

[See Chapter 1/title page for disclaimers and rating](#)

Sound, she was surrounded by a cacophony of sound. The noise shook the walls around her and made her ears ache. It was like nothing she had ever heard before. Beneath it and around the roar which rose and fell and came back every few minutes was the constant ping of something against the roof and walls. For all that the first was frightening and loud, clapping hard and causing brief flashes of light, the other was somehow soothing and reminded her of the sound of her brother's soldiers as he flung them against the wall of the cargo bay. Zack must be terrified, she thought. The thought of her brother was what completely pulled her back to herself. She sat up slowly, ignoring the pounding in her head that was amplified with each loud bang outside. Pain shimmied along her nerve endings and she took a brief moment to try to close out everything and access her injuries. Her ribs ached with each breath but not enough to keep her from rising and her lower abdomen throbbed with a deep ache. There also seemed to be assorted scrapes and bruises. Her head was the worst though as it kept throbbing, barely allowing thought to enter. With another deep breath, she stood, using the wall beside her for support. Her fingers slid over the rough cold surface and she acknowledged the familiarity of it. *Metal then*, she thought to herself. The pounding in her head increased as she stood and for a moment she thought she might vomit, but then the awareness that she did not sense her brother came crashing down on her. The total sense of loss forced her to her knees and her mind sent out a frantic call of *Zack!* There was nothing, no response, and she curled into herself. Where ever she was and where ever he was, she couldn't feel him, hear him, and that scared her more than anything. For the first time she could remember, T'Lin Archer was truly alone. She allowed the noise to surround her once more and the pain in her head to pull her back into darkness.

Zack awoke sharply and suddenly, rolling to his feet in a move that would have made his father proud. He was sore and bruised but alert and he knew something was wrong with his sister. A quick glance around told him he was in a small metal room. It was cold, and the noise battering at the walls was frightening. He closed his eyes tightly as a loud boom caused the floor beneath his feet to tremble. Fear tugged at him making him want to cry, and he sent out a desperate call to his sister. *T'Lin?* Silence answered him, that and the feeling that she was hurt, maybe so hurt she couldn't respond. Tears began to slide down his cheeks and he choked on them. He was only seven he reasoned to himself it was okay to be scared, but somehow the tears tasted sour. He stood there for a long moment, waiting, deciding, and then made his choice. Throwing himself at the door, he slammed against it full force, his small body making a noticeable thud. His fists battered the door as he screamed at the top of his lungs. "T'Lin! Let me out! Let me out! T'Lin!" The noise echoed through the room, even over the rumbling outside and still he continued.

Zack fell to the ground, earning himself another bruise and a face full of dirt as

the door flew open. He didn't lay there long, instead, he rolled, once more rising swiftly to his feet. His instincts screamed at him and he dropped back into a defensive crouch as a fist swung right where his head had been. The hand dropped suddenly, glancing off his ear as it fisted in his shirt collar. He was lifted off his feet, but did not remain still. Screaming his frustration, he kicked out at the form in front of him, making solid contact with a muscular thigh. The man grunted in pain but did not release the boy, choosing instead to shake him until his head rattled.

Having never been exposed to such violence, all the fight was leached out of him in moments and the man holding him chuckled. "Little Vulcan bastard, just like the rest of your people, weak and spineless." He carried him from the room, fist outstretched as if the boy were something contaminated.

When his head stopped spinning, Zack studied his captor. The man was short and ugly with stout arms and legs. Though bald and wiry, the man had a strength that could be read in the twist of muscle in his arms, and the power of his stance. The eyes were the most frightening with their bold yellow gleam and malicious intent. They reminded him of a picture he had seen of a cat, so similar were the shape and design, but he didn't recognize the species. He had barely thought to take in his surroundings when he was flung to the ground. Once more his ears rang as he made contact with the floor. He slid about three feet, and decided as he came to a stop not to move. The smaller a target he made of himself, the less likely he was to be hurt. Turning his head slightly and slowly, he was able to peek out through his bangs at his surroundings. He was lying on the floor of yet another room. It was dimly lit, mostly by the fire barrels that were providing heat as well. As the ringing in his ears faded, he noted several other voices. The language they were speaking was familiar to him and he was able to make sense out of what they were saying. *What was it again?... ah Andorian, but the man who brought me out here is not Andorian.* He shifted a little more and was able to make out the familiar blue species. Once more he shifted, only to yelp as he was dragged to his feet once more. This time the words spit at him were in Vulcan, as was the man holding him. "Useless child!" He flung Zack away from him causing the boy to stumble, but the child kept his feet. The Vulcan turned toward the Andorians. "You wasted firepower and risked a conflict with the High Command for a stupid child?" He sighed in disgust. "I knew I should have sent the Satorian. At least he knows the difference between a useful prisoner and a useless one. Even the Captain would have been a better choice, but no, you bring me a couple of children."

Satorian, so that's what he is, Zack thought. He filed away that thought. He would remember that species. He stood his ground as the wiry man walked over to him and grasped his chin. "At least he is a male. He should have some value, unlike the other one."

The Vulcan sighed again. "Vulcan females are much more valuable than

Satorian ones, Sorka, even children. But they are children and I can't figure out why you took them." As he turned to glare at the Andorians, Zack shuddered.

Too much emotion for a Vulcan, he thought. *He is showing way too much emotion.* Unable to remain silent any longer, he screwed up his courage. He stuck with Vulcan, grateful for once for his appearance. He pulled everything he had been taught about control and logic around him and faced the Vulcan male. "Where is my sister?" He could almost see his mother's approval as all traces of emotion left his voice. His face was calm and steady.

The Vulcan raised a brow. "Very well done my boy. Compared to the racket you were raising earlier, you seem to have gotten control of yourself."

Though trembling inside, Zack countered his look with one of his own. "My sister. Where is she?"

The Vulcan glanced at the Satorian. "Sorka, bring the girl here. We need to find out who they belong to so we can ransom them." He barely acknowledged the Satorian's grunt before turning back to the boy. "I like the look of you boy. How old are you?"

Zack swallowed. He considered lying, but decided against it. "Seven."

The Vulcan's brow raised again. "You are small for your age. What is your name?"

Again Zack considered lying, but the thought of T'Lin kept him from doing so. He still couldn't reach her with his mind and had no way of telling her. "Zack."

The man walked around him, studying the boy. "What an unusual name." Zack nodded, but said nothing. "Come into the light Zack. I would get a better look at you."

The boy stood firm. "Your name, Sir. I would know who has taken me from my ship."

"I am Vek. The fools who took you from your ship are Andorian. Your removal was a mistake. We were after much more valuable hostages. Mind your manners and you will be returned to Vulcan."

Again Zack nodded. It made sense in his mind. He wondered where his grandfather and Ambassador V'Lar were. They would have made valuable hostages. Of course, if these people knew who he and T'Lin really were, they might find them more valuable than they thought. "Why were you looking for hostages? What you have done is considered treason to the High Command."

Vek laughed, startling the boy. "The High Command already considers me a traitor boy. I have been isolated from my people for far too long. I chose to follow an obscure path, one in which we as Vulcans embrace our emotions. We were exiled, forced to leave Vulcan and our families. So you see, I really don't care what the Vulcans think of me."

The word flitted about in his brain, but wouldn't land on his tongue. He remembered the stories of Vulcans who experimented with emotions, but he had never met any. He was just about to speak when Sorka returned. His heart clenched in fear as his sister dangled from the Satorian's arms. Though he wanted to run to her, he forced himself to remain still. "What is wrong with her?"

Sorka grinned. "She is female."

Zack bit back a scowl. "Why is she unconscious?"

Vek glanced at her, catching the filthy tangle of hair that cascaded nearly to the floor. He pulled it up and away from her face, taking in the deep purple bruise at her temple. "It looks as though she has a nasty bump to her head." He dropped her hair and turned back to Zack. "She will live."

Zack flinched as the Satorian dropped his sister at his feet, but he refused to move. He could see from the look in their eyes that they were watching him, waiting to prey on any weakness. The moment was interrupted as Sorka knelt and grasped a corner of T'Lin's robe. He didn't like the look in the man's eyes as he handled his sister. Zack moved swiftly, jerking the material out of Sorka's hands and pulling it until it completely covered his sister's legs. Fear raced through him as the man lifted a hand stained in bright red blood.

Sorka stood and held his hand out to Vek. "What's this? I thought you bastard Vulcans bled green."

Vek glanced at Sorka's hand and then to T'Lin, noticing the spreading stain near her hem. He knelt quickly and jerked the skirt up once more until he bared the lacerated calf. Anger pulsed through him as Zack's tried to pull the material down again. He pushed the boy with enough force to send him flying. Watching the blood pulse forth with every beat of her heart, Vek wondered what exactly he had in his possession. A Vulcan with red blood, was it possible? He had heard the tales but hadn't believed them to be true. Perhaps what he had in front of him was much more valuable than he thought.

Zack rose slowly to his feet. Fear ate at him and once more he felt himself fighting back tears. The taste of them was still sour and he could barely stand it. He wanted to scream and yell and throw a tantrum, but none of those things would help his sister or himself. He moved forward slowly, positioning himself next to T'Lin with the Satorian on one side and the Vulcan on the other. "Leave

her alone.”

Vek stood slowly and studied the boy. His hand lashed out suddenly catching the boy on the cheek. The blow snapped his head back and split the skin causing a spray of bright red blood to spatter on Sorka. The Satorian laughed as he wiped the spray from his face. With a leering grin he held the blood smeared hand before his face. Zack could have sworn he could see the difference between his and T’Lin’s blood. His stomach jumped and turned as the Satorian licked a long stripe clean. The garish blood smeared grin made him want to run and hide but he knew he dared not move. The blow had stunned him but he had managed to stay on his feet. His heart skipped several beats as T’Lin groaned and shifted. He wanted to move, to curl around her and let her comfort him, but as her eyes fluttered open he realized that he still couldn’t hear her. For the first time in his life there was silence.

He didn’t have time to consider it as Vek dragged T’Lin to her feet. To her credit, his sister didn’t make a sound, but she seemed to have trouble focusing her eyes. She stood still and silent, trembling. Zack moved without thinking, sliding by Vek and pressing against T’Lin’s side. He curled one arm protectively around her waist and nearly sighed in relief as she sagged against him. “Leave her alone.”

Vek’s eyes narrowed at his words, but amazingly he released the girl. “Alright, for now anyway. What are you boy? Who are you? You look and speak Vulcan, but you do not bleed like one.”

He was saved from answering as another voice echoed through the room. “Leave the children alone Vek. I did not have my men bring them to you for abuse. They are too valuable for that.”

Zack nearly smiled at the startled expression on the Vulcan’s face. As the man spun to face the speaker, Zack got a good look at him. It was another Andorian, this one with a commanding presence and behind him were other Andorians, one holding his grandfather and the other holding V’Lar. Vek seemed to pull himself together. “Perhaps you should have told me how valuable they are, Arven, and I would have cared for them better.”

The Andorian glared at him. “The last time I checked Vek, you worked for me. I don’t have to explain myself. And if you knew as much as you think you do, you would realize what a true treasure we have in those children. They are unique you see, the only children of a human and a Vulcan. That in itself would not mean much except they are highly valued by two top officials in both the Earth and Vulcan governments.” He turned to face Soval and smirked. “Isn’t that right Ambassador?”

Zack’s first instinct was to run to his grandfather, but he wouldn’t leave his sister.

After a moment he realized his best course of action was to stay put and listen. If Soval's expression were anything to go by, his grandfather would not appreciate the act. He thought back on the older man's words about patience and stillness saving his life. He now understood the lesson, even if he didn't like it. It gave him a new respect for Vulcan teaching and control. He listened closely as his grandfather spoke. Politics meant nothing to him, but that didn't mean there weren't clues to his survival just the same.

"They are simply children. Krenath if you must know and of very little value in the general scheme of things."

The Andorian's smile made Zack's skin crawl. "You can try to downplay their worth, but you have made no secret in your support of them and their family on Vulcan, the same goes for Admiral Forrest on Earth. They have value, why else would too such notable men claim children with no blood ties to them? Especially children who are scorned by both societies for their very mixed blood?"

Zack blinked in surprise. He knew there were people who didn't care for Humans and Vulcans, but this scale of dislike was new to him. He hugged his sister tighter as his young mind tried to make sense of all the things he heard. He knew Pixie was listening as well, for there was a stillness to her that matched his own.

"The children are the result of a union that is barely tolerated among both cultures, but they represent a hope for the future and are innocent. Forrest and I decided to do what we could to help them. There are enough roadblocks in life, race should not be one of them."

"A noble sacrifice Ambassador, but I still say you are bluffing. Vulcans are known for their lies, especially to the Andorians, and no amount of treaties will change that."

Soval's eyes narrowed fractionally. "Do not pretend to represent the Andorian people."

Arven's temper blew and he backhanded the older man, nearly knocking him from his feet. "I represent those who would be free of Vulcan logic and interference, including those whom Vulcan has abandoned."

Soval glanced at Vek and raised a brow. "Vulcan has not abandoned any of her people, rather they have chosen to leave her fold."

"Arrogant bastard... It matters not. Those children will make the humans listen if nothing else, and the humans will do their damndest to influence the Vulcans. They will also bring Jonathan Archer to me, and then I can get my revenge." He

glanced at the children, his eyes narrowing further. "Get those children out of my sight. Put them in with the others for now."

Even though the men turned away, Zack refused to let down his defensive stance. His tightening hold on T'Lin was the only sign he showed of his unease. As hands reached for them, he smacked them away, shoving his sister behind him. "Don't touch us. We will go where you want us to go, just don't touch us."

Sorka grinned. "Such a tough little man, hehe, we shall see how strong you are soon enough little Vulcan."

Zack didn't want to even think what he was referring to. The Satorian led them to another room in the compound. This one was just like the others only larger, with a scattering of furniture throughout, and an almost lived in look. Sorka couldn't resist shoving them into the room, laughing heartily as Zack stumbled and T'Lin fell. As she hit the floor, T'Lin made no sound, and this frightened Zack. In fact her total lack of coordination and communication concerned him. Neither of the ambassadors joined them. Kneeling next to his sister, he stroked her hair away from her face. "Pix?" She looked up at him, but her eyes were unfocused and cloudy. Zack didn't know what to do. It was obvious his sister was hurt, but she had always taken care of him, not the other way around. His fists clenched in frustration. "I don't know how to help you Pixie?" It was a whispered plea and he wasn't certain she had heard him.

T'Lin heard him. Pain wracked her body but she couldn't figure out why or where. It seemed she was one giant ache. All she wanted to do was curl in on herself, but the desperation in Zack's voice wouldn't let her. She had never been able to ignore him, even when she wanted to, and she wasn't about to start now. Raising her hand, she curled it around his. "Just hold onto me for a minute Zack. I'll be okay in a minute." The words were weak, but then so was she. She lay silently, taking in her surroundings the only way she could.

A soft voice interrupted their conversation. "Let me help."

Zack whirled on the voice, positioning himself between T'Lin and the woman approaching them. She moved slowly as if approaching a wounded animal. She was tall, taller than any woman he had ever met. It was rather intimidating at first, but her eyes, her eyes reminded him of his Aunt Hoshi's, warm and brown and full of tenderness. He couldn't imagine anyone having eyes like that and being bad, and yet, he was still cautious. "My sister is hurt."

The gentle smile set him even more at ease. "I can see that." She knelt beside them and brushed a strand of curly black hair behind her ear. "So are you." She raised that hand to his cheek, but Zack jerked away.

"Pixie needs your help more than I do."

The woman nodded. "Alright." She reached out and gently turned the girl onto her back. Her voice was soft and soothing. "My name is Grace. Your sister's name is Pixie?"

Zack tightened his grip on his sister's hand. "Her name is T'Lin, but we all call her Pixie. Dad says its cause she's so damn cute."

Grace smiled. "I bet he has something to say about you repeating that."

"Not really, but my mom does. Only she doesn't say anything to me, just my dad." He was surprised at how easy it was to open up to this woman. "My mom is Vulcan, but you can tell when she's mad cause she gets this look on her face, actually its more like no look, but suddenly she uses our whole name instead of our nicknames. It's kind of funny. My dad really gets a kick out of it, though he always makes us do what she says."

"Sounds like your parents get along really well. What is your name?"

"Zack. Zack Henry Archer, but everybody calls me Zack or Sprite. You can if you want."

"I'd like that." She studied the blood on his cheek and the pointed ears. "You are part Vulcan?"

He nodded. "Yeah, my dad is human. We live on a starship." He watched as she washed the blood from his sister's head. "Is Pixie gonna be okay?"

Grace smiled at him again. "I think so. I see a lot of cuts and bruises, but none of her bones appear to be broken."

"That Sorka dropped her on the floor like she was trash. I don't like the way he looked at her either. It made my tummy hurt."

The look she gave him was sympathetic. "Satorians aren't known for their kindness to females. Can I clean your cheek now Zack?"

"You've done all you can for Pix?"

"For the moment. I have a pallet in the corner of the room. We'll move her there in a few minutes."

"Okay." He tried not to flinch as she cleaned his cheek. The gentleness was a balm to his soul after the violence he had experienced. He fought back a sudden rush of tears. He wasn't successful though and they spilled down his cheeks. His body stiffened for a moment as she drew him into a loose hug. "I think your

parents would be proud of you and how you've taken care of your sister."

He rubbed his face in her shoulder. "You think so? Pixie always takes care of me and I don't know what to do to help her now."

"I think you are on the right track. You let me help her, and you are trying. That's a lot for a young man to think about. How old are you Zack?"

He wiped his running nose on his shirt sleeve. "Seven. Pixie is twelve." He glanced down at his sister, the tears rolling harder. "Know what the worst part is?" At her negative shake, he continued. "I can't hear her in my head." He tapped a finger to his temple. "For as long as I can remember, I could hear her, even if she was on the other side of the ship. If I needed her, needed to talk to her, she was there. Now she's gone in my head and its scary... and lonely."

Grace hugged him again. "I'm not a doctor but I think that your sister has had a bad blow to the head. I think maybe your sister has some swelling there and it may be affecting that. Once it goes down, she'll probably be able to talk to you again."

"Really?"

"Probably. Try to look at it this way. You've never had to learn to communicate with your sister in any other way. You've never had to read her body language or her eyes, you've just heard her. Now you have to listen. Look at it as a learning experience."

Zack pulled back a bit and scowled at her. "You sure you're not part Vulcan too? That sounded almost... logical."

Grace laughed, and it was sweet and clear. "I've been around them for a long time. It probably rubbed off on me."

A soft voice floated up to them. Both looked surprised as T'Lin spoke. "Why are you here?"

Grace brushed the hair from T'Lin's face. "Can you stand?"

T'Lin rolled slowly to her side, hissing as pain rolled through her head. "I think so." She let go of Zack long enough to try to stand. She stumbled and swayed, but Grace wrapped an arm around her waist to support her.

"Take it easy, Honey. It's just a short walk across the room, and then you can rest some more. Your eyes are dilated so I don't think you should sleep, but I don't see a problem with you resting."

"Thank you." T'Lin relished the strength of comforting arms around her. It made her miss her parents fiercely and she had to bite back the tears that threatened. Tears would get her nowhere, and would probably just make her head hurt more. Her arm curled reflexively around her belly. The pain was becoming more distinct now. Her lower belly was cramping as though she had eaten something that didn't agree with her and her head was pounding with each pulse beat. She sank gratefully onto the pallet, afraid to move. "Grace?"

"Hmmm?" She fussed with a blanket, covering the children as Zack laid down next to his sister and snuggled into her as she wrapped her arm around him and spooned around him protectively.

"Why are you here?"

"I was in the wrong place at the wrong time it seems."

"What do you mean?"

"I was traveling on a cargo ship on my way back to Earth. We were attacked by the Satorians and the crew was claimed as slaves."

"How can they just do that?"

"Satorians do what Satorians want to do. They don't care much for rights, especially those of a female. They have a strange sense of honor. Men, even boys," she tapped Zack's nose, "have power. They have the right to speak and challenge things they don't think are right. Females on the other hand are worth less than nothing. If you two are going to survive, Zack is going to have to continue to be strong and fight back." She her attention to Zack, giving him a deep look. " You have to make them understand that T'Lin is yours to do with as you will. Do not let them see you treat her with any type of contempt, or babying, or they will use it against you."

T'Lin hugged Zack tighter to her. "Surely there were men on the freighter who could protect you?"

"Most of the men were killed in the attack. Those that survived were sold before they had a chance to learn Satorian codes of honor, such as they are." She said with a snort.

"So they treat you okay?"

"For the most part. I have some value you see, more than the women they are used to. I have a son and he protects me. I also have some healing skills and that makes me valuable as well. That and the Vulcan has taken a liking to me. Sorka sold me to him after only a few days. He has not harmed me, but he is

unpredictable."

Zack spoke up. "He's scary." As Grace nodded, he glanced around the room. "Where is your son?"

She smiled then, a beautiful smile that lit up her face. "Vek has him training. Aidan is about your age. He's nine. My husband and I were stationed on Vulcan, part of a scientific cultural exchange. Aidan was born there. When my husband died a year ago, we made arrangements to return to Earth. We've been here nearly four months."

Zack sat up, dislodging the blanket. "I've never met a boy near my age. Will he be back soon?"

Grace chuckled. "Starfleet isn't big on families on Starships. I'm surprised your parents were allowed to serve together and have children."

T'Lin sat up slowly. "My parents are... unique. They are the only people to have an interspecies marriage. Daddy says that humans aren't comfortable with a human/Vulcan marriage, any more than the Vulcans are. Being in space makes it easier."

Zack nodded. "My dad is Captain Jonathan Archer of the Enterprise and everybody lets him do what he wants. That includes marrying a Vulcan and having kids."

T'Lin sighed as she stood, bracing her hand against the wall. "That's not quite true. Daddy does get away with a lot, but he does a lot too. Everything requires compromise, he says."

"That's true. Are you okay Pixie?" Grace stood and held out a hand to the girl.

T'Lin bit her lip. Her voice dropped to a whisper. "I need a... a bathroom."

Grace nodded sympathetically and guided her to a door to the left of the pallet. "If you need me, holler."

T'Lin would have nodded but her head hurt too much, so she gave her a weak smile.

Grace walked back over to Zack. "So you are the only children on your ship?"

"Nah, my Aunt Hoshi and Uncle Trip have kids. Lots of them." He leaned forward conspiratorially, his voice dropping to a loud whisper. "They're all girls."

"Really? How many?"

"Four." He started counting on his fingers. "Charlie, Alex, Teddy and Tommy."

"I thought you said they were girls."

Zack nodded. "Yup, but Uncle Trip wanted a little boy so they all have boy names."

"And his wife goes along with it?"

"Aunt Hoshi thinks its funny and tells him its all his fault." He glanced at the bathroom door for a moment then turned back to Grace. "I don't see how though." He sighed, his eyes taking on a distant look. "I miss Charlie. She's my best friend. Our birthdays are only four days apart. She's seven too."

The tone of his voice caught her attention. "How long have you been away?"

His eyes widened, and a deep sadness entered them. "Six months. Mommy and Dad sent us away. They didn't want us anymore."

She hugged him tight, finding it hard to imagine anyone not wanting such precious children. "That doesn't sound right to me Zack. There has to be another piece of the puzzle we aren't seeing." As she spoke the main door opened again and an older Vulcan woman was shoved in. Like Zack, she stumbled but kept her feet. She was surprised when Zack jumped out of her arms and raced over to the woman, throwing his arms around her. She was even more surprised when the Vulcan embraced the boy back.

"Ambassador!"

"I am pleased to see you as well, Zack Henry."

"Pixie is hurt, but Grace helped her. Where is Grandfather?"

V'Lar's eyes settled on Grace as the woman moved toward her. She held out her hand in a standard Earth handshake. As the woman took it, she shook her hand, and nodded appreciatively as Grace raised her hand in the customary Vulcan greeting. "I am V'Lar and you must be the Grace the boy spoke of."

"Yes Ma'am. It is an honor to meet you. All the humans who lived on Vulcan have learned of Ambassador V'Lar and the good she has done for her people."

V'Lar stroked her hand over Zack's hair. "Some deeds have been better than others." As Zack bounced impatiently next to her she raised a brow. "Patience young one. Your Grandfather is being sent to Earth. It seems these men have a desire to be heard, and are using us to make their point." V'Lar glanced around

the room. "Where is Pixie?"

Grace glanced up, concerned as Zack answered. "She had to go to the bathroom. She's been in there a long time. Do you think we should check on her?"

Grace and V'Lar shared a glance, and both women moved toward the bathroom door. Grace knocked lightly. "Pixie?" A soft sob in response had her cracking open the door as V'Lar drew Zack farther away. The girl was standing against the wall with her arms wrapped tightly around her waist. Grace approached her slowly. "What's the matter, Honey?"

Tear filled eyes raised to hers. The misery there was almost palpable. "I think I'm hurt really bad."

"Why? Where do you hurt?" It was possible that she had missed something, but she couldn't be sure.

"My tummy hurts really bad... and... and... there is b...blood everywhere."

Grace stared at the girl in confusion, her brow crinkled. Suddenly realization dawned. She reached down and placed her hand on the girl's lower abdomen. "It hurts here?" When T'Lin nodded, she drew her in a hug. Her hand drifted to her lower back and pressed lightly. "And here?" Again the girl nodded. "Does it hurt when you push on your tummy?" T'Lin shook her head. "Just a few more questions okay? Did any of them hurt you or touch you in any way?"

"Not that I know of."

"Okay. This has never happened before?" As T'Lin shook her head Grace smiled gently. "Has anyone ever talked to you about the changes your body will go through when you grow up?" Again the girl shook her head. "A ship full of humans and no one thought to explain the reproductive process to a little girl. Honey, it's just your body growing up. It's preparing itself for the ability to carry young."

T'Lin's eyes widened and horror replaced the fear. "You mean? But...But I'm half-Vulcan. Doctor Phlox taught us about the reproductive cycles of humans and Vulcans but I didn't think... know..." She gave Grace a helpless look. "What do I do? Does it always hurt?"

Grace hugged her quickly then pushed her toward the shower. "Everyone is different Pixie. Wash up and I'll bring you something to take care of the other." With a relieved sigh, she left the girl to her bath and returned to the main room. As she collected the necessary supplies, she filled V'Lar in on what was going on.

The older woman nodded. "Her mother would not have thought to tell her as Vulcan women do not have to deal with such things, and her father would most likely have not thought about it. Human males are reluctant to discuss such things as it usually means their little girls aren't so little anymore."

"I hope that is all it is and there is not something else going on. I would feel better if a doctor could check her out."

"You have done your best for her. We could not have asked for more." It was during this exchange that Aidan joined the group. After his mother introduced the two boys, they stared at each other uncertainly. Neither child had any experience with boys their own age, and weren't certain how to interact. They remained in a silent study of each other broken only when T'Lin and Grace came out of the bathroom. Zack glanced at his sister and started to laugh. Gone were the grungy Vulcan robes. The girl wore a pair of trousers that were about two inches too short and a button down shirt with the sleeves rolled up. In one hand she held her shoes, a pair of simple tan half-boots. She threw him a disdainful look and sat on the bed, taking a minute to put on her boots and tuck the pants into them.

The boy beside him spoke up, his tone indignant. "Mama, those are my pants!"

T'Lin sighed and tried to smile at the boy. "Thank you for letting me borrow them. My clothes were a mess."

Grace smiled at the diplomacy in her tone. Sometimes a shower could work wonders, so could knowledge for that matter. "Pixie, this is my son Aidan. Aidan, this is Pixie."

The boy pulled a pouty face. "That's a stupid name."

Zack scowled at the boy. "You leave my sister alone. She didn't do anything to you."

Aidan glanced at the boy in surprise. There was something in his face that said he loved his sister as much as Aidan loved his mom. That was enough in Aidan's book, and enough to open the door. Aidan nodded at T'Lin. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be rude. I've never heard of anyone named Pixie before. It's the name of an imaginary creature, not a person."

T'Lin sagged against the wall. She patted the bed beside her and Zack came instantly, curling against her. She glanced at Aidan and raised a brow. He came closer and sat next to his mother. "My real name is T'Lin, but when I was a baby my daddy started calling my Pixie. It stuck."

Aidan frowned. "Why'd he call you that?"

T'Lin pushed her hair behind her ears, turning her head so he could get a good look. "He said I reminded him of a little pixie with my pointed ears. He calls Zack, Sprite." She wrapped an arm around his shoulders as she said it, taking comfort from the solid feel of him against her. "Our mom is Vulcan and our Dad is human, so we are a mix of both."

Aidan smiled. "That's cool. I like Vulcans most of the time. I was born on Vulcan. Were you?"

"No. I was born on a Starship. Zack was born on Earth."

"Wow." He glanced at his mom, before continuing. "Is your dad dead too? Is that why you are here?"

"No, at least I don't think so. My parents sent us to live with the Vulcans for a while."

V'Lar moved closer and took a seat next to T'Lin. Her brow rose as Aidan pointed at her. "You her Grandma? I had one but she died like my dad."

V'Lar blinked. "The children and I are not related by blood, but yes I think I am the closest thing to a Grandmother that they have on Vulcan." Her eyes met T'Lin's. "I would be honored if you would call me such."

T'Lin nodded and nestled against V'Lar. She loved the way the older woman smelled and sounded. It was almost like having her mother in her arms again. "I miss my mom, Grandmother."

V'Lar stretched so her arm could go around both children. "I know, Child. I am sure she misses you as well."

The pain had receded somewhat, though not enough so she could completely ignore it. It was enough, however, for the anger to build back up again. If her parents hadn't sent them away, they wouldn't be in this situation. "Like they care. They sent us away remember? They don't want us anymore!"

V'Lar and Grace shared a look. Finally the older woman spoke. "That's not true." She took a deep breath as she considered how much to reveal. "T'Lin, Soval told me that you and your mother are very close, that you can sometimes feel what she feels? Especially if she is hurt or sick?"

T'Lin sat up and nodded slowly. "I can do that with Daddy, and Zack too." Her hand came up to her head. "At least I could before my head hurt."

"Your grandfather told me that the reason your parents sent both you and Zack

away was because your mother was very sick. Your parents didn't want you to go through that with her. Your mother would have tried to block you from feeling what she was feeling and it would have drained her too much. She wouldn't have had enough energy to get well."

T'Lin's eyes widened. Zack clutched her hand. "Is it the Pa'nar's syndrome?"

V'Lar blinked, surprised. She had not been aware of that. "I don't believe so."

Zack's voice was small when he spoke. "Is she going to be okay?"

"From what I understand, she isn't well yet, but she is stable."

T'Lin nodded. "Doctor Phlox will take good care of her, so will Daddy. They didn't have to send us away though."

"Knowing your parents the way I do, it must have hurt them a great deal to send you away. Your father has such a generous spirit, and your mother... I've never met anyone with her integrity. I knew them before you were born, not long after they had started their journey. I told them I sensed a great bond between them. I had no idea how right I was. I wouldn't be surprised if Enterprise comes to get you, your father leading the charge."

T'Lin sighed. "I hope you are right, Grandmother. I hope you are right."

Aidan took that moment to break in. "I like Vulcans. I've lived with them my whole life except for our time here." His gaze was focused on V'Lar, and so solemn his mother had to bite back a grin. Only heaven knew what her child was going to ask the woman, but she heard the question in his voice. She didn't expect what he came up with. "May I call you Grandmother too?"

V'Lar floored her with her answer. ""Of course."

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