devoured by le-matyas. They declared him dead and his katra lost. There were solemn funerals, where everybody was very careful to hide their relief. He had always been a puzzle and a slightly threatening oddity to his own people.

I used to be a Communications officer.

I should be able to communicate this information to the Captain.

But nothing in my linguistics can help me here.

Then I think of the frescoes inside ancient Terran tombs. Egyptian, Etruscan... Scenes of daily life. People at work. Animals in fields, birds in flight, fish in rivers and seas. Food. Kisses.

Painted images to make the dead remember how it was to be alive, warmed by sunlight, treading solid ground. Smelling and touching and tasting and hearing and seeing. The feel of a body from the inside.

Do the dead remember?

Do the dead remember love?

What I do is concentrate on them both. The unity they were. I fill my mind with my memories of their life and I bind these together with my knowledge of their deaths.

I close my eyes and plunge inside myself, toward the deep, thin fault line at the bottom of me from where this awareness of someone-other-than-me is welling up.

I hope it will be enough.

::

3. Spock

The first thing is the texture of stiff velour under my fingers. The hem of a garment.

The second is a half-memory that the sensation was at one time connected to pain and fear, but not any more.

The third is the certainty that something like what I am feeling now, has already happened to me once.

This fine thread of... perception, needling through a thick, deep *nothing*.

Then I hear a voice, loud and clear.

"Spock, do you remember those damned uncomfortable red-and-white jackets?"

Suddenly I am flooded with sensations. I see a human hand fumbling with a too-tight white collar on a deep-red jacket. I smell the clean cold smell of the engine room. I taste in my own mouth the copper taste of effort, and fear, and finally of blood.

It is too much. I want to escape. Behind me there is total stillness, in front of me this too-vivid knot of space-and-time I don't want to enter again. But beyond that, I still hear the voice, calling at me.

I know that voice.

I want it, with an eternity of hunger.

I want it more than I don't want to go through the memories seething between us.

I let go of the stillness to which I cling and throw myself forward across the divide.

I am caught in a whirlwind of forces tearing me apart. Too much of everything— half-phrases, the tang of food, sleek muscles under my hand, the stench of decay, shapes and colors in brittle, sharp fragments. This fragile awareness of mine is dissolving in turn in a myriad splinters.

But no, something strong and solid pushes toward me, penetrating the turmoil. I am taken, and held tight, and pulled out on the other side.

There is soft light. There is warmth. There is something like a hug. There is laughter, and this laughter I know and I love.

I had forgotten my last hope.

But it is made true.

Jim.

I have come to where Jim is.

He brought me here.

We are one again, he-and-I.

We will not forget, because we are together.

::

4. ...

//Do you feel? There is one awareness, encompassing all that exists and lives. I/you are in that//.

//Pseudopodia pushing out from the core//.

//Taking form one choice after another//.

//Tips meeting, touching//.

//You? I!//.

//How easily we forget the core whence we come//.

//We were called back in the end//.

//Together... When we were in space-time, we grew together, not apart//.

//We grew more and more ourselves, and see, we were one//.

//We are one//.

//We. We are! One//.

::

*The sky
 Is a suspended blue ocean.
 The stars are the fish
 That swim.
 The planets are the white whales
 I sometimes hitch a ride on,
 And the sun and all light
 Have forever fused themselves
 Into my heart and upon
 My skin.
 There is only one rule
 On this Wild Playground,
 For every sign Hafiz has ever seen
 Reads the same.
 They all say,
 "Have fun, my dear; my dear, have fun,
 In the Beloved's Divine
 Game,
 O, in the Beloved's
 Wonderful Game."*

— Hafiz, XIV century a.D., Persia

::



NGC 4631, "The Whale Galaxy"

Credit & Copyright: Adam Block, Mt. Lemmon SkyCenter, U. Arizona
 (Astronomy Picture of the Day at <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap090502.html>)

::

::

::