

Sa'ren Part 1 Tears That Heal

by
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and
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Prologue:

The Seals Open

It is 2048, and Earth is a dark and terrible place. In response to the terrorist actions in 2001, most of the countries of the world ended up in a War against Terrorism that eventually became the Third World War. In the aftermath, only half the population of the planet remained, and a new world government came to power. In 2011, a group calling themselves the Eldar took control of much of the free world; almost Fascist in doctrine, all liberty was changed. Religion became outlawed, all sexual variance eliminated and banned on pain of death, and slavery is allowed and upheld in law. It was not a good world to be an orphan in, even less so for one 'out of place'...

Province Wales, United Britannic Isles. Bridgend, Old Mid. Glamorgan

In the Slave's Section of Bridgend Library, seventeen youths were seated in front of PCs, wearing headphones and focusing their entire attention on the lessons before them. Striding around them was the Slave Tutor, tasked with ensuring they did not part from the required teachings and indoctrinations. Every so often, he would slap a boy hard across the back of the head, most of the time for no other reason than because he could.

In the top left corner of the room sat a small, black-haired boy. His rich blue eyes fixed upon the screen before him; his ears covered well, he seemed to pay no interest in the movements of the Tutor. He was not, however, studying the day's lessons at all. He already knew every lesson right up to those taught to the final classes. He was currently on the Internet, via a hacking program he had designed. With a simple touch of a key, which would only seem like him going to the next page of work, the whole screen would shift back to the standard Slave access. Within the mainframe ran two, not one, virtual hard-drives. One was the original, the other was illegal. The other belonged to Joel.

Joel, to be blunt, was a prodigy. Photographic memory and an aptitude for science and programming kept him one step ahead of the Tutors here, not to mention the law, such as it was. Like every Orphan-Slave, he was dressed in grey; pants and shirt of thin coarse wool that rubbed painfully against the welts and scars that covered his body, and did little to keep him warm. Upon his brow was a barcode tattoo, the number and mark of a Slave.

Yet his current physical state did nothing to detract from the fact that this boy was unique. Twelve years old, nearly thirteen; he was so undernourished that he looked closer to ten. However, a pixie face, framed by his matted, curly hair, and a quick intelligence in his eyes all showed a beauty that seemed unearthly, but was largely ignored. Not even the dirt and bruises that covered his features could hide it.

In less than twenty minutes, Mr. Williams would come to pick him up from 'school' and return him to his work at his home. More than enough time, he knew. Before him was the news about the current state of the world. News not told by the puppet press, but on the Underground. Through these forbidden servers and contacts, Joel had found out all he could about this world, but it was not to his liking. Every

new thing he discovered only made him sadder, for he knew how much further he was from freedom with every single thing learned. More saddening still, was the total lack of the wonder that once held sway barely forty years ago. Music, art, and culture were all gone. Television shows portraying 'Anti-Eldar' beliefs and all things that would allow people to escape the horror of the world, if only for a moment, had been banned.

It was only on this underground network that Joel had been able to experience some of what had passed away. Music from the turn of the century played through his 'phones while he searched for news on the Resistance. It was not good news. More had been caught and executed without trial, and some of Joel's favourite sites had been brought down. Reports of more senseless slaughter; the killing of people whose only crime was to believe or live differently from the norm. He sighed quietly to himself, the black dread of his existence slowly came back to the fore in his mind as the time to leave approached. All he took with him was his memories, and at night in bed, he would re-see those old shows, listen again as his mind sang those old songs. Of the religions that had long been outlawed, Christianity had caught Joel's attention, and seeing the only chance for a 'father' in his life, he had memorized the Bible. God was now his Father, and the only one he had to talk to.

After checking the news, he started surfing for more stories, from authors long since dead and gone for joining the resistance against the Eldar. David Eddings, John Hollingway, TSL... many more, all gone. Only some of their writings lived on to give Joel a 'fool's dream' of hope, but it was enough. He picked a small story, only the first eight chapters had been saved, and re-read it; the rest of it was now lost forever.

The clock above the door chimed 4pm, and on the dot, a man walked in and waited by the Tutor's desk. Without being prompted, Joel stood and turned off the PC, quietly whispering under his breath "Night, 'Goos'..." He waited for the Tutor to dismiss him, and once done, he hurried to his master's side painfully as the fresh wounds he carried started to bleed at the movement. Following without word, Joel went behind him as they walked to the car. Mr. Williams simply pointed to the passenger side door, and then got into the car himself. Joel did as directed and they left for home.

Eight miles from the town, Mr. Williams pulled into the driveway of an old Victorian farmhouse. It was a fairly decent looking building, but a palpable sense of dread hung over the place. This was the site of much of Joel's pain. It would never be home to him. Once the car came to a stop, Joel left it and stood by the front door; his eyes were turned down as he waited for his master to open up. Barely a week had gone by since Mrs. Williams had left her husband, and the sense of fear seemed to loom ever closer.

Feeling his master's eyes upon him, Joel inwardly shuddered. The door was opened and he was pushed inside. As always, he stood to one side of the stairs waiting for his orders. They never came. Mr. Williams seemed content to mess about in the living room and kitchen for the next hour, leaving the boy to stand alone, shivering in the cold hallway. When he did finally approach Joel, it was in total silence. A fist connecting sharply to Joel's jaw and a stunning pain when his head slammed into the wall was all that started to give away his master's intentions.

He came too a few moments later to find himself in his cell of a room being stripped naked. He knew better than to fight this, yet a gut wrenching fear took over. Mr. Williams was a homophobic bigot, and

had, thankfully, never sought sexual contact before with Joel. His wife had had to deal with this pervert's excesses. Now the boy knew what that 'dread' he had been feeling pointed to. He was about to be raped.

For the first time in his life, he fought back, screaming all the while. Pain from a beating is one thing, but after this act, he would be slain. His master would be unable to leave him alive, as he would not stand to be near Joel after he had used him so. This Joel knew for a fact. More blows rained down on Joel's head and shoulders and a brutal slam into his gut from Mr. Williams' knee brought Joel to the ground, sobbing and groaning in agony. The last of his clothing was ripped from his body, and he was hurled onto the bed, then quickly tied down by his wrists, and facing up. He was pulled to the edge, giving his master access to his behind.

Still sobbing, Joel looked through his tears at his worst dream made real. As his master lowered his own pants and underwear, Joel yelled out and closed his eyes tight.

Yet nothing happened. He cracked open his eyes after a moment to stare at his master, his breath gulped in panicked measures. He did not know why he was not coming any closer. Then he noticed; his master had not just stopped, but seemed frozen in place, as if all motion ceased to exist. Joel started looking everywhere, his eyes as large as saucers. There was no sound, no motion, no nothing. To his right was the window and the late afternoon outside, but no sound of the country could be heard. In front of him was Mr. Richards, frozen in time.

Then the wall just behind his master started to change. As if liquid, the wall shifted and twisted, and a strange mist appeared in the middle of the effect. The phenomenon grew up by seven feet and across by ten. Irregularly shaped, like a circle that had been squashed from various directions, the sight captivated Joel, even as he tucked his feet up towards his body in a futile effort to protect himself should he need to.

Through the mist stepped a being the like of which Joel had never seen. An angel, yet seeming rather younger and more strangely dressed than you would have imagined of an angel. Wings of bright gold-coloured feathers, brown hair and eyes, and dressed in what looked like white jeans, tee-shirt and trainers! Joel gaped at him.

The angel moved quickly to the boy, and with a gesture, the ropes fell from his arms. "Come, child. This is over for you. Come here, Joel," speaking softly, the angel opened his arms. Joel, after a quick look at the terrible form of Mr. Williams, made his choice in a heartbeat. He flung himself into the arms of the angel, who shifted Joel about so that he was sitting on his right hip and he drew his right wing down to cover the boy's nakedness and warm him. The blood on Joel's body did not seem to rub off onto the angel's clothing; neither did the dirt that had rarely been cleaned off the slave boy. It just had no meaning to angelic cloth.

The angel turned around and as he stepped towards the mist-like portal, two other beings of light appeared; but not from the portal. These were over seven feet tall, armed with swords made from crackling lightning, and whose faces shone like bronze. Wings of membranous silk flowed from their backs, and the glint of Holy justice and wrath was seen blazing in their eyes. The larger one spoke, "Go, and take him home. We will deal with the filth here. Please warn the Guardian that this place has offended the Father. The Test is over, and this universe has failed. Go quickly, time is short: and the child's own universe is waiting for him." With gentle fingers the being brushed back Joel's hair and smiled at him.

"As you command, Lord Michael," the golden winged youth said as he carried Joel through the portal, which quickly vanished. The two large angels looked at each other for a long moment, and then Michael asked "What of the woman? She must pay for this as well!"

"One of your captains has been sent for her. Do not worry, for justice will be served this day. Do you have your mandate?" replied Gabriel.

"Authority is given you to repay that man for the horror done to the child, followed by forever in hell.' I never thought I would say this, but it will be a pleasure!"

Then Michael, Archangel of the Host, made a motion with his sword and time moved again...

... And the screams began.

Joel had kept his eyes closed as the winged youth stepped through the portal, so he failed to see what made it, and didn't notice the new place he was in. The youth moved with haste and settled down to sit with his back to an ancient wall. His wings enlarged and formed a cocoon around himself and the boy. Power flowed around them and all the outside seemed shut off from within what was in essence a sphere of golden light.

Joel trembled, and without realizing, asked his first question in over six years, "Am I d... dead?"

"Far from it," chuckled the angel, "you are safe and soon to go home. To your true home," he continued quickly, noticing Joel's fearful reaction to the word 'home'. He moved Joel around and placed him between his legs on the floor facing him. Joel finally opened his eyes and looked at the angel. Calmness and love radiated from the youthful face before him.

Something about the power coming from the youth kept the temperature median and comfortable inside the sphere, but there was still a lingering doubt that stopped the boy from relaxing into the offered safety. He blurted out past his subconscious voice that always told him to remain silent, "H... how can I t... trust you? How do I kn... know you don't work for... for him...?"

"I assume you mean Lucifer?" The boy nodded, "then there are only three options: either I serve the Father, serve Lucifer or you are dreaming," the angel pointed at Joel, "Pinch yourself."

Joel did so. "N... not a dream..." and then continued stubbornly, "but what of the r... rest? Even the d... devil can 'appear as an angel of light', you kn... know!"

"True, but if you know that part of Scripture, you should know what no Fallen can say, do you not?" Seeing Joel hesitantly nod, the youth leaned in and whispered in the boy's ear, "Jesus has come in the Flesh."

Joel relaxed, and leaned in to the angel before him, tears slowly making their way from his eyes. He could trust him. For the first time in nearly thirteen years, Joel had found someone to trust.

"Sleep, little one, for I will keep your dreams at bay," and the angel gently pushed the child back so he was lying against the golden wings that encircled him. Feeling totally supported and protected, Joel finally gave in to his body's demands for rest, and slept. "Sleep in peace, child..."

He looked down on the child nestled into his wings, and sighed. So much pain, mistrust and hopelessness seemed to permeate the boy. He set about healing the open, bleeding wounds; wounds that had been prevented from causing more damage by the time flux of the planet they were now on.

Once all the sores were closed, he ran his fingers through the boy's mind, and absorbed his feelings and stilled them. Pain, grief, loss, loneliness, fear above all, yet tucked away was a small, yet powerful thing... love. Strength unknown to the child was possessed by the child, and it would take equal strength of love to bring that power out. For now, the simple healing he had preformed would let the child sleep in comfort. The remainder of his pains would be needed to reveal what must be. He sighed, and murmured softly, "Only by going through pain and darkness can we truly appreciate the light. Only by having bad days can the good days come. I wish there were another way, little one, but experience always shows different."

He was determined to take as much time as needed to prepare the child for his return to his true home, his true realm. Things only thought to be fantasy and fiction would come to shocking reality, and he knew that the boy's fragile mind might not take too many surprises. There were surprises enough already, even for him.

He relaxed back and kept vigil over Joel, as well as to watch the progress in the stars above their heads. Angelic vision enabled him to see whole galaxies wink out at the furthest reaches of space. The Seals had been opened upon this perishing universe.

Joel started to stir and wake up, his body no longer the mass of pain he had endured for so long. A few aches lingered, but all in all, he was comfortable. Opening his eyes he saw the smiling face of his rescuer. Remembering the angel's answer just before he went to sleep, he quickly accepted the strangeness of sleeping against an angel's wings. He remained relaxed and nestled further into the soft feathers he lay upon, and a contented sigh escaped his lips.

The young angel noticed his charge awaken and asked "Feeling hungry, little one?"

Joel looked at him with puzzlement, for he had never been asked anything before. Was he to respond? Or should he remain silent as he was taught?

"You can speak, child. You can ask, seek and know whatever you wish." The youth said with assurance. His power flared and he removed the child's learned resistance towards asking questions for a time. His wings drew the child in towards him and into a sitting position. "Are you hungry?"

"Yes, sir," came the hesitant response.

"What would you like to eat? Anything you want, I can make for you."

Now Joel really showed perplexity. A choice? He started to reply slowly, "Sir, I, err... I've always eaten what I was given. I will eat whatever you choose to give me."

The angel looked at him carefully, "You've never had much to eat before, have you?" Joel shook his head. "What have you eaten, what type of food were you given before?"

"Bread mostly, sir. A little meat dinner a few times each week and fruit if I did my work well. Only chicken or apples, though." He paused, "I don't deserve good food," he finished so quietly that only the angel's supernatural hearing could catch it.

"Child, you deserve everything good! Everything you have learned until now will change, do you understand? You can have whatever you desire, now." He said with passion, then softly "Tell me, of the 'good food' you have seen others eat, is there anything you have wanted to try?"

After a moment's thought, Joel remembered what his master had always had for breakfast. Something he had always loved the smell off. He stuttered out "Scrambled eggs? On toast? If it is okay, sir?"

With those words that very smell he had remembered filled the golden globe they were cocooned in. Hot pieces of toast with butter melted through them and piles of steaming scrambled eggs were nearly overflowing a plate that had appeared in the angel's hand. Joel just looked at it in wonder, his mouth suddenly watering.

With a giggle, the angel moved his hand in front of Joel and produced a knife and fork, "Don't touch the plate, it's hot. Tuck in, kid."

And tuck in Joel did! Never had he tasted anything like this. It tasted better than it smelled, hot and filling and totally delicious. He ate until he felt like he would burst, yet the plate was as full as when he had began. He knew he could eat no more, yet he couldn't leave food! He would be in so much trouble! Tears started in the corners of his eyes. The angel noticed and asked "What's the matter?"

"I have to finish, sir. I can't eat any more, but I have to..." started the panicked replay.

"Shhh," with understanding the angel made the plate and cutlery vanish, "you could never have finished that plate, Joel. We of heaven always give until it runs over. You did well, though. I've not seen many eat that much; apart from my brothers, that is."

Joel's tears had stopped even before they had truly begun, and he asked with growing curiosity, "Brothers? Do angels have brothers?"

"I was once alive, Joel. I was not created an angel, unlike those others you saw yesterday. They are Princes of Heaven. I am human, even though I have died."

"Do all humans get wings when they die?"

"Nope, not all," the youth moved Joel about so that he was sitting on his lap in a tight hug, one hand wrapped securely around Joel's now full, extended stomach, "Some get to be Guardian Angels, others Saints. Many, however, remain fairly normal and stay in Paradise. We all have jobs; just some have to

go back to the mortal worlds to do them." He started to brush his fingers through Joel's dark hair, easily untangling it without causing pain. Joel's loose curls started to fall free of each other.

"Oh. I'm sorry," was the relaxed, quiet response.

"What for, me dying?" Feeling Joel's head nod he continued, "It was just my time, and now I get to do some wonderful things for those I love that I was unable to do before. Everyone has a day to die, Joel. It was just mine, that's all. Now, if you are comfortable, there are a few things I need to tell you. Things you need to know before you get a few too many surprises. Does that sound okay?"

More questions, more choices. He was so unused to this, so all he could manage was a weak nod. He pulled the angel's arms tighter about him and pressed himself back into the warmth of his chest. The angel smiled as Joel sought comfort, and thought 'Poor boy. Take all the hugs you want, little one, and there will be plenty to follow soon.'

Then he spoke, "Right, jump in if you need to ask anything. Remember, you are allowed to ask whatever questions you want. I'll try and keep this as simple as I can:

"You were not born on the Earth you grew up on. You were not even born in this universe, and you were most definitely not in the right *time*. I do not know how you ended up here, but Our Father received a call from the Guardian informing Him of a time-shift that should not have occurred, into a universe that is totally restricted!"

"Right time?" queried Joel. "What do you mean?"

"You were born in 1991, not 2035. You have not only been lost in another universe, but also time shifted. That is why I was put on detached duty to come to your aid. I am also from your true time period and universe, as is my family. The Guardian has not explained much to me other than that you must be returned to where you came from, and to the correct time that you would have been in had you never been lost.

"Now, this universe is a little different from most of the others. Here, only Earth has life. This place is an experiment, in a way; an experiment that has failed and is now in the process of being purged. Those on earth who are struggling to love and live will be granted immediate access to the Father. The majority, however... well, let's just say they are going somewhere... rather 'warm'..."

Joel suddenly caught onto something and broke in with excitement "Universes? You mean there really are other Earths? Other places and timelines like in those sci-fi shows? And do other worlds have people? Aliens? Like Star Trek?"

The angel giggled at the lad's joy, "Yes, Joel, many, in fact. But here's the most puzzling thing. In every universe, in every timeline there are people born with an ability to dream about the other universes. Some people have dreamt of things and made up books and stories and TV shows thinking they were just their own ideas. But they are true, in another place."

"Superman? Spiderman? X-Men? Star Trek?! All true?!" Joel asked in wonder, remembering all those secret websites he had found.

"Some? Yes. All? Maybe, but that is not for us to know. The world we come from is such a place, where things you think are just fiction are real. I am forbidden to tell you what is different there, though, as you must find out for yourself. But remember: you can expect some things to be wholly familiar to you, yet you would have only seen them in books or on TV. Don't panic when you realize where you are, for you will be safe where we're headed. That's about it, I think. You ready to go?"

Joel nodded; excitement mixed with nervous fear coursed through him. The angelic youth stood up, and started to tuck his wings back behind him, shrinking them back to normal as he did so. He held Joel securely on his right hip, then used his wing again as a cover for his nakedness. The sphere of power slowly dissipated, revealing the desolate world they were on. The sky above was almost totally void of stars.

Joel looked around taking in the sights of a gigantic ruined city, now lit mainly by the bright presence of the angel. It reached further than he could see, and it seemed oddly familiar. The angel started to walk around the wall they had rested against then spoke, "Guardian, I bring a message and a request. Will you hear me?"

Joel looked towards that which the angel had addressed, and gasped.

//I will hear you, Saint of Heaven. What is your Message?//

"This Realm hath failed the Test. The Seals have opened, and all is being consumed. Thy Task here is complete. Thus says Our Father."

//My thanks. And your Request?//

The Saint looked down at the stunned face of the boy in his arms, "It is time for this youngster to go home, Guardian. Can you open a fixed point, to our own universe and to our correct time?"

//With ease. Joel shall be the first of mortal kind to step through me from this realm. The first... and the last//

Joel had recovered somewhat from the shock of seeing fantasy made reality, and looked the Saint in the eyes, "May I ask a question, sir?"

He responded with a laugh, "Yes, but don't call me 'sir'! You're making me feel old!"

Joel giggled, "Umm, okay, but what's your name? If I ain't to call you sir, what should I call you?"

"In life I was called Michael Patrick Short, now I'm Saint Mikey of Urbandale, Protector of Gay and Abandoned Youths," he replied with a smile, "but you can call me Mikey."

Joel returned his smile, the first truly happy smile that had come across his face in years, "Okay, Mikey?" Seeing him nod, Joel continued, "Is that what I think it is; The Guardian of Forever? And is this 'Forever World'?"

Mikey started to walk towards the Guardian, "Yes, this is 'Forever World', and this is the Guardian of Forever."

"Star Trek..." Joel whispered in wonder.

"Yes and no. The Guardian is present in all Universes. Not different versions of him, but he's actually in each at once."

As they drew closer, the mists within the Guardian started to swirl. Joel was holding tightly to Mikey's side, his fear and nervousness starting to grow, as he didn't know what lay behind this portal. He closed his eyes and buried his face into Mikey's neck; all desire to ask questions gone, for Mikey had just withdrawn that temporary gift so that true healing could take place.

Seconds before they entered the mists, Joel heard within his mind the quiet voice of the Guardian, **//For the Mending of a Father's Heart; for the Healing of a Broken Son; for two Souls to join in Love; for a Brotherhood that will never break...//**

Then they were gone, and the Guardian was alone again on a deserted world in a dying universe. Then 'Forever World' vanished, and the realm soon followed, swallowed by the Power of the released Seals.

Author's Note:

The original concept for the boy 'Joel' came from a daydream I used to have as an eight and nine year old boy. After reading the wonderful stories that now fill the CSU, I saw a chance to bring that dream to life in a way I never expected. 'Joel' has grown and developed over the last few weeks and has now been given life by the kind permission of all those authors working in the Clan Short Universe.

I hope I can realize this dream and bring 'Joel' to the point that I imagined all those years ago. I also hope this brings some small joy to those who read it, and remember: Don't let your childlike dreams die; they can live if you choose to let them!

Enjoy and God Bless,

Iluvantir

Editor's Note:

The City on the Edge of Forever was one of my all time favourite episodes of Star Trek. It was very nice to see the Guardian of Forever and he seemed to be very caring and helpful.

This wonderful story is going to be a fantastic addition to the annals of history in the universe into which our hero is led. His new life, I predict is going to change and certainly for the better.

With the help and encouragement of the Angel that helps him find where he belongs, I am sure he will thrive and have many wonderful adventures.

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher

Soundboard Notes:

I'm excited: The first time I'm allowed to write such a note, and then for a story which took shape in front of my eyes.

It has been a breeze to work together with Ilu, because he doesn't get upset if I remark at the tiny things which are not coming together in my opinion. He sits them down with me and explains how it is meant, or sometimes even says: Yeah, you are right, I should explain that better.

I'm really glad I'm allowed to help out here, and I'm really curious how the story will develop. Joel had to endure so much in his short life. And it looks like Mikey got there just in time to prevent the worst. Joel deserves some rest, joy and love. But I'm positive that there will be enough of all of it in the upcoming chapters, from the things I have heard up to now.

And even if my editing skills are not up to the standard of other editors on the fort, I will gladly be the "soundboard" which bounces, changes and maybe even enhances the ideas Ilu has.

John Hollingway

Clan Short Archivist's Notes:

This looks like it is going to be a truly interesting new story in the Clan Short Universe. We will just have to wait and see how the story develops but from what I have seen so far it will definitely grab your attention. Ilu has done a commendable job for a first time author and I can't wait for more. Everyone should sit back and grab your arm rests as this looks like it is going to be a roller coaster ride on a grand scale.

The Story Lover

Chapter 1:**Hidden Secret**

NOTE: Please read the following stories before this Chapter:

"Memories Part 2, Chapter 16" – By ACFan
"Be Careful What You Ask For..." Chapter 5 – by D&B

If you don't, you'll get spoilers!

Place: 'Forever World', Multidimensional Planet

Time: Forever

Federation and Starfleet Codename: Planet 'Gateway' **Classified**

Movement. Space. Time.

Meaningless concepts. This was all NOW and HERE to the Guardian of Forever. He twisted his thoughts and fixed the Point of himself at a small, blue-green world in orbit around a G2V Spectral Class star. The star was Sol. The world, Terra... more commonly called 'Earth' by its indigenous life-forms.

Such a small world in an out of the way segment of one of this galaxy's spiral arms.

Such a very small world... yet it was here that Time was twisting, shaping, reforming: Possibilities lay here that did not occur anywhere else in Creation. Events already in motion, and more waiting to spring forth.

All due to the actions of a small group of people. No, a small group of boys.

//Not so small a group. You will grow, and have grown, in Time. I would know...//

The Guardian, the one given Mandate to preserve Time, was now about to set a new ripple in Time's Fabric: A lost child, a lonely boy, was going home.

//Now...// and the Guardian opened his portal on Terra... and chaos ensued!

Monday, 25th October, 2004

CIC Building – Recreation Room - 3.30pm

Cory and Sean were cuddled together and quietly watched their kids, brothers and friends. They watched them play, talk and generally chill out in the Rec Room, as they should all have been able to do all along. It had been a long time since Cory had been able to just simply sit together with Sean, or so it seemed, and that day itself had been unusual with the appearance of a man and four boys from an alternate universe.

The story they had told defied belief: they had known all about the Clan up to the time that Vincent had left on the Yorktown. Cory shook his head with a smile. Well, at least things could not get much more unbelievable.

Since Kurt and the boys were now with Allen Thompson for the afternoon, and things in CIC were returning to near normal, Cory decided that he should obey Grandfather Sarek's orders to the letter. He relaxed, and then pulled Sean in tighter to give him a gentle kiss, just trying to regain a sense of peace that had been so cruelly torn from them all two days before.

Suddenly...

"Daddy! Poppa! What's happening?! Look!" Timmy yelled out and pointed at the far wall that stood between the Rec Room and Main CIC.

Cory jerked his head up from the kiss with Sean, and they both stared with jaws dropping at the sight: the wall seemed to shift and change, become liquid and started to reform. The effect branched sideways by ten feet and got to seven feet in height. As the wall became more and more liquid, a mist started to take on form within it.

As he and Sean jumped up to get between the 'portal' and the boys, Cory yelled, "Set Condition Red, Security to the Rec Room. Mom, get the kids out of here, NOW!"

Sirens started to sound as Teri ran in from the dinning room, followed closely by Dan and Doc Austin. They glanced quickly at the forming 'portal', then herded the smaller boys out, but Timmy alone refused and ran to stand by his parents, eyes glinting fiercely. The older boys started to gather with Cory and Sean as well, especially those armed with Phasemorphs.

William and Duke, however, looked down from their perch on a bookshelf. They both seemed to be amused by all this activity as if knowing that it was a good thing that was about to happen.

Security ran in just as Teri, Dan, the Doc and the kids ran out, and JJ and Adam stood with them, all aiming at the growing 'portal' in the wall. "Phasers to stun only," JJ ordered.

As the Mists parted in the 'portal' a tall figure could be seen walking towards them from out of an alien, barren and blasted world. He had bright gold wings and seemed to be carrying something...

"Hold! Stand down Condition Red!" Cory called in sudden relief, and motioned at the security team to holster their phasers. JJ and Adam quickly lowered their aim away from Mikey, and nodded to the security team who then filed back out of the Rec Room. Teri, Doc Austin, and Dan came back in through the door as Security left, leading back in all the smaller boys. They all stopped when they saw Mikey standing there, a wing covering something in his arms, and the portal in the wall closing behind him.

Cory lowered his own hand as he turned back to his oldest brother. "Mikey! You tryin' to scare the crap outta us, bro?" he admonished.

Joel, now covered almost completely by Mikey's wing, shook. The shouting and raised voices had terrified him. He pulled his face in tighter to Mikey's neck, his little body trembling as if threatening to shake apart. Mikey's left hand was pressed to the back of Joel's head, stroking his hair trying to sooth him, "Sorry guys, there was no real graceful way for me to get here, and I needed to bring this little one straight inside." He lowered his wing enough so that Joel was seen clearly by the others.

Joel felt the back of his head being uncovered and a small sob of fear escaped. Tyler seemed to rock backwards into Kyle, for the burst of fear was palpable to him. He moved forward and reached out with his power, siphoning away part of that fear and grounding it. Joel slowly began to tremble less, and started to relax into Mikey's embrace.

Sean, looking at the terrified kid, asked softly "Who's this, bro?"

"This is Joel," Mikey shifted his head slightly and kissed the frightened boy on the top of his head, "Joel? It's fine, kiddo, you can look up now."

Trustingly, Joel slowly looked up into Mikey's eyes. Seeing reassurance, he then looked about the room and at the boys and adults there. The split lip and bruises on his face were not new things for the Clan to see and elicited only compassion, but the barcode that was clearly visible on his forehead brought a gasp from a number of boys. The sudden sound they made caused him to cringe back fearfully into Mikey.

"It's okay, Joel, don't worry," Mikey soothed softly, then he turned back to his brother. "I'll explain everything later, Tigger; but Joel is going to need a few things right now. A shower, some clothes and a hot drink; in that order. Do you think the Clan can manage that?" A few of the boys giggled quietly.

"Sure thing, Mikey," Cory said with a tight, sad smile as he looked about the room, "I think we can *just* manage that." Seeing that Joel seemed very skittish, he selected the two boys who seemed best suited, "Babe, Ty? Can y'all hook Joel up with a shower and clothes, please?"

After getting nods from them, Cory turned back to Mikey. "Okay, Mikey, they'll take him from here. I'll talk with you and Mom while we wait for them."

Acknowledging Cory, Mikey said to Joel, "These guys will look after you now, little one. I'm staying right here as I need to explain a few things to my brother and mother."

Forcing the words past his lips, Joel stuttered quietly "Is...is this my n...new f...family?"

With a small nod, Mikey replied "Yes. Whatever happens, this is your family now." He had, however, misunderstood Joel's meaning.

Joel started to try and get down from Mikey's arms, and his eyes widened in panic as Mikey did not release him straight away. "Please... p...please, Mikey," he started to sob. "L...let me d...down! I'll be b...beat, if I d...don't!"

Mikey quickly lowered Joel to the floor before the panicking boy fell from his arms. He looked on in amazement and horror as Joel first looked about the room, and then seeing that Teri and Dan were the nearest adults, approached them and stood quickly to attention. His hands were rigid at his side, and he kept his fear filled eyes staring at the ground before Dan's feet. He made no move to cover his nakedness, nor did he show any outward signs of embarrassment. He seemed just a little taller than Kyle and looking not much older, but all skin and bone. His ribs were painfully easy to see through his skin; the many scars showing through the dirt and blood covering him gave mute explanation to what Joel had referred to by 'I'll be beat.' Everyone just looked at him in sorrow.

Cory felt compassion rise in him and his eyes started to moisten, but they suddenly blazed in anger at what Joel's next words implied. Joel trembled, "Master. Please f...forgive me f...or..."

Cory rushed forward with Sean on his heels. He placed his hand softly over Joel's mouth to silence him, and then started to lift his chin while Sean turned him to face them properly. Dan was just standing there looking at the scarred skin on this trembling boy, not believing what had just happened, and Teri had her hand covering her mouth at the sight of Joel's tortured, beaten body.

"Look at me, Joel," Cory whispered as he and Sean crouched down before him. Joel did as he was told. He saw Cory was close to tears and gasped in astonishment. Cory asked, still in a soft whisper, "Why did you call Dan 'master'?"

Joel answered quickly, yet with puzzlement, "I am a s...slave. Y...you are m...my f...family. I...I must serve y...you."

Cory just stared at him for a long moment and then looked back towards Mikey. Mikey nodded sadly, "He was a slave, bro. I should have seen this reaction coming. I'm sorry."

Turning back to Joel, Cory spoke with quiet conviction, "We are *not* your masters. You do *not* serve us. You *never* need to serve us, nor anyone else, *ever* again! You are *free*, Joel." Sean just nodded firmly, and gently squeezed Joel's shoulder.

Free? Joel had held little hope of freedom as it was a dream impossible to make true. His eyes just darted from Cory's to Sean's and back in disbelief and mistrust. He was looking into their eyes to seek the lie. He could not find it. He turned his head to look directly at Mikey, an unformed question hovering on his lips.

Mikey moved in close and spoke quietly into Joel's ear, "These boys are telling you the truth, Joel. You can trust them, really you can; you are free."

Joel blinked at him, still not entirely sure of the truthfulness in the answer, so Mikey added a nod and a kiss to Joel's head to emphasise his statement. Joel turned back to the two boys kneeling before him. His heart came suddenly to his eyes and tears began to trace lines down his cheeks. A huge sob burst from his lips and he started to tremble violently; it caused Cory to reach out without thinking to pull him in for a hug and without hesitation, Joel started to hug him back for all he was worth.

His slight frame was not a burden as he wrapped himself around Cory, his legs hooked about Cory's waist. The realization of what had been said began to slowly sink in. '*Free? I'm... I'm free?!*' He tucked his face into Cory's neck and began to openly cry, letting loose all the pain he had carried within him for so long. His sobs of anguish seemed very loud in the sudden silence that had fallen upon the room and Sean, unable to hold back his own tears, began to cry as well. He pulled both Cory and Joel into his own arms, thus keeping Joel between them in a tight hug. Cory did nothing other than to hold Joel protectively while muttering soothing words; his own feelings also bringing him close to tears due to the obvious need projected from the hurting boy. Everyone else was just quietly watching as Joel was cuddled by the two kneeling teens.

Joel's feelings rolled within him; never before had he felt protected, felt safe. Now he was. He kept his face hidden in the nape of Cory's neck and Cory was gently stroking the soft curls of his hair soothingly. He was surrounded by two pairs of strong arms, and his back seemed guarded by Sean's chest. The back of his neck started to get wet as Sean's tears fell in response to his own. He could feel Cory's heart beating against his chest as he tightened his grip on the blond-haired teen.

He cried until his tears dried up, salted lines sparkled in the lights of the room as they ran down his face and upon Cory's neck. His sobs quietened, and he was just sniffing and hiccuping slightly as he absorbed the attention from both his new protectors.

Once the child's sobs had lessened, Sean pulled back slightly and helped Cory to slowly stand up, bringing the trembling, distraught youngster up with them. Even though Joel was slightly bigger than Kyle, he weighed so much less that Cory had no problems holding him to his side and cradled over his left hip. He looked down at the dirt and blood that had transferred to him from Joel, before he stated quietly, "I think I'll shower with you guys too." Facing Mikey he asked, "Will you wait with Mom, bro?"

"Sure thing, Cor."

Turning and motioning with his eyes, Cory led Tyler and Sean into the bathroom just off from the Rec Room. A murmuring started as soon as they had left as the boys began to whisper among each other, as well as to start throwing questions at Mikey.

Teri watched the bathroom door close, then she turned to the boys and stilled them, "Okay, can you grab some of CD's clothes for Joel, Tommy? Joel seems to be about his size. Also, go grab some for Cory and Sean too, as I think they'll need clean clothes after hugging Joel." The boy nodded and darted off quickly. Teri continued, this time with a slight hardening to her voice, "Mike, you come with me to the kitchen right now and start explaining what's going on."

"Okay Mom," He led his mother and the other adults out of the door, whilst the rest of the room went back to talking excitedly about what just happened.

As they left the room, Teri asked seriously, "First, why didn't you clean and clothe him yourself, Mike?"

"Trust me, Mom. That poor kid needs healing. Let my brothers work their magic and watch them when they come back."

Teri simply smiled and nodded with understanding as they entered the kitchen and found seats, and then the questions really began.

Once they were in the bathroom and the door was closed, the boys started to disrobe, piling their clothes in random areas. Cory was still holding Joel securely in a tight embrace; the child's trembling had stilled and his tears had stopped. Once Sean was ready, he approached Cory and Joel.

"Joel, is it okay if I hold you while Cory gets ready?" he asked gently.

Joel turned to look at Sean and saw only concern. He looked back into the encouraging eyes of Cory, then back and nodded silently. Reaching out, he was transferred from one to the other, and then was settled over Sean's hip, with his head resting lightly on Sean's shoulder. Touched by this show of trust, Sean kissed the top of Joel's head, then giggled slightly, "You are as light as Timmy, Joel! You need fattening up!"

Raising his head, Joel just looked at him, and a very small, sad smile tugged at his mouth. He then rested his head back on Sean's shoulder and watched as Cory stripped off. Safety and contentment, both so new to feel and only barely recognisable to him, filled his heart. He absorbed the warmth from his contact with Sean and relaxed fully into his arms.

"I'm ready, let's go," Cory announced, and the boys moved into the big shower, Tyler bringing shampoo and soap with him. After turning on the water and getting it to the right temperature, they got under the stream and Sean lowered Joel to stand in between them. Cory spoke softly, "We'll help you shower, if you want, or you can just clean yourself. It's up to you, Joel."

Joel had never showered before. He was looking at the boys around him, biting his lower lip. "I... I don't know what to do..." he whispered fearfully, believing that he would get punished for his lack of knowledge.

Tyler simply took the initiative, guided him directly under the water, and started cleaning off the dirt and dried blood with Sean moving to help, while Cory set to work on Joel's hair. "You've never had a shower before?" he asked softly, as he worked in the shampoo.

"N...no. I wasn't allowed to get clean. At least not very often." Joel mumbled as he looked back over his shoulder at Tyler. Tyler just smiled at him with compassion, so he relaxed more into Tyler's hands that gently soaped and washed his sore tender back. The light, gentle touch was easing his pains and he suddenly realised that he felt... felt good! For the first time that he could remember, he had people around him that were making him feel better, not worse. Tyler was continuously siphoning off the fear and mistrust that was rising like a never ending tide in Joel. He projected into the battered kid as much reassurance as he felt Joel could handle.

"Never mind, bro, that's all over with now. It will never happen again." Sean said, as he got more soap to work into the boy's chest and stomach. At this, Joel started to relax even more, a small smile played upon his face, and he very nearly started to purr at this unaccustomed affectionate attention. He grunted sharply with pain, however, when Sean brushed a hand over some of his ribs. "Sore there, bro?" Joel nodded mutely. "Okay, I'm sorry. I'll be careful."

As the accumulated ingrained dirt from years of neglect was being washed away, large bruises were clearly seen upon his back, stomach and even more across his chest. Scars old and new traced his upper torso, buttocks, arms and legs. There appeared to even be old burn marks, as if from a car cigarette lighter, or even cigarette ends that had been cruelly pressed into his flesh. The boys said nothing; they just looked with pity and horror at Joel, then at each other.

As Tyler was gently soaping up Joel's back, he asked, "Where did this blood come from, dude? You have no open cuts back here."

"Yesterday morning, sir... I... I failed to wake in time, so I was punished," came the stammered reply. "I think Mikey took care of the cuts last night."

Tyler nodded, but Cory then squatted down in front of Joel and looked directly up into his eyes. "Joel, I'm Cory. This is Sean and he's Tyler. Please," he pleaded softly, "please don't call us 'sir'."

Joel stared at him, and then at the other two and saw that they were asking him the same thing with their eyes. An order was an order. He turned back, nodded and whispered, "Cory." Cory pulled him in to a quick hug which he accepted eagerly.

As Cory pulled away and started washing him again, Joel started to wonder. Why did these boys want to hold him this way? Why did they bother cleaning a slave such as he? And why did he feel safe?

What was going to happen now, and was all this just a cruel joke? No matter how much safety he felt, those nagging terrible doubts lingered. Freedom? Was Mikey joking?

"Where did Mikey rescue you from?" Cory asked, while applying yet more shampoo to Joel's hair.

"F...from my m...master's house. I...in Wales."

"Wales? I've never heard of there being a problem with slavery there," Cory said, as he looked at Sean. Sean shook his own head and shrugged. Cory asked Joel, "Where was this exactly? We have to deal with this, if there's child slavery going on in the UK."

Joel looked up into Cory's eyes, "Not h...here. I w...was lost th...there. It w...was another pl...place, another universe, a...and it's a lot different i...if there is n...no slavery here."

Tyler looked past Joel's back and into Sean's shocked face, "That sounds like what happened to Kurt and the others; maybe Kyle and I need to check into what's happening."

"Maybe," Cory said. "It's okay, Joel. You're really safe here, and there is no slavery with us." He hugged Joel briefly again then went back to washing him down.

It took a further ten minutes to fully clean up the battered boy, to make sure they did not hurt him, especially his tender, sore ribs. As they finished and left the shower, they finally noticed that Tommy was waiting just inside the door. He was holding fresh towels for each of them, and had three new piles of clothes for Joel, Sean and Cory laying on the bench behind him. They each took a towel to dry off with, but Cory took two, in order to wrap one around himself and use the other to dry Joel.

Joel had never felt anything as soft and nice on his skin as this, before. Stuff like this was never given to or even used on slaves. Maybe he really was free? But could he truly believe it yet? He did reach to help Cory at first, but the whispered "Don't worry, bro." just made him relax. Joel gave in and allowed himself to be cared and loved by the older teen who was now gently drying him down. His eyes never left Cory's face at first, but when the concern and compassion neither changed nor wavered, he finally just closed his eyes, in trust, and for the first time in his life, he surrendered totally to another person and just let Cory dry him; just as if he were a little child. One single tear made it's way down his face, only to be gently wiped away by Cory's thumb.

Cory's heart was breaking. This boy was so trusting, even after all the hell he had obviously been through. He stopped drying Joel and just pulled him in to hug him again before continuing.

After he had dried himself, Sean grabbed another towel and moved over to Joel to help with his hair. Cory, having finished patting Joel down, wrapped the towel he had been using around Joel's waist, and then started drying himself. As the change over took place, Joel looked towards Tommy in question. Tyler piped up with a smile, "This is my brother Tommy. Don't worry, Joel, he's cool."

"Ya clean up real good, Joel!" said Tommy, as he smiled at the cute pixie face that was just visible under the towel. Joel replied with a small, uncertain smile of his own, his head moving back and forth as Sean attacked it briskly. Tommy grinned more at him, and then moved over to replace Sean in drying Joel. Joel now looked at him with his blue eyes filled with doubt and fear at the unexpected movement. He faced Sean and Cory quickly in question, but they just nodded and winked at him in answer. He

turned back and he let Tommy help him dry his hair, but not before allowing Tommy to pull him in for a nice quick hug.

Once they were done, they began to get dressed. Joel marvelled at the wonderful clothes presented to him; blue shorts and a loose white tee-shirt that were so soft and comfortable. This was beyond his wildest dreams, and nothing he had ever experienced could relate to it. It must be a mistake. He stood there fingering the soft material of the tee-shirt, making no move to dress himself. He looked uncertainly at Cory and Sean. Sean understood quickly, "Yes, Joel, they're for you."

He started with the tee-shirt, and pulled it over his head. He smiled at no-one in particular as he stood there in just that shirt, slowly running his hands down it, still in wonder. It did not itch? It was warm and comfortable, if maybe a little baggy; but it did not itch? He looked so cherubic with the joy radiating from his pixie-like features that Tyler and Tommy could not resist hugging him yet again. Another feeling coursed through him, but this one he knew. He had rarely felt happy in his life, nor contented, but it had occurred on very rare, special occasions; and he knew, he was very happy now. After being released from the three-way hug, he pulled on the underwear and shorts. His smile beamed out brightly, as his joy showed clearly.

Cory watched the emotions play on Joel's face and grinned to himself. He asked, "So, Joel, how old are you?"

Joel's entire demeanour changed in an instant. "I'm t... twelve, si... err, Cory. I'll be th... thirteen on the 28th of O...October," he stated without inflection, waiting for the rejection he was sure was about to come. There was a stunned silence for a moment as they looked at him. Joel felt the silence building and he looked down at his unclad feet in shame. They thought he was a freak, now.

Cory recovered first, and cleared his throat. He said with a smile, "Well, your birthday's on Thursday; we'd best have a party!" He kept his voice clear of his concern, and thereby warned the others to do the same. They started agreeing with Cory, while Joel just stood there looking perplexed and a little lost.

"P...party? Y... ya want me to s... stay? But... but I... I'm a freak! I'm never gonna g... grow up..." he choked out before clamming up fearfully. He should not have questioned them; he should have remained silent. He closed his eyes and waited for the blows to fall. Feeling Sean's arms come about his shoulders in a hug, and a gentle kiss placed on the top of his head, he opened his eyes in astonishment and looked up into the pair of hazel eyes that were gazing at him in compassion.

"You are not a freak; you just need a check up, bud. We'll get you fixed up real good, we promise." Sean felt everything in him just wanting to cuddle all the hurt out of the kid in his arms, and so he pulled Joel in even tighter to him, and carefully rubbed his back. Joel melted into his chest, nodded his head and sighed in relief. Sean's hands seemed to find each of the sorest spots on his back, and as they rubbed over them, his aches seemed to ease. Sean held him safe for a moment, and then whispered, "Shall we go for that hot drink now, bro?"

Not believing that anyone would be concerned if he had wanted to just keep cuddling, Joel nodded into Sean's chest again, to agree to the drink, and then released him. As he stepped away, Cory took one hand while Sean took his other, and the five boys made their way out of the bathroom and back into the Rec Room.

Tyler came up behind Joel as they were walking and placed a hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry about your growth bro; one of your new brothers is over fifty thousand years old and he looks fourteen. I'm never gonna look older than I do now; so it really don't matter." Joel turned his head briefly and stared at Ty with his eyes wide as he tried to figure out if he was being lied to or not. Tyler simply smiled at him and nodded.

As they made their way through to the Dining Room and kitchen, the boys there started to crowd around Joel. Kyle and Levi moved to stand near Tyler, while Tommy rushed ahead to the kitchens to ask for the drinks, obviously wanting them for everyone, judging by the anticipatory grin spread upon his face. Joel started to tremble at the number of strange boys getting closer, all looking at him curiously.

Sean spoke up with a smile on his face, "Guys, can you back off just a bit; give Joel a little room, will you? Bro," he turned to address Joel, "I'll just give you a quick introduction for now. This little redhead is our son, Timmy, and that's Ricky attached to his side. That's his little brother Paul, cuddled with his jaguar kitten Wacko, next to him are the rest of their brothers; DJ, Tanner, Brandon, Calen, CD and Austin. The two kids cuddled with Austin are his sons, Conner and Leo." With each name, the boys waved at Joel with welcoming smiles, "Over there is Josiah and Gavin..."

Joel followed the names and fixed them and the boys' faces into his memory, and wondered at how many of these kids had kids of their own. However, when he spotted the last boy Sean had introduced, those thoughts all left him. He gasped and his eyes grew wide. He ignored everyone else, pulled away from Cory and Sean and started slowly towards the boy he had failed to notice earlier. Gavin curiously watched him approach with a slight smile on his face.

Once he was face to face with Gavin, Joel slowly reached up and with trembling hands, ran his fingers over the heavy brow and cheek bones on the boy's face. Gavin held very still, instinctively knowing that this was important for the poor kid touching him. Joel's eyes grew even wider as he realised that this was no boy in make up! "Mikey!!" he yelled, a grin spread widely on his angelic face, and his eyes came alight.

Mikey flashed in, looking prepared for the worst, but he relaxed when he saw Joel's smile. Teri and Dan came around the door seconds later, also looking concerned, but they too relaxed as they saw the scene before them: Joel excitedly exploring Gavin's features with gentle fingers and with a joyous smile on his face. He turned to Mikey, all his hesitance forgotten, and bubbled, "Rigelian!! He's Rigelian?? Oh God! Does this mean?... Mikey? The Federation, and Starfleet?... is this..." Mikey just nodded at the questions, both asked and unspoken, with a smile forming on his lips. "When? What ships, I mean? Sovereign Class? Constitution Class?"

Cory shot a look at Sean and mouthed, "Sovereign Class?!" Sean shrugged and they both continued to look on with interest.

Mikey just said, "NCC-1701-A" and waited for the explosion.

Joel's mouth dropped open again in shock and his legs started to shake, "You don't mean... I... Kirk?... Spock?!... NO WAY!" Mikey giggled, and most of the boys started laughing softly. Gavin grinned at Joel and pulled him into a brief hug, which he returned without hesitance nor resistance.

Mikey suddenly stopped giggling and tilted his head as if listening to something only he could hear, before moving over to Joel.

"Kiddo, I have to leave now." He said quietly, "I have some other kids to help. I will be back often to check on you, though, and you can always pray and talk to me at any time."

He picked Joel up and hugged him tightly, "Just stick close to these guys. They'll all be there for you." Mikey then kissed Joel softly on his forehead, right where the slave-mark was. "I'm so happy I found you, Joel. You're going to be doing great here, now."

Joel just gripped onto Mikey with all his strength, his excitement ebbing at the thought of being without his rescuer, "I don't w...w...want ya to go. B...but I promise... I'll b...be good for C...Cory and Sean. I p...promise!" he mumbled, suddenly close to tears. He buried his head into Mikey's shoulder for a moment, and then sighed out "Go, Mikey... g...go save some o...other kids." Mikey kissed him again, then placed him back on his feet. Mikey smiled at him once more before flashing out of the room, and golden sparkles fell gently down and around Joel.

Cory and Sean moved up to Joel, hugged him between them for a moment, before leading the now muted lad through to the Dining Room and on towards the kitchen. The others followed, the smell of cookies and hot chocolate drew them automatically.

"You know Kirk and Spock, Joel?" Cory asked with interest.

Joel nodded his head slightly, "I...I kn...know *of* them. F...from 'Star Trek'. I n...never th...thought they'd be r...real." Sean and Cory shared a look, and smiled slightly, realization dawning in their eyes at hearing the term 'Star Trek'.

As they entered the kitchen, Helen had just finished making the boys' drinks. She turned to see Joel and then walked slowly over to him. "Here you go, sweetheart; some nice hot chocolate." Joel froze in place and stood ramrod straight with his eyes turned away from her face. He gingerly took the large mug from her and then nervously watched her turn and leave. Once she was a safe distance away, he looked at the dark brown liquid in the mug. He took a sniff, and, smelling an aroma that set his mouth to watering, he cautiously sipped the hot drink. His eyes popped open, and he started trembling. Looking back towards Helen with fear in his eyes, he started to place the mug down on the kitchen table.

"What's wrong, bro?" Cory asked, "Too hot?"

Joel shook his head, "No. It's... it's too g...good for me. I can't drink I...it! M...must have b...been a mis...mistake!"

Cory firmly stopped him from putting the mug down, "Sure you can. You get nothing less than the rest of us."

Joel began to smile, then his face froze again as Teri walked over carrying two more mugs. She handed one to Cory and the other to Sean, all the while smiling calmly at him. Joel started shaking badly, her smile terrified him beyond all measure and reason. Sean quickly pulled the boy back into his chest as Teri realised it was her he was scared off. She backed away quickly, looking slightly upset that any child would be that afraid of her.

"Don't be scared of Mom, Joel. She won't hurt you." Cory stated while squeezing his shoulder. Joel tried to believe him, but could only manage a very weak nod of his head. "I'm going for some cookies. I'll send Timmy over with some for you two," and he then moved off.

Joel, now beginning to relax again, looked back to the mug he held and carried on drinking it slowly, taking his time to savour each sip. Sean just stood behind him for a moment, gently rubbing his shoulders with encouragement while watching this scared kid enjoyed hot chocolate for the first time in his life. He then led Joel to some kitchen chairs and sat down with Joel pulled onto his lap. He thought to himself, 'What was so bad, what happened that was so awful, that he is *that* afraid of Mom and Helen?'

It was not long before Timmy and Paul walked over with a plate of cookies between them, and sat next to them both. "Joel, you want a cookie? They're really really good!" Timmy asked, with a firm nod. He held out a toffee covered cookie towards Joel, who cautiously accepted it.

"Th...thanks, Timmy," he took a small nibble and his eyes grew wide. "Wow!" The rest of the cookie disappeared in a blink, and even the crumbs that fell seemed to be gathered up and eaten. Timmy giggled and Paul quickly offered another one, this time chocolate chip. That too vanished in record time. The two little boys started talking to Joel, who answered them reluctantly at first, but they had him melted in no time. Safely held by Sean, he relaxed and continued to accept the offered cookies as Wacko placed his head in Joel's lap.

"Wacko likes you; he says you can scratch his ears if you wanna!" Paul told Joel with a huge grin.

Joel smiled slowly and, once he had finished his latest cookie, he started petting and scratching Wacko behind his ears.

While Joel was being fed and looked after by the munchkins and Wacko, Doc Austin walked up to Cory and Teri, "I think I need to have Joel examined, if Mikey's story is anything to go by," he stated. "He probably has many things that need checking over, his malnourishment is just one of them."

"I agree," Teri confirmed, with a look of total sadness.

Cory looked at both sharply, "What did I miss?"

"We'll tell you after, let's just get him into the Infirmary and settled down first. We'll go through everything later. Oh, but Mikey says that what he told us is just the little that was told him. Only Joel can reveal more... if he even wants too, poor child." Teri looked sadly towards Joel, who was still held firmly on Sean's lap while alternating between sipping his chocolate, petting Wacko and happily munching on the cookies being handed to him by Paul and Timmy. The sweet smile that was plastered on his face captured her heart.

Sean was running his fingers gently through Joel's curly hair, while holding him close with his other arm. He looked ready to cry, or even to kill whoever had caused pain to Joel; such was the intensity in his eyes when he looked up at Cory briefly.

"Okay," Cory acceded, also touched by the sight, "let him finish his drink, then we'll take him to the infirmary for his check up. And Doc? That tattoo is gone; one way or the other."

Doc Austin nodded in agreement, "Should be simple enough, but it will probably leave a scar." He trailed off, also watching as the lad tipped the last of the chocolate into his mouth.

Joel pulled away from Sean and stood. He walked slowly to the sink and automatically prepared to wash the mug, pouring the hot water into the sink and looking around for the wash cloth. Sean just sat and watched this, puzzlement and sadness in his face as he thought, 'This kid doesn't know how to just *be* a kid.'. He motioned to Helen and pointed at Joel.

Helen noticed what Sean was pointing at, and moved over to the little boy. Joel saw her approach from out of the corner of his eye, and turned quickly. He lowered his gaze to her feet as he had been taught to do, and waited with trepidation for his punishment. He should know where everything was, and now these people had to waste their time teaching him. This was going to hurt bad.

"What are you doing, sweetheart?" she asked gently. He looked up at her quickly before averting his eyes again. This was not as expected.

"C...cleaning up, ma'am," he replied softly.

No answer, no blows.

He looked back up at her with puzzlement and saw her smiling face. He forced out through his fear, "If that is the r...right thing to do?"

"Sweet of you to offer, little one, but don't you worry none. Just leave it in the sink, and I'll deal with the washing up after," she answered him gently, and once he'd put down the mug, she drew him into a quick hug.

He stiffened in fear at this, and closed his eyes, preparing for the horror he knew was coming. *'No! Please, God... not again...'* Tyler looked up quickly at the echo of fear he suddenly felt. His face grew grim, and he started siphoning off the emotion. Joel felt some of the fear leave him, yet he didn't relax. He couldn't. He started shaking again; badly.

Whilst this was happening, Cory had moved to Sean to ask him to gather up Kyle and Tyler, and then he approached Joel. Helen was looking sadly at the poor boy she had just released, but moved away when she saw his discomfort was not decreasing.

Cory put his arm over the boy's shoulders, "Joel, we need to have you checked out. Doc Austin wants to see if he can help with that tattoo and the rest," he said encouragingly, "and we'll be right there with you."

Joel looked a little unsure at the idea of seeing a doctor, but nodded his head, and surprisingly reached out to hesitantly put an arm about Cory's waist. Cory smiled and drew him close before leading him up to Doc Austin and wait for the others.

Sean quietly approached Kyle "Bro, can you and Tyler come to the Infirmary with us? We might need you both there with Joel."

"Sure thing, dude. I'll ask Levi to stay with Timmy for now." Kyle walked off quickly and spoke to the other two. Sean watched as Levi nodded his agreement to stay, before walking out after Cory and Joel, with Kyle and Tyler quickly following.

Camp Little Eagle Infirmary - 5pm

"Joel, jump up on the biobed, please, and we'll start the tests," Doc Austin said as he pointed to the bed, and Sean helped Joel up onto it. The Doc started pressing a few buttons and the bed came to life, causing Joel's eyes to darting everywhere, recognizing many of the items around him, and finally settled on the monitor above his head. The markers were starting to move as the bed scanned him and kept track of his vital readings. "Well, at first glance, everything is reading as they should, considering. Your heart rate's a little high, though. How are you feeling, Joel?"

Joel looked from the monitor towards Doc Austin with mistrust. However, his training automatically took over and he replied, "A l...little scared, sir. I...I don't kn...know what you're gonna d...do to me..." Tyler again started to 'ground' some more of Joel's fear and started to project reassurance into him again.

"No need to be, Son. I'm not going to hurt you," he assured him with a smile, then he noticed something change. "Well, heart rate now dropping; still high, but within limits; adrenaline is also high, but that's understandable too. Everything else is fair." He moved to another monitor a few feet away, "Think I'll run a more detailed test on you, just so we know what to do to make you a bit healthier. That sound okay, Joel?"

Joel looked at Cory and Sean seeking their approval of the request. They nodded slowly, so he in turn did. He watched Dr Michaels work the controls and heard the hum from the bed in response.

Tyler and Kyle, standing just past the foot of the bed, reached over together to pat Joel comfortingly on his lower legs. The boy flashed them a quick smile. "How easy will it be for you to get rid of that tattoo, Doc?" questioned Tyler, turning from the bed. An idea was already forming in his mind.

Doc Austin looked up for a moment and replied carefully, "It will take a bit of work, but I'll manage," he looked quickly at Joel and winked, "I'll make sure all that handsome face will be seen clearly, soon."

Joel's eyes widened slightly and a slow blush mounted his cheeks as he mumbled "Th...thanks."

The boys started chatting between themselves as Doc Austin worked. Joel remained fairly quiet at first, but with easy questioning, they got him to start talking about some of the books and stories he had read. He answered the questions put to him, sometimes fearfully, as he knew he was not meant to know about these books and stories. He refused, though, to ask any questions himself, even though he frequently cast questioning looks at some of the things the others said. Tyler eventually asked him, "Joel, why don't you ask questions too? We won't bite, you know."

"I... 'a slave sh...should not speak unless s...spoken too'," Joel recited, then looked down at his chest with more fear building, "If I ever s...spoke out of turn, I'd be b...beat bad." Were they going to punish him for *not* asking questions? Sean rubbed gently over his right arm, then took his hand and squeezed it to comfort him. His fear receded.

Tyler looked quickly at Kyle before starting to ask Joel about his favourite stories, and the boy quickly responded with a brief explanation of 'Dragon Earl'. Kyle projected into Cory's mind, 'Tyler and I can help him overcome this problem he has with asking questions, by placing temporary prompts in his mind. What do you think, bro?'

'How 'temporary' will they be, and how will it help?' he thought back.

'Will last a day or so, but they will allow him to ask questions easier, and to loosen up a bit. Once he sees that he can speak freely without getting hurt, then he will just continue, once the prompts have faded. It will just build his self-confidence about his place here.'

'We'll have to ask him. If he's for it, give it a go.' Cory looked at Joel directly and waited for him to finish answering Tyler, before speaking. "Joel, Kyle has just asked me if he and Tyler can help you, but it's something that only you can decide for yourself." Joel looked quizzically at him as he had not seen Kyle talking to Cory at all.

Catching the look, Kyle started to explain briefly. "I can read thoughts and project them, amongst other things. There are many who have powers here: some of us are Telepaths; others are Empaths; even some with things like telekinesis. Then there are those with different powers again, but we'll explain fully later about that. For now, there is something I'd like to help you with." Joel just looked at Kyle, and nodded even though he felt unsure. Tyler nodded at him that he could trust Kyle too, so he smiled up at Kyle as he spoke. "Tyler and I would like to place some temporary mental 'prompts' and 'shields' into your mind, to allow you to speak freely without being so afraid. They would last for a day or so, but they would give you the confidence to ask questions and spend time with us, without your feeling that you will get hurt. Once they have faded, you will remember that you could speak freely and ask questions without being 'beat' and then you'd be able to continue doing so. Would you like us to do that?"

Joel nodded quickly.

"However, I need to let you know that we would be exposed to your memories while implanting these 'prompts' but we promise, we will not speak to anyone about your past, unless you want us to. Do you still want us to do this?" Tyler finished, with a smile on his face.

Joel thought about this. The ability to choose for himself: somehow it felt really good, it felt like he was respected enough to be asked. He struggled with himself, but finally started to reply, "I th...think I'd like that. I don't w...w...want to be afraid no more..." he trailed off, and just looked with pleading, moist eyes at them both. "I do...don't c...care if you see what happened. You c...can tell anyone... can ya really h...help me?"

They walked around the bed to him and held out their hands for him to take. He trustingly reached out and they took his left hand in theirs, linking the three of them together. "Yes, we'll help you, bro," stated Ty firmly. Both he and Kyle closed their eyes as they started, and a strange look came over Joel's face as he felt a gentle tickling warmth in his mind. In a little under a minute, both the others had opened their eyes and smiled at Joel. "How do you feel now?" asked Tyler.

"I'm fine. Is it done? Have you... Wow!" Joel's jaw dropped open. He had felt a twinge of fear, more like nervousness, yet he had talked freely! In sheer wonder, he looked between the two on his left and

Cory and Sean on his right, who were all smiling happily down at him, "I'm speaking?! Wow! This is so wicked! Damn, I can ask questions too? YES!!" All four boys reached in to hug the ecstatic Joel. They formed a massive, giggling pile on the biobed, which of course, caused the readings to go all haywire.

Doc Austin, still over by the other monitors, said laughingly, "Great work guys, but you are messing up the readings. Can you back away for a second?" The boys backed off and the scans continued as normal.

Cory spoke up softly, "Cool, Joel. Just remember, you can ask anything at any time. No one will hurt you. Also, try not to think of yourself as a slave any more. I meant what I said earlier. You're free, now. Please believe that." Joel just looked at him, and nodded while a small smile crept to his lips.

After checking the readouts again, the Doc said, "This is showing you've not had much nutrition. What have you been eating mostly, Joel?"

"Bread and butter for the most part, and some chicken on occasion. Maybe some apples, if I did my work well. I've always been hungry, though," was the thoughtful response. He looked to Kyle and smiled his thanks. Being able to talk freely without fear felt so good, and he hoped that they were right about what would happen when the 'prompts' faded.

"That figures. Now, for a blood test and DNA scan. This won't hurt at all, I promise," the Doc said with assurance as he picked up a hypospray and moved to stand by Kyle and Tyler. Joel stiffened at his approach, but as soon as Cory took his hand, he felt safe enough and lifted up his left arm to allow the blood to be taken. The 'spray' activated with a small hiss and the vial filled with Joel's blood. Once Doc Austin had moved away, the boys started chatting again.

After a few moments, Doc Austin's attention was drawn to a variance in the readings of Joel's DNA. As much as could be seen, it looked normal, but at least half of it was, for want of a better word, shifting about. It seemed to be trying to mask itself as human, but then it phased between human and blanked out DNA. It made no sense. He hit a few buttons and the biobed started running a more in-depth scan on Joel. Within moments, a series of beeps sounded from the bed, and the computer's voice stated flatly, "Foreign object located." Cory moved over quickly to stand next to the Doc to examine the readings.

"What the hell is that?" Doc Austin started to focus the scan at the top of Joel's spine where it joins the skull. A black spot on the monitor started to resolve slightly, but still seemed phased, much like the DNA he had been checking. The readings continued to confirm the presence of an object there, but refused to yield any more useful information.

"I wonder if Ark could help with this." Cory mused, "I'll call now and ask her to link in with these scans."

<I am already monitoring them, Crafter, and once again, I am not female.> Ark's voice came from the view screen on the wall.

Sean giggled and smirked at his partner. Cory sighed and continued, "What do you think, Ark?"

<These readings seem familiar to me, and I think I can find the relevant information; please give me a moment.>

Joel was watching from the bed, looking totally lost. "That is something new. Never heard any computer in 'Star Trek' sound or talk like that." he mused out loud.

Tyler said, "Ark is very old. He was made over sixty thousand years ago by the Founders, to gather all the knowledge of mankind and wait for the day that we'd stop killing each other."

"Founders?"

"Long story... *very* long story. We'll tell ya later, bro." giggled Kyle.

"Cool!" With brightening eyes, Joel turned his attention back to the monitor to listen in.

<I am not male either, Tyler.> Ark suddenly said, <Crafter, I can recall only one possible connection and it is regarding something that happened recently. About fifteen years ago, in March of 1989AD, Gregorian Calender, Starfleet Covert Operations started working on a Bio-Phase Chip to aid them against possible attack from such foes as the Romulans, and at the time, the Klingons. The B.P.C, as it was more commonly called, was designed to suppress the DNA of one species, and cloak it with the DNA of another. This would change the subject via metamorphosis to look and read to any scan as a member of another species. The research was discontinued on Earth in 1990 when the Vulcans were asked to participate and at that point, all testing was shifted off-world to Vulcan. I lost track of the project at that point.>

<While this 'chip' in Joel's neck does not read as per the information I have on the first Starfleet trials, the current state of Joel's DNA is, however, within the hypothesized results of using a B.P.C. during the first stages of testing. The fact that half of his DNA is showing as normal for humans, yet the other half is phasing between human and blanked out, points to the chip being a test version. The desired result of a fully functioning B.P.C would, of course, leave no traces or clues what so ever that anything was amiss. We can also know that Joel is at least half human. There is no point in using this B.P.C. unless there was something to hide.>

Doc Austin and Cory were stunned and just stared at the monitor before them. Research files appeared on the screen, showing the first few years of testing before the project was taken off-world. Very advanced stuff, even more so, as this data was nearly fifteen years old. "Ark, are you able to tell us how to deactivate this chip?" Cory asked.

<No, I am sorry, Crafter. Unlike the original plans, this object in Joel's neck does not read as human technology. The current scans give us that much at least. It does not read as Vulcan either, but that could be due to the phasing it is going through. If it is Vulcan, then I would need to be in contact with it, or have contact information relayed from your end, to determine the level of sophistication, in order to safely deactivate it. If it is not of Vulcan origin, then Starfleet will be most interested in this item.>

"What is the likely result of simply removing it?" asked the Doc.

<Joel would enter system wide, neural shock and would in all likelihood die from the result...>

"NO! Don't take it out, then! I'd rather..." Joel started to panic.

Sean immediately reached back in to cuddle him, while Tyler stilled his emotions. Ark continued, <Do not worry, Joel. Nothing bad will happen to you. Dr Michaels, to remove this chip, you would need to activate the shut-down protocols, either by operating there, with me monitoring, or to relocate here. However, the current status here is between busy and chaotic. Unless the operation starts to go badly, I would recommend deactivation and removal there. I will take as much time as I need to study the contact readings before starting the shut-down, and if it is Vulcan technology, I should have very little problems with it.>

"What if it's not, though!" Joel was still worked up, "What if it's totally alien! Please, Ark, I don't wanna die!"

<We will not proceed with this unless I am sure it can be done with no harm to you. I will not permit anyone or anything to harm you, Joel, I promise.>

Cory turned to the wide eyed Joel and went over to him. "Bro, this is your choice. Do you want us to remove the chip?"

Although scared at the prospect of being operated on, Joel turned to look at Cory and Sean. He reached out to hold both their hands before turning to Doc Austin. "Yes. If this isn't really me, then I want to *become* me." He looked back to Cory and asked, "I'm half human? Do you have any idea what the other half is?"

"No, bro, we don't, but we'll be here for you no matter what."

<I cannot tell what your other racial heritage is either, Joel. We will have to wait and see what happens after the B.P.C. is deactivated and removed. Doctor Michaels, I recommend sedation as these changes are likely to cause at least some discomfort. Depending on which species DNA the hidden half belongs to, it could vary from a simple itch to severe pain.>

Joel looked a little scared again at that, "Sleep? No, please don't! I don't wanna dream! Please, Ark..."

Before he could tear up, Kyle and Tyler moved over to him. Tyler said, "It's okay, bro. We'll keep you from having bad dreams. Just relax and it'll all work out." Joel did as he was told and again felt a warm, tickling sensation in his mind as both boys reached out with their power, stilling his fear and organising his memories.

Doc Austin pressed the comm. and called for Antonio to come to the Infirmary. Turning back to the room he said, "Guys, 'Tonio will help me here, but I can't have too many people standing around." Looking to Joel he continued, "They will be here with you, once you wake up, I promise." Joel nodded. Doc Austin then continued, "Sean, please show Joel where the bathroom is. He might need to go before he goes to sleep for the night."

Joel started to nod again, looking sheepish, "Yes, please, I really need to go!" He hopped down from the bed and followed Sean out of the room quickly. It did not take long before he was running back in and being helped back onto the bed.

About five minutes later, Antonio entered and went to Doc Austin who gave him the brief run down of what was going on. Cory spoke to Joel, "Antonio is going to help the Doc for a while, Bro. He's cool, so don't be scared, okay?"

Joel nodded at him, then watched as Antonio came over to him and took his hand. "Hi. I'm Antonio, but most everybody calls me "Tonio," he began with a warm, friendly smile. Joel liked him immediately. "I'll be staying here with you and keep you company."

"Hi, "Tonio," Joel squeezed Antonio's hand as he saw Doc Austin approach with another hypo spray. He heard the hiss as it was depressed into his arm, then, just as everything faded out, his last mumbled words were, "I just hope I don't wake up a Klingon..."

Cory led the others from the room once Joel's eyes had closed, leaving the other two free to work. Once out, he glanced at Kyle and Tyler, and with the unasked question being answered, all four boys vanished...

CIC Building – Kitchen – 6pm

Back in the kitchen area of CIC, Teri was speaking quietly with Helen and Dan. Cory and the others suddenly popped into the room, and began to seat themselves near to the others. Tyler was gently holding Kyle, and Sean was watching them both with concern evident on his face as they were both beginning to look a little sick. Teri looked between them, "Okay, spill. What's going on? Where is Joel?"

"Doc found something unusual, Mom," Sean said, as he reached for some cookies on the table before them. "Joel isn't entirely human, and there's some chip in his neck that is hiding his DNA. Ark is going to help him and "Tonio remove it."

Teri's eyes went wide at that, then she looked at the two upset boys, "What else?"

Cory sighed, moved from his chair to the counter and started filling a few glasses with orange juice. He said, "Seems like Joel's past is very bad. Kyle and Tyler said they could help him with the problem he has with talking, but doing so meant that they would know all his memories. I think they're a bit darker than most, going by their reaction."

"It's mainly hopelessness and fear, bro, almost unending. He has suffered a lot, but the worst of it is that where he was, there was little to no chance of it ever changing," was the soft response from Kyle.

"Can you tell us what Mikey told you now?" Cory asked, as he sat, handing the drinks to the others. "We know he's from another universe, but Joel didn't explain anything else."

"Well," Teri settled back in the chair, "First off, Mike said that Joel was born here, in our Universe, but had somehow gotten lost in time and space. He's not from another universe, he just got lost there. He mainly told us about the universe Joel was trapped in. It was supposed to be cut off from all the others; a sort of test-realm, or something. No-one was meant to go there, no matter what powers they had. From what Mike said, there are a few of these 'test-realms' out there, but travel to them is totally restricted. They can be classed as other universes, rather than time-lines, as time-line would suggest that

they branched from ours at some point. The one Joel was in never did; it was very similar to ours, yet at no point intersecting ours. It seems like Joel ending up there was a total accident."

"In that Universe, only earth had life. That was the test, I would say, but they got so bad... well Mike said that place has now been purged, and thankfully so. Joel was about to be raped by his master when Mike intervened. The world, there, was built on slavery and a totalitarian regime. Now that he's home, as it were, he can find his family, if any live."

Cory nodded to himself and muttered, "Figures. He looks like he's been through a war. I agree about that place being 'purged'. What a hell-hole."

Kyle spoke up, "It also seems like the place Joel was is very similar, in some respects only, to the place Kurt and the others are from. They grew up with TV shows called Star Trek, and it seems that Joel managed to find and watch them on some 'underground resistance internet'. Mikey told Joel that he was trapped in the late 2040s. He has more 'Trek' knowledge than any of those guys."

Sean said with a smile, "I wonder, though. He doesn't seem to recognise us, just Starfleet and Kirk. Those stories about us they mentioned might not have been in that universe."

Kyle shook his head, "No. From what I gathered from Kurt, Galen and the others, those stories were labelled as 'Clan Short Universe' stories, or CSU for short. Joel had found an old reference to them on the underground internet he'd accessed, but they had been pulled from the 'net years before Joel got on to it. He never found any 'illegal' site that hosted them. He would only vaguely recognise the term 'CSU', not even 'Clan Short'."

Sean then asked "What was that portal thing they came through? Never seen or heard about anything like that."

Teri said, "Mikey wouldn't explain it. He said Joel could and would if asked, but Mikey wasn't allowed to."

"That's a minor issue, though. We'll deal with that later." Cory then turned to Kyle and asked, "Do you and Ty think you can tell us any more about Joel? As much as he'd be happy us knowing?"

Kyle nodded, but it was Ty who spoke first, "I'll start, bro, and Joel was being totally truthful; he don't care who knows most of this stuff. First, his full name would be Joel Williams, although he was only ever know as Joel. Since his master was Williams, that name will do for now."

"Okay, as for everything else? He's a real mess emotionally: never known love, comfort, safety, nothing. He seems to be dead inside in some ways, but deep inside, I sense a longing for those things. On another level, I have never felt as much mistrust and doubt from anyone. He knows he is not a slave any more, but he still doesn't believe that yet. You could say he's waiting for 'the other shoe to drop'."

Kyle broke in with disgust in his voice, "He was in an 'orphanage', if you could call that shit-hole that. Sorry, Aunt Teri, but it's the best way to describe that place. They trained him to obey and remain silent. To accept whatever they did to him. Once he was sold, the only 'good' thing was that he was never raped. His master was a homophobic bigot of the highest order. Other slaves would be raped and sexually used with the full support of the world order, but Joel never was. And that is what confuses me. Slaves could be used for sex by their masters, yet homosexuality was forbidden, and under a death pen-

alty. It's messed up. Thankfully, Joel never had to bear that. His mistress, though... No, that's for Joel to tell you. I can't..."

He trailed off and looked down at his hands before continuing softly, "He's lost his entire childhood. He's what Ricky would have been if he'd not been saved." He started to tear up, and hung his head.

"He has a fear of adults," Tyler picked up, moving in closer to Kyle to hold him in a hug, "A massive fear. When he was hugged by you, Helen, the fear racing off him hurt me, and he barely trusted the Doc. Just something for y'all to keep in mind."

Helen nodded her head, "I felt him stiffen in my arms and I knew real fast, I'd made a mistake. I think he needs to come to us, rather than us offer hugs to him."

Teri patted Helen's hand, "Don't feel bad, I felt like cuddling him too." She turned to Tyler, "Where is this fear of adults from? His being beaten?"

"Not totally. That counted to it, but there is something else. I can't tell what it is, though. Kyle?"

"Nor me. It was confusing at first, as when I read another's mind I learn everything at once. There are dark parts to his memories, however, as if there's nothing there. I'll tell you this, though; even if that 'chip' had not been discovered, I'd have known something was alien about him. He doesn't think like a human at all, and... and I think that's what these blank bits in his memory are; deleted or repressed memories, just done in an alien way. I don't even know if *he* remembers what's there, just that he should be afraid. Very afraid." He choked up again slightly and stopped.

"He does seem to totally trust Mikey, Sean and Cory, though. He feels safest of all around you," Tyler said, trying to lighten the mood. "But as for the rest of us? He's okay with Tonio, Tommy, Kyle and myself; Gavin he accepts as one who wouldn't hurt him, and he feels no threat at all from the little kids. Timmy and Paul had little trouble feeding him, earlier."

Dan looked towards Tyler, "Why Gavin? What caused the trust there?"

Kyle gathered himself a bit and spoke instead, "Gavin is right out of fiction, as far as Joel is concerned. He is an 'alien species' from his favourite TV shows on the Underground Internet. Rigelians never hurt him, so he doesn't fear them. He'd likely treat Xain the same way."

"What about Sean and Cory? How did he trust them so quick? Mikey, I can understand, but not Sean and Cory."

"Trust transference." Tyler simply stated.

Sean blinked at that, but then understood, "When Mikey told him he was safe with us, Joel was looking at both me and Cor... the trust he gave to Mikey just spilled onto us!"

"And that is what makes your job so much harder, guys," Tyler warned, "as if you do anything to break that trust, you might well shatter any hopes we have of healing him."

They all stayed silent for a few minutes, weighing up the situation.

"Also, regarding his conditioning to obey without question," continued Ty, feeling the silence too heavy, "I get the strong feeling that if we were to jokingly tell him to strip and run around the outside of the Compound naked, he would. He would do anything, even if it involves pain, to avoid greater pain..." Ty trailed off, his eyes elsewhere.

Kyle then said, "Most amazing of all is his mind. He is more than just intelligent; photographic memory, multi-tasking, fast thinking, analytical. He would give Xain a run for his money, I'd say. And his knowledge..." He shook his head in wonder but relapsed back into a contemplative state as he went back over Joel's memories again.

Sean asked softly "Kyle, in many ways, the 'Safe Haven Act' does not truly apply here, as an alternate universe would be outside it's jurisdiction, but going by the SHA, what codes have been broken?"

Kyle closed his eyes in thought, "Okay, some of this stuff is recent, some life long. Give me a moment to think and sort them into order."

He opened his eyes and started reciting in formal Vulcan mode, "From a baby: 17.1: Employment Abuse 17.1(a): Slavery - All points. 10.3(a): No dedicated washing or bathing facilities. 11.1: Signs of beating, strangulation, physical restraints. 11.2: Threats of beating, strangulation or physical restraint. 11.3: Behaviour which is indicative of such abuse: 11.3(a): Cowering, withdrawal, hiding behind people, or other behaviours known to be present in victims of abuse. 12.2: Isolation of children from their peers and normal socialization. 12.2(a): Deliberate isolation for purposes of depriving children of necessary social skills. 14.2: Failure to provide necessary medical care. 14.3: Neglecting to provide necessary medications for survival of youth. 17.10: Consistent exposure of children to content or environments inappropriate for someone of their age group. 17.16: Failure to provide adequate external garments for environment. 17.21: Punishment of children for normal developmental stages, and 17.22: Unreasonable incarceration."

"In part, attempted '12.1: Brainwashing or mentally programming children to believe that there is only one religious or social belief system contrary to the actual status of same in the predominant societal structure of the local area'. I say 'in part' as it would seem to apply, yet not totally as the law allowed such, and promoted it, and the 'predominant societal structure' was based on slavery and coercion in any case. Also, since his mind is very powerful, they failed to change his thinking and belief, but they did achieve the desired results as he will obey in order to not get hurt."

"From the age of eleven, '13.1: Use of minor children to provide sexual gratification' applies, but very loosely. More like 'Use of minor children to provide sadistic pleasure through sexual torment'."

"Almost getting raped?" Cory questioned.

Kyle hesitated, but then shook his head, "Not really, but that does fit it slightly as well. However, like I said, what really happened is something for Joel to tell, not me. All I can say is that it's not as bad, on the surface, as some of the stuff we've been through, but it did leave scars in his mind. That's it, Cor. That's basically what he went through... all his life and with no hope of escape what so ever. If anything, that is the worst part of his story. *We* had hope that things *could* get better. Joel *knew* it never would and that he was trapped. He lived knowing that was all he'd ever have." He finished, once again looking upset.

Sean looked up from the table he's been staring at, and said quietly, "He is going to be a lot of work, Cory. We're going to have to tell the guys to keep him off the 'prank' list; he's going to have major trust issues, and I have a feeling it's gonna fall to us two mostly. Will the others cope with this? Will we? It's going to be like walking on egg-shells for a long time."

Eyes closed, Cory considered that. After a moment, he looked Sean directly in the eyes, "Yes, I'm sure they will. We'll talk to them after, but I can't see anyone not going along with this. Besides, no-one here has ever given up on anyone, and I doubt they'll start now." Cory thought again, then continued, "As for the two of us, I will do anything to keep those smiles on his face. God, Sean, he's so little and just trusts so much, once you win it. I don't care if it falls to me and you, I'm going to just help him anyway..."

Sean nodded, "I feel the same way. No worries about us not handling it, guys. I just hope everyone else can too."

Teri had remained silent through all of this, quietly musing on the idea she had, had from the moment Joel arrived. As Sean finished, she spoke up firmly. "He is going to need a family. Mike said this is his true place, true universe, and that he may still have relatives here. However, until we find them, and determine if they are suitable, I am hereby placing Joel in my custody pending consultation with Joel himself."

Sean looked between her and Cory, then started laughing softly, "I think you just beat Cory to that, Mom!"

Cory laughed shortly with him, "Yup, I was about to ask Sean if he wanted another son!" Then he became formal "Clan Short agrees with this decision. Upon agreement from Joel, he shall be under the care of Teri Short until such time, if it comes, that his blood family is found and prove suitable for placement."

"Kewl, another brother!" exclaimed Tyler, "will he be Short too? He's gotta have our last name, Mom!"

Teri smiled, "If he wants to be, yes, he'll be another 'Short'."

"Oh, Mom? Joel's birthday is on Thursday. He'll be thirteen and we need to have a party for him. I don't think he's ever had one, so I want him to have a great surprise for a change. That okay?" Sean requested seriously.

Teri just nodded with a smile, then rolled her eyes, "One Teenage Party coming up; it might do everyone here some good."

Cory then started to rattle off orders, "Okay: Ty, Kyle, can you go around and tell everyone in the Compound there's a Clan Meeting at seven, please? Sean, go find Seth and ask him to contact Southcrest. I think we'll get the guys over from there. I'll go ask Tommy to prepare a relay between here and the Thompson house. That covers the most likely guys to have immediate contact with Joel. Tomorrow, we'll send out a recording of the meeting to the other Divisions. Ark?"

<Yes, Crafter?> came the reply over the Sub-Vocal communication device in his ear.

"Just wondering, how's Joel doing?"

<Doctor Michaels has not started on the operation to remove the B.P.C. as he is healing a few cracked ribs and various minor problems he has discovered. He did mention that he will inform you when we begin deactivation and removal of the 'chip'.>

Cory nodded his head in acknowledgement, "Cool, thanks Ark."

Sean then turned to the guys, "Okay, let's start rounding up the Clan. And Cor? Stop giving orders! You're resting, just like Grandfather Sarek told you!" Cory pouted playfully, then sighed and walked off with Sean, arm in arm.

CIC Building - Main CIC - 7pm

The boys were all assembled and Sean started by telling everyone what had been revealed so far, followed by Tyler and a summery of Joel's emotional state and likely actions that would result from it. As a picture of Joel from the Security system was shown to those at the Thompson residence, Tyler finished with, "His trust is totally shot, basically. He is going to fixate on those whom he trusts, especially Cory and Sean. Take your time and don't push him. Also, he's not going to act thirteen very often at first. He'll either be very young, or very old in what he does and says. It's all emotional, though. He'll settle and grow soon enough, I hope."

Most of the guys simply shrugged at that. "No sweat, dude," Adam said, speaking for them all, "Just another brother to love and take care of as far as I'm concerned." The others nodded emphatically at that statement.

Ty continued, "However, and this is really serious. Do not just walk up to him and hug him. Be friendly, be loving and talk to him, yet do not make any sudden moves at him until he trusts you. You know the signs, just as we know with Timmy, for example. We know when you want to be picked up and hugged, don't we, Gizmo?" Timmy grinned and nodded. "Do the same with Joel. If you think he'd like a hug, then offer to hug him, and then let him come to you. If he trusts you, he will."

Kyle, sitting on the ground with Levi pulled onto his lap, also spoke up, "It wouldn't be a good idea to pull any pranks on him or tease him as we do each other. He'd take what you say and do at face value and act on it, believing he would get punished or worse for not doing so. Also, he's never played before, not with others or with toys. He's going to find much of our stuff, games and toys fascinating, so will probably play with whatever and whoever is near."

"He'd play with our toys with us too, Unca Kyle?" asked Timmy excitedly. Paul and Ricky also looked on expectantly.

"Yes, I'd say so," he smiled at the kids. "He'd love to be invited to play with you, and especially as he doesn't fear you munchkins, Gizmo." He then addressed everyone again, "Just don't tease him until he starts teasing first and then only return the teasing to the level that he does. As for the pranks? Same... if he pranks you, then return them to the level he uses. Go no further. If you do, you could break the trust you've gained."

Everyone again nodded in agreement, while Justy turned to Cory, "Do we know how Joel is right now? Can we call in to see how things are going?"

"I was about to," Cory got up and went to the terminal, where Kurt's boys, the Thompson boys, Lawrence, Lehman, Vincent and Deacon were watching. "I was told that the Doc would tell us when he'd began removal of the chip, but I've heard nothing yet." He hit a button to split the screen into two, and started to connect a call to the infirmary. "Doc, do you have a moment?"

After a few seconds the Doc appeared, *"Yes, Cory. I was just about to call you anyway."*

"How are things with Joel?"

"We've dealt with all the minor things like bruises and cracked ribs. We did open up the area where the chip is so that Ark could take readings and run a few reverse engineering protocols on it. Just waiting on Ark to say what to do next. The 'chip' is still unidentified, but the readings show it's at least twelve years old. If it is Vulcan, then it's unlike any Vulcan Tech I've ever seen."

Xain, watching with interest, asked, *"Doctor, can you send your current findings to me, please? I will send the files onto my father for analysis. He may be able to find out if it is of Vulcan origin or not."*

"Sure, Xain. Files will be sent in a few moments, and thanks."

Cory saw Antonio come up behind Doc Austin and tap him on the arm, *"I think Ark has things ready. Shall I ask him to proceed? He thinks he can do the shut down by remote."*

<He?>

"Hush, Ark," was the giggled response.

Doc Austin laughed, *"Okay Ark, if you're sure, go for it. I'll get to the monitor here."* He moved away from the view screen, totally forgetting he'd left it on, and Antonio went to Joel's side with a tricorder in hand and started scanning. Due to the position of the view screen, Joel was just out of sight.

After a few minutes the Doc said, *"Things are looking good. There was a brief flush of enzymes for a moment... wait... oh God, 'Tonio, grab that hypospray quick!"* Alarms started sounding from the bi-obed and the monitors scattered about.

<Joel's nutrient reserves are dropping at an alarming rate. I recommend connecting him to an IV with the following supplements.>

A nearby screen started to fill with instructions that Antonio was quick to study. Doc Austin used the hypospray that had been handed to him, then turned back to the monitor with Joel's readings. He then noticed that the view screen was still active and filled with concerned boys faces.

He rushed over, *"Sorry guys. I'll call when I can."* And the screen went blank. Kyle and Ty looked quickly at each other, then 'ported out of CIC in the blink of an eye, taking Levi with them.

Sean was holding Cory's hand tightly as he had moved to the screen while this had been happening. Cory looked at him, concern evident in both their faces, before they turned to the rest. "Guys, I'm sure everything will be okay, and Ark is watching over them in there," Cory assured them, trying to get the image of the worry he had seen in the doctor's eyes out of his mind. "Let's get to the kitchen and our snack. Doc will keep us updated." The Clan got to their feet and made their way out of CIC, leaving Justy, Sean and Cory talking to those on the view screen.

Xain formally stated, *"Patriarch, the files I asked the Doctor to send have arrived. Shall I relay them onto 'he who is my father' with your approval?"*

"Please, Xain, and thank him for us, no matter the result." He responded with a small smile, "Oh, Mom asked that I invite y'all over for breakfast tomorrow. Can you check with Allen and Billy and get back to her?"

"I'll go ask now!" Grinning, Kevin rushed away from the screen, to the puzzled looks from the others. Kenny just rolled his eyes.

A few moments later, he came running back in, *"Sure thing, Cory! Billy don't know yet, but Poppa said we'll be there; he'll tell you what time we'll be there later,"* he then turned, hugged his startled twin quickly and kissed him before rushing back out of the room again.

"What the hell's gotten into Kev?" wondered Jake. Kenny shrugged, still looking at the doorway Kevin had just sped through. Jake then turned back to the screen, *"Dad is bringing these guys back later, so I'm sure he'll let ya know what time we'll be there then, Cory."*

Cory waved and said while shaking his head at Kev's behaviour, "Okay, thanks. Seeya then, guys. CIC out."

"Thompson Residence out." Xain replied with a hint of a smile.

The connection terminated, and Cory quietly led the others towards the kitchen. Sean walked close to him and Justy came up to his other side and spoke. "I've asked Pop if we can stay here tonight and he's said its okay, if Teri gives us the all clear."

Pleased, yet now slightly abstracted by worry for Joel, Cory and Sean nodded their heads in acknowledgement. They entered the kitchen and helped themselves to the snacks.

Tuesday, 26th October

Cory and Sean's House - Just after 6.30am

It was very early, but movement was heard nonetheless from the upstairs of Cory and Sean's house. Both boys appeared, looking tired and sandy eyed, and came down quietly from their room and made for the kitchen. Making a bee-line for the coffee machine, they started pouring themselves exceptionally strong mugs. They both stopped dead in the doorway of the living room, however, when they saw Kyle pacing to and fro and Tyler in an armchair with Levi half asleep on his lap. They all looked totally beat.

"What the..." Cory started. He and Sean moved into the room further, and Sean seated himself on another chair. Cory addressed the others, "Couldn't sleep either, bros?"

Tyler and Kyle tiredly shook their heads, and Tyler said, "We didn't stay long with Doc. Just helped stabilize Joel, then left the other two to get on with it. We did heal those scars he has, though. And remove that tattoo. No scars either!"

"What with everything else that's happened, we didn't want worry for Joel to add to that," Kyle picked up. "So we didn't even try to sleep. We've spent the rest of the night keeping as many as we could calm enough to sleep, stopping the bad dreams from that crap on Saturday and tried to stop the worry about Joel, but some of y'all were harder to help than others." He looked at Sean and Cory with a small smile.

Sean giggled, "That seems to be more than true. This one here kept shifting about all night!" He pulled Cory onto his lap before picking up his coffee for another long drink.

Cory sighed and relaxed back against Sean. "Like you were still, either." he said before he turned and kissed Sean contentedly.

The others giggled weakly for a moment before Sean asked, "One thing puzzles me, though. Why didn't you heal Joel when he first arrived? In the shower? Ty?"

Tyler closed his eyes briefly, "It... it just felt the wrong time. I dunno... Kyle and I both felt that we should wait."

"Okay," Sean replied, then they all settled down and chatted quietly for a while, trying to keep themselves awake.

Tyler suddenly spoke up with a grin, having remembered something "Oh, didn't have time to mention last night. Someone at that meeting seemed more than a little 'interested' when the images of Joel were shown around. Joel might have a 'good friend' if he's lucky..." He finished as a yawn silenced him.

"And you are not gonna tell us, are you?" Kyle giggled.

Tyler simply shook his head 'no', a big grin on his face, and a softly chuckling Levi on his lap. "I know too, but I ain't gonna tell you!" Levi said tiredly in a sing song voice.

Cory smiled at the trio but then he remembered something. He asked curiously, "Kyle, you said last night that you knew Joel's mind seemed alien, even before we found out he is at least half alien. What race do you think he might be?"

Kyle stopped pacing for a moment as he thought back over the events of last night, "Not sure, bro. He felt familiar, yet a bit off. The 'chip' might be the cause for that, but if I had to guess, I'd say..."

He stopped as Antonio suddenly came in through the front door looking dead on his feet. He nearly tripped over Ty's legs and practically fell onto the couch. "Oh God, what a night," he leaned his head back and closed his eyes. At his appearance, the others came out of their lethargy. "I could sleep forever..."

"Hey! Sleep later, what's happening?" Kyle said as he went to Antonio and cuddled in next to him, "Come on, spill, before you're out for the count, dude!"

He mumbled, "Not got the energy... Doc says you can go see him... Glad I don't have to wake you guys up... can't climb stairs right now...." he trailed off with a yawn as sleep took him. Kyle gently got up and laid the boy down on the couch.

Cory climbed off Sean's lap and said, "You three stay here with our boys, Sean and I will go see Joel. And no arguments! Once Austin is up, ask him to get the kids moving to the CIC kitchen for breakfast, then y'all are going to bed. Take our room, or one of the boys', and ask Austin to carry 'Tonio up with you. Sleep 'til lunch, that's an order!"

He looked at them, daring them to object, but they just seemed too tired. They nodded with a smile. "Yes, Uncle Cory, sir!" Levi said, giggling quietly. Cory and Sean smiled at him and shook their heads before heading out towards Camp Little Eagle.

Camp Little Eagle Infirmary – 7.15am

As they entered the Camp Infirmary, they saw another 'walking dead'. Doc Austin was leaning against the door to Joel's room, coffee mug in hand, and rubbing his eyes with tired fingers. He looked towards the approaching pair and sighed. "Good, I'm going to sleep for a few hours, but I've enough go in me to last a short while longer. Is 'Tonio in bed yet?"

Cory shook his head no, "He's flaked out in our living room. We've left instructions for our Austin to put him to bed at our place once the kids are up. How's Joel, Doc?"

The Doc nodded, "Very well, I'm happy to say. Those boys were great, and they healed what we couldn't and left Joel with nothing more than faint lines and pale marks on his skin where the scars were. Once they left, Ark also told us how to take some advantage of the metamorphosis back to his true biological form in order to accelerate his growth. Still looking too young, but it's a good improvement."

He paused, picking his words carefully, "His current state *does* raise a few concerns, however, and will have some unpredictable problems. We'll just have to talk about it after I get some rest. Then we'll work out how to help him integrate as best we can. Let's go in now and I'll wake him up."

Cory and Sean shared a nervous look. Doc Austin turned and opened the door, and beckoned them both to follow him to Joel's bed. He just watched silently as they looked down at the peacefully sleeping boy. "Wow... didn't expect..." started Sean, wonder rising in his eyes, but quickly became concern as he realised what some of the problems the Doc was hinting at could be.

Cory just looked at Joel with his mouth hanging open, then he said, "Oh my... you're right, Doc. Things could get *very* messy..."

Author's Note:

Sorry, sorry, sorry... Str8mayb made me do it!!

No? Not convinced? Boo! Okay, he DID say it was a good idea though!

Well, what did you all expect? First story, first chapter... first cliffhanger! Well, two, in fact. But the clue to the other one is in there somewhere... hehehe!

Seriously, my thanks goes out to ACFan, MultiMapper, and Akeentia for the help and assistance they have rendered to make these guys true to life. Also, to all the other Author's who's kids I've mentioned and who've given advise: Thanks!

Last but not least, to The Phone, John Hollingway, Darryl and The Story Lover. My Editing and Sound-boarding team!

Hope you enjoy!

God Bless and Hugs,

Ilúvantír

Editor's Notes:

Well, this was certainly one amazing roller coaster ride. I loved it. I agree with Ilú that one of the cliff-hangers is actually resolved, if you were paying close enough attention. You really should be able to answer that question. I hope everyone enjoyed this chapter. We have found out some interesting things and there is plenty more to learn in the next several chapters, though. Joel is a very special person and I already love him. I want to know more about him.

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher

Clan Archivist Review Notes:

Having been working with this story since early in its creation I can still say that the finished product is amazing. Ilúvantír has done an amazing job giving his characters depth and life and the integration with the other stories in the CSU is top notch also.

Hopefully somewhere, sometime children won't have to live like Joel did and unfortunately like many children in the real world. Until then all we can do is give our love and care to those who are in need and continually hope for a better world for all.

This chapter has indeed lived up to the promise shown in the prologue and has actually surpassed it; now on to Chapter Two. Wait I don't have it yet! Ilú??????????????????

'Goos' says thanks also and he can't wait to read more about his new cousin.

Hmmmm Str8mayb is in JAIL yet he is still teaching how???

The Story Lover AKA TSL

Chapter 2:

Darkness and Light

As soon as Joel's eyes had fallen shut the evening before he had slipped into a deep dreamless slumber. All the excitement happening around him went unnoticed and time seemed to pass in a peaceful blur of nothingness. Towards the end of the night, however, he did start to dream, but as per Kyle and Tyler's promise, all the dreams were good. He had very few happy memories but it seemed like he dreamt them all.

He was out in the country alone. His master and mistress had left for a long weekend away, and had locked him out of the house. He had been expected to sleep in the tool shed, and so he had for the first night. However, in the back of the shed he had found something unexpected; a camping tent. He raided the bags by the back door for the little food that had been left behind for him, took some of the garden tools that he thought he might need, and headed into the hills surrounding the farmhouse. He was determined to fully enjoy this weekend free. He did not get much time to himself so he was going to enjoy himself to the hilt. Camping alone when only eight years old would have scared most other children, but not Joel. He had faced much worse than simply being alone. He worked out how to make a bow and arrow set for himself within a few short hours, then started hunting for something to eat.

A few dead rabbits later, he was now collecting wood for the fire. It took him almost ten minutes to start the fire, like in those films he had sneakily managed to watch. After getting the fire contained and burning well, he used a Stanley-knife to skin and clean out the rabbits before cooking them. Cooking over an open fire caused a few problems for the bright young boy, but he had fun all the same! And roast rabbit, even if it was a little burnt in places, was the best food he had ever tasted...

The dream faded and another started...

He was ten years old and in the Slave-section of Bridgend library. He was meant to be working on the day's tasks, but was just too excited. He had finally finished the hidden program that would prove to run undetected for the better part of the next three years. He started the program and was immediately given access to the internet. He started a few more programs of his own design and the search was on.

Over the next three years, he found news, stories, films, books, music, games... finally some beauty to spark in the darkness of his existence. He did find horror as well, though. The news always depressed him, but the joy and goodness found on the Underground Internet kept him coming back to it. Then, barely a year after he'd finally gotten on-line, he found what would come to be his most favourite story of all:

"Dragon Earl" - © by The Story Lover

Chapter One - The Discovery

Joth awoke from a restless night's sleep sweaty and disoriented. He threw his supple dragon skin bed covering off...

Again, the dream shifted... A few more scattered good days, or short hours of freedom alone... and then everything settled on something that was not a memory. At least, Joel had never believed it to be so. He had always assumed it was a daydream, or wishful thinking...

He was being held in strong, steady arms that were wrapped comfortingly around his tiny body. Above his face he could see deep dark blue eyes, much like his own, yet the face was out of focus. It was a woman's face, yet the rest of her was a mystery to him. Was this his mother? Maybe, maybe not, but nevertheless, he was content. Above them, a burning sun was beating down from out of a deep, orange sky, and a hot wind was blowing against his naked body.

As he turned his head, he could vaguely make out mountains of dark red and brown, with sparse green foliage dotted here and there upon them. The deep, echoing call of a predator on the hunt reached his ears, a sound not terrifying but soothing. A call within his very being seemed to respond to that deep toned bellow, and a yearning for something he knew not tugged at him.

The heat, which he knew should be terribly oppressive, was also soothing; a gentle touch upon his flesh, and the murmuring voice of his mother filling his ears added the perfect counterpoint to everything he was feeling.

If this was just a fantasy, he never wanted to return to mundane reality. Here, in his made-up mother's arms, in this hot, dry paradise for his senses, he felt finally safe and content.

He was home.

Intruding softly upon his peaceful reminiscence came the voices of Sean and Cory...

"Messy is an understatement, bro," Sean whispered.

Cory took Joel's hand and squeezed it gently. The scars that were once covering Joel's body were gone, and in their place were pale pigmented marks in his flesh. His forehead was blissfully clear of any such mark, though; Kyle had done an excellent job with that tattoo.

"I'll wake him up now; I kept him in assisted sleep for a while," Doc Austin said as he depressed a few buttons on the Biobed. "Look, this is going to be a shock for him, and he's in a lot of stress physically, so lead him gently to what he has turned into."

Joel's face creased slightly and his eyelids fluttered. He cracked them open and looked straight at Cory, his small face unreadable at first. Then fear was clearly seen rising in those deep blue eyes. "Did I sleep late? I'm sorry if I did... really I am..." he began, his voice filling with panic.

"Shhhh... relax, lil'elf." Cory replied gently. "You're allowed to sleep whenever you want for as long as you want. We were just watching you sleep to make sure you were okay."

Sean looked oddly at Cory, *'Lil'elf?'*

'You heard Mike. He said our 'Lil'elf' is coming...' he sent back. 'Tell me Joel doesn't fit that name, dude.'

Sean answered with a grin and moved closer to Cory's side.

Joel had relaxed at Cory's softly spoken words, however he was puzzled at the name he was just called. He sat up slowly, his hand still held tight in the comforting grip of Cory's own, and sat there with his legs crossed beneath the light sheet that had been over him. He yawned, then stopped suddenly and looked about ready to cry.

Cory guessed, "You can yawn too, Joel. It's normal."

Joel stared at him, before nodding slowly. "Can I stretch too? I wasn't allowed before when people were around..."

Mutely, Sean nodded, and so the smaller boy did so.

This time, he stopped with a gasp, and his hands flew to his sides and ribs: searching. He looked down, and gasped again. "They're gone! They're all gone!" he half yelled, throwing off the sheet to fully explore himself... and found not one scar on his now smooth skin.

He was now smiling and his face was alight with joy. He looked back at his two protectors, "How?"

"It was Kyle, Tyler and Levi, Joel," Doc Austin answered.

Joel froze and glanced around Sean's body to see the doctor sitting the other side of the room. He trembled, and averted his eyes. *'He was nice last night, but... he's still an adult...'* he thought fearfully.

"They also," the Doc continued quietly, trying to make his voice as non-threatening as possible, "got rid of your tattoo, and helped heal everything else."

"Th...thanks," Joel trembled, looking mutely at Sean for some form of help. He was feeling that same old fear come back. He reached out with both hands subconsciously and grabbed a hold of each of theirs that was nearest...

Cory felt a light touch on his heart, as did Sean, and they saw an immediate change in Joel's own eyes. He began to look calmer. Joel asked, "Who's Levi?"

"Kyle's son," Sean answered with a smile.

"Oh," Joel said, feeling confused. Then he remembered that Sean and Cory had kids. *'Maybe they adopted, but... ain't they still young?'*

The boy pulled his hands back, and looked at them in wonder, then looked down at himself again. His eyebrows crinkled as he seemed to be trying to work something out. Then he looked back up, "Need to go to the toilet. Can I, please?"

Cory nodded, hiding his sadness. "You can, lil'elf. You never need to ask, you can just go."

Joel threw his legs over the side of the bed and hopped down; and nearly fell. Sean caught him and held onto him as he found his balance.

"You grew a little last night, bro," Sean murmured to him quietly. "Lean on me, and I'll help you."

Joel half smiled, and started towards the door, but stopped and turned slightly towards Doc Austin. "Sir, did you remove that chip?" he asked, his voice trembling.

"Yes, son. It's out now," came the quiet response.

Joel was about to ask what he was, and what the other half of his once hidden DNA pointed at, when his body practically demanded him to move post-haste to the bathroom. Sean sniggered as Joel started hopping from foot to foot, so they made their way out and down the corridor to the toilets quickly.

They made it just in time. Joel ran over and stood to relieve himself, keeping himself facing sideways to the door so that Sean could make sure he was *only* touching himself 'there' to pee. He braced himself for the pain that he had had to deal with for the past week, and... nothing! No pain! He opened his eyes and looked down in wonder. Obviously, that 'kind of nice' doctor had healed him. He grinned and just enjoyed the relief of peeing without pain. Then it came to him; he felt no pain, but he felt nothing else either.

He sighed and forced back his tears. So, he had been healed, but there were some things that not even the Federation could fix. He felt less than nothing at that instant. He finished, flushed and moved sadly over to the sink to wash up.

Sean had watched all this from the doorway, with Cory just behind him. They had seen fear and expected pain on the kid's face, then relief and joy, and now sadness and loss. Sean cast a questioning look at Cory, who could only shrug in complete bemusement at him. Sean looked back quickly and saw that the swollen look Joel's dick had had yesterday had gone, and so was completely in the dark as to why Joel was now sad.

Filing it away to ask the boy later, he watched as Joel moved to the sink. Sean grinned at his soon-to-be-husband; there was a mirror above the sink, and they both knew... Joel was about to find out! Grinning, they watched and waited for the hopeful sight of an extremely happy Joel.

It did not come as they expected, for Joel never looked into mirrors any more.

The tattoo that he had borne all his life disgusted him, and he hated his own reflection, so habit kept him from looking even though he knew he would not have the mark on his forehead any more. He washed his hands quickly, keeping his eyes averted all the while from the wall and the mirror on it, then dried up.

He paused again, staring at his fingers.

Something was very wrong with his eyes, there must be. He rubbed them and looked again.

Still the same. He looked up at the two boys by the door, and they looked normal. Looking down at his nude form, he could see he was not.

He moved over to the two teens and gently reached and took Cory's hand. He interlinked his own fingers with the blond boy's and studied them.

Under Cory's fingernails the pink coloured flesh could be seen, and the blond's skin, what with him being Caucasian, had that same healthy pinky colour.

The bed's of his own nails were not pink, and his skin seemed dusky and darker where once he was as fair and pale as Cory. He looked at the pale marks that were all that remained of his scars...

"I'm..." he trailed off as he looked up at Cory.

Cory raised both his hands and moved back Joel's curly yet shaggy hair away from his ears, and then traced his fingers gently over them.

Joel's eyes popped open and his mouth formed a perfect O shape. He clapped his own hands over Cory's and together they traced his ears together: his pointed ears.

"Vulcan..." he managed, a shy smile starting on his lips as he glanced back and forth between the two teens. "I'm a Vulcan?"

"Well, you're not a Horta, that's for certain," Sean grinned at him as he too reached and rubbed one finger up and over the point on Joel's nearest ear. "Yes, Joel. You're a Vulcan!"

Joel smiled widely, and turned and ran for the mirror. He looked in wonder for the first time at himself, and moved his hair to see his ears and eyebrows. He was giggling as well, for the sight of a Vulcan face smiling back at him seemed vastly amusing.

"Come on," Sean said as he walked over and pulled the boy into his arms, "let's get you back and dressed."

"Okay!" bubbled Joel. "I am feeling a bit... I'm feeling colder. Why? Wasn't cold last night!" he asked, suddenly puzzled.

"The Doc can answer that," Cory said as both boys reached him at the doorway. "Don't worry," he added quickly as Joel's face fell, "we'll be right there with you."

"Kay," Joel mumbled hesitantly.

As they got back to the room they found that they had visitors; two Cheetah-boys were standing by the Biobed with MP5's slung over their shoulders. Joel froze for a second, then looked up at Cory, "What kinda alien are they? Never seen them on Star Trek... are they friendly?"

"They're just a couple of cute pussy-cats, at least they are if you're their friend. Going by their grins, I think you're approved, lil'elf," Cory replied softly. "That one is Hermes, and that's his twin, Mercury."

"Pussy-cats?" Hermes grinned at the Patriarch. "Going by the rules here, we are allowed to dunk our commanding officers, so you are going swimming later, Sir," the cheetah-boy rushed out.

Mercury gave Joel his best toothy grin, "We're your bodyguards, Joel and we'll make sure nothing hurts you. But we're not aliens... we're half human half cheetah and the Patriarch is right; we are friendly if we like you and we like you a lot!"

Joel looked up at Cory again, seeking reassurance, before padding across slowly towards the two cat-boys. He reached out with trembling hands and touched their arms lightly. "Warm," he murmured before sandwiching himself between their fur covered bodies. "Nice," he whispered, a ghost of a smile on his face.

Sean sniggered, "Okay, dudes; where's the robes? None of you cats go about without them, from what I've seen with your lion bros."

Hermes shrugged as he kept his tiny charge snugly held between himself and his brother, "I was sleeping, on orders from the Doc, but when I woke, Joel was gone from the monitor, and the Doc looked like he'd been knocked out, so we came running in fast."

Doc Austin chuckled, "I was resting on the chair here and nearly fell asleep. I think it made them nervous by the way I was positioned."

"Uh huh," Mercury purred. "It's okay, though. We don't mind being this way; we'd prefer it, but humans like wearing clothes so we do so to fit in better."

"The ears and furry faces kinda make that a little hard, don't they?" Cory asked, giggling.

Two raspberries were his answer as both cheetah's responded in unison.

Joel poked his pixie-like face out from between the two cheetah's chests, "I like them. They feel safe."

More purrs met that, and Joel found his face being licked by two wet tongues.

"I think you've made their day, Lil'elf," was Cory's laughing response.

Doc Austin coughed lightly and gestured at Cory. Once the teen had come closer, the Doc pointed at a pile of clothes. "Can you give them to Joel?" he asked quietly. "I'm afraid of startling him too much if I try."

"Sure, Doc," Cory smiled as he gathered the Clan clothing into his arms. "He said he felt cooler so clothes are good."

"He would," was the Doc's reply. "Vulcan is a hot world, and his biology would naturally seek higher temperatures than most of earth. He may have been used to it when he was 'human' but he now has to reacclimatise himself. Make sure he stays warm and dressed until he does, Cory."

"Sure, Doc. I'll get him dressed once I get his purring, furry guardians to let him go for five seconds," Cory giggled.

"See us in an hour or so," Mercury called over, "he gives good back rubs!"

Joel's arms, wrapped around Mercury's body, were gently moving up and down the cheetah's spine, and Sean could see that the Vulcan's eyes had closed blissfully.

"Oh, you'll need to make sure he has this lotion rubbed into his skin at about noon, then every 5-7 hours after," Doc Austin handed a tube of skin-cream to Cory. "His skin is highly sensitive right now, but not in a touch way. After his change last night, his skin started to tighten slightly. It wouldn't harm him to leave it, but this cream keeps him moist and loose, to lessen the discomfort. After 24 hours, he should have adjusted fully."

"Got ya," Cory said, taking the lotion.

Joel wasn't listening to this, however, as he felt a lightness in him as he was cuddled between both cheetahs. He was fully relaxed between them now, and the rest of the world seemed distant. He could also feel a protective fire radiating from the two teens standing close. He had never felt safer in his life.

"Joel? Do you want to get dressed now?" Cory asked gently as he came and stood next to the cuddling trio.

Joel's eyes popped open. Confusion was plainly seen in his face. "If you want me to, Cory," he said in a small voice.

Cory's face fell a bit as he remembered that Joel was unused to making choices for himself. "If you want to keep cuddling for a while, that's cool; isn't it, guys?" he said, addressing the question to the cheetah twins.

"Sure thing, boss," Hermes purred to Cory. He brought his muzzle closer to Joel's ear and whispered, "We can stay here as long as you want, Joel."

"Or, if you want, you can get dressed and cuddle more after," Mercury added, whispering in Joel's other ear.

Joel was now nearly in tears. He started to blubber, "I... I don't know... I... I'm scared, and... I..."

"Relax, lil'elf," Cory replied softly. "You need to do what makes you the most comfortable. If you want to keep enjoying the kitty cuddle, go right ahead and keep doing it. When you feel calm and comfortable enough that you feel like you are ready to hunt down some food with us, then we all can invade the cafeteria."

Joel's eyes were wide as he tried to process his new 'instructions' to relax, and yet his near thirteen years of slavery training was telling him to put everyone else's wishes first and his never. How could he make a choice? Why won't they just tell him what to do?

His arms were still wrapped around Mercury, yet they were trembling violently.

Cory's empathy could pick up on the fear, and the two cheetah's could certainly smell it as it radiated from Joel.

Sean asked gently, "What's wrong, Joel?"

Training, as always, took over; even though the answer he *must* give to the question could end up causing more pain for him.

"I can't have desires; I can't have no wants. I'm not allowed them. I don't really know what I would want even if I was allowed," he said in a squeaky voice, before sliding out of the twin's hug and pressing himself against the wall. He slid down it and covered his head with his arms, "I'm sorry... please don't hurt me!..."

Sean and Cory moved as one without thinking, and both cats stepped to one side immediately to give them direct access to the now sobbing and violently trembling Joel. The Vulcan boy found himself in the possessive, protective arms of the two teens, and he opened his eyes in wonder. Where were the lashes; the blows; the pain? Fire upon Fire, and Heat upon Heat slammed out from the two teen's chests and overwhelmed his senses, and he could not but obey, finally, the command to 'relax'.

"We'd never hurt you, never," Cory managed brokenly, his emotions clearly heard in his voice. "You're never going to be hurt again; not ever, if I have anything to say about it."

Sean whispered, "We only want you to be you, lil' bro. We want you to be happy. We give you the right to choose, and to forget all that you were told and taught before."

Joel trembled again, yet it was not fear. There was a spark of Heat and Fire in his own chest that suddenly flickered to life, but he did not know what it was. It felt something like the Fire and Heat still pouring from his two teen protectors, but it was just as puzzling to him.

Sean added, and tears were now heard in his voice as well, "We know it's going to be hard to 'forget' all you were told before, but please try. We just want you to be happy."

Mercury and Hermes moved in closer and sat down next to the trio. "Joel? Can you look at us, please?" Mercury asked quietly.

The boy raised his face and looked into the cheetah's warm, yellow eyes.

Mercury started to speak slowly and clearly, allowing each and every word to carry all the sincerity that he could muster. "Cory gave an order yesterday. He said that anyone who hurts you would answer to him. My commander, Adam Casey, told me and my brother to come here and be your guards. If anyone wants to hurt you, they have to come through us; and that *includes* Cory and Sean. No-one, not anyone, is allowed to hurt you, EVER!!"

Cory glanced up at Mercury, his eyes asking what in the heck he was talking about.

Hermes explained, "Your telepathic whatsit yesterday, Sir. We all heard it; at least all telepaths, and some of us Unit guys have that ability."

"Oh," Cory murmured, blushing slightly. He then pressed his face to Joel's hair, "See, lil' elf? We all love you. You never have to be afraid of us."

In a very small voice, Joel replied, "I'll try, Cory. I'll try real hard."

Sean rubbed his back slightly before asking the Vulcan, "Now, do you want to get dressed and get some food, or do you want to have some more hugs with the four of us first?"

Joel thought hard and fast. With the slightest of trembles he whispered his choice, "Hugs... please?"

Doc Austin watched with tears in his eyes as the four larger boys sat together in a circle with Joel sitting in between them. The Vulcan was slowly being passed from one set of loving arms to another, and the man could see that with each cuddle, hug and kiss he was receiving, more and more tension and doubt seemed to leave the tiny boy's face and eyes. He decided that now was as good a time as any to explain a few things to Joel, since he was being calmed and loved by boys he so obviously trusted.

"Is it okay for me to talk to you guys for a moment?" he asked gently.

Joel stiffened for the briefest of seconds before Sean's arms snaked about his body and he found himself held tight, his back to Sean's stomach, and his hands held fast by Cory on one side and Hermes on his other. Mercury giggled lightly and said, "I guess I get to cuddle your toes, mmm, Joel?"

Joel cocked his head slightly, then giggled as the fur on Mercury's paw-like hands tickled the soles of his feet. He nodded, and giggled, "Uh huh; yeah."

"Go ahead, Doc," Cory answered as the man slowly moved and sat nearer, but not too close to the five on the floor.

"Okay Joel, I'm going to explain a few things to you now, but more after I've had some sleep. If you have any questions, please know you can ask them. I won't be mad nor angry at *anything* you ask; I promise. Do you understand, sweetheart?" Doc Austin asked.

Joel pressed his lips together and nodded, his eyes fixed on the Doc's mouth, for he just could not bring himself to look an adult in the eyes, yesterday notwithstanding. Yesterday much of his training had been forgotten due to the shock of finding himself in a Universe where 'Star Trek' was real; now, all his training was back, yet some things were different already. What Kyle and Tyler had done in his mind

yesterday was helping some, but his fear just seemed too powerful to be disregarded as he had been told it would.

Doc Austin began, "That's good, kiddo. Okay, first the obvious; you are half Vulcan and half human. I'll get to that later. Anyway, you have some fairly big changes to get used to; mainly your characteristics. As with all hybrids your physiology is mostly Vulcan as Vulcan DNA is generally dominant. That gives you everything any other Vulcan has. There are some bad points, though. You are untrained, and your emotions are going to be far, far stronger than you're used to. Also, your physical strength is greater than that of a human boy your age. Well, physical age I mean. You could easily hurt others if you are not careful."

'Like I said, this could be messy!' Cory sent to Sean with a telling look.

Tightening his arms around the boy, Sean sent back a quick agreement.

"I don't wanna hurt no one," Joel murmured nervously.

"We know you don't. I just want you to be aware that you have more strength than most of us here; myself included. In a rage, a Vulcan is able to do more than any human. I'm not sure yet what one of the Unit is capable of, but I'm sure not even they would want to face a truly annoyed Vulcan. It is not the course of wisdom," the Doc continued gently. "Plus, you are a hybrid, and all hybrids are stronger than pure bloods. The best of both parents is the most likely to rise to the surface. Take Captain Spock; he is stronger than an average Vulcan by at least fifty percent."

Joel's eyes brightened momentarily.

Mercury giggled, "Wouldn't it be cool, Joel? If you found out you were Spock's son? He's well famous!"

Sean nodded, "That would be something, but impossible. Uncle Spock is half Human, and so is Joel. If he was Spock's boy, then Joel would be either a quarter Vulcan or three quarters Vulcan, or a mix in-between; not half as he is."

Joel nodded in agreement. "Yeah. Sean's right. But I do hope I get to meet him, at least once! I've always..." he trailed off and looked up at Sean briefly before completing his sentence nervously, yet with no small measure of pride for the accomplishment, "I've always *wanted* to!"

"I promise you will, actually pretty soon." Cory replied gently. "Uncle Spock is probably gonna check in with us as soon as he reaches Planetside."

Joel grinned slowly, then he widened his eyes in shock as what both Cory and Sean had said sank in. "*Uncle?* Uncle Spock?"

Cory smiled. "Yep; he's our Uncle, which makes him *YOUR* Uncle."

"How's he your uncle?" Joel asked curiously.

Sean answered lightly, "It's a Vulcan thing, Joel. We're a Vulcan Clan of Adopted Brothers, and linked to Uncle Spock's Family. So, he's our Uncle!"

The boy sat there and processed that; then he stared in shock at Cory when he finally realised what else he'd said. "H...how is he my Uncle if he's *yours*?" he asked in total confusion.

"Because you are our little brother now, Joel... our very special lil' elf brother!" Sean and Cory chorused.

The gears in Joel's head were very nearly audible. He blurted out, "Brothers? I... I have..." He stopped speaking, not even daring to hope that he had heard them right. His soulful eyes met Cory's and he saw acceptance and confirmation in them almost at once. "I have brothers...? For *real*?"

"You can count on it; and Cory and I promise to be your brothers *forever*, too." Sean replied, giving the boy on his lap an extra special squeeze.

He was immediately followed by Mercury interjecting, "Us too." Hermes just nodded firmly.

Joel burst into tears... but this time they were happy tears. A massive shiver went up his spine as a wave of happiness and joy flooded out from his heart. That small spark of Fire and Heat he had previously felt in his chest bloomed and burst forth, and was met by equal Fire and Heat from Cory and Sean, and, to a lesser extent, from the cheetahs as well.

"Well," Doc Austin said, smiling as the four larger boys got to their knees to make a circle-hug around the happily sobbing Joel, "I think I'll save what else I was going to say until later. You guys go eat, once you're done. I'm off for an hour or so in bed." With that, he got up and left them.

Joel did not even hear him leave...

He had brothers.

It was not long before Joel had calmed down and decided that food might be a good thing to go on the hunt for. At least, the loud rumble from his stomach gave that away for him. Cory giggled, stood and sat the boy on the biobed, "Those clothes are yours, lil'elf. They'll keep you warm, and then we can get something to snack on before breakfast."

Joel reached over and pulled the pile towards himself. He ran his fingers lightly over each article of clothing. "Soft," he whispered.

"All of your clothes will be soft from now on, little brother," Sean whispered back.

Joel smiled up at him, "Thanks. All my old stuff used to be thin and scratchy."

"You're our little brother; you only get the best," Cory replied as he reached over and gave Joel a loving squeeze.

Mercury, meanwhile, had picked up the pair of boxer shorts. He knew what they were, but for obvious reasons the G-Cats never wore such. Looking at his twin and winking, he decided to have some fun and see if he could bring more giggles from the Vulcan they were guarding.

"Hey! Is this what you do with these, Boss?" he asked Cory.

Cory looked over and burst into laughter, as did Sean. It was, however, the crystal clear, almost bell like laughter from Joel that Mercury had been aiming for when he had put the shorts on his head; with his ears sticking out from where the legs should be.

"I think you're covering the wrong head!" Sean got out through his giggles. "They do kinda work as a cat-hat though!"

Sean's statement had a profound effect on the tiny Vulcan. He stopped laughing and averted his eyes from everyone for a moment.

Mercury was giggling at Sean, however, and failed to notice. "Really? Oh. So this is a tail hole?" he asked as he took the shorts of his head and wiggled his finger through the opening in the front.

He never got an answer, for a moan of terror escaped Joel's lips, and he was unconsciously covering his genitals with his hands and his legs were pressed as tightly together as they could get.

Cory did notice, and he wrapped his arms around Joel. "Shhhh..... relax little one; you are safe and nobody is going to hurt you."

Mercury gently handed Joel the shorts, "Sorry, Joel. Didn't know that would upset you."

"S'okay," Joel mumbled quietly as he took the shorts and put them on. "Not your fault, si... ah. Cory, what do I call them? Sir? Or can I use their names?"

Cory smiled. "Usually we only use 'sir' if we are being formal; I'm sure if you asked nicely they would both let you call them by name. They might even let you call them a nickname if there is one they really like."

Joel turned his deep blue eyes towards the two cat boys and he asked, "Can I? Call you by your names?"

The two cats looked at each other and grinned. Hermes slowly walked over to the bed the little boy was still on, and gently placed one of his paws on the boy's shoulder, "You could call us anything you like... except late to dinner."

Joel blinked, then giggled. He pulled Hermes in and hugged him.

"But seriously, our brothers call me Merc, and my brother Herm," Mercury said as he watched his brother hugging Joel. "We would both be honoured if you would call us by those names. Then you would really be our brother."

"Thank you," Joel mumbled.

Hermes sniggered, then started passing clothes over to the boy.

Sean was looking curiously at Mercury as the boy's twin was helping Joel. He said quietly, hoping Joel would not hear, "I'm curious, dude. I don't want to pry or anything, but I noticed with Mont and Bast and just thought it was them. Your, ah... well, your dicks don't look... well, were you hurt by the people who made you this way or something?"

Mercury looked down at himself, then back up at Sean. "Ah... no. That's how it's meant to look," he responded just as quietly.

Joel dared a quick look at what Sean was referring to, for his Vulcan hearing was greater than Sean realised. His voice trembling, he offered a fast yet succinct response. "They're cats. A cat's penis retracts deep within the lower abdomen, so you'd only see the small external sheath."

"Ah, that's what you're on about!" Mercury giggled. "Yeah, we can make ours appear when we need to go answer a call of nature, and... well.."

Sean nodded, blushing, "When you get excited, yeah, I get it."

Surprisingly, Joel asked, his eyes fixed on the opposite wall, "Do you have hooks like cats do, or...?"

"Hooks?!" Hermes giggled softly. "Ouch! I'd feel for anyone if we had them!"

"No," Mercury said while chuckling, "when they come out they look like a normal boy's one. Just without a foreskin, as the sheath is the foreskin."

"Kay," Joel whispered, as he tugged on a hoodie.

Sean giggled as Mercury deliberately made his 'little Merc' visible, "See?"

"Yeah, we see!" Cory giggled, squeezing Joel's shoulder. He gestured with his free hand for Mercury to 'put it away', glancing at the Vulcan who's eyes were closed tightly.

Mercury did so, and said with a smile, "I'll get our robes. Be right back!"

As he ran out, Joel opened his eyes, and smiled timidly at Cory, Sean and Hermes.

Sean sent to Cory, *'I wonder, why he is so afraid to even look?'*

'Dunno, but I'll try asking Kyle after. I'm not asking Joel; not yet anyway,' Cory sent back.

Joel looked like he was about to say something else when his stomach suddenly rumbled again.

Cory snorted affectionately as he gently poked Joel's belly, "Let's get that beastie fed before it escapes and eats us all!"

Joel giggled.

Joel's head was swimming from the smells permeating the cafeteria, and he found himself moving towards the counter where a full breakfast buffet was laid out ready for any and all who needed it. He only stopped when a woman came into view on the other side. He turned quickly and ran behind Cory and wrapping his arms around his big brother's middle. He was trembling so much his teeth rattled in his head.

"Hey there, Ms. Jackson!" Cory exclaimed as he placed his hands on Joel's to calm him.

Sean came up from behind and cuddled into Joel's back, whispering, "You can relax lil brother. She is safe; she gave up a really good job to move here and help make sure kids who have been hurt are fed really good food while they are getting better."

Joel nodded into Cory's back, but could not bring himself to let go of the death grip he had around his brother's waist.

"Joel, you've got two attack cats watching over you; I don't know of any human who is stupid enough to mess with them," Cory whispered. "I'll never lie and tell you to trust someone I don't trust; I trust her so I know you are safe around her."

"I... I just *can't*, Cory," he nearly wailed, shaking his head violently 'no' against Cory's back.

He could not even say it. A man, he could deal with, abate fearfully. A woman, however, brought out a terror that was physically hurting him, and was even making Cory wince slightly. It was only due to knowing his new brothers would protect him that allowed him to even turn and run away from women. Before, he would have stayed there; terrified half to death.

Ms Jackson looked on in pity. "I'll get something ready for you five, Cory. You take the child over to those tables, and Sean and these two cute cats can bring your snack over, okay?"

"Thank you, Ms Jackson," Cory smiled, although the smile did not reach his eyes. He backed away slowly, turned and pulled Joel around to his front as he made his way to the tables on the far side of the room.

"Bacon sandwiches coming up, Sean," Ms Jackson said with a small smile. She added, as she started making the sandwiches, "Doctor Michaels spoke to me after he sent little Antonio over to get you; he said that poor boy went through hell last night due to some of his internal organs changing and rearranging."

Sean gasped, "You're kidding! How could he survive that?!"

"All the doctor said was that it took Antonio, someone called Ark, himself and those cute kids, Kyle, Tyler and Levi, to help keep Joel alive throughout the night. They had to restart his heart twice, and then have the biobed on overdrive for three hours to repair the damage the heart failures gave him," she continued.

Sean paled. "Does that mean that he could have *more* heart failures?" he whispered fearfully.

"No, he's okay now," she smiled gently, before continuing seriously. "However, neither human nor Vulcan biology allows for what that kid went through last night. How he came to be that way to begin with without dying in the process is beyond me. And I'd know; I was a nurse before working here. That's why Chameloids amaze me at how they change. I loved reading about them when I was younger; but humans or Vulcans doing so? Can't happen. Shouldn't happen. That boy..." she pointed at Joel who was snuggled next to Cory and now giggling slightly at the tickles his blond brother was giving him, "That boy is a living, walking miracle."

"I'll say," Mercury said in awe.

She handed the three boys three plates of bacon sandwiches, "Doctor Michaels said that the boy was to have the energy drinks from now until the Enterprise gets here and Doctor McCoy can see him."

Sean accepted one of the plates, his jaw on his chest. "*Bones* wants to see Joel?"

"Yes. Dr Michaels mentioned that Dr McCoy is the foremost Starfleet expert on Vulcan/Human hybrids. He contacted him a few hours ago and as soon as Enterprise gets here, Joel is slated to go there; or as soon as is practical. The word is that the ship will be here Wednesday night."

Sean nodded, thinking quickly, "Yeah, they were on the core-wards side of the Federation Central Hub. That's a good week's travel at normal cruise speed." He nodded at the two cheetahs and they both started towards the table where Joel and Cory were. Sean looked back at Ms Jackson, "I'll tell Mom about the drinks, and we'll make sure Joel rests up."

"Good," she smiled, "And tell those two cute cats that I'll bring warm milk for them in a moment, but I'll leave them on the table there," she pointed. "I don't want little Joel getting scared."

"Thanks," Sean smiled before he, too, walked towards the table.

He found Joel looking closely at his own plate, and then nervously watching Cory as his brother ate a sandwich.

Sean grinned, "You can eat, lil'bro. It's not as good when the bacon gets cold."

Joel nodded slowly, and tentatively took a nibble. The two cheetahs came close to choking with laughter when they watched Joel gobble the rest down in less than ten seconds.

Cory's mouth was hanging open in shock. "Lil'elf, you just put Gavin to shame! I've never seen anything disappear that fast!"

Joel started to grin, but then a spark of nervous fear was seen building in his eyes.

Sean jumped in quickly, however. "It's okay, bro. You're not in trouble. You obviously liked it," he said with a soft smile as he cuddled in closer to the boy.

Cory nodded and did the same from Joel's other side, so that the tiny Vulcan was hugged from both sides. Joel grinned openly then, "Uh huh, it was very yummy! Thanks for letting me have some of your food. I really liked it."

"That was *your* food, Joel," Cory corrected softly. "Anything you want to eat at any time here or anywhere else we go is *yours*. If we are outside our home here, you'll have the same kind of card that we do to buy anything that you want to eat."

"But when we are here or at home, just ask for some food whenever you are hungry and whoever is making food at the time will get it for you," Sean added. "If you can't talk to the person cooking, ask any of the guys and they will get it for you."

Mercury looked Joel in the eye and grinned, "Plus it'll give *us* an excuse to get more food!"

The boy's eyes had grown wider with each new piece of information he heard from his two big brothers. He even giggled at Mercury's jest. "Money? You'd give me money?" he asked Cory wonderingly.

"Yes we will, little brother; that is part of you being **family**," Cory replied.

Joel's smile reached from pointy ear to pointy ear. He twisted slightly in his seat and buried his face into his brother's chest, while pulling Sean over to 'guard' his back.

"Thank you," he murmured hoarsely.

Joel's Point of View:

I hugged myself in closer to Cory's chest, and I felt Sean wrap his arms around my waist from behind. I heard someone come closer to the table and place something down, but I just kept my eyes closed and enjoyed these "hugs".

I think I like "hugs". They feel really, really nice, and don't hurt or nothin'!

Sean sat back after a moment, and my back felt colder. I heard him pull his plate over and knew he was eating, so that was okay. Same as Cory, for only one of my... my brother!... He's my brother, and I still can't believe it! Anyway, only one of his arms was holding me tightly against his chest, so he just had to be eating too.

I opened my eyes and looked up, and found I was right. He swallowed his mouthful and smiled at me. I couldn't help but smile back.

Smiling felt good too. I never used to smile much, but now I'm smiling a lot!

I buried my face back against his chest and closed my eyes again. Breathing slowly, I found myself relaxing into his arms, and it was then that I noticed...

"You smell nice," I murmured, half to myself. I looked up as I sensed him turn his face down to look at me nestled into his chest.

"Thanks!" he smiled. He then asked me something strange, "You're a very huggable lil' elf, can I keep you forever?"

I wanted to stay with him forever. He was a good master; even letting me be his brother. But a slave can't make that decision. "I... ah... I'd like to be here forever..." I hesitated, before closing my eyes sadly. "But it depends if you sell me or not," I finished with a whisper into his chest.

His smell changed, and I felt his muscles in his arm tense up. I tensed too. I must have said something wrong, so I winced and waited for the beating.

"You're a free boy, lil' elf." I looked quickly. His soft words were serious, but... there was no sign of anger there.

He continued to speak in that serious tone, and I found myself almost believing him, "If anyone ever tries to sell you they have to deal with me. You're worth more than all of the money in the world, and the only way that you belong to anyone is that you are my little brother. It hurts me when you talk about yourself as a slave; there are no slaves in my house and you will live here as long as you want to."

He then... kissed?... I think these are kisses. I'd read about them, and seen some on some films... but... whatever, they are nice. He gave one of the 'kiss' things to my nose, and it tickled so much that I giggled. So did he. I like it when they all 'kiss' me. Merc and Herm are real funny with their tongues. My ears are still kinda damp.

I cuddled back in and tried to think about being 'free'. Cory kept saying it. He'd said it yesterday, now today, and he just kept on saying it.

Can't be real, though; can it?

Free for real?

His smell was normal again, now, and he started eating his food again.

Boy, I was still hungry.

That 'bacon sandwich' was nice, and it *was* more food than I'd ever had for breakfast before... except for those eggs Mikey gave me on 'Forever World'... but I was still hungry.

My tummy rumbled a bit, and I hoped Cory didn't hear it. I didn't want him to think I was being greedy. The hunger can wait. Won't be long 'til nightfall and evening meal, and if my new owners always gave me that much more each time they fed me then I won't be as hungry as I used to be.

But... didn't he say something about asking if I wanted more? I can't do that! Can I?

While I was thinking, and trying to keep my belly from rumbling more, I heard Herm move slightly on the other side of the table. "Joel?"

"Yeah?" I asked, looking over at him.

"What did you mean by Cory smelling nice?" Herm asked as he tilted his head to the side.

Had I asked something wrong? Can't have! Cory didn't say nothing bad about what I said. He said 'Thanks'! Why's Herm asking this then?

"I... he jus' does. He smells... safe. Nice. Warm," I whispered, half afraid.

I felt Cory reach out again, and looked up to see him smile again, "Thanks Joel; that's got to be one of the sweetest things anyone but Sean has ever said to me." He then handed another sandwich to me, "I felt your tummy asking for another one of these; here you go, take your time and enjoy it. There are more if we want them."

I swivelled in his hug until I was seated side to side with him, his arm still around me, though. I took the sandwich slowly. "Really?"

"Yes, really," Cory ruffled my hair before starting to eat again.

I looked down at the sandwich, up at him, across at the cheetahs, then to my other side at Sean. Sean was chewing happily on his own food, but he did nod at me.

The new sandwich disappeared fast.

If they give me more food, I'd better eat it before they take it away again.

I heard Merc sniggering at me before whispering to his brother, "He has a good sense of smell."

"Vulcan's have higher senses than humans," I heard Sean mumbled through a mouthful of sandwich. "Girl Vulcans have a lot higher sense of smell than the boys, but boys have nearly the same as you cat dudes."

"Wow, really? Didn't know that," Herm said in a rush. Boy, they were funny when they spoke! He looked at me, "Can you smell us too, Joel?"

I nodded shyly. I'd noticed something with the cats, but I didn't know Vulcan boys had a higher sense of smell. I just thought it was the girl Vulcans that had that. I smiled, "I... it's not something strong, but I can tell you are Herm by... well, by something about the way the air smells when I'm near you. It's different for Merc. I sorta noticed before in that hug, and you smell... a little stronger than Cory."

Herm nodded, "Yeah, we do. That's cool, Joel!" He grinned at me, and I had to grin back. I just couldn't help it!

"Well at least we won't need name tags for you then," Merc giggled as he took a slurp of his bowl of milk.

I suddenly burped. I clapped my hands to my mouth quickly, "Sorry! Really, really..." I started to sob out.

Cory gave me a quick squeeze as he said softly, "Relax; I do that too if I eat too fast! Tommy says it's not bad manners, it's good food. In some places if you don't belch it's an insult to the cook, so relax. Mom likes it if we say 'excuse me' after we burp, but we don't get in trouble for it."

I furrowed my brow. *He* used to whip me for doing stuff like that.

"Umm... Excuse me...?" I tried, looking up uncertainly at my big brother. He just nodded at me with one of his huge, beautiful smiles.

Sean then reached out and pulled me over and into his side. "My turn for lil' elf hugs!" he said, and I could feel that Heat and Fire as he said it.

Pass up more "hugs"? No way! I wrapped my thin arms around my other big brother's belly and snuggled in quickly. All Vulcans have a higher sense of smell? Well, I started to put that to the test.

I inhaled deeply.

"Wow," I grinned up from Sean's chest at him.

Sean giggled at me, "Do I smell good too?"

I nodded happily. It was different from Cory. I now knew that I could find Sean or Cory even if in the dark.

But I knew something else, now.

They *both* smelt good.

They both smelt *safe*.

Normal Perspective:

As they left the Camp clinic, Joel's eyes bugged out of his head. Mont and Bast were outside, standing guard by the doors.

...And they were massive compared to him!

He turned and fixed Cory's eyes with his own, "They like Merc and Herm?"

"Yup, they are my bodyguards, just like the twins are yours," Cory replied as he held Joel's hand.

"Oh, okay," the cherub smiled before pulling Cory over to see the lions.

Both lions looked at each other and smiled before looking down at the seeming nine or ten year old who was grinning up at them.

"Are you my brothers like your cheetah friends are?" Joel asked excitedly.

Bast looked at Cory and Sean, and both boys giving slight nods. He took a step forward, and then knelt down in front of the boy. "The Cheetahs are our brothers, and if they like you enough to consider *you* their brother too, then that's good enough for us. So, yes, we would be honoured to be your brothers."

Bast suddenly found himself with an armful of happy Joel, and the little boy was wonderingly running his fingers through the lion's short mane.

Mont grinned as he joined his brother and his new Vulcan one, "Now, since you're our brother, then I guess we should tell you all the ticklish spots that Herm and Merc have."

Joel looked over at Mont and smiled. "Only if they like being tickled," he said softly, to which both cheetah's rolled their eyes and giggled. Then Joel asked the lions, "What do I call you? I don't know your names."

"I'm Mont... and he's Bast... and were here to pump..." Mont clapped, "... you up!" he finished, in a very bad Arnold accent.

Joel giggled as he reached from Bast's hug to end up in Mont's arms. "You're funny; and you're nice, too. You're like Merc and Herm and Cory and Sean. You're safe."

Cory giggled, "Come on, Lil'elf. I'm still hungry, and there's food waiting for us at home."

Joel gave Mont's ear one last tickle before being transferred to Cory's arms. He was held securely chest to chest with his blond haired brother, his thin legs wrapped around Cory's waist, and the grin on his face seemed fixed permanently.

As the group of seven started making their way towards a large group of buildings that were across a road ahead, Joel asked curiously, "What is this place? And what is that place over there? I can't remember much from walking over here yesterday, and that's funny 'cos I remember everything else... everything..." he trailed off slightly, looking a little sick.

Cory answered slowly, concern in his eyes, "This is Camp Little Eagle, and we're going back to the Short Compound; our home, Joel." He looked at the child's face closely and then asked, "What do you mean about remembering everything?"

Joel shuddered. "I remember everything; from my first memory when I was about three to when Mikey came and saved me... everything... every beating, every c...cut of a knife, e...every... b...b...burn..." he started to sob. "... All the p...pain... everything..."

Cory cuddled Joel tightly. "Shh... don't review those memories yet, Joel; you need to let your mind heal itself first. A wise little boy once told me that 'Sometimes bad things gotta happen so that good things can happen'. The bad things are in the past, now; you need to let them go and allow all of the good things that are waiting for you, to happen."

Joel sniffled into Cory's neck. "I've an eidetic memory, Cory," he sobbed quietly. "They're always there, always alive in my mind... but I'll... I'll try... for you, I'll try really, really hard..."

Sean reached over and rubbed his new brother's back lovingly, while the four cats exchanged a sad look with each other. The rest of the journey to the Compound was made quietly, save for the quietening sobs from the frail little Vulcan as he drifted off to sleep in his brother's tender arms.

Once Joel had dropped off, Sean quickly filled the others in on what Ms Jackson had said. He finished, "I'm worried. If Doc Austin needs Bones to look at Joel, then something must be really wrong."

"No point looking for trouble that we don't already have, Love," Cory said softly as he cradled his newest brother in his arms. "We're just going to have to wait for Wednesday or Thursday. Just hope nothing else happens before then."

They all nodded in agreement. Hermes then asked, "How old is Joel. Inside, I mean. He acts a lot younger than nearly thirteen."

"Kyle said," Cory answered softly, "that he never grew emotionally. He's acting like a little child for inside he is one. But, he can also act like an adult as in other ways he grew up *too* fast. He should even out in time."

"And even if not, he won't be the only one who is emotionally younger than he appears," Sean added with an understanding smile. "Whatever happens, we're going to love him."

As they reached the CIC building, Mercury ran ahead and opened the door for Cory to walk through before they all followed their noses to where breakfast was lying in wait... as well as the rest of the Clan...

"Justy; is Joel back yet?" Kevin asked the teen while looking around for the small black haired boy he'd seen a picture of the previous evening.

Justy giggled. "You might say yes and you might say no, Kev, knowing how Blondie walks when he knows food is waiting, I'd say they should be opening that door over there in about thirty seconds."

"Yeah," Timmy put in his opinion, "They been away for ages, and Daddy needs food jus' a little less than he needs Poppa-cuddles!"

Kyle sniggered, "Justy's wrong about the time, though, Kev. Here they are now!"

Kyle pointed to the door leading from Main CIC and Kevin turned to see the group from the Camp enter, with a small kid sleeping in Cory's arms.

"You cheated!" Justy giggled as he tickled Kyle.

"So?" Kyle laughed as he squirmed about under the assault.

Kevin was not paying them any attention. Rather, he had moved away towards Cory, much to his twin's amusement: or more specifically, towards the boy Cory was carrying.

Kenny cast a telling look at Xain and Jake, grinned and quickly found a place to sit in order to watch what would likely be a typical Clan romance start. 'About time,' he thought to himself, for Kevin's loneliness had been bothering him for quite a while, now.

Sean cleared his throat to get everyone's attention; which was generally hard to do as half the group present had food on their plates. Food on plates was a sin. Food in bellies was good. Interruptions were unwelcome.

"Guys, Joel's here, and is now *our* brother," he said, pointing to the group who had walked from the Camp, "and I just want you all to remember what we told ya last night. Let him come to you. He seems to like gaining *new* brothers, so it won't take too long for him to open up. I just don't want y'all thinking that he'll act the same for everyone. Don't startle him and he'll end up asking you what he asked Mont and Bast; to be his brother or sister, okay?"

They all nodded solemnly as Cory started to whisper at the face that was mostly hidden in his neck, "Lil'elf? Wake up, bro; time for a real breakfast."

Joel's head moved up as he came awake. "Real breakfast? I thought we'd *had* breakfast."

"That was just the 'wake up snack'," Cory giggled.

Joel blinked, then giggled, "Are you really hobbits or something? People don't eat that much... do they?"

Cory smiled, "I think the only time a couple of these guys stop eating is to take a nap."

Joel turned slightly so that he was now over Cory's hip and looked around the room. It was full of children, some older than him, some younger, and all smiling. He recognised most from the night before, just barely, but one new face seemed to stand out quickly: and it wasn't the Andorian waving at him from the back next to the two Klingons; and that was surprising; him paying more attention to a human rather than a non-human.

It was a small boy that held his attention. He was about Joel's size; with short, spiky brown hair and deep, dreamy brown eyes. He was also standing less than three feet from Cory.

"Hi," Joel managed to whisper, his own eyes lost in those of the boy's before him.

Kevin smiled shyly as he also managed an eloquent, "Hi," in return.

Cory smiled at Kevin as he lowered Joel down onto his feet. As he straightened up he whispered something to his new little brother, and Joel nodded his head in answer, his eyes still lost in Kevin's.

Cory grinned, and gently moved Joel's curly, wild hair from covering his ears, revealing what he truly was the the others in the room.

"Kewl! You're a Vulcan!" Calen exclaimed as he trotted over. "I've got an awesome Vulcan Uncle, guys!!!"

Joel's eyes broke contact with Kevin's as he watched Calen come closer. "Your uncle...? Cory, didn't Sean say that he was your son?"

"Yup, and that's why you're his Uncle," Cory responded, squeezing Joel's shoulder.

"I... I remember, now. You have lots of kids... are they all my nephews as well?" he asked as Calen reached him. Joel wasted no time in pulling the other boy in for a hug.

"Yup," Sean answered instead.

"I'm... an uncle," Joel whispered happily as he hugged Calen tightly.

Calen giggled as the hug broke. "You hug real good, Uncle Joel," he said to the smaller boy.

Joel just smiled, then found that his eyes automatically turned back and found Kevin's.

Kevin moved over slowly and stood a few inches away from Joel. Considering that Joel had never met him before, he was very surprised that the Vulcan boy's only reaction was to smile more. "You want to sit with me to have breakfast?" Kevin asked shyly.

Joel nodded, "Yeah; but can Cory and Sean be there too?"

Kevin nodded happily, "I'll get you something to eat. What would you like?"

Joel tilted his head at that. On one level, he knew he was allowed to make choices now. On another he was trained not to. On yet another, some force or power seemed strong in this large group of kids, and the vast majority of the Fire he felt was coming from Kevin. Fire, and overwhelming strength. He answered, "I've not eaten much before, so I dunno. Can you pick something good for me, please?"

Kevin nodded and trotted to the buffet, while a bemused Joel was gathered up by Timmy and Calen and led to a chair. Cory went with him while Sean smiled and moved to the doorway leading to the kitchen. "Here you are! What's happening, Mom? Why are you here and not with us?"

Teri smiled, "We just had a message from Ms Jackson. She said that Joel nearly freaked out when he saw her, so we thought it best for the adults to eat in here and let him enjoy his breakfast."

Sean smiled. "Okay, Mom. Do you have an energy drink for him? He needs them."

"Sure, we were also told to get one ready," Allen said as he turned from the counter. "Here, this one's for him, and the other for Kev."

Sean giggled as he took the two strawberry milkshakes from Allen.

Both were topped with whipped cream and chocolate sprinkles.

"What's your name?" Joel asked.

"Kevin," came the response. "Kevin Thompson."

Joel smiled. "Can you tell me what this is?" he asked, holding up an orange.

Kevin did so without laughing. "You've not seen one before?" he asked gently.

"Nope," Joel replied as he placed it on his plate. "Not much food where I was. I read about them, though, but never saw one..."

Kevin grinned and then pointed to each item near Joel, and those Joel did not know he explained.

As he was doing so, Sean came up and handed both boys the shakes.

Joel's eyes bugged out of his skull yet again that morning. "Wh...what's this?"

"Doc Austin sent a few messages over, bro. It's a special milkshake that'll help you grow," Sean said as he gave the cherub a kiss on the cheek.

Kevin smiled, "My Poppa made them."

"How'd you know that?" Joel asked nervously.

"Cos they're extra special," Kevin said as he started drinking his.

"Oh." Joel took a sip, and the flavour exploded on his tongue. He sat there dreamily sucking up the strawberry flavoured milk; and Cory could have sworn the boy was purring.

Once both had finished their shakes, Joel asked, "Why do you need them?"

"The shakes?" Kevin asked. Once Joel nodded, he explained, pointing at his brother next to him, "Cos I'm smaller than I should be, too. Kenny's my identical twin, and I should be like him."

Joel looked past Kevin and at Kenny. He regarded them both, then whispered sadly, "You were starved too, huh?"

Kevin nodded, his face also showing sadness. "It's all over now, Joel. We're looked after and loved, now."

'Loved?' Joel thought. He half smiled, although confusion was in his eyes, and he turned his attention to that orange he had first picked up. His first bite made his face scrunch up as it was a little sharper than he was expecting, but he found he liked the taste anyway. Giggles from Kevin and Kenny made him curious, so he looked at them in open puzzlement.

Stifling his laughter, Kenny said, "Try peeling the skin off first. It'll taste better." Kevin opened his hand as if asking for the orange Joel held, and once he had been given it, proceeded to peel it for Joel. Once done, he offered the segments back.

Joel chewed one piece and reflected on the difference. "Mmm.... okay, that's nice. The, errr, skin?" Kevin nodded. "Well, I liked that too, but if it's not to be eaten..."

"You can eat it if you want, it's not gonna hurt you," Kevin said with a small smile. "It just tastes yucky!"

Joel giggled, shrugged, then proceeded to finish all the segments before chewing on the orange peel. Cory, along with most of the others near, just sniggered quietly and left him be: if he was happy, why stop him?

Tommy was watching his newest brother when an idea came to him. He stood and whispered to Kelly before tearing out and into the kitchen.

While Tommy ran out, Xain had moved over and sat on the other side of Kenny, placing a plate of food down at his seat and giving another to an older boy next to him.

Joel watched both boys carefully. He whispered to Kevin, "How many Vulcan's are here?"

"Two, now," Kevin giggled. "He's Xain, and he's my brother. And that's Jake next to him; he's my brother too."

Joel smiled wider, and looked up at the other, older seeming Vulcan boy. Xain caught the look, and nodded, a very small smile on his lips.

Joel then started to reach for a few of the more colourful pieces of fruit near him. He felt a pair of eyes watching him, so he turned around to see who it was. It was Sean, and he was watching each piece of fruit on Joel's plate with caution.

"Want some?" Joel offered, holding out a banana.

Sean recoiled back slightly and shook his head forcibly.

"H...have I done something wrong?" Joel asked in fear.

"No Joel, Sean just has a fear of fruit, since the last time he visited the Moon," Cory giggled as he rubbed Joel's shoulders. "It's okay; nobody had a chance to tell you. I did the same thing yesterday morning on accident, and I knew about it!"

Joel looked between the two boys briefly before saying in a small voice, "I'm sorry, Sean. I'll remember."

"Apology accepted, Joel; it's okay since you didn't know." Sean replied, still keeping a safe distance from the banana. "If you do forget, it's not a problem. The guys are trying to help me get over it by teasing me with fruit whenever they can. At least I don't run from the room any more!"

Joel felt something stir deep within his being. He handed the banana to Cory, stood and moved over and sat on Sean's lap facing him. He felt another inner prompt, and laid one hand on Sean's cheek.

"Fa, tev'du tishau savas?" he asked, not knowing why he was doing so.

"Before, did you like fruit?"

Cory's eyes opened wide. Joel had not spoken in English. It was in High Vulcan.

"Ha," Sean replied in the same, shocked by the sudden change.

"Yes,"

A whisper, then. Carried on currents of Time, and audible only to those touched of Time... touched of the Doctor...

"He is coming; your brother. You will love him at first sight, but you will be afraid of what to say to him. Do not be! Follow your heart when it commands, and he will be healed. Think, and he will break. In his healing is your own."

Cory and Sean stiffened, yet Joel remained unmoved. He held out his hand for the banana, and Cory found himself handing it to him.

Sean started to tense up, but found his building fear reducing, as if by half; yet the once calm Joel was now trembling as much as he was and was looking at the banana with the same fear.

"Na' abru'sarlah pthak, du z'limuk pthak," Joel stated, his voice echoing in the large Dining Room.

"To overcome fear, you must face fear,"

The rest of the room was still, and at the doorway, some of the adults had gathered to watch, curious as to why a room full of teens and pre-teens was as silent as the grave.

Sean and Joel were both trembling in unison by now, Joel's hand still on his brother's cheek. Sean reached and peeled the banana, and broke a piece off. The war in his face was mirrored in Joel's. He ate it, and then Joel took a bite from what was left.

The banana soon vanished, and a peeled orange was handed to Sean, this time by a small ginger haired child who was smiling at them both mysteriously.

The orange also vanished the same way, yet with less fear shared by both.

An apple was handed over, and shared. This time without the hand to cheek contact, and only Sean was trembling. Joel was not afraid of the fruit: he had only been sharing Sean's fear... his pain...

"Du vuhrgwau dru kusut, heh nazh-tor karik'es s'vuhrgwaya," Joel echoed finally before his eyes rolled in his head.

"You shared your pain, and gained strength from the sharing,"

Cory caught him as he fell limply from Sean's lap, out cold.

Sean just sat there, bemused... and eating another apple.

Joel was held possessively on Cory's lap, and was being rocked gently while the rest of the boys watched in silence. Levi was on Sean's lap, scanning Joel.

"I... he's asleep. I don't know what happened, Uncle Cory. I really don't!" Levi said in concern.

"How the bloody hell did he learn High Vulcan?" Nathan asked from the other side of the table. "Didn't the report Mikey gave say he was lost since he was a baby??"

The ginger haired boy who had been handing Joel the fruit smiled, "You'll find out, guys."

"D... John, if you know something..." Cory said, catching himself in time before giving away the boy's secret.

"Can't say, Cory. Not mine to tell, and not time either. See you later, dude; I'll be back to watch the wedding," 'John' said with a smile before wandering off, eating a banana.

A few seconds later, Joel stirred and opened his eyes. "What happened?" he asked in confusion.

Cory cuddled Joel, "We don't know either, lil' elf; whatever it was, you made it so that Sean isn't afraid of fruit any more. You did a great job and helped him a lot. Thank you."

Joel looked over at Sean, only to see him smiling and eating some pineapple.

"You spoke Vulcan, Joel," Kevin said gently.

Joel glanced over at the brown haired boy with the stunning eyes. "What?" was his puzzled reply.

Kevin repeated, "You spoke Vulcan. High Vulcan; how do you know that?"

Joel tilted his head slightly, "I... I can't speak Vulcan... can I?" He looked around the room, only to see most of the kids nodding at him.

Xain stood slowly, "Shal Xain, Kan t'Solak."

"I am Xain, Child of Solak."

Joel responded without thinking, "Shal Joel, t'ri-fainu ork'ik'ai."

"I am Joel, of unknown ancestry."

His eyes popped open. "How?" he asked in shock. "How'd I..."

Cory shook his head as he placed the boy back on his seat next to Kevin, "We don't know, lil'elf. Don't worry, though. We'll have people find out for you, okay?"

Joel nodded his head uncertainly, "Okay," he whispered, before turning back to his almost forgotten food.

Just then, Tommy came back out from the kitchen carrying a large plate of pancakes and syrup. He slowed as he came near to Cory and Sean, looking at Joel meaningfully.

"Hey, Tommy. What's up? I thought you were busy making cakes," Sean giggled.

"Sean, you know I ain't gunna let my new kin starve! He's gettin special pancakes; my li'l brother ain't gunna be a eatin' just regular food!" Tommy replied, obviously expecting Sean to have understood without asking.

Cory grinned. "Thanks, Tommy; but he's your big brother, not little," he giggled.

"He's li'l'r then me, so he's my li'l bro, blondie!" Tommy stated. "You keep to a worryin' about cuddles; let the exp'rt handle feedin' him. Thar's enuf here for him to be a sharin' with Kevvy if he wantsta. I done made surea that."

By now Joel had picked up on the fact that the three next to him were speaking about him. He turned and saw the nice boy, Tommy, that had brought him those first clothes yesterday in the showers. "Hi," he said with a timid smile on his face. He then asked hesitantly, "You're Cory's and Sean's and Tyler's brother, ain't ya?"

Tommy smiled back. "Yeppers Joel! I'm not only their kin, but ur's too. You're my li'l big brother too, so I gotta make sure you're eatin like you an' Kevvy are 'posed to."

Tommy placed the plate down in front of the wondering Vulcan, and started to turn back, but Joel stopped him by pulling him in for a hug. "You're nice. Can I call you Tommy?" he asked, his chin on his 'big' little brother's shoulder.

Tommy grinned. "You kin call me Tommy; if you keep givin good cuddles like these you kin call me anythin' you wanna!"

Joel giggled, and for the first time in his life, found himself cracking a small joke: "Okay, 'Anythin'-You-Wanna'," he smiled as he broke the hug.

Tommy giggled back with a huge grin. "I'm gonna collect somea dem cuddles again later; you needta eat the pancakes while they's still hot, that's when they's the best!"

"Thank you," Joel murmured, "I will."

Tommy walked off with a happy smile while the Vulcan turned to look closer at the plate. Pancakes, cream, syrup, strawberries, and a few other things were there, and in a large quantity.

Kevin, who had watched the entire show with a mysterious smile, was now side by side with Joel, looking at it as well. "Boy, he must really love you, Joel. That's extra special pancakes that is!"

Joel nodded mutely. He glanced sideways at Kevin, "You want to... to share some with me?" he asked hesitantly.

Kevin, as was normal, did not feel like eating; however, he thought to himself, *'He trusts me, and I don't want to disappoint him.'*

Kevin nodded, "Yeah, but not too much. I don't eat a lot."

"Kay!" Joel grinned happily before digging in. Every so often, a fork full was presented for Kevin's consumption, and happily accepted by the brown haired boy. Also, due to the fact he was sharing his food, Joel seemed to slow down his eating speed without knowing it.

Mercury nudged his twin in the ribs lightly, "Look. That's so sweet."

Hermes giggled and nodded, before returning to his bowl of warm milk.

Artemus and Aphrodite were near to their brothers and watching Joel closely. As with the others, they had been surprised at the dynamic change that had occurred when he had started speaking Vulcan, but now that he was acting as before, that heavy scent was back in the air, and it set them on edge. Even in his happiness, Joel was afraid; mortally so, and it made the two female G-Cats go into maternal protection mode.

Muttering to themselves, they remained where they were, and nibbled on the meat on their plates; watching the boy.

Cory was watching his brothers and friends mill around the room, in between glancing at his young charge at his side. Everyone seemed to be eating well enough, but rushing to get away from the table after casting giggling looks at him and Sean. Cory rolled his eyes. *'They are definitely up to something, Teddybear,'* he sent to his beloved.

'How'd you tell?' was the sardonic response as Sean continued to inhale his breakfast.

Cory watched him for a moment in bemusement, *'How the heck can you eat? I'm nervous as hell!'*

'Well,' Sean sent back, looking up with a wicked gleam in his eyes, *'I'm thinking I'm going to need my strength for... later...'*

Cory blushed five shades of red, nodded, then fell into his own breakfast with equal gusto.

Kyle noticed and giggled, bringing himself to Cory's attention. Cory blinked, then narrowed his eyes slightly, "Bro, didn't I tell you to get some sleep?" He looked around and saw Antonio. "Him too! He needs it more than you do!"

"We got about ten hours, ain't that enough?" Kyle giggled.

"You stopped time?" Sean said while still chewing, then giggled as a piece of bacon flew out of his mouth, vanished and appeared on his plate.

"Naw; Levi knows this cool place to just chill and sleep by a waterfall. You should try it sometime!" Kyle replied with a grin as the bacon on Sean's plate tripled in quantity.

Sean looked down, then chuckled, "Thanks, but I don't want to eat an entire pig, *Your Majesty!*"

"It could be arranged!" Kyle giggled. "Now eat your food, horsey boy!"

"Bite me," Sean muttered, yet he did as he was told with a loving glance at his 'baby' brother.

"You've got whole pigs?" Mont called out from across the table, his ears perked forwards with extreme interest. "They still alive?"

Kyle giggled. "Get with me after the wedding; I know a place where all of you can go and have a really good hunt! This place is overrun with wild pigs and would appreciate the help in getting rid of a few!"

"Sweet!" all the G-Cats chorused happily.

"Wedding?" Joel asked, looking around.

Cory smiled. "Yes, a wedding. Sean and I are going to get married later today; and going by the faces I'm not seeing here all of the rest of the guys are planning on making it something really special."

"... or overdone... or both..." Sean muttered with a grin.

Joel reaction to his answered question was not expected, however. He started to tremble violently and looked around nervously for something or someone he did not know, suddenly afraid of something he could not remember. He pushed back from the table and stumbled backwards from them, tears falling thickly from his eyes.

Kevin moved quickly and took a hold of one of Joel's hands. "What's wrong?" he asked softly.

Joel shook his head, his fear receding as that strength he had felt earlier from Kevin was magnified by his touch. "I dunno... I don't wanna lose my brothers..." he sobbed brokenly, looking through his still falling tears at a shocked pair of teens in front of him.

"Why do you think you are going to lose them?" Kyle asked softly as he watched Cory and Sean try to process the sudden change in mood.

"They... they're..." Joel tried and failed to say.

"Gay?" Kevin asked, a fear of his own in his eyes. Was Joel afraid of gay people? Had he been abused by someone and was now terrified of them?

Joel nodded, then screamed.

Allen had just come through the door and was walking towards Cory and Sean. He stopped dead at the deafening scream from the tiny boy, and even backed up a pace or two.

"Wha...?" was all he managed to say.

"Get away from them!" Joel sobbed, running forwards and placing his trembling form between his new big brothers and the horror before him. "Don't hurt them!! Don't..."

"Joel, I'm not..." Allen said, extending both hands in what he hoped was a passive gesture.

He was not prepared for Joel's sudden collapse into the waiting arms of Sean.

The few kids left in the room all moved at once, and all seemed to be productive. Justy and his young twin brothers rushed to the door and held it closed, Xain and Jake moved forwards to help Cory and Sean stop a thrashing Joel from injuring himself or others, the G-Cats, who had been watching this in dumbstruck horror started calling for medical assistance, and the three Mikyvis started scanning.

"What's wrong with him?" Cory managed as he just about held one of Joel's arms down.

Levi had tears in his eyes. "I don't know! I've not seen this before... his mind's *gone*, Uncle Cory! It's gone!" he sobbed.

"No, it is not, Levi," Xain said as he reached Joel. "*I* have seen something like this before, when I was a child on Vulcan. His mind is wounded, and he has been drawn into that wound."

"I can see a blank space there, bro, but I can't see inside it!" Kyle said, fighting down his panic.

Tyler was nearly incoherent. "I won't lose my new brother; I won't! DOCTOR!!!" he yelled out, amplifying his voice to sound through all the Compound.

Xain looked at Tyler curiously, wondering what a human doctor could do to help Joel. "Patriarch, I do not have all the required training, but *I* am his only hope of survival. He needs a mind-meld, and Grandfather Sarek is too far away to get here in time. Joel has moments only."

"Do it!" Cory ordered, no option for argument left in his tone.

Xain was about to when Allen addressed Cory quickly. With pain in his voice he said, "Xain might die."

"What?" Cory asked in horror, immediately weighing his love for Joel against that for Xain. "Why?"

"Sopek at work mentioned this to me; a family member of his tried helping another with Joel's problem and was untrained. He died, and the one he was trying to save was lost," Allen said, worry in his voice. "It could happen to Xain."

Levi interrupted. "No he won't; *I* will make sure of that!"

Xain felt a chill of fear run up his spine. He fought it down and placed every emotion he could within the deepest levels of his mind and locked them away. He turned to Levi and ordered, "Levi, this needs Vulcan touch telepathy. Your telepathy might be equal or greater to my own, but can you place your mind into another's body as Vulcans can? If yes, then meld with me while I meld with him. You *must* let me direct our joined minds. I know what to do, it is only that I do not have the finesse nor experience of a Kolinahr Adept."

Levi nodded seriously. "I've studied how you do it Uncle Xain, and I can mimic it to the point that you will have as much use of my mind as you need. You'll just have to tell me what to do once I connect to you."

Levi put his fingers to Xain's temple and felt a touch on his awareness through his non-human nervous system. Quickly adding new levels of protection, he allowed Xain's mind to briefly enter his own being, before feeling and allowing Xain to gather what he could of his own mind. Together, they dove back through into Xain's body. Just as soon as Xain's fingertips touched Joel's face, they said together in Xain's voice, "Our minds to your mind..."

When Joel had seen movement by the doorway to the kitchen, he had not seen what the others had. Instead, he saw his master was coming through, holding a baseball bat in his hand, and the bat was covered in blood.

Mr Williams marched, savagery etched in his face, towards the two gay teens.

Joel screamed; a howl of terror and fear, knowing that he was about to lose his two big brothers.

He placed himself before them, and faced his master. Only due to that strength that Kevin had somehow given him could he do so.

"Get away from them!" Joel sobbed, "Don't hurt them!! Don't..."

He saw his master stop and look at him in disgust. "Joel, I'm not..." was all he said before everything turned to darkness to Joel's eyes.

He seemed to fall beyond all thought and knowledge, and slowly, like a building wave, pain started to lance through his mind.

Bright light, screams, yells, fire, smoke... people milled about, all dressed in black, apart from the few slaves like himself who were dressed in grey. His master was with the other Eldar Enforcers, exacting justice upon the wrongdoer. The 'criminals' were being let out of the prison vans one by one, and parcelled out to various groups.

Once there, they were slowly beaten to death.

The Enforcers had a variety of weapons, all blunted objects, like baseball bats, golf clubs; you name it, they had it. Joel was on the edge of one circle and was being made to watch, the night surrounding them lit by bonfires spread about the old playing fields in Bridgend. These fields had long since been abandoned for playing games; they were now solely used for this barbarism.

He witnessed horror after horror as Christians, Jews, Hindus, homosexuals, and many more were brought into the circle to face death. They all looked at him as they died, or so it seemed.

This was a suppressed memory. He knew that now, but he had no knowledge about events after this, or even from before it. It was as if he had always been here; trapped in a time-loop of carnage.

Yet as he watched the events repeat over and over, subtle differences started to rise. His master had paid no attention to him when this started, now as the all too familiar faces started coming forward to die once again, his master's eyes seemed fixed on his own. An oppressive dread and malevolence started to close in on Joel, as even the dying started casting their eyes at him; blaming, accusing, hating.

He trembled and shook, but could not turn away... he tried to close his eyes, but was unable to. He had to watch. Blood seemed everywhere, and he could feel it splattering onto his face. He started sobbing "Please stop. Please, don't hurt them any more... please... stop..."

His master's eyes started glowing red, and a voice, low and terrifying, started to intrude upon Joel's awareness...

Die... scum... pain... blood... you are next... you'll be ripped apart... no more... unloved... agony always...

The voice was his master's, yet Mr William's lips uttered no sound. Joel started to feel the darkness close in, and pain lancing all the more through his every nerve. His head seemed ready to split in two.

Another voice. Clear and strong and... recognized! It came from somewhere Joel could not remember, yet he knew it. He could not hear the first thing the voice said clearly, yet it suddenly and sharply came into focus:

"... our minds are merging; our minds are one."

Two boys appeared. One was small and very young looking, with bright purple eyes, while the other was slender and taller than he, and his ears! They were pointed! The 'older' boy looked at him in the eye, "Joel, take our hands. Come with us. Quickly."

Trust. He felt trust. He raised his left hand but it grew heavy and fell back again. His master was staring straight at him, malevolence smiting into him like fire, pain unlike he'd known. Joel screamed, "I can't leave! I can't move!"

Pitiful bastard... suffer and die... worthless trash...

"You can. Fight it and move your arm. Take our hands!"

Behind the boy with the pointed ears, another boy, taller, came into view. His hands were gripping onto the first boy's left shoulder and his eyes also fixed themselves on Joel's face. The first boy's voice became choral as he said "You are nearly out of time, Joel. Please. Take our hands!"

... how does it feel, freak? To have your life torn away...

But he could not. His strength had gone. There was nothing left to fight with. All that remained was the courage to tell these strange boys to leave, before they too were killed. "G... go! Go now! You can't..."

You cannot escape me, you faggot!... I will rend your flesh!... you shall not live to be His Shaper!

The voice intruded and more pain lanced through his mind. "G... GO! Quick!" he yelled at the three strange boys before him. He started to pull back from them as if to give the strange ones room to run, but stopped suddenly as he felt strength enter him. Someone had taken his right hand.

He looked down to see a pair of hands holding his own. He looked up at yet another boy, of the same height as he, who had brown hair and beautiful brown eyes that shone with life... and something else. Something he could not recognise. "Joel, please come. You are scaring me."

His voice sounded choral as well. Joel looked past him and saw yet another boy. They looked very much alike, yet the second was slightly taller. He suddenly remembered! Kevin and Kenny!

He reached out with the new strength flowing into him, grasped hold of Xain's hands and the now five boys seemed to reach as one and yanked him out of darkness...

You will NEVER escape... I will come for you, Broken S...

Huge sobs ripped from Joel's throat at the pain in his head, and the light in the Dining Room stung his eyes. He could barely make out Xain sitting on his legs and gripping his face between his hands, with Jake on one side and Levi behind him. He closed his eyes tightly, and just continued to sob, for the pain, while now lessening, was overwhelming.

"My turn Xain; pay attention to what Poppa taught me," Levi announced. Without any warning, Levi began to glow an angry purple as the entire compound was rocked by lightning strikes outdoors despite the clear sunny skies.

Joel's sobs grew less as the pain vanished. Xain gently moved himself off Joel's legs, which were drawn up to Joel's chest as he tried to curl in on himself in emotional trauma.

He could not, however, for he was being held in a sitting position by Sean, with his smaller body pressed against his big brother's chest. "Shh, it's over, Joel," Sean soothed quietly. "You're here, you're safe. Shhhh..."

Cory crouched down and pulled both of them over and into his arms, murmuring comfort to the gently weeping Vulcan.

Levi continued to siphon Joel's pain and redirected it outside, while his parents and the Double J's stood together and worked on repairing, as best as they could, Joel's mind.

"We're not trained for this!" Tyler spat out angrily. "There's 'something' else in there!"

Justy was still by the door, holding it closed to stop the other kids in the Rec Room from seeing what was happening. He suddenly felt himself prompted to open the door, and once he did so, three kids came in quickly: Jason, Nathan and Victoria. Their eyes were glowing a brilliant blue.

"We are trained; we'll help," Jason said firmly as the three N-Gens joined their minds with Jamie and Jacob.

Kyle smiled with relief as he and Tyler added their own power to the mix. "Show us, bro. I think we need to know!"

The Double J's grinned, and their eyes started glowing, just the same as the other three N-Gens.

Teri, watching nervously from the Kitchen doorway with Billy, sighed.

Angela came over to them and hugged Teri tightly in comfort. She looked at her three children who had just joined the group, then noticed the twin telepaths. "More glowing eyed kids. Are torches going out of date or something?" she asked no one in particular.

"Torches? Hmm..... that might add a little more to the ceremony. Thanks Aunt Angela!" Bryce commented before popping out from his vantage point next to her.

The external light show started to fade as Levi sensed the pain in Joel fading away. Jason sighed in relief a moment or so later, and the glow from his and the other four N-Gen's eyes faded. "That's got it," he said happily.

"The blank place is still there, Jace," Kyle stated in concern. "This could happen again."

Jason nodded, "I know, but I'm not a Vulcan, and Xain ain't Kolinahr trained. We need Poppa Spock for this; he can heal Joel fully."

Nathan added, "But we have placed blocks there, and you did too. They have got to be able to hold against that 'thing' breaking out again."

Cory was speechless as he moved to envelope Joel in a full hug. Jason looked down at them, then gestured to his brother and sister, "Come on. Joel's in good hands now; let's get back to the 'other stuff'."

The three of them quickly moved out of the room as Sean shook his head in shock. "What happened?" he asked Xain.

Xain sat down, his body trembling slightly, and answered Sean, "He must have suffered trauma in his past and from his reaction now, I think he blocked those memories when he was a human. When he returned to being Vulcan, those blocked memories would have injured his brain. He was trapped in what can only be described as a hole in his mind."

Cory found his voice, "What *happened*, though? What was... all that...?"

Jake, tears in his voice, replied, "He was made to watch people getting executed for being religious or gay, Cory. He had to see many die for it, and so he thought that is what would have happen here when he saw Dad moving towards you two."

Allen looked sickened. "Joel?" he called gently.

The boy turned his face away from Cory's chest long enough to cast a nervous glance at the man.

"I'm gay, Joel. And I have someone special. It's okay here; we won't get hurt," Allen said, sincerity in his eyes and voice.

Billy came forward. "Watch, kiddo," he said as he pulled Allen in and kissed him deeply.

Joel gaped at them both.

"So," Cory tried to piece it together, "When he saw Allen come towards us, it triggered repressed memories?"

Xain nodded.

"And that happened, as I said they were gay?" Kevin asked with horror.

Again, Xain nodded, but reached and pulled his little brother to him. "It was not your fault, Kevin. It would have happened anyway. What Joel saw here might have happened at any time. His fear for his brothers caused it, and it was not your fault."

"It's best that it happened here instead of somewhere that all of us could not have been there for him," Levi added seriously.

"I... I was also scared..." Joel mumbled, still looking at Allen and Billy in wonder, "because I think I'm gay too..."

He buried his head into Cory's chest and sobbed in relief. He had finally admitted it openly and freely, and even to himself, for the first time ever.

Cory rubbed Joel's back as he softly said, "Most of your new brothers are too, Joel; you're home now and don't need to worry about being gay any more."

Joel smiled timidly as he raised his head to look his brother in the eyes. "I...I have always been scared of... *him*... my master finding out..." He paused and closed his eyes. "Thank you, Mikey," he prayed quietly. "Thank you for saving me!"

He pulled back from Cory, then, and looked at Allen. In the greatest gesture of trust that he could manage, he offered himself to one whom he believed could easily hurt him; a man. He raised his arms, just like a tiny child begging for hugs, and blinked at him tearfully.

Allen came over and reached down to scoop up the small boy, and Joel clung onto him tightly. He finally let himself believe it was okay to be gay; to be safe. Allen moved and sat on a chair and simply held him, kissing his head in comfort. Joel felt suddenly very comfortable while in Allen's arms, and that Heat and Fire seemed to be back. He let it wash over him, different though it may be from the Heat and Fire from Cory and Sean.

"I'll go tell the others things are okay, Cory," Justy said quietly before leaving the room.

Sean got up from the floor and sat down heavily on the nearest chair. "Xain, can you explain more about what happened? How did this 'hole' get in his mind?"

"Unlike most humanoids," Xain answered, his voice hollow, "traumatic memories are not only psychologically disturbing to Vulcans, but have physical consequences as well. Joel's brain, in attempting to reorder the neural pathways and recover from the extreme shock of those suddenly emerging memories, literally tried to lobotomise itself. I would suppose that the first shock was in those repressed memories being integrated into his renewed physiology last night. As Joel was asleep, his brain could 'cordon' off those traumatic experiences without causing the situation we just observed. When the memories were triggered, however, Joel was pulled into those shut off areas of his own mind. Had his brain done what it is meant to, Joel would have been effectively dead to us. His body would be alive, and so would his katra, his spirit. But he would have been trapped forever, in his own mind."

Levi added seriously, "He will require healing. What I sensed in there was the combined worst experiences he has ever been through. It is as if he has a separate personality within that area that wants to destroy him."

"I felt the same," Kevin whispered, looking at Joel sadly.

Jamie added, "As he came free, that other 'thing' in there tried following. It was awful, Cor. Pure hatred, and it wants to destroy Joel. We barely managed to keep it in."

Joel then spoke up, his voice filled with horror, "So I'm brain-damaged and in...insane? Wh...what else can go wrong... w...with me!"

"You are neither." Cory replied softly. "You are healing from something which none of us can even imagine. We're your brothers, and whatever it takes to help you heal we'll do. If something like this happens we understand that it's a part of you that is still readjusting to your new life, and we'll make sure that you're helped through the adjustment."

"But..." Joel started.

Xain moved over and placed a hand on the boy's shoulder. "Joel, you need help from all of us, as well as from our people. You are not beyond help nor aid. Trust us."

Joel looked up and into Xain's dark eyes, and something seemed to click slightly inside. "Thanks," he whispered.

He turned back to look at his big brother from the comfort of Allen's lap and he let himself smile. He hugged Allen tightly again for a second, before sliding off and moving over to Cory.

He felt he wanted to say something, but the emotions that now filled his little heart were wholly unfamiliar. It was that Heat and that Fire again, and it was larger than ever. He looked up into Cory's eyes. "I... I..."

He trailed off in frustration and nervousness. What if he got the name for this feeling wrong? He'd be lying! He'd be in so much trouble.

What Cory saw in Joel's eyes, however, he recognised and understood.

"I love you too, lil'elf," Cory whispered as he hoisted the boy up and into his arms. "I love you too."

Sean was sitting with Joel on his lap in the Rec Room while Cory was engaged in a whispered conversation with Doc Austin. The doctor had been called by the G-Cats when Joel had first entered his 'fit' and had come over post-haste.

"Joel, relax; we're not going anywhere," Sean said as he cradled the trembling boy in his arms.

Joel sniffed and clung onto his big brother tighter.

Sean continued, "Whatever happens, just try to relax. We'll help you, and we love you, and you won't be alone ever, okay?"

"Kay," was the whispered answer from the now frightened and confused boy. 'What's this feeling? Where is it coming from?' he wondered to himself.

"I'm surprised," Cory was saying after he had finished explaining what had happened to the Doc, "You're not as tired as you were an hour back, Doc."

"I've slept for ages," the man laughed, "and you can thank Dylan for that. As soon as I got to my room I found him there. He took me to some quiet garden spot somewhere and brought me back after I'd had a good long sleep."

Cory shook his head. "This is getting to be a common thing around here!"

"Yup!" Dylan giggled as he popped into Cory's arms, gave him a huge, wet, kid-like sloppy kiss to the cheek, then popped away again.

"Okay, who told Dylan to take kissing lessons from Timmy!" Cory giggled.

"ME!" Levi bubbled as he too appeared in Cory's arms, and delivered his own wet, sloppy kiss to Cory's other cheek before vanishing.

Joel suddenly giggled as he witnessed this; his crystal clear, beautiful voice ringing out with his mirth. It was something Cory was overjoyed to hear; his new Vulcan brother laughing. Whenever Joel cried, his tears seemed to break Cory's heart, but his laughter was lightening to everyone's spirits.

Kevin, sitting next to Sean and holding Joel's hand, smiled and held in a sigh. He could still sense that, even though this was funny to Joel, a darkness was still pressed in on the boy's spirit and emotions.

Bryce could also be seen laughing at the other side of the Rec Room, and Cory noticed the mischievous look in his eyes. He braced himself, and was not disappointed when the eleven year old Mikyvis landed in his arms. "Family Tradition!" he crowed, before giving Cory's forehead the same treatment that his brothers had given Cory's cheeks.

Once Bryce had popped back to Xandor's side, Cory turned to find Doc Austin on his ass, laughing.

Joel was laughing openly, by now, as were Sean and Kevin.

As the doctor calmed down, he looked up at Cory. "I'll need to get with you guys after, but it will take some time to give you more details than I've just done. Just after the wedding would be best; not long to wait for that now. Nervous?"

"Let's just say Cory don't need to trim his nails!" Sean giggled.

Joel grinned as Cory poked his tongue out at his boyfriend.

Cory helped Doc Austin to stand then said, "Okay, after the reception, we'll have a talk."

The doctor nodded and moved away, and Cory went over and cuddled in next to his betrothed. Joel grinned at him, "You bite your nails too?"

Cory nodded. "I've done it since I lost my memory over a year ago; nobody says much about it and I'm down to only doing it when I'm nervous or worried."

Joel nodded solemnly. "I *had* to bite mine, or... or *he* would have pulled them off..." he whispered, a haunted look returning to his eyes and pushing away the jovial spirit that he had had watching the Mikyvis kissing their Uncle Cory. "I remember everything now," he said in barely a whisper, "all those people..."

Cory pulled Joel over and tight against him. "Remembering is okay, dwelling on it so that it makes you sad can hurt you. Always remember that is the past and not here; the Lord has taken those who suffered to a better place while those who tortured are feeling what they made others feel. You've got a wonderful smile, little brother; I'd like to see a lot more of it!"

"I'll second that!" Sean interjected. "Your smile is even brighter than Cory's."

Happy tears replaced the sad ones in Joel's pain filled eyes in an instant, and he started to smile again. "I think you both have beautiful smiles," he said shyly, before turning to Kevin. The boy was grinning at him, "And yours is too."

Kevin blushed, "Thanks, Joel."

Joel started to colour up slightly with his own blush, then he sighed again and scrunched his eyes up. Cory felt his happiness ebbing yet again, and sadness and pain replacing it.

'He needs to talk about it, big bro,' Victoria sent to Cory. *'Let him tell you in his own words.'*

Cory extended his budding control of his natural empathic abilities and 'pushed' an empathic hug out to the little Vulcan sitting on his lap.

He sent back, *'Thanks, sis. Will do.'* He then pulled Joel in tighter and cuddled him firmly against his chest. Joel shuffled about until he was sitting sideways, his legs over Sean's lap. Kevin was having none of it at being left out at comforting Joel, so he decided to shuffle under Joel's legs; ergo, now sitting on Sean's rather comfy lap.

"If you want to talk about it, Joel, then we're here," Cory whispered.

Joel began to whimper a bit as he started to purposely relive all those restored memories, but was drawing comfort from the three boys holding him. Protected and secure in their arms, he started quietly talking about what he had experienced.

"It... it started when I was ten. He took me down to the fields to 'do our duty', as he called it. All he'd ever said was that he was going to kill monsters to make the world a better place. I was actually kinda excited... at first... but then I saw who those 'monsters' really were; people... just people. And I felt so ashamed for being excited..." Joel choked up quickly and started sobbing. Cory started to rub his back with one hand soothingly while gripping one of Joel's hands firmly.

After a few moments, Joel stopped sobbing enough to continue, "They were just people. Young and old, it didn't matter. I heard about their 'crimes' and saw them die and I couldn't stop it. It wasn't long after that first time that I broke onto the internet and really found out about everything. And I began to get more scared when I realised that I too might be gay, and therefore a 'monster' in my own master's eyes."

Joel pressed his face into Cory's neck and bit his green lower lip to keep in a wail that was threatening to pour out. He managed to say, "I remember their faces... their names... there was a baby th...there... They... they..." He couldn't hold the wail in any longer.

Cory kissed Joel's head as he whispered, "Remember that they were called to Heaven to escape that place, Joel; they don't feel the pain any more."

"Really?" Joel blurted. "How do you know?"

"What does the Bible say, Joel?" Mikey asked as he appeared in front of the settee they were sitting on. "What did Saint John say about tears?"

Joel blinked and his eyes seemed to dart to and fro as if reading something. "... And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new.", " Joel recited quietly.

"And what did He say to Isaiah about fear and being redeemed?" Mikey asked again as he crouched down to join his brothers and Kevin in hugging Joel.

Quicker this time, Joel answered, "But now, this says the Lord, He who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name; You are Mine.'"

"You memorized the Bible, Joel?" Sean asked softly in wonder.

"All those who suffered," Mikey said gently, while nodding a 'yes' to his younger brother's question, "all of them; they are with Our Father, now. All; except you. You He needs here, with those who were always meant to be your brothers. You're needed here, Joel Short."

"What? What did you call me?" Joel asked, turning his head to look into Mikey's eyes in wonder, his pain suddenly forgotten.

Mikey kissed the boy's forehead, "Something good that's going to happen, little brother. Your name is in the Book of Life, but it's not 'Williams'... it's 'Short'."

"I think we best call Mom over," Sean giggled.

Joel went ramrod stiff. "Why?" he blurted out, his voice sounding wild and terrified.

"Because it's usually a good idea if we tell her she has a new son; just ask Mikey, she is his Mom too and he can tell you that she is safe." Cory replied softly.

Joel trembled, "But... she's a woman..." he cried, now petrified.

Mikey held out his arms, and scooped Joel up into them. "Tigger, go get Mom. Tell her to just be herself. I'll help the elf. Sean? Go get our brothers and the others who've also taken our name," he added with a wink.

"Figures, you always give *me* the hard jobs!" Sean giggled as he stood and prepared to jog around the building.

"That's because you're the youngest!" Cory giggled as he headed off to find Teri.

"Or because... no, I'm an Angel, and we can't make sexual innuendo references," Mikey said with dignity, while blocking Joel's ears with his power.

Tyler popped over quickly, "Sean, you just gather those here; I'm going for the others who *ain't*, 'kay?"

"Okay bro." Sean replied, inwardly confused as to where else any of them could be.

As Sean headed one way, and Tyler popped to Lord knows where, Kevin giggled up at Mikey. "Shall I get my brothers too? We kinda like Joel," he asked with a shy grin.

"Of course. Anyone can be here, Kev. And don't you just mean 'you like'?" Mikey added with a wink.

Kevin blushed and ran off to find his brothers before his blush could get any worse.

Mikey sat down and unblocked Joel's ears. The little boy had not noticed, so panicked was he about the idea of being that close again to a woman. "Joel, I'll be right here, and so will Cory and Sean. Mom won't hurt you," he said soothingly.

A frightened face raised itself to look at him, "But..."

"No buts, elfin. She was nice yesterday, wasn't she?"

"Yeah... b..."

"Joel; I'm right here. Do you think that anyone, even my Mom, could hurt you if an Angel of Heaven was standing with you?"

Joel shook his head slowly. He hugged in closer to his Rescuer and whispered a question.

Mikey answered it softly, "You'll have to ask *her* that. Joel, you know what Vulcan's can do with their powers, don't you?"

"Yeah, but I don't know how."

"You also know about Vulcan empathy, right?"

"Yeah...?"

"You need no training for that; just touch," Mikey explained.

Joel sat there and thought about that for a while. Maybe he could ask Cory's mother about things, and maybe he *could* know if she was telling the truth. He was still scared, though, and he felt like running away.

Joel was still lost in thought as the room grew quieter and the Short family gathered near the quiet area where he was being cuddled on his Angel brother's lap. Kevin and his brothers were already there and Kevin was once again sitting next to Joel, and tucked under Mikey's wing with Kenny.

Sean came in with Timmy riding on his shoulders, and being followed by Allie.

Teri and Cory were the last to arrive, and it was then that Joel noticed. He started to shake. 'She *was* okay, yesterday. She *was*! She didn't hurt me... but I'm sooo scared!' he thought as he fought with the panic inside him.

Cory immediately noticed Joel's unrest, and came over to where Mikey was sitting. "Remember, we are right here with you, little brother," Cory said softly as he reached out and took Joel's hand.

Joel nodded up at him while biting his lower lip. Cory felt the pressure on his hand increase as Teri came forwards, and knelt down to look at Joel more on his level. She knew to keep herself as non-threatening as possible, but it hardly seemed to work now. Joel seemed ready to start and run away at the drop of a pin.

"Joel," she began softly, "it's not right that you remain without an official family to call your own while we search for your relatives. Mikey said that this universe is where you were born, so you may still have family left here; but we may never find them. If that is the case, then I want you to have all the love that you deserve. I want you to have brothers that will love and protect you, and I want you to have a family to call your very own."

The boy looked up at Cory and back at Teri quickly. "But Cory said I was his brother already," he forced out.

"Yes, and you are; but every boy and girl in this Clan has at least one other who is either blood brother or sister, or adopted brother or sister; not just one by promise," she said softly. "And all have someone to go to if they need a parent. You don't; not yet."

Joel's lower lip started to tremble. He suddenly worked out what Teri was offering, something he hadn't thought about piecing together. He slid off Mikey's lap and moved closer, letting go of Cory's hand. A foot away from Teri he stopped. "Parent?"

Teri gave Joel a gentle smile. "I think you would prefer someone you can call your 'mother' and if you want that I would be honoured to be that person."

"A... a mother?" His mind was spinning. He'd never had one, not that he could remember; and it had been years since he'd wanted one, or could have even trusted one. Was this just a cruel joke? He looked back at his brothers, and they were smiling at him.

He turned and looked deep into Teri's eyes; searching for a lie, a deception.

He didn't find one.

Trembling, he reached out and took one of Teri's hands. Heat and Fire; different from Cory's and Sean's and the others, but... it was nice; just like Allen's. He shuffled closer and whispered something that she only just managed to hear. "You'll never.... hurt me? Cut me? B...burn me?"

"No," she replied, using all her training to keep her face straight and impassive at the veiled explanation of what Joel had been through. "Never."

Joel's eyes streamed tears, now. He could *feel* the truth in the touch through his hands. He whispered yet again, a longer and far more involved question.

Teri had to force the bile back down her throat before she could answer him. "I will never touch you there, nor look; not unless you were hurt or needed help and asked me to do so. Never. I promise," she swore on oath, tears also pouring from her eyes as well. Now she knew why Joel feared women.

She gently released Joel's hand, then raised both of her own slowly to cup Joel's gaunt cheeks. Her thumbs were gently stroking those cheeks while her fingers rubbed his ears soothingly. "I would *never* hurt you. Never," she whispered again, willing him to believe her.

Joel felt that Fire and Heat yet again... and surrendered to it. His legs slowly started to give way, and he fell into Teri's chest, sobbing his little heart out. "M...Mammy! Mammy!"

"Cory..." Teri croaked out through her own building emotions as she cradled the sobbing child in her arms, her hands rubbing small circles into his trembling back as he heaved out his sobs. "I... can you... I can't..."

Cory nodded and stood straighter. "As Patriarch of Clan Short, due to violations of the Safe Haven Act including 90% of the Articles either active or in deliberation for inclusion into said Act, I hereby declare Joel Short the child of Teri Short by the powers invested in me by Article 200 of the Safe Haven Act."

Joel barely heard him. The only thing that registered was his new name, and the arms that surrounded his body. He felt other hands touch him and, blinking away his tears, he saw the other kids in the room

coming closer and giving him back rubs and gentle squeezes to his shoulder. As each came close to him, they heard him repeating over and over, "I've got a Mammy! My Mama!"

They just smiled. To Joel, this was everything, and stating the obvious was totally normal.

They had done it themselves.

Then, in a Voice that overlaid the time-streams, Someone spoke. Someone that Joel recognised from the day before, and He repeated some of those strange words that He had said then...

//... for a Brotherhood that will never break...//

It wasn't long before most of the kids had gone off their separate ways. They were milling about the Compound on 'secret missions that Cory and Sean were not allowed to know about or interfere with', and thus left the Rec Room quiet.

Teri was still there with the obviously restricted teens, Cory and Sean. The four bodyguard G-Cats were lounging about, and Joel was seated on Teri's lap with a beaming smile on his cute face. Kevin and Kenny were both together on another chair watching, and a few other boys were scattered around the room resting up between 'secret missions'.

With his back tight against her chest, Joel relaxed more and more into his new mother's arms. Her hands that were around his front securely were, however, held in Joel's own grasp. Even with his memories now muted and his fears abated, he just had to make sure her hands did not go anywhere he was nervous about. He was still happy, though.

Joel was so happy that he was humming an old tune that he had heard from the underground internet; an old tune that Kevin knew very well. So well in fact, that he started to sing along without even meaning too.

"Such a feelin's coming over me,

There is wonder in most everything I see,

Not a cloud in the sky, got the sun in my eyes,

And I won't be surprised if it's a dream,"

Joel joined in, also without thinking, and both boys seemed to be looking at each other without knowing it;

"Everything I want the world to be,

Is now coming true especially for me;

And the reason is clear, it's because you are here,

You're the nearest thing to heaven that I've seen:"

Together, they continued to sing, and the others just sat there, amazed at the pair's crystal clear, pure voices:

"I'm on the top of the world looking down on creation,

And the only explanation I can find;

Is the love that I've found ever since you've been around,

Your love's put me at the top of the world!"

As the last line of the chorus ended, Joel became aware that he was staring into Kevin's miles deep eyes, and blushed.

Kevin didn't notice and just kept right on with the next verse; almost a serenade to Joel:

"Something in the wind has learned my name,

And it's telling me that things are not the same.

In the leaves on the trees and the touch of the breeze

There's a pleasin' sense of happiness for me;"

Joel just had to sing the rest with Kevin, not really knowing why, but something deep inside prompted him to:

"There is only one wish on my mind,

When this day is through I hope that I will find

That tomorrow will be just the same for you and me;

All I need will be mine if you are here.

"I'm on the top of the world looking down on creation,

And the only explanation I can find;

Is the love that I've found ever since you've been around,

Your love's put me at the top of the world!"

(Top of the World © The Carpenters, 1973)

"Wow," Cory whistled. "You sing really well, guys! That was beautiful!"

Kevin blushed crimson, more due to the fact that he realised he'd been serenading Joel, and the Vulcan had been doing so to him as well.

Joel giggled, even though his own face had gone a lovely shade of green.

Kenny's face, however, spoke volumes. He smiled joyfully at them both.

Sean added his agreement, "I'd love it if you could sing for our wedding, guys."

Kevin looked nervously at the two teens, then back at Joel. Joel, however, had no nervousness about that. If his Sean wanted him to do something, he would. He looked at Kevin with question in his eyes.

"Ah, sure. Okay," blushed Kevin again.

Joel nodded firmly. "Yeah. Okay, Sean!"

Teri hugged her new son lovingly, "You have a lovely voice, Joel. You too, Kevin. What do you want to sing for them?"

Kevin hopped down from the armchair and moved towards Joel, gesturing for Joel to do so as well. Once the two boys had met together they whispered briefly. Joel nodded suddenly. "I know it. I think I can sing it," he said quietly, now feeling nervous.

"Don't matter if you mess up a little, Joel," Kevin said to him, squeezing his arm gently. "It's what's in your heart that matters."

"Kay," Joel turned and climbed back onto his mother's lap. He quickly whispered in her ear before resuming his position as before, and holding her arms around himself again.

She laughed happily, "I'll go and tell the others and we'll get it ready, okay?"

Joel nodded, yet his grip increased on her own arms. He did not want her to go away from him just yet; now that he had found a mother, a woman, that he trusted he wanted all the 'mother-hugs' he'd been missing all his life.

"I need to get a few things ready now, sweetheart. Do you want to come with me and help, or stay with your brothers for a while?" Teri asked.

Joel glanced at Kevin, then at Cory and Sean, almost seeking approval to make a decision. The gentle nods and happy smiles made him grin, "Umm; can I stay here a while?"

"Sure," Teri said, leaning her head closer to kiss his cheek.

"But... you *will* come back after for... for more hugs?" he asked hopefully, turning his head to look at her.

"That's a promise. I've got a new son, so I have to get to know him and start giving him all those cuddles he's been missing, don't I?" she answered with a laugh.

He felt that she was being dead serious, even through her humour. Joel hopped down from her lap, "Okay, Mammy!" He then trotted over and sat by the Thompson twins as he watched her leave.

He found it amazing that Mikey's simple advice had been right. He could feel emotions through simple contact, and in doing so had shattered his fear of his new mother. Yes, he was still nervous with other adults, but now he knew he had a way to know if he could trust them. Kevin's pop was the first man he truly trusted, and his Mam was the first woman. All others? Well, time will tell.

He looked over at his big brothers and the four G-Cats lounging about on the settee and armchair and was met by six wide smiles. He felt the large armchair he was sharing shift slightly, then arms around his painfully thin waist pulled him further into the cuddle the twins had going.

He giggled as he looked at them both, and they grinned right back at him. Kevin kept his arm around Joel's waist, however, and that funny weird strength was back again. Joel smiled softly and laid his head on Kevin's shoulder as he tried to concentrate on it.

Everyone started talking quietly around him, but both he and Kevin remained silent. The others were not being that loud, but as soon as Joel managed to pin down one thought regarding the feeling of strength, some comment or other by one of the others drew his attention away.

Joel looked over at his brothers before asking, "Is there anywhere quieter to go to for a while? I'm not used to all these people about..."

Kevin nodded his head against Joel's gently, while his twin giggled and said, "Sure there is, Joel. Lots of room in the Compound. I'm gonna stay, though. Need to speak with Cory. Kev can show you around, though."

Kevin smiled, "Come on, Joel. We'll walk around for a while."

He rose and held out his hand for Joel to take. Joel did so and they walked out of the room hand in hand.

Cory and Sean watched from the armchair, smiling all the while.

Joel's Point of View:

I'm not sure what's going on, now. Everything's so confusing. It's all so much different that I'm not sure how to take it.

I'm not hurting. I think that's the weirdest thing. It's only just after breakfast and by now I'd be scrubbing the floor, or cleaning something, and being hit over and over each time Mistress would walk by.

These people haven't hit me yet. It's so weird.

Then there's Cory and Sean.

Don't think they will hit me; not ever. At least, I don't think they will. They feel safe, even... Oh, I don't know.

And then there's Kevin. He's holding me by the hand, now, and we're going to walk around this 'Compound' so I can find somewhere quiet to think. Why'd they even care what a slave wants? Why does he smile at me like... like he's doing now.

He asked me, "Do you need the bathroom before we go outside, Joel?"

I thought about it and realised it was a good idea, so I nodded and said, "Yeah."

He pulled me into a huge, and I mean HUGE with a big H, bathroom; and then over to the toilet.

I made sure I did it real fast, of course. He mustn't think I'm doing anything. I don't wanna give him more reasons to hit me later.

Once we were done, we left the room, then the building and I just stood there looking out at everything. The door behind me opened and closed quickly and I saw Herm and Merc moving over to us. They are nice! My brothers, like Cory and Sean and Mont and Bast. What is Kevin to me, though?

"That's FYS," I heard Kevin say as he led me by hand around one of the many pathways. Herm and Merc were close behind, but seemed to be staying a good few feet away, unlike when they came back from that Camp place with me. Had I done something wrong?

It was then that I found I was thinking about a lot more things all at the same time. I had even asked Kevin something and been given an answer, all the while, I'd been wondering about my Cat brothers. I'd asked what FYS was, and Kevin had replied with a giggled, "Sorry, Joel. Federation Youth Services. They are run by your new Mom, Aunt Teri!"

"Oh," I replied, before my thoughts went off in about five different directions. One was all giggly about the Federation, and another about seeing Captain Spock as Cory promised earlier, and then... wow, being Vulcan was so fun! I was still listening to Kevin as well! He was telling me all about where my new brothers lived. Seems like Cory, Sean, Tyler and Tommy aren't the only brothers in their family; there's Gavin and Adam and a Gabe and a JJ... funny name, that... and loads more.

"They all have a surname 'Short'?" I found myself asking.

"Nope," Kevin giggled.

"Oh," I was confused again. "What about Herm and Merc? Are they Short? And Mont and Bast?"

"Nope," Kevin replied as he stopped and looked at me more closely. I think he saw how confused I was. "You don't know about this brother thing, do you?"

"Yeah... well... no, not really..." I replied nervously. I'm going to be slapped at least five times for this, now, so I braced myself. "I'm sorry, Sir. I'll try to learn quicker..."

Kevin started hugging me instead before leading me over and sitting me on the grass. Wow, this grass ain't like the stuff in that *Other* universe... this is so green and nice smelling! I was doubly confused now; how can I be wondering at silly stuff like this when I'm about to be beat for being stupid? I stopped multitasking my thoughts and looked at Kevin and my brothers, and waited for the discipline.

It never came.

Instead, Kevin kept hugging me and that strange feeling was getting stronger, and the other two sat a few meters away watching us both closely and smiling at me.

"Joel, I'm not going to hurt you if you don't know something," Kevin whispered in my ear, and I thought I could hear tears in his voice.

He pulled back and looked at me, "If you want to know something, or don't understand, you can just ask. We all do that, and no-one gets into trouble 'cos of something they don't know."

Yeah, this I'd kinda heard from Cory and Sean already, and it was still confusing me. What I knew was that I had to learn fast and do right or I get whipped. They can't be telling me the truth, and yet it feels so... so right. They believed it, really they did, or was it just an act?

"Okay," I mumbled back as I released Kevin's hand and moved slightly to get a bit more comfortable on the ground.

The second I stopped touching Kevin at all, I felt cold and alone. I looked up in panic, and started searching for someone. I didn't know who, but I knew that I needed someone. This was the same as how I always used to feel in *that* place, and I didn't like it.

Damn, it was getting worse, and I was getting frightened. I started to cry a bit, and that made Kevin grab me and pull me into his chest.

The feeling went away, then, and I gasped.

"What's wrong, Joel?" Kevin was asking me as he rubbed my back.

I told him. He looked at me strange as I explained what just happened.

"Ookay," he said, after thinking about it for a few minutes.

"That's what I wanted to think about. In there, I was feeling okay all the time, but when you touch me, I feel strange. Can I... can I think about it and work it out?"

"Of course," Kevin smiled. Then his face brightened into a grin as he told me, "You lie down, I'll use your belly as a pillow, and you think about it some. That way, we're both comfy, and I'm still touching you."

I did as I was told. At least this order was a nice one. Kevin's head on my belly as he watched the clouds in the sky above felt nice, as did his hand in mine, for he just grabbed it. I looked up as well and started to think...

Return to normal perspective:

Joel smiled and laid his own head back and stared at the few clouds overhead. Kevin's head against his stomach seemed all the contact needed, let alone their hands together, to fill him with that weird, comforting feeling; that Heat and Fire and Strength. He started to go over the events since he had arrived here. He had not felt that alone since before Mikey came to him in his cell that day, so why did it suddenly happen now? No-one else filled him with this strength; strength enough to make him feel as if he could keep *himself* safe. Was that why he felt a little more alone when not touching Kevin? He started to run the fingers of his free hand through Kevin's hair, and gently across his brow without noticing what he was doing. Kevin's eyes darted sideways in pleased surprise to look at Joel as the Vulcan stared off into the sky.

As he went over everything, Joel noticed that he always felt most protected when touching or near to Mikey, Sean or Cory. Was that the key? His safety lay with Cory and Sean when Mikey wasn't there? Then, what about now?

"Kevin," he started slowly, still absent-mindedly, running the fingers through Kevin's short, spiky hair, "When I touch you, I feel... I dunno... kinda stronger."

Eyes slowly closing due to the gentle touch upon his brow and through his hair, Kevin responded just as quietly, "Stronger? How?"

"I dunno. Not like I'm Superman and can lift a car or anything, but... it's like I can stand up for myself again." He paused. He suddenly remembered that he used to feel this strong once, long ago. Before he had started breaking into the Internet. Before he learnt that he was stuck in a world with little to no chance of rescue from his pain. Before the beatings and abuse had sapped his energy to fight. "Inner strength, I think... I feel strong inside when I'm touching you," he murmured.

Kevin turned his head to look up at Joel.

Joel felt the movement and looked down into those beautiful brown eyes, sparkling up at him in the morning sunlight.

Kevin smiled at him, then sighed happily. Joel kept running his fingers about Kevin's hair, and traced his ear and forehead, also smiling contentedly. Kevin started to speak quietly, "It's something in me, Joel. A few months ago there was a problem, and Mikey came to sort it out. Turned out I have a lot of strength inside me..."

Joel listened attentively at the story, not even asking questions. He was mesmerised by Kevin's eyes.

"... so I have strength to cover Kenny's weakness. Now that we are soul-mates we cover those weak areas of each other. I think you are drawing on the strength that I carry, somehow." Kevin finished.

Joel's left hand now resting lightly on Kevin's forehead. "How? How am I doing this? Or is it you doing it?"

"I dunno. We could try asking the others?"

Joel nodded then laid his head back again to watch the clouds.

Kevin turned his head to watch Joel stare into the sky for a moment. He could hear Joel's heart rumbling fast, and giggled. "I love listening to a Vulcan heart-beat!"

Joel looked down at him curiously for a moment, then grinned as he remembered from the shows and books he had read, "Yeah, several hundred beats a minute."

"Mmm," Kevin's eyes were closed in contentment, "I sometimes hug Xain like this. So relaxing..."

Joel grinned even more, feeling completely pleased and, well... honoured, really. *He* was making someone *else* feel good; and after all these people making him feel happy, that brought a weird smile of pleasure to his face. He continued to run his fingers through Kevin's hair, while Kevin continued to mutter happily as he was fussed over.

After a short time of this, Joel raised his head slightly and looked about the Compound. He checked out the area for a while before he asked, "What's this Clan stuff about anyway? Heard it mentioned, but never asked."

Kevin giggled again. "Well, it all began in Iowa, with Cory and Sean..."

"... after that, they moved down here, into the Compound. Starfleet and Vulcan had given the money and items needed for both this place and the Camp opposite to be built. It's kinda grown a lot since." Kevin finished a while later. He had only briefly touched upon the Clan history up to the move to Florida.

"Cory said that Captain Spock will be here soon," Joel said happily. "Will Captain Kirk be here too?"

"Yes," came Xain's voice in answer.

They both looked up at the other Vulcan and smiled at him and Telez who was beside him. Xain gesturing for the two cheetah's to come over as well. "It is time to prepare for the Bonding Ritual. I am here to bring you inside," he said to Kevin.

Kevin moved up and away from Joel without thinking, and for a second, panic filled Joel's face. It was immediately replaced by puzzlement.

"I don't feel alone now, Kevin," he said in wonder.

Kevin blinked at him. "Well, all that's different is that Xain and Tel are here."

"What is the issue?" Telez asked curiously, drawing Joel's attention to him fully.

Joel realised that he had not even been overly curious at meeting an Andorian for the first time. He shyly explained what he and Kevin had discussed earlier before asking hesitantly, "Can I touch your antennae?"

"If you are gentle, then yes, you may," Telez smiled. He had been through this before, and he always found it amusing.

As Joel explored Telez' features with feather light touches, something clicked again inside Joel. He giggled at the faces Telez was pulling before hugging the blue-skinned boy.

"Joel," Xain said as the two boys broke contact, "I need to confer with he who is my father, but I think I know what this feeling you are experiencing is in regards to. Once I know, I shall explain. Is that acceptable?"

"Yeah," Joel nodded as Kevin took his hand. They all moved back down the path towards CIC, "Thank you."

"The 'Telan t'Kanlar', Xain?" Telez asked quietly as he drew closer to his new Vulcan friend.

Xain raised an eyebrow, "Correct. How do you know of the Telan t'Kanlar?"

Telez sniggered, "VSO, brother. I've been on Vulcan a few times, and the first was for training. It came up."

"The Bonding of the Children?" Joel asked curiously, once again amazed at himself for understanding the Vulcan words. "What's that?"

"All children bond with their parents and siblings prior to emotional control being gained," Telez answered lightly. "It allows them to feel safe and loved while very young. I think you just did it with me. I felt something touch my 'heart' when you were touching my face."

"You as well?" Xain asked, obvious startled going by the look on his face. "Only blood or close, very close friends cause this in children!"

Telez shrugged. "Dunno, bro. I'm more confused than you. Either you're more trusting than you seem, Joel, or your history is even more weird than we think!"

They walked on quietly for a few more yards, Joel's face troubled. 'Only blood? Wait... blood?? Xain?!' He reached out and tugged on Xain's hand hesitantly. "Are we related?" he asked, softly... hopefully.

"I... I do not know," Xain mused as he squeezed the smaller boy's hand. "I have no brothers... unless there was a child born before me that 'died'... yet... my father never mentioned anything such as that." He stood still for a moment, "I cannot see how you could be my brother, even though we are both half human. You could be a cousin."

"Same here," Telez added, much to everyone's confusion. "Half human, guys. Joel wouldn't know that, but come on, dudes!" he giggled at them all, which made them laugh as well.

Joel shrugged. "Well, can you two be my brothers anyway? Please? You too, Kevin?"

"Of course!" they all responded, surrounding him in a four way hug.

Once Joel's grip on them loosened, they started walking on. Kevin asked Xain curiously, "When I woke up this morning, there was a note on the bedside cabinet from Levi. He said I was to bring two sets of good clothes; do you know why yet?"

Xain nodded and stopped walking again. "Tyler told me earlier, Kevin."

Telez turned to the smaller boys and said, "Stand side by side, and stand up straight."

They did so. It was Joel who got it first.

"Me? Levi asked Kevin to bring nice clothes for me?!" he asked in shock.

"Oh!" Kevin giggled. "We're the same size!"

Telez winked, "Yup!"

Kevin giggled to Joel, "If we get to wear nice stuff, so do you."

Joel nodded hesitantly. "What if I... what if I break something or damage it?" he trembled. "I'm only a slave..."

Sadness came to Kevin's eyes, "Not any more, Jo'. You're not a slave. And anyway, if something gets damaged, then we can get it repaired."

Mercury squeezed Joel's shoulder firmly, "He's right, bro. Don't worry, and just enjoy the morning, okay?"

They moved off again, and came to CIC, where many of the other kids, who had been messing around outside before the wedding, were now gathering. All were dressed up to one degree or another.

Kenny ran over and grabbed Kevin's hand. "Come on, Kev. I've got our stuff in the bathroom. Joel, yours is there as well. Come on!"

They moved off, and Telez nodded briefly at Xain before joining his Division brothers. Xain had a feeling that he should be with Joel. Some link had formed that he could sense, and he was fairly sure what it was. Although, why or how it had formed was a mystery. Just as he was about to enter the bathroom with his own change of clothes, Rory rolled over.

"Ken in there?" he asked.

"Yes, Rory. They are changing clothes," Xain replied, raising his own bag that he carried.

"They? Kev too?" he asked with a smile.

"And Joel, yes," was the Vulcan's response.

Rory nodded, "Then I won't go in. Joel don't know me, yet. Don't want to frighten him."

"Logical," Xain half smiled. "We will not be long." He moved in and closed the door, leaving Hermes and Mercury outside on guard.

Joel was standing next to the twins, looking confused. Kevin was pulling various items out of his own bag and laying them out in separate piles.

"Okay, Jo'; strip off and I'll pass you your stuff to wear," Kevin said as he was still rooting about in the bag.

A gasp from Kenny made him look up, only to see that Joel had taken him literally and was now totally nude. Kevin was about to gently say that he only meant down to his underwear when he saw what had made his twin gasp.

Joel was a living skeleton.

The thin Vulcan tilted his head slightly as he watched Kevin's face distort somewhat. "What is wrong?" he asked, quickly looking down at himself and back again. He looked around at the other two, and Kenny was almost as bad as his twin, while even Xain was having problems keeping what he was seeing from destroying his emotional control.

"What?" Joel asked again, feeling nervous.

Kevin just continued to stare. Joel was standing normally, totally unconcerned about being in his skin, and for a nervous boy, that seemed weird to Kevin. 'Why isn't he shy and covering himself?' was just one thought that flashed through his head. Most, however... He asked his brothers in a whisper, "Was I that bad?"

"Nearly," choked out Kenny. "Oh, Joel," he finished with a whisper.

Joel was checking and rechecking himself. He looked up and caught Kevin's gaze with his own, "Please? What's the matter with me?"

Kevin and Kenny shared a look. Something seemed to pass silently between them and they both nodded together. They stripped to their underwear and stood next to each other.

"We're identical twins, Jo'," Kevin said by way of explanation. "When Kenny and I first met, I was all thin like you too, but you are so much worse!"

"He's still to skinny," Kenny added, pulling his twin in for a brief hug, "but he's a lot better now. Sorry, Joel, but when I saw you... it just made me feel bad for you."

Understanding, and also comparing himself with Kevin, Joel nodded. "Oh," he whispered sadly. Then, "Will I get better?"

"Yes," was all Xain said as he came over and hugged Joel to him.

Kevin broke away from his brother and moved over to them both. He pulled Joel from his older brother's arms and cuddled him. "We'll make you better, I promise," he whispered.

Joel hugged Kevin in return, and noticed how much more flesh was on this still too thin boy compared to himself. "Thank you," he murmured.

"Come on," Kevin said then. "Let's get changed. And next time, you can keep your underwear on, Jo'. We're changing the outer clothes not everything."

"Kay," Joel said, smiling slightly.

Xain moved and assisted Joel with the unfamiliar clothing, for what the boy had worn on that 'hell-earth' was unlike the shirt, pants and tie he was handed by Kevin. The twins helped a bit but it was Xain who did the tie up for each of them in any case, for, "It is logical for the one who can make it look the best to do so for each of you."

Joel simply giggled.

Upon leaving the bathroom, Kenny went straight to Rory's side. "You look great, Ken," Rory murmured quietly, and Joel only just managed to hear him. Joel's eyes widened as he watched them kiss briefly.

"You're... you are gay too?" he asked Kenny while looking curiously at the wheelchair bound boy.

Kenny nodded with a gentle smile, "Yeah."

"That isn't a problem, is it, Joel?" Rory asked with concern.

Slowly, Joel shook his head. "I... it frightens me 'cos I..." he trailed off, looking pleadingly at the twins.

Kenny nodded as he understood and whispered quickly into Rory's ear. Since he had seen much of what had happened in Joel's past when he had been drawn into Joel's mind, he could relay it in words that Rory would understand and that Joel could not say.

Rory looked sick and automatically opened his arms to Joel. "Oh, man. Come here, Joel!" he wept.

Joel found himself moving without thought, and he ended up in Rory's arms and seated on his lap on the wheelchair. Both were crying softly.

"Don't worry about it, Joel. If you feel uncomfortable when we kiss or stuff, just look away. We'll understand that you ain't being mean or anything," Kenny whispered as he stroked Joel's hair and rubbed his back.

"Th...thanks," the Vulcan mutely replied. "What's your name?" he asked as he pulled back to regard the one he sat on.

Laughing now, Rory answered as he wiped tears from his own and Joel's eyes, "Rory. Rory Teeter. Best you know the names of those you use as armchairs, right?"

Joel tilted his head slightly and raised an eyebrow. Then he giggled, "Yeah, thank you, Rory."

He got down and found his hand grabbed by Kevin. He smiled at the brown haired boy, and received a stunning smile back.

"Ah, Joel?" Kenny asked, looking at the smaller boy carefully. "Do you want to know who is and who is not gay, just so..."

Joel was shaking his head. "It don't matter if people are or not," he whispered hesitantly, "it's just... I keep expecting to see... to see them... die... and stuff. I'm gay; I think. I... it's..."

"Shh," Kevin pulled Joel into a full hug. "I'm gay too, and if anyone tries stuff, they have to get through me first, okay?"

"Kay," was the only response Joel could give. He then thought of something and looked at Kenny and Rory, "You my brothers too?"

Nodding heads and grins were his answer.

"Thanks," he bubbled as he ran over and quickly hugged them before returning to Kevin's side.

Xain coughed slightly to gain everyone's attention. "It is almost time for the Ceremony," he said formally, "and Kevin and Joel have to decide how and when they will deliver their song. Rory, if you and Ken will proceed to the Auditorium, I shall take Kevin and Joel to see Jason and Nathan."

"Okay," they all replied, except Joel who asked, "Who're they?"

"Friends," Kevin giggled, "Come on."

"Wow!"

Jason looked from the floating Nathan above the stage towards the source of the outburst.

Joel was staring open mouthed at Nathan as the blond haired boy finished fixing the Seal of the Federation above the monitor at the back of the stage.

"Greetings, Joel," Jason said formally, giving the Vulcan salute.

"Ah," Joel stammered as he threw a quick look at the brown haired boy, "Greetings." Joel returned the salute easily. He had known how for years after watching everything he could from Star Trek.

"Hiya, Joel; how's it hanging?" Nathan called down. "Jace; is this straight?"

"If it is, then it's unique here, sweetie," Jason called back, giggling.

Joel looked curiously between them both, then down at himself, then at Kevin. "How is what hanging?" he asked nervously.

"He means 'How are things?', Jo'," Kevin smiled. "Or 'How are you feeling?'."

"Oh. Okay," the puzzled boy looked back up at Nathan. "I'm feeling okay, but a little nervous. You are scaring me a bit, and it's cold, but I'm not hurting or nothin'..." he trailed off quietly as he saw both Nathan and Jason's faces fall.

"Umm, I scare you?" Nathan asked, hurt clearly heard in his voice. He floated down and landed next to Jason.

"Yeah," Joel replied slowly as he backed up into Hermes' arms.

Jason sighed. He glanced at Nathan for a second, and the blond boy nodded back sadly. "Joel," Nathan started, "sorry if I said anything..."

"No," Joel interrupted softly, "not that. I'm scared of most everyone when I first meet them properly."

Hermes licked his ear before purring, "They are cool. Why don't you ask them what you asked us?"

"You mean...?" Joel started, but stopped when he felt Hermes nod his face against his own. "Kay."

Joel moved over slowly until he was a foot from the two Welsh boys. He looked up into their eyes and asked softly, "Would you be my brothers too?"

Nathan smiled softly and offered a hand out to the small Vulcan. "Love to," he said, as Joel took his offered hand. He watched as Joel's face changed from wariness to total openness at the touch.

Jason offered his own hand, and the same reaction came when he added, "No such thing as 'too many brothers'."

Joel hugged them both fiercely.

"Ribbs!" Nathan squeaked. "Air! Lungs! Breathing... good!"

"S...sorry. I didn't mean..." Joel started, but a touch on his mind stopped him.

'Don't worry, we know,' he heard from them both.

Joel grinned up at them then, and moved back and had his hand immediately held by a waiting and smiling Kevin.

"Jason, you informed me that you wanted to speak with my brother and Joel. Is it in regards to the song they shall be performing for the Bonding Ceremony?" Xain asked politely.

"Oh, yeah. Sorry, Xain; I kinda forgot with the whole 'getting a new rib-breaking brother' bit," Jason giggled as he winked at Joel. "Okay, guys. We have about fifteen minutes before show time, so I'm going to run you both through what's happening, in my head. You'll have practice time in there and you can take as long as you want, okay?"

"In your head?" Joel asked, mystified.

Nathan sniggered, "Yeah. He's got no brain, so you and Kevin will fit easily!"

"Makes me a good husband for a blond, then, don't it?" Jason retorted, lightly slapping Nathan's butt.

"Are they crazy?" Joel whispered to Kevin.

Kevin nodded, "They fit in well, here."

Joel blinked.

"Kiddin'," Kevin giggled. "They are just teasing each other. What Jason means is that he can take our minds into his own, as he's a telepath. Well, sorta telepath. I don't really know *what* Jason, Nathan and Victoria are, but..."

"We're special," Nathan said in a little boy voice, before breaking into giggles.

Joel couldn't help but giggle as well. He grinned at Jason, "Okay. Is it like a mind meld?"

"Similar, but only to a point. Humans can't meld. Not even Mikyvis can, so we found out earlier; they can do part but not all. It seems to be unique to Vulcans. Come on then, in you come!" Jason giggled.

Everything changed before Joel's eyes and he found himself next to Kevin in Jason's mind. Everything around them was dark.

"Okay," Jason said as he appeared before them, "I'll make an image of the Auditorium and then you two can decide how you'll do your little show for Cory and Sean. And, for the record, Joel; you can call me 'Jace' and my blond haired cutie is 'Nath', okay?"

"Kay!" Joel smiled as he quickly hugged his newest brother... and this time, he could really hug him without the fear of breaking ribs!

Joel's Point of View:

It was fun in Jason's mind. He showed us lots of things, and I got to sing that song a few times. Singing out loud is good! It felt nice to not have to be quiet all the time.

When Jason let us back to our bodies, it seemed like we'd been gone ages, but only a few more people had come into the huge room we were in. Kevin looked puzzled, but Jace *did* say time wouldn't matter in there.

Kevin grabbed my hand and together we ran over to our seats. Mammy was at the front row directing people to some of their chairs, while just lettin' others find their own. Not sure why she was doing that, to be honest.

"Joel, can you and Kevin come here please?" I heard her call as we ran closer.

Kevin smiled up at her, "Yes, Aunt Teri?"

Mammy smiled at us. I like her. She's nice, and she smiles a lot. Her smiles ain't like *hers*. *She* had a frightening smile. Mammy's is nice.

"Joel's to sit with his brothers for this, Kevin. But since you both are singing after, you should sit with him. Your brothers are in the row behind," she said to him.

He nodded, and I felt his hand squeeze mine, "Okay!"

I looked at the front row and saw Tommy, but no others; not even Tyler. There were a few other boys there, though. "Brothers?" I whispered quietly to Kevin. "Only Tommy and Gavin's here... are these the other brothers you told me about?"

"Yup, that's Adam," Kevin started to point each of them out for me. "That's Sipek, Skirk and Syzik. They are androids like Austin."

"Austin's an android?!" I gasped. Androids? In *Kirk's* time?? "And they are too?!"

I had a strange look from the three android boys. "Is there a problem with us being Android, Joel?" the one called Skirk asked me, his tone emotionless.

Wow, he could pull off the Vulcan thing easily!

"Umm... well, androids don't... I mean, they shouldn't... how can there be androids??" I was completely lost, now. What else in this world was different? First, Star Trek is real, now the times are all squiffy!

Tyler was suddenly at my side making me jump.

"Oops! Sorry! I forgot about that; sorry for scaring you. But about androids; we'll explain about them later today, okay?" he said to me, his face showing concern.

Feeling my heart rate decrease slightly, I nodded at him, "Kay."

"I'll be over for some of them great hugs you give later. Tommy said they were great!" he bubbled then, looking a lot happier. I nearly felt bad for making him *think* he'd frightened me, but after he jumped and kissed my cheek and vanished, I could only stand there in shock.

"Mikyvis," I heard Adam mumble as he rose and came over to me.

I grew nervous. He was big. Not as big as Cory, but still. I cringed back and felt Herm behind me.

Adam slowed and smiled. He held out a hand, "Mikey said that if you touch someone you'll know if they are being truthful or not."

I nodded, "So he 'splained to me, yeah." I looked up and smiled at Herm, then stepped forward a bit. I reached out slowly and touched Adam's hand.

He smiled more, "I'm your brother, and I like you, Joel. I won't hurt you."

I felt that Fire again. It was different from Cory's and Sean's Fire. I liked Adam immediately. Then I felt that weird Fire in *me* as well! It was echoing with Adam's!

I moved right in and hugged him, whimpering. What was this Fire? This Heat? I was so confused.

"Relax; it takes time to get used to having family," Adam whispered into my hair softly. "Just live and learn; you are doing great."

Having a family, a real family; yeah, that'll take some time, but... it still didn't tell me what that Heat and Fire was... maybe... maybe it's...? But how could I tell! I just don't know!

I pulled back from the hug, and I wish I'd not. Adam gives nice hugs! He had been rubbing my back and it felt so... comfortable. "Can I have more of them hugs later?" I asked him hopefully, as Kevin took my hand and sat me down.

"Sure!" Adam grinned back before he moved over to his own seat.

I looked around as Mammy moved off towards the doors we'd come in from and disappeared through them. There sure were a lot of kids here! And why was I on the end of the row? I began to feel exposed. Suddenly, I felt an arm slip around my waist; it was Kevin, and he was pulling me over and into his side. I wonder if he knew I needed this?

Mammy came back a minute later, and she had a comb and a jar of something in her hands.

"What's that for?" my voice squeaked nervously.

"I want to make sure everyone else gets to see how handsome you are," she replied with a smile. "This will help you keep your hair in place."

I began to cry. So, she *was* just like my old mistress. I started to shake and no matter how much strength I could feel coming from Kevin, it just wasn't enough to help. I wanted Cory and Sean, but... what if they agree with Mammy?

Her face change as I looked at her through my tears, and I felt Kevin tighten his grip on me. I wanted to look at him, but I was too afraid of Mammy, now. Herm and Merc were sitting behind me, and I heard a growl come from each of them. One pair of arms suddenly encircled me from behind as Merc cuddled into my back, and then Herm was there next to me. He didn't seem angry at Mammy or anything, but he was standing strangely.

"Joel... what's wrong, sweetheart?" Mammy asked as she sank down to her knees to look up at me.

Sniffing, I answered; just liked I'd been trained to, "You're... you're gonna hurt me..."

There was a pause as she knelt there, staring at me. She put that jar and comb down and held out her left hand towards me. Then she waited.

It seemed like she wanted me to... oh! I reached out and touched her.

"Why do you think I'm going to hurt you?" she whispered.

"I... you said you were gonna make my hair stay in place..." I breathed out.

Her brow wrinkled, and she looked confused. "Why would that hurt?" Her voice was... curious. Just curious! That wasn't right, and I could feel she was upset and puzzled through her hand.

"*She*... my old... Mrs Williams... she used to... sometimes, she used super glue to 'make my hair tidy'... then she'd... I..." my voice faltered as the sobs I'd been trying to hold in came out instead. Kevin moaned next to me and buried his face into my neck as he tightened his grip on my waist. Finding my voice I added, "Then... she'd cut it off with a knife... cutting me... and once... just once, she set it on fire... It was the only time *he*... Mr Williams... ever did anything nice for me... he put it out and took me to hospital... I..."

Merc and Herm were growling a lot, now, and Kevin was whimpering and crying as much as I was. Could he feel what I felt as I remembered the pain? Could he?

"This isn't super glue Joel; you can put some in my hair to prove it if you want," was Mammy's soft reply, and I felt the truth as she said it.

"It's hair gel, Jo'," came Kevin's whisper as he raised his head off my shoulder to look at me, then at Mammy. "Aunt Teri, could you do mine first? My spikes have gone a bit flat."

Glancing at him, I saw that they were a little different, probably from his head pressed against my cheek.

I watched as Mammy used some on Kevin, and saw her make his cute spikes reappear.

As Kevin sat there, smiling at me, I couldn't help but reach and wipe some of his tears from his face. He smiled more.

I also reached and poked a finger into the jar Mammy had in her hands. She really had spoke the truth. This was some funny, slippery and sticky stuff.

Nodding my head as she held her comb towards my hair, I allowed her to use a small amount of the stuff on me. It took her about five minutes before she sat back on her heels and nodded, "That's a lot better. You're a handsome young man, Joel."

I blushed. I felt my face get very hot, and Kevin started to giggle at me. "That's cool! Green face, just like Xain; only he don't blush much!"

Herm and Merc had, by now, gone back to their seats. They still had one of their paws on each of my shoulders, though. I turned around at them.

"Looking real good Joel," Merc giggled. "Umm, Mrs Short? Could you put some of those awesome spikes in my fur, like what Kevin has, please?"

Mammy started laughing but she did wave Merc over to her. "Call me Teri, or Aunt Teri; or I'll shave *all* your fur off, not spike some of it!"

"Okay, okay, I surrender," he giggled as he knelt down next to her. I started laughing quietly.

It only took a few minutes, then he had a short 'garden' of mini-spikes between his ears. I really started laughing a lot, then.

"Thanks, Aunt Teri!" Merc giggled as well. He moved a bit, licked my cheek in one of those 'Cat-kiss' things, then trotted back behind me.

Mammy watched him go then looked back at me and held out her arms. Slipping off the chair, I hugged myself into them quickly. "Sorry for thinking you'd hurt me, but..."

"Relax honey; I understand," she interrupted me gently while giving me another great hug. "Any time you are unsure about anything just ask."

Well, okay... an order is an order. I nodded slowly before feeling two small arms circle my waist again. I giggled as Kevin pulled me slowly back and up to my chair. He whispered with a muted grin, "We need to let Aunt Teri go now, Joel. She has to get Cory and Sean ready for their wedding!"

I'd obviously upset him with what I'd said about the super glue, but I didn't have the time to talk to him about it as the lights started to change and dim.

It was time for the wedding, I s'pos.

Wow, it was dark in here now! I'd watched the place fill up in the dim lighting, and even seen Ambassador Sarek take a seat on the other side of the aisle! I wonder... will I get to meet him? Anyway, it got real dark, and I hugged into Kevin's side more. He whispered that it would be okay, so I just nodded against his cheek; he couldn't see and nor could I!

On the view screen at the front, little CD could be seen at an organ some place far away, and he started playing. I think it was the Wedding March, but I'd only heard a brief snippet of that a year ago or so, so I wasn't sure. I think CD is Calen's little brother... at least, he *is* Sean and Cory's boy, so... whatever.

The door opened at the back, the one Mammy had left through and I could see little Paulie and Wacko start down. As they did, torches took light at the same pace as them. Then came Mont and Bast with Mammy just behind them. There was Kyle and another big boy just after. Not sure who he was.

Mikey! Mikey was here, and he was leading Cory, and... No way!! Aaron Carter?! He's alive??

I just had to meet him after! I had to!

Cory was almost next to me when he stumbled. I think he saw his son on that organ. He looked upset.

Next thing I knew, I was looking forwards again, and Cory and Sean were at the alter, and this purple eyed older boy was talking to them.

I glanced at Kevin and he looked at me strangely.

"What's wrong?" he whispered, as the purple eyed one, Tyne I think he said his name was, backed away.

"Dunno... what happened? Cory was next to me one minute, then he was up there a second later!" was my puzzled answer.

Kevin blinked. "You didn't remember taking his hand? He looked a lot better after you did, then you sat back and went stiff for a second."

Again? I'd done something again without knowing it?

I felt frustrated tears well up and spill down my cheeks. Kevin pulled me over and cuddled me against his chest while whispering something under his breath. This was scary. What was I doing?

I just about heard this man up there with Cory say, "...To honour our Heavenly brothers and sisters, who the Mikyvis Council assure me are joining us today from what is Universally known as the Spirit Realm, I ask each and every one of you to join me in a minute of silence."

I sat up quickly so that Kevin wouldn't be in trouble for talking. I liked him, and if he got into trouble for talking to me, then that would be real bad!

After the man started talking again, I slowly reached and took Kevin's hand again. He smiled at me, pulled me over and 'kissed' my cheek. I'm gonna have to ask someone about these 'kiss things'; just to know if they *are* kisses. I thought kisses were for lovers, but most everyone was 'kissing' me... It was unnerving. Nice, though.

I really listened when the man... I think he was a pastor... started to recite from the Bible. I liked that passage. It was about 'love'... and love was something I always wondered at. I'd never felt it, myself, so I was not sure I was understanding things right about it. Could that Fire and Heat I kept feeling be love? If so, why's it all different for everyone?

When the pastor started to pray, I began to really feel nervous. Reading the Bible and praying? It was allowed here, I kinda guessed that; but I still expected someone to come in and start... start killing us all 'cos of it!

I just sat and thought about that Bible passage for a while, and I guess I missed a few things that were being said. Well, I think I missed it, but when I started reviewing the past few minutes, I found I could recite it all word for word in my head... I like being Vulcan!

Cory made a promise to Sean, then, and I felt my back tingle; and when Sean made his *own* promise, I *really* felt a tingle. Everyone did! It was nice; like *Someone* had answered them.

Musing on that, I vaguely remember hearing some song, then I snapped back to what was going on when the lights dimmed again.

"Come on," Kevin whispered, "it's time for us, now!"

"kay!" I half whispered back, and, just as Jace said I should, I quickly moved to my side of the stage while Kevin went to his...

... It was time for me to sing a 'Thank You' to my big brothers!!

Normal Perspective:

As Joel stood and ran to his side of the stage, a pair of wolfish eyes followed him.

Black Feet watched as the boy that would be his held his mic in his nervous hands. The half wolf, half border collie pup turned to look at the back of the room.

Timmy turned quickly as well. There, almost hazy, was a huge, silvery wolf.

Black Feet nodded his head, then jumped up on Timmy's lap and licked his face.

"That your dad?" Timmy whispered as he glanced down at the puppy.

Black Feet nodded again.

Timmy looked back up, and started slightly.

The Wolf was gone.

"Where...?" he whispered.

Home

Timmy looked back at the puppy on his lap. "You didn't talk... how did you do that?"

Silver Wolf... William... Same

Ricky snuggled closer to Timmy and asked the puppy, "You mean your daddy's a' Animal Spirit too?"

Yes Black Feet replied, *I from Silver Wolf. I for Boy. Half of 'Those To Protect'. One with Teeth coming. Soon. He same Me*

Timmy giggled as the music from the front started and Kevin was highlighted before the Crest of Clan Short. "Half Animal Spirits... kewl! Joel's a Guide?"

Not Guide. We not William. We Spirit Guardians. One from Boy's Home here. One from Boy's Home there. Protect Soul and Mind of Shaper

"Who's the other?" Ricky asked as Kevin started to sing.

Me not know. Soon know. Not now

Timmy and Ricky looked at each other, then sat straighter and just listened to Kevin and Joel sing.

Black Feet hopped down and curled up at Timmy's feet.

He would be with his Boy later. It can wait.

Soon

Editor's Notes:

I definitely am going to need to replenish my supply of tissues. I lost count of how many boxes I used while reading this chapter.

Thank you, Ilu, for writing this wonderful story; this is a very special chapter. It blends beautifully into the next chapter of another story that I am sure will be very special as well. Since I don't know when various chapters of stories will appear, I won't confuse people by mentioning which ones are involved. Let's just say there is a lot more coming along very soon, and I strongly suggest that you stock up on tissues or handkerchiefs or maybe even towels. Since these stories are seen on the Internet I will just call them very E motional. Sorry about that.

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher AKA Sleeping Beauty

Chapter 3:

Elven Prince...

Joel sat alone and fairly close to Cory and Sean as almost everyone from the wedding enjoyed the show that Jon and the band were putting on for them. He looked especially small and lost on the fairly large outdoor chair he was sat upon, his legs swinging freely as he tapped his hand on his thigh in time to the music. A small, almost wistful smile was playing over his lips. Bon Jovi was alive, as were the British Royal Family, and Aaron Carter.

The music pounded through him, and he felt his heart lift up with it. He sang along with those old classics, from his perspective, and all his cares seemed forgotten for a time; too short a time...

He glanced around and found Kevin with his eyes. Not long after those helicopters had flown over Kevin had said that he was going to talk to some of the new kids. He had asked if Joel had wanted to go with him, but the exertions of the morning had worn on the fragile boy, and so Kevin's question was answered by his own glance at the trembling Vulcan. Joel had been led to a comfortable chair close to and a little behind the newly-weds and told to relax for an hour or so.

"I'll be around, Jo'," Kevin had told him gently. "You just rest up, and if you need anything call me, okay?"

Joel had mumbled his agreement with a smile. Cory and Sean were close; he was happy.

He had even been happy when Hermes and Mercury had said they were going to talk to their brother and sister cats. "We'll be at the back watching you, Joel. If you need us, call," Hermes had whispered as they both gave his face some of those 'lick-kisses'.

Dark thoughts, however, began to rise up. He started to think about going up to talk to Prince Harry and Aaron Carter, but... who was he to even ask to go near them, never mind *talk* to them? A slave, hobnobbing with Royalty and Heroes?

Did he still even have the right to be in this family? His big brothers were princes, now... Slaves don't have cuddles from princes.

Just as quickly as his good humour had arrived due to the wonderful music, it vanished. He looked over at Cory's back sadly, and watched as his brothers seemed to slip away from him. He wanted to cry and run to them; to be held; to be cared for: but he could not bring himself to risk it.

The longer he was without physical contact with someone, the worse he was feeling. The loneliness that he had felt before when out of physical contact with Kevin and too far from his brothers was not there, but... something else was missing instead.

He wanted to call Kevin back; he was losing his brothers, and he wanted someone, anyone, to tell him it was not so - but he could see that Kevin was now laughing with some new kids. He was happy. He would be angry with him if was interrupted over something as worthless as himself.

He faced forwards and tried as hard as he could to think of something happy... but he failed.

His tears could not be held in any more, and as the band started playing "Bring Me to Life" on request of Adam, he let loose on his sobs of fear and pain. They were drowned out to the point that no-one noticed... no-one but one small, red haired Fireball:

Timmy.

"Waz the matter, Unca Joel?" Timmy asked as he came over. "You needin' cuddles?"

Tearfully, Joel nodded his head before looking scared and shaking it. He then hid his face in his hands and cried harder.

"Waz the matter?" Timmy repeated as he came to stand right in front of Joel's chair. He reached out and pulled Joel's hands away so that he could look up into the Vulcan's tear streaked face.

"I'm l...losing them," Joel managed to whisper as his throat tightened with his crying.

"Whoya losing?" Timmy asked as he started to worm his way onto Joel's lap. "I can help you find them!"

His arms acted without his conscious thought. Joel wrapped himself around Timmy in a hug that his heart so desperately needed and he cried into Timmy's bright red hair for a moment or two longer before whispering though his burning throat, "Your daddies. I... they..."

"Daddy an Poppa love you; they ain't leavin ya," Timmy interrupted with certainty, "they never 'bandon no-one; Daddy saved me an' I was six seconds from bein' blowed up!"

Joel just cried more. Timmy did not understand. How could he? He was not, and never had been, a slave.

Across from them, near the stage, Victoria felt echoes of pain. Her brother Jason, who had been laughing at something she had sent to him over the noise of the music, looked at her sharply as her eyes blazed in power.

Pain was something she hated; both to feel herself, and to feel in others.

The Heart of the Dragon formed a bridge of power between her mind and her brother's, and then branched off to the other N-Gens at the concert. Then, after her lightest of touches against the alien minds of the gathered Mikyvis, Kyle and Tyler answered her polite call for aid and threw in the combined might of the Mikyvis to the Weaving she had started to so skillfully make.

She turned around and saw the source of the echoing heartache... and then focused her power, and the combined powers of those in the Weave at the strongest, most loving hearts there who were present and available to 'work their unique magic'...

Timmy, Cory and Sean.

Timmy was holding his uncle as tightly as he could and was beginning to wonder if there was anything more that his innocent, loving heart could say when William's call echoed in his mind. He moved his head to look towards his daddies. Beyond them, he saw Victoria turn their way, her eye's shining bright as the sun...

As the Weave of Power poured into him, he knew what to do. "Unca Joel, take me to my daddies. I need Daddy hugs," he ordered, knowing that Joel would carry out his order without question.

Automatically, like any well trained slave from the world he had been on for so long, Joel obeyed. He stood and moved quickly towards Cory and Sean with the determined Fireball in his arms...

Cory felt a touch upon his mind and heart; Victoria's voice was whispering directly to his own heart in words he could not make out, yet knowledge and understanding came. He looked up and saw the tear-stained face of Joel as he carried Timmy over towards them. "Sean, I think we've neglected cuddle-duty too long," he whispered just loud enough for Sean to hear.

Still not realising that he was following Timmy's order without his even knowing it, Joel was completely surprised when his tears vanished at the loving contact of Cory's hands. He found himself and his cuddly burden lifted up and squashed between the two newly-weds firmly.

He looked at Cory in shock and started to tremble when his eyes fell upon the circlet around his big brother's brow. His trembling decreased when he felt Fire and Heat coming from all three boys wash away the growing nervousness about them now being royal.

He chewed his lower lip for a moment before different tears started; tears of frustration. The emotion was felt clearly by Cory, and surprisingly, by Sean as well.

"Tell me what's bothering you," Cory whispered softly, knowing from what Victoria was saying in his mind that he had to do this in an order format.

"You're a prince. I'm a slave. I can't have you hugging me. I'm worthless," Joel mumbled, looking forlornly at Cory's shoulder as he was unable to look his brother in the eye. "You can't be bothered with such as me anymore..." His voice caught in his throat, and he had to stop to catch his breath and not break down before continuing, "Th...that's what I was feeling... and I dunno why, 'cos it don't feel that way now... I... I'm just stupid... so stupid..." he finished as he leaned his head forward and rested his trembling forehead on Cory's shoulder.

Cory pulled Joel in tighter to him, "You're not stupid; you're a very smart boy who is letting his brain think faster than you're ready for emotionally." Cory paused, then added, "I'm just a Prince; Mikey is a Saint. You're good enough for Mikey-cuddles; there is nothing on Earth that could make me more important than Mikey. Everyone is a slave to their own mind; but not a single person here today, not even you, is a slave to another person."

"Besides," Sean added, "you're an expert at cuddles, just like Timmy. Now that we're Princes, that means we get to ask for only the best cuddlers; that puts you and Timmy on the top of our list for cuddles any time you want them."

Timmy added his own agreement by snuggling further into Joel's arms as they were both being snuggled between the older boys.

"You... you really think I... that I give good cuddles?" Joel's voice was small and quiet, and as he lifted his head to look at his big brothers they saw the naked need for confirmation there.

"I think you give awesome cuddles," Cory and Sean said in unison.

"Me too!" Timmy added with a giggle. "You need to teach me how ya do it, Unca Joel."

Joel smiled. They meant it; they really did. Joel then thought seriously at Timmy's request; he went over each cuddle he had received and each he had given since that morning. "I... I just give the type of hugs... cuddles... that I like getting," he whispered to Timmy. "I dunno how else to say it..."

"You an me's gotta practice a lot then!" Timmy replied as he snuggled into Joel's chest more.

"Okay," Joel responded peacefully as he tightened his hug on his nephew. He felt giddy at the Fire that poured out of the little redhead, as well as it's automatic, echoing response welling up from his own heart.

After a moment of relative silence between them, Joel leaned his head and rubbed his cheek against Cory's. After pulling the teen's attention from the song the band members were singing, Joel asked curiously, "Why did I feel those... those stupid things back there? Why did I think you wouldn't want me to be your brother? It wasn't like when I was too far from you and I let go of Kevin's hand. I didn't feel lonely and in danger. It was... I dunno... different."

"I think you started worrying because you saw some things becoming different around you," Cory replied softly. "You're not used to how fast things happen around here, and it scared you. Any time you start to feel that way, find someone you trust and tell them so that they can help you understand what is happening."

It seemed right, that answer. Joel nodded slowly, then looked unsure. "I can't be asking for your help alla time; not fair... Timmy needs you, and Calen needs you... I can't keep coming to you alla time."

Cory smiled, "Lil'elf; you don't need to worry about taking too much of our time. Most everyone out here has needed to do what you need right now with one of us at one time or the other. Besides, cuddles are good for both people involved, so any time you need cuddles you're helping whoever is cuddling you too."

"And if you understood that, then you're really our lil' bro, bro!" Sean giggled into Joel's hair as he first kissed his Vulcan brother, then leaned past him and his son to kiss Cory soundly.

Timmy sniggered, and stage whispered to his Uncle, "They're soppy."

Joel said nothing. He just watched.

"What's 'love'?" he blurted as their kiss finished. He felt completely awash with the Fire and Heat that had been bouncing between the two teens as they had kissed.

"I better take this one, you'll fry Joel's brain if you try to answer it!" Sean giggled to Cory as they separated. "Joel, that is a question that there is no simple answer to; there are so many types of Love. It's kinda like a fire in your chest that makes you happy, when you're around different people it feels different, but the more you care for someone the stronger it is."

A Fire that makes you happy? The Fire he felt in his heart made him dizzy and it scared him, but... it was a nice Fire. "So... you feel different 'love' for different people?"

"Yes, Lil'elf; that's what makes it confusing," Sean replied. "I feel a different kind of love for Mom than I do for Cory; and a whole 'nother type for Timmy!"

Joel thought for a moment more while both teens and their son watched him closely. Joel finally spoke. "Can I... can I try something? I can feel what others feel most times, but it's stronger when I touch with my hands. Can I touch your chests and ask you to think of different people?"

"Sure," Cory replied, "but you should probably trust Sean's responses more than mine; right now my emotions are kinda screwed up and the Mikyvis are helping me. You might get a wrong idea from my feelings."

"I know you feel upset about a lot of things," Joel whispered. "I... you feel like I feel. Scared. Frightened. You... you also feel guilty sometimes... like I feel when I do... when I *think* I've done things wrong. I know those. I don't know 'love'. I won't get confused about your other feelings," he finished with sincerity. "Can I? Both of you?"

They both nodded at him, and so, after whispering for Timmy to tighten his hug on him, Joel let go of the hug around his nephew and opened both teen's uniform tops slightly to slip a hand in. He laid his warm hands on their chests right where their hearts were. "Ready?"

They nodded again with gentle smiles.

"Timmy," Joel said, and felt, building slowly the longer they thought about their first son, Fire and Heat. He felt the shape of the emotions and felt the colour and the strength.

"Adam." The Fire changed shape and colour, and the Heat altered it's power.

"Mammy," he whispered, a smile on his face.

The Heat and Fire in Cory was completely different from the Heat and Fire in Sean with each name and for each person.

So 'love' was different FOR each person, and even different in two people when thinking of the SAME person? That kinda made sense. Sean was right.

"Each other, if it's okay for me to share in it," he hesitated.

Sean giggled, "We don't hide our love, bro."

Joel's eyes suddenly widened. It was intense.

Once he had cleared the ringing it gave his mind, he grew puzzled. The Fire in Cory that he felt for Sean was the same as the Fire that Sean felt for Cory.

Exactly the same. So was the Heat.

He had, when Cory and Sean had thought about Mammy and the others, felt his own Fire and Heat, and, just like his big brothers, it had been different for everyone. And even different for Mammy than what Cory and Sean felt for Mammy.

Yet, not only did Sean have the same Fire for Cory that Cory had for Sean, he too had the same Fire for them both. It was only different by it's strength. Theirs were like raging waters and blowing winds. His was small and gentle... but the size, the shape, the colour?

Completely the same. He felt for Cory exactly what Sean did. He felt for Sean exactly what Cory did. And all three of the Fires were identical, save for the strength. He fought with building panic as he thought, 'I 'love' them like this too?'

"M...me," he whispered aloud.

The only difference he felt as they turned to look at his face was the strength.

It was identical. They felt the same Fire for him that they felt for each other... just not as powerful.

But... Sean said it was meant to be different!

He pulled his hands away slowly and wrapped them back around Timmy before he leaned into Sean's chest, his face filled with confusion.

"What did you find out?" Sean asked softly.

How could he tell them that they feel for him what they feel for each other? But it was an order. But... well, the strength WAS different...

"You feel different for everyone, except each other. That's totally the same," Joel whispered. "The Fire and Heat changes in some ways... for... changes for everyone else... at least a little," he stopped and sighed.

There. It was true, from a certain point of view. 'I'll never tell them. Not fair. How can I tell them they feel for me what they feel for each other? Even if I can't say for certain, that would upset them. And I just *can't* tell them I feel the same for them... really not fair!' he thought to himself.

Aloud, he added sadly, "But... I can't say it, though. I can't."

"Joel, nothing you can say will upset us," Cory stated softly, Sean nodding his head in agreement. "We are learning just as you are; we can't learn if you do not share what you found out."

Joel shook his head, "No. I mean that I can't say I... I 'love' someone. I... I can't be sure. It keeps *changing*. It keeps moving. The patterns in... in here," he tapped his chest where his heart was, a little lower

for him than the humans cuddling him, "they change and shift and move and... I can't say it... I can't..." he finished with a broken hearted sob. "I can't lie... I... You said I wouldn't get in t...trouble for a m...mistake... but I... I can't... I'm too scared to say that I l...love you 'cos I c...can't be sure and I so want to... I so want to tell you..."

He buried his face in Timmy's beautiful red hair and sobbed harder.

Timmy cuddled closer into Joel. "I know you love me Unca Joel. I can feel it; your chest feels happy when you cuddle me an' you get a nice smile. If it makes you feel happy to think of sayin it then it means that you love someone in onea the ways!"

As Timmy comforted Joel, Cory gave his husband a long, sad look and Sean's eyes showed the same concern as his own. They increased their cuddling of the two boys between them and waited for Joel.

Once he had managed to rein in his sobs, Joel leaned back from Timmy and regarded all three of them.

Timmy's small hand reached up and wiped the tears from his uncle's face. "Please don't cry no more, Unca Joel. You make my heart all sad when you cry. When you smile you make me feel good."

Joel nodded again, his face calmer now. "I'm sorry. I'll... I... I'm sorry." He turned his gaze on his brothers, "I wish I could say it. Really I do."

Cory gave Joel's cheek a kiss, then said softly, "Every time you look at me or Sean; every time I see you look at Kevin or Mom; every single time, I see your eyes saying it, Joel. One day, I hope you'll be able to say it out loud, but... We know you love us with every smile you show us, every hug you give us, and by all the trust you have for us."

Slowly, Joel started to smile. Really smile.

"Come on, Unca Joel!" Timmy grinned as he started to bounce. It was obvious to his parents that he had thought of something, "You want to come and play with me and Ricky? We'll show you around to all the Clan; in a big circle, and each time we stop at someone, we'll demand hugs!"

"Now that," Sean laughed, "sounds like a great game!"

Joel couldn't help but agree.

JJ and Adam were the first stop for the three boys, and after showing Joel brilliant examples of the fine art of pouncing, Ricky and Timmy told their uncles in no uncertain terms that Joel had to get hugs. Laughing, both twelve year olds agreed.

"Adam was right, Joel," JJ smiled as Joel clung onto him like a limpet. "You give really good hugs!"

"Uh huh," Joel mumbled happily as he was released to be pulled into Adam's arms, "Timmy says so too."

The Fireball nodded, a pleased grin on his face. "He's gonna teach me and Ricky how ta hug as good too!"

Their next stop was where Paulie, Levi, Bryce and Dylan were playing with Harley, Eddie and Samantha. They collected their hugs, and also seven more players for the game. Levi, Bryce and Dylan shared a quick look, then reduced their ages to five (and their clothes this time) so as to join in as well.

"Dad and Pop next!" Levi prompted, pointing to where Kyle had his back turned to the approaching mob of rugrats.

One mass pounce later, which Joel stood by and watched in awe, along with the required cuddles, as per the rules of the game, and the group was off again.

They continued in this manner for the next ten minutes, and had gathered a sizeable horde by the time they drew close to Cory and Sean once more. Many of the 8 to 10 year olds had also joined in with the Tribe, with Daniel being the oldest of all.

Joel had yet to pounce anyone as, even with everyone's encouragement, he could not make himself do so with those he just met until after touching them and sensing their hearts. By then, pouncing was redundant for he was incredibly busy with the serious business of hugs.

Cory and Sean, however, were a different story.

Justy watched all this with a happy smile on his face, but that was quickly replaced by an awed expression. "That was the best pounce *ever*!" he yelled, laughing madly at the sight of a nearly thirteen year old, nine or ten year old sized, 36 pound in weight Vulcan pouncing his big brothers with all the energy his Vulcan biology gave his legs. "I need lessons now!"

Cory had ended up lying out on the bench that he had been cuddling with Sean on, laughing as Joel squirmed and giggled happily on his chest. "Was that a good pounce?" Joel asked hopefully.

"Justy is the master of pouncing, and you just heard him say that you could give him lessons!" Cory giggled in reply. "That was the best pounce EVER!"

Joel almost purred before gently getting off his big brother's chest and latching onto Sean for the 'required hugs'. Once done, the horde of rugrats poured over and claimed theirs.

As Joel stood to one side watching, he saw Kevin looking at him. Kevin grinned broadly, gave him a thumbs up and blew him a kiss. Joel blinked, then hesitantly copied the action.

Sean noticed. It was the first of any type of kiss he had seen Joel bestow; and Kevin receiving it was the perfect way to start.

Kevin agreed; or at least Sean assumed he did, judging by the blush.

Joel continued to look around at the still ongoing concert, absorbing the good feelings that were permeating the air. He finally, truly, felt happy. Really happy.

"Come on, Unca Joel! Time to find more people to get hugs from!" Ricky giggled as he tugged on the Vulcan's hand impatiently.

The group set off on their circuit again, however, once they were nearing Cory and Sean once more, and after Joel had been shown around to a larger group of the Clan, Joel started to feel itchy. All over.

Timmy noticed his discomfort as they left the second hug fest with Cory and Sean. They were now moving towards the main doors to the CIC building as the group had noticed Teri, Doc Austin and Queen Elizabeth exit for a moment to chat in the fresh air.

"Waz wrong, Unca Joel?" he asked quietly after watching Joel dig at various parts of his chest and legs as the itching grew worse.

Joel shook his head, his eyes growing fearful and nervous, "I dunno. 'm scared, Timmy; I'm itching all over. I dunno what's wrong!"

"Unca Doc is here," Timmy pointed. "Come on... I'll prote't you," he added as Joel stiffened slightly.

"No, s'okay," Joel half whispered as they drew closer, "Mikey has given me a way to... to not be nervous... *once* I touch someone."

His nerves, however, were being caused by proximity to the Queen, a woman he had not yet learnt to trust. No surprise there, for only his Mam, Teri, was a woman that he trusted.

"Unca Doc! Unca Joel's feeling all itchin' and stuff. Can you help, pweeaaazzze?" Timmy begged, as he held on tightly to Joel's hand.

Doc Austin looked at Joel quickly. "Itchy?" he asked the boy for confirmation. At the boy's timid nod, the Doc smiled, "I'm not surprised Cory forgot, to be fair. I gave him a cream earlier for you. Timmy; could you run over and ask your dad where...?"

He never finished, for Levi, who had been listening curiously, giggled. He opened his tiny hand and the tube of skin-cream appeared there. "Here you go, Doc!"

"Thank you, Levi," Doc Austin smiled, taking the tube. "Okay, Joel; just go into the nearest bathroom and rub this stuff into your skin. You'll feel better then," he explained as he handed it to the Vulcan boy.

Joel took it, and in doing so slightly grasped the Doc's hand. The relief on his face made Doc Austin's spirit lighten. He nearly cried, however, when Joel crept forwards to hug him tightly around the waist.

"Thank you," Doc Austin whispered thickly as Joel took a step back from him with his happy, trusting smile fixed in place.

"You want me ta help rub the cream into your back?" Timmy asked Joel helpfully.

Joel, reading the tube, nodded absently. He then froze. "Umm... where do I have to rub this?" he asked, a strange sound in his throat.

"Into the skin that would be normally in air contact," the Doc replied, still recovering from the burst of emotion at Joel's hug. "No need for your gums or anything," he added by way of a joke.

The joke fell flat, for Joel started shaking. "I can't... No-one can! It's wrong! I can rub it... put it..."

Levi came closer and wrapped Joel's belly in a loving hug and looked up at him, "You need it there, though Uncle Joel. I know you're itching all over."

"But I can't, Levi; I'll be in so much trouble!" Joel panicked.

Teri shared a look with the Queen before moving over to her new son and pulling both him and Levi into her arms. "No you won't, Joel. You won't be in trouble."

Joel shook his head and murmured, "No, no, no... I will..."

Teri was confused. She understood why another touching him in some areas would scare him, but not why he couldn't touch himself.

"Is there someone you trust to help you?" Levi asked.

Joel paused and shook more. "No... well, yeah, but... I'll be hurt..." he whispered.

"Who do you trust?" Levi pressed.

With the barest of whispers, "Cory, Sean, Kevin and Mammy."

Teri looked surprised. "Me? After what you told me, I didn't think..."

Joel looked up, tears running down his face, as he forced himself to ask something that would be the bravest thing he had attempted to say or do so far in his life. "You said you'd not touch or look unless I needed help or was hurt. You said you'd never hurt me. I felt you tellin' the truth. I... I need you, Ma-ma... I just can't touch myself there... I just can't... and Levi is right, it's itching something wicked bad now," he whispered through his gentle tears.

Without another word spoken, for the faith placed in her had robbed her of her voice, Teri quickly led Joel inside the building and into the nearest bathroom. Levi ran up behind and called, "Grandma? Here's Joel's comfy clothes. They'd be better than the nice ones he has on; less itchy."

"Thank you," was all she could manage as she took the suddenly offered bag, turned and closed the door. The last thing Levi saw was Joel's tearful face. At the same time, both absolute trust was seen as well as the expression of a man about to go to the gallows...

Fifteen minutes later and a jeans clad, topless, barefoot, laughing and giggling Vulcan came zooming out of that very same bathroom... and was met by the tribe and rugrats he had been playing with earlier. He had the briefest of seconds to register the mass pounce coming straight for him before being piled under.

Laughing, Teri walked out, a carrier bag of clothes that Joel had just been wearing in one hand and his tee-shirt and hoodie in the other. "Let your uncle breathe, guys!" she chuckled.

Joel giggled in response, and, as Timmy found him and helped fish him out of the pile, everyone could clearly see the peace on Joel's face. There was a lightness there, now. He looked back at his mother. "I..." he paused and nearly grew frustrated, but then he remembered what Timmy had said. He walked over and looked up at her, letting all that Fire and Heat he felt for her, along with the boundless trust he now had, be seen in his eyes. He hugged her tightly and whispered, "Thank you."

"Thank you for trusting me," Teri replied softly.

Joel smiled brightly and hugged her even tighter.

"Unca Joel?" Timmy asked as he lightly poked Joel's lower back. He giggled as Joel jumped and squirmed in Teri's arms at the tickling sensation.

"Yeah?"

"Granma Lizzy has something to ask you!" he announced proudly. He had been busy in the fifteen minutes that Joel had been with Teri.

Joel looked up at his Mam. Teri nodded at him, "You can trust your Grandmother Lizzy, Joel."

Joel turned to look at the old lady. She was what he remembered from old pictures from that 'Hell-Earth' he had been in. He moved forwards and asked politely, yet with obvious fear in his voice, "Yes, your Majesty? What do you need me to do?" He kept his eyes fixed on the floor in front of her. She was a woman. She was also a Queen. He? He was a slave.

Elizabeth's eye's opened wide before she knelt down. "Can you look at me, child?" she asked softly. "I can't have one of my princes looking at the ground all the time; you'll just keep bumping into things."

Joel did as he was told... then realised what she had implied. "Princes? Prince? *Me*?!" he squeaked. "But you said that only Cory's brothers who asked could be named... called..."

"Are you not one of Cory's brothers?" she asked with a smile.

"Yeaah..." he answered, then grinned. "Timmy asked for me, didn't he." It was a statement, not a question, and the nods from the entire group, except for Teri, confirmed it.

Timmy giggled.

"Yes, he did. And he explained why he was doing so, rather than you. I agree with his logic," the Queen replied as she, as Timmy had advised, offered a hand to Joel.

He took it slowly, then pulled himself into her arms tightly as he felt the warmth and protection of Royalty wash over his soul.

"I name thee Prince Joel Short, of Clan Short of Vulcan," she said into the child's hair. "Once it has been made, your own crown will be given to you, and your full title shall be made known."

Levi giggled this time, and everyone looked at him in shock. His eyes were glowing white. "My Friend says you don't have ta wait, Grandma! He's made it for Joel," Levi giggled again as he held out his hands and a circlet appeared. It was different to the others. A lot different.

In the centre was... something. It was circular, just like the Clan Short Seal, and red, like the Seals of Vulcan Houses and Families; yet the markings that should have been clearly seen were 'misted' out by some effect or power beyond even Levi's ability to penetrate. To the right of the 'something' was the Crest of Clan Short, carved from Emerald just like the ones on Cory and Sean's own crowns. To the left, the Coat of Arms of the British Empire. The intricate design of the crown was such that it seemed like many more crests and seals could be added.

Joel's jaw dropped open. He ran a finger lightly over it, then looked closely at the hidden, misted out Seal.

"I don't know, Uncle Joel," Levi said seriously, "but I'm sure we'll find out soon, then my Friend will let it be seen here, too."

"Come on," the Queen said as she stood and hoisted the boy into her arms. "I think everyone outside needs to see this."

"Please, Grandma," Joel pleaded. "Please don't make a fuss... it's my brothers' big day."

Lizzy nodded, "I won't, but it must be still said in public. It won't outshine this day for your brothers, I promise."

"It'll make Cory and Sean's day even better," Teri added, "just like CD getting admitted into the Royal College of Organists."

"Well, okay," Joel murmured. "If you're sure."

"I am; now you come here, young man. No son of mine is being crowned prince in just a pair of jeans!" Teri laughed.

"Why not?" Elizabeth laughed. "Remember that little tale about my meeting Jason and Nathan stark naked in their home? I crowned them that moment."

"Kewl! Come on Joel, you wanna do it that way too?" Timmy giggled.

Joel half laughed. "If you order me to." He thought for a moment longer, then giggled and shook his head. "No. Don't mind being naked, but it would be odd at a wedding party. What would Cory and Sean like? Would they want me to have a tee-shirt on, or can I stay just in my jeans, Mama?" he asked Teri.

"They want you to be comfortable and happy," she replied. "Whatever makes you feel that way is fine with them."

Joel thought for another long moment, then cuddled into the Queen's arms. "If they won't mind, then I'd like it like this. It's cool right now, and it feels nice on my skin after all that itching."

The Queen laughed and proceeded to walk outside regally, carrying her latest 'prince' securely in her arms. The Tribe and Rugrats that had watched all this formed up as her honour guard, and all of them had grins on their faces...

"Wow, twenty minutes without Joel? Are you as concerned as I am, love?" Sean asked as he looked around.

"No, not really. Timmy's with him," was the blond's answer before he caught Sean in a serious lip-lock.

It was due to their kissing that they failed to notice the procession making its way to the stage.

"Y'all two love-birds need to be gittin a room! There's a show comin on, and y'all swappin spit ain't watchin' it!" Tommy said as he nudged them from behind.

"Bite us," Sean mumbled as the two broke apart. They smiled at their grinning brother, then followed his gaze to the stage... where the Queen had just set Joel on his feet. Levi was standing to their left, carrying a new crown that shot sunlight in all directions, just as the ones they wore did.

"No way! He asked?" Cory wondered as he looked at his little Vulcan brother who was being hugged against the Queen's front. "Where did they get a new crown that fast?"

Sean shook his head mutely as the Queen addressed the assembled, and now quiet, Clan, "I have been informed of this young man's past, and many of you here today have either heard it yourself, or have recently met Joel. For those who are unaware, please allow me to give a brief overview of what this child has survived.

"For all his life, that he can remember, he has been a slave. He has never had a family to love him; never had brothers to cuddle him and protect him and nurture him; never had toys to play with or friends to cry and laugh with; never owned anything other than his own life: which, in effect, could have been taken from him at any time by the whim of his master or mistress.

"Now, he has family; he has brothers and sisters; he has people to play with and love him and protect him.

"But, he is still a slave in his own heart. That is not something this child can ever forget. It was all he was trained for and lived for. We are all going to keep telling him that he is free, but please be aware: he may never fully believe that. A lifetime of training is not easy to break.

"What hurt this child about not long ago was the realization that his new brothers, Princes Cory and Sean, were royalty. He, in his heart, is not. He, in his heart, is still a slave.

"No longer! You cannot be a slave *and* a Son of the Empire. You cannot be a slave *and* a Prince of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. You cannot be a slave *and* a Defender of the Commonwealth Alliance.

"It is therefore my great pleasure to add one more gift to the Newly-weds. Cory and Sean; I present to you His Highness, Prince Joel Short of the House of Windsor, Prince of the Empire and Defender of the Commonwealth Alliance!"

So saying, Queen Elizabeth took the ornate, triple Crested Crown from Levi and placed it on Joel's brow.

"Has Grandma Lizzy been taking logic lessons from Xain?" Sean asked as he tried to wrap his head around the surprise.

"Does it matter? C'mon, it's our turn to grab cuddles from a Prince!" Cory replied as he stood and pulled Sean up with him.

Joel's eyes were swimming with tears. Everything she had said had struck home. Yes, he may always feel he is a slave, but now... now he is a Prince. He now had a way to fend off those thoughts of being a slave; or at least attempt to.

He turned and bowed to the Queen, then, when he looked back up at her and saw her smile and nod, he turned and ran across the stage towards his approaching big brothers. He pounced at them from the edge and was plucked from the air by Sean and then squashed between him and Cory.

Those who had been on the receiving end of Joel's cuddles that morning started cheering. Those who had yet to meet him simply smiled and clapped.

Joel did not care.

None of the three Princes cared.

They just stood there and cuddled.

Sean and Cory were seated again, this time with their little princely brother on their own royal laps. Joel had his back pulled in tight against Sean's chest and Sean was happily nuzzling Joel's hair and making him giggle, while Cory examined the Vulcan's circlet that Joel had handed him.

"I can't make it out," he murmured, "it's just not giving any clues to which Family you belong to, Joel."

"It's the same colour as that red one at the wedding," Joel whispered softly, his eye's closed at the attention, "so... am I part of the Ambassador's House?"

"Can't say," Sean added his voice just as softly, "Most Families and all Houses of Vulcan have red Crests. Symbolizes that the Houses and Families come from Vulcan itself; red for a red world. Clans get green crests as we come from the Families themselves, so..."

"So it symbolizes the blood of my people?" Joel asked shrewdly.

"Yup," Cory grinned, "and Jace said that there are a few Families that have green Crests as they, long, long ago, started as Family-Clans. So, no, Lil' Elf. I can't tell from this which House or Family you're from." Cory reached over and placed Joel's circlet gently back on his head. "There. Suits you, Elven Prince!"

Joel started giggling, and he only grew louder as Sean held his arms away to let Cory attack his ribs.

Cory felt a small hand on his arm, and so he stopped tickling the chortling Vulcan to face Kevin who was standing at his side. He suddenly grew concerned when he saw the pain and tears in the brown eyed boy's face.

Joel sobered and reached forwards just as Cory did, and they both drew Kevin up and onto Cory's lap. "What's wrong, Kev?" Cory asked him quietly.

"Grandma Lizzy said Joel was upset earlier; 'cos I'd left him alone! I'm sorry, Joel! I shouldn't have left you alone," Kevin mumbled, tears starting to roll down his cheeks.

Joel shifted slightly to wrap an arm around Kevin's waist and drew him close, "No, it wasn't 'cos of you. It was something stupid."

Joel explained briefly, with Cory or Sean adding their less slave-biased explanations.

"Why didn't you call me?" Kevin whispered to Joel, a slight catch of hurt in his voice.

Joel tried to not cry, but it was hard work, "I'm sorry. I thought, when I was feelin' like that, that I wasn't worth your t...time..."

The brown haired angel did not let him continue. He just pulled Joel into a tight hug against his chest. One of Kevin's hands was gripped tight around Joel's back while his other he used to hold the back of Joel's head tenderly. He ran his fingers gently through the Vulcan's curls as he whispered, "You are worth it, Joel. Really. Please, next time you feel down, come find me, okay?"

"Kay," was the calm, relaxed response from the little prince as Joel rested his chin on Kevin's shoulder.

Kevin pulled back slightly after a moment, and smiled at him. He ran his fingers over Joel's circlet. "That's cute on you," he murmured, bringing a bright blush to the young Vulcan's face. Kevin looked down at Joel's chest, and his brow furrowed. "Are these...?" he began to ask, tracing a his fingers over the pale marks and patterns in Joel's flesh.

"Yeah," Joel responded quietly.

"Kyle and the rest healed him, but they left the marks. I don't know why," Cory added quietly.

Joel looked at him. "I will always remember the pain; these marks... I dunno, maybe they are for others? I can never forget, so they don't stay for me to remember, but... maybe others will see and know that you... that..." Joel trailed off uncertainly.

Sean nodded, "I know what you're trying to say, Lil' Elf. Others will see and know that people can survive anything and recover."

Kevin nodded absently as he touched each and every mark on Joel's body that was showing.

Joel giggled. "Wanna see them all?" he asked innocently, his hands going to the button and zip on his jeans.

Kevin blushed. "Maybe later," he whispered shyly, causing Cory to laugh softly. The brown eyed boy leaned and kissed Joel's cheek before going back to tracing his fingers over what remained of the Vulcan's scars.

"Are those kisses?" Joel asked, his hand pressed to the cheek Kevin had just kissed.

Kevin looked up, his face sad. "Yeah... don't you know about kisses?"

"I've read about them, but in stories where it's two people in a couple kissing. Same in films... yet everyone here kisses me all the time. I keep... I keep thinking everyone is trying to get me to be their... ummm..." Joel trailed off and hung his head while Sean pulled him tighter into his arms.

Cory ruffled his hair. "They are kisses, bro, but just like love there are many types of kisses."

Kevin nodded, "Yeah. There's brother kisses and lover kisses and friend kisses. All types of kisses."

"Oh," sighed Joel. "Are lover kisses the ones you give to people's lips, then?"

"A lot of them are," Sean said into the Vulcan's hair, "but not all. Brothers, sisters, Moms and Dads give lip-kisses too, sometimes, and little kids nearly always give you sloppy kisses on the lips. Timmy's a master at them! Even friends can."

Joel thought for a moment, then nodded slowly. "Kay." He faced Cory and hesitated for a moment before moving in and pecking the lightest of kisses to the blond teen's lip. He swivelled slightly and did the same for Sean before attending to Kevin.

"Thanks," all three chorused, making Joel's heart jump again in his chest. He'd done something right, and they were happy!

As Kevin went back to exploring Joel's chest, he suddenly noticed something. "Wow! That's soooo cute!"

"What?" asked the other three. Joel looked down to try and find what Kevin was staring at.

"You've got an outie bellybutton!" Kevin giggled. "That's just soooo cute!!!" He tickled Joel's belly button, bringing light, sweet laughter from the boy. "Sexy too," Kevin mumbled.

"Looks like you're not the only one who likes 'outies'!" Cory giggled to Sean.

"You got one too?" Joel asked his blond haired big brother as he tried to laughingly fend off Kevin's tickling hands.

"Yeppers!" Cory giggled as he attempted to fight off Sean who was trying to prove it. Joel found that, within a few seconds, he was on Cory's lap while Kevin had been pushed over by a laughing Cory onto Sean's. "There; now I can use my Lil'elf as a shield!"

Sean sniggered, then stage whispered to Kevin, "That means poor Joel gets it first, then, right?"

"Right!" Kevin agreed, also sniggering.

"Cory!" Joel squealed as two pairs of hands started tickling his belly.

"Turn around, they can't reach them if they're not in the open!" Cory giggled as he tried to get Joel to turn towards him.

Joel did so quickly. Chest to chest, both boys poked their tongues out at their two tormentors. Joel giggled as both play-pouted, then looked up into Cory's sky blue eyes, "What about Sean do you think is cute, then?"

Without missing a heartbeat, Cory said, "His smile."

Joel glanced back at Sean, who was grinning and blushing like crazy.

"Especially when he blushes like that," Cory added, thus making Sean's blush worse.

Joel giggled and twisted back around before being pulled back into Kevin's arms. "I promise, no tickles," Kevin grinned as he once again started exploring Joel's pale marks.

"Kevin?"

"Yeah?"

"Why do others call you 'Kev'?" Joel asked curiously.

Kevin smiled, his hands now gently resting on either side of Joel's waist, "My friends call me that. It's my nickname. You can too, if you want. I'd like that. I... I'd like to be your *best* friend."

Joel gaped, "I... you want to be my... best friend?" he repeated.

"Yeah," Kevin grinned as he pulled in tightly and hugged Joel again.

"Wow...! Yeah! I have a best friend! Can I be yours too??"

Kevin pulled back and giggled. He nodded; then paused. He was looking deep into Joel's eyes and started to slowly moving closer to the Vulcan's face. Joel, for his part, suddenly felt his heart-rate increase. Why were Kevin's eyes darting down to his lips? And why was he coming slowly closer?

Barely centimetres apart, Joel felt the sweet breath from Kevin against his lips. He shuddered in anticipation. 'He's gonna kiss me! A 'for real' kiss, not a brother kiss... W...why?' he thought briefly before the feeling of Kevin's lips coming into contact with his own wiped his mind clear.

It was tender and loving only; nothing major, and over quickly, but Joel was completely speechless as Kevin pulled back with a shy smile. Kevin only managed to part his lips to mumble something when Joel moved in himself and returned that kiss just as tenderly.

"Awww! Wow, Unca Joel!" came Timmy's voice. Kevin and Joel turned to see Timmy and the rest of the Rugrats and Tribe watching them; all with huge happy grins. "You've got Unca Kev as your boyfriend?"

Kevin's mouth dropped open, and Joel went bright green. They shot each other questioning looks before Kevin took Joel's hand tightly and said, "Uh, just friends right now, Timmy."

Joel nodded, "**Best** friends!"

"Uh huh," Cory giggled, "the best kind; the kind that likes swapping spit, I would say!"

"Don't tease 'em, Daddy!" Timmy ordered, stamping his foot. The mischievous grin on his face, however, said that teasing was to be *his* job. "Besides; you says that to everyone! Get new lines!"

"Swapping spit?" Joel whispered in Kevin's ear.

Kevin blushed crimson as he whispered back, "You know; tongues and stuff?"

"Oh..." Then, "Oooh!" Joel blushed even more... and giggled.

After watching Kyle and his big brothers float high above them all for a few moments, Joel moved off with Kevin and the Tribe to resume their hug-seeking game. Joel, still barefoot and topless, provoked far more severe reactions this time when he latched onto various kids for his own quota of hugs. Before, he had just 'felt thin'... now they could see his ribs, lack of stomach and what used to be scars. In short, he looked like an undead.

As the group would move from one hug-target to the next, the eyes that followed Joel were all filled with pity; and in most cases, determined looks were there that such should never, ever happen to anyone again.

Adam was one of the most affected by the sight when he and JJ ended up on their backs with a giggling Vulcan sitting on Adam's chest.

"We're brothers in more ways than you know," Adam whispered to Joel.

"What do you mean?" Joel asked as he looked curiously down at his brother.

"Lift up for a second," Adam requested quietly. Once Joel had taken his slight weight off of Adam's chest, Adam lifted his shirt and showed Joel his own personal reminders of abuse.

Joel gingerly sat back, now on Adam's lap as JJ helped his boyfriend into a sitting position. Tears started trickling from Joel's eyes as he gently laid the palm of his hand over some of the scars he could see on Adam's chest.

"A... a belt?" he whispered his question.

Adam nodded seriously. "Our brothers saved my life too. Mom, John, and Judge Joe made sure that my father and step-mother could never do this to anyone again. JJ helps me out when I still have nightmares about it; he was the first one of the guys to make me feel like I was worth something."

Joel's jaw dropped open half way through this, and he looked in horror between Adam and JJ. "Your... your *parents* did this?" he stuttered out through his trembling lips. "Why?! They... nooo... NO! Mams and Dads shouldn't... they can't... Why?!"

"They usually don't," JJ replied seriously. "No matter where you go there are bad people; Adam's *FORMER* parents were some of those; Pop made sure they were 'taken care of' for their crime before Momma Teri was given the position in the Federation she has now. I heard Dad and Pop talking a while back; since Pop is Federation Security now he had them transferred to a prison planet to make sure they never repeated the crime. People like them are not allowed to have children on prison planets."

Joel bit at his lower lip for a second before blubbering, "I thought I had it bad, but... it wasn't my mam or dad hurting me... I am an orphan, a slave... I have no rights... had, I..." He stopped, then lifted Adam's top once more to look at the worst of the scars. He leaned forward and kissed them gently before throwing his arms around Adam's neck and sobbed into the twelve year old's shoulder.

Adam wrapped his arms around the sobbing boy and held him while his tears ran their course. He shed a few of his own as well, and JJ was misty eyed. Once Joel had quietened some, Adam said softly, "Little brother; you have the same rights I do. You're home now. Our scars are reminders that we need to make sure nobody else feels what we felt if we can stop it. You're my little brother forever now; together we will do anything we need to do to prevent anyone else feeling what we felt."

Joel nodded mutely, pulled back and hesitated for a moment before kissing Adam's cheek. He then smiled and asked gingerly, "Umm, Kev told me your age... You're *my* little brother... aren't you?"

Adam giggled, "You're my little brother when you need cuddles or hugs; you can be my big brother the rest of the time."

"Deal!" Joel smiled, his face lighting up at being *someone's* big brother. "That makes you and Tyler little brothers... and he's only *just* littler than me! Tommy said that since I was littler than him, I'm his little brother... so he won't let me be his big brother."

"You're Tommy's big brother too; he just calls you his little brother so he has an excuse to give you extra hugs," Adam giggled.

JJ nodded his head, "That's right, Joel; where Tommy was raised they are about a century behind the rest of the world. He feels more comfortable doing special things for you if he's doing it like you're his little brother."

"He wants to be my 'big' brother so he can do nice things for me?" Joel asked, wanting to be sure. "He *wants* to do nice things for me? Like those yummy pancake things? It makes him happy?" The look in Joel's eyes made it clear that he was still having a hard time accepting more than hugs and cuddles from people, and the idea that people *wanted* to make *him* feel good was having a harder time again at sinking in. "Really?"

"Really!" Adam and JJ chorused.

Joel looked back over his shoulder at Kevin, and found him nodding at him, along with most of the Tribe who were collecting cuddles from the other, older kids around them. One of which was Tommy; and it was clear he had heard everything Joel had said and asked.

Joel turned and kissed Adam and JJ quickly on the lips before getting up and pouncing Tommy. He looked down into the southern boy's open and honest face from his new 'chest-perch' and smiled, "If you want to be my big brother, you can. I... I want you to be happy, and if me being your littler brother makes you happy, then that's what I want too."

Tommy pulled Joel down into a hug. "You gotchself a big bro forever, Joel. That means y'all's got cookies for munchin' when you wanna get them too! I love ya, li'l bro."

Joel trembled as another of those weird chills ran up his spine. He wasn't cold, but he shivered nonetheless. "I... I..." Joel felt like he was trying to force words out passed a vacuum. His face clouded momentarily, then he sighed and snuggled further on Tommy's chest. He tried his best to make sure this was one of the best hugs he could give; his only way he knew of expressing the Fire that he felt inside. "Sorry... I just... I wish I could say it, Tommy."

"I know; Ty was watchin' over ya. He done made sure all your bros knows you show it instead of sayin' it. Havin' a mickymouse lil bro is kewl when we need to know 'bout stuff," Tommy replied with a smile.

"I heard that!" Tyler yelled. "It's Mick-E-Vis, goofball!"

"Like I done said; mickymouse!" Tommy yelled back with a laugh, obviously continuing a friendly brotherly banter.

"What *is* a Mikyvis?" Joel asked curiously as he sat up and made himself comfy on Tommy's stomach. He looked between Tommy under him and Tyler and Kyle walking over towards them. "You can read minds, you told me yesterday, but you appeared earlier like magic... or... Are you like the Q??" he asked, gears spinning in his head. "Power to do what you will, and go anywhere and stuff??"

Kyle and Ty stopped next to the pair. "I've never met a Q yet," Kyle replied. "What I've learned about them though is they are something like we are. They are what's called a 'High Race'; since we are one too it means there are some things we have in common."

"High Race? That figures; one of them keeps sayin' he's omnipotent," Joel murmured, his eyes distant.

Levi, still in his reduced age size, joined Joel on Tommy's chest. "The Q you know from the movies that you saw has a son, Uncle Joel. Him and me have been having fun going around and learning all about different universes while I'm supposed to be sleeping."

Joel looked at Levi, and a previously unseen look of protection arose in his eyes. In a tone of voice that seemed totally unfamiliar and mature coming from him, Joel said, "Be careful; that Q is always making nasty pranks at Picard and the crew of the Enterprise. He... he seems to have a reason in the shows, but... just be careful."

"Don't worry, he's not quite the same in real life," Levi smiled. "He likes me. He thinks I show great potential for 'fun'."

Joel glanced up at Kyle, then back at Levi. "If you're sure," he said, his voice still filled with warning.

"I'm sure." Levi replied. "The Q ain't bad guys like your movies showed; if they were they'd never have been left as a High Race. The oldest High Race way back would have blocked their growth. The movie guys had to do something to make the Q fit their movie, so they made them look bad."

Joel spent a long moment looking into Levi's smiling face before relaxing and, in effect, reverting to his far younger seeming state. He pulled Levi over, rose off Tommy's stomach, then placed the little 'five' year old boy on his shoulders. "Come on then, High Race Levi... I think Timmy wants to get more cuddles from more people!" he giggled. Turning to the now standing Tommy, he stretched up and kissed his brother's lips before asking with a sunny smile, "Can we snuggle more later?"

"You better believe it!" Tommy replied with a smile of his own.

"Kewl!" Joel reached and grabbed Kevin's hand before racing off after the now departing horde of Rugrats, with Levi giggling from his shoulders.

"Do you think he'd mind, Kev?"

"Nope; I think he'd be used to it, Jo'. He's been poked and prodded by all the kids since he arrived on Sunday."

"Can he really fly?"

"Sure can, and his cousin as well!"

"Where is... ah, that's his cousin?"

"Yup, the one in the robe."

"So why's Riti flashing his bare butt to everyone?"

"Riti hates wearing clothes. His people have no concept of modesty that way; even Xandor don't care about being nude. It's just that Xandor was from the urban areas of their world, and Riti from the coun-

try. Riti says the 'City-folks' wore clothing to make themselves feel better than the rest, while Xandor says it was due to the growing space program."

"Cool," Joel giggled as they came to a stop by the Lo'Garn in question, who was, by now, laughing madly at Joel.

"Hi," Riti smiled, his owl-like eyes blinking comically at the giggling Vulcan.

Joel noticed Riti's circlet and started smiling more, "You're a prince too?"

"Yup! You're my newest brother! Cory and Sean too," Riti grinned.

Joel reached out to gently run his fingers over the circlet on the Lo'Garn, while Riti did so for Joel's. "You've got nice hair; soft," Joel murmured to him.

"Thanks, Joel! I really like yours too. We Lo'Garn don't have curly hair," was the bird-boy's reply.

Joel then asked, "Could I touch your wings?"

Riti simply turned around with a grin. He started laughing as Joel went to town on exploring.

"You've just made a friend for life," a new young voice said as Riti's eyes closed blissfully at the near preening Joel was giving him.

Joel looked up and saw a big, comparatively, Klingon standing next to them both. Joel automatically moved back and slightly behind Kevin.

Koth tilted his head curiously. "You're scared of me? I thought aliens didn't scare you, Joel," he murmured quietly.

Joel thought fast and hard. "I... you're Klingon; I..."

Tyler appeared and helped Kevin wrap Joel in a double hug. "Klingons here are different from those in the TV shows, Joel."

Koth's eyes opened slightly, "That 'Star Trek' thing? We're bad guys in it?"

Joel nodded. "Yeah, at least at Kirk's time in the shows. Only after Kirk's time did the Klingon Empire and the Federation join in an Alliance."

Koth smiled gently. "Don't worry, Joel. My race ain't in an Alliance with the Federation here, but relations are good right now. Also, me and my brother have been living with Jason and the rest for nearly a year, now. We're not going to hurt you."

"Agreed," came another deeper seeming voice as an even bigger Klingon joined them. "I'm Korris, this is Koth-Boy."

"It's 'Koth', Kor!" Koth retorted, blowing a raspberry at his big brother.

"If I say 'Koth-Boy', then 'Koth-Boy' it is," Korris growled affectionately as he pulled his younger sibling over and tickled his ribs.

Joel started to giggle, and at the gentle prompting from Riti and Kevin, he moved over and greeted the two now giggling Klingons.

After some rather enjoyable cuddles, Joel turned around to pull Kevin against his side again. As he did so he saw the last of the Dragon Division leadership standing there. "Hi Jace, Nath'," he bubbled.

Nathan grinned, "Hey, Joel. We thought we'd come over and officially meet our new prince-brother; and introduce you to Vicky and Tony."

Joel glanced at the tall, black haired boy. "Hi," he waved.

Antony simply pulled him over and hugged him. On contact, Joel could feel how shy this boy was, and so gave him a supportive hug. "Wow, you *do* hug good," Antony whispered to him.

"You needed it," Joel replied as they released. He turned to Victoria, and started to tremble slightly. A girl didn't scare him like a grown woman did, but still...

Victoria offered her hand and simply waited.

The small Vulcan reached out and took it, then grinned and hugged her.

"Hi, Joel," Victoria smiled as she hugged him tightly. "This is so kewl, Jace!" she bubbled as Joel hugged her more, "We've got another brother; and another Vulcan one too!"

Joel's mind ground to a halt. He had a few nieces, but... "You're my sister! Wow, I have a *sister!!!*"

Jason started laughing, "That's something you might wish otherwise once you get to know Vicky... ouch!" Jason started to rub at his arm where Victoria had reached out and slapped him.

Joel giggled more, and continued to snuggle with his first sister.

Joel and Kevin decided to sit and watch the tail end of the concert, as well as the last dance by Cory and Sean. They were near the back of the large group on the lawns and simply chatting quietly. Mainly, Joel was asking who certain people were, how they fitted in with the Clan, and general details in that vein.

Teri moved up behind them, and Joel turned at the faintest of footfalls his Vulcan hearing could pick up. "Mama!" he crowed, his face lighting up like the sun as he gave her the biggest, happiest smile he could.

"I see that you're taking a break from helping your nephews make sure everybody felt welcome!" Teri said with a smile. "How are you feeling Joel? Are you having fun?"

"Yes, lots of fun," Joel nodded, although he did look puzzled. "Is that what I was doing? Helping? I thought it was just a game."

"It was a game," Teri replied as she held out her arms for a hug, "but Timmy's games always involve doing something to make other people happy. He's been like that from the day Cory saved him; he likes having fun while making sure everyone is as happy as he is."

Kevin giggled as Joel swarmed up and into Teri's arms, to end up perched on her hip and kissing her cheek. "'m glad you're here," he mumbled. "I... I've been kinda looking forward to some Mammy-hugs you said you wanted to give me... was... is that wrong?" he asked uncertainly, "'cos I don't want to be... umm, selfish if you're too busy..."

"I'm never too busy for hugs," Teri replied as she kissed Joel's forehead. "Why don't you and Kevin join me and we'll take a walk around; you can ride up here, and Kevin can take my free hand if he wants. We'll take hug breaks while we're making sure all of the guests are having fun."

Kevin nodded shyly as he stood and took Teri's outstretched hand, "Thanks, Aunt Teri."

Joel smiled happily down at his best friend, and Teri caught a look in his eye. 'Another Cory and Sean... will I survive it a second time?' she mused with an inward chuckle.

"Who we going to check on first, Mama?" Joel asked as he laid his head on her convenient shoulder, the top of his head nestled against her cheek.

"How about we check on the Band. They seem to be getting ready to finish," she answered as they started towards the stage.

Joel perked up even more, "Bon Jovi? I get to speak to them?"

Kevin giggled and looked up, "Sure you do! You'll like Jon, he's great!"

"Nice, real nice. He... he was dead in that other place. He died in the resistance. It's so great to see him and Aaron Carter and even the British Royal family... all I know of them is from the Underground Internet," Joel bubbled out in a rush, his eyes fixed on the band on stage as they finished the last song.

"Did someone special that I've not met properly yet mention my name?" a laughing voice from behind them asked.

Teri paused to turn and smile at her eldest living son. "Will you join us, Aaron?" she asked, with a shell shocked Joel gaping at him from her hip.

"Of course, I'd love to, Mom," he answered as he quickly tickled Kevin before picking him up, placing him on his own hip, then moving to stand next to Teri.

"You're my *brother* too?!" Joel asked incredulously.

Teri smiled, "Yes, he adopted me as his mother." She winked at Aaron, who reached with his free hand and ruffled Joel's hair.

As they started moving again, Joel and Kevin found themselves more or less back to back, and they both giggled before finding a way to link their hands. Aaron laughed, "Well, since these two are as inseparable as Timmy and Ricky, I see this was a good idea!"

Kevin blushed, while Joel asked curiously, "They best friends too?"

"I remember a comment that was made a while back which fits them; if one farts, the other one's butt cheeks flap," Teri replied with a chuckle. "They give best friends a whole new meaning."

Joel giggled in her arms, as did Kevin. "That's the type of friend I want to be for you, Joel," he said quietly as he leaned his head back to rest it against his friend's.

Joel, therefore, was still giggling madly at the idea of flapping butt cheeks by the time they got onto the stage to be met by Jon and the band. Teri kissed his forehead again as she pointed at the band, "Joel, meet Jon Bon Jovi; Jon, this is Joel."

His giggling stopped completely as he stared at them in wonder. "Wow; WOW! It's sooo cool to meet heroes like you... ah, wait... no, that's not here... I... sorry, I keep thinking... never mind," he trailed off with embarrassment.

"Joel; they are heroes here, too." Kyle replied as he joined them. "Just ask any of these kids out here who looked up to see Uncle Jon or Uncle Richie bandaging their wounds three days ago."

"I was just doing what Cory would do!" Jon replied with a grin. "He has that affect; once you meet him you want to be like him."

"He's my big brother!" Joel said with pride, "and I wanna be like him, too; and Sean and Kevin!" He smiled down at Kyle, "Thanks. It's confusing. People who died fighting in that other place decades ago are alive here, and I don't know what's real or what's not."

"You're welcome," Kyle replied. "Ty and me are watchin', so any time we think you might need help with explaining we'll be around to help you. I gotta help Ty look out for his big brother!"

"Can't I be *your* big brother too?" Joel asked hopefully.

Kyle's eyes gleamed happily. "Of course! I'd love another big brother!" he nearly yelled with joy. Jon reached down and picked up the bouncing Mikyvis and held him close enough to Teri and Joel so the two boys could hug and seal the 'deal'.

"You must be pretty special to be Cory's new brother!" Jon said as he put the smiling Kyle back on his feet. "Would you like to meet the rest of the guys?"

Joel came close to nodding his head off, "Yes please!"

Joel's head was soon in a whirl at meeting the entire band, and getting hugs from each of them. He finally ended up in Aaron's arms while Kevin giggled from Teri's lap. She needed to sit down due to the laughter at the bubbling and excited Vulcan and all his questions. What was the funniest, though, was that his Vulcan appearance kept throwing Jon and the others off completely. You could tell that it had

not sunk in that Joel was an untrained Vulcan, and it was clear that they did not expect him to laugh, smile or react emotionally. Each time he did, therefore, their eyebrows raising and shocked expressions brought fresh laughter to the entire group.

Joel snuggled happily in Aaron's arms and was about to say something when his stomach beat him too it.

Teri laughed, "I think that's the sign that food is required. If you are all finished, I think we can get everyone inside."

Jon nodded, chuckling, "I'll announce it. If you want a minute's head start to avoid being trampled by this large group of obviously starved and wasting away kids, go now. Fifty eight seconds and counting!"

"Come on!" Levi bubbled as he appeared next to Teri, "I'll get you to the front of the queue!"

They all vanished, leaving Jon and the band laughing.

Joel stood and stared at the huge, beautiful work of art in the centre of the room.

"That's some cake," Kevin muttered in awe next to him.

"Cake? *That* is food??" Joel could not take his eyes off it. "What do you do with something that huge and pretty looking?"

"Eat it," giggled Sean as he and Cory walked past.

Cory added, "Once the photos are taken. We have to have some photos of that amazing cake; Tommy and Tyler outdid themselves!"

Joel managed to tear his eyes away from the ten foot cake to look at his elder brothers as they found their seats. He asked Kevin, "Tommy and Tyler made this?!"

"Yup," the brown eyed boy giggled.

The young Vulcan cast his eyes around the room, searching. "Kev, I'll be right back. Need to give them a big hug! Cory and Sean felt happy when they walked past."

Kevin nodded, but asked, "You didn't touch them. How do you know what they felt?"

Joel answered after a moment's reflection, "Dunno. Just do."

"Kay," Kevin said, looking at his friend with gentle curiosity, "I'll keep your seat warm." He moved off with Joel watching him briefly.

Joel started looking around again, and in a break in the flow of people ogling the cake or finding seats, he saw Tyler and Tommy. They were by the kitchen door, and both were beaming with accomplishment as they watched everyone gape in wonder at their creation.

"Incoming!" Tyler giggled, giving Tommy a 2.467 second warning before they both ended up on their backs with Joel plastering kisses all over their faces.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you!" the Vulcan cried happily. "Cory and Sean really, really love it. I felt it. It's amazing. It's soooo pretty! How did you make it that big??"

Paul, Pauly, and Wacko heard the commotion from the kitchen, and came out to investigate. "Unca Ty's a Mickmiss;" Pauly giggled from Paul's hip, "he made it so nothin felled makin it big!"

"Aww shucks. Thanks bro; y'all's kin, and kinfolk likin it means a lot, 'specially you," Tommy said with a blush as he hugged his little 'big' brother tightly for a moment.

A giggling Timmy came over then to rescue his uncles from the Joel attack. "Unca Joel? There's someone special who wants to meet you."

Joel stopped hugging Tommy long enough to look up with a raised eyebrow... only to get a wet tongue licking his face.

Spluttering, he rolled off Tommy's chest and sat on the floor, only to have his lap taken by a large puppy. At least it seemed like a puppy, but Joel saw subtle differences in the shape of the animal's head and body. He looked up at Timmy curiously as the pup continued to bathe his face.

Timmy giggled. "Unca Joel, this is Black Feet. He's been waitin to meet you; he's gonna live with you now!"

"Me?" Joel asked as Black Feet started increasing the wash Joel was getting. Joel started to laugh as the pup started cleaning his belly. "He's... staying with me?"

My Boy

Joel looked down at the puppy, who had stopped licking and was staring back at him intently.

Timmy gaped, "You hear him 's well?"

"Hear what?" Tommy and Tyler asked.

Joel nodded at his nephew, yet gave his brothers a puzzled look.

Me Protect. Me Guard. Black Feet is Boy's. Boy is Black Feet's

"You didn't hear that?" Joel looked up at his brothers again.

"No," they both answered.

Timmy explained, his face registering shock, "It's spirit talk. William talks to me like it sometimes. It's from Black Feet's spirit to yours, Unca Joel." The Spirit Guide knelt down and tickled the pup's ears and asked, "Blackie? You said Unca Joel wasn't a Guide; so how can he hear you?"

Black Feet sent to Timmy alone, and kept Joel from hearing him:

Boy belongs to Black Feet. Boy belongs to Him. Boy is His Shaper

'Him? The Great Spirit?' Timmy sent back his question.

Blackie nodded:

His Shaper

"What's happening?" Joel asked nervously.

Timmy smiled, hiding his surprise at this turn of events well, "Blackie is special, Joel, and you can speak to him and hear him in your spirit. He's here to help you; and be your friend and companion."

Joel nodded slightly, then looked down into the pup's amber/gold eyes. "You're part wolf, aren't you," he murmured. "I've seen wolves before."

I from Silver Wolf. I from Shelly

"Shelly is your mother? She's a dog, a canine?"

Blackie nodded, then proceeded to lick Joel again, bringing laughter back in to break the near deathly silence that had fallen of the group.

"Time to take your seats," Helen said as she joined them from the kitchen. "Hello Joel. Congratulations on getting a new mother."

Joel looked up and found to his surprise that his normal fear of women that he had not yet 'touched' and trusted was now, seemingly, gone.

Blackie lolled his tongue out of the side of his jaw in a wolfish laugh.

Joel pushed his surprise to one side and replied, "Thank you. Sorry for being scared of you yesterday. I was being silly."

"No you weren't. Your mother hasn't told me what happened to you, but she did tell me you have a reason. Do you want to take my hand so that you know I won't hurt you?" she asked him gently.

Joel nodded and reached up. Seconds later, he was up and hugging her, the wolf pup held between them. "Thank you, Auntie Helen," he murmured.

"Come on, let's take our seats. It's time to eat," She said as she led them all into the Dining Room.

With Blackie curled up at his feet and munching on a large piece of beef, Joel was happily digging into his own huge plate full. There had been a brief relapse when first presented with his food, for he had started to inhale it at top speed. A gentle hug and whispered words from Cory next to him that it *was* his food, and that *no-one* was going to take it allowed him to slow down.

"The table don't need a shower, Joel," Cory had whispered with a laugh, "just relax and enjoy each mouthful, okay? You'll like it better, and won't make yourself ill."

"Kay," Joel had whispered before returning to his plate; this time at a pace matching his brothers. Occasionally he would pause to feed a fork full of whatever was currently on his plate to Kevin. Both boys had their chairs completely touching and Kevin's arm was about Joel's waist constantly. When he wasn't being fed, Kevin had his head on Joel's shoulder; a contented smile on his face, and his eyes filled with warmth and peace.

Kenny, opposite them both, had a relieved and joyous smile on *his* face. He turned to Rory and kissed him happily before turning back to watch his twin brother.

Kevin was no longer alone.

Editor's Notes:

I am so happy to have the opportunity to edit this story. This is a wonderful chapter, and I used a few towels since I was running short on Kleenex. I can always wash the towels. Blackfeet is very special, isn't he? It is really nice to see that Kevin and Joel are finding each other, and no matter what Joel thinks, he does love Kevin, along with loving a lot of other people. I can hardly wait to see what happens next.

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher

Chapter 4:**Destiny, Fate and Prophecy**

Forward:

I have forgotten to say until now, but any time you see any of the Memories Characters speaking and acting/reacting in "Sa'ren", they have either been written by ACFan or been checked by him. A big thank you, ACFan - I'd never get it right without your help here!

The same for MultiMapper and Roland - Thanks, guys - You are helping me keep your kids and characters correct.

Also, Thanks goes out to Akeentia - The final section of this chapter was written in concert with him. Tyne is an amazing character, yet only Akeentia writes him. I am so grateful for your help, my friend.

Now, on with the show!

"Lady Teri, might I have a word with you please?" Sarek asked softly as Teri entered the Kitchen midway through the Wedding Feast.

Teri looked at the Ambassador sharply. "It must be serious if you are using Vulcan titles, Patriarch."

"It may be," Sarek said, looking past her towards Cory and Sean; or more specifically at the waif seated to Cory's other side. "It is in regard to Joel."

Teri gestured with her hand and they both left the Kitchen and made for the nearest Meeting room, just off from Main CIC.

Once they had found a seat, she raised her eyebrow at the older Vulcan, prompting him to begin.

"Yesterday evening," he began, "I looked over the sparse information regarding both young Joel and the group that came in with Kurt Farnsworth. The information on the latter group did not raise any overt concerns; at least no more than from any other rescue or intake the Clan has been involved in. What is concerning me is Joel."

Teri remained silent and simply raised her eyebrow again.

"I apologize for my thoughts not being as collected and organized as normal, Teri, but this is a situation I have not encountered before. I am uncertain as to how to proceed without causing you undue concern and worry," he said finally.

"What did the boys do this time?" Teri asked, not really sure where he was going.

"It is not so much what they did as what you asked Cory to do," Sarek replied, almost wincing.

"Okay, fill me in," Teri replied.

"You did nothing wrong, for everything that led to this was done logically. There is the possibility, however, that what has transpired has placed the Safe Haven Act in direct conflict with the Council of Houses of the Vulcan Confederation," Sarek began. "When I reviewed the information Justin placed on record last night, I was only curious as to how a child long lost from this Universe knew what his birthday was; but that was only until I realized that it must have been an arbitrary date picked for convenience sake. I must admit that I was emotionally uneasy upon reviewing those notes and seeing the visual record of your son Michael bringing that scarred child here, but I was doubly uneasy once I saw him at the wedding. I had not had a chance, considering the state of events today, to be informed as to what his true biology was until that moment.

"He is Vulcan, hybrid or not, and as with Xain, no Vulcan child can be adopted under A'nirih or M'aih relation nor join another Family's Clan without the Family or House of the child giving consent. The Safe Haven Act is technically over Vulcan precedents and Law, but has never had need of use within the boundaries of Vulcan or our dominions. Child abuse and neglect is almost unheard of, and when it does arise, our internal Justice goes further than the SHA allows. It is therefore considered to be a Law that would never find a place to be applied and used against a Vulcan Family or House; that is, until now.

"In this situation, you have legally bonded a child of unknown parentage to yourself without first confirming the lack of Family or House that would rightfully care for him. You have done this as the child in question requires stability to survive. Your actions are completely logical. However, they are also filled with the possibility of dire consequences should Joel's Family or House be located. What are we to do if any of his blood relations survive and learn of his existence and ask for his return? He is now your son under M'aih relationship, pending it being changed to Ko'mekh should it be found that he is truly orphaned. This is a relationship that is at once legal under the SHA, yet could be illegal under Vulcan Tradition - kidnap to be exact. Logic is not paramount to the love we bear our offspring, and... and I am concerned that this could grow out of control if handled poorly."

Teri nodded. "I considered that already; once he has healed mentally, if his family is found, then a discussion will be arranged to decide the best course of action from the viewpoint of all involved."

Sarek nodded, "That is the normal, logical path to follow. However, not all Vulcans act logically when it concerns their children. I know that very well from experience. They may, and do have the right to, demand his return as soon as they find out about him. Then there is also the fact that not all Vulcan Houses have a liking for humanity and are especially against the mixing of our bloodlines. Xain is again the perfect example for this. His father allowed Xain to become a part of Clan Short, and in retribution Xain's grandfather, the Patriarch of his House and Family, cast both Solak and Xain out. They are, or I should say were, outcasts. If Joel is from such a House or Family, we may face a greater issue. Vulcan is not without internal problems, and that is something I am still attempting to address and correct. It is, how you humans say, slow going. Joel may be used as a catalyst, an excuse, to weaken my position or even... even for more dire consequences."

Teri smiled. "Trust me, after talking to Janet and Angela, I think the last thing that any Family will want is to be responsible for causing an interplanetary incident. If you add our little Mikyvis family in-

to the equation, it could very well turn inter-dimensional too. Joel may not realize it, but he has thousands of brothers who would not be happy if either he was punished for his heritage or you were to receive a backlash over something which was done by the book. I can be a real bitch if backed into a corner; the one advantage I have over the boys is that I have the full resources of the Federation at my disposal if needed. Joel's safety and well-being is my top priority; if his family is found and judged unsuitable or dangerous for him to be with, then the Vulcan Council better back up the very Charter that they authored."

Sarek smiled, and that shocked Teri to the core. "The High Council authored the SHA, and yes they will support it. The House Council is different and distinct to them, however. The House Council deals with purely internal matters as they relate to Family and House interaction. The High Council deals with Vulcan's interaction with the universe at large. However, I thank you; I am glad you are on the same page as I. Here is the situation as it stands at worst: There are five Great Houses and Fifteen Minor, or Lesser, Houses. Of that number, one Great House and three Lesser Houses are most definitely against the mixing of Vulcan Blood with that of Offworlders. Xain's old House, Suvak, is the Great House that is leading the other three, and his grandfather's despite of me and my House is well known. If Patriarch Siprak chooses to use this against me, then the Council of Houses will be in turmoil for a long while. The High Council itself, however, will side with the Law: and thus you have the perfect excuse for Civil War. There is one chance to avert this, and that is what she who is my wife is now attempting to put into place."

Teri nodded her understanding and waited for Sarek to elaborate, and neither of them heard the door open quietly as Sarek continued, "By Tradition, if a child is lost then found but of unknown parentage, then at the order of three Great Houses or five Lesser Houses or a mixture of five of both, the child can be given a place within the eldest of the Houses in question on a temporary basis. This would legitimize Joel being your child under the SHA and grant him his legal place in Clan Short *until* his true Family is found. Even after his Family is found, he shall always be your son under M'aih Relationship; none can deny either him nor you nor his brothers the right to see each other. There can therefore be no backlash, and no cause for war, while doubt over his heritage is still present nor afterwa...."

"M...Mama?" a tearful, frightened voice came suddenly from the door. Teri spun in her chair to see Joel standing in the doorway with Kevin, Cory and Sean standing behind him. All four boys' faces were troubled, Joel's worst of all. She suddenly remembered what she had been doing that could have prompted the kids to come and look for her: she had gone to get Kevin and Joel's energy drinks, and had not returned.

Joel's face creased as terrified tears sprang to his eyes. "I'm causing trouble... I... I... I wish I'd never been found! I don't wanna cause you trouble!" he wailed, and it was only due to Cory grabbing him that stopped him from fleeing away from them.

"Excuse me, my *Son* needs me," Teri stated as she turned and went over to the boys. She quickly knelt down in front of Joel, and calmly held out her hand for him to take.

Joel ignored her hand. He simply melted into her, wrapping arms and legs about her like a limpet, and trembled. "I'm a pain, a nuisance, worthless," he cried into her neck, tears falling thickly. "I'm always causing trouble," he sobbed quietly, and she only just heard him.

Teri kissed his head, "Relax and listen to me, son."

Teri felt her Vulcan son tremble more for an instant, before the tension began to leave his grip. He sniffed and pulled his head back to look at her. The pain and lack of self-worth she saw in his eyes nearly broke her heart. "You are Joel Short, son of Teri Short. I have never adopted anyone worthless in the past, and I do not ever plan on starting. That alone means that there is no way that you are worthless. A few days ago, I killed a man who was trying to use his own son as a hostage; I did not know either one of them. I was mad then; if *ANYONE* tries to harm you or cause trouble because I adopted you, they will find out what I'm like when I'm *really* pissed off. I will protect you for as long as I live, son."

"We all will," Cory and Sean added without thinking.

Sarek looked around suddenly as a massive tremor ran up his spine. He looked at the others and saw them looking shocked and puzzled as well, and he began to wonder. "The Guardian called him the Shaper... but, what is he shaping?"

//You shall see, High Prince of Vulcan// the Guardian answered him within the halls of his mind.

Joel, meanwhile, was looking deeply into Teri's eyes when that shiver came, and he sniffed again. "But I'm always causing trouble, Mama... how can you want me? What if I cause a war on Vulcan... I'm not worth that..."

Kevin was feeling pissed off by now. Partly at Sarek, but that was only due to the bad news being relayed by the Clan's Grandfather. Mostly, he was mad at those who had made his Joel feel like this. "Vulcan can fuck off, those bastards who told you you're worthless can go fuck themselves, and the same for anyone who tries to hurt you," he grated through clenched teeth. Sean immediately grabbed onto him and refused to let him go when he angrily struggled against the hold. "I'll kill them, I swear it! Damn it to hell, Jo'... you are NOT worthless, and I don't care if Aunt Teri just said it, I'M FUCKING SAYING IT! I don't like you saying that, Jo'... I lo... I love you too much..." he finished with a whisper, his face changing from pure anger into shocked revelation in an instant.

Joel turned to look at him with his jaw on his chest. Somehow, even though he was not in contact with Kevin, a blast of Fire and Heat had slammed into him, coming right from the boy; and it was as powerful as the Fire and Heat that Cory felt for Sean, and vice versa.

"I think we'll make a good team, Kevin," Teri stated with a small smile. "I think you could have used a few more descriptive words though; you can't tell me those were the only ones you learned in Chicago. You're my eyes and ears to watch over Joel if I'm not around."

"I wanna be more than..." Kevin started to say, but stopped with a blush; a deep one.

Joel was still gaping at him. He closed his mouth with effort and limply fell away from his mother to move over to the now furiously blushing boy. He reached out and laid a hand to Kevin's burning cheek, then impulsively embraced him.

Teri glanced up, and couldn't help but chuckle at the two shocked teens who just kept glancing back and forth between her and Kevin. "What's the matter, you two? It's not like neither one of you has expressed yourself that way before."

Cory just stared at her. "Not where you could hear it!" he semi-admitted.

"That's what you thought. If you two don't hurry up and explain the rights of being one of my sons to your new brother, I'm going to do it. I'll make sure to use lots of examples from when you were younger too."

"They... they don't have to right now, Mama... they'll miss their party," Joel murmured as he continued to give Kevin the best cuddle he had ever bestowed.

Kevin was still in shock from what he had just revealed regarding his feelings for the frail Vulcan hugging his breath away. His admitting of it was a surprise even to him. He was still hugging Joel as tight as he could in return, though.

Joel turned his head, whilst still holding his best friend, and looked at the Ambassador, "I'm... I'm still nervous, though... will I be... be the cause of a war?"

"No, youngling," Sarek answered, sparing an instant to throw a glance at Teri, "I make an Oath on my Blood that I shall do all in my power to prevent that. My wife is even now starting to put into action my plans. If you all have time to spare, I can explain."

Cory nodded, "The party isn't going anywhere, and this is obviously more important. We'll stay."

"In that case," Teri said as she picked up the two still hugging little boys and sat down with them on her lap, "Sean, please go and find Dan, Doctor Austin, and Solak. Cory, please ask Xain, Telez, and Jason Evans to join us. There are a number of things we need to talk about."

Both teens nodded, glanced at each other and left quickly. As the door closed behind them, Joel heard Sean mutter, "Jesus, it's a war council. All we need now is for Adam and Logan to be called...."

"Why is my grandson being asked to come?" Sarek asked Teri as he sat down again. "I am aware of the issue regarding Xain and Telez, but Jason was not involved there."

"He was the mind-healer earlier today, and I have a feeling he could be needed," she answered as she kissed both cuddling boys on her lap.

"I like Jace," Joel murmured as he half hid his face in Kevin's neck.

Kevin continued to act like a silent cuddle-toy -- doing a fairly decent job of it too. 'I told him I loved him. I just up and said it. What... how...' was all that was repeating in the boy's mind.

"Joel, Teri: I must say something to you both first, before the others arrive," Sarek said, his face again troubled.

Teri nodded at him as she increased her hold on the two boys in her lap.

"Joel, you are Teri's son, no matter what. I am not against you in this. I was simply the bringer of bad news to your mother. I will do everything I can to make sure that, if your true Family be found, your mother is kept as your M'aih. You need her, and she you."

Joel whispered his thanks, and Teri gave him a weak smile and nodded.

The first to enter the room was Dan, closely followed by Telez and Jason. A moment later, Solak and Xain walked in. Last of all, Doc Austin arrived, leading Cory, Sean, Jake, Antony and Nathan. Teri laughed, "I should have guessed. Come on then, I don't think you lot would have been kept in the dark by your significant others, but you might as well hear it now."

"Don't forget me, Grandma. The Guardian says I need to be in the loop too," Levi announced as he popped in, giving the two boys on Teri's lap a quick hug.

Levi was about to find a seat when Joel's thin arm snaked out and caught him, pulled him back firmly, and sandwiched the seven year old into the hug between himself and Kevin. Kevin, for his part, absently started to include the little newcomer to the snuggle-fest, his eyes still lost, elsewhere.

"I think you broke him, Uncle Joel," Levi giggled.

"Nope," Sean laughed, "I think he broke himself, Leev!"

Levi was silent for a second, then giggled. "Took ya long enough, Uncle Kev!"

Kevin shook himself and looked Levi in the eye for a moment. A shy grin started to spread over his face, and it was matched by an equally shy one from Joel.

"I'm too big, you guys need more cuddle room." Levi giggled before shrinking himself down to a four-year-old. "There, now you can cuddle around me!"

Joel giggled and kissed the tiny boy's cheek before increasing the cuddles on both of them. Kevin copied Joel, and then they all settled back slightly on Teri's lap.

Sarek nearly smiled again. "I think we need to explain what it is we are doing regarding the issue with the House Council, and my plan to..." he started to say, but stopped when the door opened and his wife entered. "T'hy'la, do you have the answer?" he asked, his eyes showing a tenderness that Joel had never seen in any of the TV shows.

"I do, my husband," Amanda nodded her head, and then continued in formal address, "Matriarch T'See-la of Great House Sukaan and Patriarch Misak of Great House R'Kath concur with you. Great House Surak shall have Legal Custodianship over the Vulcan child known as Joel Short, and his rights as a member of Sub-Clan Short of the Family of Sarek are confirmed as valid until such time as his Family or House is found. They agreed to this based upon the visual evidence of his eyes."

"His eyes?" Dan asked. "He's got two, just like any other Human or Vulcan."

Jason started to laugh, but stopped as he regarded Joel. "Eyes... oh! Blue! Why didn't I... wait... blue eyes...?" his face grew pensive, thoughtful.

Sarek sighed sadly as he reached out and laid a hand on Jason's shoulder. "That thought also crossed my mind, but it cannot be so, grandson. There were no survivors," the older Vulcan said quietly. He turned to Dan, "How many of my people have you seen or heard about with blue eyes, Doctor?"

"I'm not that versed in the peculiarities of the Vulcan race, Ambassador," Dan admitted. "I've been too busy trying to sort out blonds with memory problems; it's a full-time job, but very rewarding."

"Memory problems?" Joel queried, looking between Nathan and Cory.

"Oops, sorry, Jo'; I didn't tell you that part earlier. I'll 'splain later," Kevin whispered as he kissed Joel's ear.

"Not me! I'm firing on all thrusters, thanks!" Nathan was saying with a giggle. He was immediately pulled into a headlock and noogied by Cory.

"Yep, a normal blond; one thruster consisting of a bottle rocket!" Sean laughed as he ducked behind Dan.

He found himself lifted up into the air by Nathan, then dripping wet after a brief layover in the mid Pacific by Levi. After dripping over Dan for a few seconds, both Dan and Sean were dry again.

"Hey, at least you didn't return with assorted aquatic animal life this time, dude," Jason said as he roared with laughter.

"I didn't?" Sean replied as he shook his leg, causing a baby sea turtle to slide out of his pants and onto the floor. "Levi, could you make sure Timmy's new friend finds him?"

"Sure Uncle Sean!" Levi replied as he and the turtle vanished. He reappeared a few seconds later. "Timmy says Lance will be just fine now!"

Dan reached and pulled Sean onto his lap, "Sit and shush, Sean, before you end up bringing more creatures to this mad house! You were going to explain the relevance of Joel's blue eyes, Ambassador?" he finished, looking curiously at the happily chortling boy on Teri's lap.

"Yes, but I find that watching inter-dimensional pranks to be far more rewarding," he answered as Amanda sat down next to him. His eyes twinkled as he winked at Levi. He then sat straighter and rested two of his fingers on Amanda's. "There are very few born on my world with blue eyes; it is a very recessive gene in our make-up, and is found only in the descendants of Surak himself..."

"Surak? I'm descended from... wow!" Joel exclaimed as he started to bounce in Teri's lap.

Sarek nodded, "Yes, child. Over time, those Families in whom the gene is strongest have gone and mixed with other Houses and Families, but records are kept of those Families that are most likely to have blue-eyed children born to them. The number of Families is still large, but in this situation, your link to my House allows me to grant you cover. It is quite likely that you are a member of my House as the majority of those Families are part of House Surak. There are a few in other Houses, and a very small number within less open Houses -- those against the mixing of our blood. We can only hope for you to be from an understanding Family, Joel."

"Grandfather, why was Jason so... I don't know; why did he look the way he did when he looked at Lil'elf?" Cory asked, his eyes darting between Jason and Sarek.

Jason glanced quickly at his grandfather, then hung his head. "Sorry, fa'sami; I just messed that up, didn't I?"

"Do not be concerned, my child. They are family," Sarek answered him.

'And he calls Nath a dizzy blond?' Sean thought, unaware that Cory picked up his thought.

'I heard that, teddy bear!' Cory replied as he tried to hold back a smile.

Jason looked at his grandfather and received a nod. He then glanced at Sean, "I heard that too, bro. There's a reason this time: Poppa Spock had a child once, a baby he never even got to see. The boy died with Pop's wife in the Great Transwarp Disaster."

"Shit," Cory muttered.

"That's what I thought just after asking Pop to *be* my Pop. I was the first child to ever do so, and it nearly broke his heart," Jason said as tears formed in the corner of his eyes. "Poppa showed me the only hologram he had of his son; and the baby had blue eyes. Fa'sami's Family is one of those where the blue eyes comes up on occasion."

"Jason's reaction to Joel just now was my first reaction at the wedding," Amanda murmured, a deep lasting pain heard clearly in her voice.

"You were not the only one, wife, for I too felt that. It is not so, however. No one survived," Sarek added just as sadly. "It did give all of us another reason to gather as many children to us as we could; and we had reason enough already. I too have lost a son, but I was fortunate in that he was a man full grown when he passed. I saw him, Named him, and loved him. It is a... a joy that has been denied Spock, for my grandson was never Named and never held by Spock. Yet in the past ten months I have seen the father arise in Spock as he played with, loved and cared for his new children, Clan Evans. He even showed it when you, Cory, became part of the Family. There is a hole in his heart that you have all filled, and I thank you."

Joel was weeping openly by now. Amanda looked over at him, "Do not cry, child. It is not your fault."

"I agree. Stay your tears, youngling. You are not the cause of this grief, but you are one of the cures," Sarek said gently as Teri comforted her boy. "Through helping you, which we do simply because it is the right thing, we are healed. We would help anyway, but there is joy in children that I will forever cling to. Stay your tears."

Joel nodded at him as Kevin and Levi wiped his eyes clear.

Sarek looked at Teri, "If you rub the outer lobe of each of Joel's ears, you shall help calm him. It is an ancient method still employed to calm and relax our young."

She smiled her thanks and began doing so, and the result was immediate.

"Never heard of that before," Sean said quietly.

Xain half smiled, "I have only told Jake. The nerves in our ear lobes have a trigger effect upon some of our glands; they aid in rest and relaxation, and, in certain situations, can also heighten..." he fell silent.

"We get it," Cory sniggered, looking at the now sleepy face of Joel as his mother continued to massage his ears.

Kevin then asked, bringing the conversation back on topic, "What puzzles me is this bonding thing Jo' is doing. He bonded with Cory, Sean, Xain and Telez. Xain may be related, but I don't know how he is or could be with Tel and the others."

"If I'm related to Joel, then it must be by my human side," Telez whispered.

"It is mainly by blood relation, but trust is also a known quantity for the Bonding," Sarek explained.

Solak looked thoughtful, "We have enough people here to run a few genealogy searches: to find the common blood relation between Xain, Telez, House Surak, Cory and Sean."

"That would take longer than needed," Sarek said as he continued to watch Teri soothe the boy in her lap. "The Enterprise is arriving shortly, and they can run the genetic search quicker than it would take for us to run those investigations."

"Far more certain too," Solak nodded in agreement.

Levi just sat there, an innocent smile on his face.

Jason noticed. "You know, don't you Levi?"

"Not about Joel, no. No-one does, except maybe my Friend. Joel's unreadable, in a way; but I know of a link between Xain and Telez..." he giggled.

Xain raised his eyebrow. "Can you inform us?"

Levi nodded, "The sister of your great-grandmother on your human side, Xain, married a Carl Fisher: your father's grandfather, Telez! You're cousins!!"

Telez' antennae perked up and he stood and grabbed Xain into a tight hug. "Blood Family! I... I only had my dad left after... after losing the rest! I have a cousin!!" he cried happily.

Xain's face was peaceful as he had the stuffing hugged from him, as was Solak's.

Cory giggled, "Congrats, guys! That's great news! Levi, what about Sean and me? Are we linked somehow?"

Levi giggled, "Y'all have a common grandfather back in Cycle Two; all the human parts of everyone here come from that one guy; he was real busy makin' babies!"

//He died with a smile on his face// the Guardian whispered to them all, bringing laughter from most.

"What a way to go!" Dan chuckled. "As you were saying?"

"I believe that covers the situation as it stands on Joel's ancestry and bonding. We shall learn more about these issues when Kirk gets to Terra," Sarek said. "I believe Doctor Michaels has a few issues he wishes to raise."

"Yes, thank you, Ambassador," Doc Austin nodded briefly. "There isn't really a lot to cover, topic wise, but this is a sensitive subject to most Vulcans, so this needs to be in confidence. Joel, you might not feel funny about this, but Xain might and other Vulcans can also feel, if I can use the term, uncomfortable by having this subject raised. So it's best to be careful whom you tell this stuff to."

Joel blinked at the Doc for a second, then froze. There was only one issue that Vulcans found uncomfortable to talk about: "Pon Farr," he whispered, a hint of dread in his voice. "But what's that got to do with anything?! I'm too young! No, noooo... not yet... please say it's not yet..." He started to shake in Teri's arms, much to her puzzlement, and he looked at Cory pleadingly.

Cory moved over to rub Joel's shoulders. "Would you feel better if Levi blocked it so that you don't have to hear about it, Lil'elf?"

"But it's gonna happen to *me*, Cory," he wailed as he thrust himself from his mother's arms and into Cory's. "I can't... I just can't... I'll be... I... it's not fair... I just can't."

"I don't know if it's like those movies you watched, bro. Relax, have Levi block your hearing if you want, and then we can talk about it in private later on if you think that would make you able to look at it more calmly," Cory whispered as he hugged the trembling boy tightly.

"NO! You don't understand... you don't know! I *can't* do it, Cory! It's... I just can't..." he finished hysterically as he pulled back violently from Cory, horror and loss showing clearly in his face. He turned and ran blindly from the room, sobbing heavily and cracking the wood in the door by the violence of his exit.

Cory stood to follow him, but Kevin had already beaten him to it. The brown haired boy ran out yelling, "I'll go."

"I'm with them, Uncle Cory." Levi replied as he vanished.

Levi suddenly reappeared, floating in mid-air. **//The Two Souls move closer; do not interfere//** the Guardian ordered gently as Levi was levitated by a Power the likes of which none of them had ever seen before; a glowing energy holding him gently yet firmly. **//Great Heart I name thee, and Great Heart thou art, my Voice, but not the Great Heart the Shaper doth require. Please remain and help thy family here while the Strength joins his Soul with the Shaper. Thy Time to bond with thine Uncle is fast approaching//**

Levi was placed back on Teri's lap by that power, and she enfolded the startled Mikyvis in a loving hug.

"Wow, our little mini-mouse gets to stay here?" Sean commented.

"Well, I see you are the first of Mikyvis-kind to be shown the true 'Power of Forever', Levi," the Doctor said as he Folded out of nothing. "I felt a disturbance in the force'," he giggled at Cory's questioning glance.

"Wise One you be, butt smart is yours!" Levi giggled. "Movie found have I; strange be universe it from."

"If we're gonna play Jedis, then I call dibs being Obi-wan!" Telez giggled, trying to lighten the dark mood Joel's flight had brought.

"Huh?" Jake looked at him curiously.

Antony laughed, and managed to say, "*Blue* 'lightsaber'!"

"I can make one all kinds of colours!" Levi giggled. "Rainbow!"

Cory sighed irritably, and the others stopped giggling as they noticed the looks on both his face and Sean's. They were both worried sick, and the levity was not helping.

"Sorry, bros," Antony and Telez said together.

Sarek looked between them for a moment before resting his gaze on the ginger haired ten year old who had just appeared. "What is your name, youngling, and why have I not seen nor read reports regarding you. Your abilities are interesting."

The boy raised an eyebrow. "My name you know, but from your history only, Child of Vulcan. I am the Prince of the Time Lords: I am Ish-Hassu."

Both of Sarek's eyebrows disappeared into the fringe of his hair, "The Doctor? You mean *that* Doctor?! You are the one who came to my world all those centuries ago?"

The Doctor nodded. Solak just stared.

Dan's jaw had fallen open. "But he's... you can't be... can someone explain?"

Levi smiled and dumped the entire information regarding what he knew of Time Lords into Dan's mind, and Dan's eyes opened wider. "Wow!"

"Something's wrong; they've been gone too long, Merc," Hermes whispered.

Mercury was still watching the doorway that Joel and the others had used. He nodded absently, "Yeah. I don't like it. First he runs off looking for Aunt Teri, then Cory runs in and starts talking to others. Something is definitely wrong."

"Well, don't just sit there like a pair of spare pricks at a wedding, come on!" Artemus exclaimed from their side as she and her sister, Aphrodite, stood up and ran from the room. Both cheetahs glanced at each other and quickly followed.

As they entered Main CIC, they saw one of the Meeting Room doors fly open violently. Joel, his face a mask of fear and pain, came flying out and zoomed quickly through the northern doorway, followed closely by little Kevin.

"Fuck's sake! Told you!" Hermes yelled as he went into overdrive and chased after them, his brother moving with him and his sisters following as quickly as they could.

Aphrodite was the last to exit the building and she saw her brothers and sister ahead of her, and in front of them, she saw Joel and Kevin disappear into some bushes that were around JJ and Adam's house. She sped over to the other three and stopped suddenly, barely ten feet from those bushes. "What? What's stopping us?" she asked quickly, poking at the 'thin air' before her that seemed as immovable as the Earth.

"Fuck knows, but I'm getting angry," snarled Hermes as he clawed at the 'nothing' that was around the bushes.

"Don't worry, guys," a voice behind them said gently. "Joel and Kevin are okay. It's just that Joel needs some time with his best friend right now. Not even I can help."

They turned to see Mikey standing there, his face showing concern as he looked past them at where Joel had vanished.

"Who's stopping us?" they all asked in unison.

"Correct... in a way. It's complicated. Come, sit here with me," he answered as he made himself comfortable on the grass. "I'll explain everything I know about 'Who' and the Guardian. If you four are to protect these two boys, you have the right to know."

"Four? Both?" Aphrodite spluttered. "Only Joel's got a guard, and that's my speedy-brothers!"

"Not any more. Joel and Kevin are soon to be One. You four are Named "Protectors" for them both." Mikey smiled thinly, "It's going to be interesting; I'm not even sure what the next few seconds will bring, and that's unusual. But I am being given weird and wonderful tasks to do; this is one of them."

"What; to assign us Guard Duty over *two* boys? Sorry, dude. You may be an angel but we take orders from only two: Amur and Adam!" Mercury said defiantly as he sat next to his twin.

"Agreed: we are on general duty here at Orlando," Artemus began before Mikey raised a hand politely to gain their silence.

"You are Named 'Protectors' and will ye or no, you shall carry out that task, for a Power greater than all is at work here. You are that, will be that and have always been that. Nothing can change it. Adam Casey shall add his authority to it when the time is right. I have no idea when nor how, but he will. He

cannot help it any more than you. This is what Must Be," Mikey said quietly. He then started to explain to the four shocked G-Cats all about their task... and the strange Powers that were guiding them...

"Greetings, Sellik! What brings you here?" Riti flapped up from his place at the wedding feast and flew right for a VSO uniformed Vulcan who had just entered.

Sellik raised an eyebrow as he caught the little cherub in his arms. "I am looking for cousin Sarek. Is your grandfather nearby, Riti?"

Riti nodded happily in-between pecking kisses on Sellik's cheek. "He's in the other room through there," he pointed towards Main CIC. "He's talking to Jace and some others about my new Prince-Brother, Joel Short."

"Intriguing. This Joel is the reason I am here. I-Metri and her cub were quite insistent. When I got to the report regarding this Joel's arrival yesterday, the Cub started acting in a very peculiar fashion." Sellik paused and turned as the largest Sehlat the Clan had ever seen walked in with a small cub at her side. Small, however, was a relative statement. The cub was nearly six feet long and almost 3/4 of a tonne in weight, but was still dwarfed by his mother.

"I-Metri!!" Riti crowed, drawing the attention from the room.

Timmy came zooming over quickly, but was stopped by Sellik. "Child; I-Metri is not a domesticated Sehlat. She is quite wild. She likes children, but please take it slow at first."

Timmy giggled, and I-Metri huffed out a bark. Sellik turned to see I-Metri amble over and push Timmy to the floor, snuffle her nose under the boy's shirt and start to clean him.

"Then again, carry on," Sellik murmured, glancing between the chortling Riti in his arms and the madly giggling Timmy on the floor as the she-Sehlat cleaned him.

"Timmy's a Spirit Guide, and has a way with animals!" Riti explained happily as he hopped down and joined Timmy with the serious business of greeting the large she-Sehlat. Very soon, they were joined by all the Tribe and Rugrats, with the older kids coming over at least once to meet the large animal and her cub.

"That Sehlat never ceases to amaze me," Sellik said quietly before turning and making his way to CIC.

Blackie was watching all this from near the door to CIC, and barked once. The large cub looked up, cough-barked back, nuzzled his mother, then ran at a surprising speed for one so big at the very small seeming wolf pup.

Marjur, the Sehlat that had come as part of the package with Sipek, Syzik and Skirk, ambled in at that point, and huffed his own greeting at the two new Sehlats.

After he had huffed his own greeting back, the cub turned his attention to the small wolf/collie cross at his feet.

One With Teeth, I Black Feet Blackie sent.

Where is Boy? asked the cub.

In Pain. Hurting. Boy needs us Blackie answered with a whine.

The cub huffed a few times. *We find Boy. Now*

They both howled in unison, Blackie's howl being high pitched while the Sehlat's was very low and rasping. Together, they sped from the room... looking for *their* Boy.

Joel had not picked a place to run to; he simply ran. Tears streaming, and the ghosts of pain, shame and grief clawing at his mind, he flung himself through the door and headed outside. Yells and calls from behind him were ignored, but not by intent; he simply did not hear them.

Ahead was a building, and bushes and shrubs were planted around it. A hiding place. Such places had served before; they would serve now. As he came to the nearest bush he slid under it and started to crawl further until he reached the most sheltered and covered spot. He later learnt that he had chosen JJ and Adam's personal garden as his hiding place, but right now, he just wanted to cry, hide and forget. The latter was impossible. He never forgot. Never.

As his chest heaved with his terrified sobs, he became aware of a rustling behind him. Why are they following? Why do they care?

Someone appeared and touched his shoulder. His first reaction to the contact was to sob harder and curl up in a ball. He had wilfully ran from his masters, and that was a grievous error; he was to be punished severely for that. Mid way through curling into himself he realized that strength was pouring into him; it was Kevin.

He twisted to look into Kevin's own sad eyes. Those deep pools of brown life shone with tears that seemed to match his own, and confusion and caring were both present and in force in them.

"Jo'?" Kevin whispered as he sat down next to his friend. "What's wrong?"

Joel shuffled slightly until he was half lying on Kevin's lap, while his tears and cries continued unabated.

"We can't help if we don't know, Jo'," Kevin whispered as he brushed twigs and leaves from his friend's curly hair.

"Please," came the hoarse whisper from the weeping Vulcan, "don't make me say. I... it's too... please don't make me say..."

Kevin's heart was heavy in his chest. He knew that he could order Joel to tell him, and a small part of him was tempted to do so; but the love he bore the frail boy was greater. He swore silently there and then that, without others advising him to do so, he would never ever order Joel to do anything. "I won't.

I promise I won't, but... but you should tell someone, Jo'. It's not good to keep things in here all the time," he whispered as he laid a hand on Joel's bare chest. He then continued to run his fingers through Joel's hair, and whispered again, "We love you... *I* love you, and I want to help, but I don't know what to do, Jo'..." Kevin began to weep himself, his little heart breaking. "I want to take away this pain; I would if I could. I'm here when you want to say, Jo': really I am. Please believe me; when you want to say, when you feel you can, I'm here. Cory and Sean's here; all of us. We love you."

Joel blubbered, "... I know, b...but I can't... not yet. I'm ashamed, Kev... I am *frightened*; I'll be in trouble..."

Kevin was weeping just as much as Joel, now. "What can I *do*?" he cried helplessly. "I don't know how to help you... I *want* to help... tell me what to do, Jo', and I'll do it... anything..."

"Hold me..." was the answering whisper, "... keep me safe... please?"

There, sheltered from the view of the world, and covered in leaves, twigs and loose dirt, Kevin lay down behind Joel and pulled his friend tight against his chest. Spooned in behind him, he curled his body to match Joel's pitiful pose, and gently started to rub his friend's chest and belly soothingly. "Forever and ever, Jo'," he whispered into Joel's pointed ear. "Where you go, I go. I'll *never* leave you."

The light breeze that was blowing found them in their shaded spot at that point, and they both shivered.

"I promise," Kevin continued to whisper, "that I will protect you forever."

"A...and I... I wanna protect you too, Kev... but I'm... I'm not strong enough..." Joel's quiet sob answered.

"But I am strong," Kevin replied. "*I'm just not brave*, Jo'. Kenny is, but I'm not. You are brave; more than Kenny, more than anyone I know. You be my courage and I'll be your strength..."

The wind found them again, and it seemed stronger this time. The chill that ran up their spines would have normally prompted most boys to run for the nearest warm house, but not this 'chill'. This was soothing. This was providence.

"Okay..." Joel sighed, his tears slowing to a stop. "Forever and ever."

The final chill came then, the most powerful of them all.

Kevin began to sing softly, comforting Joel all the while:

"When you're weary, feeling small,

When tears are in your eyes,

I will dry them all.

I'm on your side

When times get rough,
And friends just can't be found;"
"Like a bridge over troubled water,
I will lay me down.
Like a bridge over troubled water,
I will lay me down."
"When you're down and out,
When you're on the street,
When evening falls so hard,
I will comfort you.
I'll take your part
When darkness comes,
And pain is all around;"
"Like a bridge over troubled water,
I will lay me down.
Like a bridge over troubled water,
I will lay me down."

(Bridge Over Troubled Water - P. Simon, 1969)

Both boys fell asleep as the last note faded from Kevin's lips; their souls joining and binding together as Destiny shifted around them. Shaped and Formed by the power of the Shaper and the power of the Shaper's Strength: Kevin.

//**Done!**// said Forever, and a sweet, bell-like note was heard ringing.

It was fast asleep that Blackie and the Sehlat cub found the two boys. The cub huffed quietly to his smaller companion and curled up around Kevin's back. He used his large, clawed paws to gently pull both boys back until Kevin was half hidden in his fur. Blackie started to snuggle into Joel's arms so that his longish coat of hair would keep his Boy warm.

A quiet yap and a huff, and both of these strange animal spirit guardians joined the boys in their slumber.

Meanwhile:

"What's the problem with Pon Farr, and why did Joel act that way?" Cory asked, a hint of anger in his voice. Something was hurting Joel, and he had no way of making it better. He was pissed, and these interruptions were getting on his nerves.

Sean nodded forcefully, glaring around at the others as if daring them to push the topic off course again.

The Doctor noticed and sat down on Cory's lap, and gestured for Sean to sit next to him. "I'll keep you steady, brothers."

Sean did as asked, and then the Doctor looked at Doc Austin, "Your turn; do your thing, *Doc*."

Doc Austin smiled his thanks and started. "First, I am no expert on Pon Farr, so please correct me if I slip up," he said as he glanced at Sarek and Solak. "I do not want to offend anyone over such a sensitive matter."

Sarek and Solak nodded briefly. "Of course, you need not ask that," Sarek said.

"Thank you," Doc Austin nodded himself. Then, "This is rather more serious than it would normally be due to Joel not being in puberty. Normally Vulcan males go through Pon Farr on or around their fourteenth birthday. However, I did a full profile on him after he finished his change last night, and there are markers already that show that Pon Farr is anywhere from three days to a week away."

Solak raised his eyebrow, "This is most serious; without puberty, the mild version of Pon Farr that he will face will either cripple his mind permanently at best or kill him at worst."

"The other question is, how has Pon Farr been triggered if he has not entered puberty?" Sarek asked the doctor.

"And why did you not say something sooner so that we could get him help?" Cory added, obviously not in the least bit happy.

Doc Austin looked at Cory with compassion, "We have already done as much as we can. It's the reason why Doctor McCoy is wanting to see Joel as soon as possible. He is the foremost expert in hybrid Human/Vulcans. He has had more experience in that field than even Vulcan doctors, Cory. There is at least three days, and he will be here in less than two. Puberty only needs to have started for Joel to be safe, so, while this *is* serious, I am not concerned about it being life threatening yet."

"All you'd have to do is ask Kyle and he could be here right NOW!" Sean stated forcefully.

"No, not yet. It isn't *Time*," the little Doctor said as he pulled Sean closer and gently brushed his cheek with his palm. "As Captain Spock would say, 'For all things there is a time', Sean."

Levi also added, "And if that is true, and we tried taking Joel there, I don't think the Guardian would let us..."

"WHY?" Cory exclaimed in exasperation.

"You've seen how he is with anything related to sex, haven't you, Uncle Cory?" Levi asked.

The Doctor did not wait for them to reply. He added, "What happens to a boy in puberty, guys?"

"I'm too little to hear this," Levi stated as he covered his ears.

The Doctor smiled at the kid, then continued, "Joel would start getting, as you put it, random stiffies... and he would lose what little control and feelings of safety he has in that instant." The Doctor turned to Teri, "When you were helping him with the skin cream that he could not apply to his privates, did you notice the lack of response that would be automatic in any child, pubescent or no?"

She nodded, then her eyes widened.

"Right now, Joel cannot get one. That will change as time goes by, but **ONLY** at the right **TIME**. He needs to heal, deep inside, before Doctor McCoy can do anything. And the Keys for that healing are..." he trailed off as he twisted around in Cory's lap and looked meaningfully at him and Sean.

"Us," Sean whispered.

Cory added, "And Kevin, right?"

"Yup," Levi said as he removed his hands from his ears. "I know what needs to happen, but not what will. He *needs* you three first, before he needs Uncle Bones."

Cory and Sean weighed all that had been revealed silently.

Sarek asked Doc Austin, breaking the silence, "Can you explain how Pon Farr was triggered *without* puberty?"

Doc Austin nodded, "There is ample evidence in Joel's scans that shows his puberty *did* start a few years ago, but it was stalled and halted. It was the simple result of that chip he had in him combined with physical and emotional stress that stopped puberty. But even that small spurt of puberty would have triggered Pon Farr, and the stress accelerated it."

"Logical. Unheard of, but logical," Solak nodded to himself.

"The next problem will be once Pon Farr arrives," Xain spoke up then. "Joel does not have, nor will have in time, the mental discipline I have learnt in preparation for my first Pon Farr; although I do not now need to use such," he continued, glancing at a blushing Jake. "Joel cannot meditate out of it. He has to let it run its course."

"So you're saying Joel turns into another Sean and Cory?" Teri asked, ignoring the glares from her sons.

The Doctor giggled half heartedly. "I make jokes that Time Lords are worse than Vulcans, as does Tardis, but... who am I kidding? Pon Farr is what Alpha Stage puberty is, just all in one burst. He will be driven to find a mate, fight for one to the death... or die of the Blood Fever. And Xain's right, this is a problem."

"Why?" Sean asked in complete bemusement. "Kevin loves him, and I'm sure as heck that Joel loves him just as much. Wouldn't that be the answer?"

"No," Jake sighed.

"Why?" Jason, Nathan and Telez chorused.

"Because Kevin is afraid of sex as well," Xain answered reluctantly. "He feels that sex and anything to do with it will make him a whore. He has not even..." Xain became silent.

Jake sighed and made the universal gesture they all understood.

"Gawd, I'm too YOUNG for this!" Levi protested, covering his eyes.

"Ah," Cory sighed. "Shit."

//They will heal each other. They will need the Heart of the Nexus to do so. Are you willing to be that help?// the Guardian asked Cory and Sean in the depths of their hearts.

'You must be the only one that didn't hear my promise if you have to ask that,' Cory responded silently.

//I did. I do not ask questions because I need the answer, for I already know the answer. I ask questions to test the one being questioned. Would you be willing to help them should they need it? Would you be willing to push Socius to the limit? Should Kevin refuse to bear Pon Farr, would you do so to save the Shaper's life? Whether or not you need to, are you both willing?//

Cory's reply was cold. *'He's my brother; and I do NOT abandon my brothers who are needing help.'*

'That goes for me too,' Sean added, obviously not happy about his devotion to family being put to question.

A strange bell like tone was suddenly heard.

//Done!//

"What in the holy hell happened?" the Doctor gasped, looking around quickly. Everyone had been watching emotions play over both Cory and Sean's faces for the past minute, for they had not heard this exchange, not even Levi. "Time is moving! What... what the hell did you two do??"

//They made a sacred promise at the instant the Shaper joined his soul to the soul of his Strength, Kevin. Destiny is moving//

"Granma Teri? Is it okay for me to say 'Oh Shit'?" Levi asked.

"In this case, I think that is mild." Teri replied.

//The Players are set; The Path is done; Love is joined; Pain shall run; Destiny moves... My brother doth come...// the Guardian intoned. Then, **//Cory Short; Sean Short; my testing of your resolve was not for me, nor others, but for you. You now know, not just believe. You shall do, you shall have the strength. I shall supply it. Now go... find your 'Elven Prince'. He doth sleep in the arms that love him, warmed by those sent to watch him, and watched over by four Protectors set forth from of old. Go//**

Cory and Sean vanished with another bell-like tone, and the Doctor plopped down onto the seat that Cory had just radically vacated.

"Hell, I need a vacation..." he murmured to himself.

"I second that; my head hurts," Levi responded as he curled into a ball on Teri's lap and trembled.

Jason looked at his husband, then back at Levi sadly, "Sorry, but I don't think they make aspirin that can help you."

Sarek's face was unreadable, however.

"Fa'sami?" Jason asked as he noticed the old Vulcan. "What's wrong?"

"I... I am unsure, but... I believe that something long thought to be a simple legend of the past is about to take place in reality," he answered.

"What legend is that?" Teri asked as she began to soothe another frightened child.

Sarek did not answer, for Jason's gasp showed that he had guessed.

"He comes and It comes, and the sunlight shall tremble..." Jason quoted hesitantly, looking at his grandfather for confirmation.

Sarek nodded, "Joel speaks the tongue of our race, yet he has never been taught it. He heals a wounded heart with the power of the Sharing, but has never learnt how to do so..."

Solak gasped, then regained control of himself. "It cannot be... it is only a legend!"

"Is someone going to explain or am I going to have to kick ass?" Dan asked impatiently.

Jason quoted again, "'Unknowing shall he speak - Words that he shall not have heard. Untaught shall he know - Using his power to heal. Unguided shall he find his Strength... and forge the Destiny of Sa'ren'. It is the Legend of Sa'ren; the re-forging of the Broken Sword of Surak, and the saving of... the

saving of Vulcan," Jason looked in awe at Teri. "Your little boy is the one who will re-forge the blade, Aunt Teri."

"I hate to sound the cynic here; but just how old is this legend, and how many times has it changed over its lifespan?" Teri asked as she tried to sooth the Mikyvis cuddled into her chest.

//As old as I am, and I spoke it through both Surak and T'Klass, his pupil. It has been kept down all the years since the Age of Awakening unbroken. Whether or not it comes to pass, and whether or not the Shaper can Reforge Sa'ren is unknown. Even I cannot see what *will* happen. Just as the Children of Forever, I see all possibilities in the coming Time, but I cannot tell upon which path you shall tread. Joel is for now Without Destiny, yet he doth Shape it for all without knowing. We can only hope that all that has been and will be set in place is enough...//

Sean and Cory appeared in front of four determined G-Cats who were standing guard around a large bush in JJ's garden.

"What, you guys gone and become Mikyvis too?" Hermes asked, once he had found his skin to climb back into again.

"Where's Joel?" Cory asked, not in any mood to joke.

Hermes got the message loud and clear. "In the bush with Kevin, an irritable wolf pup, and the biggest fucking long toothed bear cub you've ever seen..."

Cory and Sean nodded absently at the cheetah before rushing past and scrambling into the bush themselves. They reached their target, expecting to see Marjur and Blackie watching over the two boys... instead, they were met by a big furry face that most certainly wasn't Marjur's... A face with very big teeth.

The Sehlat cub sniffed them extensively for a moment while they remained stock still. Then the cub huffed happily, moved to one side, and laid back down to gently encircle the group lying on the dry earth. He looked up and huffed softly again, and started to thump his tail.

"I think we've just been ordered to cuddle," Sean stated, relieved to see Joel relaxed and asleep.

The cub thumped his tail a few more times and huffed at Sean.

"You think?" Cory replied. "I don't think arguing is a good idea."

The cub shock his head, then reached and patted the space he had made between himself and Kevin lying in front of him.

"You first," Sean said as he moved into position to lay down. "It's my turn to be the spoonee."

The cub started laughing at them both. The 'huff, huff, huff' could not be anything but laughter.

"Oh, be quiet, you," Cory giggled as he spooned in behind his husband, while Sean gently pulled Kevin and Joel and the wolf pup closer.

Cory's giggles stopped as a huge, clawed paw was draped over him and the others as the cub completed the mass spooning.

"That's unnerving," Sean started to giggle.

"No shit," Cory sighed, then laughed lightly as the cub decided that Cory's neck needed a wash.

"Awww, Joel's sucking his thumb," Sean said tenderly.

Cory shrugged happily, "Let him. It's his to suck."

Another bell-like tone reverberated through them, and a whisper came to their minds, **//It is complete. They are linked, now and forever. You can wake them, Hearts of the Nexus//**

"But they're so cute sleeping like this!" Cory replied aloud.

"Whoth cewt?" came Joel's sleepy voice as he began to wake up, his thumb still jammed in his mouth.

"You are, little brother," Cory replied softly.

Joel removed his now soggy thumb and regarded it. He then shifted around in Kevin's hug, bringing Blackie with him, to look at his sleeping best friend, his brothers... and a Sehlat! He was about to gasp when he found his eyes drawn to Kevin's that had just cracked open. He smiled contentedly at his best friend, then kissed his lips lightly.

"Hi," Kevin murmured once the kiss was broken.

'Huff, huff, huff,' came the rumbling Sehlat laughter again.

"What was that?" Kevin turned his head slightly to see. "That Marjur?"

"Nope," Sean giggled. "Not sure what his name is; but he seems to think cuddles are mandatory."

Yes

Joel raised his eyebrows, as did the other three boys. "That wasn't Blackie... did you hear him too?"

"Yep; now I've got TWO cuddle-hungry teddy bears in my head!" Cory giggled.

Not head. Heart hears. Head no hear. Spirit talk. Boy; I need Name

"Boy?" Sean asked curiously as he craned his head to look at the cub.

Boy came the reply as the cub lightly patted Joel with the large paw that was draped over them all.

"I have to name you? But Blackie already had a name... why don't you?" Joel asked.

Black Feet from Earth. I from Vulcan. From Vulcan, all Named. You Name me

Joel looked nervous. "How? I might give you the wrong name..."

Knowing without knowing. Touch face, Name me

Joel moved and got up. He crawled around to the cub's head and hesitantly placed both hands on the cub's muzzle.

"I-Cheya," he said in wonder as images danced before his eyes.

I-Cheya. Thank you. I-Cheya is Boy's. Boy is I-Cheya's I-Cheya thumped his tail happily, then went back to washing Cory's neck.

Joel crept back and settled down again facing Kevin. "Why are you out here?" he asked his brothers as he nuzzled his cheek against Kevin's happily.

"You needed us," Cory replied simply.

Joel smiled his thanks as Kevin tightened his hug on him. "Told you, didn't I, Jo"? We all love you."

"I... I guess so. I'm sorry for running out like that," Joel said with the smallest of trembles in his voice. "I got frightened and didn't think. It was wrong of me."

"We understand; everyone runs when they are scared if they listen to their body. It's a part of our genetic make-up," Sean replied.

After a second's thought, Joel nodded in acceptance. "Do you want to go back to your party now? I don't want you to miss it."

"Not unless you guys come with us," Cory replied.

Kevin giggled, "That'll be nice. I think I could do with some more feeding, Jo!"

Joel giggled. "Okay, but I first gotta see Mama and the others. I don't want them to worry more."

"Okay, Lil'elf. When you're ready, we'll go," Sean smiled.

It took a minute or two to find the easiest path out of the bush they were in. It basically became easier once I-Cheya ploughed a path through by brute strength.

"Mark is going to be royally pissed off," Cory giggled.

'Huff, huff, huff.'

"Like Mark is goofy enough to complain to a Sehlat?" Sean chuckled.

"Is he friendly like Marjur?" Artemus asked as the group came into sight of the G-Cats, I-Cheya in the lead. Unlike their two cheetah brothers, Artemus and Aphrodite had met a Sehlat in the Compound already.

I-Cheya quickly moved into a flat out run, stopping dead in front of her; then he wagged his tail.

"Fast," murmured Mercury.

Hermes nodded, "Big too. What is it?"

"A Sehlat, from Vulcan," Joel said proudly, "and his name's I-Cheya. He's my companion like Blackie is!"

"Cool," chorused the four G-Cats as they started to pet the large cub.

"We have some news too, Joel, Kevin," Aphrodite said shyly. "Saint Mikey was here a while ago. He said we four are to be your guards -- for the both of you. Our commander will ask us girls to do it at a later point, but really, we're your guards right now."

"I think you just needed an excuse to be around for more Joel-Cuddles," Cory giggled.

"If they're as good as Merc says, then yup!" Artemus giggled.

Joel moved over and climbed into her arms and proved it.

"Oh! Sweeeeeeet!" she started to purr.

Teri was silent at the Guardian's pronouncement. "So... I've adopted a Messiah figure?" she asked, fear in her voice.

//All futures are open, Lady. What Time shall bring is for One to know, and Another to Shape//

"*You* don't even know? Then *who* does? I won't have any of my children put through hell if I can help it, and I'll be **damned** first if I just sit here without trying to help him!"

//There is only One who can see, yet He does not speak of it. Lady, all I can offer you is Hope and Strength. What is about to occur has never happened before, nor will it ever happen again//

The Doctor raised a hand, and at Teri's nod, spoke softly, "I know some, but that is only due to my first meeting with Joel being in Joel's future. It is weird, however: that 'history' I know is shifting in my mind. I know what I was told, but until I see it happen in the Now, it is not stable in my head. I cannot speak of what is To Be, as it may Not Be. I must watch, just as you have to. After the point of my first meeting with Joel, *everything* is blank. Everything."

"Should we keep your identity secret from him, Doc?" Jason asked quietly.

The Doctor nodded, "He... I mean, IF he is to find out, then he must work it out. I cannot say yes or no to your question, other than continue to act in public as you are now. I cannot risk anything being revealed with the Shaper about."

"What *is* a Shaper??" Dan asked. "I keep hearing the name, that otherworldly voice keeps saying it, and Levi and Kyle were gabbling about it earlier. What is a Shaper, and how can that poor boy be one?"

"There is only one, Uncle Dan," the Doctor said mutely as he was pulled over and sat on Amanda's lap. "There has never been one before, and may never be one again. I must go into the Laws of Time to explain this; if you can handle it?"

They all nodded.

"Very well. Levi, sweetie?" the ginger boy gestured for Levi to join him on Amanda's lap.

Levi popped over instantly, and felt the tension in his mind leave.

"Aspirin won't help, but all you need is a Doctor," the small Time Lord half giggled, making the others smile.

Levi sniffed slightly in his arms, "That's the first time I felt bad, Galli."

"Yeah, I know. It's not often you get Destiny changing," he answered, then looked up and said, "Come on, you five. Out of hiding."

"Nothing gets past you," Dylan tried to joke as he and Bryce and Peter appeared, but the sight of his appearing Dad and Pop running over to check on Levi was too serious for laughter.

"He'll be fine; just a temporal headache. Which I'm sure you're all feeling, correct?" the Doctor asked them.

They all nodded.

"Come over here and touch me. It'll clear your heads." Everyone else simply watched as the gathered Mikyvis went over and hugged the small Time Lord briefly, then they all clambered up and sat around Amanda and Sarek.

Kyle and Tyler pulled their first born over and onto their laps. "Go on, Doc," Tyler said quietly as he kissed Levi's hair. "Tell us about my brother, the Shaper."

"First, Destiny and Fate. What do you know of them?" he asked generally.

"They are the same, are they not?" Solak offered. "Fate and Destiny mean the same."

The ginger Time Lord nodded, "In the tongues of the Younger races, yes, that is true. However, in Gal-lifreyan, the words have a different bent to them. Fate is a point in time that cannot be altered easily, but it *can* be altered. It is a Might Be, or a Could Be, event. Mixed with it are Random Chances, those choices we make each and every day. Destiny, however, is not like that. It is Fixed; unmoving. There

are nearly always two 'choices' with a Fixed point, but really, there is no choice at all. Example, a long time ago for me I went back and visited Pompeii before the volcano erupted. It was in another Universe. Just as here, the volcano would have destroyed all of the city. In that Universe, though, there were aliens living IN the volcano, and they were stopping it from erupting. They intended to conquer the world and kill all of humanity. I was left with a Fixed Point choice: leave them and watch all of the Earth burn in extraterrestrial flames, or make the volcano erupt and sacrifice one city."

He paused, then hung his head. In a whisper, he said, "I chose the lesser of two evils. I am the one who caused Pompeii to die in that Universe. It had to happen; it did not make it easy knowing that, however. But; if Joel had been there, and if he knew what he was doing, he could have either Reshaped Destiny, or simply Shaped a new one. That is a power that exceeds anything the High Races, or even the Guardian, can do."

Levi looked at the Doctor, "Is Joel a High Race member then?"

"No," the ginger boy shook his head. "He is The Shaper. He is Young Race. He is Joel. Special yet Normal. There is no other like him in all Creation. Without Destiny, yet Shaping Destiny."

"He has *no* Destiny at all?" Jake asked in wonder.

"He must have! I was told by Cory that Mikey said his name is in the Book of Life!" Teri exclaimed.

"Yes, there are things known about him, but he is still Without Destiny; well mostly. There is something, but it is unknown. However, look at what you just said; 'The Book of Life'? Who writes that, Lady Teri? *Who* knew?" the Doctor asked leadenly.

"Oh... oh my," she whispered. "God..."

"So, Destiny is an unchangeable event or choice, yet Joel can change them to his own ends, right?" Dan summarized.

"Yes, correct," the Doctor nodded. "Fate can be changed; not easily, but it can. And there are five little boys linked with or directly part of the Clan who are appointed to do so to save this Universe. Destiny, however, is from 'Of Old'. The Destiny of Creation was written before the First Cycle of Creation came to be. It must happen... unless the One who wrote it allows a change."

"That happened a few times," Kyle mused. "Remember Mikey saying the Book of Life had been changed for Toby and Beau?"

The Doctor grinned, "Yep, so I was told. Vae'Runam, the Guardian, has already caught me up with current Changed Points, just so that I'm aware. That was the One you call Our Father changing things in response to Faith. That happens a few times, but not as much as you think. It is still *Him* changing things, though." He paused, then continued slowly, "Joel is *His* Shaper. There once was only One who could reform Destiny, and only did so when Faith was shown. Now, there is another... and he can either reform it, or make a new one completely."

Sarek was staring at the Doctor incredulously. "You are saying that a mortal child, with a battered and wounded soul, bears and wields the power of Oekon?!"

"The *full* power of the Supreme Being? No," the Doctor shook his head. "One ability, that over predestination, yes. Foreknowledge? All Powerful? Creating? No. He is not God, nor a god. He is, or more specifically will be, the Shaper."

"This is crazy!" Dan exclaimed, "I'm sorry, Teri, I don't mean to belittle that wonderful little boy, but this is damned stupid! He is unstable, in my professional opinion; and I can only say that much, going by the human side he presents to us. I have no idea about the purely Vulcan issues he is going through and will go through. This is dangerous, Doctor!"

"Don't look at me, Dan, I did not choose him. El'Runi'm did, and personally, I am not going to second guess the Creator!" the Doctor said, raising his hands in a placating gesture. "Besides, right now his powers are working but not under his direct control. The Guardian says that the One who knows is using them through Joel. Remember what I said; Joel is His Shaper. *If* Joel learns how to do this himself, then he will still be stopped from destroying all if he tries to go too far. This ability is a mystery to me... maybe he will *never* learn to direct it consciously, but it may just happen when his spirit responds to specific events, as led by Oekon, Our Father, Great Spirit, El'Runi'm, God - call Him what you will... He is in control when it comes to Joel. Joel might learn to change something with the force of his will, but... Everything that has been Reshaped so far has been automatic. He has altered 'What Is' to 'Be' something else. He has not even used the Shape aspect of his ability yet. So far, he has only moved Destiny, not Created a new one. Until he does, then the promise he shows will not be realised. The Hour of the Shaper is not yet. The reason for him *being* the Shaper, though... I don't know, I really don't."

Nathan hugged himself closer to Jason, "I'm a Christian, and I will trust what you have said, Doc. But I'm still scared; for *Joel*... this is something no-one has told him yet, right?"

Kyle shook his head, "Right."

"That's good. I can think of no easier way to completely flip that boy's head open than to tell him he is a Lord of Destiny!" Nathan sighed as he snuggled more into Jason's arms.

"He must have been told," Levi whispered.

Kyle nuzzled his son's neck as he increased his hug on the boy, "No, sweetheart, he wasn't. I've been in his head, and no-one told him."

"Someone must have, Dad... in that thing this morning, when he got lost in that hole in his mind? That 'other' personality was yelling at him and hurting him. It said '...you shall not live to be His Shaper...'. That was another personality within Joel... how did it know that?"

Kyle and the Doctor looked at each other, and shrugged. "Don't know, but I'll keep an eye on him. That work for you, Doctor?" Kyle offered.

"Doctor who?" Joel asked as he came smiling into the room, followed by Cory, Sean and Kevin. A 'huff huff huff' could be heard from outside the door.

The Doctor rolled his eyes as Jason started howling with laughter.

"What?" the little Vulcan asked Jason curiously. "And who are you?" he asked politely, glancing at the Doctor.

"Joel, this is John Smith. John, this is Joel Short, my big brother!" Kyle introduced them with a grin.

"Hiya, Joel," the Doctor grinned at the boy.

Joel giggled. "Hi, Joh... John Smith?" Joel started to tremble as his Vulcan mind put together all the clues and Jason's reaction at a phenomenal speed. "Doctor? Nooo... wait, THE Doctor??"

The Doctor started to giggle, "Nice one, kiddo. Yeah, I'm him!"

Joel's mouth was hanging open, then he too giggled, "You really ARE Doctor Who, then!"

"Doctor *WHO*?" Dan asked with a chuckle.

Telez and Antony, who had both been sitting there silently, smiled. "You're feelin' better now, Joel?" Antony asked the boy as Joel ran over and pulled the Doctor in for a massive hug.

"Yeah! Thanks to Kevin, and my two companions... and then it was even better waking up to see my bros!" he giggled from the Time Lord's arms.

"Companions?" Telez looked curious.

'Huff huff huff'

In though the door came I-Cheya, and his tail was wagging a mile a minute.

Sarek's eyebrow raised, "You have bonded with Commander Sellik's cub? I did not know that my cousin was even here."

Jason smiled at his grandfather, "Yes, I was going to say, fa'sami, but all this..."

"I understand. I shall go and speak to him after," Sarek nodded.

"And I thought Timmy collected animals..." Teri commented with a small grin.

Blackie walked in, followed by the four G-Cats. *One Wolf, One Bear, Four Pussies; Not many* they all heard in their hearts.

Aphrodite looked at her sister, "Now I know why cats dislike dogs!"

Mercury picked up the wolf pup and started tickling him, but since he was a canine, this was bliss to the pup.

Timmy walked in and giggled at the sight of a G-Cat tickling a dog. "Poppa; Lance says that you need to let Lew outta your shirt pocket."

"Lance? Lew?" Peter asked. "Did I get some new brothers while I wasn't lookin'?"

Sean gingerly reached his hand into his pocket, and slowly pulled it back out with another turtle hanging by his fingernail. "I assume this is 'Lew'?" Sean asked as he placed the little turtle in his hand and passed it to Timmy.

"Yeah Poppa; he's Lance's little brother!" Timmy replied. "They're goin swimmin' with some fishies Allie brought me."

"Joel, I'm envious, bro," Jason giggled as the Fireball trotted back out carrying his new friend. "I was hoping that the cub would bond with me, but I'm just super glad he did with you."

"Thanks," Joel smiled happily as he ran over and climbed onto I-Cheya's back, pulling Kevin up behind him. "This is I-Cheya."

"I-Cheya?" Sarek asked. "That was the name of my Sehlat when I was a child. He became my son's but..."

"I know," Joel nodded seriously. "He died protecting Captain Spock when he was seven."

Sarek nodded in amazement. "So it is true, you know more about this place than would be imagined."

Joel smiled again, "Yessir, I do. Didn't know that Vulcan's Named by touching and seeing weird stuff, though."

"The Ahm-Van-Kal, the Naming," Solak explained. "We do not always See in that, Joel; you and I-Cheya are fortunate to have experienced it."

I-Cheya nodded his head and huffed at them all for a moment, before turning and ambling back out and towards the Dining Room with the two small boys on his back.

"I think that is the signal for more food," Sean giggled.

As everyone got up to leave, Jason moved over to Kyle quickly.

"Little Angel," he whispered as he picked up the brown haired Mikyvis and cradled him over his hip, "Tony and I need to have a quick chat with you."

Kyle smiled softly at the name, "Sure, Jace."

Jason and Antony left the room and headed to the far side of Main CIC and began an earnest conversation with the smaller boy.

Last to leave the room was Solak, Sarek and Xain. Jake was nearly at the door to the Dining Room when he noticed his T'hy'la was not moving.

"My son, there is something I need to tell you and explain," Solak started.

Xain nodded, "Okay, Father."

"Please, sit. You may be here as well, Jake," Sarek said, directing them all back into the room.

Once they had all been seated, Solak started, "Xain, he who is your grandfather was not pleased with my decision to allow you entrance into Clan Short."

"I did not think he would," Xain murmured. "What has he done to counter it?" he asked, a sick sound in his voice, and Solak watched as he grasped at Jake's hand for emotional support.

Solak looked at Sarek, as if appealing for help, before answering slowly, "We have been cast out of House and Family, my son. We are no longer of House Suvak."

Xain went stiff, then seemed to melt into Jake's arms. His eyes became haunted and tears appeared there.

Jake gripped his Bonded tightly, for down their Bond-Link, the true horror of this was made known to him. "Outcast?" he asked Sarek, his voice trembling. "We can't marry? You're gonna let Xain *die* in Pon Farr??"

"No," Sarek answered, laying his hand on Solak's shoulder.

Xain and Jake quickly focused their waning attention on the Ambassador.

"Your paternal grandmother was, until her Union with He who is your Grandfather, a member of House Surak. Both you and your father are therefore distant kin, cousins, to me and my House. As of nine o'clock this morning, He who is your Father has been Accepted within House Surak as the Patriarch of a new Family, Family Solak," Sarek explained, moving to sit with Xain and Jake.

He pulled them both closer and into his arms, "I am now your House Patriarch, and never shall you be Outcast again."

Jason and Antony stood near the door and watched as Kyle approached Tyne and Rusty as they were finishing their dessert. "Tyne, we have a Founder issue that you need to help sort out," Kyle said softly as he came to stand next to his friend. "It's about Antony Parnell, Jason Evans' Clan Archivist."

Tyne looked up at Kyle as he set his fork down, "Okay, is it serious enough that we need to return to the Ark Compound or would you like to just slip into the conference room?"

"That depends on you," Kyle answered, lowering his voice. "Antony is a fully trained VSO operative, loyal to Vulcan above all, trained to kill... and a Founder with his abilities locked out who wants to have a talk to the 'leader of his people' as he is interested in being unlocked and trained."

Tyne frowned as he slowly stood up, "Well, that's...different. I think its best that we move to the Council Chambers at the Ark Compound, just to avoid being bothered." Tyne turned to Rusty, "I'll be away for a little while, Rusty, would you..."

"I'll cover for ya," grinned Rusty. "Though I don't think anyone but maybe Dominic or Nyo would be looking for you right now anyway. Hurry back."

Tyne smiled and then turned back to Kyle, "Well, Mr. Richardson, if you would be so kind."

Jason started to bounce happily as they all vanished from the Clan Compound and reappeared in the Council Chambers of the Ark Compound, "Hoo boy! I've been looking forward to this since yesterday! Tony, I'll have a promise from you, though."

"What?" Antony asked hesitantly.

"No getting lost in Ark's memory core and seeing what buttons do what. I don't think the Seer would be impressed if Ark came down with a case of nervous tension brought on by an inquisitive Welsh boy playing about in her processor!" Jason giggled, earning him a slap from his best friend.

<Her? I am just meeting you people in person and already you are trying to assign that gender to me? Tyne, this is a serious issue, I am not female.>

"I'll look into getting them to call you Mom instead then," grinned Tyne as he took a seat in one of the open Council chairs. "So, let's see; Jason, I believe we were briefly introduced before, though I don't remember exactly what it is you do. And I'm guessing that the other young man with you is Antony."

Following Tyne's gesture, Antony and Jason sat down next to him, and Kyle took up lap space on Antony. "Yeah, we met briefly Sunday and yesterday, Seer," Jason smiled. "I'm a Clan Patriarch for a brother Clan to Clan Short, and also a Vulcan Division Commander for the Vulcan Special Ops. Antony is my brother and best friend, and Clan Archivist, as well as a Commander in my Division. Oh, and before we go further, just know that Antony won't be being rude by being quiet at first. He's very shy, and takes a while to warm up to people he's never met." Jason reached out and linked his hand with Antony's, and the taller boy smiled shyly at Tyne and nodded.

Kyle smiled, "That's why I'm having cuddles with him, to help with that."

Antony hugged the boy closer with his free hand, then looked at Tyne fully. "Pleased to meet you, Seer. I hope I'm not going to cause you a problem with all this."

"As Seer of the Founder Council I am here to help my people, so even if you were causing me a problem, it would be my job to help you with that problem if you asked for help in the first place; that is part of my job," said Tyne. "And you can both call me Tyne; we may be in the Council Chamber, but this is not a formal situation, I don't think. So now, Kyle briefly mentioned why we are here, but what is this exactly about and why is it an issue?"

"Thank you, Tyne. If you will, please call me Jace, and he's Tony. We tend to prefer our nicknames. Anyway, I think I'll start explaining, but Kyle will need to explain his part," Jason started. "Ten months ago, Levi appeared to us and healed my Klingon brother. That is what started this whole thing with my Clan. A few days later, he came back just as I and my sister and boyfriend started getting very ill. We were changing and our powers would have killed us. He brought with him two boys who were shrouded like rainbows, and together, they healed me, Nath' and Viccy."

"They also opened up latent gifts in the 'core' group who were there, including Tony. He became our 'dreamer'. I took a look in his head, and to me it was very strange. He had two extra 'rooms', as I understood them, but they were sealed off. However, when he slept he would see things that could or would happen a few days ahead. A useful ability that has more than helped us over the past ten months."

Antony nodded and spoke softly, "That's all I called myself. Dreamer. Then on Sunday, Ark downloaded a lot of information into Clan Short's database for Aunt Teri, and I was the first to read some of it. I found a reference to 'Founders' and that they saw the future or past. There was instructions for what to look for genetically, and so I tested myself. I have those 'tags'."

Jason continued then, "We guessed that those sealed areas of his mind was done that way by Levi or the other two 'Rainbows'. The information we had said that Founders need training or they could hurt themselves or others. Since we knew no Founders, it was logical for Tony to be blocked. But, we don't know why Tony never showed any signs when a child of 7 or 8, like the info said should have happened."

"My turn," Kyle spoke up, "The reason I and the others went back to ten months ago was to close off a circle in time involving Jason and his brothers and sister. As I was scanning everyone, I found that Tony was a Founder; or should have been. There was a slight problem in his mind, though, and it would have caused some major issues for him once he got older. It was why he didn't show the signs as a younger child. I repaired it, and that meant he became a Founder with full abilities. 'Cos I knew Founders would not 'be around' for the best part of ten months, I closed off his Past and Future parts of his mind until he could be trained, just allowing him to access the future subconsciously in his dreams."

"So that is how it stands," Jason said seriously. "Antony is a Founder, but also not one at the same time. As can be expected, he wants to know about his people and take part in his heritage. I'm all for that, but he and I both know there is a problem here."

"I'm trained to kill, if needed," Antony whispered. "I have rarely done so, though. I don't like field work that much, so I've not gotten into as many fights or battles as my fellow Commanders have. The real kicker is that I've read that Founders are generally peaceful and refrain from killing period. I cannot be that way. My first loyalty is to Vulcan. 'To be the first and last line of defence' is the VSO directive, and I will use any and all means to fulfil a mission if needed."

As he trailed off uncertainly, Jason continued for him while squeezing his hand comfortingly, "He feels that to be a fully trained Founder and then have to go and fight and kill if required would be an insult to you and his people. Yet, he also WANTS to be a Founder in all ways; it's his birthright. So... we've come to you. I love my brother, and just want the best for him, but I also respect his attitude to want the best for you and the Founders as well, Tyne."

"Well that is an interesting situation," Tyne said as he stood up so he could pace.

Editor's Notes:

Well, this chapter is certainly full to brimming with important situations. There are a lot of things happening here that will indeed shape things to come. It seems that finally Joel and Kevin have bonded and

are now as one. There are obviously still some issues that they need to deal with and hopefully with some help, they will be able to get past those issues.

So, Joel is The Shaper. I wonder what that will mean and what responsibilities he will take on. It sounds like something very important indeed.

It also looks like Anthony has some issues that he will need to deal with. Hopefully Tyne will be willing and able to show Tony what he needs to know.

This story is going to continue the saga of the CSU along with some others, however, we will need to watch this one very closely, because it will definitely have some powerful pivot points, and they will impact strongly on all the other stories which will need to be addressed before part three of Memories can start. It looks to me as if Ilu has a big responsibility ahead of him. I have confidence in him though, so let us sit back and enjoy this wonderful story.

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher

Chapter 5:

"Things could get very messy..."

Many thanks to Akeentia and ACFan for their help. Without them, this would not be possible.

"You're right as far as Founders go, we do refrain from killing. In fact sixty thousand years ago when the Founders were in power any Founder that committed murder was sentenced to have their mind wiped and then were sent to the moon to live out the rest of their days as a Savant for our Archive there. But times change..." Tyne paused for a moment and then looked over at Antony, "The Founder Council was overthrown, and our people then made some very interesting mistakes that cost us our standing in the world. By the time I was born Founders were already considered outcasts and we were in hiding, with most of us living here at the Ark Compound. The ideals were still the same but things had changed for us. The Council before my father's time was responsible for bringing the Moroi into this world, and the Moroi were hunting us for making them what they were. My father, however, wanted peace, and although he knew it would not work he was preparing for something... something I'm just now beginning to understand as I read through past Council notes and as I finally force myself to work through some of my own problems." Tyne looked down at the ground and sighed, "You see, my father had arranged for a meeting with the Moroi leaders, it was supposed to be to talk about a truce. Both my father and my Socius went to this meeting, and it was at that meeting spot that I found them. My father was dead when I got there and Cyna died in my arms. It's not something any twelve year old is prepared for, and come to find out that there were still Moroi waiting there to see if anyone came to retrieve the bodies they had left." Tyne started to slowly pace again, "I wasn't like my father, you see, I always held the ideals that the Moroi needed to be pushed back, not killed as that wasn't the Founder way, but something needed to be done. My father always wanted a non-violent approach. But as I sat there holding my dead Socius and those Moroi came out to get me something snapped. If you ever wanted to know what a Founder can actually do to another being, I'm afraid I know the answer. I caused them to live

their darkest nightmares, I caused them to tear themselves apart. I hated them, I wanted to kill them... and I did."

Tyne stopped and looked over at Antony again, "But that's not where this all stops though. You see the Council knew what I had done. I was supposed to be sentenced and sent to the moon, or so our law stated. But I wasn't, in fact the Council didn't really say all that much about what happened other than that they were sorry. You see, the Council knew what was going to happen; they knew I was going to do what I did and that I would lose Cyna and my father. They allowed it to happen, WITH my father's blessing even. You see, they knew that I was going to need to understand what I learned from that event, they knew that in my future there would be times where I would need to be able to take care of those that needed to be done away with." Tyne smiled a little, "Family is very important. History is very important as well. But our people don't learn from history very often, but to my dismay I was expected to succeed where they could not. I'm still struggling with what I did, killing is not easy for someone that was brought up with the idea that to kill was to die from society and become... something else. I can't say that I would enjoy killing people that deserve it, but at this point in my life I am willing to let my emotions sometimes guide my actions and do what actually needs done. So from where I stand I think I can say that I at least understand your situation."

Antony nodded, his face thoughtful.

Jason, however, was looking at Tyne with compassion. "So, Founders are able to use their abilities to kill," he murmured, then, "Tyne, I understand you completely. I too can and have killed with the power I have, and in a very similar way in some cases. I ain't a Founder, so what you did is not how I do it, but the end result is the same. And the feeling after that a gift you were born with has become a weapon... tainted... that is not something a human can deal with easily. I..." he paused. "I do have something that might help you, though. Vulcan training lets you do what is logical yet keeps the child in us free from it. I've killed with my power, yet my power remains joyous to me. I... I don't know if you'd want it, but if ever you did, I could start teaching you that Vulcan mindset. If ever you are required to do something, whether by hand or mind, that is the right thing to do yet you feel it would sully you, the training will keep your soul free from it. Or if not me, then Kyle could train you on some of it. Kyle's going to get some more of the training I have soon. He has a lot, but not VSO level; and that's needed for many in his Clan now especially him, Cory and a few others. It *would* take more trust than you have for me at present for you to learn it, so I'm just letting you know the options are there. If or when you feel you want to go for it, and we're closer, I'll be around, bro."

"I appreciate the offer, but my problems help define who I am; even if they cause me grief," replied Tyne. "I can't say that I feel tainted by the experience, at least not from a skills point of view. I'm not afraid of what I am, just what I can choose to do. I now let my emotions get involved with how I make my choices and that's what I think my people were lacking before that caused their downfall. They let the entire world get detached from their feelings, and so the world chose an extreme to help them feel again. I think I need to learn to use my emotions to help make better decisions rather than remove it from the equation; humanity is too imperfect for me to make decisions based on logic. Thank you for offering though, I know you mean well."

Jason nodded. "Agreed on humanity. I respect that, Tyne, fair enough."

"So," Antony half whispered, looking at Tyne for confirmation, "let me see if I have this right. What you're saying is that I can have my gifts opened, someone who knows can train me to not mess up with them, then, if I too find a way to use it as a weapon, you won't have a shit fit?"

"Antony, I may be the leader of our people, but you still make your own choices," said Tyne. "Had you been coming to me with this problem about a week ago I might not have been this lax about the whole thing but what this really comes down to is if you had all of your abilities, which I have no right to say you can't have, how would you feel if you had to use them as a weapon?" Tyne paused for a moment and then continued, "I can offer advice, I can help you if you need the help, but really, this choice is yours and I will have to live with whatever choice you make. And unless you choose to be placed under our government if you did encounter a situation that might cause me a problem, I really have no authority to say anything. Though I would probably express my unhappiness with the situation."

<Yes, he seems to never have any trouble expressing his opinion or mood.>

Tyne sighed, "Nobody asked you for your input, Ark."

Antony shared a long, telling look with Jason, and it was obvious they were communicating.

"I left his broadcasting on," Kyle explained quietly to Tyne as they watched the two brothers 'talk'.

"Seer," Antony said formally as he stood up. "I am a Founder, at least once Kyle does his thing. I am therefore under you as one of your people. However, I am also a British subject and member of the British Royal House, so I have loyalty there as well. Add to that, I am a sworn operative of the VSO. Vulcan and her interests are paramount.

"Since those interests include the best for Earth and our people, and since the British Royal Family feel the same, and since the Queen, my grandmother, has already said she would support the Founders when they choose to re-enter the world stage, I am comfortable and authorised to place myself under you as a member of our race, answerable to the Council. As long as the Council does not act without reason against my Family, my Royal House or Vulcan, I have no reason not to.

"That, I feel, won't happen. If ever you stood against one of the above, it would be for 'logical' reasons. I have strong doubts as to the Founders being an enemy to Vulcan nor the British Empire. We are all linked to the same brothers: Clan Short."

Antony paused again, picking his words carefully. "I would like to be counted as one of our race. I want you as my Seer. Does this sound acceptable to you, Seer?"

"That's an awfully long list of loyalties," grinned Tyne. "I don't see where any of that would conflict. So, if that is what you want, then yes, that is acceptable. That at least grants you the rights of any Founder, including Socius if you should so want it, as well as the right to council with any of the members, if not all, of the Founder Council if you should need it. That also grants you rights to live in the Ark Compound if you should ever want to."

Antony grinned back, "Can't have too many friends and brothers, Tyne! Thank you. As for Socius, I have to talk to Telez about that. We have a few kids we've adopted already, and Kyle told me about what the general feeling for that is outside of Socius. But Tel's Andorian, and his culture is important to

him. He wants the Zan'Fi Na ceremony to go ahead first." He then impulsively hugged Tyne, his grin fixed in place.

"Don't forget fuzzymores!" Kyle added suddenly, giggling.

Jason raised an eyebrow in a very Spock-like fashion. "Those them lightning casting whatzits you guys have hooked into your nervous systems?"

"Hey now, don't go callin my buddy a 'wazzit'!" Kyle giggled as he petted his arm. "He didn't mean it Fuzzy!"

<They are called Phasenmorphs. They were created during the second cycle of humanity to be living weapons. I can provide more information on them if you would care to read about them.>

"Yes please," echoed both Jason and Antony in chorus. They glanced at each other and giggled. Jason added, "We read the little you put into the Clan's systems about them, Ark, but as with the rest, the info wasn't in-depth in a number of areas. We've been curious for a while!"

Kyle poked Jason in the side, then raised his arm and revealing Fuzzy More Richardson. "He wants a kiss! Say sorry, Jace!" he giggled.

Jason rolled his eyes then kissed the 'morph. He then picked up the giggling Mikyvis and did the same to his cheeks and forehead. "There, little dude; happy now?" he laughed as he sat back down with Kyle on his lap.

"If you pet him, we'll both purr," Kyle suggested impishly.

Jason did so.

It was Antony's turn to raise an eyebrow. "Ummm... that... could be interesting! I wonder if they work on half human Andorians!" he murmured to himself as Kyle went relaxed and blissed out on Jason's lap.

<They were designed for a human neuro-chemical system, Antony. For a Phasenmorph to work, it has to join with the nervous system of a human. It is not known if a hybrid between two races could join with one.>

Jason looked up, "A few tests by you would answer that, right, Ark? There's Xain and Telez who could be your guinea pigs. I'd say Joel too, but I don't think he'd be ready for all this yet."

"Heeeeeeeessssss noooooottttttt...." Kyle moaned.

Jason started to wonder at that point. "Um, Kyle, sweetie? Won't Ty be all pissed off if you get off on my lap by my doing this?" he asked with worry. "I can face anything, but I have no chance against a pissed off Mikyvis angel if he thinks I've done things with his husband!"

"Itttt..... dooooooonnnnn'tttt.... feeeeeeeelllllll..... gggooooooodddd..... tthhhhaaaaaatttt.....
wwwwaayyyyyyy....." Kyle replied in bliss.

"You could have fooled me," Antony said in awe as he watched the 'disabled' Mikyvis become even more limp on Jason's lap. He turned to Tyne and commented with a giggle, "One of the most powerful beings in creation, and he's owned by someone petting his purring bio-weapon! I'm scared, are you?"

"Only if it causing him to relax his bladder," replied Tyne. "I don't want to have to explain why we need the council chamber cleaned."

Antony giggled, "You're the boss, boss. The answer's easy; don't explain!"

"Yeah but Ark would rat me out," grinned Tyne. "All they would need to do is ask her what happened."

<Excuse me?>

"IT! Sorry, I meant 'it' not 'her,'" Tyne said quickly.

Antony smiled, "Draco is easy to get on with. He's a Vulcan 12yo mental aged AI who likes being human. We'd end up having our beds transported out into the pool if we called him 'it', and he'd giggle the entire time!"

<Well, I am glad that he enjoys being assigned a gender, but I have never claimed one. I just do not understand why everyone keeps insisting that I am female.>

Through Jason's communicator, Draco replied, *'But Mama Ark! You're voice is so motherly! Besides, I was just an AI. I was modelled as 12 years old to interact with the sprogs and especially Jace, but I chose my sex... so nerrr!'*

Jason held up his hands. "Don't look at me, Ark! I'm staying outta this! You know the way to Wales; spank him!"

<I can not physically DO anything, though I would certainly like to. So help me, if I ever find a way to have a physical form you are all in trouble. As far as what I CAN do, do not make me black out half the planet to get my point across.>

"I can help, Ark!" Kyle giggled from Jason's lap.

<That is not needed, Kyle; thank you for the offer.>

'Transferring core commands and memory algorithms to Yoshuhlnak... transfer complete. Wales could do with a black out, Mama Ark; help yourself!'

<The only person I have ever been a parent to is Nyo, and I do mean parent not mother. I find you are all rather upsetting. So, if you are all finished, I have better things to be doing with my time than argue gender.>

"Draco! Say sorry right now, or you know that lovely Clan Computer Voice they have in Orlando...??" Antony said with some small heat.

'You wouldn't!!'

"Try me," Antony grated. "Teasing is one thing, hurting Ark's feelings is another. Say sorry right now!"

There was silence for a moment, then, *'Tony's right... 'm sorry, Ark. Was only messin'. Sorry...'*

<I miss the days when it was just Nyo and myself, then at least there was no one talking back to me. One of these days one of you is going to need something from me and I will give you what you have coming to you. That being a smart reply, followed by a laugh.>

Tyne frowned, "He said sorry."

<I know he did. But I do not like being challenged about who I am in my own home. I can forgive, but I do not have to pretend that it does not upset me. I have earned that much.>

"No one ever said that you didn't," replied Tyne.

<Good. Now, is there anything else you need, Seer?>

Tyne shook his head, "No Ark, not right now."

Antony looked at Jason and received a nod. He then addressed his communicator, "Draco, you will place yourself back in your Nest core and think on what you've done here. We'll have a long chat once I'm back from the Ark Compound after my training. You have that long to think, reflect, and explain to me what you have discovered."

'... yes, Tony...' came a surprisingly tearful reply before the comm went silent.

Jason caught Tyne's odd look. "Draco looks to Tony as a father figure. It'll be okay, and Ark will likely get a proper apology and promise of better behaviour. The day he modelled himself after Belar now seems to be a bad one." He then turned slightly and addressed Ark, "I'm sorry too, Ark. I won't tease you again about your gender or lack thereof - unless you are in a teasing mood and start it, of course."

Antony sighed briefly, then turned to Tyne and asked, "How will this work? Once Kyle opens my mind, what's the game plan for training and the rest?"

"Well, you'll definitely need training, and the sooner the better," replied Tyne. "If you wait too long, you could end up in the state that Kyle found himself in when I came across him. You could end up either hurting someone else or you could get lost in your own mind. Neither of those is all that much fun. Its up to you as to whom you want to train you, but I'd recommend Kyle, Levis, or myself. Depending on what you plan to do with these skills right now, will probably determine which of us I'd actually recommend though."

Antony nodded and thought for a second. He glanced at Jason with question. Jason shrugged, "Your choice, bro. I cannot act here, other than be your brother. Grandfather said for me to leave the 'Commander' at 'home' for this choice."

Antony nodded again and faced Tyne. "I won't ask for anyone to train me to use the skills as a weapon. I'll likely find that on my own as you did if required, and I would not want that on another's conscience

anyway; especially not yours. I need to learn to control it, to live with it, to not hurt myself, nor others unknowingly and to put it to the best use for myself and my brothers."

"That's reasonable enough, though I wouldn't know how to teach you to use it as a weapon anyway; it's more of a feeling than a learnable thing," Tyne said as he walked over to Antony. "I can at least give you a basic lesson now, if you want, and then you can either choose to come back and I will train you myself, or you can go to Kyle. I at least want to be the one to help you cover the basics so as to avoid problems that Kyle may have not had himself."

Kyle nodded his head in agreement. "I don't wanna mess up either; I like you, 'Tony, and Tyne knows more than I'll ever know about bein' a Founder. I didn't get much time as one before my body decided to go into overdrive!"

"Okay, I'd like you to train me first anyway, Tyne," Antony smiled, "but first, Little Angel?" he looked at Kyle.

Kyle giggled, "Just say when, and the doors will be unlocked."

Antony glanced nervously at Jason who stood up and placed Kyle on his feet. "I'm here, bro," Jason said as he took Antony's hand. "Just as I promised after..." he paused and shook with fear briefly before continuing, "...just as I promised. I'm always with you."

Antony smiled with understanding, and with his own remembered fear making him shake, he trembled to Kyle, "Wh...when."

Kyle nodded his head; and Jason took in a breath and closed his eyes quickly. He trembled for the briefest of seconds before smiling, "Woah, I was right, Tony. Your mind is amazing!"

Kyle shot Jason a look, "You okay, Ja... you're in Tony's mind, aren't you?"

"Yes, but I'm anchored; this is fantastic," Jason grinned as he opened his eyes, which were now glowing brightly and bathing Antony's face in a subtle sapphire glow.

Antony smiled back at him, "I like this. Okay, Tyne, I think I can be trained, now," he finished with a slight giggle.

"And I'll withdraw for the training. Don't want to mess things up," Jason said as his eyes returned to normal.

"Tyne, you think I need to give Jace some help so that he can keep from getting lost in the big empty space that 'Tony calls a brain now?" Kyle asked. "He's worse than a blond now!"

"You can teach Jason whatever you want, Kyle, just as long as you both stay out of his head for this," replied Tyne. "Because of his age, I'm already going to be using a very different method to do this, so I'm not sure if what I'll have him doing could hurt you or not if you're in his mind."

"I'm more worried about it hurting him if I'm in there," Kyle replied seriously. "Okay Jace, you ready to learn Advanced Mind Mapping?"

"If it's anything like mapping my own mind, this should be entertaining. At least all my rooms and areas are in the present; mapping future and past areas is going to be cool," Jason giggled.

"Oh, that reminds me," Kyle added, "Tyne, I don't know if you guys down here have noticed yet, but future scanning is rather blocked right now. I'm getting a blank wall about two to four weeks ahead, and I can't be any more accurate than that. What about you?"

"Odd boy this Kyle is," said a boy, who was dressed in black robes, that looked very much like Tyne that had suddenly appeared in the room. He walked up and stood next to the real Tyne. "He has no idea of what he speaks, thinking that a Founder mind couldn't still hurt his. And who does he think he is to think that we haven't already seen this wall of which he speaks."

"Well, we weren't entirely sure that it wasn't just us," said yet another boy, who was dressed in white robes, that looked like Tyne that appeared in one of the Council chairs nearby. "But this does confirm what we were afraid of. I think we would have rather been sick than find out that something is coming."

Tyne cleared his throat, "They can see you."

"Who are you talking to?" the Tyne in black asked.

"You," replied Tyne.

The Tyne in black looked at Kyle, Antony, and Jason, "Oh, so."

"Wait, why can they see us?" asked a little boy, who also looked very similar to Tyne, that just appeared behind Tyne and was peaking out from behind him.

"Because I'm going to have you help me train him," replied Tyne. "He's too old for me to just instruct him, so while I instruct, you three will be keeping a watch on what he's doing."

"Why does Reason get out of helping?" asked the Tyne in White.

"Because I need him in my head watching out for me," said Tyne.

"Right," White replied. "I suppose that's a good idea."

"Wait, why does this seem like something we've read about," said the Tyne in Black.

"Because it is," replied little Tyne. "Our father wrote a paper on this. We are each going to be instructing Antony while in each of those parts of his mind. The information will unify in the present and he will better understand the terms and meanings that Tyne needs to tell him."

"Oh, well, THAT sounds easy," the Tyne in Black said sarcastically.

'Kyle, please say this is normal, or do I have to unleash hell?' Jason sent to his little friend as his eyes blazed into blue brilliance and he automatically prepared his powers for battle.

'Relax you must; normal it's not, functional it will be,' Kyle replied in his best Yoda imitation, obviously having enjoyed the movie a bit too much.

Jason suppressed a giggle and quickly sent a mental hug to Antony. *'Okay, my little not-green-yoda-like angel. Now, for the mapping stuff?'* he sent as he tickled Kyle's ribs lightly.

Kyle giggled. "Listen closely, must you; important lesson this be."

Jason picked up the now giggling Mikyvis and moved away from Antony and the Tynes so that they would not be disturbed. "Okay, angel. I'm listening, but tell me; how does your equally angelic husband cope with a funny little munchkin like you all the time?" he asked teasingly, kissing Kyle's forehead.

"He wuvs me!" Kyle exclaimed between giggles.

Jason smiled and regarded his little friend seriously. "I'd be surprised if he didn't. Come on then," he murmured as he sat down on the far side of the Council chamber with Kyle on his lap, "let's be at this training; oh, but there is one thing; I guess you saw my fear earlier. When I showed you my mind on Sunday, there was one area blocked. If you saw inside, then please say nothing to anyone. It's stuff that you can only know if you're under a Red One code and NOT wanting to join the VSO. We can't have details of the Trial of Fire getting open. If it does, my life is forfeit. I'm just saying, as I kinda now guessed you might know."

"I know nothing; I've been taking lessons from the blonds!" Kyle giggled, giving Jason his answer without answering him.

Suppressing his sudden tears and fighting around the lump in his throat, Jason murmured, "I love you, sweetheart. Thank you."

Kyle kissed his cheek, and then began to quietly teach him about a Founder's mind.

Meanwhile:

"Rusty?"

Rusty looked up from his third slice of wedding cake. "Nathan, right?" he asked with a smile.

Nathan nodded, "Yuppers! I've just got a message from Jason. He said that Tyne is doing the basic training with Tony right now and might be a while. Depends how quick Tony is, on this stuff. He said he'll be back when he can, but for you not to worry."

Rusty giggled, "I have cake, brothers to talk to and more cake. I'm good. Thanks, Nathan."

"Call me Nath', and I think I'll join you in the eating of this wonderful cake. I'm gonna have to get Tommy to cook for my birthday party next year!"

Allen and Teri left the Kitchen and walked into the Rec Room to watch all the children and teens playing. Teri scanned around the room looking for her newest child, only to have her heart melt at the sight of him cuddled into Cory's arms, again fast asleep and sucking his thumb contentedly.

"I think Joel's found a favourite nap spot," Teri commented softly.

"You think? Look over on the opposite sofa, Teri," Allen said, just as softly.

She did, and saw Kevin doing the same thing on Sean's lap.

She smiled, "Awwwww...."

"I think that whatever happened earlier wore them out," the Doctor said from their side as he looked up at them both. "You know, changing the Future is tiring work, and all."

"And a certain ten-year-old should be getting cuddles as well," Teri said as she turned and lifted the Doctor to her hip. "Besides, this way I can keep track of you."

The Doctor giggled, "I'd swear you didn't trust me, young lady!"

"She don't," giggled Jay as he Folded in next to Allen, only to be scooped up and cuddled over the man's hip.

"I wonder what would give you that idea?" Teri chuckled.

The Doctor didn't answer. He just snuggled into her arms with a contented smile on his face. "I can deal with this type of 'distrust', lover-boy," he murmured eventually to his Bonded.

Jay was nearly purring, "Same here. Oh, Dad is asking if he can come out now? You said he had to remain hidden 'til Joel knew who you were."

"Is this Universe ready for an Immortal, Teri?" the Doctor asked her seriously.

"And he means that word, for no other is as Dad is, Mrs Short," Jay added just as seriously. "Even a Mikyvis can die; Dad can't, not yet anyway."

"We could use an immortal parent to help keep up with you guys!" Teri chuckled. "Tell him I said he's late for his grand opening appearance."

Joel woke with a start as a deep toned, modulating thrum ran out through the room. He focused his sleepy eyes at the blue Police Box that started to appear in the corner. "The TARDIS!!!" he yelled happily, waking Kevin in the process.

The Tardis' door opened and a man stepped out. As soon as the door had closed, the Box vanished with the same thrumming sound. Everyone in the room looked at the newcomer, waiting to see what happened next.

"Jack Harkness?!" came Joel's gasp. "It's Captain Jack, Cory!!!"

"I give his opening a seven; he should have used some lightning!" Teri said with a smile as she moved towards the newcomer. "It seems Joel is doing introductions, so you can just stay where you are, little man," she kissed the Doctor's cheek.

The Doctor giggled again.

"I see the oldest being in Time and Space has found someone to cuddle him," Jack said with a laugh as he shook Teri's hand. "Captain Jack Harkness, Time Corps. You must be Lady Teri Short of Vulcan, Director of Federation Youth Services, correct?"

"Dad, she's not interested. Stop hitting on her!" the Doctor giggled.

"What? I was just being friendly!" he protested.

Joel sniggered.

Teri chuckled. "You'd run anyway once you found out how many kids I have!"

Jack grinned, then winked at her, "I'm making a collection myself. Besides, although you are a completely stunning young lady, I have my Ianto; he's inside reading stories to the horde."

"I wonder which one of us has more!" Teri chuckled. "I think there might be one slice of cake left if you want to grab it before a kid does!"

"I couldn't," Jack said jokingly as he looked about at the children and teenagers relaxing and patting their over taxed stomachs, "I couldn't take food from such a large group of starved children!"

Joel sniggered more, then got up and pulled Cory behind him to meet Jack. Kevin and Sean watched from the sofa; they were just too full. Kevin especially was having a hard time with that fact; and only Sean rubbing circles into the smaller boy's stomach helped. Joel had kept feeding him, and he had *wanted* each mouthful, even though he *knew* it was just too much for his small appetite.

"Come on, Cory!" Joel was saying as he yanked his beloved big brother after him, "You'll like Jack; he's funny!"

"I'm still getting used to you knowing people you're just meeting here, Lil'elf!" Cory giggled as he let Joel lead him to Jack.

Jack smiled as they came within hugging reach. He pulled them both in and held them for a moment before saying, "Glad to finally meet you, Prince Cory. I've 'read' so much about you!"

Jay started laughing as he managed to say, "Yeah; Dad was laughing like mad when you and Sean were helping repair Ark..."

"Ummmmm...." Cory replied as he blushed at the memory. "Someone wrote *that* down too?"

From the supposed safety of Teri's arms, the Doctor started to list off, "In the shower the night before you met JJ; the morning Timmy caught you both; the..."

"DUDE! Not around MOM!" Cory half yelled with even more of a blush spreading over his body.

"What they talkin' 'bout, Cory?" Joel asked with concern at his brother's reaction. He turned more and took the blushing teen's hand and squeezed it gently.

Teri was in the middle of tickling the Doctor to 'avenge' her blushing son when Joel's question came. She stopped and looked at Cory seriously.

Fighting with his blush, Cory brought Joel into a full hug and whispered briefly, "Nothing you need to worry about, Joel. I... I don't want to frighten you again."

Joel suddenly trembled. "Oh... th...that," he whispered. Then, "I'll go cuddle Sean so... so you can... I..." He pulled away and turned to run towards his other beloved brother.

Cory pulled him back. "Nope -- YOU are more important than avenging the munchkin in Mom's arms for discussing things he shouldn't," Cory replied as he picked Joel up and put him on his hip.

The Doctor was shame-faced, "I'm sorry, little one; I forgot. Even Time Lords forget. I'm so sorry."

Joel tried to smile, yet failed. "S'okay," he whispered sadly. "It's not your fault I'm a baby about... about... *sex*..." he managed to force out before looking in terror at Teri.

"No more than a lot of the other kids here when they first arrived, son," Teri replied softly. "It will take you a while to adjust to life here and how different things are; we all understand."

Joel's terror decreased. This response was not what he had anticipated. What replaced the look of fear, however, was a profound look of loss; and neither Cory nor Teri could explain it. Joel's lips moved as he breathed out something, but no-one, not even the Doctor caught what he said.

Teri had read his lips, however, and replied softly, "I'll bet when the time is right, you will too."

"How?" Joel started to sob, "a...and even if I c...could, I'm not allowed... I d...don't have the r...right..."

He hid his face in Cory's neck, then, and bit his lower lip hard. 'S'not fair,' he thought to himself. 'Just not fair.'

Cory found, to his surprise, that he could hear Joel's mental mutterings. He looked over towards Levi and saw the boy nodding seriously at him; so that was the reason for the added ability that was not truly his own.

'You're allowed anything you wish, Lil'elf; you're my brother now,' Cory sent back softly.

Joel's face came up quickly and he stared in shock at his brother, *'Wh... how'd you do that? Can you hear me?'*

Cory nodded as he kissed Joel's cheek.

Joel bit his lower lip again, hard enough to draw a small flow of brilliant green blood. *'You're... you're not reading my memories, are you? Please... don't look **there**... don't want to say yet... please don't make me...'*

'Your memories are private, lil' brother; I just hear when you talk.' Cory replied.

He received a kiss for his answer, and when Joel pulled back and snuggled back into his neck, the others could see that a small drop of green was on Cory's cheek.

Teri moved over and saw the bleeding from the corner of Joel's lips. "Sweety, please let me look in your mouth," she asked him. Once Joel opened his mouth, she took a brief look, then signalled Doc Austin to come over.

"What's wrong?" Joel asked with puzzlement.

Cory replied, "You just cut your lip, biting it."

"Oh," Joel murmured, bringing his fingers up to check, and then looking at them when they came away green. "... don't feel it... I never feel little pain any more... not really..."

'That will change as your mind adjusts to your new home.' Cory sent lovingly.

Joel held still as Doc Austin ran a regenerator over the small cuts inside his mouth, then he smiled at Cory. So, his brother could read his thoughts? Maybe... just maybe...

'Cory, I...' Joel thought, then sent all that the Fire and Heat he felt for his big brother at him, before finishing, *'...you.'*

'I love you too!' Cory sent back, pushing his love back with it.

Jack Harkness, his son Jay, and the Doctor had moved off to teach the youngest members of Clan Short and Clan Evans one of the oldest games in the Universe. It was one of the oldest, confirmed the Doctor, as he played it when he was a little boy, and that was over seven billion years ago, relative to current time of course.

The kids soon found out how fun yet complex a Time Lord game could be; but its difficulty was a part of the fun. Once it was no longer difficult, you had grown out of playing it, yet had learnt everything you could from it.

Timmy and the rest were going ape.

Allen and Teri watched from the sofa while Joel was snuggled happily between his big brothers with his best friend in a death grip.

"So," Allen smiled at them, "What do you think, Joel? Shopping a good idea?"

"You're gonna let ME shop? *I* get to pick stuff... for *me*?" he bubbled out in stunned joy.

"Yes!" Gabe replied as he, Travis, Davey, and Jimmy joined the group. Davey and Jimmy both had the same look of shock on their faces as Joel.

Joel looked at the two smaller boys. "You never been shopping neither?"

"No, sir," Jimmy replied politely.

Joel's face registered shock. "Sir?" he asked as he looked up at Sean. "Why's he calling *me* 'sir'?"

Sean smiled. "Because you have not given them any reason not to respect you, little brother."

'Also, their ex-parents brainwashed them so badly that they couldn't even dress themselves.' Cory added. *'This will be their first shopping trip, too.'*

*'... why are there parents in this fucking universe who are doing that! Adam's was the same... it's not RIGHT, Cory! Even where I was, parents LOVED **their** children... only orphans like me had it bad...'* Joel's anger blazed for the first time in his life, shocking both him and Cory. Tears soon followed, though. He wriggled down and moved over to the two boys by Trav and Gabe. "Can I... can I hug you?" he asked them, tears standing in his eyes.

After getting approving nods from Gabe and Travis assuring them it was safe, both Jimmy and Davey agreed to the hug.

Joel noticed. As he started the three-way hug, he whispered to them both, "I'm like you. I can't do stuff for myself either. I'm a... I was a slave. I don't belong to me. I have to check with Cory and Sean too, like you just did with... your dads?" They nodded their cheeks against his, so he continued, "But... but I've managed to make a few choices myself today. We can help each other, if you like..."

Joel's voice started to alter slightly. Only Cory, Sean and Kevin noticed, though. His voice took on a more adult tone... a female adult tone.

"I'll be here to help you, young ones," he said without hearing himself.

Joel shuddered for a second, then regained his senses. Jimmy and Davey looked at him as the three small boys were still in their cuddle. "Will we be better? I want to be," Jimmy asked, and Davey nodded his agreement to the question.

A look of determination came over Joel as he said, "We all will."

Everyone in the room shivered slightly, and Levi rubbed the sides of his head briefly before he and all the gathered Mikyvis casually walked to the Doctor to touch him.

"Be glad Doctors still make house calls!" Teri chuckled, knowing it was an inside joke the Doctor and the Mikyvis would get but no others would.

The young Time Lord giggled, but Joel looked at them curiously. "What is that shiver that keeps happening, and why'd Levi look ill?"

The Doctor's eyes went unfocused for a second, and Levi's began to glow. They looked at each other, and the Mikyvis nodded.

"You are stronger than you know, Child of Vulcan," the Doctor said finally, facing Joel. "Your love keeps changing things around you, and those changes give those of us with the ability to sense Time a bit of a headache. They are good changes, though, so don't stop. Your heart is greater than you know, Joel."

After regarding the Doctor impassively for a moment, Joel finally nodded. "Oh..."

"It's okay, big brother; you're reminding us that we're human as well as Mikyvis. It's a good thing," Tyler added.

Everyone just stood or sat there looking at Joel as he pondered this new information. Finally, he gave Jimmy and Davey one last 'extra special hug' before pulling them over to his big bros. "They give great cuddles," he told Jimmy as he easily picked the boy up and sat him on Cory's lap. He then did the same for Davey and placed him gently on Sean's lap, before clambering up and cuddling in with Kevin between the other four.

"Wow, you're strong!" Davey said in shock after Sean's open arms were accepted for cuddling.

"Vulcan," Joel grinned.

'Huff, huff, huff.'

"I-Cheya!" Teri yelled as a wet nose touched her neck.

'Huff, huff, huff.'

"You need cuddles too?" Teri chuckled.

The still huff-laughing Sehlat plodded around from behind the sofa and placed his head in Teri's lap, his tail wagging furiously. I-Metri, his mother, watched for a moment before grabbing the next available Rugrat for cleaning: Belar, this time. Teri watched in amazement as the massive she-Sehlat effortlessly stripped her 'prey' and began the bath.

Belar went into hysterics.

Timmy looked up from his part in the Time Lord game they were still playing, "My turn next!"

I-Metri huffed slightly, and then Timmy found himself scooped up by Marjur.

"He don't need more excuses to streak," Cory murmured as he watched the tee-shirt with "Belongs to Ricky" go flying.

Allen laughed. "Well, I'm ready to go for this shopping trip, so if the groups have decided who's going, we can leave in thirty minutes."

Gabe nodded, "It's a large group, but we'll split into two teams once there, Uncle. We'd over-load the mall otherwise!"

"I think they can handle your little expedition if you follow that plan!" Teri giggled.

Cory smiled happily, then looked at Sean, "Come on, let's get ready to go, love. I don't think we'd blend in while in these outfits," he laughed, pointing at his white uniform.

Allen smiled and quickly said, "There's no need for you two to come as well. Telez said he'd come with us, since he's linked to Joel too."

Cory smiled and looked at Joel, "I like that idea; that way Joel can surprise us with all of the nice clothes he's going to pick out."

Joel and Kevin gave him matching grins. Jimmy, still snuggled happily on Cory's lap, added, "We'll help him, Uncle Cory; and he'll help us too!"

Gabe smiled, "Okay, guys. Let's get ready. Meet you in thirty, Uncle Allen?"

The man nodded, and watched as Gabe and Travis guided their sons from the room, after Joel had received another round of hugs.

"Need to go to the bathroom," Kevin murmured as he slipped from the sofa. "Poppa? Is Kenny coming too?"

"No, he and Rory need some alone time, little one," his father answered peacefully.

Kevin nodded, then ran out quickly.

Allen stood up and was about to leave to get the last few things ready when he felt his hand taken. He looked down, then knelt to be on eye level with the tiny Vulcan, "Yes, Joel?"

"What do I call you?" Joel asked shyly.

Allen smiled again, "Anything you want, sweetheart. Allen, Uncle, or even dad or pop; I don't mind."

Joel smiled, then looked at the bathroom door that Kevin had just entered. Turning back and curling his arms around Allen's neck he asked, "Poppa? Can I call you 'Poppa' too?"

Thickly, Allen answered, "I'd be very honoured," as he picked up the waif and held him tight before sitting him on his own hip. "Poppa it is... Little Heart."

"Why'd you call me that?" Joel whispered into Allen's ear.

Allen smiled, "You're the smallest Vulcan with the biggest heart that I know, Joel; my Little Heart."

"Jace? JAAAACE!!!!"

"I know that voice!" Cory giggled as he ran back inside CIC after waving Joel off.

Kyle appeared at his side and laughed as well, "Yup! I think it's the Terrible Twosome!"

"CORY! KYLE! YIIIIIPPEEEEEEEEE!!!" came another yell as the blond patriarch and his little brown haired God-powered brother got pounced by blond haired, blue eyed eight year old twins. Both small boys had tears running down their faces, yet happy, wide grins were clear to all present as they picked an old friend to get their long awaited snuggles from.

Sean had followed Cory back in, and stopped with a giggle as he saw the situation. "Let me guess; friends from the Home?" he managed to say between the giggles.

Cory and Kyle both nodded as they cuddled their respective twin. "Hey guys; how you been doin'?"

"We have been..." one twin started.

The other finished, "... missing you like crazy!"

"I still can't tell you apart!" Cory giggled.

"This is Drew. You have Davy!" Kyle giggled as he gave his old friend a kiss on the cheek.

"You always knew..." Drew started.

"... how to tell us..." Davy continued.

"... apart," Ross finished as he ran over to join his big brothers in the cuddles. "Told you, didn't I, Davy? Drew? They hav'n't changed at all!"

"Yeah! You're our favourite..."

"... Cory and Kyle!" the twins bubbled together as they got up and helped their friends back to their feet.

Cory giggled as he picked up Davy, "I'm gonna keep you right here so that you guys don't switch on me!"

Davy giggled, then sobered. "You can tell us apart easy now."

Drew added as he was being held from behind by a grinning Kyle, "Yeah. Show 'em, bro."

Davy pulled the high neck of his polo-shirt down slightly, and revealed a deep, wide scar running across his throat.

Cory winced. "I better not ask how you got that; I might have to kill someone. I liked it better when I couldn't tell you apart. How badly do you want to keep that scar?"

"I don't," Davy murmured as he covered it again. "It makes me sick to look at, and it feels funny all the time. I don't like looking different to my brothers. And don't worry... Korris and Jace; they... they gutted the bastard..." he finished with a whisper. His voice was a mix of horror, fear... and anger.

Cory frowned. "Kyle, either you fix it or I'll find one of your kids to do it."

Kyle nodded. "I'll do my best bro."

Davy looked at Kyle with hope, "I... I didn't wanna ask or nuffin'... I... I just wanted ta see ya, not ask favours and such... but..."

Cory kissed Davy's forehead. "You stop worrying; you're one of us, and we take care of our own."

Kyle came away from Drew and pulled Davy into a tight hug. "Just relax. Let me try," he whispered as both boys started glowing with purple energy.

A moment or so later, and the glow faded. Drew, unable to wait for his brother to build up the nerve to check, came over and yanked off the polo-shirt, leaving Davy in his Spiderman Tee-shirt. No scar.

Davy's hands were all over his throat, then he and his twin were squashing Kyle in a hug so tightly that if Kyle had been human, he would have stopped breathing. "Thank you thank you thank you..." both boys bubbled over and over again.

"First thing's first," Jason giggled from the doorway, "you four git to the kitchen where cookies, brownies and drinks are waiting. Then you sit and talk for a while. You'll only have 30 mins, though lil' bros. We have a task waiting for two Teeps in Utah. You'll get more time tomorrow, though. I'm having you both on detached duty here for a few days... surprising how that worked out, no?"

Sean looked at Jason with sad puppy dog eyes. "No cookies for me?" he asked in a whining tone.

"You great goof! Go follow your piece of cute stuff," Jason laughed as Cory and Kyle took off with the twins and Ross towards the kitchens at warp speed 10. "As if anyone here would deny you anything..."

"Goof?" Sean muttered as he started to walk past Jason with forced dignity. That all changed rapidly as Jason found himself tossed over Sean's shoulder, with the inside of his knees being tickled unmercifully.

"I'll show you 'Goof', Limey!" Sean added as he walked into the kitchen, Jason crying with mirth and begging him to stop.

Kevin was grinning at Joel. Watching the excited Vulcan try and see everything possible all at once through the limo windows was better entertainment than a good movie. Every so often, as they were

travelling through Orlando, Joel would whisper, "Wow, that's cool!" or something to that effect. Kevin would squeeze his hand in response, which in turn prompted Joel to kiss him again.

"I think you do that just to get kisses," Jack Harkness laughed to the brown haired boy, making him blush and nod.

For some unknown reason, Jack had said he would join them. Allen had not objected once he had realised that he would have been the only adult on this trip.

'Huff, huff, huff.'

"I-Cheya, stop laughing," Joel giggled, his face still pressed to the window.

Thump, thump, thump.

"And stop hitting Poppa with your tail!" he added, giggling more.

"How did this Teddy-bear get in this limo?" Jack asked curiously, as he scratched I-Cheya's ear.

Allen laughed, "It was a tight fit, but Sehlat's look bigger than they are, around the middle. Their fur and natural body fat, you see."

'Huff!'

"He wasn't saying you're fat! He was saying you're cuddly!" Joel giggled again.

'Huff, huff!'

"Seriously! *I* think you're cuddly, and I don't think you're fat neither!"

'Huff, huff, huff.'

Jack laughed, "You know, I almost understood that."

Blackie was sitting on Jimmy's lap watching all this and laughing in his wolfish fashion: his tongue was lolled out of the side of his mouth and his eyes were dancing. Then, he turned and bathed Jimmy's face thoroughly.

"Where're the Cats?" Jack asked.

"Other Limo with the other kids. Getting Cub here into this one filled their spaces," Telez sniggered, earning him a tail thump from the cub.

"I-Cheya! Play nice!"

'Huff, huff!'

"No, you can't eat him; blue don't taste good!"

'...huff?'

"No, I-Cheya!"

"We're here," Kevin said through his laughter as the Limo pulled into the parking lot of the Florida Mall.

It took less time to exit the two limos than it had to fill them. I-Cheya was the reason for that, for he chased everyone out of the first, before ambling over to the other and doing the same.

"I give up!" Joel giggled, as he and Kevin stood by Allen and helped Jack to stand.

Joel looked around at the group as they all gathered, or were herded by the cub, together. Gabe and Travis stood next to Justy and Dean and were quietly laughing at the excited cub, while Jamie and Jacob led Jimmy and Davey over to the large bear to climb onto its back for a ride to the door of the Mall. John and Luke Grant stood by the two adults and the four G-Cats, chatting about what to do first.

The G-Cats were standing quietly while the others were chatting, their hoods from their robes pulled up and their faces in shadow.

Jack noticed and tapped Allen's arm. "I think these guys need to loosen up a bit," he murmured quietly to Allen.

Allen nodded and moved to pull the four Cats in closer to himself and Jack. "You're not having fun like the others, guys. What's wrong?"

"We're on guard duty, sir," Mercury explained. "We're Joel's guard."

"And we're on general duty," Artemus added. "We're trained to not draw attention to ourselves."

Allen smiled. "How old are you?" he asked gently.

"I'm 12, and the others are 10; or at least that's our physical ages," Aphrodite said shyly as she looked up at him.

"You're children. You should be playing like the others. That is what people will expect from children, and it will draw less attention than being quiet and hooded," Allen said quietly as he knelt down to look up and under their hoods.

They all blinked at him sadly. "We get stared at in public, Uncle Allen," Artemus murmured quietly. "We don't like being looked at as freaks."

Jack also knelt down and smiled gently, "Look around you. Tell me what you see?"

They did. Near the door to the Mall an Andorian family were entering with their children, and just coming out were a few Denobulans with a mixture of children from many alien races. Mercury nudged the others and pointed to where a human boy of about five had fallen and skinned his knee. The child was being helped by a Vulcan who was healing the wound with a dermal regenerator. The Vulcan then

watched as the child got up, hugged him and ran over to his quickly approaching parents. They smiled, thanked the Vulcan, then moved away.

No-one seemed to be paying the slightest bit of notice to race.

"This is Orlando, kids," John explained as he came over with his younger brother, Luke. "This is the main South Eastern Centre for Starfleet. Aliens are seen all over."

"But we're not aliens," Mercury whimpered as Allen lowered his hood gently.

Allen shook his head, "We know, but to anyone who doesn't, that's how you look. They won't even think much about it, other than trying to work out which world you are from."

Mercury started to smile, his teeth gleaming in the afternoon sunlight.

Hermes lowered his own hood, and his sisters copied him. "What about our training? We're not to draw attention to ourselves."

Jack chuckled, "You have the Secret Service here, don't you? The ones who protect the US President and government?"

"Yeah," they all chorused. Artemus added, "They are the best trained security agency Earth-side. Not in our class, but the best at what they do."

"When the President is giving a speech, then he's in a suit, and so are they. When he's playing golf, they are dressed, look and act like golfers. If he's in jeans and a tee-shirt at the beach, they will be too," Jack explained. "So, if those *you* are guarding are playing, shopping and having fun, then the best way to be 'one of the gang' and blend in, is..." he trailed off, and simply looked at the cats in a leading fashion.

"To play and have fun and shop," Mercury finished slowly, his eyes growing wider. "That way we just look like kids and then if something happens, we'd surprise the perps and no-one will expect us to be guards," he finished with an excited rush. "We get to have fun and *still* look after Joel!"

Jack nodded, "Yep. Now I'd normally say to get out of those robes, but I know from the Tardis Records that G-Cats prefer going around in their fur only. You're not in clothes under those robes, are you?"

"Nope," Hermes giggled, "we're really stand out if we did go in the fur!"

"Hardly," Telez giggled as he came over, "look there." He pointed at another alien family walking into the Mall. They were covered in fur, fairly long, yet it was easy to tell the difference between male and female. "If a race don't wear clothes then they don't have to. Most who join Starfleet learn to, as even on their own space fleets, they know going without protective coverings is a bad move, but on a planet with a mild climate? Do as you want, guys."

Artemus pondered that. "Mmm. No, we're on guard, and we are armed. Heavily. If we were not on duty, then... maybe. No, we'll keep the robes. There's lots of other aliens wearing robes so we won't stand out that way."

Jack nodded, "Sounds like a plan, then. Okay, go and play; have fun, yet you're still able to guard."

After listening to all this, Blackie looked up at Joel, *Ready?*

Joel nodded, and so the wolf pup ran over and nipped at Jack's leg.

"I think we need to go and stop talking," the man laughed.

Allen agreed, "First, we get the guys inside, then we can split the group in two. Let's give Joel, Jimmy and Davey some time together before we overpower the stores!"

They made their way to the doors, but entry inside started out as a near no-show.

"No pets... weird ones included," the security guard said, looking at the large bear-like Sehlat disdainfully. He spared a glance at the kids gathered near and around the cub, and his lip curled at seeing the four G-Cats and the Andorian. Joel received not a second look, however, as his curly hair was settled back over his ears and eyebrows. "Offworlders think they run everything," Joel heard him mutter as he raised his walkie talkie to his mouth to call for assistance.

Allen came forward and started to speak to him, "Sir, the Sehlat is on guard with this group; and we called ahead to ensure his presence would not cause a problem with the Mall management. We were given permission."

"Like hell," the guard replied. "I am not allowing animals inside, especially freak ones and wolves."

"He's not a freak," Joel muttered loudly, yet he was half hiding behind Kevin.

Kevin, for his part, was getting pissed off for the second time that day.

Telez beat the angry eleven year old to it. He opened his Vulcan robe and let it fall to the floor, revealing his VSO dress uniform and rank insignia. "Sir," he started respectfully, yet with an authority he had earned, clearly heard in his voice, "I would imagine you recognise this?" He pointed to the collar of his uniform, and the Commander Insignia.

"You're playing dress up; what of it, kid?" the reply came.

"No, I am not," Telez answered coldly. "I earned this rank and the right to wear the Black of the VSO through blood, sweat, fear and pain; and by this authority, I supersede yours. However, regardless of the rights I hold over even the President of the United States, neither I nor my companions have attempted to pull rank. We called ahead, we cleared this expedition, and your bigotry will not get in the way. Now, I demand that you call your commanding officer to come here, before I dispense summary judgment for standing in the way of a registered Federation envoy," Telez ordered as he walked to stand directly in front of the man.

The guard's face grew red in anger. "Get lost, kid, and go play your games elsewhere. I'm talking to this man, not some snot nosed blue-skinned freak."

Jamie and Jacob started scanning at this point, while Jack Harkness moved forwards angrily. "Hey, less of that. He is a Vulcan Commander, and you will obey his commands regardless of your lack of respect."

The guard's hand moved to his gun, "You better back off; backup is on the way. I knew you lot were going to be trouble."

Telez was seething, yet not from the insult given to him. Jamie had just dumped a massive amount of information into his mind. They were now updating the rest, barring the three boys that the trip was for. "That does it," Telez spat, as he raised his right arm and pointed his clenched fist at the man. "I am arresting you under the Authority of the VSO. If you attempt to fight, you will be stunned."

The guard drew his gun and laughed shortly, glancing back over his shoulder for his backup.

Travis pulled his boys in close and turned to protect them with his back, while Gabe moved in front of them and placed himself facing the guard. He also raised his hand, palm open, and pointed it at the guard.

Jack pulled his own gun out and levelled it, "Do as you are told, son. On you knees; now!"

"Fuck you," the guard spat as he turned back to face Telez and Jack. He was quick; quick enough so that two shots rang out. The first bounced off the shield around Telez and went of harmlessly to the side. The other, however, took Jack directly in the heart.

The thump of Jack's body hitting the floor was loud, and everyone gasped, even Jimmy and Davey who did not even witness it. Everyone except Joel; he just grinned knowingly.

The shots had another effect, however. Those who were carrying weapons all pulled them clear and trained them on the man and started to pull their triggers to fire, but they were all slower than Telez and Gabe who already had their arms extended towards him.

The whine and blast of the wrist mounted VSO phaser on stun, plus the crackling, yellow electrical discharge from Mario the Phasenmorph were quiet compared to the stunning noise from the glass-door that the guard was standing in front of. The reason for the stunning noise was due to the shattering of said glass door due to the force of said 200 pound guard being flung through it.

"Prick," Telez said.

Gabe spat out, "Scum."

Allen was nearly having kittens by this point as he was shielding Kevin and Joel from harm.

"Umm... Poppa? Is it okay for me to say 'Fucking Hell'?" Joel whispered to him as he tugged on the speechless man's hand.

Allen just nodded, and so Joel said it.

Hermes moved to Jack's body and mewed sadly. "Not again. Can't we just have one day without this shit?" he muttered, his mewling being heard in his voice.

"He's not dead," Joel said quietly.

They all looked at the Vulcan. "Joel," came Mercury's puzzled response, "the bullet went through his heart. He's dead."

"Nope. He's not. 5... 4... 3... 2... 1..."

Jack gasped and sat up, making all but Joel jump a mile.

"Told ya!" Joel smiled. "He's Jack; He's immortal!"

"Bastard! He ruined my best shirt!" Jack yelled, throwing the bullet to one side that had plopped out of the now sealed hole in his chest. "I'm going to kill him!"

Joel looked at Telez and Gabe seriously. "What did he do? Why'd he act that way?"

Jamie came forward and answered for them, "Me and Jacob were scanning him, Joel..."

"... and he's a sick, bigoted pervert who's abused kids a lot before..." Jacob continued, looking with disgust at the prone man lying amid the shattered glass of the door.

"... and last night he hurt a boy so badly that he died and then he dumped the kid's body out in the country." Jamie finished.

Joel's eyes went flat in anger and fear, but the anger was winning.

Telez was currently talking into his comm while Gabe had run inside to identify himself to the fast approaching guards and even one police officer. "Confirmed, Lieutenant," Telez was saying, "One man, and on the word of two Vulcan registered Teeps, he is sentenced to death for child molestation, rape and murder. Oh, and the attempted murder of a Clan Short associate."

Close Eyes I-Cheya sent to Joel, Jimmy and Davey. They obeyed quickly; Joel hiding his face in Kevin's neck, while Travis had his two boys still cuddled to his chest.

Vengeance! Joel heard in his heart as I-Cheya sprang forward to land heavily on the unconscious man.

A large gasp came from the assembled onlookers. Even Telez was in shock momentarily. "Uhhh... make that one corpse. Please lock onto the Sehlat and dead body, beam them on board and clean up the cub. He's needed back here... once he's finished his lunch."

A short while later and a rather happy, full and cleaned up Sehlat appeared out of a Vulcan transporter beam. The kids all turned to look at him briefly and waved before turning back and throwing more questions at the Immortal in their midst.

'Huff... *BURP*... huff'

Joel, however, continued to look at his cuddly friend with a new found awe. He shifted slightly on his perch on Allen's lap and asked, "Uh... enjoy?"

Righteous Vengeance. Good

"Then say 'excuse me' when you burp. It means it was good food," Joel said seriously.

Just as seriously, the Sehlat answered, *Evil man. Not good. No say*

Joel pondered that for a moment. "Hmm... 'kay, that's logical."

Teri's House:

"Roger that, Telez," Jason said as he closed the comm. He looked at Brant, "I don't believe this. Where's Cory and Sean?"

Brant, his eyes still wide, mutely pointed through the window in Teri's kitchen towards the teen's house.

"Mmm... if they're 'busy', then it can wait," Jason half smiled.

"Unless they include Timmy and Ricky in their 'fun', I don't think that's a problem," Brant managed. "Come on."

They left at a run, Jason's mother and grandmother watching curiously.

They got to the house and started checking the backyard area that contained the mini-golf course. "Cory?" Jason called.

"In the rest-stop. Join us?" Sean called back.

Brant grinned. "Nothing like giving serious news when naked in a pool," he giggled as he pulled off his clothes and ran over.

Jason shrugged, hovered, stripped and then levitated the rest of the way before plopping down next to Timmy and Ricky. He was in the pool less than two microseconds when both rugrats decided he needed their cute presence and cuddles.

Austin giggled as he splashed Brant, "About time you joined us, bat-boy!"

Brant rolled his eyes, "How many times do i gotta say it... *I can't turn into a bat; that is movie stuff, Mr. Roboto!*"

"Yep; and that is why it's so much fun picking on you with it!" Austin replied as he pulled Brant into a hug.

Jason grinned, "I think little Joel is going to have fun with you, Brandar." He looked at Cory, "Has Joel been told that vampires are real yet?"

"Not yet; Brant promised to let me know when Joel was ready," Cory replied.

Jason nodded, "Good idea. I'm finding it most interesting, personally." He looked at his new friend fondly and reached out and pulled Brant over to help him give Timmy and Ricky hugs. "Love those old myths, and to find they're real; bonus! Plus, your mind still blows me away, dude," he finished with a giggle.

Brant blew a raspberry at him, "Call me Brant, Jace; or you're my next lunch victim!"

Sniggering, Jason agreed quickly. He then turned to the smiling Cory and Sean; and sighed. "As nice as this is, we have something to report; and 'cos it involves a few of your Clan guys and your 'Lil'elf', you need to be in the know even though Tel has... cleaned up the 'problem'."

"And you wondered why I passed on going into a public place with that group?" Cory replied semi-seriously.

"I wish I had gone," Jason murmured. "Umm, lessee; you know that I-Cheya is wild, like his mother? His dad was too, so totally wild?"

Cory nodded.

"Do you know what wild Sehlat's would eat?" Jason asked.

"Anything that doesn't eat them first?" Sean giggled.

Jason half laughed, "They share the top of the food chain on Vulcan with one other creature, and no, not Vulcan's. They are what we'd call man-eaters; or Vulcan-eaters. Well... let's just say that Tel and your twin wonders found someone who ended up sentenced to death... and I-Cheya decided he was hungry..."

"No, we are NOT related!" Brant exclaimed with a stern look at Austin, his smile giving away the humour in the thought he had picked up.

"And the boys the shopping trip was for have responded, how?" Cory asked seriously.

Just as seriously, Jason replied, "I-Cheya told them to look away, and Blackie kept their emotions normal. The three of them are okay; a little shocked as are the majority of the customers at the Mall, but okay. In fact, I-Cheya was beamed to my Interceptor and cleaned up; he's back now and being cuddled by all three of them. There's no damage, Cor, but you'll certainly have three boys with an adventure to tell once they return!"

"Exactly HOW did this 'person' get detected and intercepted?" Austin asked, obviously deciding to give his parents a break and take charge himself.

"The security guard on the door started acting the prick, not letting them take the animals inside with them, even though we'd received clearance. Then he started showing his bigotry against aliens, so Jamie and Jacob started scanning... he had abused many kids in his time, and the last one, last night, died of it and he had dumped the body out in the sticks. May even be near here for all I know. He then resisted arrest by Tel, shot Jack Harkness in the heart, then was stunned; then eaten. Anyway, I have two teams looking for the kid's body now. Least we can do is give the poor thing a decent burial," Jason replied sadly.

"Jack is dead??" Sean asked in shock.

Jason, forcing some humour into his voice, replied, "Nope. You *really* need to watch 'Torchwood' and 'Doctor Who', Horsey-boy! Jack's Immortal, and just a bit annoyed at his shirt being ruined!"

Sean grabbed Jason and pulled him over, tickling him without mercy. "I think you need a bath, *little* brother!" he quipped as he started dunking the smaller patriarch.

Bryce and Xandor, seated outside the pool and snuggling, looked over to them. "We'll go help your teams, Jace," Bryce said before both ported away quickly.

Sean let Jason up for air, then squashed him between himself and Cory, "Keep you out of trouble, Mister."

Jason rolled his eyes as he spat water out of his mouth. "Okay, sending to Nathan that Bryce and Xan are authorised to help; as if they need authorisation." He sighed slightly then and pulled Cory's arm around him tightly. "That poor kid," he murmured, his forced good feeling vanishing.

"Was this guy in it alone?" Brant asked, obviously not happy. "If not, I'd like to take the cub out for a night-time stroll."

Jason's face grew set, "No. And it's personal to two of the little ones with the shopping group; Jamie and Jacob... he was a part of the group that included their bastard 'caregiver' who 'used' them. We have a couple of teams on the investigation into the FCC, and one is in the area. I got them investigating this as well; they're led by Ollie and our Psy-Corps."

"Good; while I don't like to feed, I've decided after what I've seen recently that there are times where my species is useful. I think the Cub and I might make a good team when I need to help with taking out the trash," Brant spat out.

Jason smiled thinly. "If you want to join in with the group, then contact Ollie and Draco; you'll get transported to where they are. That's up to Cor... I mean Sean, though. You're in charge, dude; what say you? Fancy letting Brant here go for a joint operation with Ollie and the Corps?"

Sean looked at Brant curiously. "It's nowhere near time for you to feed yet; what's up bro?"

"Sean, I know that I shouldn't need to feed for a couple of weeks yet, but all of the stress from the attack has messed me up and I'm getting hungry already. I know the telepaths told me that they'd help locate someone who deserve a death sentence, but I still don't feel right doing it. If the Dragon guys are on a Search and Find mission, then if someone gets the death sentence, I can at least do part of it," the young Vampire explained to Sean softly.

Sean nodded. "I trust you, bro. Don't push yourself though; remember that helping sentence three people can do your body just as much good as draining one."

Timmy looked up at Brant and smiled. "This mean you're gonna stay wit' us, Unca Brant? You ain't gonna sun-'west like you was gonna do?"

Brant held out his arms, and Timmy jumped into them. "That's right, Munchkin; I'm gonna hang around my new family here. I've got one of my reasons for hanging around sitting on my lap right now."

Timmy smiled as he snuggled into Brant, wordlessly expressing his approval of the decision.

Jason grinned happily. "Once I get the message from Ollie, I'll send you to be with him, Brant. If I-Cheya is back as well, then he can join in if he fancies a nibble."

Florida Mall:

"It's all settled," Telez reported to Allen as he came back from his talk with the gathered police and Starfleet security detail from the Hood. "Two Dragon groups have been dispatched to find that poor child's body with Bryce and Xandor helping, the orphanage he was in is being contacted, and the police are beginning to accept having a self-feeding Sehlat on their side. We can shop, now."

"We only just arrived, and we have a drama; I'm nervous," Jack half whispered to Allen with a smile.

Allen did not trust himself to answer that, and so he just rose up and placed Kevin and Joel to their feet.

Aphrodite and Artemus, sitting on I-Cheya, giggled. "You guys get fun days out; we have to do this a lot."

Jimmy and Davey looked at them, then each other. "Pop, is it going to be like this all afternoon?" Davey asked Gabe quietly.

Gabe smiled, "No, I don't think so, sweetheart. Come on, let's go shopping."

They moved out of the café and made their way to the nearest children's clothes store and entered. Strangely enough, the other customers gave the Sehlat leading the procession with his two feminine feline riders a wide berth.

Jamie and Jacob glanced at each other. *'I wonder just how much he can eat?'* Jamie mused.

'I bet we find out... that is if the other pervs we heard in here have not run for the hills.' Jacob replied with a small smile.

Growing. Still hungry they both heard as I-Cheya turned his head to wink at them.

'Good; I think I recognised another one of my ex-father's friends in here. I'll let you know if I find him again,' Jamie sent back seriously.

I-Cheya stopped to let the twins draw alongside his head. He gave each a lick. They both felt a warm peace enter their hearts as he sent, *Vengeance Mine, I repay* The voice they heard this time, however, was overlaid with the weirdest sound of rushing waters.

Both boys hugged the living Teddy-bear and kissed his muzzle. "Thank you," they whispered in chorus.

Joel, meanwhile, was standing with Allen, Kevin, Jimmy and Davey at the racks of jeans and running his fingers over some of them in awe. "I get to pick?"

"Sure you do. The three of you," Kevin smiled. "Trav? Can you help your boys? I'll help my best friend!" he called with a happy smile.

Travis laughed and came over.

"Don't let the selection blow your minds; just look at one thing at a time and it'll be easier," Travis explained to his shell-shocked sons. "There is only one rule; you are not allowed to look at the price tags."

Joel had already looked at the tag on a pair of very soft jeans that had felt especially comforting when he ran his fingers over the material. His face paled. He placed the pair back on the rack and turned fearfully to look up at Travis, "S...sorry. I didn't mean to, sir, but I did look at that one."

He then closed his eyes and half cringed in upon himself, waiting for what he knew would happen.

Travis leaned in and kissed Joel's forehead, "That is not a rule you can be punished for, Joel; what it means is that you pick out what you like, no matter what the price is. If you don't look at the price tag, then you don't worry about spending too much."

Joel opened his eyes and regarded the boy. "Okay... Travis," he said meekly. "I'm sorry... You're nice and I sh...shouldn't have thought you'd beat me."

Travis hugged him gently, then picked up the jeans that Joel had been wondering over. He handed them back to the Vulcan and asked, "You liked these?"

"Yes. Soft," Joel answered as his timid smile grew.

"Then they are yours," Travis grinned. "Come on, Kev. Get your cute butt in motion and help your boyfriend!"

Joel blushed deeply. "He's my best friend," he murmured.

At the same time, Kevin had also blushed scarlet and said the same.

"Yeah, uh huh," Travis giggled as he smiled and turned to help his two boys.

"Why don't they believe us, Kev?" Joel asked his furiously blushing friend.

Kevin shook his head and grinned shyly, "Maybe 'cos I love you and 'cos you love me; and they see it."

Joel looked sad for a second. "Do I? I feel Fire, but..."

"I know. Don't worry, Jo'; I understand. Come on, let's look for more jeans."

"But I've already picked one," Joel spluttered.

Allen laughed lightly, "You need more than one set of clothes, Little Heart."

Joel's eyes grew wide... and he turned to start examining some more.

"That's cute!" Kevin giggled, "Literally!"

Joel grinned as he tried on the tee-shirt. 'If you think I'm sweet, gimme a kiss!' was printed in large font on the front.

"About as subtle as a shovel to the face," Jack laughed, "But yes, it's totally you, kiddo!"

Kevin proved it by landing a smacker on Joel's smiling mouth.

Jamie and Jacob were laughing at the sight of Jimmy and Davey in identical tops, each saying 'I'm with stupid'. The only difference between the tops was that the arrows under the writing were pointed the opposite way. They stood side by side and grinned shyly at the rest, with Trav and Gabe standing next to them. Davey then whispered to his brother, and they swapped places; thus the arrows were no longer pointing at each other, but now at their parents.

Tickles were the result of that act.

"That's sweet! Their first act of rebellion... it only gets worse from now," Jack whispered to Allen.

Allen nodded, "I hope Gabe and Trav can cope!"

"Jo', you can't..." Kevin started but was too late to stop his friend from stripping down to try on some boxers.

Joel looked up, "What?"

Artemus grabbed a beach towel from the nearest rack, threw another to Aphrodite and together they used them to screen the two boys from view. Aphrodite was giggling like crazy, while Artemus eyed up the now naked Vulcan. "Pity you're gay, Joel; you're real cute!"

Joel blushed, but continued to try out the boxers. Kevin, however, just mentally agreed with Artemus.

Allen sighed, "This store will never be the same again."

As the group left the store, arms full of bags of clothes and not all for the three main shoppers, for they had all seen something they fancied, they decided to split up. Artemus and Aphrodite elected to go with Gabe and Travis' group, while the Cheetahs, who were specifically assigned to Joel, obviously stayed with him.

"You want to get together later, Joel? We can compare what we found then!" Davey bubbled happily.

Joel nodded, "Deal!"

Jamie, Jacob, Travis, Gabe, their two boys, Dean and Justy moved away with the two female G-Cats, John and his brother acting as their guards.

Moments later, two stores in two different areas of the Mall started to experience the havoc that could be unleashed by a Clan Short Shopping Trip.

Half an hour later, and now with even more bags, Joel and company rested and ate ice cream. Telez giggled, "I'm having this lot beamed back to the Compound; I'm not up to carrying much more!"

"Good idea," Allen said as he broke the conversation he was deeply into with Jack. "Then we can continue; I'm just glad I'm not paying for all this!"

"Can we visit that one, Poppa?" Joel asked, pointing at a book store.

"Sure, Joel," Allen smiled down at the boy just as all their shopping vanished into the transporter beams.

Books. What seemed like miles and miles of books.

Joel was nearly catatonic from information overload.

Then he went still.

He found the religious section. On display, for all the world to see, were books and scriptures from any and all religions from around the world. Even a few from alien cultures.

His eyes found one item in particular; a Special Edition New King James Bible, bound in soft leather with gold leaf writing on the outside.

He lifted it down from the shelf in wonder and gently opened it to read a few lines. "Same," he whispered, tears beginning to run down his face. "It's all the same. It's... it's beautiful."

Kevin gently took the heavy Bible from his now sobbing friend and, without Joel noticing, he handed it to Allen with a wink. He then moved in and guided his friend to the floor to sit and cuddle as Joel let his emotions run their course.

Blackie and I-Cheya moved over with Mercury and Hermes and together they all cuddled around the two small boys.

"Vulcan clothes?!" Joel gasped as he was led into the next store.

Telez giggled, "Yeah! I thought you would like this. It has everything from the other Federation worlds, and even from the Klingon Empire." He then pointed, "Your people's stuff is over there, Joel."

Joel went slightly bonkers, and it was a sight that brought joy to Kevin and the rest. After three minutes, however, Kevin found himself wishing he had stayed outside, as Joel had insisted that his best friend get matching clothes, and so had stripped the brown haired boy and handed him clothes to try on.

It was the first time Joel had seen Kevin completely naked, and he just stood there staring.

The two Cheetahs pulled out the two beach towels that their sisters had used and then bought for this type of thing and played 'shield' while Joel and Kevin eventually dressed. They had to be reminded as they were just looking at each other happily.

Half an hour later and two boys dressed in identical Vulcan attire, left the store, being followed by two cheetahs dressed in Klingon Battle-Armour.

"My tail is squished!" Mercury mewed plaintively.

Hermes nodded, "Yeah; this needs adjusting, like right now!"

Telez crawled out of the store after them, howling in mirth.

Blue - Take Puss-Cats to Ship Blackie nudged the hapless Andorian as Telez rolled onto his back, laughing madly.

"Wis...Wisdom to Y...Yoshuhlnak," he gasped into his comm.

"Receiving, Commander. How can we assist... again?" came the neutral response from the ship.

"Nine to... to beam on-board," Telez managed.

Cory's Backyard, Seventh Hole Rest Stop:

'Jace! We found him... he's alive!' Nathan sent to his husband excitedly. *'Thank GOD that Bryce and Xan were here. He and Riti were flying and Xan saw the boy's foot sticking out of a bush... He was close to death, but Bryce is truly another angel. He's okay!'*

Jason slumped in the water, and only Cory's quick grab at him stopped him from banging his head on the side in shock. *'Bring him here, love! Ask Bryce to do the honours!'*

"What's wrong?" Sean asked in worry.

"They found the 'body', only the kid's alive! I'm calling Vicky... That boy's going to need emotional healing, and we don't call my sister 'Heart' for nothing," Jason murmured, his face filled with joy and relief. His eyes shone briefly.

"S'okay, Uncle Jace; I'll fetch her!" Levi smiled as Vicky appeared, dripping and with shampoo in her long hair.

She looked around, then down at the boys in the rest-stop pool, shrugged and hopped her naked self in there to rinse her hair. "Okay," she said as she came up from rinsing, "What's the emergency, Leev?"

Brant giggled, "I'd have thought you'd have freaked at that, Vic. If I'd have been ported naked into a group of girls, I'd be having words with Levi!"

She giggled and shrugged again. "One, most here are gay, and so I just look pretty to them and nothing more. Two, I'm not Tony; shy ain't my middle name. Three, what's wrong with my cute bod, Bat-boy?" she giggled finally, showing that Jason had already caught her up on current issues.

Brant stared at Austin, "I need to ask Uncle Marc about reprogramming you... to a toaster!"

Before Austin could make a come back, Bryce ported in, bringing Riti, Xandor and Nathan with him. Cuddled securely in Riti's arms was a tiny little boy, no more than four or five years old. He had strawberry blond hair, and vivid green eyes... and there was something oddly familiar about him.

"Oh crap... I know that brain signature..." Austin stated in shock.

"I agree Austin... there is only one family with that signature..." Brant added.

"Uh huh," Nathan nodded. "He's related to our two newest N-Gens." Nathan glanced down at the shocked look on Cory's face, "This is Jamie and Jacob's brother; half brother."

"Do they know about him?" Cory asked, concern in his tone.

Jason's eyes went unfocused for a second. "No," he said finally. "But I-Cheya is going to deal with that right now..."

Florida Mall:

"Ahhhhh! That's much better, now my tail ain't half shoved up my ass!" Hermes sighed in relief as they all appeared in the food-court of MacDonalds.

Joel was still in Allen's arms, crying with laughter, and Telez had only just finished breathing into a brown paper back to stop his hiccups of mirth.

"Battlecats... HOOOOOO!" Justy exclaimed as the groups rejoined, causing a whole new round of giggles.

Joel fell out of Allen's arms as both he and the man dissolved afresh. I-Cheya saw this coming and was already lying on his back, so Joel landed limply on the bear's furry tummy.

Hermes and Mercury struck a battle-pose and growled at them all, before falling over laughing as well.

Jimmy ran over to the still giggling Joel and said, "Wow, you look great! Look at what we found!"

Joel pulled himself together enough to examine his new friend's track-suit and sneakers. He started giggling again, for both the top and sneakers had the Thundercats on them.

I-Cheya started huffing slightly just then. He rolled over and got up. Moving over to Jamie and Jacob, he gave each another spirit-healing lick before simply looking into their eyes.

"A... we have a little brother?" Jamie whispered in awe.

"Ummm... what... we WHAT!" Justy exclaimed as he rushed over to pull his two little brothers into a hug.

Blackie nipped at Justy's heel, and then stared up at the fourteen year old for a moment.

Justy tilted his head, "Oh shit... remind me to burn I-Cheya's sh... faecal matter for my own revenge on that bastard."

Allen spoke seriously, then. "Listen; we can continue shopping here. You four," he pointed at the three brothers and included Dean as well, "need to go back and meet that poor boy."

Joel nodded, happy tears leaking from his eyes, "Yeah. He needs great big brothers too, just like the ones I have!"

"Go on, Uncle Justy; Joel's big teddy-bear will protect us," Davey added, Jimmy nodding his agreement.

'Huff, huff, huff.'

Dean, Justy and the twins suddenly vanished, leaving behind a shower of golden sparkles.

I-Cheya turned and sent, *Mikey*

Allen smiled at the gathered boys, "Okay. Now that the cats are no longer meowing at us about their tails," he tickled Mercury behind the ear as he said it, "we can get food. If you will tell either myself or John what you want, we'll order it for you. It'll be easier than all of us lining up."

That made sense, but Joel was still completely lost as to what he should or could order. Kevin smiled at the confused look on his best friend's face. "Poppa? Can you choose something you think Joel'll like for him, please?"

"Sure thing, Little One," Allen smiled at his son before looking at the Vulcan cuddled into his arms, "I think we'll try you on a Big Mac meal first, Joel. But if you don't like it, just say."

Joel nodded his head with relief. "Don't worry, Poppa. I never waste food."

Allen came over and knelt down to look him in the eyes, "That is a good thing, Little Heart, but you don't have to eat something that you don't like the taste off. Unless it is medicine, then food should taste nice; okay?"

"Okay, Poppa," Joel murmured with a quick, happy hug around Allen's neck.

John and his brother were giggling when they got to Allen. John sniggered, "The cats are arguing. The cheetahs want to try something, but it's still not evening, and their sisters are telling them to just have some milk."

Allen turned and beckoned them all over. "If you ate now, boys, what would happen?"

Before either of the cheetahs could answer, Artemus spoke up, "They'd eat like starved pigs, make a mess, likely put the squishies off their food, and then sleep... for HOURS!"

"But we can TASTE something! We won't get sleepy with JUST a taste!" Hermes shot back at her.

Allen tried and succeeded in holding his laughter. "Ladies and Gentlecats; I know a little about cheetahs in the wild, and if there was a little food about they would pig out on it. But, if you promise to only have a patty each, I don't think it would harm. Just don't start going on a hog-frenzy and steal everyone else's, okay?"

Artemus rolled her eyes. "Me and my sis will make sure of that, Uncle Allen."

Hermes and Mercury blew them raspberries and went over to sit near to the Sehlat and wolf pup. "Blackie will want his cooked," Hermes called over.

I not hungry I-Cheya sent a second later.

Allen murmured under his breath as he turned to join the line, "Not surprised!"

Ten minutes later and they were all eating. Again, Kevin was seated next to Joel, and each boy's arm was around the other's waist. Joel was happily stuffing himself with the fries, and pausing every so often to pop another one into Kevin's mouth. He then opened his burger and looked at it curiously; his nose sniffing on overtime. "Mmm, smells okay," he murmured and took a large bite.

A few bites later, he offered it to Kevin.

Kevin tensed up slightly, and Joel felt disgust roll off him through their contact. "What's the matter?" he whispered to Kevin.

Kevin looked at Joel seriously. "I don't eat much, Joel; but I like it when you feed me... but I can't eat that."

Joel placed the burger down into its box. "What's wrong?" he asked again.

"Bad memories," Kevin said slowly, not wanting to explain with everyone around. "Burgers make me feel sick if I think of eating one. The bread, the tomatos, that's all okay, but not the meat. Not in that shape."

Joel hugged his friend tightly. "You liked the meat we had at lunch time, yes?"

"Yeah, that's okay. I'd eat burger meat as well, but not in... not in that shape. Bad memories," Kevin answered into Joel's hair as he enjoyed the hug.

Joel pulled back and smiled again, "Okay. I don't wanna force ya if you don't like something. I'll eat the meat thing, and you can have some of the veggie stuff?"

Kevin smiled widely, "Okay. And those fries are good too. I like them."

Joel looked down. "Oh... um, they're all gone... sorry, Kev..."

Allen, seated next to Joel, smiled. "Don't worry, Little Heart. I'll get you some more."

Joel smiled up at him then turned and kissed Kevin on the lips. He then giggled once the kiss broke; for he popped a tomato slice into Kevin's mouth immediately upon doing so.

After chewing and swallowing, Kevin murmured, "Love you, Jo'."

Joel grinned more, and hugged him again - telling him the same, just through actions instead of words...

Cory's Backyard, Seventh Hole Rest Stop:

The boy was sucking his thumb while sitting on Victoria's lap. She was humming an old song quietly as she pulled a comb through the naked boy's shoulder length hair as they both relaxed in the pool with the others. Her 'magic' had worked, and the fear and horror the boy had been radiating was gone, replaced with peace and wonder. Riti was sitting on the edge and rubbing the boy's back in slow, easy circles.

The boy was beginning to feel safe now, as well.

Jason looked at his sister and winged brother. "Are you two thinking what I think you're thinking?" he giggled.

"Nope. We've thought what you think we were thinking. We're doing," Riti replied as he spared one eye to glance at Jason. "I'm a dad, and no one is stopping me!"

The boy sucked his thumb harder as he smiled around it upon hearing that.

Victoria continued to hum contentedly, a mysterious smile on her face.

"I've brought some clothes like you asked, Vic," Koth called out as he came around the side of Cory's house, "but why... do you... well, I'm a Targ! You're adopting?" he trailed off as Victoria sent him her mind-burst.

"Yes," she whispered, kissing the boy's cheek.

Suck - suck

"Awww! He's cute, all right! Reet, bro? Congrats! I couldn't think of a nicer Mam and Dad for him!" Koth bounced happily, dropping the clothes onto the 3rd hole starting area. He ran over and yanked off his shorts before joining the rest in the pool. "Hey, little guy; I'm your Uncle Koth!"

The boy regarded him for a second, took his thumb out of his mouth long enough to give a Timmy-Class sloppy kiss to Koth's lips, then...

Suck - suck - suck

"When can I teach 'em to pounce?" Timmy asked eagerly. "Allie's comin' over to meet 'em too. Was-shis name?"

"'m Ather," the boy said around his thumb.

"Arthur?" Cory asked.

The boy giggled. "No silly!" he said as he pulled his thumb out of his mouth again. "'m Asher!"

"Kew! I'm Timmy, this is my Daddy Cory an my Poppa Sean an my big bro Austin an my boyfriend Ricky an our Uncle Brant. Here comes Allie to swim wit' us; you'll like her, she's nice," the Fireball rushed out excitedly as the 'gator slid into the pool easily and settled near an empty side to watch.

Asher's eyes lit up and he grinned at the two munchkins, then reached and patted Allie softly on her snout.

"How old are you, Asher?" Koth asked as he stroked the boy's cheek gently.

Asher held out a hand and tucked his thumb in. "'m dis many!" he said proudly.

A shower of golden sparkles was the only warning those in the pool had for the arrival of four more bodies.

"I'm going to find a way to kill a Saint; I swear it," Dean muttered as he clambered out and started removing his soaked boots and clothes.

"Nice aim, Mikey!" Cory giggled as he looked up.

"What do you mean?" came the reply. "I was trying to get them to land upside down!"

Austin giggled, "They musta used cat genes when they made the Vifers, then."

"Ha ha, nephew," Mikey's voice echoed as Austin found himself upside down in the water, his bare butt breaking the surface.

"Ewwww -- Android butt!" Brant giggled as he helped Austin back upright.

"Who're dey?" Asher asked, pointing at the twins who were trying to get their clothes off yet remain in eye contact with the tiny boy. "Dey looks like me!"

Bryce giggled, "Let me help you, Uncles!"

The four new arrivals found that their clothes were piled up on the side, then, and were instantly dried. The twins rushed over and stood at Victoria's knees, just looking at their little brother. "We're... we're your big brothers," Jacob said happily, his voice squeaking with emotion.

"Really?" Asher bubbled. "I has big brudders?"

"Yeah; we kinda didn't know we had a little brother either until a couple of minutes ago," Jamie replied as he took one of Asher's hands.

Jacob took Asher's other hand, then clasped free hands with Jamie. Their actions were unconscious, yet the results were visible to all present. A blue spiral of energy began building around them; at first it was a few wisps, but it steadily built up until it was a globe which lifted them up and enclosed the trio.

//I Bind thee together, and never shall ye be parted, one from the other. Distance and Time mean naught; thou art one... Time, Love and Blood! Thus saith Forever//

The Doctor's voice came from nowhere, then, "I Attest to the Binding of Time."

Levi spoke up, "I Attest to the Binding of Love."

"I Attest," came a new voice, one that only Levi recognised, "to the Binding of Blood."

Forever spoke again, **//You cannot be unlike your brothers. Power like Power, Heart like Heart, Love like Love//**

The power then radiated out and enveloped Jason, Nathan and Victoria. Surprisingly, Justy and Riti were also included. They were all drawn into the sphere of power with the other three.

//I name thee the Ka'Inri, the Mind-Walkers. Wield thy Powers with Care, Love and Justice//

The power slowly vanished, and all the kids involved were gently lowered back into the pool.

"Well..." Cory started to say, but stopped. What could be said to that?

"Ka'Inri," Jason mused. "N-Gens. Well, we now have a name... I'm guessing we're a species, or something?"

Levi giggled at him, "Nope, still Intermediate. You guys are just something else, including all N-Gens that ain't here."

Jason nodded, "I agree with Sammy's attitude. I just like being me, so that's okay then."

For the next few minutes they all remained quiet as Jamie and Jacob remained in a cuddle with Asher, the three mentally spending that time getting to know each other, both past and present.

Meanwhile, Riti had moved over to Jason slightly. "What was I doing in all that?" he asked in concern.

Jason turned to face him, and then gasped.

Riti's eyes were glowing blue.

Florida Mall:

Jimmy, Davey and Joel were dribbling, and it was not because of some delicious looking food... but over the Mac Pro with a 30 inch flat-screen on display. "I... I've never seen one so... so..." Joel whispered.

Kevin giggled and looked up at his Poppa. Allen bent down and whispered, "Note taken, we'll get Gabe to grab one for each of them later."

Standing taller, Allen got Joel's attention, "Come on, Little Heart. We still have a few places to go."

"Okay, Poppa," Joel whispered as he moved towards Kevin, his eyes still fixed on the Mac.

Gabe grinned at Allen. "I think we'll head off that way," he pointed, winking at the grown-up.

Allen nodded, and took the little Vulcan's free hand. "Come on, Joel. Time for a hair cut."

Joel gasped and started to tremble.

Kevin whispered to him comfortingly, "Don't worry. They won't hurt you, and I'll have one too."

Joel nodded numbly.

His fear did not last long. Soon, he and Kevin were side by side having their hair washed, and Joel was nearly purring at the attention of the hairdresser.

"What would you like?" she asked him as he sat in front of the mirror. "A normal Vulcan cut?"

Joel grinned, shocking the teenage hairdresser. "My hair's curly; I don't think it will stay in that shape."

"Mmm," she murmured, "You're not a normal Vulcan, are you?"

"I've never been trained... I don't know who my Vulcan family is..." Joel whispered a bit sadly.

"Aww, don't worry, sweetie. My uncle's in the Fleet, and I know what they're like," she said. "They'll find them for you. Now, I think I can get your hair partly like a Vulcan's, but it'll still be curly. At least people will get to see your cute eyebrows and ears, okay?"

"That'll be cool," Kevin giggled from the chair next to Joel.

She looked down and saw that the two boys were holding hands. "Ah. Well, I know who really wants to see your cute face now, don't I, sweetie?"

Joel blushed.

Meanwhile, in the Rec Room, CIC:

"They stopped glowing now?" Riti asked Jason as he watched his big brother get up from the bath I-Metri had just given him.

"Yes, Reet. You're back to your normal insane self again," he grinned as he accepted the towel the Lo'Garn handed to him.

Riti stuck a webbed finger up at Jason and blew a raspberry. Then, more seriously, he asked, "Does Levi know why I'm all glowie like you yet? I feel no different."

Jason shook his head as he started to pat himself down, "Nope. There's nothing in your head different, so I really don't know either. But Leev said he'd keep an eye on you. Has Antony arrived back yet?"

Riti nodded and pointed to the Dining Room, "Yeah; he and Tyne are sampling the cake. Rusty is there too, and Tel."

"Cool, cool," Jason giggled. "Okay, you go play with your new son, bro. I'm going to have a quick word with Justy about getting him, Dean, and the Twins an apartment in Wales for when they visit."

Riti cheeped at him briefly, then went back to Victoria and Asher, who was playing happily with Paulie, Belar and Ross.

Jason wandered into Main CIC while still drying himself down. "That Sehlat can't half get one wet!" he giggled to himself.

"Um, Jace? Where's your clothes?" Justy asked curiously as he noticed the Welsh boy enter. "And weren't you already dry?"

Jason grinned, "I-Metri felt I'd not cleaned up quite enough, so I was waylaid, de-'furred' and bathed... again..." He glanced behind him and a Vulcan robe flew into his hand. "Your kid bro is having a blast with Bel and Ross, lil' cousins," he giggled at the twins.

"Division Commander Evans, we've got something that you need to see, here," Justy said formally, standing slightly straighter.

Jason jumped into the his robe and moved over to them. "Okay, hit me with it, Commander," he said, also fully serious.

"Our brothers Philip and Randy, and their father, have uncovered evidence of corruption in Starfleet Engineering. May we seek the assistance of VSO Dragon Division?" Justy requested formally.

Jason quirked an eyebrow. "Our orders are to defend Vulcan and assist in defence of the Federation. Internal Starfleet is part of Section 31's area. Do you have any evidence of direct action taken against a Vulcan interest by these corrupt Starfleet members? If not, I shall contact my opposite number in the Section."

"We have evidence that suggests the FCC are involved with the corruption of Starfleet, and may have been the motivating factor behind it. IF the FCC was involved, then yes, it would be an act of war against Vulcan, in the form of our Clan. If not, then we can leave it to Section 31 -- but reserve the right for the two Clans to be involved if the evidence of FCC involvement proves to be accurate." Justy responded calmly.

"You are *sure* about this evidence? That it points to a tie to the F.C.C.?" Jason asked intently.

Jamie nodded. "I'm sending what we have to you now, Jace."

Jamie did so, and Jason's eyes widened. He tapped his comm, "Voice to Fire Eagle; have you got any leads on the Target yet?"

"Yes, Voice," came the reply. *"Sending what I have so far, and I don't like it. Do you have anything that adds confirmation?"*

Jason's eyes grew distant as he received a telepathic dump from Fire Eagle, "That is confirmed; Big time. I shall Send what I have in a few moments, just get your team to San Francisco Academy and await my orders. Also, contact S-31 and have as many teams as they can spare to join with you there. I shall be making a request of VSO Command; one I never thought I'd have to make."

"Dad, does this mean...?"

"Yes, Ollie. Code Red-Red-001."

"Confirmed Code Red-Red-001," Ollie replied, his voice both excited and nervous. *"Let the Enemy Beware the Dragon. Fire Eagle out."* and the comm went silent.

"Commander Dodds, Captains, your request is granted," Jason confirmed formally as he faced his cousins.

"What does that code mean?" Jacob asked with interest.

Jason replied, "The F.C.C. have not only struck out at Vulcan by attacking you, they have also tried to undermine Starfleet. What my son has just sent me fills in some of the holes in the information you have. Vulcan's High Command is at War with the FCC. The VSO now join with the High Command. We are now at War."

"War? You can call for war on behalf of the VSO?" Justy asked in wonder.

Jason nodded, "Yes. Now, please excuse me for a while, Commander. I have to start liaising with VSO Command and Section 31."

Justy nodded and watched as Jason moved to the far end of the room. Jamie and Jacob cuddled into his side and smiled up at him. Jamie giggled, "This is exciting. And when did we become Captains, bro?"

Nathan walked in with the Queen and Prince Harry. Nathan glanced over at Jamie and grinned at his question, "Just now, obviously. Your Blue VSO uniforms are on order and your training will start next week. If you want to go for the Black, you'll be evaluated. Jason never lets anyone go to Vulcan for testing until he is sure first. Personally, if you want it, I advise you to NOT ask. He won't say yes for you. Trust me, he's looking out for you. It's up to you though. Now, I need to help him. Be with you in a few." He then went towards Jason with his Grandmother and Harry following quickly.

Seth chuckled as he watched the emotions on the twin's faces, "About time someone surprised you two!"

Jamie and Jacob stuck out their tongues at Seth just before an incoming call took his attention, "Clan Short Headquarters, Seth speaking."

"Seth, this is Janet Marshall, Summerville CPS. I have an unusual request to make of your Clan."

"Unusual requests are our speciality," Seth replied. "How may I help you?"

"I have a young boy here who lost his father in the recent battle," Janet replied. "Witnesses stated that his father was killed after disposing of a man who was trying to kill a boy. This youngster would like to meet the boy that his father died trying to save, if he's still alive. While I'm confused as to how it can be done, Governor Jacobs assures me that you have methods to trace down who this boy was."

Seth nodded to himself. "You are right, this is an unusual request, but I believe we can assist. What is the name of the young boy with you, and what was his father's name?"

"Liam MacKendrick, 6 years old, and his father was Duncan MacKendrick, Charleston Police officer in charge of Advanced Cadet Training. Liam's mother, Dawn MacKendrick, died in childbirth on him. She had no known living family, but Officer MacKendrick is survived by an aunt, uncle and cousin in the United Kingdom. Liam will be heading there in the next few days as they are his only known surviving relatives."

'I'm on it Seth.' Kyle's voice said in Seth's head.

"Our Intelligence team is in the process of locating the information now. I expect results within the next two minutes; would you like one of our people to prepare Liam for..."

Seth paused as Kyle's voice hit his brain. *'Tell her that the boy is alive!'*

Seth continued his sentence; "Since the boy is alive, we can have someone come over to escort Liam to meet him."

Seth looked over at Harry, and grinned as Harry nodded his head. "In fact, I think we have just the person to escort a soon to be British citizen."

Janet had just enough time to recover from the quickness of how fast the information was found. *"I think that would be wonderful; I'll let Liam know that his wish is granted. When should I expect him or her?"*

Harry walked to Seth, "Ms Marshall, I shall be transporting over in ten seconds. Is that acceptable?"

Janet started to laugh, *"Quite; Liam is looking very happy with that statement. Now, why do I recognise that voice?"*

"You'll see," Harry chuckled as he tapped his comm. "Draco; transport me to Ms Marshall's location, please."

'Energising,' Draco replied mutely.

Seth chuckled as Harry disappeared, "This should be fun!"

Janet laughed, *"I can tell you are still kids; let me take care of Liam and I'll contact you in a little while to see how things are going. Thank you, Seth."*

"Feel free to call any time, Janet," Seth replied.

"Have a great day," Janet replied before ending the call.

"Took you long enough!" Kyle exclaimed as he appeared in Seth's lap. "You know, I coulda got a nice tan waiting on the roof for you to finish!"

Seth poked Kyle's ribs, causing Kyle to giggle as Seth replied "Do you have a report for us, King Kyle?"

"Quit with the King stuff, dork-face," Kyle giggled. He then looked at Jamie, "Liam's dad was the man who saved you, Jamie! He shot the guy who hit you over the head with that baseball bat, but he was hit by a shotgun blast to the chest seconds later. He died to save you. There's something else you guys need to know, though, but we'll find that out once Harry gets here with Liam. That boy has more family than just the one he knows about. This is gonna be fun," he finished, looking over at Jason briefly. Jason was still deep in conversation with Nathan and the Queen and failed to pick up on it, however.

Jamie and Jacob caught the look, though; and started to grin.

"Hey Draco, when Prince-boy decides that he's ready to bring our guest back, let me do the honours; Levi insists that I need to practice more!" Kyle announced as he grinned at the waiting faces around him.

'As you wish,' came the quiet response from a rather muted Draco.

"Prince to Clan Short; request relayed by Draco. Taxi Service when ready, Little Angel," Harry's call came twenty seconds later. *"And get my grandmother over as well; she's going to love this... I THOUGHT I recognised that name!"*

'Granma Lizzy? Can I pop you over here? We have a good surprise for you!' Kyle sent to the Queen. Once she nodded her assent, he transported her over. Kyle held out his arms for a cuddle; once he was securely in the Queen's arms, Harry appeared on Seth's lap with a little boy securely in his arms.

"Uh... Hi, Seth!" Harry spluttered with a goofy grin. "Say, do you have a phaser in your pocket, or are you..."

"That will be enough around young ones, Henry!" the Queen admonished with a small smile. She took a look at the little boy in his arms. "Well, hello, Liam. It's been a while since I saw you."

The six year old looked up at her and smiled, although it did not quite reach his sad eyes, "Hi, Auntie Lizzy."

Jason and Nathan wandered over to see who the newcomer was, and why the third member of their war-council had to be popped away from them.

Kyle nodded at Liam as he motioned for Jamie to come over. "Hi, Liam; I'm Kyle. How did you like your escort?"

"Great. I like Harry, he's fun," the boy smiled at the eight year old in his Aunt Lizzy's arms. "I've not seen 'im for a whole year! He gives great tickles." He then looked around at the others, "Can I see the boy my daddy went to heaven to save? I'd like to see if he's nice. My daddy was nice, and as long as the boy is, then my daddy would be happy. I'd know."

Kyle nodded, "I'm gonna introduce you in a second, but I need ta show you why he don't look hurt now. It might be a little scary to you if you don't know what's about to happen; I'm kinda a special kinda kid, and Granma Lizzy can tell you that I'm not gonna do anything bad."

The Queen nodded at Liam, "You can trust Kyle, little one. He's got a few powers that are going to seem like magic, but he will not hurt you."

"Okay," Liam replied as he slid down off Harry's lap. The Queen lowered Kyle to the floor and both boys vanished.

Jason had a curious expression on his face. "That kid looks familiar," he murmured. Then, "Granma? How do you know him?"

"His father's aunt is the Countess of Mar, Margaret Alison. I last met Liam and his father last October," she replied.

"Oh, okay. What of his mother's side?" Jason queried.

"Unknown," Seth answered, and the Queen nodded. "Draco just dumped the records here a moment ago and I was looking... while getting a nice armful of Prince as well, of course!"

The Queen chuckled, then explained further, "Dawn MacKendrick, born Dawn O'Keefe. Her mother died twenty years ago. Father unknown."

Jason's forehead remained creased as he thought hard. He re-ran the boy's face through his mind. "Oh, hell... please don't tell me... Draco? Do you have the DNA profile for Dawn MacKendrick?"

'Yes I do,' came the response.

"Please compare and contrast with Patrick O'Hare," Jason requested.

'The Bastard? Okay. Working,' Draco half giggled. A second later, *'Match found. Paternal likelihood, 100%. That man was busy when he was younger, wasn't he?'*

Jason sighed, "You can fucking say that again - the arrogant, hypocritical cun..."

"Jason!" the Queen interrupted him sternly. "Watch your mouth!"

"Sorry," he mumbled ungraciously.

"But we were learning new words!" Jamie exclaimed as Justy was joined by Dean, both standing by Jamie's side.

Kyle reappeared with Liam and giggled, "You're too young!"

Liam glanced at Jamie, and climbed into his arms to hug him.

Jamie smiled. "You're a pretty special little guy; I'm Jamie, you wanna be friends?"

"Daddy says that you are a very special boy. He's happy that you are the reason he went to be with Jesus. And yes, I wanna be your friend; you *are* nice," the kid murmured softly into Jamie's shoulder. "Your brothers too."

Dean had quietly joined the group during the arrival of Liam, and smiled as he placed an arm around Justy's waist. "You know, babe, considering how much training your little brothers have given you in hiding your thoughts, it's a miracle that I can still read you like an open book. You got the best little brothers in the world by following your heart; don't stop now."

Justy turned to look at Dean. "You sure? It's not gonna be fa...."

Dean placed a finger over Justy's mouth. "It will work out; things always do when you are involved. You know what you need to do."

Jason shared a knowing look with Nathan. "I think we had that expression on our faces when we first saw Belar, didn't we, love?" Jason giggled to his husband.

"Oh, my, yes. I do believe we did, Jace," Nathan grinned impishly at Justy.

"Well, our newly found little cousin with our other cousins works out well, don't it?" Jason sniggered, making everyone except the Queen and Kyle look at him in shock.

Liam was the first to speak, "Little cousin? Me? But..."

Jason smiled at him softly, then looked over his shoulder to see his mother enter.

"You Sent for me, Jace?" she asked curiously.

"Mam? You know you said you were an only child?" he asked.

Angela nodded, "Yes. I am."

"Well, technically, you are now. You did have a half sister that none of us knew about, but she died in childbirth. Seems like 'grandfather' isn't the 'moral' man he shouts about all the time," Jason explained, "Oh, and this cutie hugging Jamie is your nephew."

Liam was quickly looking between both Jason and Angela. He paused as he stared at the woman. "You look like pictures of my Mommy!" he almost shouted.

Angela walked over and gently touched the boy's cheek before scooping him up and into a hug. *I'm going to kill that man who calls himself my father,* she sent to Jason.

Jason nodded seriously. *Yes, all the more so 'cos if he'd BEEN there, this kid wouldn't be as orphaned now! His dad died on Saturday, Mam.'*

Angela nodded slightly, then whispered to the child in her arms, "What's your name, cariad?"

"My name's not that!" he half giggled. "I'm Liam!"

Angela smiled more, "I'm your Aunt Angela, Liam. I'm so very glad to meet you."

Liam grinned fully at her, "I didn' know I has another Auntie!"

"We're your cousins too, sweetie," Jason giggled.

"Kewl!"

Angela turned to Jason and asked, "Who is going to look after this child now?"

Jason smiled and glanced at Justy, and raised an eyebrow leadingly.

"Jeeze... no pressure or anything!" Justy giggled. "I haven't even had a turn at welcoming him here with a cuddle yet!"

Angela laughed and handed over the little boy into Dean's and Justy's arms.

Dean took his turn first, knowing instinctively that once Justy took a turn things would move quickly. After a minute or so of cuddles, he looked into Liam's eyes. "You ready, little one?"

The boy cocked his head to one side, then beamed a truly happy smile at him, "Daddy said that you are my Poppa now. And he said the Golden Angel is my new Daddy." Liam turned to look at the shocked face of Justy and reached out as if to touch something that only he could see, something that was coming from Justy's back. "My Angel Daddy!"

"I told ya so!" Kyle giggled as the twins fell to the floor holding their sides.

"Me too!" Mikey's voice echoed through the room.

Justy rolled his eyes and took Liam into his arms. To his surprise, he felt a peace wash over him that had been missing from his life since the attack. He looked into Liam's eyes and smiled as he replied, "I'll be your Angel forever if you'll let me, little one."

Liam kissed Justy sloppily, then reached and pulled Dean over to do the same. They held him tight between them.

A whisper, for that was all it was, came:

//Once, Two Hearts were Full, but Child's Heart did Groan. Now, Three Hearts are Filled - Never More Alone//

Clan Short Garage:

A few hours later, and more money spent between the entire group than Allen had ever earned in his life, and the two limos pulled into the Clan Garage. I-Cheya, once again, did his thing and hustled everyone out of the vehicles, and Joel was happily bouncing around in his Vulcan clothes with Kevin looking like a mirror image. The only difference was their ears and skin colour, and the fact that while they both had Vulcan style haircuts, Kevin's was still spiky like Kenny's, while Joel's was, if anything, even more curly than before.

Cory and Sean were waiting for them as the group started moving towards them, and their hearts were skipping with joy to see their little brother happy, laughing and playing without fear as he bounced on over.

"Did you have fun, Lil'elf?" Cory asked as he watched the animated group start showing off their booty from the mall raid. Out of the corner of his eye, he spotted Davey and Jimmy, both holding a parent's hand with death-grips, gingerly giving Mike a framed picture of themselves. 'It's a start; they are trying,' Cory thought to himself as they allowed a quick hug from Mike before returning to the safety of Gabe and Travis.

Joel nodded happily, "Yeah. Me and Jimmy and Davey got LOADS of stuff, and then we played on some arcade games and then we had a... what was that meat thing, Kev?"

"Big Mac," Kevin chortled.

"Yeah, a Big Mac meat thing, then we saw some AWESOME computers, and then went for a hair cut... look, it's kewl, ain't it?" he asked, as he gave his big brothers a twirl on the spot.

"You definitely look like the best-looking Elf on Earth!" Cory replied. "I think it's awesome!"

"Agreed! We should get pictures of you two; you look awesome! You made some great choices!" Sean added.

"Kev helped lots, and Jimmy and Davey did too! They were brill..." Joel then continued, at a mile a minute, to explain his afternoon.

Kyle and Tyler ambled over on I-Cheya's back, and Tyler sent to the giggling Cory and Sean, *'Where are we sending his stuff? Has a room been picked out for him yet? Mom's house, yours or an apartment next to ours in the Pool Building?'*

'He's got a room at our place, but he should have an apartment too for when he wants to have alone time,' Cory replied.

'Okay, so the empty room next to yours?' Kyle asked with a grin. *'Plus a case of ear-plugs?'*

'Sure, you can get them while you are getting you and Ty another case of lotion,' Cory shot back.

'Bite my immortal, cute butt, Blondie!' Kyle giggled as he and Tyler, and a large amount of the shopping, vanished.

'Huff, huff, huff' I-Cheya laughed as he grabbed the still jabbering Joel and tossed him onto his back, followed by Kevin. He then turned and nosed Cory and Sean a few times. They took the hint and climbed up as well. "You sure, boy? We're not too heavy?"

Insulted I be. You all baby weight I-Cheya snorted, then, *Hold fur*

They all did so as the large cub moved off at breakneck speed towards Teri's house with the four G-Cats and Blackie running alongside him.

When they got there, Teri and Angela met them at the door. "Well, well; look what the Sehlat dragged in," Angela quipped with a chuckle.

Meredith, Jason's grandmother, and Gwyn, his grandfather, came up behind them. "Now that is a group of fine young men for me to tease rotten," the elderly man said with a wink at Joel and Kevin who were riding practically on I-Cheya's neck.

"How are you feeling, Joel?" Teri asked as she came over and lifted the boy into her arms.

He watched for a second as Meredith did the same for Kevin before answering, "I'm good, Mama. Do you like our clothes? They are real Vulcan ones!"

"They are amazing. They suit you, both of you," she smiled as she kissed his cheek. She put him down to his feet gently, and then helped her other two boys off the large animated Teddy-bear. "We have

Tommy and the double Pauls making pizza. You know how Tommy gets when people are late to feast on the product of his hard work, so get yourselves inside," she said lovingly.

"Yes Mom!" Cory and Sean both giggled, I-Cheya's nose on their behinds not giving them much choice.

My Boys safe I-Cheya sent to Teri alone, and she noticed the emphasis on the plural 'Boys'.

After the group had gone inside, including the G-Cats, she whispered to the bear, "Boys?"

Boy and Cory-Boy and Sean-Boy. Safe... for now. Shaper heal soon

Teri nodded, "Thank you. When you are ready to eat, tell Timmy. He knows a cow who is getting old and would like to feel useful as her last act of life. She would be honoured to provide a meal for the protector of Joel."

Hungry now. Cow be honoured. Cow be at peace. Gentle sleep I bring he sent before huffing lightly and ambling off. He paused at the door as two small boys charged out with their two eagles and climbed on his back. He ran off quickly with Timmy pointing the way.

Where cow? I-Cheya asked the two tiny boys on his back as he ran passed Main CIC.

"Slow down, you give us bear-back rides an' we'll show you!" Ricky exclaimed as Timmy nodded his head in agreement.

'Huff, huff, huff,' came I-Cheya's laughter.

He slowed to a stop, tipped both kids from his back and started snuffling both of their bellies with his wet, cold nose under their tee-shirts.

After five minutes of tickle torture, I-Cheya huffed out a few times in laughter at the two red faces, and the clucking laughter from the two eagles, and sent, *Where cow? Or more tickle?*

"C'mon, out by the toy garage!" Timmy giggled as they climbed back on.

After making sure both boys had a firm hold on his long fur, he ran on. Both eagles flew easily alongside him. He reached the garage to see a large old cow eating grass slowly. Allie was near to her, and a large group of carnivorous creatures were seated with the 'gator.

The cow looked up and blinked at the Sehlat before making her painful way towards him and the two Spirit Guides on his back.

Timmy smiled as they got closer. "Bessie, this is Bear. He's gonna help you!"

Timmy and Ricky slid off I-Cheya's back and watched as the Sehlat moved up to the cow and sniffed at her for a moment.

Child of Earth. I am Rest. I am Sleep. Green Fields await. Blue Skies, Gentle Souls, Source of All. Sleep, Child of Earth. Sleep and Dream Forever. Earned Rest I bring

Bessie closed her eyes and was about to tense up when I-Cheya licked her face.

Fear Not. Breath given, Breath now taken. Breathe out, Breathe in

Bessie closed her eyes again and started simply breathing deeply. The Sehlat placed his muzzle by her nostrils and as she began to exhale, he inhaled. Bessie did not breathe back in. Her mortal shell stood for a moment longer before falling gently to the earth.

Breath gone to Father of All who gave. Flesh goes to Children of Earth who need. Child of Vulcan shall share

Timmy and Ricky watched in awe as the cow was shared gently by the Sehlat. With what seemed the greatest respect, I-Cheya called each of the meat-eaters over and gave them what parts they would most desire.

William and Duke watched also, then turned slightly. They nodded at the spirit that stood by Timmy. Bessie nodded back before a light enveloped her and she vanished... going home to Green Fields and Blue Skies... to the Father of All. Honoured.

Meanwhile:

Teri walked inside, and just in time too. Tommy had innocently asked Joel to help him prepare food, causing the boy to take flight in the direction of the door she was coming through, his face a mask of fear. Blackie was chasing after him, but this fear was greater than a Spirit Guardian could overcome.

It was not greater than a mother's love, however.

Teri caught her newest son and pulled him up into a snuggle. "What's wrong, little one?"

He curled into her arms, sobbing and hiding his hands in his robes. Tommy came running out a second later and skidded to a stop next to Blackie in time to hear Joel blubber, "Tommy wants me to help get... get the hot things outta the oven... he wants me to burn myself... I thought he was nice, Mama... I... have I lost my brother? Is he mean like *her*?"

Teri glanced at Tommy, and his shocked expression told her more than words ever could. "What exactly did he ask you, Joel?" she asked softly.

His voice hiccuping with his sobs, Joel responded, "He asked me to help him cook... that's what that means... he wants me to hurt myself so he can laugh and whip me when I drop the food on the floor, then he wants to..."

"Shhhh, listen for a minute please," Teri responded softly. "Do you remember what I told you about the bad stuff that happened back there?"

Joel sniffed and nodded. "It was over now. You said I won't be hurt like that again."

"Any time you feel like you did just now, I think you should stop and think about that," Teri said softly. "If Tommy let anyone get hurt, Helen would ban him from the kitchen. He wants you to learn the fun parts about cooking; I know from watching him with other boys that he does not let anyone near hot parts of the kitchen until he is sure they are ready and are not going to make a mistake which will get them hurt."

Joel was still hiding his face and hands against his mother, but he did stop crying. He looked up at her and nodded, and it was then that he saw his 'big' brother Tommy. His face drained of colour and he hid it in his hands. "Sorry, Tommy," he whispered, his voice now filled with shame rather than fear. "I... I'm bad and thought you'd hurt me. I don't... I'm sorry..."

Crying softly, he dared a peek at Tommy, "Are... am I still your brother?"

"Always, li'l bro," Tommy said as he stretched up and kissed Joel's cheek.

Joel slipped from his mother's arms and into Tommy's. He kissed the boy's cheek soundly before mumbling, "Sorry. Thank you."

Tommy smiled and kissed him back, then carried his Vulcan brother back towards the kitchen. At the door, they met up with Cory and Sean who had witnessed it all.

They gave their mother a thumbs up, before following after the 'chief cook' and his elven helper.

"Sean's sittin' with Jase's kinfolk up front. Would ya like to take his vittles up ta him, Joel?" Tommy asked the boy as he handed him a huge plate full of pizza and a generous side of garlic bread.

"Okay!" Joel bubbled as he took the offered item and started carrying it carefully out of the kitchen, his tongue caught between his teeth as he concentrated hard on not dropping it.

Sean saw Joel coming, and stood up to take the plate from him. "Awesome! Thanks Bro; you're doing great! Are you having fun?"

Joel nodded, and gave his brother a snuggle before running back to the kitchen. After delivering five more plates to various family members, Joel started to feel that itch starting again. He went in search of his mother.

She was deep in conversation with Meredith and Angela when he found her, and Cory was also there giving I-Cheya's belly a good rub.

I-Cheya huffed slightly then raised his muzzle to look at Cory. Cory blinked, then glanced up at the scratching Vulcan boy in the doorway who was debating whether or not to disturb their mother.

"Ah," Cory said as he patted I-Cheya again. "I get it. Thanks, boy."

He stood and went over to Joel quickly. "I know, Lil'elf. Lotion. It's in the bathroom waiting."

Joel looked up into his brother's eyes, then down at the floor, "I'm sorry, but I just can't..."

"I know; your teddy-bear told me. Don't worry; we'll fix it for you, okay?"

"Okay," Joel murmured as he took Cory's hand to be led into the bathroom.

"Now that's a nice pair of PJs!" Cory giggled as Joel rooted about in the bag that just appeared by Levi-taxi. Once Cory had finished helping him with the 'troublesome' part of the lotion application business he had decided to show his big brother some of the cooler items he had bought that afternoon.

"These ones then? You really like?" Joel giggled as he held out the Power Ranger covered top for Cory's closer inspection.

"If you picked it, I like it," Cory stated firmly. "Get those bottoms on first, though. I still have to rub this cream into your back."

Joel nodded happily and did as directed quickly. As Cory started to apply the soothing cream to Joel's furiously itching back, Joel did the same for his own belly and chest. "Thank you. I didn't like to ask you nor Sean as you're married and stuff. But Mama was busy with Granny Mere, and I didn't wanna nag her neither."

"Helping you get healed is always important to all of us, Lil'elf," Cory assured Joel with a smile. "If it looks like we are all busy, just ask and either we'll put the lotion on for you, or we'll call for someone that you trust to help you. Don't suffer just because you think we are all busy."

Joel turned slightly to smile at Cory, abate uncertainly. "But isn't it wrong for... for you to touch me... well, *there*? You're married..."

"You're my brother, right?" Cory asked, turning the boy completely to face him.

Joel nodded, peace in his eyes.

"I love all my brothers. I help all my brothers. So does Sean. We've done stuff to help like this before with Kyle and Ty and many many others. You are worth as much as them. We love you," Cory said slowly and lovingly. "It's not wrong to help your family. Ever."

Joel's smile grew in size, and the peace in his eyes almost blew Cory's heart to pieces. "Thank you, Cor. You and Sean are the bestest brothers ever," Joel whispered, and Cory's heart nearly melted.

Joel then clapped his hands to his mouth and horror appeared in his face. "Sorry! I didn't ask! Sorry!"

"Didn't ask what?" Cory said as he pulled Joel into a cuddle.

"Didn't ask if I could call you 'Cor'. I'm sorry, I just keep hearing the others call you that, and... sorry..." Joel whispered as he hugged his brother.

'He's not trembling. It's a start,' Cory thought to himself. 'At least he's not scared of getting beaten by me if he thinks he's made a mistake.'

"Joel. You can call me anything you'd like, as long as you love me," Cory whispered back. "We all give each other pet names, and the favourite for most of the guys for me is 'Cor'. You're just like them."

Joel's hug tightened for a moment, then he pulled back and looked at Cory seriously. "I gets to give you a pet name too?"

Cory nodded, "Yeah. You can, or you can copy the others, or just use my name. You can give me loads, if you want. We're *brothers*. It's what brothers do."

Joel looked up at the ceiling for a moment longer, thinking.

"Blondie is nice. I liked the sound of that when Tommy called you it," he said finally, thoughtfully.

Cory giggled and started to tickle Joel, "If you're gonna tease me like them, then you get teased back, elfin!"

Joel squirmed about laughing, but eventually managed to ask, "Teasing? hehehe... I wasn't..."

Cory stopped tickling and looked at his little elf closely. "You weren't, were you?" he asked rhetorically.

Joel shook his head. "Nope. Teasin's bad, isn't it?"

"No," Cory smiled, "not if brothers who love each other only do it in play."

Joel nodded, "Oh, okay. But I don't wanna tease you with a name. Not fair. I won't call you Blondie, Cor. I promise."

Cory smiled lovingly, "Joel, if you call me that name, I'd be honoured. I know you'd not use it to tease me, so you get to be the only one to call me that as a for real pet name. The others get tickled if they do, though; and you can help me. Deal?"

Joel's smile could have put the sun to shame. "Deal, Blondie!"

Giggling, they finished applying the cream to those areas that had been missed, then they left the room to get their own food.

"I'm going back to tickle I-Cheya. It's quiet in there. Want to join me to eat, Lil'elf?"

"Uh huh. I'll bring it to you, 'kay?" Joel grinned up at his big brother as he finished tugging his Power Ranger PJ top on.

Cory nodded and watched as the boy sped off to the kitchens. He entered the room they had left earlier to find only Blackie and I-Cheya in there, and snoozing on one of the sofas.

"You okay, Jo'?" Kevin asked curiously as Joel reappeared in the kitchen. "Bear said you and Cory were busy with some cream or something."

Joel nodded and kissed his best friend quickly. "Yeah, I need cream rubbed in my skin all over every few hours, but I can't... you know..."

"Ah, okay," Kevin smiled. "Tommy said that your food and Cory's is over there. It's still hot."

"Come on. We can eat with Blondie!" Joel giggled as he pulled Kevin over to the plates and grabbed them.

He looked at them curiously. One had garlic bread, the other didn't. 'Tommy must have forgot,' Joel thought as he turned to the massive amount of bread still on the counter and placed a large helping on the plate for Cory. He took a nibble of a piece himself, and then added more onto his own plate. Tommy had said that he could help himself, so he was just 'doing as he was told'.

Kevin was looking thoughtfully at the two plates. "There's something... ah, never mind," he giggled as he followed Joel out and to the room where Cory was.

Once they had entered the room and moved over to the Patriarch, Joel presented the plate of food to his brother, and Cory noticed the massive amount of garlic bread on it.

Cory saw the proud look on Joel's face, and knew that refusing the plate would break him. "Wow, that looks awesome, Lil'elf! I know nobody warned you, but if I eat garlic bread it gets really stinky around me. I like garlic, but nobody likes the farts it causes."

Kevin snapped his fingers, "I knew there was a reason why I never saw you eat it!"

"I thought you said that we could have whatever we wanted to eat, though, Blondie," Joel asked, his voice small.

"Yes. But since I have a reaction to it that badly, I usually don't eat it," Cory smiled. "You didn't know, and you did nothing wrong anyway. It's okay."

Joel thought for a moment. "If you like it, then it's not fair for you to not have it," he said firmly. "Ain't there tablets or something to help with the... reaction?"

"Not that anyone knows of; I think we'll have to ask Doc Bones when he gets here," Cory replied with a grin.

Joel and Kevin squashed themselves snugly in between Cory and I-Cheya and started eating; or at least Joel and Cory started eating, while Kevin let himself be fed by Joel.

"Bones? I get to meet him too?" Joel asked around a mouthful of peperoni pizza.

"I think his exact words were something like 'as soon as we are within transporter range I expect to see that boy in front of me in Sickbay'." Cory giggled.

Joel gaped, then giggled. "Yeah, that's 'im, all right!"

"He's the best doctor in the whole universe! Hey, Jo'? Can I pinch another piece of that bread? It's great!" Kevin giggled.

Joel's answer was to lift the bread up and let Kevin eat it from his hand. There was something almost healing about watching the way Joel took care of Kevin, and vice versa, Cory thought as he happily consumed his own bread.

I-Cheya, however, sent to Blackie, *Eruption incoming. Boys all blow*

I know. I sleeping with Timmy. You?

Timmy be too close. I sleeping with I-Metri on Ship

Baby

Bite me

Darryl's Notes:

Well, there seems to have been quite a lot of things happening in this chapter. Joel is becoming more accustomed to living as a free person and he and Kevin are getting closer and closer. They really do love each other; the only thing that they are not quite sure how they should express the love they both feel. I am already waiting with my hands outstretched for the next chapter.

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher

Archivist's Notes:

Well, that was an event-filled chapter! Two new little boys, Antony coming into his full Founder heritage, and forebodings of some housecleaning in Starfleet. It is rewarding to see Joel gaining confidence and love, however haltingly. Just as Darryl said, we eagerly await the next chapter.

D&B

Chapter 6:

The Hour of the Shaper...

Much Thanks goes out to Dark Star, ACFan and Multimapper for their help and co-authorship in this chapter.

Disclaimer:

This chapter contains a small love scene that is needed for the character development of the two principle boys in the story. It is a scene that some might not wish to read as it covers two boys beginning to explore their sexuality together in a loving manner. It is not written to provoke an erotic response, but instead to show the healing deep inside that is taking place in both concerned characters.

If this is not the type of scene you wish to read, then once you get to when the children involved are entering the bathroom in the early hours of the morning, jump to the last section of all.

Thank you.

The boys were quietly talking while they enjoyed their food; mainly about Joel's emotional bonding that he was doing with others, as with Xain and Telez. After they had finished, Kevin poked Joel in his ribs lightly.

"Jo'?" Kevin managed to ask around a mouthful of garlic bread.

Joel looked up with a questioning smile and a giggle, "Yeah?"

"You given them those special things, yet?" Kevin asked, grinning at his friend.

With his eyes opening wider, Joel gasped, "Ooops! Nope! Where are they now?"

Tyler popped in with a carrier bag. "Here, big bro. And I've told Sean to haul his chubby butt in here!"

"I heard that, pain!" Sean growled through his giggles as he rushed into the room and started tickling his youngest brother.

Joel giggled as Tyler squirmed about on the floor, laughing helplessly.

Cory quickly consumed the last of his own garlic bread before the new arrivals saw him with it. He then allowed himself to laugh at Tyler's predicament, while slowly eating his pizza.

"UNCLE!" Tyler giggled eventually.

Sean sniggered as he lifted up his prey and plopped him on his shoulders. "So, what's up?"

Joel smiled at him, then poked his face into the bag Tyler had handed to him. "Ah, here," he murmured as he pulled out an small oddly shaped yet beautifully wrapped present and handed it to Sean. "For you; for being my big brother!" he said proudly. "I made it myself."

Sean got a huge smile on his face as he took the wrapped gift and opened it. It was a little bear. "Oh my God; this is AWESOME, little brother! Thank you; I love it!"

Joel's eyes brightened. "Really? I did good?" At Sean's nod, Joel jumped up to hug him, and then pointed at the bear. "It has your eyes and your hair colour for his fur, and your Vulcan robe... he's a little Teddy for Cory's Teddybear!" he finished happily.

"You made a perfect gift; I'll treasure it forever," Sean replied as he kissed Joel's nose.

Joel returned the kiss, then looked into Sean's eyes. He grew hesitant, and looked at Cory as if asking permission. Cory guessed and simply nodded, still happily chewing on his slice of pizza. "Sean? Cor said I can give pet names to my brothers. Can I give you one?"

"Of course, Lil'elf; you can call me anything you want," Sean replied.

Joel glanced at Cory again before turning his watery eyes on his brother's face, "You're Cory's Teddybear. I don't have no teddies... can I call you Big Ted? Will you be my Teddy too?"

"I would be honoured," Sean replied seriously as he gave Joel another cuddle.

After cuddling with his 'Ted' for a few more minutes, Joel happily led Sean over and sat him next to Cory. Tyler was still giggling from Sean's shoulders. He then rushed to the bag and pulled out another gift, just as oddly shaped, and offered it to Cory.

Cory put his plate down and gently took the brightly wrapped gift and opened it. It was another stuffed toy, but not a bear. It was a young lion, with the beginnings of a golden blond mane, and bright blue eyes.

"Cos you're the brave one," Joel whispered softly, his eyes showing his hope that his beloved brother would like it. "You're strong and brave and the leader. Just as Big Ted's your Teddy, you are his Lion."

Cory held out his free hand for Joel to join him in a cuddle. "Thank you, Lil'elf; the only person ever to give me something nicer is Sean. I love it, little brother."

Joel pushed himself in between both brothers and snuggled, his eyes running freely with tears yet a massive smile of accomplishment was on his face.

Tyler coughed quietly, and handed something down to Sean.

"Lil'elf, I have something for you too," Sean whispered as he kissed the back of Joel's head. Joel swivelled around and saw the item that Sean had in his hands. Sean continued, "It was made by some nice lady on the moon for you a few days ago, and I was given it to give to you."

Joel reached and took the stuffed toy Sehlat into his hands. He stared at it in wonder for a long moment, then tears began to run down his pale cheeks afresh. "I... I've always wanted a... a toy," he blubbered out softly. "Is this for me? Really?" He looked back into the warm loving eyes of his big brother.

"Yes. Really," Sean nodded.

Cory pulled Joel in backwards against himself tightly as the Vulcan rubbed the soft fur of the Sehlat against his cheek. "A... a toy. For me..."

Teri poked her head around the door to the quiet sitting room where the five boys were relaxing, and nearly backed out due to the comfort expressed in all their faces. Joel and Kevin were finding out how well Sean could act as a pillow, while Tyler was doing the same with Cory. Both teens were resting with their heads propped up on I-Cheya's belly, for the large Vulcan bear was lying on his side, snoring.

Cory saw her and asked, "Anything happening, Mom?"

She nodded, "Allen is about to go home. I thought Kev might want to say good night."

Kevin looked up quickly, a hint of sadness in his face. "Yeah... okay, Aunt Teri." He turned to Joel and gave him a kiss on the cheek, "See you tomorrow, Jo', I'll..."

"Kev," Teri chuckled, "I meant for you to say good night to your brother and Poppa!"

"Wh...what?" the boy spluttered.

Cory giggled, "You're staying the night, doofus! Like Lil'elf will let you go, anyway!"

Kevin started to act like a fish; his mouth opening and closing repeatedly. "But... I've never stayed here without Kenny before..."

Joel snuggled into Kevin's back, "You said you were soul linked, right? And you and your bro mind talk? I don't think you're alone, Kev."

Kevin thought about that for a moment, then asked, "I don't have much of my stuff with me. I've got my Vulcan clothes ready for tomorrow, but nothing much else here."

Sean sniggered, "You and Joel are the same size, right?"

"Oh, yeeaaaah!" the brown haired boy giggled.

Joel nodded happily, "And I got loads of PJs for you to pick from!"

Kevin grinned, "I sleep like Kenny, now, Jo'. Naked."

Joel tilted his head slightly. He nodded slowly, "I've always slept that way, but Pop said I could try PJs at least once; if I don't like them, at least I've tried. That's okay, isn't it? If I'm in them and you're not?"

Kevin nodded happily. "But... ummm, could I have a pair anyway? I think they'd be more comfortable to relax in 'til we go to bed."

Grinning, Joel bounced up off Sean's belly, making his big brother's breath whoosh out, then he grabbed Kevin's hand. "Levi sent me two pairs. The bag's in the bathroom! Come on!" They ran out, giggling.

"How's your pizza settling now, teddybear?" Cory giggled as Sean rubbed his belly.

"Buuuuurrrrrpppppppp!" Sean replied. "It's better now!"

Teri rolled her eyes and left the room, "Teenagers!"

Five minutes later and Joel ran back in with Kevin. They stood there, grinning and modelling their PJs for the three still lying next to I-Cheya.

"Superman!" Tyler giggled. "Kewl! You picked it, Joel?"

"Uh huh! I picked all my stuff; Kev, Jimmy and Davey helped, but I had to pick them myself!" he bubbled proudly.

"Nice choices! And Kyle'll love the Power Ranger one you have on, bro; he loves them!"

"Power Rangers?" Kyle asked excitedly as he popped in next to Joel. "Where... who... oh! KEWL!! I wanna pair!"

Joel tilted his head, then grinned. He pulled off his PJs quickly and handed them to Kyle. "Here," he bubbled, standing in his skin completely unconcerned, "Present for you, little brother! They're a bit big, but I've seen Levi shrink stuff with his powers," he said, his face alight with joy at being able to make *his* little brother happy.

Kyle hesitated, and his face became unreadable as he looked between Joel and their big brothers on the floor.

"Please?" Joel half begged, hurt now appearing in his eyes. "I... I've never had stuff to give to others before, and I kinda like it. I have lot of PJs, loads. Please?"

Kyle grinned, his mind finally made up. "Thanks bro; I'll wear them whenever we all sleep together! I was thinking, would you like a pair of 'Transformers' PJs? That's what I was gonna wear tonight; I was checking to see if they were clean before I asked you."

"I... yeah, I'd love them if they're from you; but, what are 'Transformers'?" Joel asked, his face tilted cutely to one side. The grin on his face, however, spoke volumes. Kyle had accepted his gift, and he was suddenly so very, very happy.

"We'll have to dig out the movie - it's AWESOME!" Kyle replied, ignoring the muffled groans from Cory and Sean.

Joel grinned and nodded happily as Kyle produced a pair of PJs for Joel to take. He took them and put them on and found that they stretched and stretched until they were the right size; which meant baggy. Joel liked them baggy. He then looked down at the picture. "He looks cool; a robot?"

"Optimus Prime!" Kyle giggled as he stripped off his clothes and quickly replaced them with the Power Rangers PJs. Joel giggled, for at first the slight eight year old seemed lost in the PJs that he'd worn, and they were baggy on HIM. Then he watched in wonder as Kyle shrank them down to fit him snugly. "There! Once you've gone over to say good night to your Poppa Allen, we can watch the movie!"

"Wanna come with us? We're riding I-Cheya over," Kevin asked, grinning.

"Hey! He's our head rest!" Cory protested playfully, before I-Cheya moved suddenly and started lightly swatting at the two teens lying next to him playfully.

Joel giggled, then asked, "You gonna watch it with us, Blondie? Big Ted? Ty?"

"Sure!" all three agreed, not wanting to disrupt the personal time with Joel.

"We watching movies? Can we watch Gremlins after??" Timmy asked as he poked his head around the door.

"Sure, Munchkin!" Cory giggled; figuring Joel might as well get that one out of the way too.

"Gremlins 1, 2, 3 or 4, Timmy?" Joel asked curiously.

"There are *TWO MORE*?!" Timmy asked in glee.

"I'll look for them tomorrow, Timmy!" Kyle giggled.

Also giggling, Levi poked *his* head around the door, "You should try asking the Tardis first, Daddy! Here; Gremlins 3 and 4, and the live action Transformers 1, 2 and 3. Gotta go. Me and a friend have an adventure planned, but I'll be back for the movies!" Then he vanished.

"YIPPEE!" yelled Kyle and Timmy in unison.

Sean, Cory and Tyler rolled their eyes - however, the new films had piqued their curiosity.

"This place is nuts," Joel murmured happily.

Cory shook his head, "Okay, Kyle-Bear and Munchkin. Transformers 1 then Gremlins 3. We can't watch them all in one sitting."

"Sure we can, I can stop time, and..." Kyle began with glee, but Tyler got up and came over to him.

After a massive kiss to bring his Socius back to Earth, he said, "No, we won't. We can enjoy the new stuff a bit at a time with ALL our brothers. Transformers 1 and Gremlins 3, cutie, or you're sleeping with those funny flying lizards in that Universe Dylan mentioned earlier."

Kyle giggled, "Okay, okay! Come on, Lil'elf, Kev! Let's go see the others then get Tommy to make some popcorn!"

Two minutes later, and I-Cheya was making his way towards Main CIC with the three small PJ clad boys riding on his back. Blackie was running along beside him along with Aphrodite and Mercury.

They reached the Rec Room and entered to see Justy and Dean playing with their new son, and the Double Js playing with their newly discovered little brother. Riti and Victoria were helping, and the rest of the Dragon Division were mixed in thoroughly with the members of Clan Short.

"I see you're staying the night, little one," Allen smiled as he picked up Kevin from I-Cheya's back.

Kevin nodded. "Yeah. I came over to say good night, Poppa!" he grinned and proceeded to hug his dad.

Joel climbed down from I-Cheya's furry back and watched as his two Cat Guards moved over to play with some of the little kids.

"Joel, I don't think you've met Sammy, have you?" Kyle asked as he remained on the Sehlat's back.

Joel shook his head, "Nope. Who's he, and is he friendly?"

Kyle pointed towards an eleven year old who was standing at the far side of the room. "That's him, and I think you should meet him. He's able to sense feelings real well, and I think you're startling him."

"Why?" Joel asked curiously as he watched the brown haired boy across the way look about himself with concern as if searching for something or someone.

"Your fear, big bro. He can sense it, and he's worried. You'll like Sammy, he is just like you; loves cuddles. Go on, bro," Kyle encouraged with a smile.

"Okay, if you're sure," Joel said uncertainly, and with Blackie at his feet, he walked towards the boy who was now closely watching him.

:Sammy's Point Of View:

Where the hell was it coming from?

I could feel it, but for some reason I couldn't figure out exactly where it was coming from, and Vic said I should be able to.

This was weird but I knew I had to find whoever was so frightened and try to help if I could.

Then I suddenly noticed a little Vulcan boy walking towards me, and Kyle was there behind him... sitting on one of those teddy bear animals that are wandering around here.

It was him!

Suddenly I just knew; all the fear, terror and... and... a lot more was coming from this kid.

I felt Dot come up from the shadows and stand beside me, looking just as intently at the boy in question as he made his way over to me.

The wolf coming with the boy may have had something to do with it, but then I sensed that she too felt the boy's fear and was ready to attack whatever was causing it.

I didn't blame her, and it was only trying real hard that kept my hand away from the gun at my side.

All I wanted was to make the fear disappear from him.

I watched as the boy stopped a few feet away and smiled at me real nervous like before turning back and looking at my little brother.

Damn, gotta stop thinking like that, I barely know Kyle here.

I could feel the fear coming off him like waves pounding the beach and I had to fight everything in me that said to just rush over and take him in my arms.

His teddy bear seemed to make some noises telling him it was alright and my... no... Kyle nodded at him, causing him to turn back around, and in almost a whisper he said "Greetings... Sammy?" before raising his hand in the Vulcan Salute.

I could see that hand shake with his fear and gently sent out my mind to feel him and try and reassure him as I replied softly, "Hello, you must be Joel and yeah, I'm Sammy."

I also raised my hand and did what I remembered seeing others do.

"Live Long and Prosper, Joel Short, son of Teri, and brother to us all."

As I finished I could feel him even more, and it was a thousand times worse than what I had been picking up already.

I had to use everything Vicky and Jace had taught me to hold back the pain that was locked inside this child in front of me, and at the same time I felt my heart break that he was feeling any of it.

How he was even standing, much less not be completely crazy from it, is something I will probably never know; but as I gasped for breath I tried to send reassurance to him.

He tilted his head to the side and suddenly the fear and terror were joined by an overwhelming blast of shame, sadness, regret and loss as he whispered brokenly, with tears streaming down his face, "Please... don't look in my head... I... Kyle and Ty have, but... I don't want people to know I'm... I... please don't look..."

My head was shaking before he stopped speaking as I cried, "No, no, I wouldn't do that, Joel. Please believe me, I'd never go into someone's head unless they asked or I had to. I just feel people and I was trying to show you that you didn't have anything to be afraid of. I can feel your feelings but not what is causing them. I only know I want to make it better and show you, ya don't have nothing to be afraid of no more."

I knew tears were falling down my own face now, and Dot was up on her feet issuing a low growl from deep within her.

I knew if whoever had caused those feelings in Joel was anywhere near right then the cat would be tearing that person into shreds.

I so wanted to hug him and let him know somehow that everything was going to be okay, but I was also afraid that doing that might just freak him out even more; but it was taken out of my hands when I heard a voice deep within me say, *Boy - Samuel-Boy safe. Samuel-Boy good. Hug Samuel-Boy*

I watched as the wolf pup nudged Joel's legs to get him moving and realized that it had been him who had spoken. Joel came the last few feet to me and slowly raised his hand to my cheek.

It was like a electrical charge as his fingers made contact with my face, and I watched as he shook slightly before smiling, then he began to fall slowly to the ground.

I quickly wrapped my arms around him and followed him down to the ground, hugging him to me and holding on tightly as he whispered, "S...sorry."

As I held him to my chest he went on, "It's the first time I've met someone new without Cor, Sean or Kev with me. Sorry for acting like a baby..."

"Nah," I answered him softly, "Joel, you're not acting like a baby. You're just scared is all and that's okay. We've all been there too, though I don't think as bad as you. I guess I was kinda lucky cause I could sense stuff about people and it made it easier for me to meet new ones. It was still scary though, so you take all the time you need and I won't push ya or nothing, 'kay?"

"Kay," he replied softly before sighing a bit before lifting his face to look up at me and tell me, "I like you. You... you're nice and safe... you feel... your Fire is warm." As he said that, a smile that lit the room, at least for me, appeared on his face. He gently kissed my cheek before turning serious again. "I can't stop feeling the fear though. It's always there. I'm sorry if it hurts you, really I am, but I can't help it... I've always been scared."

My heart felt like it was going to break as he said that, but then I watched as his face screwed up tightly and with a horrified whisper he said, "SHE is always there, and HE is... I feel and see them all the time... I can't get away from 'em. I can't forget. Ever. Even the p...pain... I feel it like it's happening now..."

I took a deep breath and hoped what I was gonna do didn't scare the crap outta him, but this was going to stop; at least for now, I hoped.

Letting my power out like Jace and Vicky had taught me, I felt my eyes blaze brightly as I poured out all the warmth, caring and protection I could, and focused it on the trembling form in my arms. I let it wash over him and engulf him like a blanket as I said, "You're not hurting me Joel, I'm just sad that you are. I hate seeing anyone hurt or be scared and no one is ever going to hurt you again, if I have anything to say about it. You're Vulcan, Joel; FEEL what I'm saying, FEEL what will happen should anyone hurt you again. I'll do everything in my power to make sure you're okay now, and I bet Cory and Sean will too."

Dot gently butted her head into the boy, purring forcefully and telling him much the same thing in her own way. He tickled my panther's ears with one hand, and he seemed to begin to relax.

Suddenly, with a sharp intake of breath, he looked up and deep into my eyes: I watched as that beautiful smile of his came back to his face. The light from my now brightly glowing eyes flickered across his features, gently bathing him in their azure glow.

I could feel him listening to me and reaching out, joining with me, and I let him take the lead as he 'felt' into me and of me - of what I was trying to show him.

"You're like Cory!" he suddenly exclaimed with a giggled. "You're just like Cory," he said again.

Then a weird thing happened. His eyes changed and it was if another person was there inside him.

What the hell?

I started to pull in my defences when just as suddenly an overwhelming feeling of peace came over me and I just knew somehow that whatever was going on wasn't bad and that Joel wasn't being hurt none or gonna be either.

His mouth opened and a voice clearly not his own began to speak, "Gentle Heart are you, Human child. A father's soul is in you. A patriarch's soul."

Then Joel gave himself a shake and looked back up at me with a confused look on his face before saying in a mumble, "Did I do something again? It keeps happening and I dunno why."

To say I was stunned was like an understatement, but his cheeks turning a dark, dusky green told me that he was embarrassed by this.

I knew later I was going to have to go to Jace and tell him about this.

Someone taking control of someone's mind, nice someone or not, was something he needed to know about and the sooner the better.

Not to mention that while what the voice had said was nice, it had also left me confused too.

"Yeah little guy, something happened, but it looks like you're okay and everything is alright, so don't worry about it. I'll talk to a real good friend who knows about this sort of thing later on and see if maybe he can help, okay?"

I didn't want to say much more as I didn't want anything else to trouble this sweet little guy; not any more. Never, if I could help it.

Joel cocked his head at one side, looking at me closely, before saying, "Jace? You're gonna ask Jace, aren't you. He's like you too, all blue and Firey and strong. He's harder than you, though. He has a dagger in his heart and head, to fight people who hurt others. I was in his head this morning and he left doors in his mind open. I saw. He's good, though. Just a bit hard. Guess he had to learn it, yeah? Not like you, though. I feel... I feel an edge in you, but... it's not like Jace's. You are a weapon sheathed, and a soft hand; a Warm place. He's Warm and cuddly too, but his blade is in hand. He has blood in his heart. You just have it on your hand."

I'd never heard someone described like that before but somehow it fit Jace perfectly. Me too, if I had to be honest about it.

"Yeah little guy, I'm gonna ask Jace. I think if anyone can help, it'll probably be him. He, Nathan and Vicky know a lot more than I do about all this mind stuff and we don't want you hurt no more. Maybe he can help you put some shields up to keep whoever or whatever it is out and if you've already melded with him then it'll be easier for you. I don't wanna try anything, cause I'm still too new at all this stuff to be totally cool with it and somehow I don't think you need me stomping around in your head like a clutz," I said as I gently stroked his back in reassurance.

"Okay" Joel giggled then surprised me by giving me a kiss on the lips.

"I think..." he started to say, then stopped and looked nervous for a moment, and I could sense he felt like I might reject whatever it was he was going to say or that maybe he'd gone too far with that kiss.

I smiled down at him and gently returned the quick kiss saying softly, "It's alright."

I felt something for him, something that I couldn't quite place and wondered just maybe if...

My thoughts were interrupted by him saying "Sammy..." before stopping again to take a deep breath to continue. I could tell this was taking a lot out of him to get out.

"I'd... would you be my brother too? I'd like another brother... if you want to that is?"

Then he dropped his gaze down at his hands which were holding onto mine, and in a whisper I could barely hear he almost pleaded, "Please?"

And again, "Please say yes..."

I looked down at him and thought, 'No, not that, but like Peter and the Trinity.'

I just wanted to protect him and hold him; kinda like dad does with me all the time.

I never wanted to let go.

I somehow knew that this was something very special for him to ask of me and letting everything I was feeling right then go out to him I answered, "Yes Joel, there's nothing I'd like more than to be one of your brothers, thank you for asking me. Somehow I don't think you ask too many people that, so I know how special it is. Thank you, it means a lot to me that you want to be my brother."

I could see the un-shed tears in his eyes as he looked up at me. He cried "Oh thank you, thank you," before launching himself on me and hugging me tightly around the neck, crying with joy.

I did what Dad did, and just kissed the top of his head softly over and over again as I let my hand gently run up and down his back. The intense joy coming from him was almost overwhelming in its strength, and again I had to wonder; just what had this little thing been through in his short life where someone caring about him would cause this type of reaction?

Suddenly there was a strange noise of 'Huff, huff... huffff!' from the teddy bear looking thing from earlier as it came over to us and Joel looked up at it and, blinking through his tears, said to it, "Okay, I will."

Then he turned back to me looking me in eyes again as he said, "This is I-Cheya and he wants to be your friend too."

Dot was watching all of this intently as I looked at the bear but before I could say anything I heard a voice in my head saying *Yes. Sammy-Boy nice to my Boy. Sammy-Boy my Boy now* as it blinked and began to sniff me all over.

I-Cheya gently pushed Joel out of my arms causing him to land softly on the floor, then pawed Dot and the wolf cub over to him. Joel started to giggle and said "I... I think he wants to bath you," just as I-Cheya managed somehow to take my clothes off.

"Oh great, now I have four, no five who want to do that," I just managed to say as tongues began to lick me all over, making me giggle like mad.

Dot just snorted and I heard an amused reply, **You never clean well enough**

I gasped out "I...am...not...dirty!" but it was hard to talk while being tickled so much.

Grooming. Bonding. You clean outside. We now clean soul of pain I heard inside me from what I realized was both the bear cub and the wolf pup.

Then they placed their mouths near my face and gently breathed out on me. It was warm and it caused a powerful heat to flow into my body. I gasped in surprise and then wonder as I felt it, all gentle and soothing, go through me.

Joel moved over and kissed me on the forehead as I lay there feeling these wonderful feelings passing through me.

It was then that I felt something deep within me. Deep in my heart I felt like something had clicked there. I knew somehow that something or someone joined, or maybe linked with me; in a way that was like and yet not like what I did with my dad and brothers. As I looked into my new brother's eyes I knew just who it was, and that it was just as powerful a joining as those I already had. Joel stammered "I...I." before sighing and simply saying "Brother."

He didn't have to say anything else, though. With this new link, even without my powers, I could feel everything that he wasn't saying as he looked at me with those soulful blue eyes. Everything he was feeling was washing over me. It was like my powers were using the link he had made in new way. I pulled him down and cuddled him on my chest as I lay there.

Love, trust, warmth, joy, peace. All those and more came from the little angel now in my arms, even if he couldn't say it.

I once again sent out everything I felt to him, letting him know with more than the words everything that I felt for the trust he had just placed in me; for his trust and his love, and just how much they meant to me. I softly kissed his cheek, and I then said that which he could not.

"I love you too, little one."

Normal Perspective:

After Joel and Sammy had had one last hug and cuddle, they parted with a promise to talk again tomorrow. I-Cheya grabbed Joel and led him back to Kyle, and Blackie followed, after giving Dot a wolf-kiss in parting.

Sammy watched for a moment longer, then became aware of a shadow behind him. He turned quickly and saw the Doctor standing there, smiling at him.

"Well done, Heart of Gold. Well done," the Doctor giggled.

"For what, Doc?" Sammy asked with a small smile. "I only did what I always do; love my brothers."

The Doctor nodded, "So I have found out. I just had to witness it for myself. I did sense something, however. Uncertainty just before he asked you to be his brother. Do you mind telling me what that was? I believe I know, and I believe I can explain, but I would like to know in your words nonetheless."

Sammy thought for a moment, then gave a small, rueful smile. "I thought that he might have asked me to be his boyfriend or something," Sammy whispered so that only the small Time Lord could hear.

The Doctor nodded again, "Thought so. It's only natural that you would think that. You love him, don't you?"

"Of course, he's my brother... now," Sammy added with a happy giggle.

"No, I mean really love him. It runs deep, I can see it."

Sammy looked uncertain, "But..."

"It is a brother's love, yes; but if you were to feed it, it would grow. You are not the first to feel this around Joel. Many here do, but few understand what they are feeling. Only one has acted upon it, and he is the one that stole Joel's heart as well. Kevin Thompson?"

Sammy thought, then, "Oh, the twin of Kenny and brother of Xain and Jake?"

"Yup."

"Lucky for them both," Sammy smiled. He then asked curiously, "Why do I love him that quickly, though? I've only just met him."

"He is the Shaper. He twists time. And also, above all, he is filled with Love. What did you sense the moment you touched him? The need for and desire to share love?"

Sammy nodded mutely.

"He loved you instantly upon touching you. Your own power and heart of love responded instantly. You could not help it, yet you did help it. You chose to reply to his unconditional trust and love with love of your own. Know that it was not against your will. He is so free with his love and trust once you win it that your response was automatic - and natural."

The Doctor paused then. "But in you I sense something else," he murmured curiously. "May I touch you and attempt a scan? I cannot see much that lies ahead right now, for the Veil of Shadow still lies before us, but... may I?"

Sammy nodded, still unable to find his voice.

The Doctor laid his hand on the boy's cheek and remained still for a moment. He then opened his eyes and smiled, "Thought so; you find him physically attractive as well. Well, you might be surprised, Samuel Reynolds, at who will find you. There is one for you, for your heart. I cannot see his face, but logic dictates that one as loving as you will not be without the other half of his soul for much longer. I must go now. Take care of Joel; oh, and that link you felt? It was the Bonding of the Children. In your case you feel it both ways, but it is designed to let Joel feel safe. Only 4 others have the bond so far. There may be more, but there is rarely more than 10. Be honoured. You are one of the few he trusts that much. Good bye for now, Samuel."

The Doctor Folded away, leaving Sammy with more questions than he had answers...

Sammy just stood there for several moments after the Doctor left before slowly reaching down and removing his communicator. He opened it brought it to his mouth, "Reynolds to Commander Evans."

"*Commander Evans here,*" came the reply.

"Jace, I need to see you right away about something that has come up."

"Okay, I'm in the Kitchen talking to John and Dan. I'll be right there," Jason replied.

A minute later, Jason walked up to Sammy and asked, "What's wrong, Cariad?"

Sammy spoke quietly, "You know about this mind stuff a lot more than I do, and I don't want to freak anyone out, but Joel was just with me. He said something has been invading his mind and taking over lately. I didn't sense anything bad or anything from whatever it was when it happened but it was different and... Jace it seemed... older. It made Joel talk only it wasn't Joel, if you know what I mean."

Jason's eyes narrowed. "Another personality? An older one, but not bad? Not evil?"

Sammy shook his head, "No, not evil."

Jason looked over at Joel for a moment, then lowered his voice, "Joel had a Vulcan Mind-fit early this morning. He has suffered severe trauma in the... wait, do you know anything about Joel? About where he came from? Has anyone told you yet?"

"No but I felt..." Sammy stopped as a shudder ran through him violently. He continued, sounding sick, "Whatever it was... it was bad Jace, real bad." Tears began threatening to spill from Sammy's eyes, "I had never felt anything like that before."

"Do you want to know it all? I can tell you if you want, but you are right. He has gone through what few others have," Jason asked softly.

"I do want to know, he's my brother now; but is it something I should know before he tells me?" Sammy asked hesitantly.

Jason's eyes went unfocused for a second. "Kyle says that you can know. You are one of the few he's asked to be his brother directly, and you've become one of his emotional anchors. He won't mind. Kyle knows that."

Sammy sucked in a deep breath, "Okay, tell me."

"Not here, Cariad. Come, into one of the private rooms," Jason said softly as he led Sammy from the Rec Room.

Once in one of the Meeting Rooms, Jason sat on the nearest comfy chair with Sammy pulled up and held close. He began to rapidly send all that they knew about Joel, his past, the Universe he was stuck in, and all his pain. Jason then held Sammy closely as the boy wept hard; wept for his new brother.

When Sammy finally managed to pull back his tears, he whispered, "How? He's so... so... how did he survive it Jace?" Sammy started crying again, "He's so full of love, he loves so much. How?"

Jason could sense the pain and grief from Sammy and knew that Sammy couldn't understand how a boy that had been through so much could still love and trust the way Joel did. Jason wasn't sure he understood it either, but he did understand the wonder that he felt in Sammy; the wonder at how Joel would ask him to be his brother, to ask him something that precious.

Jason answered thickly, tears in his own voice, "Joel is... Joel is special, little bro. He is so special. He has more courage than a lion, yet no strength of his own; not any more. He used it all to survive. Kevin Thompson is now his strength, and those he has bonded with are his protection."

Sammy and Jason sat still for a few more moments before Sammy asked, "And you were saying about a fit this morning?"

Jason nodded, "When a Vulcan mind receives an emotional trauma, it will cordon off those 'hurts' and lobotomise them from the rest of the brain. Joel had witnessed murders of gay and religious people, Sam, and then buried the memories when he was hidden as a human. When he became Vulcan again, those memories were adapted as a wound in his mind. It's still there, and it was triggered at breakfast. We nearly lost him. Kyle and the rest of us helped Xain get him back, and then we blocked that area of his head... but he has another personality in that wounded area, an evil one. All the worst he has been through, and... something more. We can't understand it, but we can't get rid of it either. It needs a fully trained Vulcan Kolinahr adept or Master to heal him. My Poppa Spock is trained more than Master level, and he's gonna be here Thursday. But as for this new personality you met; that wasn't the evil one. I don't know what that is. I didn't see anything else in his head, and I would... I... oh, my!"

Jason stopped and Sammy looked at him quickly, "What?"

Jason said slowly, "I can't be sure, but if there IS a real person in there with him, and I can't 'read' it, but it can be 'sensed' with empathy... he might be carrying a Katra!"

Sammy looked puzzled, "What's a Katra?"

"Well," Jason answered, "I don't know if you're gonna believe it, but Vulcans can place their living souls into either another person, usually another Vulcan, or they can give them to the Hall of Memories on Vulcan. If they do that, though, the Katra is no longer living. Vulcans only do this when close to death, so that their knowledge can be used by future generations. Once the Katra has passed from the Vulcan into the living person holding it, it is then taken to the Hall on Vulcan. Then, and only then, does the living part leave to go where souls go. The Katra is then just a memory. If Joel is carrying a Katra, then a living soul not his own is inside him; with him."

"Jesus! you mean there's a ghost haunting him or something? Hasn't the poor kid been through enough?" the brown haired boy asked in complete shock. His face, however, held no disbelief; he trusted what Jason had said, it was only that he could not understand it.

"No, not really; not if it's a Katra, SamSam," Jason smiled. "I don't know if you ever heard about what happened to Poppa Spock in 1996; when he died? It was major news that he had died on a training mission but no one knew how or why. Then a month later, he comes back after the then Admiral Kirk goes AWOL and appears on Vulcan with him. It happened with Pop. He put his Katra into Uncle Bones, Dr. McCoy. Then when they found Pop's body and saw that it had regenerated due to some weird thing, the Kolinahr Masters of Mount Seleya put his Katra back in. If Joel is carrying a Katra, then it would have to be a Vulcan. I don't know of any bad Vulcans; do you?"

Sammy thought about that for a moment or two. His face was a picture as he tried to make sense of something so 'alien'. "Wow. I didn't hear about Spock, cause I was like only three years old back then, but that's almost unbelievable, Jace! You're right, though, that I haven't heard of a bad Vulcan, and like

I said, it didn't feel bad or mean. Nothing like that, just I could sense it wasn't Joel but something else. Other than the weird stuff it said to me, kinda nice stuff but still weird and I don't understand it; but Joel was embarrassed by it and said it had been happening to him a lot lately. I don't want to see him hurt any more, Jace, I really don't and it's bothering him, bro."

Jason nodded seriously, "One, I didn't hear about Spock either at the time as I was only little too, but I love Vulcan stuff, so it came up. And he's my pop. Go figure," he added with a small grin. Then, "I agree about Joel. I can't sense anything at the moment, but if it is a Katra, neither I nor you would sense it, unless it 'came to the front' and did something. You got the impression it was good, so that's okay by me. We'll just have to help him as much as he needs, until Pop gets here Thursday. He can deal with a Katra, and Pop's mind is better to carry one if Joel is holding one."

"But Jace, you, Vicky and Nath are like experts on all this mind stuff and Joel said you'd linked and been in each others' minds. Can't you go back in find out what it is? Or maybe you can put up shields or something for him. I mean if it's really a Vulcan soul in there I suppose you wouldn't want to get rid of it but isn't there something you can do so it doesn't bother him so much? I think it's kinda freaking him out, ya know? I mean if I had someone's ghost in my head I'd be freaked. If anyone can do something until Spock gets here then I think it would be you guys."

Jason giggled, "I've been in his head, but I'm not linked to him. That's just you, Cory, Sean, Xain and Tel. I can't keep a Katra out, Sammy. It's a soul, not a mind. It's also Vulcan, and their powers are not like ours. We can't Meld, they can. We cannot put our souls into another, they can. I wouldn't know where to start. However, let's try something."

Jason led Sammy back into the Rec Room and found a chair to sit on with Sammy cuddled into his side. He closed his eyes and formed a bridge with Sammy, gently asking for permission to link up.

'Always, Jace,' was Sammy's happy reply to that request.

Jason sent silently, *'We have been given a name by the Guardian, SamSam. Ka'Inri, Mind Walkers. Come on; let's 'Walk' in Joel's and see if there is something there, and see if it'll answer.'*

Sammy looked startled for a moment at the name. *'But...'*

'Don't worry. It just means we're us, Sammy. You are you, and I am me. The name is 'cos we Walk with our Minds. That's all,' Jason smiled.

*'I remember when we joined before, Jace, and it was like I've done with the Trinity only more. I **know** you won't hurt me; I am more worried about Joel and going into his mind. He didn't want that. He said only you and a couple of others had. He's ashamed of what happened to him and didn't want me to know. The name is cool though.'*

'Don't worry, Cariad. I did not show you what he is ashamed of. I know it, and he has nothing TO be ashamed of, but it's a... a sex thing, I think is the best way to say it... and he's no longer as strong as you. Then, he's also ashamed 'cos he thinks he's not a real boy any more. I didn't tell you, and I don't think you really want to know. Your choice though, but that will be for after if you do. Jason sighed, We won't see his memories now, anyhow. He's awake and would feel us doing that. We're going into one of the deep levels,' and with that, his and Sammy's eyes started glowing.

'We'll be his strength and protection for now, Jace, until he can be for himself again,' Sammy sent back lovingly.

They reached out and found Joel's mind and entered easily. They moved deeper quickly so that Joel would not feel them, and Jason sent out, *Is there someone here?'*

'Yes. What is it you wish, child of Spock?' came a quiet answer; and it was not Sammy.

'Ah, so I was right. And so was Sammy; you feel good. Who are you?' Jason asked.

'For now, I am not to be known. You will act different if you know, and until I tell the child myself, I cannot risk further hurt to him.'

Jason smiled to himself as he felt Sammy's power reaching out and sensing. Seeming satisfied by the love this 'person' was feeling for Joel, yet also puzzled by the cryptic reply it gave, Sammy pulled back, and Jason picked up his stray thought "Way beyond my pay grade!" within the link they had going.

'I can respect your desire to not harm Joel, but I am commanded by the Patriarch of House Surak to defend all within Clan Short of Vulcan,' Jason stated formally. *'Neither I nor Sammy will say anything to Joel about your presence until he comes to us regarding you. But - I need to know more.'*

Silence.

Then a response came, *'Blood of my blood. Flesh of my flesh.'*

As clear as the presence of this 'person' was, whomever it was suddenly vanished from their senses.

Jason pulled back slowly and took Sammy out and back to their own minds. Opening his eyes, Jason led Sammy back into the quiet room they had been in. "Well," he asked his younger friend, "do you think there could be a problem here?"

Sammy looked about ready to give a flippant response, but then he paused. Slowly, and with care, he answered, "I don't think so. Jason, as strange as this may sound, I think whoever that Katra is loves and cares about Joel even more than we do. Part of me wishes we'd chased it down and tried to make it answer, but another part, the bigger part, thinks we should leave well enough alone for right now and just keep a watch on Joel in case I'm wrong. You felt what I did from it, didn't you? I mean there is something there... something that... I think... is looking out for Joel. I don't think it would hurt him, at least on purpose. Jace, it loves him. I wish Vicky had been there with what she can do. Her powers are so much more than mine and he's been hurt so much, I don't wanna be wrong about this and see him hurt more."

Jason nodded, "I agree with your assessment. Whoever it is, loves Joel. I am content to watch." He paused, "I do know one thing, though."

"Oh?" Sammy asked, tilting his head to the side.

"Whomever that is? It's family to Joel. I'm guessing a parent. Has to be, for Vulcans don't use "Blood of my blood" unless they speak of their children," Jason finished slowly.

"Wow, his mom or dad? That means they're dead though," Sammy murmured sadly, his eyes moving to look at Joel with concern. "Thanks, Jace, for coming and finding this out. It makes me feel a lot better about things," he added as Jace looked at him.

Jason nodded, "Any time, little bro." He paused before continuing, "It's going to be hard for him, yes. But that is only one Katra. No one I know of can hold more than one. His other parent might still be alive... I hope. Please, God; I hope," he finished with a whisper.

"Me too," Sammy replied as tears came to his eyes, "Me too."

Meanwhile:

I-Cheya huffed at Joel for a moment or two, then the boy looked over to where he could see two boys standing just inside the doorway; twins, it seemed. They were both looking at him and he could see they were both concerned.

I-Cheya nosed him over towards them.

"Hi," he said shyly to them once he got close enough.

One of them gave him the Vulcan salute, saying, "Greetings, Joel Short. I am Vincent Winters, son of Clan Short of Vulcan."

Joel raised an eyebrow. "You're the son of the whole Clan?" he asked, then looked at the other boy. "Your brother too?"

Vincent smiled and nodded.

Joel grinned and returned the salute. Then he stopped all motion and sniffed slowly. "Something smells... different."

He looked at the twin on Vincent's left and cocked his head to one side. "You're not human," he stated in wonder. "You... you don't smell Klingon or Vulcan, and I don't know many Star Trek races that look *that* human... you're a Chameloid, aren't you?"

"This is Lehman, and you're right; he's a Chameloid," Vincent giggled slightly before leaning in closer to Lehman, "Vulcans have a really good sense of smell. He just smells your natural pheromones and stuff."

"Oh," Lehman said without inflection, then he looked back at Joel and smiled slightly, "I was sure I bathed well today," he said, trying for some levity.

Joel's eyes widened slightly. "I'm sorry... that came out wrong... I'm sorry..." he murmured and started to back away slightly.

Lehman reached out a hand slowly to him, his palm up. "You don't have to be sorry, Joel. I understand; we've been told you came from a very different place."

Joel reached out and hesitantly took Lehman's offered hand. He stopped looking so nervous and smiled. He then offered his other hand to Vincent, who took it calmly.

Joel giggled slightly as he relaxed, but that was changed when he felt a slight click in his heart. The click of something connecting.

"What was that?" Vincent asked quickly as he removed his hand from Joel's. "What just happened?"

Joel looked at him in wonder. "I... I just... that was a link, I think..."

"Link?" Vincent repeated, "Like a Bond-Link?"

"Kinda," Joel nodded.

Vincent looked at Joel seriously. "I'm already married to T'Lani; can you remove it? Now?"

Joel backed away slightly, his lips trembling. "It's not a marriage link, Vincent; honest. I don't know how I did it and I don't know how to get rid of it... Xain and Telez called it the Bonding of the Children..." He started crying softly then, "I didn't m...mean it, Vincent... It's just that I... I must trust you or something... I'm... I do it to feel safe when my big brothers ain't here... please don't hurt me..." he finished in a near whisper.

Vincent's eyes popped wide open at Joel's reaction. "I won't hurt you, Joel," he whispered gently, opening his arms to offer a hug. "I was just afraid you'd done a type of marriage link or something. I've never felt the Telan t'Kanlar before."

Joel moved forward and melted into Vincent's hug, wrapping his thin arms around the nine year old tightly. "You know of it?"

"Yeah," Vincent murmured as he gave and enjoyed the hug. "T'Lani mentioned it, and I was taught about all the Links in my Vulcan lessons. I have just never felt it before. I'm sorry I scared you."

"S'okay," Joel mumbled as he laid his head on the boy's shoulder and closed his eyes trustingly. "I'm always scared anyways; that's not your fault."

Lehman reached over and rubbed Joel's back, which caused the two way hug to become a three way one. Lehman started giggling. "Another Vincent - can the Universe survive two hugging boys like you in the same place?"

"I like hugs too!" Levi giggled as he appeared and made it a four way hug.

Lehman rolled his eyes, but then they all looked up in shock as a Voice came suddenly to their minds:

//Powers of Destiny, Fate and Love: be thou one//

"What was that?" Lehman asked nervously.

Vincent answered, "The Guardian of Forever; I'll explain after, Lehman."

"Okay," Lehman agreed slowly.

Joel looked at Levi, "What did Forever mean?"

"Don't really know what He means there," Levi said cautiously.

Vincent, however, began to guess. The Doctor had told him that he would be going on a mission with Levi and one other: and he now believed that Joel was the 'other' that the Doctor had been referring too.

Joel was once again standing by I-Cheya and looking around for Kevin. He finally saw him deep in a conversation with his twin brother. They both kept shooting quick glances at him and Kevin kept blushing and shaking his head, a grin on his face.

Joel walked over to see what was going on. Kenny giggled as he saw him approaching and pulled him into a large hug, "You look after my brother, okay?" he murmured with a happy smile.

"I...I'll try," Joel promised quietly as the hug broke. Kevin grabbed him and they resumed their preferred positions; their arms around the other's waist and fingers tucked into the top of the other's pyjama bottoms.

"Good night, Kenny," Kevin smiled as he pulled his brother over and gave him another kiss.

"Good night, Kev, good night, Joel. Try and get *some* sleep," he giggled as he walked off, winking at Kevin.

"What did he mean?" Joel asked curiously.

Kevin blushed then grinned, "He's teasing, Joel. Don't worry. Come on. You have to say good night to Poppa then we can go watch those films."

Five minutes later and Allen, Rory and Kenny left the Compound, while Joel and Kevin had once again gotten on I-Cheya's back with Kyle pulled up before Joel, and they moved from the Rec Room. Levi was also with them this time, and rode on Kevin's shoulders, once he had shrunk himself down to a four year old size. Aphrodite and Mercury were once again running alongside them, and Blackie was speeding away in front.

It was not long before I-Cheya plodded in through the door of Teri's house and moved quickly to the room where they had left Cory and the others, only to find all the Short kids gathering. Those with partners and kids had them there as well, and those kids with kids, the same. Each and every one of them were wearing PJs of one type or another. Tommy was already half way through bringing in large amounts of popcorn of various flavours, and everyone was finding places to curl up for the double film-fest.

Kevin and Kyle started giggling. "Pyjama Party?" Kyle giggled.

"Come on, Lil'elf," Cory called, opening his arms for the little Vulcan. He was settled on the floor next to Sean with his back to the sofa. His kids were piled up behind him, and his brothers were all around with their boyfriends. Kevin and Joel ran over, and Joel was pulled to sit in front of Cory, with his older brother's legs holding him securely. Sean pulled Kevin into the same position with himself, then Kyle and Tyler came and sat on Joel and Kevin's laps respectively. "Adam, hit play, bro," Cory giggled.

Kyle blinked and the lights dimmed; and the Transformers movie started...

"That was AWESOME!" Kyle and Joel echoed as the credits started to roll. The others couldn't help but agree.

Timmy started bouncing on the sofa behind his 'rents, "Gremlins, Gremlins, Gremlins!"

"Okay, okay," Sean giggled. "Bryce has just changed the disc, so it'll be ready to start soon, Fireball!"

After a quick dash by a lot of the boys running to the bathroom, they all settled back in for the next 'unseen and unknown of' movie...

Joel had fallen asleep long before the end of Gremlins 3, and his quiet breathing into Cory's neck as he was curled up in his big brother's arms nearly put Cory himself to sleep. Kyle had long since moved to snuggle with Tyler and his children, so Joel had all of Cory's lap to himself. His sleep was deep and contented. Cory nodded to Sean and they both got up, whispering their own 'good-nights' to the rest. Their kids would be spending the night with Teri, along with the rest of the Short family. Cory and Sean, however, were not. They were going home, Joel carried in Cory's arms.

Only not just these three. Kevin came trotting along beside them, and the six G-Cats and two Animal Guardians were circled around them as they walked.

"We'll make sure the house is secure, Cory, then go to our apartment. Brandar said that his people will be on watch tonight, and after talking to them, we trust them," Bast started.

Cory shook his head, "No need, bro. We have loads of space in our place. There's a few rooms without owners, so you guys can grab one, or one each if you'd like. You're our guards, and for as long as you want, they are yours."

Hermes asked, "What about Joel? Will it be near his room?"

"You can pick any," Sean confirmed, "so yes, it can be."

"Works for me," Artemus smiled.

Mont nodded, "Okay, that'll be great. Hey, Bear! You staying with us too?"

The Sehlat turned his head as he was plodding along and nodded with a huff. Blackie also added his agreement.

"Nesting time," Kevin giggled.

"Of course!" Hermes and Mercury chorused.

Soon they were in the house, and the G-Cats spent five minutes checking every room and the windows and doors while Cory carried Joel upstairs to bed. Sean and Kevin followed behind about ten minutes later, carrying hot cocoa.

"Which room's Joel's?" Kevin asked curiously.

Sean pointed to the door just past his own bedroom, "Kyle said he put Joel's stuff there."

"Thanks," Kevin bubbled and trotted up to the door. He was about to open it when Cory poked his head out of his own room.

"You're not sleeping with us?" he asked the smaller boy.

Kevin turned and looked at the two teenagers with open confusion, and a good deal of blushing. "Umm... it's your wedding night, Cor..."

Cory giggled, "Sean and I took care of that last night; we kinda figured we might have a cuddle monster convention tonight."

Kevin started to blush even more, but did make his way back towards them. "Well, if you're sure," he murmured hesitantly, his cheeks burning.

They led him into the room, and he looked around in wonder, "Oh, wow, this is a real nice room!"

Sean grinned. "It's our place where we can be ourselves, Kev. The others don't come here unless they're with us, and even our kids would only come in here when we're here. This is our special place."

Cory nodded as he pulled Kevin in to hug him. "Only those special to us come here with us, little bro; and you and Joel are very special."

Kevin smiled up at his Patriarch, then looked around slowly. Joel was sleeping in the middle of the king-size bed, looking especially small on it. Kevin smiled fondly, then looked towards one area of the room. Engine schematics, models of cars and ships and starships, all with the engines showing, were on shelves or on the wall. A desk was set up with a PC and a tonne of games around it. "This your stuff, Cory?"

"Yeah," Cory murmured.

"Figures," Kevin giggled. "No wonder you're an Engineer for the Enterprise."

Sean laughed, and Kevin turned to where he was sitting on the other side of the bed. That side of the room had aeroplane models, shuttlecraft drawings and another desk and PC set up, but fewer games. Instead, flight simulation software was scattered around the desk. "Yeah, that's why I'm the pilot!" Sean giggled at the dumbstruck eleven year old.

"What's those things?" came Joel's sleepy voice.

They looked at him and smiled, then followed the direction of his eyes to a special area of the room.

"Those are our keepsakes, Joel," Sean explained. "If we're given something that means a lot to us from people we love, then they go there."

Cory moved to the shelves with Kevin, and was soon joined by Sean carrying Joel. Cory pointed, "That's the game that only I and Mikey play, and this is the Tigger he gave me."

"That's the cookie cutter that Tommy gave me; it's all I'm allowed to do when cooking with him, so only I get to use that when making chocolate chip cookies," Sean whispered, his eyes moist as he pointed to one of the myriad of items on the shelves.

"One sec," Cory commented. "Hey Silicon Brain; do I have any messages?"

The screen on the computer on his side of the room lit up, and a voice came from the speakers. "You blonds are all the same; if you'd think to look at the screen, you'd see that you've already read what came in today."

"Bite me, Transistor Breath!" Cory giggled.

"I'll leave that for your hubby; us higher lifeforms have standards," the computer replied as the screen went blank.

Joel looked between the PC and Cory while Kevin giggled. "Who programmed that?"

Sean giggled, "Guess."

Joel faced the teen who was carrying him, then kissed his cheek. "You're silly!"

Cory giggled, then went to the door where he picked up two items. "Here, Sean; put this where you want it," he said lovingly as he handed Sean the 'Sean-bear' Joel had made for him. Cory put the 'Cory-Lion' up next to the Tigger.

"Well, it's not going anywhere but there too, love," Sean smiled as he placed his bear on Tigger's other side.

Joel's eyes started leaking happy tears again, "They mean *that* much to you?"

"They're from our favourite little elf, so yes, they *do* mean that much to us," Sean replied.

"Tigger only holds stuff from *really* special brothers," Cory added.

Joel had nothing to say to that so he just smiled tearfully at them both. He then glanced back at the special items; then started reading something. Something Cory and Sean instantly recognised.

"I sit here, Dream and wonder,
I look into your eyes and fade away.
You tempt me, you lure me,
Your innocence will let me dream today.
Your eyes, they look in beauty,
They send the sense of lovingness.
And they forbid me to look away.
Those eyes, they make me slowly drift away.
Today, is the day,
I'll never turn my back and walk away.
I'll tell you, I love you,
I'll take my chance, in a twist of faith today.
If only, you'll be mine,
I'll be with you, until the end of time."

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As he had been reading, his voice started becoming choral, and Sean, who was looking into the eyes of the boy he was carrying, could have sworn that someone 'else' was also in Joel's eyes... reading it as well.

His shocked look towards Cory and Kevin made them look at Joel's eyes also, and they saw that 'someone' as well.

As Joel read the last line, however, something happened that drove all three to their knees, and Joel found himself now standing at Sean's side; shivering like a leaf in the wind.

"That's beautiful," he whispered finally.

"Thanks lil bro." Sean replied. "I wrote that for Cory while he was recovering in the home."

Joel nodded with a smile, and then noticed he was standing while the other three were kneeling.

"What... why you on the floor?" he asked curiously.

Kevin shook his head, "I dunno. Joel... I... you were reading that then I felt all tingly and fell down."

Cory sent a brief thought to both Kevin and Sean, *'Say nothing about what we saw to him. He nearly freaked about that evil persona in his head; who knows what he'd do if there's another.'*

'Shouldn't we tell Kyle or someone?' Sean sent back.

Cory paused, then subtly shook his head, *Can't be bad, otherwise he'd have picked up on it. Let's wait 'til the morning.'*

"Come on, Jo'," Kevin murmured as he stood and pulled the boy tightly against himself. "It's getting late, and we have a big day tomorrow. Let's get some sleep."

"Kay," he agreed with a grin. He hopped back onto the bed and was handed his cup of coco. He watched absently as the other three stripped down and climbed in with their own mugs. "I feel odd being dressed when you ain't," he giggled in between sips of his drink.

"We'll put our pyjamas back on if you want us to, lil' bro," Cory replied with a smile.

Joel shook his head happily. "No, s'okay, Blondie. Poppa said I could try sleepin' with stuff on to see if I'd like it. I've always slept like you are, but... I dunno. Being in some sleep clothes makes me feel... like I'm not a slave any more. I might not like it, though, so... if I get warm and sweaty, can I take them off again?"

"Sure," Cory answered with a gentle smile.

The door cracked open slightly then, and Mont's face poked in, "We've found a room a few doors down. One of us will be awake at any given time and just outside that door in the hall if you need anything."

"Yeah," came Hermes' voice from down the hall way, "Bear is taking the first watch; he insisted... Hey! No tail thumps, you great Teddy!"

'Huff, huff, huff,' came the Sehlat's laughter.

Mont rolled his eyes, then grinned, "Night, guys. Sleep well."

"Night," they all chorused as the door was closed.

Once their drinks had been finished, they settled down under bedding. Sean had Joel pressed against his chest, while the Vulcan and Kevin were chest to chest. Cory then spooned in behind Kevin.

Joel looked deep into his best friend's eyes from an inch or so away, then lightly kissed him. "Good night, Kev," he whispered.

"Night, T'hy'la," came Kevin's sleepy response.

Joel grinned, then sighed. He increased his hug by way of a response, then closed his eyes. 'I wish I could say it,' he thought as he began to relax. This would be his first night literally sleeping with others. He hoped he could.

A quiet murmuring made him open his eyes again, and he looked into Cory's face. His brother was praying, and asking for God to protect everyone that he cared about. Due to having his arms wrapped around Kevin, the backs of his hands were pressed into Cory's belly. Sadness and loss, and fear and guilt and... Joel shuddered. Pain like his own, yet unlike.

And it was getting worse...

**//The Unchangeable Comes, and *Naught* can Unmake It;
Yet Change *Must Be*, or *All* shall Be Undone.
The Power of Destiny *must* Arise...
For this is the *Hour* of the Shaper...//**

"Cory! What's wrong?" Joel cried out, for the emotions were now spinning in turmoil within the blond teenager.

Sean started up from behind the Vulcan and reached for Cory's hand. "Cor? COR! What's happening?"

"Feel... I feel..." wept the teen, his voice losing strength.

Kevin was in tears, for his empathy was crying out with Cory's pain, yet he could do nothing to help. Joel was in nearly the same state.

Sean shook Cory's shoulder, but the only reaction he got was an unfocused smile as Cory's eyes began to glaze over.

Kyle woke with a start and looked around the room. Everyone seemed to be sleeping soundly, even the other Mikyvis; although Kyle knew different on that score. He then stretched out his mind and searched for what had woken him.

He found it. His quick call to his family brought them all to full wakefulness, then they vanished from the mass nest in Teri's house.

On the roof of CIC, the Doctor, Jay, the N-Gens and Mikey were sitting and holding hands. Kyle and the rest appeared and went straight up to them.

"What's going on?" Tyler asked nervously. A palpable sense of foreboding was pressing in around them.

Jason looked up with tears in his shining blue-powered eyes, "I'm being pushed back, Ty. I... Cory's no longer sharing a room in my head, and I can't stop him slipping."

"WHAT??" Kyle half shouted. "Mikey! Do something!" he ordered as he stretched out his power to take up Jason's burden... and found he could not make the connection.

The Doctor sighed, "You can't, he can't."

"What? What do you mean?" Levi asked in a panic. "We're gonna lose Uncle Cory??"

"Yes," whispered Mikey.

Dead silence.

"Why?" Tyler cried out suddenly.

Mikey sighed. "The Book of Life... a page I was not allowed to see. It's... Cory is going to be lost to us tonight. He's falling into a coma, and nothing we can do will pull him out."

"I... No! I won't accept that! I'll go and see St Peter if I have to... I..." Kyle started to rant, tears streaming down his face.

Mikey looked up and gestured, porting the small boy into his lap. "I've already asked, begged and screamed, Kyle-bear. This... I..." he stopped as sobs took him.

The Doctor started to whisper, "Some things are Fixed, some things are in Flux... That is how I see the Universes; every waking second I can see What Is, What Was, What Could Be, and What Must Not. It is the Burden of the Time Lords." He looked at the others, "Those events that are Fixed are Destiny. Like I said, Destiny cannot be altered, except by an Act of Faith. And most Destiny points have two choices. This one - this is one of the few that has none. It's an immutable point - There is no option; there is no recourse. Cory is lost."

"But..." Levi stuttered, "but Uncle Mikey, you... you said that your kiss would last 'til our Lil'elf comes! Joel's the Shaper! Can't he do something??"

Mikey, his face streaked with tears, shrugged, "Only he can... if he is ready... and I don't know. I really don't."

"Joel must become the Shaper in *fact*, not just in promise. 'Til now, he has only changed Destiny, but with this form of Fixed Event, a change won't work. Never before has an Immutable Point been altered," the Doctor whispered, half to himself. "Joel must Shape a *new* Destiny... he must... but can he? Will he manage it?"

Bryce slammed his hand down on the roof of CIC, "Doc, the Guardian said that Cory's name would live forever..."

"Yes," the ginger Time Lord nodded, "in Memory only, if this Path is not changed."

Again, dead silence filled the air, and this time, it stayed unbroken as they all turned towards Cory and Sean's house and watched.

Minutes ticked by, until:

//This is the Day, the Hour, the Moment... The Heart of the Nexus lies in the Balance; The Shaper's love must awaken - the Power of Destiny must Stand//

Time began to spin around Cory's house - *What Is* started to become *What Could Be*... and the Doctor hoped that it would change *What Must Not*...

'Child,' came a voice that only Joel could hear.

Joel was about to look around, but then realised - the voice came from within his own mind!

'Wha... *who are you?* he thought back.

'There is no time for questions. You know what to do. You KNOW... 'Share your pain with me'...'

His eyes widening, Joel ripped off his pyjama top, gently pushed Kevin to one side and threw himself upon Cory's now near motionless form. The sudden act shoved Sean to one side in the same motion. In full contact with his beloved brother, Joel's eyes now bore down into Cory's fast fading ones. "I. Will. Not. Lose. YOU!" he spat out in fear and... and... That Fire was there, and it thrummed down his spine and made him shake like a tree in a storm.

Around them, Time rang with a shimmering echo unlike any other.

Destiny had not been *changed*, this time.

It had been erased.

Eternity shuddered as a completely *new* Destiny started to be written...

Joel reached out and pulled Kevin and Sean in until all four boys were in contact one with the other, then... he Shared Cory's pain - again using the ability without knowing how, he shared it equally between all four of them.

"I will not lose you! I cannot lose you! You're my brother FOREVER!" he cried. "Share your pain! Share it!" he yelled.

Cory's eyes popped open wide - clear and focused... and he began to spill out everything.

Everything.

//... the Hour of the Shaper... the Broken Son heals the Heart... the Door opens for Sa'ren's return...//

"Oh God! It's happening! He's doing it!" the Doctor cried out excitedly, jumping up and down on the roof top. Very soon, they all saw what he saw; Time beginning to spin rapidly around Cory's house. Kyle shared that vision with the N-Gen's on the roof with them. "He IS the Shaper!" the Doctor yelled out.

Time continued to twist... and suddenly all of them able to sense time got a mild headache behind their eyes...

"Ouch!" Levi muttered, and reached for the Doctor, only to see him rubbing his own eyes as well. "Ah, well... Uncle Mikey?"

"Sure thing, kids," Mikey giggled in mad relief, "we can't expect the Doctor to heal himself, now can we?" He reached out, and all the High Racers were wrapped up in his wings; shielding them from the disorientating effects of Destiny being Made anew...

Cory told of his fears. Cory told of his guilt. Cory told of his pain, his loss, his frustrations... it poured out; all the events from losing his memories to the hell of Saturday just gone, to watching other hurting kids and being unable to do anything... He spoke, and cried and wailed, and the other three cried with him.

He spoke until his mouth went dry and all the words were used.

Then he held them against himself, and silently wept more.

Joel, again without knowing how he knew to do it, let Cory's emotions fold back into the blond teenager... only now, the pain was without poison. The boil had been lanced, the wound cleansed, the infection eradicated.

'His pain will make him more than he was,' that new voice spoke again as it receded back into some unknown place in Joel's mind; the voice that only he could hear. *'He shall be better for it; a Patriarch unlike any that has graced the Sands of my World. We shall speak again when you are ready, child.'*

Joel was confused, yet the voice did not seem bad. In fact, she had helped... 'She? It's a woman's voice!' he thought to himself, utterly amazed yet nervous. He had a female, a woman, in his mind?

"Thank you," Cory wept into Joel's hair as he pulled the boy in tight.

Joel felt two more faces come close and get snuggled against his cheeks; Sean and Kevin were weeping also, yet his own eyes were now dry with the shock of finding yet another aspect of himself that concerned him. Trying to get his mind off of it, he raised his head and kissed all three of them before looking at Sean who was gazing lovingly and thankfully at him. "You have pain too. D... do you want to Share? It'll help..." Joel whispered, a ghost of a smile on his face.

Sean thought for an instant; while worried about overloading Joel, in his heart he knew their newest brother would not have offered if he did not think he could do it. "I think I'd like that, Lil'elf. Just as long as you don't have to push yourself to do it."

Joel shrugged lightly as Kevin and Sean placed their arms about him more fully. Cory also increased his grip. "Pain's something I'm used to, Big Ted," Joel whispered. "Pain and loss and f...fear. I know them. Who better to help?" he finished with a nervous grin.

He started to draw out the emotions from deep within Sean's heart, and started Sharing them between the four of them equally. "All men hide a secret pain," he said, quoting lines from memory, "Share your pain with us, and gain strength from the Sharing..."

As each emotion that was hurting Sean came into focus between them, Sean would tell of his fears; losing Cory, nearly losing him again, nearly losing their brothers, seeing and saving abused children, remembering everyone else's history for his role as Clan Historian... all of it started pouring out.

As before, as with Cory, the more Sean talked, the less poison seemed to remain. He talked until the words ran out; then and only then did Joel stop the Sharing.

As they cried together yet again, Sean and Cory felt their core, their centre, lighten. Love for their newest brother poured out and slammed into Joel's senses, stilling his tears, and also Kevin's. Joel blinked down into Cory's face.

"Thank you," Cory whispered again.

"For you and Sean, anything... same for you, Kev," the Vulcan replied, turning to face his best friend. Kevin, his face inches from Joel's, simply kissed him and nodded.

"You can if you want; Share my emotions, I mean. But I don't want to speak of them just yet. I think Sharing the emotions will help alone, though," Kevin stated quietly.

Joel smiled and nodded. Again, he used his almost mythic-like Vulcan abilities to draw out everything Kevin had in his heart and poured the emotions between all four of them again.

Heat and Fire, loss, pain, hunger, loneliness, joy, happiness, brotherhood, family... so much like, yet unlike, Sean's, and the same for Cory's, yet the base was the same. Behind it all, an image of a green Crest. What helped and united these three boys, Joel found, was the family that had been collected. No matter how different each child or person in the Clan were compared to each other, they were all one.

After five minutes of experiencing Kevin's heart, Joel stopped the Sharing.

Cory hugged the two boys against his chest as tight as he could, and Sean wrapped all three of them in his arms as best he was able. Cory whispered, a bit sadly, Joel thought, "I feel bad, Joel. You know us better than we know you, now. I wish..." Cory trailed off, worry in his face.

"Wish what, Cor?" Joel asked curiously.

Hesitantly, not wishing to bring up bad memories from the small boy, Cory continued, "I wish we could share what you feel that way... but we'd need another Vulcan..."

Joel looked shocked. "You want to feel what I feel?? You... you don't... you can't mean that, Cory!"

"You're my brother; I want to help you like you helped me," Cory and Sean whispered together, then glanced with a knowing smile at each other.

Joel trembled. "I... I think... I could try pushing my emotions out. It would only be reversing what I did with you," he whispered with tears in his eyes, "but... you're not gonna like it... but if you say so, I will. But... I can't tell you everything; not yet. If you want to Share my feelings, you can... but you really won't like it, and I don't wanna hurt you... I l... I... oh, Cory, are you sure? All of you?"

All the boys nodded, letting Joel feel their sincerity in wanting to help him.

Joel closed his eyes and concentrated. He lightly pulled on their feelings, testing and checking on what he was doing.

Seconds after Joel closed his eyes, Cory felt like a dam had burst. When he had felt Sean's fears, it had been hard but manageable; same for Kevin, and he was sure they felt the same about his.

It was no wonder their fears did not hurt Joel, only upset him.

What slammed into Cory's heart first and foremost was Fear. Fear unlike anything he had ever come across. Pain came in behind, all the worse as it was remembered and unforgotten and unforgettable. Then loneliness like that Kevin once felt, then guilt as he himself was feeling over Saturday. It was intense, and frightening.

What came after, or seemed to to Cory, was love. Boundless and growing. Trust, hope and joy came then, and the purity of them made Cory burst into tears; they shone all the brighter as the Fear and Loneliness was still there. In the Dark Loneliness of Joel's Soul, these pure emotions shone.

Images started appearing before Cory's eyes; a man who was the focus for Pain and Fear, a woman who was the focus for a blinding Terror and Guilt that nearly caused him to wet himself, a cell of a room that was the focus for the Loneliness. Then more faces, those of himself, his brothers and mother; and the Love, Hope, Joy and Trust wrapped themselves around all the faces. The Love wrapped itself around three of them most of all, though. Around himself, Sean and Kevin; and Kevin, the Love almost eclipsed him.

"Oh Joel," Sean whispered, his voice shaking in terror, "you feel this? All the time?"

Joel nodded, then added, "You're getting a quarter each... but yeah, all the time."

Sean's eyes grew wider.

Kevin just kept his face buried in Joel's neck and sobbed loudly, shaking due to Joel's fear. Cory heard him whisper, "You're scared of me??"

Joel sniffed and nodded. "Can't help it. I trust you three and Mama most, but... I'm sorry, but I'm still scared... scared of you," he finished softly, and the fear they all felt started growing worse and he drew back slightly from Cory's chest.

Cory pulled him back, "Just remember we love you no matter what, little brother. One day soon our Love is going to beat that fear; I swear I will not stop protecting you until the day I die."

The Fear they were all feeling was suddenly drowned out by a burst of Love from the trembling Vulcan, then Joel grinned. They all felt their emotions and feelings being pulled upon at the same time. Joel merged them and shared equally with them all what each of them were feeling at the same time.

Kevin blushed and looked at Cory, Cory giggled and looked at Joel, Joel smiled as he glanced at Sean, and Sean just lay there gob-smacked. "Cory! Stop thinking those things!" he whined, shifting himself about, due to a rising problem.

"Sorry, I can't help it!" Cory giggled. "I can't believe how much you love me, is all!" he finished with a kiss to his husband's lips.

Joel was now looking at Kevin with his eyes sparkling, "I... Kev, I..." he stuttered, then closed his eyes.

Cory broke his kiss to glance at the Vulcan as he started shaking.

Joel sighed and rolled off Cory to land on his friend and simply hugged him. Kevin whispered, "Love you, Jo'."

Joel and Kevin soon found themselves pulled back in and snuggled between the two teens, and for the next half hour not a word was spoken. They just glanced back and forth between each other. Something wonderful had taken place, and they were now closer than ever... as brothers and friends, and for the teens, something more. Maybe for the younger two as well, but only Time would tell there.

Kevin and Cory had fallen asleep, and Sean was about to join them when Joel shifted slightly and shook his brother's shoulder.

"Wazzup?" Sean grinned, opening his heavy eyes to attempt to focus on Joel's cute face.

With seriousness, Joel whispered, "I'm beginnin' ta itch 'gain, Sean. Can you help me put that cream on? It's not as bad as before... but I can't get to sleep."

Sean smiled and yawned. "Come on, Cory put it in the bathroom," he whispered as he got out of bed gently. Joel shuffled over towards him, but instead of letting the PJ clad boy walk, Sean picked him up and carried him.

Joel's curious look was answered with a kiss. "I like carrying my Lil'elf, so sue me," Sean giggled.

Joel smiled.

After quickly stripping, Joel asked, "My back first; that's really itching."

"Okay," Sean smiled as he started applying the cream, handing the tube to Joel so that he could start on his chest. It had not taken long the previous times to do this, but both boys were sleepy, and this was relaxing for both of them. Joel eventually stopped helping with the cream and just let his brother massage his itching skin soothingly.

"Okay, Elf. It's time. How do you want to do this?" Sean asked as Joel turned to face him.

Taking a deep breath, Joel trembled out through his growing nervousness, "Just do it quickly, Ted; but don't... *please* don't roll back... you know..."

"Your foreskin? Don't worry, I won't," Sean murmured quietly.

He did as Joel asked, yet, surprisingly for Joel, he kept his eyes locked with him. Joel felt less fear due to this, for the eye contact made him feel that Sean was confirming this was help only, and not sex at all. His mother and Cory had done it quickly, but Sean added a new level to his comfort; to his peace. He stopped trembling altogether.

"Done," Sean smiled, looking quickly to check. "Okay, sit down and you do one leg, I'll do the other."

"Kay... and thanks," Joel whispered with a ghost of a smile.

Once complete, Joel stood and hugged his brother for all he was worth. "I love you too, Joel," Sean smiled as he returned the hug.

Joel grinned up at him, then took his hand and started back out of the en-suite bathroom.

"No PJs?" Sean asked as they entered the bedroom.

Joel shook his head, "They're comfy to wear to relax in, but the bottoms were getting all bunched up, and it tried creeping up my butt. Didn't like that much."

Sean giggled as he lifted the boy up, gave him a loving cuddle, and laid him back down next to Kevin. He snuggled in behind Joel and kissed the back of the boy's head. "Good night, Elf," he whispered.

Joel whispered back softly, sleep already beginning to claim him, "Night night, teddy..."

Very Early Wednesday Morning:

Cory woke with a start at the cold wet nose that was touching his butt cheeks, sniffing.

"Blackie!" he hissed, trying not to laugh. "Don't wake Joel, or I'll drown you!"

Was fun. I no resist. Sorry, Cory-Boy came a response that Cory was sure held laughter in it.

Black Feet crawled back out of the bottom of the bed and padded from the room. Weirdly, the door closed behind him, yet... Cory shrugged and increased his grip on the still sleeping Kevin, and started to doze back off. 'It's too early for this,' he thought with a grin.

'You still awake?' Cory heard in his mind.

He kissed the back of Kevin's head and answered, *'Yes. Anything wrong?'*

'Um; not sure,' Kevin answered. *'Might be something wrong; I'm worried about something 'cos I think Joel's going to freak.'*

'What's wrong, little bro?' Cory asked again, a serious note in his mental voice this time.

He suddenly felt Kevin's embarrassment welling up as the boy answered, *'I got a stiffy and it's pressed into Joel's lower belly... he freaks about sex stuff, Cor! I can't make it go down and I've been awake for ages... even tried thinking about Vicky naked... not helping!'*

Cory knew this could be serious, but still had to hold in his giggles. *'You need to go to the bathroom, bro? Could be your body just telling you it's time, you know?'*

Kevin shook his head slightly so as to not nudge Joel's peacefully sleeping face that was tucked under his own. *'Don't need to. I'm comfy and sleepy, but it just won't go down... and, well... I, ummm...'*

'Go on, Kev. I won't be mad no matter what,' Cory prompted with a smile.

'Wouldn't matter if mine goes down. I've been... oh god! Umm... I've had my hands around Joel's lower back for ages, and someone ELSE is, ummm.... well, like me...'

Cory could feel the heat from Kevin's red face as he tried to not laugh, *'Ah... Sean; well... that's Sean all right! Oh, Kev; don't worry. If anything happens, we'll help Joel. Maybe this is meant to happen this way to help him heal.'*

Kevin thought about that for a moment before nodding slowly. *'Do you know why Joel's scared of sex? And what was that about Pon Farr yesterday? I missed it looking after my Jo!'*

Cory sighed. *'Don't know about the fear, Kev, but I'll tell you the problem with Pon Farr; but you might get a bit freaked yourself. You could be involved here, and Xain and Jake told us why you are nervous about sex as well.'*

Kevin sighed. *'Oh... they must have had reason... Yeah, I am. I don't wanna be a slut like Jake was, and I'm scared that doing sex stuff will get me hooked and I'll become a whore.'* He paused, then mentally muttered with shyness, *'Never even played with myself, either.'*

Cory nuzzled Kevin's neck, *'I know. Don't worry, Kev; we're here for you both. Now, do you want to hear about the Pon Farr issue?'*

Kevin nodded, and so Cory informed him of all they had been told yesterday.

Once he had finished telling Kevin, Cory started gently rubbing his hand around Kevin's belly to calm him.

'If I don't mate with Joel, he'll die?! Cory! What if I can't?? I don't think I can... I won't lose Jo! But...' Kevin panicked.

'Shhh, and listen, lil' bro,' Cory soothed silently. *'If you can't, then Sean and I have already promised the Guardian that we'd help.'*

Kevin turned his head as much as possible to look at Cory's face. *'What? You'd mate with him?? But you're married... and he's MINE!.... but... oh, Cory; that'll kill me. If you mate with him, then I...'* Tears began to trickle from Kevin's eyes.

Cory nodded sadly, *'I know, bro. I talked to Grandfather Sarek about it just after you guys went shopping. A Vulcan in Pon Farr is like an animal. It's only because of thousands of years of tradition that Pon Farr is seen as a part of the Bonding ceremonies. It's not. If a Vulcan is far from home when Pon Farr hits him, he'll mate with anyone. He would prefer to be with his Bonded, but if not... it won't matter to them. It's not a commitment; not really. It's seen as that now, but in reality it happens a lot with space flight. Many Vulcans have been caught away from the Sands of their home and from their mates when it happened. Many have had to mate with other males even if they are straight. It's out of their control, Kev. It will be out of Joel's as well. If he is Bonded to you by then, then you will both be drawn together, but if you can't get to each other for some reason, you'll both mate with the closest person that you trust completely. If you're not Bonded, then Joel will likely try going after you, but if not, then he goes for the closest person he trusts most. That's either me or Sean, in either case.'*

Kevin's eyes were wide. *'Umm, Cor; he also trusts your Mom!'*

Cory's face paled for a moment, but then he sighed in relief. *'No, bro; last night, remember? I saw images of all of us. He loves the three of us most. It won't be Mom. Thank GOD!'*

Kevin lay there and regarded Cory for a long couple of minutes. *'You or Sean would really do that for Joel? Commit adultery?'*

Cory shook his head, *'Adultery is betraying your partner. Sean and I talked. In this case, it's biology, and neither of us could stand there and let Joel die like that. You have an issue that could prevent you from helping. Neither of us do, and we are both willing to stand in your place if needed. I hope it won't, but if it does come to it...'*

Kevin nodded, tears in his eyes once again. *'You are like Kenny. You're great brothers for Jo', like Kenny is for me. I love you, Cory; and I hope I can be the one to help Jo'. I'd feel I'd miss something special if you had to, 'cos I was scared.'*

'I understand, and both Sean and I hope you will too, little dude. I... well, I'll tell you. I've never been with anyone except Sean, and same for him. Our first time was... funny, yet very very special. I wouldn't want to take Joel's first time from you if I could help it. Only to save his life. Only for that,' Cory finished with an Oath.

Kevin turned back to snuggle in closer with Joel again. *'I just hope...'* he began then trailed off in frustration.

'I know, little bro, I know,' Cory kissed his head then cuddled in more behind him.

It was about then that Joel started to wake up. He felt warm and secure with his Big Ted snuggled in behind, and with his face buried into the pillow, and with his Kevin's cheek against his exposed one, he let out a happy sigh.

"Morning, Jo'," Kevin mumbled into his ear.

"Good... good morning," came the happy reply from the peaceful little Vulcan.

Joel stretched his feet out a bit, pushing away the sleepy feeling in his legs, and sighed happily again. He furrowed his brow, however, and slowly lifted his head to be able to look into the dancing, Fire filled eyes of Kevin. "Kev," he murmured, "Why are you... poking... your hands are behind my back, Kev!" Panic started to fill his face. "Oh, God! Sean's poking me too! Kev, you have to stop; you'll get hurt! Please stop!"

"Nobody will get hurt for having a stiffy in my room, Lil'elf; I swear it," Cory replied as he put an arm around Joel.

Joel looked past Kevin's face and into Cory's, his lower lip trembling. "But... but she said it was filthy and evil and bad and filthy little fuckers who went about with hard-ons get whipped good and..."

"...and she was wrong." Cory interrupted, sincerity pouring from his eyes.

Joel could feel that Cory believed this, and he felt the same from Kevin who was now looking sorrowfully at him. Kevin murmured quietly, "Cor's right. It's normal, Jo', everyone gets stiffies. It's a problem if you don't get them."

Joel stared at him for a long moment; then started sobbing loudly, and thus waking Sean with a start.

"What's going on, Elf?" Sean whispered, but Joel continued to cry unabated. Sean looked over at his husband with a raised eyebrow.

"You and Kev are stiff; you're poking him. We told him it's normal, but... Oh, Kev; you didn't know, bro, but Joel can't get stiffies at the moment," Cory explained, kissing the back of the brown haired boy's head. He reached out again and rubbed Joel's shoulder, "Lil'elf, you will get better, I promise. There's nothing wrong with you because you can't get one yet. You're still healing inside."

"But... I've not had one for a week, Cor! And I don't want one! They bring pain... she'll touch me again and make me stiff and whip me and bur..." Joel sealed his lips quickly and started shaking his head 'no' over and over.

"Look me in the eyes, Lil'elf," Cory asked softly.

Joel kept his lips tightly sealed. His hands were now in between himself and Kevin and he was holding himself as if he was in severe pain... and due to his particular memory, this was actually the case. Tears were pouring from his memory filled and hurting eyes, yet he still obeyed his brother and looked into Cory's sky blue eyes.

"I think you are feeling something that happened to you back there;" Cory stated firmly yet lovingly, "if you are feeling pain right now, it is not real, it's something that happened in the past. It can not happen here; if a person like that was to even try to get close to you, I would turn them into a pile of smoking dust. You ARE safe, and you WILL NOT ever feel pain like that again. I'll give my own life to prevent you ever going through what you went through before, ever again."

"So would I," Sean added, just as firmly.

Kevin croaked out, "Me too..."

Joel trembled and shut his eyes. He was afraid; he was ashamed, yet that shame was needless and unmerited. He wanted to tell them, he wanted to explain. He needed them to understand, but... he couldn't bring himself to start... he needed to, but couldn't... he simply lay there as fear thrilled up his spine and made him shake the bed with his trembling.

'Guys?' came Kyle's voice in the minds of the three tenderly comforting the crying waif, 'It's time. Levi is with me and Ty, and he says that his Friend is ordering you to do what you would hate doing. You must order Joel to tell you. You must. It's time.'

'Are you sure?' Kevin sent out, heat in his mental voice. 'I won't do something that won't help my Jo!'

Levi responded, 'Yes, Uncle Kev. For you to help him heal you have to know. He needs to tell you for himself. He's ashamed, and he shouldn't be.'

Sean sighed, then ordered quietly as he gently stroked Joel's curly hair, "Joel, tell us what happened."

Part relief and part terror filled Joel's face, yet he nodded and haltingly began to spill out his pain...

:Flashback:

He was on his bed, and he was just starting to explore his ten year old body. Even though he was small and frightfully skinny, he still found himself interesting. Things he had read on the internet and in some forbidden books the library had failed to destroy filled his mind.

'I... I wonder what it's like,' he mused silently. With a small grin on his pixie face, he set to work.

'DAMN!... This is niiice!'

As he was finding himself, he lost track of the world around him. He failed to hear the footfalls outside in the hallway. He did not hear the door open.

He did, however, hear the scream of shock from his Mistress, Mrs. Williams, "You filthy little bastard! You degenerate fuck!"

Joel was now holding himself in total shock, all thoughts of the good feelings suddenly forgotten in his panic as she rushed back out of the room.

Seconds later, she returned with Mr. Williams' belt in her hands, and she proceeded to beat him mercilessly. His screams filled the house as each blow seemed to connect with every part of his exposed body as he curled himself into a ball on the bed.

"If you ever do this again, I'll kill you! You hear me??" she screamed in rage.

She continued to beat and whip Joel until his screams died away as he lost consciousness. She left the room, then. It was not entertaining to get no cries.

When Joel came to, he felt as if he was dead. He knew that he was bleeding badly, and felt weak, but he dared not do anything. If she returned he would end up getting hurt worse. He simply cried... and vowed never to touch himself there again.

It was not the end, however. Every morning since that day, he woke to find her standing over him. If he had an erection, which happened more and more often as he grew older, she would beat him senseless. He even trained himself to wake before she came in, but that was useless. Upon realising that he was waking up earlier, she would at various times in the day force him to strip. She would force him to have an erection through seeming gentle touches, but once he had reacted, he would be beaten again.

It was a wonder Joel survived, or remained sane. It was then that the dreams began, a demon of fear, as Joel came to think of it. All the nights since these events started had been long, and plagued with dread... until Mikey came...

:End Flashback:

Kevin pulled Joel closer as he trailed off. "You won't ever get punished for that here, Joel. Never ever!" he cried before kissing Joel tenderly.

"He's right," Sean whispered. "Sex isn't bad. We have a few rules, but it's all good stuff. 'No' means 'no', 'Maybe' is 'No', and Yes is okay. Also, you mustn't pressure someone to play around. If they want to, they will say so the first time. And that's it."

Kevin was watching the emotions play over Joel's face at this and added in a considering tone, "When Jake and Xain had questions and worries, they spoke to Poppa to see if it was okay for them to have private time. Would it help if... if you spoke to Poppa? Or to Aunt Teri?"

Sean looked at Cory with wide eyes, "That'll be a first; I wonder what Mom will think having one of her sons ask if he can play with himself!"

Cory smiled at his lover, "Kev's right, though. It might be the only way."

"Why bother?" came Joel's sick sounding voice as he closed his eyes sorrowfully again. "I... it's useless. I..."

"Why?" Kevin asked, his open and honest face confused.

Cory glanced at Sean. They had both caught the word that Joel had cut off earlier; the word 'burn'. They both had seen his swollen and sore dick when they first showered him. They were both working out what might have happened.

Joel answered Kevin with his voice thick with tears; this time they were tears of a profound loss and pain...

:Flashback:

A Week before Mikey Came...

Joel was scrubbing the floor of the kitchen as instructed. His threadbare clothing rubbed painfully over his bumps and bruises, but thankfully he had suffered no new beatings for a week, so he was feeling slightly better. Mrs Williams was in the living room watching the television, and Joel was grateful for it. His master was in work, as normal.

The clock in the hall chimed ten in the morning when things went south fast. She came into the kitchen and looked with disgust at the small boy. "Come here," she ordered.

He stood and meekly approached to stand before her. Inside he trembled, for he guessed what was coming. He was wrong, however. This time was to be the last, but the worst.

She grabbed him by his hair and pulled him into the hallway. She threw him violently into the banisters of the stairs, making stars appear before his eyes. As he shook his head clear of them he found that his arms had been tied so that he was stretched up on tiptoes. His mistress went back into the kitchen and came back with the clothes iron, a thin steel bar and a lighter. She plugged the iron into the hall's electric wall socket.

Joel had no idea what was now about to happen, but the evil in his mistresses eyes made him afraid. She ripped off his clothing to leave him naked against the banisters, and began the all too familiar actions that would make Joel's boyhood react. He started shaking and sobbing, for this time when the beatings came he could not curl up to defend himself. If only it was to be that kind...

"I'm leaving. I won't see you again, you little bastard, but I'll make sure you never forget me."

He looked into the eyes of the devil before him. That was how he failed to see what she was doing...

His screams ripped from his throat far louder than they had ever done, for she had retracted his foreskin and pressed the scalding hot iron into the exposed head of his boyhood. She continued, taking perverse pleasure from the boy's agonizing cries. Then, once the iron bored her, she took that thin bar and forced it down Joel's dick leaving a good inch of it sticking out past the head of his penis.

Then she took the lighter...

At first nothing, then... flesh seared, nerves flared, and thankfully Joel passed out after a few seconds from the pain...

... when he awoke, he was still groaning in pain and agony. He had been untied and left as he had fallen on the floor. He looked down at the completely burned and ruined flesh that was still exposed. In pain beyond thought, he rolled the foreskin back up to cover it, crawled up the stairs to his cell of a room... and fainted again.

:End Flashback:

"... Doc fixed it..." Joel finished through his sobs of pain remembered, and Kevin was sobbing just as hard as he cuddled with Joel between the older teens, "I c...can pee without pain now, but... I can't *feel* it any more... even if you're right and *she* was wrong... I can't feel anything... it's all ruined there..."

To say Cory and Sean were pissed off would be a gross understatement.

Cory sent his opinion to Sean telepathically in terms which would make JJ blush in shame. Before Sean had a chance to respond, Kyle interrupted. *'We get the hint! You've got half of the sailors in the world taking notes on new phrases; stop cussing and start cuddling!'*

Tightening the hug around the two sobbing boys, both Cory and Sean started murmuring words of comfort to them both. Once Joel and Kevin had calmed down enough so that only small hiccups of grief were heard, Levi sent to Cory and Sean, *'I healed him on Monday, but my Friend told me to numb everything. He wasn't ready to deal then. I'm going to release him now, but you must show him he's healed. He won't look himself; he hasn't done so since that very first time.'*

'Crap,' Cory muttered to Sean down their bond-link, *'He's going to freak out.'*

'I have an idea, bro,' Sean answered, *'and I think it'll work.'*

Cory nodded, and so Sean said softly, "Lil'elf, we need to tell you something. You know your scars, and that Kyle and the others healed you?"

"Yeah?" came the meek response from the scared little boy.

"They healed everything, Lil'elf. Your dick too, bro. It's all normal again."

Joel twisted around slightly to look into Sean's eyes, "H...how do you know?"

Sean tapped the side of his head, "Kyle and Levi just said. Levi healed you, and he says you're all normal down there but that he had to keep you numb until now. The Guardian has just said you are ready to get everything back working again."

Joel's eyes opened wide, and he pulled back slightly to look down between himself and Kevin. "But..."

Kevin looked down too, then back up at Sean. He was asking for confirmation with his eyes, and the slow nod from the auburn haired teen answered him.

"You need to see it, Joel," Cory said quietly. "You won't believe until you do. It's not wrong to touch it, it's not wrong to get hard, and it's not wrong to get good feelings from it."

Kevin was listening intently to this as well, for the aspect of getting 'good feelings' was, in part, addressing his own fears of sex.

Joel looked down at himself again, and slowly reached out with a trembling hand. He jerked his hand back and started shaking more, "I can't," he whispered. "No, no... I can't."

'Bros,' Kyle sent to the two teens, 'you have to show him. He trusts you, and if you do it he'll know that it's healed, and he'll know that touching himself is a good thing. He believes everything you two say and do'

Cory nodded slowly and Sean wrapped his arms tightly around Joel's chest. Joel reached up and gripped Sean's arms with his hands seeking comfort, yet still looking down at himself... and there was a mix of fear and hope in his eyes, now.

"Do you want me to show you, Lil'elf?" Cory asked then, beginning to reach out slowly with his hand.

Joel glanced quickly at him, and after a moment's thought, nodded slowly.

Cory was about to do so when Kevin's hand reached out and stopped him. The small boy turned his head and smiled peacefully at Cory. He had decided something, and the courage Cory could now see in his eyes was something new; something drawn out from Kevin's contact with Joel. Kevin turned back and lightly kissed Joel. "I'll show you, T'hy'la," he whispered as the kiss broke.

The kiss did more than just lighten Joel's face slightly. It had distracted him as Kevin took hold lightly of Joel's penis and slowly pulled back the foreskin. Joel gasped as feeling and sensation came flooding into his mind, and he looked down quickly. He could *feel* it, and he was getting hard... and it felt real *good*... and due to both Sean and Cory touching or hugging him, he felt *safe*!

Cory looked as well and started giggling softly, "Oh, wow! Now that..."

"...is *green*!" Sean completed with a snigger. He had his face next to Joel's, and he looked down over Joel's shoulder in wonder.

"Wow," Joel murmured, a shy smile on his cute face.

Kevin said nothing. He just ogled; and kept his hold on Joel, to Cory's obvious, gentle amusement.

"You're beautiful," Kevin murmured in wonder, looking up into Joel's eyes as they lay there smiling at each other, "all of you!"

Joel blushed and mumbled under his breath, "So're you, Kev."

Joel's pulse was racing. He sensed Fire coming from Kevin, as well as support and protection and yet more Fire from his brothers. This was okay!

His brow furrowed. He could not touch himself yet; he was still too nervous, but... maybe...

Kevin was close, and due to the situation, now in the same state as Joel. It was just as easy for Joel to reach as it was for Kevin to touch him. He stretched out his hand and, with a brief hesitation, took a hold of Kevin's 'soldier' with the lightest of grips.

The brown haired boy giggled, and looked into Joel's eyes. They both started giggling, as did the older teens. Kevin started to subtly move the hand that was grasping Joel's excitement causing the Vulcan to

shudder and shift about in Sean's embrace. In turn, he reflectively squeezed his own hand, bringing a small, quiet 'Mmmmm' from Kevin.

"Okay, dudes," Sean sniggered, "do you two want to stay here and play, or have a shower? And for either option, do you want privacy?"

"Don't leave!" Joel begged quickly, nervousness rising in his voice, "I'd... I... please stay..." Regardless of nerves, though, his hand remained in place.

Kevin grinned at Sean, his own hand still moving very slowly, "Umm, a shower might be... fun. Kenny and Rory think they are, and baths, so..."

"But you'll stay?" Joel asked quickly, locking eyes with Cory. "I... I'm... sc...scared..."

Cory nodded seriously, as did Sean who rubbed his cheek against Joel's. "Sure," Cory smiled. "Come on, let's shower."

Joel was led, by *hand*, into the shower by Kevin, with Cory and Sean following. The teens were both grinning at each other as they closed the en-suite door and walked into the shower after the two smaller boys. Joel stood there nervously, yet a shy, cute smile was trying to claim his face. Kevin was busy playing with the temperature of the shower spray and yelping as the cold water splashed over his back. However, while Joel *was* nervous, and while his lips were quirked in that cute, shy little smile, Cory could see plainly that the Vulcan's eyes were fixated on Kevin's wiggling butt.

"Nice scenery in here, don't you agree, love?" Sean giggled to Cory, attempting a very poor British accent.

"Aye, that there be. I kin see the wee laddie here agrees wit' ye, Lover," Cory giggled back, in a broad Scottish one.

Joel's eye darted to theirs and he blushed bright emerald at being caught scoping out Kevin's cute derrière. "Ummm, ahhh...." he mumbled as he fought with his burning face.

Kevin glanced over his shoulders, wiggled his behind at them all and giggled. "Ignore them, Jo'. They're just jealous that they ain't as cute as we are!"

"That's a matter of who you are!" Sean giggled as he groped Cory's butt gently, making his husband wiggle slightly and playfully fend off his touches.

"Hey now! No trying to give them lessons!" Cory giggled back at him.

Kevin turned around and pulled Joel over into a loose hug and grinned at Cory, "But you've had *sooo* much practice! We wanna learn from the masters!"

Joel's glowing cheeks started glowing brighter, but his own cute smile started growing into a grin as well. Was this 'teasing'? Should he try it too?

"Y...yeah... ummm... any tips would be gratefully accepted..." he mumbled just loud enough to be heard before giggling nervously.

"I'm sure two smart, cute little angels like you can come up with things we haven't thought of yet!" Cory replied, his smile at Joel telling him the tease was accepted.

Joel allowed his grin to become a full, sunny smile. Vividly, those first few 'sexy' websites he had only once visited in that 'other place' came to memory. He tilted his head comically and replied, "I... theoretically, I would likely give you a run for your money, Blondie... I *am* Vulcan and therefore far more bendable than you."

"Kev, I think you are about to go where no man has gone before; you're a pretty lucky guy!" Sean giggled.

Kevin blushed deeply, but it was Joel's laugh that made them all blink at him curiously.

"Space, the Final Frontier," he started in a good imitation of Kirk's voice: an exact imitation, to tell the truth, "These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. It's five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before."

'Duuun dun..dun dun dun dun.....' Levi's voice giggled in all of their heads.

"I think you confused them more than I did, Levi," Joel giggled at the looks that passed between the other three.

Kevin nodded, "That tune sounds ancient!"

"Late 1960s, Kev," Joel explained with a smile.

"I'm confused... and how did you do such a good imitation of Uncle Jim?" Cory asked with a grin.

Joel's jaw dropped open. "*Uncle* Jim? You call him 'uncle' like you do Captain Spock??"

"Yeah, he threatened to tickle us if we didn't!" Sean replied. "We only call him Captain if we're on duty on-board the ship."

Joel was on seventh heaven. "He's... he's my hero..." he whispered, finally answering Cory's question. "I... I always wondered what it would be like to... for him to have beamed in and saved me and... naa, that's silly..." he trailed off, blushing in embarrassment.

"Go on; and what, elf?" Sean asked gently.

Joel blushed more and hung his head. "I wished he or Spock or Doctor McCoy or one of the others was my dad..." he whispered, a note of longing in his voice.

"Who knows... you're smart enough to be the son of any of them!" Cory replied with a loving smile.

"Yeah," Kevin added, kissing Joel's cheek, "you're half human, and you sounded like Uncle Jim; you could be his son!"

Joel raised his head and locked eyes with Kevin first, then Cory. "That would be so... nice..." he murmured, his eyes going far away.

Sean smiled and moved over with Cory and together they moved the two loosely hugging boys under the warm spray of water.

Joel grinned up at them as they both picked up soap and shampoo. "Nuh huh! You showered me last time! It's my turn to do you two first!" he giggled, feeling emboldened enough to try this 'order'.

"Deal!" Sean and Cory giggled in reply. They handed over the soap and shampoo.

Joel glanced at Kevin and shared the items between himself and his best friend. He then looked up into Cory's beautiful eyes. "You first, Blondie," he whispered, letting the Fire inside be seen in his smile and within his own shining, beautiful eyes.

Sean stepped to one side to allow the smaller two access, but Joel reached and placed some body wash soap in Sean's hands. "You help to, Big Ted; then Blondie can help us clean you."

"Anything you want, my Elf," Sean whispered back lovingly.

Cory giggled as Joel and Kevin struggled. They were going to tip-toes to reach his hair to add the shampoo. He made it easier for them, and knelt down. Joel and Kevin kissed a cheek each by way of thanks before setting to work, with Sean busy lathering up his husband's back.

Cory closed his eyes and allowed himself to drift mentally under the gentle ministrations from the three around him. His heart filled to bursting with love for each of them, and the smile on his face never wavered. They were completing the healing started the night before, and the pain and grief inside, while just as hurtful, was not bringing his soul lower, but was giving him new strength. New determination. He rested one hand on Joel's hip and squeezed slightly, while doing the same for Kevin. He received another pair of cheek-kisses for that.

Sean was silently giggling as he watched Joel move from Cory's hair to face and neck. *'I wish I had a camera, love. He's so cute with his tongue sticking out that way!'* he sent to Cory.

Cory cracked an eye open and saw that Sean was right; Joel was concentrating so hard on being gentle while showing his blond brother that he 'felt Fire for him' that his tongue was sticking out of the corner of his mouth.

Kevin smiled as he noticed... then he copied Joel, making both older teens laugh softly and joyfully. Joel's curious expression found answer in Kevin's copying, and they both dissolved with giggles as well.

"Stand and rinse," Kevin mock-ordered once the two boys had done Cory's arms.

"Sir, yes Sir!" Cory giggled as he did as told. Once the soap and shampoo had been cleared away, he moved back to them; this time he remained standing as they worked on his chest.

Joel reached Cory's outie belly button, and looked at Sean. "Ted, you like Cor's outie; do you wanna wash it?"

Sean smiled, and giggled happily, "You wash it first, then when he goes to rinse, I'll give it a 'polish'; deal?"

Cory rolled his eyes, but smiled joyfully as Joel crowed out "Deal!" and started to half wash half tickle his belly button. Laughing at his Vulcan brother's antics, Cory looked back into Sean's eyes.

Sean took this as an excellent chance to grab a nice kiss.

Both smaller boys got to their knees to wash Cory's legs, while Sean took care of Cory's lower back and butt. Joel came to the expected point where Kevin just backed away slightly and rested a hand on Joel's back to help comfort him.

The Vulcan had reached Cory's privates and was looking up at both Cory and Sean with question and worry.

"Only as much as you're comfortable with, Lil'elf," Cory said in a near whisper.

Joel nodded and took in a deep breath. He then deliberately looked at Cory's semi-excited member... and noticed the sparse hairs around it. "Wow," he breathed, and, forgetting his nervousness, he ran a feather light finger through Cory's few pubic hairs. "Soft," he murmured. Looking back up with a sad expression, he asked, "When will I get them?"

Sean smiled down at him, and laid a hand on Joel's shoulder, "When your body is ready. No one is the same, elf; we're all different."

"Yes," Cory nodded seriously, "I'm older than Sean, and he has more than me. Look," he added, as Sean stepped from behind his lover. Joel saw that Sean had far more there than Cory did. Cory continued, "It would be a boring world or universe if everything and everyone was the same, Lil'elf."

Joel accepted this, and returned his attention to those hairs; it involved a lot of shampoo, for some reason best known to Sean. He had handed Joel a large handful of the stuff while he and Cory shared a giggle. Joel supposed they were remembering something, but if Ted wanted him to use a head full of hair's worth of this strawberry smelling stuff on Cory's nether regions, then use it he would.

Once each hair had been thoroughly washed to perfection, as guided by Sean and a giggling Kevin, Joel then screwed up his courage to wash something he had never willingly touched for the past 3 years; and this was more difficult do to it not even being his own. He paused, though, when he noticed that Cory was cut.

"Why'd they do this?" he trembled fearfully as he ran a finger of the pale small scar tissue that circled Cory's glands. "You Jewish?" he asked looking up at his brother.

"No. It's just custom here in the US," Cory answered. "Most kids hate it, though, but it's a part of me now, and Sean don't mind. I don't mind about his either."

Sean added quickly, reading the fear showing in Joel's eyes, "We were babies when it was done, Joel. We can't remember it. It's okay, really."

Joel nodded mutely as he looked back at Cory's dick sadly. Kevin sighed himself, "Same for me and Ken. I really wish I still had my skin there. I... ah well..."

Joel gave him a half smile and whispered bravely, "I think it looks nice anyway Kev..." Then looking back up at Cory he added, "Yours too."

Cory smiled and ran a finger lightly over Joel's left ear.

Joel turned back as if to start washing what he was touching properly when he did something surprising. He leaned forwards and kissed the scar on Cory's dick before applying the body wash to it.

His eyes then widened and he started trembling violently. "Sorry! I... why'd I...? I'm sorry!" he cried as he pulled back quickly from them. The three of them grabbed him fast, and Cory pulled him up and into his arms, settling him on his own hip.

"Joel, look at me," Cory ordered softly.

Joel did.

"When you and Kev were talking to Allen last night, JJ was talking to me and Sean. He told us about what happened when you saw Adam's scars. What did you do then?"

Joel sniffed, but his trembling started to stop. "I... I kissed some of them..."

"Why?" Cory asked leadingly.

"Cos... 'cos he's my 'big' little brother and he'd been hurt like me and I wanted to say I... that I... I wanted to say the scars didn't change the Fire inside I feel for him, and that I would have taken those scars as my own if I could have..." Joel rushed out quickly, then, "but your dickie... It was wrong, I shouldn't have kissed it! You're *married* and..."

"Elf," Cory laid a finger on Joel's lips to silence him, "you saw *my* scar, and you kissed it to say you loved me anyway and that it didn't change how you feel for me and that you would take it as your own if you could."

Joel's eyes widened as his own words came back to calm him.

"You kissed it like a child would kiss a cut on an arm, Joel," Sean whispered, running his fingers through Joel's hair. "You wanted to 'take a hurt away', because to you, you'd remember such a pain, wouldn't you?"

Joel trembled a bit and nodded.

"You just made me happy, Joel," Cory completed. "You kissed something you wouldn't have even looked at last night, and you did so because in the past it got 'hurt' and you loved me and wanted to take my pain away. Right?"

Joel's mind swam. He went back over that kiss and thought hard, his Vulcan mind working wonders to supply the information.

"R...Right," he whispered, wonder in his face. "I wasn't... I wasn't trying to do sex with you, I... I just... you're right!"

Kevin moved closer and kissed Joel's foot, which was all he could reach from his knees. "Come on, Jo'. Cory's dick is waiting for you to finish wash number 1!"

Cory smiled and placed Joel back to his feet, and the boy quickly dropped to his knees to complete that wash. Cory looked at Kevin and asked, "Number 1?"

"Yeah. I have to do wash 2, then Sean has to make REALLY sure and do wash 3... right?"

"Timmy taught you that in the showers he's dragged you into?" Sean giggled.

Kevin nodded, "Uh huh! Me and my bros do that all the time now when we shower each other!"

Cory shook his head laughing, "The Magic of Timmy spreads... just when you thought it was safe to enter the shower!"

"Finished," Joel smiled back up and his blond brother. "Was... did I do good?"

Cory giggled, "I'd say 10 out of 10, Lil'elf."

Joel beamed with pride, then shuffled to one side to watch Kevin apply 'Wash 2'. 'Wash 3' soon followed from Sean, then and only then was Cory allowed to rinse. While he was doing so, Sean had been corralled to his knees and his long auburn hair was in the middle of a serious case of shampooing.

Everything proceeded quicker for Sean than for Cory, but that was only due to Joel not having to stop and be comforted as he had been with his eldest brother. He even kissed Sean the same way when he saw Sean's scar; "Jus' so you're even," he giggled, but the Fire in his eyes told Sean clearly that Joel loved and respected him as much as Cory, and that, if he could, the little Vulcan would have taken *that* scar onto himself as well.

Joel and Kevin faced each other as Sean was rinsing off, trying to decide who would be first to get a wash. It was then that they were joined by another small presence; Levi.

"Hi!" he giggled as the shower soaked his hair, making it seem darker.

"Good morning, Levi. You want to shower too?" Cory giggled.

Levi grinned, "Naw, I'm here to give Uncle Kev a present, if he wants it."

"Oh?" Kevin asked, smiling gently.

Levi nodded seriously. "You said you wished you weren't cut. I can undo it, Uncle Kev. I can fix it for you, if you want me to."

Kevin's jaw dropped open. He stared first at Levi, then at the others, then down at himself. "A foreskin?" he mumbled, touching his dick in wonder. He glanced at Joel, "What do you think?"

Joel bit his lower lip and looked down at Kevin, then compared his friend to himself. With honesty in his face, he smiled up at Kevin, "It's your choice. Do you want to? I l... I like you as you are, but that's only 'cos you like you as you are."

Kevin pondered that while looking aimlessly around. Eventually he focused on the waiting Levi.

"I can do it any time, Uncle Kev," Levi smiled back at him. "You don't have to choose now. But if I do it and you don't like it, I won't cut you again. I don't harm others. If you then want to go back, you'll have to do it the human way."

Kevin smiled, "I like me anyway, Levi. I only wish I'd not been cut. It won't make my life better to get it back. It'll only be me getting a want. I don't need it, just want it." He paused again, organising his thoughts, and searching his desires. "Yes. Yes please, Levi. I want to be like Joel; just 'cos I want to. I'm happy already. This is something I just want," he asked, peace in his eyes.

Joel watched as a smiling Levi moved in between them both and took Kevin's boyhood into a gentle, glowing hand.

"There," he giggled as he let go a few seconds later, "All done, Uncle Kev! It's now as if you'd never been cut. Careful, though; it'll be more sensitive than before 'til you're used to it."

Then he vanished, leaving Joel and Kevin to stare in wonder at the new look Kevin was sporting. Joel reached out and rolled it back for Kevin, making the brown haired boy shake with the feelings.

"You two could be twins!" Cory laughed.

He was right; apart from Joel being even thinner than Kevin, and having pointy ears and eyebrows and an outie bellybutton, they were now next to identical. They looked up at the blond and blushed.

Sean's eyes widened, "Wow! Yep, identical!"

Joel looked back down, and noticed that he and Kevin had risen to the occasion; and were still matching.

"So... you washing me, or me you, Kev?" he asked, trying to fight down his nerves. He had a feeling about where this would now lead, and he was scared and excited and fearful all in one.

Kevin sensed Joel's mixed emotions through his own empathic abilities, and gave the boy a full hug for a moment. It was then that Joel sensed Kevin's own doubts and fears. While different from his own, they were still real and just as troubling to Kevin as his own were to himself.

Cory broke the heaviness of the moment by giggling at them. They both looked at him and raised an eyebrow, which caused more giggles.

"What's funny, bro?" Sean asked as he came alongside his partner.

Cory could only point towards the two smaller boy's stomachs.

Joel and Kevin looked down and failed to see anything at first. Cory then moved over and slowly separated the two touching bellies to show Joel's outie bellybutton was fitted perfectly with Kevin's innie.

"You're made for each other," he whispered to them before kissing their foreheads. Then, "I think you should wash each other at the same time. How does that sound?"

Joel whispered nervously, "Yeah; that sound's nice..." while still looking at his and Kevin's joined bellybuttons.

Kevin reached and lifted Joel's chin, and saw some fear and doubt in his Vulcan friend's eyes.

Joel saw worry and nervousness in Kevin's; he could sense it come back though their contact. "You nervous too?" he whispered.

Kevin nodded, "I wanted to in bed, but now; I dunno, Jo'."

Cory and Sean came close and wrapped them both in a hug. "Listen," Sean said softly, "you guys can just wash and not do anything yet if you're nervous."

Joel looked up at his auburn haired brother, "But... what if we feel we want to later and you're not there? I... I'm scared... even now, but... you're helping... I don't think I can without you being n...near..."

Cory smiled, "Oh, Lil'elf. Just wash Kevin, and Kevin; you wash Joel. If something happens, it happens; but don't force it, okay? Your first time doing this should be when you're comfortable."

Joel looked quickly into Kevin's eyes. "That why you're scared too?"

Kevin nodded shyly. "I've never done anything either, Jo'; and you've done more than me and would have if that bitch hadn't..." his voice broke in emotion and he stopped talking to regain his control over his anger. He then whispered, "Cor's right. Let's just have fun with a wash, and see what happens. But only if you want to, Jo'."

Joel nodded slowly, his face near unreadable. "Same; only if you want to, too."

Cory and Sean moved away enough to let the little boys move under the shower to re-soak themselves before starting to shampoo each other's hair in unison. Cory moved to wash Joel's back, leaving Sean do the same for Kevin.

There was total silence in the shower this time. Kevin's eyes were half closed blissfully due to Joel's light, caring touches as he was being washed. Joel was feeling totally peaceful at the contact from Kevin.

Cory and Sean felt a particular weight on them to not say anything, and just keep a supportive contact to both boys. Something profound was about to happen. Something that each child on earth discovers with that wondering joy, yet for these two boys it was a joy either long denied or self-denied. The teens knew without knowing how they knew that their silence was mandatory. This was all for Kevin and Joel. They were privileged to watch only. To watch, and to love them both.

Joel spent a great deal of time with Kevin's nipples. He found them fascinating.

Joel's bellybutton received the same from an equally fascinated Kevin.

The inescapable sense of peace and wonder flowed through the room, and Cory began to realise that it was due to the two empathic boys unconsciously projecting what was in their hearts.

'Are you feeling this?' he whispered to Sean down the deepest levels of their bond-link.

Sean just nodded.

This moment seemed too sacred for even that much of a reply.

The two boys had stopped their movements at each other's lower stomachs and were just giving each other questioning glances. There was an almost imperceptible nod given by each before they made contact with each other's privates, and at first, to wash them only.

Joel shuddered. The experience was unique and calming, and he saw the same reactions and blissed out expression in Kevin's eyes. Gone was the knowledge of Cory's hands touching his back. What remained was a feeling of protection and assurance from his blond brother, but that was only registered at the deepest levels of his strange Vulcan psyche.

Again they paused. Without a word uttered, the movements of their hands stopped being that of cleaning and became something else: something as old as the human race. They began to bring deliberate pleasure to the other; slowly and with great care and respect - and love. Joel let out a low keening moan, which was echoed by a long, drawn out "Mmmmm" from his brown haired friend.

Cory placed his hands just under Joel's armpits, just in case was about to happen made Joel's knees buckle. Sean copied for Kevin as well.

Neither of them noticed. Joel had never felt this before, and it was not just the physical sensations that sent his thoughts spinning away; the Fire and emotion from Kevin was enough all on it's own to accomplish that. His gaze did not break from Kevin's, and the questions, and their answers, seemed to pass silently between them as they continued to gently manipulate the other. Joel whimpered and leaned forward to brush his lips against Kevin's mouth. The kiss returned was as tender and light as the one he bestowed.

The emotions passing between both were not all Fire and wonder, however. Joel's emotions had a fairly large dose of fear mixed in, but the cure for that fear came from the protection and approval he was gaining from the close proximity and physical contact to Sean and Cory. In Kevin's case it was worry. Joel sensed this in his friend, and so automatically passed on from his brothers the protection they were giving him.

Their hands began to move at a faster pace, and with their foreheads touching, both boys were leaning more and more into the other. They each used their left arm to circled the other's back and began to let the older teens support more and more of their weight. Again and again, feather light kisses were traded between them; the Fire and caring passed back and forth as well. This was heaven; pure, absolute heaven.

Nothing had prepared either boy for what was to happen next, though.

Time became meaningless to them both as the feelings built and exploded between them in unison. Amplified by the Vulcan ability to share emotions that Joel was no longer in control of and by the growing yet distracted empathic powers of Kevin, what was flooding their trembling bodies was flung out all around them, impacting Cory and Sean. It was only due to the unfocused nature of the emotion-burst, and due to the greater sexual experience of the two teens, that stopped Cory and Sean from experiencing an orgasm as well. It was a close call, though and it did make them gasp and widen their eyes. They managed to keep their focus by holding the now shuddering and noisy pair of boys and keeping them from falling to the floor.

Once the orgasm each experienced ran its course through their bodies, they were lowered slowly down by the older boys. Kneeling, they leaned against each other and panted to regain their equilibrium.

With his head rested on Joel's shoulder, Kevin simply stared forwards at everything and nothing in particular; it had been... special. Unbelievable and special. Far more so than if he had given into curiosity and done this alone. Sharing it with the boy he had fallen in love with was something beyond words.

Kenny had tried explaining what he had felt at his first time just after Rory had left for Vulcan, since he and Kevin never kept a lot from each other. Granted, details had not been given, and Kevin had never asked; he loved his brother and respected his privacy. But Kenny was hurting at that time so Kevin was the shoulder to cry on and the ear to listen as Kenny's soul unburdened itself. He could not grasp everything that Kenny had told him, though... not until now.

He was even more nervous about sex now, though, as the buzz that permeated his body was intoxicating. He wanted that feeling again, and the old worry that he would become a slut seemed to be coming to pass. He sighed heavily, and gripped the frail seeming Vulcan tighter to himself for comfort.

Joel was crying silently into Kevin's shoulder, and all that rolled through his mind was an incoherent 'Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God!' He could not believe what had just happened, nor that he felt so safe about it. Everything for the past three years had trained him to be mortally afraid of intimacy, yet it had been so right, so wonderful. He could feel his heart yammering in his chest, far faster than was normal even for a Vulcan, yet his emotions, until now so unstable, were calm - settled and at peace. The tears that fell slowly and gently were that of wonder, gratitude and that powerful Fire for the three boys who were with him. Even more so for the small, skinny brown eyed wonder who had cared for him so much; enough to begin freeing him of a demon of fear that had lived within his heart for so long.

They both became aware of Cory and Sean at the same time, for the older teens had a massive cuddle going with them both sandwiched in between.

"Th...thank you, oh thank you," Joel whispered to Kevin as they both raised their heads from the other's shoulder. Joel's eyes danced with those emotions he still could not name; but Kevin could.

Kevin kissed him, then whispered, "I love you too, T'hy'la."

Joel sniffed back his happy tears and pulled back enough to relax onto Cory's lap, for the two teens had now sat themselves cross legged behind the smaller boys. Kevin did the same and was made comfortable on Sean's lap. They kept contact with their feet, though, and this was made easier as Cory shuffled closer to Sean until their knees were touching. Joel laid his head back on Cory's right shoulder, his cheek against his brothers. "Thank you, Blondie, Ted," he said as his eyes half closed.

Cory nuzzled Joel's head. "Any time, little brother. That is what brothers are for."

"What time is it?" Kevin asked, a small quirky smile on his face as his toes tickled the soles of Joel's feet.

Sean giggled. "Just turned six," he answered as he glanced at the bathroom clock outside the shower area. He cuddled the boy on his lap tighter, "You want to go back to bed now, you two?"

Joel shrugged lazily, and equally quirky grin on his face. He then smiled more and asked, "You and Cor gonna do what we did?"

Sean smiled, "Maybe, but why'd you ask?"

"Cos he's poking me," Joel sighed as he smiled again, closing his eyes. There was no fear in him about that, now. None. Had he beaten it?

Cory giggled, "Yeah. You and Kev sent what you were feeling into both of us."

Kevin started to blush, but did giggle as he wiggled in Sean's lap. "You want us to hold you two up?" he asked teasingly.

Cory kissed Joel's cheek. "That's up to you. You didn't mind us being with you, so it won't matter to me if you're here. Sean?"

"Same," Sean agreed as he increased his hold on Kevin.

Joel flicked his eyes to the side to look at Cory's face, "You... you want us here?"

"If you two want to watch, then it's okay by me. If it would make you uncomfortable, then no - then I'd want you two somewhere where you'd feel better."

Joel gazed at Kevin thoughtfully. "If... you keep saying it's okay to do what we did, and I kinda agree right now... if I... if you two do it too, then it would only help later if those feelings come back," he whispered, half to himself.

Kevin nodded his head in agreement. "Yeah. I'm nervous about other things, and that would help. I'll just cuddle behind Sean, though. You need some privacy."

Sean giggled, "That's up to you two, guys. We don't mind."

Cory got up and sent a challenging look at Sean that made Kevin start to snigger.

"Come on, Jo'... let's make sure their back's are 'clean'!"

Joel giggled cutely as he snuggled in behind Cory as both older teens moved closer together, kneeling in front of each other. Joel wrapped his arms around his blond brother's belly, about where Cory's outie bellybutton was. Kevin did the same for Sean, and after a moment's hesitation on both parts, they moved their heads to each of the older boy's left side and watched quietly.

Joel kept looking between what Cory's hands were doing and Sean's face, measuring the reactions.

Peace. Joy. That Fire. There was no nervousness between them. 'I wanna be like that too, soon,' he thought silently, hopefully.

'You will soon,' Cory sent to him before he moved his face and kissed Sean seriously.

Kevin felt what both were feeling, and it washed into his nervous soul with a beauty that made him bite his lip to stop from crying. He closed his eyes and just held the side of his face against Sean's ribs, basking in the love he sensed from them both. It was truly beyond words.

Joel felt a build up of emotions in Cory, and equated it with his brother's approaching orgasm. He reached out and laid a single finger on Sean's chest and felt the same.

He closed his eyes, and so did Kevin; both of them pulling back until they were pressed against each older boy's back. They felt the emotions build in the room and between them all and let their souls ride the waves of them.

They both felt something hitting their hands, and then the emotions started to level out again.

"Wow," Joel muttered as both teens sank down to sit together and cuddle. Kevin moved over to the small Vulcan and they sat facing the older boys, yet they were both examining what was now on the backs of their hands and wrists.

Both teens watched as the two small boys started investigating this new 'substance' curiously, and both teens had gentle, loving smiles on their faces...

Once they had all dried, the four boys went back into the bedroom. Joel and Kevin sat down on the edge of the bed as they felt Cory and Sean stop behind them. Joel looked up at his brothers with a questioning expression on his face.

Both teens knelt down before the two little boys. Cory spoke first, "Do either of you have any questions?"

They both shook their heads, small contented smiles playing over their faces.

Sean continued, "If you do, at any time, you know you can ask, right?"

They both nodded.

"We're proud of you both," Cory said, "and we're here for you always. This will probably make Kev blush, but Joel; if you really feel you need us around to 'protect' you when you want to discover more with Kevin, you just have to ask."

Kevin did blush, but said, "I needed you too, Cor. Thank you."

Joel asked then, a little concern showing in his voice, "Was it okay to... to taste your... umm...?"

Sean smiled, "If it wasn't, we would have stopped you."

"You're both our little brothers. Little brothers are curious, and that's okay. You didn't do anything that made us uncomfortable, you were just checking out something new and fascinating," Cory finished.

Kevin nodded happily. "Yeah. Kenny told me 'bout it, but I've only seen pictures before of sperm. He can make it, but I can't yet; I'm like you, Jo'."

"We'll get there, Kevvy," Joel replied with a small smile.

Kevin looked up into the teens' faces and finished "Uh... thanks, guys; you made me feel that everything was okay, in there."

Joel slipped from the bed and into Cory's arms. "Thanks," he whispered as he kissed his brother, then reached and kissed Sean as well.

"Come on, let's get another hour of sleep," Sean whispered back.

Joel and Kevin quickly crawled to the middle of the bed and wrapped themselves into each other's arms, while the teens snuggled around the two smaller kids in the same position as they had slept in during the night. It was then that they all heard Kyle whisper in their minds, *'You all need a lot more sleep, so the Doc says he's halting time in a weird Time Lordish way. Just get as much sleep as you need, bros, and we'll get you up in time.'*

None of them replied. They just smiled. Cory and Sean closed their eyes and went back to sleep; but Kevin and Joel continued to lie there. Surrounded by loving arms, and in a tight hug, the two boys began to talk in whispers...

Darryl's Notes:

This was a very powerful chapter. I shed a huge number of tears while I was reading it. I do hope that Kevin and Joel can continue to explore each other's bodies without being petrified, even if it came from entirely different circumstances, they both needed some outside help so they can cope.

I can hardly wait to see what will happen next.

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher

Chapter 7

The Katra...

Where to begin... Dark Star, Roland, D&B and ACFan all had a hand in this at one point or another... Cheers!

"We boyfriends now, Kev?" Joel asked as Sean started snoring lightly behind his head.

Kevin pondered that. "I... I dunno, Jo'. You want to be? I'd like it, but..."

Joel also started to ponder it. "I can't say. I feel this Fire for a lot of people, and I don't know yet which Fire is a boyfriend one. Your Fire... what I feel for you, I mean... it's strongest." He paused again before saying slowly, "But what if I'm wrong and I 'love' someone else more and find out *after* becoming your boyfriend? I don't wanna hurt you, Kev. You're my bestest friend!"

Kevin nodded slightly in understanding. "Yeah, I understand. I'm dealing with some stuff too. Best Friends, Jo'. Best friends until we're both sure?"

Joel smiled and nodded, then gave Kevin a big, loving kiss on the lips.

Kevin giggled quietly. "With benefits!"

"Benefits?" Joel asked, puzzled.

Kevin kissed Joel back, just as lovingly, and his hand moved from around Joel's back to the Vulcan's front. Joel's eyes widened as Kevin found his privates and rubbed softly. "Benefits," Kevin giggled again before putting his arm back around his friend.

Joel nodded a bit foolishly, a quirky grin back on his face, "Yeah. Best Friends with Benefits! I'd like that..."

Kevin grinned back for a moment, then his face became pensive. Joel felt a flash of worry from his friend.

"What's wrong? You feel afraid of something. You were in there too when..." Joel trailed off, still unable to give names to sex acts yet.

"When we made love?" Kevin whispered.

"Did we? I..." Joel's voice dropped to a dead whisper as if what he was saying was illegal, "I thought that was anal and stuff!"

Kevin smiled sadly, "People make love when doing anything special, even if it's only kisses, Jo'. If there's a 'Fire' in them like you say, and they care about sharing that with another, then they make love."

"O...okay," Joel nodded, understanding. "Why were you scared back then, then? And why are you nervous now?"

The brown haired boy sighed. "I'm afraid and nervous 'cos I don't wanna be like Jake was once; addicted to sex, then hooked onto drugs, and..." He paused and Joel tightened his hug in support. Continuing slowly, Kevin said, "I have known I was gay for a while, Jo'. I have also known about sex and jerkin' off and all that for a long time. I've never... never done anything before." He trailed off in a whisper.

"I'm here. It's okay, Kev," Joel nuzzled his nose into Kevin's cheek. "I'm here."

Tucking his head under Joel's chin, Kevin breathed in deeply. "I never wanted to do nuthin' 'cos I saw what it made Jake. I didn't want that. I don't want that, but now... I want to feel what we just did again, Joel! And it scares me! I don't wanna be a slut. I don't wanna just do it to feel good and get... get addicted, then do drugs and crime and stuff. I... I... don't know what to do..." He broke off and started crying softly.

Joel held him quietly for a few minutes as he thought furiously. With deliberate slowness and thought he answered Kevin's troubles, "Think about JJ."

"Umm," Kevin sniffed, "uh, okay."

"Think about doing what we did just now with him."

Kevin shuddered, but did as he was told.

"What do you think it would be like?" Joel asked softly.

Kevin turned his head to look into Joel's eyes. "Well, I'd think it would feel good, but... no, I don't want to do that with JJ. It's plain wrong! He's with Adam!"

"Okay. Now, do the same with Nathan."

Kevin, puzzlement on his face, did as he was told. After a few seconds, he again shook his head, "No. I don't wanna... it would feel good, but... No, Joel. Not with him either."

Joel smiled and kissed Kevin yet again. "Who would you want to do stuff with?"

"Y...you," Kevin stuttered shyly, "just you."

Joel giggled, "Not much of a slut, then, are you?"

Kevin began to relax more and more before breaking out in quiet giggles. "No, not really. Well, I'd be yours!"

Joel's eyes widened before he started laughing silently. Kevin soon joined him, and they giggled until their ribs hurt.

"You not sleepy, Uncles?" they heard from the lump that had appeared by their feet. There was slight movement, and a very tiny body wormed its way up until a three year old Levi sprawled himself between them. "You should sleep. You're gonna need it," he piped seriously.

Kevin grinned at Joel before they both covered the tiny child's face with kisses. Once he had been properly subdued, they cuddled in around him, and closed their eyes.

Levi decided to remain where he was. Cuddles were good, especially Joel-Cuddles.

He closed his own eyes and let himself sleep as well, yet still 'watching' all four of his uncles.

A Mikyvis' job was never done...

Kevin awoke to find that Levi had shifted behind Sean, and that he and Joel had traded places while asleep. He was now being spooned by Sean rather than Cory. What made him giggle, and therefore wake Sean, was the sight of Joel doing his regular thing as he slept, sucking a thumb. Only this time, Cory's hand that had been around his 'Lil'elf' must have drifted too close to Joel's mouth. Kevin laughed quietly, and Sean soon joined in: obviously, due to having his arms around Kevin, Joel had been unable to suck his own thumb, and so as soon as Cory's had presented itself to him, he had gone to town on it. Both he and Cory were still dead to the world, and all that could be heard were light snores and a 'suck, suck, suck' sound every so often.

"You got a camera, Sean?" Kevin managed to ask before breaking out in quiet giggles again.

Sean nodded, "Yeah, but it's... it's in my hand. Levi?"

Levi snuggled further behind Sean, and leaned his chin on Sean's arm. "Take the picture, Uncle Sean. That's cute!"

Sean giggled and did so. Cory woke up due to the flash of the light, but Joel simply muttered something around the thumb in his mouth, and was soon back to contentedly sucking it, still asleep.

Cory smiled as soon as he realized what was happening. "I'm glad he don't grind his teeth in his sleep!" Cory giggled softly.

"Wat arth yoo tawkin' abowth?" Joel murmured around Cory's thumb, his eyes opening blearily. He blinked a few times as he focused on the grinning Kevin, Sean and Levi. He went to take his thumb out of his mouth, but all he ended up with was getting a hand full of his best friend's cute butt, causing Kevin to giggle more. "Wat ith thith?" his brow furrowed in confusion as he looked at the large hand that was in front of his face.

"I think you took possession of my thumb in your sleep, Lil'elf," Cory replied softly as he removed his thumb and kissed Joel's ear.

"Oh. Sorry," Joel mumbled as his face coloured up in a blush.

Kevin sniggered, "I thought it was cute, Jo'."

"You didn't do anything other than make it soggy; it's okay, lil' bro," Cory added.

Levi smiled down at the blushing yet grinning Vulcan. "You hungry? Daddy just said that Tommy said he'd make pancakes but not 'til his chief taster gets there and helps him and that's you, Uncle Joel!"

Joel's stomach answered for him.

"Cool! I'll tell him you'll be there as soon as you've had your cream put on and dressed!" he bubbled, then vanished.

"I don't feel itchy, though," he said out loud. "I feel okay."

Sean nodded, "That's good, but the Doc said you should have a last dose this morning. Hopefully you'll stay okay then."

Joel smiled softly. "Okay. But it's Kev's turn!"

Kevin grinned, but then looked a little puzzled. "You still can't touch yourself there?"

Joel mutely shook his head, "No. I... not yet." Then his face grew a little wicked, and he glanced down at Kevin's middle, "But..."

Sean laughed, as did Cory, and they both rolled and got out of bed. "Okay, you guys get ready," Cory started, "Then we'll go get..."

A vile smell struck his nostrils making him gag, and Sean did also. "Cory! Did you steal the bread last night??" he asked in accusation.

Kevin started to blush while Joel nearly fainted.

"It... that was me, Sean," Kevin mumbled shyly. "I've never had..."

He didn't finish either, for Joel gasped, and went pale.

The smell grew worse, and Cory and Sean ran for their en-suite bathroom so fast they got jammed in the doorway.

"Jesus!" Sean cried and fell over, for Cory had chosen that moment to join in. "You did! I... I'm..." he gagged and jumped to his feet. A second later, the bedroom door was opened and Sean was in the hallway looking at them all in horror. "Three of them?! That's unreal!"

For Love of God, Close Door, Sean-Boy! they all heard from I-Cheya down the hallway.

"Umm... am I ill? Are we all ill?" Joel asked, fear once again back in his voice.

Cory, now that his nose was self-acclimatised, moved back over and cuddled up to the two boys on his bed, "No; it's just the garlic bread saying hello. Remember I told you I get stinky? Looks like you two get the same."

Kyle appeared then: in a full Starfleet issue Vacuum Suit!

Sean started laughing while fanning the air from his nose, "What have you got to be afraid of, Kyle-bear??"

"Heightened senses, horsey-boy!" retorted the King of the Mikyvis playfully, before grinning at them all. "Just messin' with ya. Okay, I'm going to 'pipe' this stuff 'away' some place. There's a world not far from here where what y'all are doing is a breath of fresh air to them!"

"Good idea," Sean nodded seriously, "or they will cause a disaster at the Funeral."

"Only if someone lights a match!" Cory giggled.

Kyle grinned again. "There, done. Fart as much as you like, we're all safe now!"

Kevin poked his tongue out at the younger boy before laughing wickedly, "I've got to do this one day with Kenny, especially if he's been teasing me!"

"Didn't think you two ever fought," Cory commented.

"We don't, but we do tease a lot. He sometimes gets me worked up, so now I know how to get even!"

Joel giggled and pulled Kevin in closer for a cuddle, "You're as silly as Sean is!"

Sean glanced down the hallway towards the Sehlat cub. "I-Cheya, I thought you and the guys were taking it in turns to sleep?"

They need sleep. I watch, they sleep

"Aren't you tired?" Sean asked curiously.

Joel giggled from the bed, "He's a Vulcan animal, Big Ted. We can go days without sleep."

"You slept a lot yesterday, T'hy'la," Kevin murmured from his arms.

"Yeah, but I'm not as fit as a normal Vulcan," Joel giggled.

Cory laughed and winked at his brother, "Now that's a good excuse. I'm getting dressed. You going to, Sean, or are you setting a new fashion for streaking at funerals?"

"Is it safe in there yet?"

Kyle gave the thumbs up.

"Why should I believe you, Kyle-bear?? You're *still* in that suit!!"

"Oh, bite me!" Kyle said as he removed the suit with a thought. "Get dressed. I'm hungry for pancakes, and Tommy won't make any without Joel. Get dressed!" he finished with a tongue poke at his brothers before vanishing.

Joel was about to get up when Kevin pulled him back. "Nuh huh, Jo'. Lie on your belly. You've got to have your cream put on first!"

Cory laughed as he went to fetch the tube of skin-cream. "I just think you want to give your boyfriend an all over massage, Kev!"

Kevin blew him a raspberry, but the foolish grin never left his face as he took the cream and watched Joel roll onto his front.

Cory and Sean had completely dressed before Kevin had finished with Joel's back. He sat astride his friend and was slowly massaging the cream into every area of exposed flesh he could.

Joel was purring, or would have if he could.

"You've got dimples on your butt!" Kevin giggled as he reached there.

Joel looked back over his shoulder, "Really?"

"Yeah!" Kevin giggled, poking a finger into each cheek to show Sean and Cory. "Where's that camera, Sean?"

Joel buried his face in the quilt and his body took on a darker shade as he blushed all over.

"No, Kev," Sean laughed as he ruffled the boy's hair. "I don't think Joel would want that."

"Thanks," came the embarrassed mumble from the quilt.

"I'm getting some coffee going. This might take a while," Cory laughed as he pulled his husband from the room. "Hey, Bear? You want anything?"

Meat from pig?

"Bacon do?"

Raw?

"Of course," Sean giggled.

Please

"Turn over, Jo'," Kevin whispered as the older teens left.

Joel did so, and his face was still burning with his blush. Kevin sat on Joel's thighs and simply looked down at him in wonder. 'He's an angel,' Kevin thought to himself, 'and he's mine!'

Joel quirked his lips in a shy smile, "You look... ummm..." He blushed harder.

Kevin whispered with a shy smile of his own, "You can say it, Jo'. It's okay to say stuff like I think you wanna say."

Joel took a deep breath and whispered, "Beautiful... and sexy..."

Kevin also blushed. "What I was thinking about you too," he murmured as he started rubbing the cream into Joel's belly; paying close attention to the outie bellybutton, of course.

Joel watched Kevin's face soften more and more as the cream was being worked into his chest, neck, face and stomach. Kevin started to smile broadly, though, when he got to a certain point, and Joel soon joined him.

"Love you," Kevin whispered as he leaned down to kiss Joel seriously while his hand suddenly became busier.

Joel just pushed his own Fire into Kevin as response as they kissed, and his own hands started to seek out a certain part of Kevin's body.

"They are noisy!" Hermes giggled as he and his brother ran ahead of their sisters into the kitchen.

"They woke you up?" Sean asked with a chuckle.

Aphrodite nodded as she and her sister entered a few seconds after the twin cheetahs, "You could say that."

Blackie bounced in. *Boy and Kevin-Boy, sitting in tree; w... a... n...*

Behave! I-Cheya huffed as he nosed the wolf pup in the rump. *No tease*

Cory shook his head as he laughed. He managed to ask, "Cream for you guys?"

The cheetah's nodded quickly, while the she-cats went to the meat being pulled out for them, "No, we'll snack on this with Bear."

Blackie looked at the raw meat and wrinkled his nose with a whine.

"Don't worry, boy," Sean leaned down and scratched the pup's ears. "We're cooking some for you."

Blackie licked Sean's hand by way of thanks and sat at his feet, waiting patiently for the bacon to crisp.

Joel found that he liked kissing a lot.

So did Kevin.

The human boy was stretched out on top of his Vulcan friend and they were attempting to find the other's tonsils.

Coming up for air, Kevin smiled down lazily at Joel. "I love you," he whispered.

Joel's own smile grew larger. He pushed what he was feeling back out and into Kevin briefly yet again.

"Come on, we should get ready. Tommy's probably wondering where you are," Kevin giggled after another long kiss.

"Mmm, okay," Joel breathed out as Kevin lifted himself off, and rolled from the bed.

Five minutes later, they appeared in the kitchen to see everyone grinning at them; even the Sehlat. Now that was an achievement!

"What?" Joel asked innocently, his eyes wide as he blinked at them all.

Mercury snorted back a giggled. "Nuffin'! Did we say anything? Nope, must be nothing, then!"

Kevin blushed, "You heard?"

"You could say that," Aphrodite stated, repeating herself from earlier.

Artemus sniggered, "Saw too. The door was open! Like I said - you're cute!"

Joel cringed back behind Kevin nervously, yet he did have a small blush mounting his cheeks.

Cory came over to him and whispered in his ear as he hugged the small Vulcan, "You did nothing wrong, Lil'elf. Just like the shower; it was all okay."

Joel nodded uncertainly, but did start to smile as the G-Cats all nodded in approval.

"Time for a real breakfast!" Sean giggled as he pushed his now empty plate away from himself. "Shall I call for a Levi-Taxi?"

"I charge by the microsecond. 5 hugs per," Levi sniggered as he appeared on Sean's shoulders.

Sean laughed and pulled the little guy down and started snuggling him. Cory came over, kissed Levi's cheek, and giggled, "When you're ready, Leev. We're all wasting away."

"Yeah, I can tell," Levi mumbled from the wonderful cuddle Sean had going as everyone in the room vanished and appeared in Teri's living room.

Jason's grandmother, Meredith, nearly choked on her morning coffee. "My goodness! These old nerves won't stand for too much popping about, cariad," she spluttered to Levi. "At least with transporters one gets *some* warning!"

"Sorry, Granma Mere!" Levi giggled with a sunny smile. "Will snuggles help?"

"Always. Get your skinny butt over here," she laughed, opening her arms.

"Okay, so it's proven that Mikyvis are powered by cuddles!" Cory giggled.

Joel, his self-worth and strength bolstered by all that had happen in the last twelve hours, smiled at Kevin and winked. He then moved over and started giving puppy-dog eyes to Cory while plaintively tugging on his hand. "Isn't everyone, Blondie?" he whispered, adding a play-pout for good measure.

"Yep, and I'm feeling an Elf-Cuddle deficiency!" Cory giggled as he scooped up Joel into his arms.

Kevin sniggered, "I'm topped up on something better than those right now." He then blushed at what he had implied, albeit loosely. So did Joel, who tucked his face into Cory neck as his own cheeks started burning.

Meredith, now hugging Levi soundly, looked over and started chuckling at the two furiously blushing boys. "Oh ho; so we have another randy couple in the house! Hope you had fun, sweeties," she smiled.

Joel's reaction was immediate. He tensed in Cory's arms and started shaking. In a whisper he asked his brother, "You s...sure I won't be in t...trouble?"

"Positive, Lil'elf... if it was a crime, everyone here would be in prison right now, including a lot of the adults!" Cory replied back.

Joel sniffed, and relaxed somewhat. Levi looked over at Sean and something passed in that look.

Sean started to quietly chuckle as he murmured, "Mom will not expect that one."

Joel glanced over at him and saw him smiling at him. He grinned back a bit uncertainly before giving Cory one last hug. "Where's our brothers?" he asked as Cory placed him back down.

Levi giggled, "It's only seven, Uncle Joel; they're still in the nest. Dad and Pop and my bros are awake and snuggling, and Tommy is in the kitchen with Aunt Helen and Grandma, but the others are still asleep."

Kevin started giggling. "Hey, Joel? You wanna have some fun?"

"Like what?" Joel asked with interest.

Cory saw the look in Kevin's eyes and rolled his own. "What have you got planned, Kev?"

"Nothin'," he grinned evilly as he took Joel's hand and pulled him from the room.

Sean glanced at Cory, then at Meredith. "Oh shit," he mumbled under his breath.

In the kitchen, Tommy was suddenly accosted by two giggling boys, and Teri and Helen started laughing as he was piled under by Joel and his 'Morning-Snuggle-Attack'.

"Morn'in, Tommy! We's got a ideer an' neeta' know if y'all's got apaira x'tra pots an' sum stirsticks. Kin we be borrow'n dem please?" Joel asked his brother in an exact copy of Tommy's accent.

"Tommy, you're contagious!" Teri laughed as she pulled her Vulcan son into a loving hug as Tommy got up from the floor, howling in laughter.

"Com'n up," Tommy managed as he handed Kevin the required items. "Thanks, Joel. I liked dat."

Joel moved over and hugged him with an extra special hug, "Any time, Tommy," he whispered, "as long as you want me to, I'll speak like you - 'kay?"

"Kay," Tommy grinned, then watched as the two boys raced back out, carrying a pot and a spoon each.

Helen looked curiously at Teri, "What do you think they need them for?"

"I think we're about to fin..." she started to reply but was interrupted. The sudden loud banging of said wooden spoons against the pots coming from the direction of the room where the kids were nesting answered Helen's question for her far easier.

Half a second after the banging started, Tyler popped into the room, still lying on the floor.

"Don't tell me that surprised *you*, Ty!" Teri laughed at the shocked look on her youngest son's face.

Tyler got up from the floor and glanced through the door of the kitchen towards where a lot of laughing and giggling was coming from. "Yeah, it did. We can't tell the future around Joel, Mom. He's a whirlwind of possibilities and everyone near him is affected in some way. That scared the shit out of me! I was kissing Kyle at the time!"

In the nest room, Joel and Kevin were being soundly tickled/hugged by the others. In Kevin's case it was mostly tickles, but Kyle had quickly sent to everyone that Joel couldn't take tickle torture yet, so *'Go easy, and hug and kiss him as well'*

Xandor was still trying to preen down his ruffled feathers at the rude awakening when the little Vulcan was passed to him for 'punishment'. "Well, I was feeling peckish," he giggled as he grabbed Joel and lifted the boy's tee-shirt. "A Vulcan belly sounds quite tasty!" He then proceeded to give Joel's stomach a massive does of belly-raspberries. Joel was in a giggling, hysterical, happy mess by the time the bird-boy let him up from the floor.

Kevin was in an even worse state than Joel. In the end, only his rather panicked, "I'm gonna pee!" stopped the torture Adam and Brant had going between them.

Joel grinned as he watched his best friend run from the room holding himself tightly. "You gonna get up now?" he asked them all happily.

Adam went over, picked up Joel and plonked him on his shoulders, "Yup, and your punishment is to go help Tommy make breakfast, little imp!" He started to walk out, carrying the laughing boy easily, "Come on, I'm hungry!"

Tyler was still by the kitchen door and was grinning as he saw his brothers coming towards him. "Wait 'til later, Elf! I'm going to think up something real good to get you back with!" he giggled.

Joel was set to his feet next to Tyler and immediately grabbed his little brother for a hug. "Just as long as you... you..." he stopped, sighed, then pushed his feelings out towards Tyler.

"I do. Always," Tyler answered him, hugging him back tightly. "You're my big Vulcan brother; I'll always love you, Joel." He pulled back and looked up into Joel's eyes. "In the short time we've been brothers, I cannot imagine not having you around, Elf. I'd die if you did," he whispered.

Joel shivered, "Don't say that! Don't. I'm not worth that, Tyler!"

"Yes you are," Tyler said with certainty, shivering slightly himself. "All my brothers are."

Joel sighed, then kissed Tyler. "You gonna help make pancakes?" he asked quietly as Adam walked back to the nest room to get dressed.

Tyler nodded happily, "Yeah. One sec, just gonna grab some clothes." He popped away, and reappeared ten seconds later in tee-shirt and shorts, "Ready!"

Half an hour later, and Kevin was patting his slightly protruding belly as he watched Joel finish the last of the pancakes on his plate. Again he had been fed each mouthful by Joel, and this time had stopped asking for more before becoming bloated. It was still more than he would have normally eaten in a day, but for some reason, Joel feeding him made food desirable rather than repugnant.

Joel pushed his plate back slightly and sat back, pulling Kevin closer to snuggle. Good food needed a good friend to snuggle with after, he decided with a cute smile as he watched his brothers finish their own breakfast. He watched as his mother came in with two energy shakes and placed them before the two small boys.

"Did you sleep well, Joel?" she asked as she kissed his forehead.

He nodded happily, "Yeah. Cor and Sean showed us their room and then we snuggled to go to sleep. Then..." he paused, glancing at Cory. Cory nodded at him, and so, slowly, he told Teri about what had happened with Cory the night before.

Everyone in the room was silent as they were let in on how close they had come to losing Cory forever. The Mikyvis were the only ones not surprised. They simply added their own explanation for it, going

by what they had seen in the night. Kyle, however, remained strangely quiet and just pushed his untouched food around his plate.

Joel had barely finished speaking when Teri pulled him into her arms.

"Thank you for being Cory's Guardian Angel, little one," Teri whispered softly.

Joel smiled slowly as she kissed his cheek. "He'd have done the same for me," he whispered. He then paused again - then started shaking. "He did as well..." he trailed off fearfully. This was the test.

Cory noticed and came over quickly to rub his back.

Joel was looking into his mothers eyes, but couldn't bring himself to say it - to ask it - to seek confirmation from his mother.

Teri raised an eyebrow at Cory, then noticed Kevin begin to blush. Deeply.

"Ah," she guessed. She looked into Joel's worried eyes. "You and Kevin had 'fun'?"

Slowly, uncertainly, he nodded his head. Then he started blushing heavily as, due to his perfect memory, something started happening.

Teri smiled as she noticed his 'reaction' and placed the now bright green boy back next to the equally blushing Kevin. "It's okay, Joel. As long as you're both happy, and as long as no-one gets hurt, then I'm happy too."

He just smiled shyly up at her, his fears receding. "So... it's okay that Kev and I masturbated in the shower, and that Cory and Sean were with us and...?"

Kevin choked and hid his face in his friend's shoulder. "Joel!" he mumbled in embarrassment.

"What?" he asked curiously. "Mama said it was okay, Kev; I'm just making sure it was, is all."

To their credit, no-one laughed. Kevin took a peek when no laughter came in response to Joel's revelation. All he saw were happy smiles. He began to grin back, even through his embarrassment. He sighed happily, and snuggled more with Joel. "Just don't go telling them everything we ever do, Jo'. It's embarrassing!"

"Can't I say we kissed either?" he asked in concern.

Kevin giggled, "Well, that's okay, and even if it wasn't, you just did!"

Giggles *did* meet that statement. "Good for you, guys!" Adam giggled. "At least your first time was in a bedroom!"

"Oh?" Teri asked, a mischievous grin on her face, "and what is that supposed to mean, Adam?"

"I... ah... damn," he mumbled.

JJ buried his face in his hands, "Blonds... God save us... please?"

Tyler was on the floor laughing at this, of course.

Joel did not know what this was all in reference to, and so he just smiled curiously around at them all.

"Tell you after, Lil'elf," Sean sniggered, glancing at JJ and Adam.

"Oh, okay. Um, Mam?" he turned his beautiful blue eyes on Teri. A hint of nervousness was still there. He obviously needed her confirmation on something else.

She opened her arms and up he hopped again. "You can ask me anything," she murmured to him.

And so he did - this time, it was Cory and Sean's turn to blush scarlet.

"You said it was okay for me and Kev... I mean, it's okay, right?" he asked, just to be sure.

Teri nodded.

Joel sucked in a breath, "Then is it also okay that me and Kev were watching Cor and Sean do the same?"

Teri chuckled, as did everyone else this time. "As long as they were okay with it, then yes."

Joel leaned in and whispered something else, after checking around and seeing Timmy giggling at the faces his parents were pulling at where the conversation was headed.

Teri really started laughing after Joel's whispered explanation and questions. "Yes, Joel. That is okay to. That's natural, especially around curious boys who like other boys. It's okay."

Joel slipped back down and snuggled in next to Kevin again while Teri pulled her two sons over and said quietly, "After what I've been told, I now know you're both growing up fine and healthy. Don't be upset at what he said, okay?"

Cory's eyes widened as he blushed, and he murmured out, "Ah, don't worry, Mom. We wouldn't."

"Even though I feel like tickling him to death right about now!" Sean added, darting a look at the innocently smiling Joel who was looking up at him.

Cory pulled back from his mother and pulled Joel over to hug him, "You just like making me blush, don't you?"

"Uh huh," Joel nodded with a smile, "You're cute when you blush!" He then thought of something. "Ah, Kev? You asked me to remind you to thank Levi for the present he gave you."

Kevin started blushing again.

"Considering who Levi's parents are, I think it's better that I don't ask!" Teri said with a chuckle.

"It was a good present, Mammy; honest!" Joel said sincerely.

"Just don't ask me to show you at the breakfast table," Kevin murmured as he looked anywhere but at the faces looking at him curiously.

Levi sniggered. "He wanted something back that had been taken when he was a baby, Grandma. I just gave him what he asked for, is all," the little Mikyvis giggled.

Joel nodded happily. "Yeah, and we're almost twins now!" he bubbled.

"I could give him pointy ears too, if you'd like?" Levi joked.

Teri raised her eyebrows, "If it's what I think it is, then I'm sure I'll see it sooner or later."

Cory started laughing. "Kevin, you nesting with us tonight?"

The blushing boy nodded, "Dunno *what* Kenny'll say."

Cory glanced at his mother. "Then yes, you will!" he laughed.

Teri rolled her eyes and left the gang to it.

"Will Kenny be angry?" Joel asked with concern.

Levi shook his head, "No. If Uncle Kevin is happy, then Uncle Kenny is too. They love each other, but Uncle Kenny's always wanted Uncle Kev to be happy. Getting his wish is a good thing."

Kevin grinned. "Yeah," he whispered, throwing a telling look at Joel, "you can say that again."

"Looks like it ain't just the Disney Mickey Mouses that grant wishes then," JJ giggled to Adam.

Kyle slapped his fork down on the table in sudden annoyance as he said to no-one in particular, "I'm getting real sick of this name calling."

JJ blinked. "It was only a joke, Kyle," he said softly in an apologetic tone.

Before he could continue, Kyle exploded at him in anger, "You go call a black kid 'nigger' and tell *him* it was only a joke! You go and insult someone's name when they were named after two of the best people he knows!" Kyle's face was streaming tears, now; tears of anger but more of helplessness and grief. Helplessness as he was unable to help Cory the night before, and grief over the upcoming funeral. He raged on in the now silent and shocked room, "Mikey and Levis! THAT'S who we're named for and every time you guys go and poke fun at our name, you insult them. You insult us! Would you like being called names by some alien race 'cos you're human? The little kids who mess up our name is no problem 'cos it IS a hard name to say, but... but... oh forget it!"

He vanished.

Joel poked his head from around Cory's back where he'd been hiding and glanced at the now empty seat.

JJ's mouth was just hanging open. His eyes widened when Tyler shot him a dirty look. "Well done," was all *he* said before he too vanished.

Joel glanced up at Cory's shocked face, then over at the wide eyed Kevin.

"L...Levi, can you take me to your dad please?" JJ whispered eventually.

Levi shook his head after a brief second. "No. He feels bad for shouting at you. He..." Levi answered before trailing off. Then, "He feels ashamed," he whispered.

"Take me," Joel said, fear evident in his voice.

Levi cocked his head to one side, "Daddy don't wanna see anyone, Uncle Joel."

Joel fixed Levi with an odd look for him, one never before seen on his face. A Big Brother look. "He and Ty are my for-real little brothers. Yet they don't know me like they know JJ. They... they are not as... they don't... they can't hurt me any more than I've already been. I don't know them like JJ does neither, so I have less expectations." He got up and walked around to JJ. He placed his hand under JJ's shirt to touch his chest and said to the boy, "Think of Kyle."

JJ did, and Joel's eyes darted around for a second. "Okay," he murmured. "Bryce?"

Bryce looked at his uncle, his face unreadable.

"When Levi tells you, bring JJ, Cory and Sean. Levi? Can you take me to Kyle please?" the small Vulcan asked the first born of the Mikyvis.

"He doesn't want to speak to anyone, not even Poppa," Levi shook his head, trying to dissuade the boy. He didn't want Joel to be hurt by a cold shoulder from his father.

"Take me," Joel whispered again, "It'll be okay."

Levi shuddered nervously, "Okay, if you're sure, Uncle Joel."

Joel appeared with Levi on the roof of CIC, and he could see Kyle and Tyler sitting on the edge. Joel saw straight away that something was different from normal, for the bird that was 'flying' past him was frozen in place.

Tyler turned and came over to Joel quickly. "Best you go back to Cory, bro," Tyler started, but Joel's quick hug and kiss silenced him.

"He's my second little brother, lil' bro, and he thinks he's hurt JJ, so I'm here instead," Joel murmured before moving over and sitting next to Kyle.

"Go 'way," Kyle said softly, morosely.

Joel pulled his little brother over and into his side in response.

"I said go away, Joel," Kyle said again more firmly.

Joel picked up his brother and sat him on his lap. He then started pushing out with his feelings, pushing out the Fire and Heat he felt for Kyle. He found that he could not do what he had done with Cory and the others and put his feelings into Kyle, but... he just kept pushing; offering.

Kyle sat stiffly on his Vulcan brother's lap and ignored the love and caring that Joel was surrounding his essence in. Well, he ignored it for a while. After what seemed like an hour later, an hour of total silence yet with this constant blanket of love surrounding him, he finally accepted what Joel was offering. He sniffed and started to cry softly into Joel's shoulder.

That bird, Joel noticed on one level of his layered mind, had still not moved an inch.

"Want to tell me what's the matter, Little Bear?" Joel whispered into his little brother's hair, bestowing the name he had chosen that would forever be his special one for Kyle.

Kyle shook his head slightly and just kept on crying.

Joel waited for a few minutes until the brown haired eight year old's sobs had lessened, then, "Come on, Little Bear. I don't mind what you say. You know the worst that I've been through, so I won't mind what it is. You won't hurt me."

Kyle sniffed and spoke nearly under his breath, "I shouted at my big brother. I got mad at him, Joel! I've never screamed at him before; not ever. I... I'm scared he might not love me any more, now."

Joel tightened his grip and rubbed Kyle's back. "I asked JJ to let me feel something before I came here. Wanna feel it?"

"What is it?" Kyle asked sickly.

"What he feels for you. Not what he did feel, but what he feels now. Here, you see for yourself," Joel whispered and started pushing out with the feelings he had picked up from JJ.

Kyle felt the emotions coming from Joel change, and again accepted them.

He started crying again.

Joel looked over his shoulder at Levi and Tyler and mouthed, "Tell Bryce."

Seconds later, Sean, Cory and JJ appeared.

Kyle looked up, looked at his three closest brothers, looked back and into Joel's eyes, then kissed Joel quickly. "Thank you. You're really a big brother, aren't you?" he whispered with a ghost of a smile.

Joel shrugged, "I hope so. Go. Go see your JJ, Little Bear."

Kyle didn't waste time running over. He just popped from Joel's lap and into JJ's arms, where he started to cry again.

Joel moved over to the group and tugged at Cory's hand. "Blondie, Kev wants to go to his home to show me some things. He told me when I was feeding him pancakes. He said we'd meet you at the funeral with Xain and Jake. Is that okay?"

Cory hugged his little elf tightly, "Sure thing, Joel. If you need me or Sean, though, call. Okay?"

Joel nodded, then looked at Levi. Levi grinned, and they both vanished, Bryce following them.

The five boys on the roof settled down with Kyle in the centre, and started to talk.

Rec Room:

Telez shook Jason awake. "Bro? I need you to finalize something for me. Bro?"

Jason yawned and stretched out. He looked around at the empty Rec Room. "Gawd, did I sleep through breakfast?"

"Nearly," Gabe giggled from the sofa. "I got a nice show, though. You and Nath' waving your swords at us all."

Nathan groaned and turned over onto his belly, "Damn it. I hate sleeping late."

"Nice flagpole though..." Travis giggled. "How do you keep a flag on it though with the way it keeps jerking around?"

Even Nathan's butt turned red at that. "My preferred 'flag' is rubbing the sand out of his eyes," he mumbled with a quirky grin as he glanced at Jason. "And my 'flag' don't mind the twitching... do you, Jace?"

"No comment," Jason giggled.

"Jace, you missed some drool on your chin..." Travis giggled, enjoying the show of his newest brothers waking up.

Jason poked his tongue out at Travis, "Well, can't be helped. He's hot. AND it's my turn next time!"

Nathan blushed more, "Jace! Stop it, you know..."

"Yeah, yeah; I know. You still love me though, don't you?" the Evans Patriarch asked, using his puppy dog eyes at Nathan.

Nathan smiled softly, "Forever."

Telez rolled his eyes, then decided to sit down and wait out his mushy brothers.

"Hey, don't roll your eyes at us! Just 'cos you got a major case of blue balls don't mean we can't have fun!" Nathan sniggered at the Andorian.

Telez raised an eyebrow. "I'll have you know Antony and I enjoyed intimacy last night, and..."

"Tel," Jason sighed, a loving smile on his face, "you've ALWAYS got blue balls... you've been around us too long, haven't you?"

Telez stopped talking. Then, "Damn. You're right. I have. Now I'll have to kick your butts."

"Let me get some popcorn; this should be fun!" Gabe giggled as he motioned for Davey and Jimmy to join them.

Jason checked quickly, and found that Telez was serious. "You really want to spar with me on an empty tummy? You're insane, bro; you know how cranky I get if I don't eat!"

Telez smiled, "Then it'll be a good work out." He glanced at Jimmy and Davey, "Children. Jason, Nathan and I will now play fight. Do not be concerned for we will not hurt each other. Will you both be okay watching?"

They both nodded. "Yeah; Poppa Trav says we should watch stuff like this so we can start learning how to protect ourselves," Jimmy said softly.

Nathan jumped to his feet and gestured. All the pillows and blankets flew away from the centre of the room, and the furniture moved out. A large empty space was revealed, around which Nathan made the pillows arrange themselves in a large circle. "Gabe, Trav. Make sure no-one enters the ring."

They nodded seriously as they made themselves comfortable with their sons. A fair number of others started to gather at the edge and found places to sit for the show.

Telez regarded both naked humans before him before stripping out of his VSO Commander's Uniform. Bright blue and naked, he swept back his hair and tied a knot in it. His antennae waved lightly from their position at the top of his high forehead just before the hairline. "I am prepared, Commanders. I shall fight Andorian style. Jason, you take Suus Mahna, and Nathan, you take Mok'bara."

They both nodded while Jason took the standard Vulcan stance, leaving room for Nathan to assume the Klingon one.

"Begin," Jason said, his voice clear of emotion.

Telez lunged in towards Nathan who pulled back to defend against the swift attack, but as soon as Jason moved in to assist his bonded, Telez changed direction and sent the side of his hand at Jason's crotch. He hit nothing but air as Jason skilfully flowed around the blow, landing a solid one to the small of Telez's back. The Andorian fell and rolled to his feet, sweeping Nathan off his own in the process, before springing up and tackling Jason to the ground.

Trav and Gabe exchanged low whistles as both of their sons paid rapt attention to the sparring match before them. "They sure don't teach *that* in gym class!" Trav giggled.

Jason allowed Telez to bring him to the ground, but used his momentum to send the Andorian over and away from him, thus giving him the time to flip himself back to his feet and face his blue brother. Telez had also regained his feet just as quickly, and was heading back towards Jason when he was sent head over heels by a well aimed kick from Nathan.

They sparred faster and faster, and many of the blows landed could be clearly heard, making most of the guys watching wince.

Jason was the first to be felled by a blow hard enough to keep him from getting back to his feet instantly. He just pressed his face to the carpet as he tried to regain his breath. Telez, seeing that Jason was down for longer than two seconds, turned his full attention to Nathan, as per the Division rules for sparring.

Nathan grinned in a feral manner at him. While Jason had been emotionless throughout, as had Telez, Nathan was acting much like a Klingon. The rage at seeing his bonded on the ground brought renewed vigour to the fair skinned blond boy, and within ten seconds, Telez was lying on his back clutching at his stomach.

"End," Jason wheezed before rolling onto his own back to lie side by side with his brother. The rage on Nathan's face fell away instantly, and he flopped down to the other side of Telez, and began to gently rub his bright blue belly soothingly.

"Good fight," Telez noted softly before rolling to one side and kissing Nathan's lip gently. He did the same for Jason then all three just lay there - breathing hard and sweating profusely.

"Tee Shirts... Popcorn... Peanuts... Gett'm before they're gone!" Beau, Jamie, and Jacob chanted as they walked into the room and started milling around the crowd, all three carrying boxes. "Last chance before the main event!"

"Main event?" Nathan giggled, "What, you want us to get down and dirty right here?!"

"Goof," Antony said with a grin from the doorway to the Dining Room, "I don't think so, horn-dog. Besides, Tel don't get loaned out unless I'm being loaned too! And no, no chance."

"You did well, Nathan," Korris added, nodding in approval. His full Klingon armour was gleaming brightly as he stood there, and his brother was giggling next to him. "You performed that last move excellently. I am honoured to be your teacher."

Gabe looked at the tee-shirt that Beau had just tossed in his lap. "Clan Klingon Battle Royale??" he asked, shooting a glance at Antony and the two Klingon boys.

Koth sniggered, "Well, we thought - you guys have probably not seen two Klingons fight, have you?"

"No... but how long have you planned this... I mean, *TEE-SHIRTS???*" Travis asked with a giggle.

"Replicators," Korris grunted as he and Koth made their way into the circle. They picked up Jason and Nathan between them and dumped them together on the nearest sofa, and Telez was soon dumped with them.

All three naked boys giggled, and Jason said, "You going to keep with the current dress code?" He giggled more when Taron and Marie, the two sabre-toothed tiger kittens pounced onto their owners and started purring.

Korris looked at his brother, who was dressed just as he was. "It is up to you, little brother. I believe we both have the skill to survive it."

Koth tilted his head to the side as he thought. "Mmm. Up to the Clan, I think. Seeing two Klingons fight with Bat'leth and Mek'leth is fun anyway - do they want to see it done butt naked?"

"Can you do it in battle gear? That might be kewl," Davey asked softly, unsure of how his request might be taken.

Koth grinned at him, "Sure thing, bro. We can do it sans armour next time, for those interested in raising the stakes."

Korris nodded his approval. "Our skills will not be put to the test in a dangerous situation this time, on request from Davey. Are you ready, Koth-boy?"

Koth drew his Mek'leth blades and twirled them in his hands. "Qapla'," he grinned at his brother.

Korris drew his Bat'leth and formed his stance... and waited.

Jason grinned. "Begin. Fight with honour."

Sparks started to fly instantly as the dual blade wielding Koth clashed against the long blade that Korris swung at his head.

Koth was moving quickly, and both hands seemed a blur as he struck out and defended with equal fluidity. Korris was the one bringing the most audible reactions from the crowd of kids, however, for the large gleaming Bat'leth seemed to sing in the air as he spun and used it with a skill that seemed unreal.

"Such is the 'Way of the Bat'leth' and the 'Way of the Mek'leth'," Jason intoned in a Klingon accent. "The 'Master of War' and the 'Master of Strategy'. Glory in the thick of battle, and Glory directing - when they work as one, none can stand against the Empire of the Klingons. Where the Mek'leth commands, so the Bat'leth goes. Where the Bat'leth brings low, there the Mek'leth finishes. Unequal, yet one. Unlike, yet the same. We are Klingons. Hear our roar. In Kahless' Name."

If the boys had thought Jason and Nathan fighting Telez had been a good show, then they could only gape at the two alien brothers as they, seemingly, tried to eviscerate each other.

Jason let them continue for another five minutes before saying loudly, "End Combat!"

The two Klingons broke apart quickly and bowed to each other. They sheathed their blades and hugged amid loud applause.

Oliver giggled from the doorway, "Geez, guys - you showing off again?"

"Yes," both Klingons grinned back wolfishly.

"You need to teach me that," Gabe said as he looked at Korris.

Korris appraised Gabe quickly. "You will need to master the Mek'leth before the Bat'leth. As it is his chosen path, Koth is required to teach you before I. I will assist, but he will be your Blade-Master until he deems you ready. Then, I will teach you the Lord of Blades."

"Just tell me when we can start." Gabe responded seriously. "I'm ready when you are."

Koth became serious, "Tomorrow. 0900 hours, in the Barrack's gym. You and your bonded. The first few lessons will require you both. The other half of your soul must understand what you are doing. Is that acceptable to you both?"

Gabe glanced at Travis, and saw the unspoken question in his eyes. "I swore I'd protect you and our sons with my life. None of you will ever be abused again."

Travis nodded. "I'll back you then, Hon."

Gabe turned back to Koth. "We'll be there."

Koth nodded. "By blood and honour, I take you as my pupil," he drew a small Klingon knife from his hip sheath and drew it lightly across his palm. Dark purple/red blood arose from the shallow cut as he handed the blade to Gabe.

Gabe copied the motion without a wince, and pressed his palm together with Koth. "By blood and honour, I accept you as my teacher."

Koth then presented his bloodied hand to Travis. He said softly, "You do not need to cut yourself, brother. Not after what you have been through. I will take it as symbolism if you simply say the words and link hands."

Travis nodded as he took Koth's hand. "By blood and honour, I also accept you as teacher," Travis whispered. Then, "Will you teach me something as well? I don't think I can do the blades, but..."

Koth pulled the trembling boy up and into a full hug as Korris said, "You have sworn an oath on blood to my brother. I shall teach you Mok'bara, Klingon Martial Arts, and your sons also. In time, you will find the courage within." He turned to the others in the room watching in reverent silence, "And that goes for any here in Clan Short. The first step to finding your courage is in finding your centre, which is what Mok'bara teaches. If you wish to learn, I and my family shall help you. If you wish to go further, there are four Mek'leth warriors in the Dragon who shall stand as your Blade-Master."

Jimmy pipped up bravely, "You'll teach me to be like Uncle Nathan?"

Korris glanced down at the smaller boy and held out his arms in an offered hug.

Jimmy glanced at both parents, waiting for their nods that it was safe to accept the offered hug. At nods from them both, he stood and joined in the hug with Korris. Korris lifted him up and sat him over his

hip. "Little human, you have a lion inside, and I will help you find him, control him, and release him. You and your big brother both. You shall roar as Kahless, I promise you," Korris whispered softly before kissing Jimmy's forehead.

Vicky moved over towards the far corner of the room where a man was standing alone. A man crying softly into his hands.

"Uncle Mike; it'll be okay. Really it will," Vicky said with a gentle smile as she reached out with her abilities and helped still Mike Reynold's emotions.

Mike smiled down at her through his tears, then reached and pulled the eight year old girl into his arms. "I know. I knew on Monday when I spoke with Gabe and Travis, but now I really know." He paused and looked over to where Jason, Nathan, the Andorian and two Klingons were comforting and whispering to his nephews and their new parents. "Your family is just... just... I don't have the words."

"We just do what we'd like others to do for us, Uncle Mike," Vicky whispered sadly to him. "But it seems like a lot of people don't wanna do nice things. But we won't stop just because they won't do good things."

Mike squeezed her tightly for a second, "That is what makes your family, Cory's family, the Unit and my family so special, Vicky. And I'm so very glad I'm a part of it." He looked again at Korris, who was now lightly tickling a chortling Jimmy. "Can those Klingons really help?"

"Yeah. You know about Koth being raped, but Korris was too. They both know, and they're both fighting and helping other to fight. Yeah, they and Gabe and Trav will make it happen. Both us Clans will," Vicky grinned before settling in, her head on Mike's shoulders, to enjoy the cuddle.

Meanwhile, Oliver had moved into the circle and was standing by the two Klingon boys. "Geez, you stink. Get yer smelly butts to the showers!"

Koth glowered at Oliver for a second before laughing. "Yeah," he giggled as he sniffed at himself, "we do. Come on, bros. Let's shower. You too, Tony!" he yelled over at the tall welsh boy.

Telez, Jason and Nathan stood up and ran at Antony before he could protest and had him 'shower ready' and blushing scarlet in seconds, while Korris placed Jimmy gently on Gabe's lap. He and his brother also took off their armour and laid their weapons reverently down upon them before following the others towards the nearest bathroom.

Just as he was entering, Jason turned and grinned at his son. "Oliver?"

"Yes, Daddy?"

"I'll take that as your first official order, Captain Evans."

"Ca... WHAT?!" Oliver shouted back in shock.

Seriously, Jason nodded at him, "You earned it. Saving those six boys, nearly dying - everything. Congratulations, Captain. Now, go get some breakfast for me, Nath' and Tel, will you? We won't be long!"

Jason closed the door behind him and followed the other five boys into the huge shower area. Koth was already messing with the control, while Antony was being tickled by Korris and Nathan. "Tel?" Jason asked his blue brother. "What did you need me for? When you woke me, I mean."

"Oh, that. Just some mission reports and housekeeping orders that need finalizing," Telez answered as he rinsed his long white-blond hair under the warm water. "Your mother has the main report from Oliver about last night's meeting up north about Starfleet, Grandfather has answered your message with just one word, 'Yes', and Admiral Morrow was wondering if you wanted to have the VSO take part in three science missions in the Terran Sector?"

"Okay," Jason nodded, growing serious. "Yes, huh? Boy, the FCC are in for a shitstorm. What are those three missions in regards too?"

"A comet not seen in one hundred years is reaching the turning point to head back into Earth space, and the tail goes through some remarkable changes, so the Vulcan Science Academy says. He wants a ship there to witness it, and wonders if you are interested as well. There's a Class 7 Ion storm forming up a ways past Pluto, and the USS Newton is going there to monitor it. It's likely to turn into a class 8 before the end of the day, and there hasn't been a class 8 in Earth controlled space since First Contact. Lastly, he needs to know if you want to get involved with a problem regarding proto-matter."

"Mmm, okay," Jason murmured as he lathered up Koth's back and hair, "Tell him I'll think about it, but the proto-matter one sounds most important."

"Okay. Now, come here and turn around, bro. Can't let Nathan always have the washing rights to that cute butt of yours!" Telez giggled.

"HEY!" Nathan and Antony protested, grinning at them both as Jason and the Andorian blew raspberries at them.

"Humans," Korris muttered lovingly. "I love humans."

Meanwhile in Teri's House:

"Kenny's still asleep?" Kevin asked Levi curiously. "It's a quarter to eight!"

Levi nodded and giggled, "Uh huh. He and Rory were busy last night. Kinda like you and Uncle Joel, only more!"

Joel blushed. "Don't wanna disturb them, then," he whispered shyly.

Kevin giggled, "We won't! Come on, Levi! Can you take us there?"

"Sure."

A second later they, and the two cheetahs, were in the Thompson kitchen - and Allen spat his coffee all over the bar table.

"Morning, Poppa!" the two boys chorused before giggling.

After he had finished choking, he croaked, "Morning - I see you're both having fun! Transporters malfunctioning again?"

"Nope," Kevin giggled happily, "Levi just wanted to prank you!"

Joel ran over and climbed into Allen's arms. "Kev wants to show me his drawings and Kenny's models and stuff. Can we wake them?"

"I was about to. Juana is changing Edovina, but the others are all still asleep. You want to wake Jake and Xain as well?" Allen asked as he cuddled the small Vulcan.

Kevin giggled more, "Okay, but we won't do what we did with Joel's brothers - Jake'll kill me!"

"What did you do?" Allen asked through his grin.

Joel explained, "We tried playing the American National Anthem on two saucepans, but they stopped us after only a few seconds of it!"

Allen was shaking with silent laughter. "If Jake didn't kill you, I'm sure Rory would!"

"What I was thinking," Kevin grinned as he came over to quickly hug his Pop. He then tugged on Joel's hand, "Come on! Let's get my big brothers up first, then we can wake my little one!"

Mercury and Hermes found a stool by the bar to sit on. "Safer to stay here," Mercury giggled at Allen.

He laughed, then went to the fridge. "We're out of cream, but will warm milk do?"

The Cats started licking their lips.

"Kenny's younger than you?" Joel asked curiously as he ran through the kitchen door and into the hall with his friend.

"Uh huh, by twenty three minutes," Kevin nodded as he led Joel upstairs. "Like Tommy is for you, Ken's my 'big' little brother!"

They ran down the hallway and quietly opened the door leading to Jake and Xain's room. There were two more doors inside a smaller hall like room. "What's this one?" Joel whispered.

"Their own bathroom," Kevin whispered back as he moved to the other door and cracked it open. "Shhh, they're still asleep. Xain has real good hearing, and I've never managed to pounce him without him waking up to catch me first. Shall we try?"

Joel grinned and nodded, "I can pounce further than you, so if I pounce Xain I should manage it without waking him first. I'd know if he'd hear - same hearing!"

"Then as soon as you land I'll run at Jake," Kevin giggled silently.

It worked. Very well, in fact.

"Sui'T'Khasi ahm!" Xain exclaimed as Joel landed lightly on his chest.

Jake, however, was far more explicit when he got a chest full of Kevin. "Jesus fucking..."

"Watch your language, Jake!" Kevin giggled as he hugged his big brother.

Joel sniggered as he looked down into Xain's eyes, which were wide at his sudden awakening. "Good morning, Xain," he murmured happily.

Xain raised an eyebrow and said nothing.

Joel's brow creased in worry. "Did... did I do something wrong?" he whispered fearfully, beginning to shake.

Jake answered, after getting control of his racing heart, "No, Joel. 'Good Morning' doesn't mean a lot to Vulcans. It's not logical to say it."

Joel glanced between both boys, then fixed his eyes on Xain. "Why not?"

Xain answered calmly, almost echoing Allen's words used when he had answered the same question for Kenny, "Morning is simply the rotation of the planet and the location of the local star. It happened yesterday and it will happen again tomorrow. It is morning, that is obvious and expected, and saying if it is 'good' or 'bad' does not change that fact."

Joel thought on that for the briefest of seconds, then, "Xain, when we Vulcans say good-bye to someone, what is the normal way of doing that?"

Xain raised an eyebrow. "We usually say 'Live long and prosper'," he replied. "Why do you ask?"

Joel smiled, "Is not that farewell just as illogical? Do we have any control over the life and prosperity of the one we say it to?"

Xain shook his head. "No. It is simply an expression of our hope or desire for that person to live a long life and to grow and prosper. Joel, I fail to see where you are leading with this line of..."

Joel kissed Xain briefly, silencing him. He then grinned, "When humans say 'Good Morning' it means the same. It can mean that the morning itself is a good one, that the weather is good, or something. It can also mean that it is a morning to be good on. Also that you or others feel good that morning, or finally, that you are 'wishing' for people to have a 'good' morning. Or day, in fact. It's the same as 'Live long and prosper'. It's a 'wish' or 'hope' for someone to have a good day."

"Fascinating," Xain murmured.

Kevin looked down into Jake's eyes. "Logic war part two?" he asked.

"Yes, but who won?" Jake giggled.

"There was no war; there was just an interesting discussion on the merits of personal greetings as compared between two worlds," Xain said.

Joel nodded at them. "What he said!" he giggled.

"Where's Vina?" Jake asked, looking over at the empty crib.

"Poppa said Mamacita has her," Kevin supplied helpfully.

"Good," Jake smiled up at him happily.

Joel kissed Xain again, then gave Jake one before tugging at Kevin's shoulder, "Come on; Kenny now!"

Kevin sniggered and crawled off the bed with his friend.

Xain watched them leave, glanced at Jake - and gave a small grin.

"Just what I was thinking, T'hy'la," Jake murmured before starting a morning kiss.

Outside his room, Kevin was quickly outlining his plan to Joel. Joel sniggered and nodded, "Okay, but won't Poppa be mad?"

Kevin shook his head, "Nope. We're gonna change the bedding today anyhow..."

Joel shrugged, "Okay, if you say so."

They both crept into the room and through to the en-suite. After grabbing the two glasses and filling them with cold water, then sneaked back and up to Kenny's bed. Rory was quietly snoring while Kenny breathed onto his chest softly.

Two glasses of cold, COLD water being poured into your faces is not the best way to be woken in the morning.

Funny for the pranksters. Shocking for the prankees.

Kevin could run pretty fast, Joel had to admit as he watched Kenny chase him around the room. He did not get that long to watch, however, as Rory had reached out and snagged him into a firm hold. His laughter rang out as Rory went to town on his armpits and ribs with tickles.

"Got you back! Got you back!" Kevin squealed as Kenny tackled him into Kevin's own bed. "Remember last week? Now we're even, Ken!"

Kenny grinned down at him, "But *I* didn't get your boyfriend at the same time! You're evil, bro!"

After Joel's laughter had begun to turn to whines of approaching fear, Rory stopped his attack and simply hugged the boy close. "I'd like to know what I did to deserve that, Kev!"

"Nothin'," Kevin giggled from the headlock and noogie Ken had him in, "We just pranked the others, so we couldn't leave you out!"

Joel nodded. "Yeah. We had to be fair, didn't we?" he sniggered.

Rory hugged him closer. "You seem different. I like it, Joel," he murmured. "You don't seem as scared any more."

Joel twisted in the hug to look at him as Kenny let Kevin up. "I... we Shared our emotions last night. We helped each other - Cory, Sean, Kev and me. I... I feel calmer, but no; I'm still afraid the same, Rory. I am just happier than I was, and I think that covers it a bit," he explained seriously.

Rory nodded. "Okay. That's good too. Just remember, we'll help with your fears. You just have to ask."

Nodding, Joel gave Rory a brief kiss, then a mischievous look came over his face. "So, Kev. You gonna show your *twin* Levi's present to you or not?"

Kevin started giggling nervously. "Well... oh, okay! I hope you don't mind too much, Kenny," he started to explain, "but once I grow to match you, in a few years, we're still not gonna be identical!"

Kenny looked curious, "What do you mean?"

Joel sniggered. "Be easier if we shower so you can see," he prompted.

Kevin nodded happily.

"I'll bring your chair over," Kenny grinned to Rory.

"I could carry you," Joel offered as he stood up.

Rory blinked. "I'm heavy, Joel," he said to the tiny waif.

"I'm Vulcan, Rory," Joel giggled.

Rory rolled his eyes, "Duh! I keep forgetting that. You don't act like I expect, Joel!"

Joel giggled again as he lifted Rory up easily and carried him into the bathroom. Kenny ran into the shower and set down a plastic chair for Rory to use, and Joel sat the larger boy on it gently. He then went out of the shower and both he and Kevin stripped down quickly, keeping their backs to the two inside who were adjusting the water to a comfortable temperature.

"Okay," Joel giggled, "spot the difference!"

They turned around and went inside to join the other two.

Kenny's forehead creased in confusion, "I don't see..."

"Wow," Rory gasped. "Ken, look..."

He pointed. Kenny gasped. Kevin giggled.

"Levi," he explained. "He heard me wish something, and offered. I said yes."

"Wow," Kenny murmured. "You're right, we won't be completely identical; but it's good, Kev. Suits you," he sniggered.

Joel laughed as Kevin blushed. "I agree!"

Joel and Kevin got to the kitchen first and sat down to watch the others get their breakfast. Juana was busying about helping Allen get the food ready, and a small baby was in a stroller next to the table, watching Joel.

"That Vina?" Joel asked as Jake walked in.

"Yes. She's our daughter," he replied as Xain joined him.

Joel got up and slowly moved over to look closer at the little person who was staring at him.

He murmured, "She's beautiful. Can... can I hold her?"

"You can feed her if you'd like," Jake offered.

Joel looked up and nodded eagerly.

"Sit down and I'll bring her to you," Jake motioned as he moved to pick up his little girl. Joel sat down next to Kevin and automatically held his arms ready to hold the child.

"Have you cared for infants in the past?" Xain asked him curiously.

Joel looked up at him, then down at his arms that were in the perfect position to correctly hold a baby. "No," he murmured. "Never."

Jake shrugged, and placed his baby in Joel's arms tenderly. "You're doing it right anyway," he smiled. "Here's the bottle."

The others started to get their food and sit down, but they all stopped when Joel started quietly singing in Vulcan.

Kevin was watching in wonder as Joel's eyes kept alternating between his natural blue and a different shade of blue.

Allen was about to ask where Joel had heard that song before when they all stopped and listened in shocked silence as Joel stopped singing, and started speaking aloud.

"Lau-kau vikuvau du; lau-ozhika ha'ge vu yut; lau-yeht-gav karik-tor du; heh lau-ashaya klashau vu khaf-spol ek'wak. K'fai'ei Surak'am khaf, Shal kudau du," Joel said, his voice echoing sonorously.

"Joel?" Kevin whispered, lightly shaking his friend's shoulder.

Joel blinked and smiled up at him. "Yeah?" he asked, his voice peaceful.

"Why'd you say that?" Kevin asked.

"Say what?"

Kevin blinked. "Not again... umm, you just blessed Vina!"

"I did? What did I say?" Joel asked curiously.

Allen answered for Kevin, "You said in Vulcan: 'May wisdom surround you, may logic light your path, may justice strengthen you, and may love guard your heart forever. Through Surak's blood, I bless you'."

Joel blinked around at them all. They were all smiling, so it must have been a good thing. *'Was that you?'* he thought, sending his question to that area of his strange little mind that he seemed to sense another presence.

'Yes, Child. It was. She is beautiful, and it is the same blessing that I spoke over another child, so very long ago...' came the whispered answer.

Joel got up quickly and handed Vina back to Jake. "I... I have to... I'll be right back..." he murmured.

As Kevin got up to follow him, Joel kissed him and said, "Not yet. I need... I need to 'think' about something..." He then ran out of the back door and to the far side of the swimming pool. Juana watched through the window as Joel sat down with his back to the wall, his face a mask of pain... and discovery.

'You're a woman, ain't you?' Joel asked silently.

'Yes,' came a stoic response.

Joel continued seriously, *'I thought you... felt female... I just wanted to be sure. Last night you spoke of the 'sands' of your 'world', and you also said Patriarch. You're a Vulcan, aren't you?'*

'Correct. At least I was, in life.'

Joel started shaking more and more. *'I'm carrying your Katra, ain't I?'*

'Correct.'

Sobs the like of which had never sprung from him before caused Joel to fall to his side. He couldn't stop them, nor slow them. He barely felt the world around him, and did not even notice Allen, Xain and Kevin wrapping him in their arms, nor Juana standing there watching him in grave concern.

'... *Mother?*...' he managed to ask.

A pause, then, *'Yes, Joel. I am your mother.'*

Joel kept crying, even while being carried inside and up to Kevin's bedroom. He continued to sob as Kevin spooned in behind him on the bed, and never noticed any of it.

Eventually, even with his continued tears and wails spilling forth, he asked, *'Why was I there, Mother? Why weren't you able to keep me safe? Why'd I have to... why?'*

'Had I known what type of world it was, I would never have let you away from my side, my son. I was dying, and I tried to give you a life. I was not aware of the type of people that lived there. Had I been aware, you would have died with me. I am sorry, my son.'

Joel's crying started to lessen after a few more minutes. He felt Kevin's arms around him. He twisted about so that he could hide his face in his friend's chest. *'I wish... I wish...'*

'As do I, Child. We shall speak more when you are ready. Be at peace, Child of Vulcan; I shall be watching over you now. This time, I will be there. The mother you now have, Teri Short; she is a good woman. You are safe with her. You are safe now... my son.'

"Joel?" he then heard his friend whisper to him. "What's wrong?"

Joel sniffed and said slowly, "I know why I keep doing things and saying things without knowing, Kev."

"Why?"

"Cos I... I'm carrying my mother's Katra; my mother's living soul is sharing my body."

Kevin had nothing he could say to that at first. "Oh," he murmured.

Joel then looked up at him in horror. "Umm, Kev?"

"Yeah?"

"My *MOTHER* is in my head... and we... twice... ummm..."

Silence.

Then, "Oh, shit!"

'Do not be alarmed, my son. I can close off all external information that I receive through your body. I neither felt nor saw nor heard anything once I became aware of what was happening.'

Joel sighed in complete relief, then relayed the information to Kevin.

"That's... that's good," Kevin said, looking into Joel's eyes with caution; looking for those *other* eyes.

'Please let your T'hy'la know that he has a very attractive and sexy body, though, Joel.'

Joel did so while giggling.

Kevin went beet red. "Thanks... I think..."

'Once you meet your big brothers again, you may also relay the same message to them as well.'

"Cory'll shit a brick!" Joel started laughing.

A little later, Kevin watched Joel paw through picture after picture, his face wide with wonder. "These are good, Kev," he said in awe. "Real good. And they are all different people and you feel what they feel?"

"Yes," Kevin nodded, "and Kenny can tell you lots more about them; like where they are, what they are thinking and doing. I know their names, can feel what they feel and can talk to their hearts through the pictures. I help a lot of them that way."

"What's in that bag?" Joel pointed to yet another bag full of papers.

"Uh," Kevin hesitated. "They are bad ones, Joel. They are people... people who died. I can't help them any more. They hurt to look at."

"Oh," Joel looked sad for a second, "I understand. Okay, I won't look in there, Kev."

Kenny entered the bedroom carrying a plate of cookies, "Here, Joel. Just finished baking, and Mamacita said these are for you and Kev... did you really eat garlic bread yesterday like I just heard from Sean, bro?" he asked his twin.

Kevin nodded with a giggle, an innocent expression on his face, "Was really nice too!"

Kenny shot him a look that cried out distrust. "Why does that face make me worry?"

"Dunno what you mean!" Kevin sniggered.

Joel wisely remained quiet and started on the cookies.

A Starfleet regulation Vacuum suit appeared on Kenny's bed just that second, and a note was attached. Kenny blinked and walked up to it and read the note that Kyle had sent him. He glanced at the two innocent angels smiling sweetly at him. "You have GOT to be kidding me! You two are just like Cory?!" he exclaimed.

Joel ate another cookie. Kevin whistled tunelessly.

"I'm never gonna let you eat garlic bread ever," Kenny muttered to himself as he walked from the room.

Kevin and Joel dissolved into gales of laughter.

After laughing themselves out, Kevin got up and walked over to the shelves Kenny had made for his models. "Here's Kenny's stuff, Jo'," he beckoned his friend to his side. Joel moved over quickly - with the cookies. He was quite taken with these cookies, he found. He popped one into Kevin's mouth absently and looked at the various models. "That's the Enterprise!" he gave an awed gasp. "It's great!"

Kevin nodded, "Yeah; my brother is really good with these. I help him sometimes, but not on the best ones here. I'm not that good with them, so we have a few others that we do together."

"Does Kenny draw?" Joel asked as he looked at the Defiant on display.

Kevin nodded, "Yeah, we do some drawing stuff together too. Come on, I'll show you."

He moved to his bedside cabinet and pulled out a small folder and handed one piece of paper to Joel.

Joel tilted the picture one way and then the other. "Is this a stick insect trying to eat it's own butt, or something?" he asked in complete confusion.

Kevin started laughing and nearly choked on his latest cookie.

Joel looked at the now red faced and howling boy. "What did I say?"

Kevin laughed harder. Kenny walked back into the room from Xain's where he'd been warning them of the lethal combination of Joel + Kevin + Garlic Bread = Toxic Gas Cloud. "What's up?" he asked, a small grin on his face as he watched his brother roll to his back in hysterics.

Joel showed him the picture and again asked the same question.

Kenny blushed, then laughed himself, "It's Possum, Rory's dog."

Kevin laughed even harder, earning him his twin sitting on his chest. "If your boyfriend don't stop laughing, I'll show you the Enterprise he *tried* to put together.

Kevin didn't stop laughing, so Kenny got up and found the 'model'.

"Um, Kev? If that was a real starship, then as soon as the Warp Field was turned on you'd have scrambled eggs for the crew! The nacelles don't point *that* way!" Joel laughed.

Kevin shuffled over to his friend, "I'd say 'bite me', but I think you'd really do that, so does 'kiss me' sound better?"

Joel didn't answer him verbally.

Kenny walked out to let them carry on, taking the USS 'Scrambled Egg' with him. "You have five minutes, then we have to go to Charleston. Oh, and Sean just said that your Vulcan clothes will be waiting for you there."

The boys were too busy to respond.

:Joel's Perspective:

I could kiss Kevin forever.

Really. I felt so at peace in his arms, and I could feel that he was still and quiet inside as he held me there.

I felt like laughing and crying every time our lips connected.

I... I so wish I could say that I love him, but do I really? Is this love?

He looked so beautiful. I'm just lying there, on top of him, and his eyes... I was lost in them.

Damn! Why can't I tell him?

"Time to go, Jo'," he whispered to me, his lips curving sweetly into a smile.

I kissed them again greedily, then sighed. "Okay."

He giggled, "Don't worry. We can do this more, after."

"Okay!" was my automatic excited response before I could even think about it. I grinned at him as I lifted up and off him, then I helped him from the floor.

We ran downstairs to find Xain and Jake waiting with the Doctor.

"Sorry for rushing you," the Doc smiled at us both, causing us to blush, "but we're on a schedule."

"Not like you can stop the clock or anything," I giggled, fighting with my burning face.

He poked his tongue out then giggled himself, "This may feel weird, guys, but don't freak out. You're perfectly safe."

"We shall endeavour to not 'freak out', Ish-Hassu," came Xain's bland reply, and I just had to giggle more. Xain was so funny.

"Kenny comin'?" Kev asked as his arm snaked about my waist again.

Jake shook his head at him as he said, "He and Rory are coming over with Dad, later."

"Okay. Hold onto your bits, guys. Folding now!" Doc said, and everything went really weird in my vision. It was like the world around us folded away while another place folded in. Even my body felt like it was slipping from one page of a book into another.

It was so KEWL!

"Again!" I giggled as we appeared in a large building surrounded by kids.

"Sorry," Doc laughed at me, "only one ride per hug, and I ain't had no Joel-Snuggles yet!"

Well, he had to say it, so I pounced him. He was nice to snuggle with, even while he was giggling and on his back on the floor. It did feel weird, his double heart beat. Weird but nice.

"You can get a few hundred 'rides' after for this snuggle, Joel," he whispered in my ear after a few minutes.

"Cool," I answered as he lifted me up off him and put me on my feet again.

I turned to see Cor and Sean coming over holding hands, and I was about to run to them to get some cuddles when I heard some of these strange kids whispering things about their wedding yesterday. I didn't like what they said and started to get angry, but before I could say anything, Mikey, Davey and Pablito appeared and Mikey whistled real loud. I clapped my hands over my ears cause they hurt so much, that's how loud he was. I quickly ran to Cory, and Kevin joined me there as he hugged us both to his front.

The room got so quiet as we all just stared at the angels. Then Davey got up and gathered all the smaller kids and led them from the room.

Mikey started talking, but I couldn't hear much as my ears still hurt and were making buzzing noises from his whistle. He then seemed to call my brother Adam and some other older kid up to where he and Pablito were standing, and Pablito started to undress them.

Adam looked so upset, and I could feel that he was getting ashamed and embarrassed there, topless in front of us all. And that other kid was as well.

"That's not fair!" I said, not realising that I was speaking so loud. Everyone looked at me, and at another small kid like me just across the room.

Seems like we both felt the same way. I started walking up to Adam while pulling my clothes off. If my brother had to show *his* scars and be ashamed, then I would too!

I felt Kevin touch my arm when I started on my zip for my jeans, and he whispered, "Not everything, T'hy'la. The top is enough."

I smiled at him, then over at that other boy, who was also pulling his top off. We were both scarred like Adam and the other boy were. I think that little boy might be the older one's brother.

We ran up and grabbed our own brother's hand.

The other kid grinned up at his brother, and said quietly, "Not fair."

I agreed, looking up at Adam, "Yeah. If you're bein' looked at, then *we're* gonna be looked at too, Lil'bro!"

Adam gave my hand a squeeze and Mikey smiled at us both. Then we stood there, with everyone gawking at us; at our scars. I know mine were only pale marks in my now smooth skin, but it did feel weird to have people pay attention this way to them. I started to blush.

Mikey then said, "I'm sure many of you are wondering what we are doing here? This is to show all of you one thing. We were all hurt. These boys bear the scars of it, in more ways than a lot of the rest of you, but on your hearts, the scars are just as plain. You all know the pain the the Unit has been through, as they lost the most family members, but understand... they are all our brothers. Most of us may not have known them, but they were family none the less. Everyone knows where Adam Short's scars come from, but very few know where Adam Casey's are from, and I'm not going to be the one to tell you. However, every single scar that he carries, holds a brief glimpse into the life he led prior to forming the Unit. Every single scar he carries tells a story about how he became the commander of the group you all call the Unit. Physical scars are easy to take, just ask him. It's the scars that we all carry on our hearts, and our souls that link every single one of us together."

I had to agree to that last bit, so I nodded at the large mass of boys watching us. I saw the other small boy nodding as he stood next to this Adam Casey; he and I must have been through something alike. I noticed others nodding out in the group of people; some were from the Compound, and some were from this other group, this Unit my angel-brother mentioned.

"Tyler, Cory, and Vicky, would you three please come up here?" Mikey called out, and up they came to stand with us. My brother then said, "I know that many of the Unit members were upset about the wedding that went on yesterday, and I can see your point, to those that don't know everything that was going on, it did look bad. However, I would like Tyler to let everyone here know what Cory was feeling when he was at his lowest point, and then hopefully everyone can understand why the wedding had to happen when it did. Cory, is this okay with you?"

I quickly looked up into Blondie's face, and saw him nod. The next second, I again felt everything that I had last night when we nearly lost Cory. I reached and clung to my brother's hand as well as Adam's. Everyone around started crying at this burst of pain, but I didn't. I knew different. I knew better. Cory still hurt, but he was getting better now. I smiled up at him, and he squeezed my hand back and returned my smile.

I really liked his smile. It made my belly do flip flops.

What can I say? My brother *is* cute! They all are!

"Now," I heard Mikey say as the wash of feelings from Cory stopped, "I would ask that Vicky show to everyone what Adam has been feeling."

Again, a flood of emotions, and they were a lot like Cory's; only thing different was that I could still feel the poison in them. He needed to cry, he really did. If this Adam Casey didn't deal with this very soon, I might have to help him, or *he'd* be as lost as Cor would have been!

Adam Casey sniffed after a moment of this experience and turned to face my big brother. Cory removed his hand from mine and reached to shake Adam's offered one, and was pulled into a hug.

This Adam would fit in well, I thought, then; he likes hugs too!

He pulled out of Cory's hug and saluted and said softly, "Now and forever Cory, you have my respect, and my loyalty... and my friendship."

Boy! That shivering thingie was back again, and I saw that it was affecting everyone!

Cory then went and made it stronger; "Will you accept brotherhood, please?" he asked Adam softly. "I swear upon my life five simple words; I'll be there for you. Until Time ends, I'll be by your side, if you will let me."

Shit. My back was tingling like... like... I dunno. It was well weird whatever it was.

Hell! Now everyone was doing the same! They were all making promises to each other and I was beginning to lose my balance!

"Me and mine to you and yours, from now till there is no more," Adam Casey said to Blondie, and then he cut his hand with his knife. He added, "This is the first of my new scars... the first of the scars that I will look upon with pride. Pride and brotherhood."

I nearly stopped Cory when he took the knife and cut his own hand as well. I don't like seeing him hurt... wow! Was this how *he* felt when he saw me hurting? Wow...

"Me and mine to you and yours, from now till there there is no more," he echoed Adam, and I fell over.

I was struggling to get back up when I heard the Guardian say inside my head **//Time. Love. Blood. Bound together, interlinked Forever. For a Brotherhood that will Never Break//**

It seemed echoed somehow, as if someone else was saying it, but all it really did was make me flop back to the ground again. The next thing I felt was Kevin helping me to stand up. "You okay?" he whispered and I felt him getting worried.

I nodded to him then kissed his nose quickly. I turned to look back at Adam Casey. I quickly went to him and hugged him. "Thank you," I whispered as I kissed his scars on his chest. "Thank you; you really made my big brother feel good then."

He smiled down into my face and picked me up. "Thanks, you guys made me feel real good too," he murmured as he hugged me tightly.

I giggled at him, kissed his lips quickly, then whispered, "You really need to cry soon, Mr Casey. I... I can feel your pain more than Vicky was showing, and you *really* need to cry. Okay? I don't wanna have to Share to heal you like I had to do with Cor. He nearly died. Please don't get that bad. Promise?"

He looked shocked and I could see that pain rise up in his eyes as he held me on eye level. He nodded slowly, and I had to force myself not to do a Sharing there and then as he said, "I promise. I'll spend time with my boyfriend after, and I'll... I'll deal with stuff then."

I kissed him again. "Good. I like you. I don't like you hurting. Crying is good. It helps me lots too. I cry about my pain, and then my brothers or Mama come and help me and the pain stops making me ill. It still hurts, but it's healing too. You go cry after with your brothers or Mama, and if you don't have a Mama, I can lend you mine, 'kay?'"

He smiled sadly at me, then giggled. "That's okay, Joel. I have a 'Mama'. There she is, standing over there," he added, pointing at this nice looking lady.

I grinned. "Okay. How'd you know my name?"

"Cory told me about you Monday night in a private chat. Wasn't hard to match the name with the face, Joel. And call me Adam. You make me feel old calling me 'Mr Casey'!"

I giggled as he put me back on my feet. "That'll be confusing! I have a brother called Adam. Can I call you... ummm... Adz instead?" I asked brightly, grinning up at him.

He laughed at me. "I think I'd like that from you, Joel. Thank you. Yes, you can call me Adz."

:Normal Perspective:

"Cory?" Joel tugged on Cory's hand once his tee-shirt was back in place. "I gotta message for you and Big Ted."

Sean turned around from the hug he and Logan had going. "Go for it, Elf," he said with a smile.

Joel grinned mischievously and pulled them both over to one side. Kevin followed, and started to smile when he noticed Teri standing near to them.

"Mother says you and Cor have very attractive and sexy bodies," Joel giggled.

Cory's jaw dropped open, and Sean started looking repeatedly between Joel and Teri. "Mom?!" he gasped in complete shock.

"Wrong 'Mom'... even though I think she might be right," Teri replied. She did come over and knelt by Joel. "First, congratulations. That's the quietest I've heard those two since the Clan started."

"I try my best," sniggered Joel as he looked at Teri with his huge, beautiful eyes.

"Mom!" Cory whined. "You're embarrassing us! And Lil'elf's done quite well at that already!"

"I'm your mother, I'm biased. You're both cute, so live with it," Teri chuckled. "You guys were even cute back when you used to try to 'help' Sean with his diaper, Cory... by removing it!"

Joel fell into Teri's arms, laughing. Sean decided that the wall behind him deserved more attention at that moment, while Cory looked like a fish out of water. "MOM!"

"Which one?" Teri asked, suddenly serious. She looked down at the chortling Vulcan in her arms. "Sweetie, can you tell me why you said what you said?"

Joel looked up at her and nodded. "Sorry, Blondie. Sorry, Big Ted... can you cuddle with us here so I can tell you? You too Kev?"

Kevin squashed himself into Teri's arms quickly, and the two blushing teens knelt down to complete the mass hug on the floor.

"My mother really did say that, big bros. She does think you are attractive and cute and even sexy. She thinks Kevin is too," Joel said, in complete seriousness.

"How?" Cory sputtered as his blush reached his toenails.

Sean, although also blushing, caught Joel's confused look at the not very eloquent question. "How'd you know what your mother would have thought, Joel?" he elaborated.

"Oh... umm, well... I kinda know where my Vulcan half comes from. My mother is... was... umm... she's Vulcan. And she's in me. Her Katra, I mean; her living spirit? I'm a Katra-Meskaraya. A Holder of a Katra," Joel explained. "My birth mother is... well... I've talked to her."

Kevin giggled, "And she took a shower with us!"

Joel's eyes partly changed their shading, and he suddenly ran a glance over Cory and Sean. "Yes, in the full light of day, my first reaction was the correct one. You are blessed, the two of you. Hearts so full of love, and fortunate to be contained in eye pleasing bodies," came a voice that was certainly NOT Joel's.

You would have thought that Cory and Sean were Mikyvis, they were glowing so brightly from their blushes. Teri said then, "I think we'd better let them calm down, little one, or else they're gonna burn themselves up. If your Mom wishes, and you are okay with it, she and I can talk about anything she thinks I should be doing to help you."

Joel looked with worry at his big brothers. He answered his Mama, "Yeah, she says you can... but..." he reached out and took Cory's hand, and did the same for Sean. "You're not gonna want me around to sleep with any more, are you?" he asked, beginning to tear up. "You're not gonna want my Mother to see you... like..."

He suddenly became stoic. Vulcan. Emotionless. His eyes fully changed shade and it was no longer Joel looking at them. It was now his mother. She started, "I want to explain, children. I was asleep when Joel went into the showers with you. When the water started and he began washing your hair, Patriarch of Sub-Clan Short, did I awaken. I beheld what was happening, and came to the conclusion as to where it would lead. I went deeply within my son's mind and closed off my knowledge of sight. I heard and felt everything up to the point that my son and his beloved started to love each other. I then regressed completely. I did not see anything that would cause you embarrassment. My views on your physical form are gained from the night before when you prepared for bed. Just as you feel content to walk

naked before your own mother, and even other adults, so treat how I beheld you. Neither of you have anything to be ashamed of nor embarrassed about."

There was a stunned silence for a brief moment of time. Then she continued, still speaking through an unaware Joel, "Please. Please do not hurt my son by withdrawing from him. Please. I cannot see him hurt any more. I was in the dark for so long when he was shielded as human, and the gaining of his memories when your doctors changed him back hurt me deeply. Do NOT hurt him again, never again. Protect him. I cannot bear to see my precious child hurt again."

They all gasped as rage, anger and vicious, righteous fury started to radiate from Joel's frail body.

It was like a god of war had appeared in the child's skinny frame and the burning power of it smote out in all directions...

...the Rage of a Titan; the Wrath of God...

...the *Anger* of a *Vulcan*.

It vanished as fast as it had appeared. In an almost pleading tone, Joel's birth mother continued, "Please... please protect him. Defend him? I can only do so much, now. Only so much... please?"

Cory spoke for them both, "I swore to protect him with my life; nothing that you have said or done will ever change that."

"That's right; he's our brother, and we NEVER abandon our brothers," Sean added.

Joel's arms reached out as his mother within him made him lay his hands on his brother's cheeks. "I thank you. If I could, I would place myself as M'aih to you both, but the dead can do little to help the living; even when still here as a living Katra. However, just as I spoke over my son the hour of his birth, so I speak over you two now, and over my son's beloved." Kevin was pulled into the middle between his friend and the two teens. Joel's mother then blessed them, "May wisdom surround you, may logic light your path, may justice strengthen you, and may love guard your heart forever. Through Surak's blood... my blood... I bless you."

Joel went limp and fell back into Teri's arms. A whisper escaped his throat, "Lady Teri of Vulcan, carry the blood of my blood and flesh of my flesh to a quiet place. Be seated with him on your lap, and you and I shall talk. I have strength enough for a Meld before I need to recover. However, right now I make you Ko'mekh to Joel - if you will accept."

"I accept. Gladly," Teri choked out.

"Then it is done," came the whisper, "... climb the steps... of Mount Seleya..."

Teri rose and quickly carried Joel out and into a private room, leaving her two sons with Kevin... watching...

"So, did you learn who his mother is and who his dad is?" Cory asked Teri half an hour later.

Teri shook her head as she watched Joel run up to Kevin and start hugging him. "No. She would not tell me. She told me a lot about the things troubling Joel, and how she thinks I should deal with a few purely Vulcan issues he is going to have. However, she would not say anything else. Joel is not ready to know, and she is very protective of her son; and I gather she is worried about Joel's father finding out before he is found."

Cory sighed, "Damn. Would have been easy to get the Mikyvis to go find him."

The Doctor came over then and said, "Not Time yet, Blond-top."

Cory looked over at the Doc. "No offence Galli, but if it'd make my Lil'elf happier I don't care WHO says the time is right."

The Doctor moved over and climbed into Cory's arms. After kissing the blond teen's cheek, he whispered, "For all things there is a Time, Cory. I know so few things about the next few days, but I do know this. If this changes, then we might upset the course of the Future in a bad way. And Joel's not ready for this yet. He will be, however. Very, VERY soon."

"You know who his father is, don't you?" Cory asked suddenly, holding the Time Lord tightly as if not wanting him to escape.

The Doctor nodded. "Yes, I do. It is not something subject to change, so I can honestly say I know. What is subject to change is you finding out. You will. Soon. But not from me."

"Tell me," Cory ordered.

The little Lord of Time shook his head. "I cannot. I will not. I am sorry, Heart of the Nexus. You must wait. Just ask Levi. If I attempted to tell you, I would be prevented from doing so. Do not worry, my friend. It will be all the better to let Time takes it's course. Surprising, shocking, but better."

He then Folded away and Cory was left holding onto nothing.

"Damn it," he muttered, and moved over to Sean, Joel and Kevin.

Xain came over to them, leading Jake with him. "I have been asked by Grandfather Sarek to perform the Vulcan Benediction with Joel at the service, Patriarch Cory. Kevin and Jake have been asked to take part to complete the four required for it. I need to prepare them for this, if they accept to do it," he informed Cory formally.

Cory glanced at the two smaller boys. Kevin nodded and Joel gave a small smile, "Yeah, I'll do it, Cor."

"Do we need to leave you, or can we stay with Joel a bit longer?" Sean asked Xain. "We've just had something shocking happen, and we just want to be close to our Lil'elf for now."

"Your presence will cause no adverse effect, Sean. In fact, your presence will be of aid to help centre Joel," Xain replied with a brief smile.

Jake smiled, "It won't be identical to the true Benediction as we do not have the required armour to wear, but our Vulcan clothing will do."

Kevin smiled widely, "I like you wearing those, Jake. You look good in them."

Jake pulled his little brother over for a cuddle as Xain lead them over to a quiet room at the Fire Station to start his explanation of the event they would partake in. When they entered the room, however, they found Jay Noble standing there; complete with four suits of ceremonial Vulcan Armour.

"These are for you. And this one is specifically for Joel. You'll find they all fit... exactly," he said mysteriously. "Also, Joel; we're getting your Sehlat dressed up in his own armour as well." He then Folded away quickly to join his Bonded.

Cory sighed, "Time Lords... they're worse than Mikyvis!"

"I heard that, Uncle Cory!" Bryce giggled as he popped in and goosed his uncle before vanishing again.

"Wait 'til you meet Q, Blondie," Joel grinned up at him as Cory rubbed at his sore butt briefly.

"Oh, be still my beating heart," Cory muttered with a half smile at his little brother. "I'd be so excited, I swear..."

Joel stuck his tongue out at him before going over to look at the armour pointed out by Jay. "Wow, this is nice. What's this symbol of a sword?" he asked, showing them the strange layered breastplate piece.

Xain's eyes widened. "That is Sa'ren, the Sword of Surak. Only... I have not seen any armour with it *whole* before... except... for... Please wait here, Joel. I need to talk to Grandfather Sarek." He turned and left the room quickly.

"Sa'ren?" Joel asked Cory, his eyebrow raising.

Cory pointed to the Crest of House Surak on his Robe. "This is it, Joel. It's the broken Sword and symbol of the Family of Sarek. I am allowed to bear it as I am a Patriarch of the Family. Sean's Crest doesn't show it."

"Then why is it whole on this if it's meant to be broken on the Crest?" Joel asked curiously as he studied the embossed image on the breastplate closely. "And what are these runes running down the length of it?"

"Don't know," Sean shrugged his shoulders, "Don't know about either question, Elf."

Five minutes later Xain returned. "I cannot find Grandfather Sarek at present. I shall have to talk to him later."

"What's the matter?" Kevin asked him. "What's the problem with Joel's armour?"

Xain thought for a moment, then answered, "I believe that is the 'Fo-wein Sa'ren'; the Armour of Sa'ren. I do not know much about the legends surrounding the blade and the armour as it is an area that I have

had very little interest in until now. However, the Armour of Sa'ren is so well known that I recognised it. It is the only armour that bears the whole symbol of the Sa'ren Blade."

Joel's eyes were wide.

"Wanna try it on, Jo'?" Kevin asked with excitement.

"Well," Cory murmured, "it fits. Exactly, too. Didn't need adjusting."

Xain was shaking his head, "It may be a replica, but I have never heard of anyone making such. We really need to speak to grandfather."

Joel, however, was looking positively stunning in his new get-up. Kevin was most impressed.

"It don't look ceremonial like the other three, Xain. That looks like real armour," Jake said.

Xain nodded, "Yes, it is. I just checked it with my tricorder, and the power pack in the belt is at full charge. It is real Vulcan Armour, the style of T'naehm Fo-wein, Battle Armour from the War of the Raptor."

"Why'd they have armour like this at a time when they had phasers and such?" Sean asked curiously as he watched Joel twirl about, showing off for Kevin. Kevin was not complaining in the slightest.

"Joel, do you trust me?" Xain asked seriously.

Joel nodded as he stopped spinning around, "Uh huh. Sure."

"Do not be alarmed, Patriarch, Sean. This will not harm Joel," Xain said as he drew his phaser, set it to maximum and fired it at Joel's chest.

Cory's heart nearly stopped for a second, but when his eyes finally readjusted after the glare of the phaser beam, he was looking at a curious Joel who was checking out the breastplate for damage. "Hope you didn't burn it, Xain. This is too nice to be damaged," Joel muttered.

Sean nearly fainted when he checked the setting of the phaser he had ripped from Xain's hand. "This would have burned a hole through titanium, Xain!" he nearly yelled.

Xain nodded calmly. "'T'naehm Fo-wein' consists of Vulcan Bio-engineering, shielding and certain metals unique to Vulcan. Unique but rare. We do not use it to make armour any more, that is how rare it has become. It would need a starship's phaser banks to burn through that breastplate, and the shield itself envelops the body of the user once the armour is fully on. Once Joel is dressed completely, I could have aimed for his face, and that hand phaser would have done no more than temporarily blind him. I can assure you on this, Cory, Sean. Vulcan Armour in general was an area I was required to study when I was at home."

"That would make him immune to all harm?" Cory asked, feeling the tension leave him. Sean started breathing deeply to steady his racing heart.

"No," Xain shook his head. "Kinetic force would knock him back, and could even hurt him. Physical objects, like a sword or bladed weapon, can penetrate the armour and shield. That metal has the ability to absorb a large amount of energy, yet it is only as physically strong as steel. The shield adds something to that. Bullets will not hurt Joel, but an explosion next to him? He would be flung to one side and injured through kinetic trauma. Some shrapnel, if big enough, may therefore penetrate. It affords him excellent protection, but not complete. It is the reason sword fighting was still common on Vulcan at the War of the Raptor."

Joel finished checking his armour and so he went back to happily twirling about for Kevin.

"I am sorry if I caused you distress," Xain added then as he watched his brother play with Joel. "Had I explained to Joel that I would be firing at him on full power, then he would have become nervous and should he have flinched, I might have hit an area without the full protection of the suit. He is still not completely dressed. By not saying anything, I knew that I could draw and fire without him reacting; especially as he said he trusted me."

Sean nodded briefly, not trusting his voice yet, but Cory pulled Xain in for a hug, "We trust you too, bro. It's just that he's our little Joel. That scared us, but now... thanks. We now have a well protected little brother, and your 'show' just confirmed it for us better than you simply telling us would have. Thank you."

Xain smiled.

"You look... real sexy, Kev," Joel whispered as he looked the now fully armoured Kevin up and down.

Kevin giggled and gave his friend a twirl, just to repay him for the same show earlier.

Jake and Xain were also dressed in their ceremonial armour, and Cory and Sean had sat down together to watch.

"Joel, Kevin. Come here please," Xain asked politely. "I need to explain the Benediction to you both, and how we will march to the service."

The two boys ran over and sat on the larger boy's laps. It did not take long for the brief explanation of the march to be told, then Xain spoke rapidly to Joel in Vulcan about the benediction.

"Got it, Xain," Joel smiled. "Just... what am I and Kev carrying if you're carrying the Banner-flags?"

Xain pointed to a box in the corner, "Both of you shall be carrying a Ceremonial Sword. They are..." Xain didn't manage to finish as Joel leapt from his lap and ran to Cory, shaking uncontrollably and crying loudly in fear. He jammed himself into Cory's side, and Sean instinctively hugged the frightened boy from behind.

"Calm yourself and tell me what's wrong, Lil'elf," Cory whispered in Joel's little pointed ear.

Joel looked up, his eyes glazed in fear. "Sharp... blade... I can't carry it, Cory... it's *sharp*," he said in a terrified whisper, and he shook all the more as he said the word 'sharp'. Cory felt slight pain in his own arms, legs, chest and back as his empathy picked up on Joel's remembered pain.

"The sword will not be used to hurt anyone little brother; especially not you," Cory reassured his newest brother. "To beat your old memory you're gonna need to make a new memory; one about how you are being given the rare honour of carrying a sword to pay tribute to the kids and adults who died to protect their friends and families. Very few people ever get offered this chance; it takes someone really special to do it. Xain is never wrong when he thinks logically; if he thinks you are the right person and that it is the right time then I bet that he's right."

Sean whispered, "Cory's right, Elf. You won't get hurt."

"But I can see *him* again... he'll hurt me..." Joel whispered, his eyes - elsewhere.

Xain moved over and laid a finger to the side of Joel's head. "Patriarch," he said softly when Joel showed no sign of noticing him, "may I be permitted to Meld with Joel again? He has not gotten lost in the wound in his mind this time, but is needing help to fight his... 'demons'."

Cory nodded, "Please - but is there anything we can do to help?"

"Yes," Xain nodded as he knelt down and placed his fingers at the correct points on Joel's face, "continue to say what you have been saying, and let him feel your love. It will help as I fight with him."

Cory and Sean both started whispering encouragement over and over as Xain started the ritual formula that preceded a Melding...

"My mind to your mind..."

Five minutes later:

Joel hugged Xain fiercely. "Thank you," he murmured, "thank you."

"It was logical, Joel," Xain half smiled as he gently held the little waif in his arms, "you are my Clan brother, you were in distress; it was logical for me to help you."

"And you love him too," Sean giggled, relieved.

Xain looked surprised that they had seen through his 'logic' then smiled wider, "Yes; and because I love you, too."

Joel hugged even tighter, then slipped down and ran over to Kevin. As soon as he latched onto Kevin, the brown haired boy said, "Love you, Jo'."

Joel sighed happily and hugged even tighter. He then pulled back and landed a kiss on Kevin's lips before turning slightly and asking, "Can we see these swords now, Xain?"

Xain nodded and opened the container. He withdrew the two blades and handed one to Kevin, then the other to Joel.

Joel felt strange taking the sword into his hands, but he tried to fight down the feeling quickly. Only, it did not vanish. It grew stronger the longer he held and looked at the rune-engraved blade before him. "What do these runes mean, Xain?"

Xain shook his head, "They are copied from the original, from Sa'ren. I believe Jason Evans would know what the writing means, Joel. From my talks with my cousin Telez, I have been made aware of Jason's fascination with Vulcan Legends and Lore; the Sa'ren Legend especially."

"Oh," Joel said, still feeling more than slightly weird. "Call him please?" he half begged, his eyes unable to leave the blade of the weapon before him.

Xain raised an eyebrow and shot a look at Cory. "I've already Sent for him," Sean said softly. "He's coming now."

A whispered "Thank you" was all Joel could manage.

It was less than three minutes later when the door opened and Jason came in. "What's up?" he asked, then saw the look on Joel's face. "Joel? Cariad, what's wrong?"

"The runes... the writing... I feel weird. What do they mean?" Joel asked, his voice trembling.

"For Destiny, Keep Me; By Strength, Carry Me; In Justice, Draw Me; To Redeem, Use Me'," Jason quoted from memory. "Such is written on Sa'ren, and such can still be read; even though the Sword lies shattered within the Place of Kolinahr on Mount Seleya." Jason watched Joel carefully for a moment before really seeing the Armour the boy had on. "Oh holy FUCK! Where did you...?" he gasped, pointing at the Armour.

"It seems as though I was right," Xain said blandly. "I have no doubt such an emotive reaction means this *is* the 'Fo-wein Sa'ren'."

Jason looked back and forth between them all, then finally turned his gaze back on the Armoured Vulcan. "Where did you get *that* from?? The last *I* knew, it was on Mount Seleya!!"

"Jay left it here with the other three suits," Sean explained.

Jason moved over to Joel as Sean said this and started slowly checking the Armour. "Is the rest here too??" he spluttered, looking for the hand coverings, cloak and helm.

Xain nodded as he moved to the required items, "Here, Jason."

"Did anyone adjust this when you helped Joel into it?" Jason asked excitedly.

"Nope," Cory shook his head. "It fit first time."

"NO WAY!!" Jason crowed with glee as he started dancing about, Joel clasped to his chest. The little Vulcan was giggling at the exuberant joy pouring out of the Welsh boy as he was spun about off the ground.

"You think you can fill us in on what you're talking about?" Sean asked with a giggle. "You're gonna fry Cory's brain cell!"

"Watch it, teddy bear!" Cory warned with a smile as he pulled Sean in close.

"Yeah, what's got you so excited, Jace?" Kevin also giggled, "you'd best be quick... Cor's ears are smoking!"

Laughing, Jason plopped Joel back to his feet, and quickly handed him the armoured gloves, "Put them on, elfling; I'll fit your cloak on right!" He turned and had the cloak handed to him by a curious Xain. He fitted it to the neck and shoulders of the Armour easily, then unfastened the section at the back of the belt area and fitted the middle of the cloak in place.

Joel now looked even more desirable to Kevin's eyes. The cloak reached to the Vulcan's mid-calf, and the silver embroidered black cloak shimmered. Joel had quickly put on the gloves and wrist guards, and again they fitted perfectly without any of the adjustments having to be made.

"Now, the helm," Jason bubbled as he handed it to Joel and helped him connect it all to the high neck of the Armour.

Sean sighed, and smiled, "Any time you want, *Jace!*"

Once Jason had finished he stood back and waited expectantly, yet nothing seemed to happen. "Mmm, okay; what's missing?"

"Jace!" Cory said in exasperation.

"It should... oh! Look at the helm! What's missing, guys?" Jason pointed.

They all moved closer to the small Vulcan who looked up at them curiously. Xain, however, was scanning Joel, "The shielding is at full power and now covering his entire body; as is expected with any true T'naehm Fo-wein. The resonance is correct. Nothing seems to be amiss, Jason."

Cory noticed first, "There's an indentation around the crown of the helm. Something else should go there. But what?"

"That's what I'm wondering," Jason added. "There's nothing in the legends about... oh, my GOD!"

"What?!" Cory and Sean nearly yelled. "For the love of... Jace, just fucking tell us, will you?" Cory added, nearly getting angry.

"The One to Reforge the Blade shall come. Unknowing shall he speak - Words that he shall not have heard. Untaught shall he know - Using his power to heal. Unguided shall he find his Strength... and forge the Destiny of Sa'ren. He shall Shine as Behr'ak; he shall Shimmer as the Sister; Alam'ak shall Rise over his coming, and the Brother shall crown his brow. He shall change what Was to Be anew, and It shall be Reborn - the Blade and Scion of Surak, the Ruler of Red Sands' and 'He shall fit Fo-wein Sa'ren instantly and be Shielded from Harm'," Jason quoted before calling out, "Kyle-Angel? Can you bring Joel's crown from the Compound?"

"Behr'ak? Alam'ak? Sister? Brother? What?" Sean asked in total bafflement.

"And you call me slow?" Cory retorted, poking Sean in the ribs. "Behr'ak is Vulcan's primary Sun, and Alam'ak is their secondary one, their brightest star. The 'Sister' is the sister world to Vulcan, their only 'moon'. But I agree with Sean, Jace," he added as he turned to his friend, "what is the 'Brother'?"

Jason giggled, "How do most Starfleet officers and crew feel about the union between Earth and Vulcan??"

"Brothers..." Kevin whispered excitedly. "And Joel was crowned by Grandma Lizzy! She's human and therefore...."

"...the Brother shall crown his brow'," Sean whispered.

Kyle appeared then with Joel's circlet in one hand and a Burger King cardboard crown in the other. The latter he plopped on Jason's head with a quick jump, while the former he handed to Joel.

"Oh, to be crowned by thee, O Masterful Mikyvis and King of thy people, is an honour I am not worthy of," Jason said with a flourish as he bowed and then prostrated himself to Kyle.

"Kiss my feet, Knave!" Kyle giggled.

Jason reached out and grabbed the boy, took off his shoes and socks and started blowing raspberries into the soles of Kyle's feet. Kyle started rolling about on the floor with laughter, trying to get away from Jason's attack; obviously he was not serious about doing so.

"I said KISS, Goofball!" Kyle managed to squeal.

Jason started kissing instead, but his hands had found Kyle's ticklish belly, sides and ribs and began their assault... yet he DID obey the Mikyvis King and continued to kiss the soles of Kyle's feet... tickling them as much as he could in the process as well...

"Okay, I give up!" Kyle gasped after five minutes of the assault. "Be glad I didn't pee!"

Jason grinned at Kyle's flushed face, straightened his 'crown' on his head then pulled Kyle over and sat the red faced and glowing child on his lap. "Good, much prefer Kyle-cuddles anyhow," he murmured happily into Kyle's hair.

Kyle also grinned and pulled Jason's arms around himself tighter as he tried ignoring the laughter from his big brothers, Joel included.

"You're crazy," Joel giggled as he put the circlet up around the helm where he felt the indentation.

Before anyone could say or do anything else, a loud shimmering came from the circlet as the 'gold' of it reacted with the Vulcan metal of the helm. The metal pieces of the Armour glowed silver, while the Emblazoned Sa'ren emblem inlaid on the sectioned breastplate blazed out in a mix of yellow and red light... the light of Earth's star, Sol, and that of Behr'ak.

//He has come. It is coming. The Blade shall be Reborn, and the Sword shall Reform// came the Voice of the Guardian as the boys stared at Joel in shock and awe...

...Joel was still shining like the dawn, and felt suddenly free of all emotion... other than that Fire that was now increasing to an unbelievable size within his chest.

After the shocked silence and the light show had played out, Kevin moved into Joel's arms. "Wow, Jo'. That was so cool!"

"Uh huh," Joel managed to say, his mind lost in confusing thoughts and feelings. He looked his best friend in the eyes and increased the hug.

"Love you too," Kevin replied with a sunny smile.

Joel grinned and pulled away to remove his helm and gloves. The shimmering from the Armour reduced to a barely perceivable level as he did so.

Jake was watching all this with just as much awe as the others, yet his eyes were concerned. "Joel, what is Kevin to you?" he asked lightly.

Joel looked over his shoulder and grinned. "We're best friends... with benefits!" he giggled, winking at Kevin who grinned back with a small blush. Joel then turned back and continued to remove those pieces of Armour Jason was now helping with.

Jake's face hardened slightly, and so he moved and quickly whispered to Kevin. They walked from the room, Kevin's face curious and concerned.

Joel turned just as the door closed. "What's happening?" he asked, looking around at the others.

"My T'hy'la is concerned for our little brother's well-being, and he is now discussing such with Kevin," Xain explained seriously.

"Oh? What's wrong?" Joel asked.

"You. Kevin does not easily say he loves others, not in the way he says it to you. Yet you do not reciprocate those feelings, and go so far as to easily dismiss it as being a relationship 'with benefits'. Jake is not pleased right now," Xain answered, his own face unreadable.

Joel's eyes filled with horror and fear. "But..."

"Xain," Cory interrupted quickly, "Joel cannot say the word, yet. He doesn't know what love really is, and if he says it and he's wrong, then he's 'lying' and would expect severe punishment."

Xain thought on that for a moment, and seemed to be listening to something else as well. "I see," he said finally. "Joel, Kevin has just relayed the same to Jake. I am sorry I said that - I did not know."

"S'okay," Joel murmured, tears now rolling down his face. Jason pulled him over and cuddled him from behind. "I wish I could say it, really I do," Joel continued pleadingly.

Jake and Kevin walked back in at that moment, and Kevin immediately saw his best friend's tears. He slapped Jake's arm and shot a look at Xain. "Next time, ask me without hurting my Jo', okay?" he said with a small measure of anger before running over and hugging the quietly sobbing Vulcan.

Jake also moved over and knelt down to look up into Joel's face. Kevin released his friend, and Joel moved forwards slightly.

"Sorry, Joel. I have always protected Kev from having to do sex stuff like I had to. I was afraid that that was all you wanted him for - for 'benefits' only. Sorry," Jake apologised as he offered his arms to the boy.

Joel sank into the offered hug, "Okay. Really, Jake: I won't hurt him... he's my bestest friend. I... we don't do s...sex stuff much... just masturbation... I'm as nervous as he is, but for..."

"Shh," Jake stopped Joel before the small boy's trembling grew worse, "Kev explained. It's okay, I understand. You just show him you love him as you've been doing."

"Kay," came the reply as Joel kissed Jake's cheek and returned to Kevin's arms.

Joel was now outside alone; thinking. At least, he thought he was alone.

After a long talk with Jason and Adam Casey, the two cheetahs felt at peace with not being on guard so that they could properly grieve for their fallen brothers, and the same went for the entire Unit Special Forces members. All had been told lovingly by Jason, Nathan and Victoria that the Dragon and Sehlat Divisions, along with Section 31, were on Watch Care for everyone.

"Just take care of your loved ones, Adam," Jason had said not that long ago. "Comfort the living and remember and honour the Fallen Heroes and family. We're your 'big' brother as far as the two Clans go, and we're doing this for you."

It had taken a while for Adam to come around, but when he did Jason found himself being hugged firmly. "Thank you. Just... thank you."

Jason smiled sadly, "To ease distress is logical, Commander. You need to grieve. You don't need the pressure of Security on top of that."

"What about your guys, Jace?" Cory had asked.

Jason sighed, "We love you too, but not as you love those who died. We are here to protect you. The Unit was not under our protection until Saturday when they joined Clan Short, but even so we had them under watch. Yet, we still don't hurt like they do, nor like you and the Clan do. We were apart from you. In the few days I've been around you in the open, I've been loved and accepted as if I'd always been here. I thank you for that, but in this instance, I have less to give than all of you do in honour of those that gave their all. It is better for me and mine to honour them by letting ALL of YOU honour them fully without distraction." He turned to Adam and stretched up and kissed the fourteen year old's cheek. "All the Unit should be here without needing to act as Security. I know you guys won't let your guard all the way down; I wouldn't in your position either, but just know that your Shadows are watching you. You won't see us. We'll never stop watching you, though."

Joel, therefore, did not see the guard that had been placed on him when he had asked if there was some place nearby where he could sit and think.

His guard, Riti, was nearby, but since he had his cloaking field on, and as he was seated in a tree above Joel, the Vulcan boy did not notice him.

His royal circlet had removed itself easily from the helm of his armour, and he had that across his brow as he sat back against a tree, while what he still wore of that Armour was glimmering slightly in the late morning sunlight.

Joel's face creased with fear and confusion. What was he to make of all this? He was meant to bring back some ancient sword? Why?

He sighed and trembled slightly, and his stomach growled at him. Absently, he picked a few blades of grass and started eating them. On one level of his mind he found himself amazed at the nice flavour of this grass, yet he was entirely focused on what had been told to him earlier.

Riti, however, grew concerned and established his link to Jason's mind. *'Get Cory and get him and yourself out here NOW, Jace! Joel's eating fuckin' GRASS!'*

Joel started to get himself more and more worked up over the next minute or so, and he had been reduced to a trembling, crying waif by the time Cory and Jason got to him.

"What's wrong, Lil'elf?" Cory asked as he ran over and scooped Joel into his arms.

Turning his gaze on Cory, Joel started blubbing harder. Jason reached over and plucked a few stray blades of grass from Joel's lip. "Shhh, cariad. What's troubling you?" he added as he rubbed Joel's back comfortingly.

Joel sobbed, "Everything... Sa'ren... me finding it... forging it... what am I meant to do? Why me? Who said all that stuff, and why is my armour so funny? I'm... I'm just... I'm only me..." He hid his face in Cory's shoulder and tightened his grip.

"Ah, Joel," Cory whispered quietly. "You are special. My little special elf, and don't you ever think otherwise. I don't know about Sa'ren, and I don't know about what you are meant to do, even if the legends are true. We'll work it out together; as brothers."

"Yeah," Jason added. "We can all talk tonight, if you want, Joel. I'll tell you as much as I know. It's all good, though. Please don't worry, little man; you make me hurt when you worry."

Joel continued crying softly but he did manage a quiet, "It's not fair... why me?"

Sammy suddenly ran around the corner and headed right over to them, panting. He gasped out, "I... I think I can... help him, guys."

Cory started smiling as Joel immediately reached for Sammy, sobbing out, "SamSam!"

"Well," Jason murmured quietly to Cory as Joel was transferred easily into the eleven year old's arms, "I believe we have become superfluous, Cor."

"Yeah," Cory whispered back. "Come on. I'll have Kev run out with cookies for him soon."

As they both left quickly, Jason glanced up into the branches of the tree that the invisible Riti was perched in and nodded.

Sammy settled down against the same tree Joel had been using, with Joel cuddled against him, chest to chest; his small face now tucked into Sammy's neck and his tears slowly making their way down his face to wet Sammy's neck.

"Hush now little one, it's alright," Sammy whispered softly. "It's alright now," he said again as he rubbed up and down on Joel's back. "Shhh."

Joel pulled back enough so that he was gazing into Sammy's golden seeming eyes, his nose touching his brother's. "You... you just made *him* go 'way, SamSam," Joel breathed quietly in wonder, his gaze not breaking from that of Sammy's and his soft cookie scented breath tickling at Joel's senses. "*He* was shouting at me 'gain... 'cos I'm so dumb... I can't understand... I don't know... why me?"

Sammy took a deep breath and opened up what he was feeling to Joel, just as he had done the night before. He let his feelings wrap around the waif in his arms like a blanket and said gently, "First of all, little guy, you're not dumb. Don't ever think that, okay?" Sammy got a shy nod from the Vulcan, and so continued, "Second, 'He' is not here any more and even if he was I wouldn't let 'Him' hurt you ever again. Not only that but I bet Jace, Cory, Sean, Kevin and about a million more that are here wouldn't let 'Him' do anything to you either. That doesn't include Dot or your teddy bear, both of whom I bet would love to eat him on sight; although it might upset their tummies. I am glad I could make him go away though," he added with a puzzled smile as Joel started giggling in his arms.

"You spoke," Joel explained, as images of I-Cheya snacking down on Mr Williams appeared in his mind's eye. His eyes danced happily, yet even with his giggles, he kept his eye contact with his Sam-Sam. Noses still touching, Joel smiled and kissed Sammy quickly. "You just spoke, and *he* went away."

There was a slight pause, then, "And Mother says 'thank you'."

Sammy couldn't help but giggle at what he could see Joel thinking about down the unique Bond they had. He said, "Well, I'm glad he went and that I could make him go, little guy, but your mother?" He

returned the kiss to Joel's little nose. He hid his concern but did start to wonder. 'Mother? If... That would explain so much' he thought, thinking about yesterday.

"Uh huh!" Joel giggled again as his smile lit up his face. His armour emitted a slight ringing note as Joel's joy grew. "You remember las' night, and I said something weird to you that I can't remember, and I said it happens a lot? I've got my Mother's Katra in my mind. She... she's kinda funny, but nice. You wanna talk to her? I can ask her if you wanna," he offered, now completely excited.

"I remember, Joel; and I was worried but it sounds as if it's okay now. Tell her 'you're welcome' and I'd be honoured to speak with her if she likes." Relief was now in Sammy's eyes as he thought, 'That explained everything from last night. I have to tell Jace, he'll be relieved too.'

Joel's eyes started changing shade. They were still blue, and Sammy could see a resemblance to Joel's natural shade, but these eyes seemed to be slightly darker. Joel sat back until he was seated on Sammy's thighs, and then his eyes darted over Sammy completely.

"Fascinating. My son surrounds himself with attractive young men. He has, as humans say, good taste," came that same voice from the night before that Sammy remembered.

Sammy's face started flaming as he blushed and said, "T..th..thanks. He's a real sweetheart." He then added, "You're really his mother?"

Joel's now emotionless face gazed back at him, yet his eyes, his mother's eyes, twinkled. "Yes, I am," his mother replied, then took in Sammy's burning face. "Ah. Do not be embarrassed. At least I have not seen you naked as I have Cory, Sean and Kevin. Although I can guess that you would be a match for them. I was right about you yesterday. A Patriarch's soul is in you, a Father's soul. The bond you share with my son; I thank you for that. He deserves all the love that he has missed, and you give that so freely. For a soul so hurt, you still give. You are truly a wonder, child."

"Well at least the naked part's true," he replied with a smile before telling her, "I'm not anything special, ma'am, I just... just care about people and I don't know any other way except to do it like that. I can feel the hurt in him, the pain and I want to make that go away. More than that, I want to make it stay away. I can also feel the emptiness inside him wanting to be filled and I'm more than happy to try and help fill it for him. I do love him as strange as that sounds just knowing him for so short a time but I do. The...ah...John says it's because of the way he is but it doesn't change anything for me. I'll do everything I can to protect him and show him that love which he needs, I promise." Sammy's eyes were filled with love as he gazed at Joel.

"John Smith. Ish-Hassu. The Doctor. What my son knows, I know, Samuel. I know what the Doctor told you also, but that is by deduction. Love given nearly always has its response in Love received. In that, in the power you have in you, you are special. And you may call me... Sara. That is all I may say at this time regarding who I am. Now, I must allow my son to regain control. This tires me more when not in complete control; he is listening and watching... and giggling, I believe. He thinks you are cute... when you blush..." her voice faded at the end, and Joel's eyes reverted back to normal.

Very normal, as he was sniggering like crazy. He flopped into Sammy's chest and kissed him soundly before settling in for a good snuggle. "She's nice, isn't she?" he whispered happily.

"Yes," Sammy whispered back with a small smile as he kissed the top of Joel's head, "she is."

They sat there for a few moments just enjoying the contact and the warm sun. "You think I'm cute when I blush?" Sammy suddenly asked with a giggle.

Joel sat up slightly to look into Sammy's eyes, his own dancing happily. He nodded, "Yeah."

Sammy grinned at him, but did tilt his head curiously at Joel, "You don't seem as... something has changed."

Joel nodded seriously and a slow blush mounted his cheeks. Sammy felt another movement, and guessed. "Did you and Kevin enjoy?"

Joel nodded shyly, that quirky grin coming back to his face.

Sammy pulled him in and hugged him firmly. After another enjoyable hug in silence, Sammy asked, "What was upsetting you earlier?"

"I..." Joel sat back up to look at Sammy again, then sighed. "This armour I have on; it's meant to be special armour that only the one who can remake some Vulcan sword would fit exactly at first try."

Sammy looked at the silver white armour and then back into Joel's eyes. "And?"

"It fitted," Joel breathed out nervously, "but I don't know what I'm meant to do to make a sword. I don't like the idea that I'm in prophecy."

"How old is this 'prophecy'?" came Sammy's puzzled question.

"Nearly two thousand years old," Joel whispered back.

"Joel," Sammy said slowly, pulling the boy's attention back to himself fully, "only you can say what you will do. Vulcans are strange, but they would never make you do something you really didn't want to do."

"The Guardian said it as well, though," Joel added, panic beginning to rise in him.

Sammy was quick to settle those emotions, using a trick Victoria had taught him. He then said, "I think I've heard this Guardian, Joel; on Monday before you arrived. He sounds nice. I'm sure he wouldn't force you either. But Jason said last night that this Guardian knows the future. It might not be a prophecy from the Guardian's point of view. He could be watching you do it right now." Sammy stopped and kissed Joel's forehead lovingly, "Whatever you do would be natural to you, so *just be you*, Joel."

Joel regarded Sammy seriously for a long moment before nodding slowly. "Okay, SamSam," he whispered, a ghost of a smile returning to his face.

Kevin appeared then, carrying a paper bag. He ran up to them both and settled down next to Sammy. "Cor said you were hungry, Jo'. I got you some cookies; Tyler says he made them specially for you."

Joel's smile became stronger as he was handed the bag. He opened it and peered inside. "Mmm, these smell yummy," he giggled. He looked up at Sammy's face from his perch on his thighs and asked, "Want some?"

With a quick nod, Sammy answered, "Yes please. They do smell good."

The young Vulcan started to feed both of them then, as well as devouring his own share.

Around a mouthful of cookie, Kevin asked, "Why were you eating grass, Jo'? If you're hungry, you just have to ask us for something and we'll get food for you."

Joel chewed as he thought back to just before Cory and Jason had arrived. "Oh yeah. I was... well, when I was *there* I used to eat anything to feel full, Kev. I just kinda did it outta habit, I think." He paused and his face grew pensive, "I...I didn't do nuffin' wrong, did I?"

Sammy and Kevin both shook their heads. "No," Sammy answered quickly, "it's just that grass ain't nice to eat Joel, and we don't want you eating anything that isn't the best. Okay?"

A smile, hug and kiss for each of them later, and all three continued to devour the cookies.

Kevin had gone to talk with Xain some more about the part they were to play in the upcoming service, and so Joel decided to wander about the Fire Station to see if he could find Sean or Cory for some more cuddles. Before he found them, he instead came upon two blond haired teenagers who were sitting together. One of them was fully engrossed in a large technical manual, and as Joel got closer he could see it was an engineering book written by none other than Commander Scott of the Enterprise.

His curiosity got the better of him. He stopped fairly near to them both and fidgeted slightly in nerves before trembling out, "Uh... hi."

"Oh, hi," the boy who was reading said, while the other just blushed and nervously waved.

Joel noticed the blush, and felt a little less threatened. "Why you blushing?" he asked the boy, cocking his head slightly as he felt a nervous tension build in the air between the three of them.

"Um, you're Joel, aren't you?" the one who had answered him said. "I'm Jude; we got here the same time as you. This's Billy Joe, and he's kind of shy about, you know..." He let his last words trail off as Billy Joe looked panicked.

Joel raised an eyebrow, then nodded. "I... I think I understand," he whispered as he sat down next to Billy. "I... where I was, you died if you were... if you liked boys. And... but don't worry. I was beaten so much to stop me ever doing... sex stuff..." he whispered more, "but Kev and I... we, ah... played with each other and it was cool and everything! If I can do sex stuff and everyone be brilliant about it, then you two can be together... and stuff..." He smiled nervously and glanced about. "Oh, ummm... Kev said I shouldn't talk 'bout it 'cos it's embarrassing or something... sorry..."

"But, uh, it's a sin -- they told me it is!" Billy Joe said uncertainly.

"No," Joel shook his head with a small smile, "it's a sin to hate. It's a sin to hurt. The Bible don't say anything about two men nor two women in a committed relationship being a sin. I'd know. I've memorised the entire Bible."

"See, I keep telling you," Jude said with a warm smile.

Billy Joe frantically grabbed at the first thing that came to mind to change the subject. "So you were telling me about the modulator for the warp core, Jude...?" he asked.

Joel giggled. He gave Billy a brief hug then looked at the page Jude's book was open to. "Oh, the possibility of Slip Stream?" he asked Jude.

"Yeah, they don't have that here yet! They had it in your world?" Jude asked excitedly.

Joel giggled again, "This is my world. The one I was lost in was without space stuff, and Star Trek was an old show. Slip Stream won't work with the current Warp engines, though. You need a completely new type of engine. And without increasing the SIF beyond even TNG time frame tolerance, the starship would rip itself to shreds."

"Oh, like they did in Voyager?" Jude asked, revealing that he was from a 'Star Trek TV show' universe.

"Uh huh," Joel nodded, then glanced at Billy's now very confused and lost looking face. "Slip Stream is a fast way of getting places, Billy. You could get from here to Vulcan in an hour or so rather than 2 to 3 days!"

"Except that they haven't developed it here yet!" Jude added, giggling.

"So how do you guys know about it?" Billy Joe asked.

"Well," the little Vulcan started with a broad smile, "the Universe I was lost in was post-apocalyptic, but before the War there was this show called Star Trek. It was about the United Federation of Planets, Starfleet, and the crew of the Enterprise. The shows covered more than 180 years and started in the late 22nd, early 23rd centuries. It looks like the stuff that people thought they were making up was really happening in *other* Universes. Jude must come from a Universe where they also had Star Trek; right, Jude?"

"Right!" Jude said with a conspiratorial smile at Joel. He then asked, "How many series did you see, Joel?"

Joel started to list them off, "'Enterprise', 'Original Series', 'Next Generation', 'Deep Space Nine', 'Voyager', 'Animated Series', 'Original Series Redux', 'Federation Wars', 16 films, 8,347 stand alone novels, and so many additional 'tech' books that I never bothered counting them."

"Omigosh!" Jude said, excitedly. "We only had through Enterprise, or through Voyager if you're looking at it chronologically, and ten movies. I really enjoyed Enterprise the best, after the original series - seeing Earth's first steps into space, with Jonathan Archer and T'Pol and all, was great!"

Two boys from the Unit walked by in full uniform, on their way to get their ceremonial rifles. Billy Joe asked, "Who are they?"

Kevin walked up just in time to hear the question. He answered as he sat down and pulled Joel into his arms, "They're from The Unit. They are the ones who came and saved Sammy and Cory and the guys on Saturday, Billy. They are all military-trained soldiers, and some have been genetically enhanced." Once finished, he kissed the back of Joel's head, and relaxed back with Joel's back firmly against his chest.

"Genetically enhanced? You mean, like what Dr. Sara Kingsley was doing in the "Unnatural Selection" episode?" Jude asked excitedly. "That's for real?"

"I think so," Joel nodded, "I don't know much about these 'Unit' kids yet, so I can't be sure who did it."

"Genetic enhancement has been going on for thousands and thousands of years, Jude," Kevin explained with a small smile. "The human race is a lot older than most alive now think. Over 65 thousand years older."

"What?!" Jude asked. "Who? How? When? Was it aliens?"

Kevin started to giggle, "Nope. No aliens. We're just a far older race than most realise... we've killed ourselves off time and time again, though."

"Not as old as the sons of T'Khasi," came that sonorous voice from Joel that meant his mother was speaking again. Kevin recognised it, but Jude and Billy just lifted an eyebrow at the change in tone in Joel's voice. "Our blood is the oldest in the Federation."

"Um, what do you mean by that, Joel?" Jude asked.

Joel's face turned to regard Jude emotionlessly, and the voice came again, "Vulcan blood reaches back over five hundred thousand years. Such is the age of the oldest ruins on our World." Joel then shook his head slightly and blinked at the two boys in front of him. He turned his head to look into Kevin's eyes, "My Mother."

"Yeah, I know. She didn't say anything bad, Jo'. Don't worry," Kevin kissed his friend's nose softly.

"Kay," Joel whispered as he snuggled back and pulled Kevin's arms in tighter about himself.

"Um ... what the *heck*?" Jude exclaimed. "Joel's eyes just suddenly changed shade, and he started talking in a strange voice... what's going on?"

"My mother's Katra," Joel explained with a small smile. "She's in my mind."

"And you've no idea how nervous that makes me feel after... uh, never mind," Kevin trailed off with a blush.

"You mean, she's watching you, everything you say and do?!" Billy Joe said. "That's *really* gotta suck!"

Joel's face fell slightly. "No, she said she withdrew and didn't see nor feel anything when Kev and I masturbated each other, but..." Kevin's face went bright red but before he could say anything Joel's soft sobs pulled his attention away from being embarrassed. "... But, I wish she had been there... before... sh...she could have h...helped when I w...was getting hurt..." Joel finished, tears running down his face. "I'd tr..trade my privacy to kn...know she's there forever... watching o...out for me..."

Without thinking, Jude reached over and pulled the smaller boy from Kevin's cuddle and into his arms, holding him as he cried. Kevin moved over with his best friend and Billy took him into his own lap so that the two small boys could still be together. "Why wasn't she there before, Kevin?" Jude asked softly as Joel wept.

"You saw the pictures of Joel when he arrived," Kevin sighed. "That chip in his neck kept Joel's mind acting and seeming human; sort of. It meant that his Mom's Katra was completely blocked off. She had no idea her baby would live and grow up a tortured, abused slave."

Jude was shocked at what Kevin had said. "Where'd they do that to you, dude?" he asked.

Joel trembled, so Kevin answered, "He was an orphan in the place he was lost. All orphans there were slaves. They were worth nothing, and so..." He shook his head, unable to say any more. Jude got the picture as did Billy Joe.

They sat quiet for a few minutes, and Billy Joe's mind started to go over what Joel had let slip about having engaged in mutual masturbation with Kevin. "Aren't you two kinda young for messing around with sex?" he asked eventually as he increased his hug on the brown haired boy on his lap.

"I'm eleven, twelve in December," Kevin whispered as he kissed Joel's cheek. "And he's thirteen tomorrow."

"Wow, you're both... sorry, I shouldn't," Billy Joe started to say, but trailed off with a blush.

"It's okay," Kevin smiled sadly. "We were both starved. We're getting better now."

Jude tried to lift the mood then, "I turn fourteen tomorrow: we've got the same birthday, Joel!"

Joel trembled. "I don't like birthdays," he whispered as he wiped the tears from his face. He shuffled over until Kevin had him in his arms again.

Jude was confused. "Why?" he asked. "Didn't you have parties with your friends to celebrate people's birthdays?"

"I was a *slave*," Joel explained sickly, "I *had* no friends. I never had friends. Kevin is my first, my Best Friend, and my brothers are my first brothers. I... I was always beaten bad on my birthday; just 'cos *he* could 'celebrate'."

Both Billy Joe and Jude were stunned at this. "But why?" Jude asked.

Kevin hugged Joel tighter. "Why'd my Mom hate me and never feed me? Why'd Adam Short's parents beat him? Why'd Jamie and Jacob's dad assault them? Why..." he stopped before he could get angry.

Kyle appeared and came up to Jude. He waved his hand and both Kevin and Joel went stock still while he explained, "You had great parents, Jude; they loved you a lot, but a lot of us guys have never had good parents until we were saved by the Clan or by our brothers before the Clan started. You heard what Sean told you on Monday, Jude. I know it's hard for you to understand, but for Joel it was very real. He was abused, tortured, beaten and nearly raped before Mikey saved him. He lived through the type of things you read about in those CSU stories. It wasn't a story for him. Not to me either. I know your grandfather beat you some, but you had so much more love in your life than we had. It allowed you the strength to run away. I hope you never really understand what *we* went through, bro. Don't ask him any more right now, not about what he went through. Every time he thinks about his past, he feels the pain as if it was happening right now. Get his mind off it, and talk about something to make him smile. Levi is in tears right now; it's his turn to help Joel's emotions stay in check, and this is making it harder. Tell him about your good birthdays that you've had, and tell him about how great your mom and dad were. That will help with tomorrow's surprise."

Kyle smiled at both Billy Joe and Jude, kissed them, and vanished. Joel and Kevin unfroze as if nothing had happened.

Jude glanced at Billy Joe, and decided to take Kyle's advice. "Mom and Dad were awesome," he told Joel. "Sure they scolded me to make me behave, but they were always there, always loving me. And they tried to make every one of my birthdays special. When I was six, there was a circus in Savannah, and they drove me up to it. When I turned twelve, we went to the beach for the day. Last year, Dad took me down to J'ville to watch the Jaguars play. Every birthday - every day - they tried to make me realize how special I was to them." He smiled, remembering.

Joel's face softened throughout all that Jude was relaying, and by the end he had a gentle smile on his face. "They sound real nice, Jude," he whispered happily, and he could feel Kevin nodding his head behind him.

It was Jude's turn to look a little sad, then. "They were the best. I miss them a lot."

Joel worked out what wasn't said. "Jude?"

"Yeah?"

"If you help me have a... a *nice* birthday tomorrow, I'll be your family for *your* birthday tomorrow as well. And... and... if you want a Mama to give you 'Mammy-hugs', then... I... I don't think Cor and Sean'll mind if... if our Mama Teri would become your Mama Teri too..."

Jude's eyes went misty. "You'd share Teri with me?" he asked. "That's probably the kindest thing anybody's ever said to me. I used to read about her and how she loved Cory and Sean so much..."

Joel suddenly grinned, jumped up from Kevin's lap and yelled "Stay there!" as he zoomed off, calling out "MAMA!!!! MAMA!!!"

Kevin started to giggle as he looked at the priceless expression on Jude's face.

"Earth to Jude" Billy Joe giggled.

Jude blinked, and continued listening to the faint calls of 'MAMA' ringing out throughout the building.

It was less than three minutes later when Teri arrived, being led by an over-excited Joel, and being followed by all her other sons who had come running at their Lil'elf's cries and calls of 'MAMA'.

"Okay, Joel. What are you up to?" Teri laughed as she watched her tiny Vulcan son bounce around arranging all his brothers so that they could see. Jude was looking half terrified by now.

Joel started explaining, "Jude's got no Mama any mores, Mama. He had a brilliant Mam and Dad in his old Universe and they were cool and hugged him and did wonderful things for him and everything, but he don't have anyone any mores and he's upset 'cos it's his birthday tomorrow and his Daddy and Mammy won't be here so I offered..." *quick breath* "... offered to share my new Mama with him... will you? Will you be Jude's new Mama? Not replace his brilliant Mammy but to be a new Mammy for him? Please?"

Cory looked over at Kyle. "You speak 'excited kid'; would you mind translating, bro?"

Kyle giggled. "Joel wants Mom to be a Mom for Jude, like Allen is a Pop for Xain. A M'aih, right Joel?"

Joel nodded from the hug Teri had pulled him into.

"Is that what you want, Jude?" Teri asked calmly.

"Um, yes, ma'am," Jude said abashedly. "I used to read about you, and how wonderful you were with Sean and Cory and J.J. and Kyle and Aaron and all. I'd love to have you for a Mom - is M'aih Vulcan for mother?"

"It is Vulcan for 'Caring and Nurturing Mother', like a foster mother. It is not full adoption. That would be Ko'mekh," Teri explained.

"Well, um..." Jude paused, unsure how to say what he was feeling. "If I had my druthers, I'd love to be adopted -- really adopted -- like Tyler and Adam were. But..." he paused and looked embarrassed "...it'd be like disowning my Dad if I changed my name to Short, because we were Lees, and we were proud of being from the First Family of the South... even though we were only distant kin to Robert E. Please don't think I'm bad for that, ma'am, but I'm proud of being my poppa's son, and it's about all I have left of him, is his name." He looked ready to burst into tears.

Joel ran over and climbed into Jude's lap, and started hugging him. Jude did start crying then.

Teri smiled softly. "Tommy would disown me if I was to force you to do something like that. Aaron is my son, yet his name is still 'Carter' for professional reasons."

"Yer darn tootin' I'd be madder than a rabid 'coon!" Tommy piped up. "Ain't no-one gonna take your kinship to ole' Robert E. from ya!"

"There... you wanna be our brother? Our for real brother?" Joel asked from Jude's lap. "You can still be 'Lee', but you'd be our brother forever!"

"Would you?" Jude looked at Teri in hope through his tearful eyes.

"Whose turn is it to do the honours?" Teri asked with a grin.

Kevin giggled, "Under the authority of Article 200 of the Safe Haven Act, Jude McArthur Lee is hereby adopted by Teri Diana Short. He shall retain his name in honour of his father and mother, and as an eternal remembrance of their love for him."

"As your Patriarch, Kev, I ratify your decision," Cory giggled, and drew Jude into a warm, close hug: one that rapidly turned into a group hug.

As the older boys released Jude from the hug, Timmy and the assembled Tribe executed a group pounce on him, leaving him breathless and giggling.

Joel started laughing from the hug Kevin had pulled him back into. He started laughing harder when Timmy scooted out from the mass pile on the floor and ran off quickly.

Timmy walked slowly back and up to Jude, holding a little grey kitten with black 'socks' on all four paws. "Here ya go, Uncle Jude; her mommy says that you need a kitty to stay with you. Her name's Socks!"

"I guess I'd better not run for President, then," Jude laughed as he took the kitten from Timmy. At the other's strange expression, Jude giggled, "I'll explain later."

Teri rolled her eyes, "You are going to fit in well, Jude. Come here; my turn for some hugs."

Jude's eyes misted up slightly as he, and his new kitten, were pulled into her arms.

"Thanks... Mom," he whispered, a catch in his voice.

Cory started back towards where Adam Casey was when a light body thumped into his back, and two small arms snaked around his neck. A quick giggle and a large kiss to his left cheek gave away that his Lil'elf had graced him with a pounce.

"Did I do good, Blondie?" he whispered excitedly into Cory's ear. "With Jude? He was all upset that he had no family and..."

"You did perfect, Lil'elf; I couldn't have done any better myself," Cory replied as he gave Joel's arms a squeeze.

Joel sighed happily. "Thanks," he whispered again, "I was a lil' scared I messed up when he got all upset."

Cory giggled softly as he continued walking, Joel riding piggy-back.

Another soft sigh came from the contented Vulcan, and then he mumbled something that made Cory's heart leap for joy:

"I love you, Cor."

Cory somehow managed to spin Joel around so that they were touching noses as he replied, "I love you too, little brother; always and forever."

Joel smiled back, then his eyes popped open wide. "I said it! I really said it??"

Cory's smile reached across his face, "Yeah, you did, Lil'elf!"

"I... I really do! I love you Cory!" he yelled in complete and utter joy.

Tommy was not that far away when this new yell came and he burst into tears. He spun quickly and ran back to where Kevin was sitting. He grabbed the startled boy and threw him up and onto his shoulders before running back towards where a laughing Joel was being spun around by an equally laughing Cory.

"What...?" Kevin spluttered as he found himself being dangerously sped over to the two happy boys.

Cory saw them coming, and so did Joel. Tommy managed to get Kevin to his feet in time for the small boy to receive the pounce that Joel had launched at him.

"Kev! I said it! I love Cory! And I really, REALLY LOVE YOU!" came the happy shout from the Vulcan as he pressed his face into Kevin's neck. "I love you!" he whispered then, tears now running down his cute face.

Kevin started crying as well as he held onto Joel as tight as he possibly could.

"Shal ashau du, Jo'," he managed to whisper through his tears, "I love you, too."

They said no more after that for Joel's lips sought, and found, Kevin's.

"Cory," Sarek said as he came close to the young Patriarch, "I need to have a word with you before you go for your food."

"Sure, Grandfather," Cory smiled as he turned from watching Joel and Kevin kiss.

Sarek laid a hand on Cory's shoulder and led him to one side, "I have received a communication from Vulcan. The High Council has made their decision regarding Saturday, and they have backed up my own opinion regarding it."

"Oh?" Cory said with interest. "Can you tell me?"

Sarek nodded, and proceeded to explain...

"Mom?" Cory called as he finished a comm call.

Teri looked over at him as she helped Joel pick out his lunch.

"Just got a call from Seth in CIC. Enterprise will be here late tonight, so Joel's booked to go up at ten tomorrow," the blond teen said.

Teri smiled, "That's fine, Cory. Let them know we'll have him ready."

Cory giggled, "And that she wants to see her hottie again," he half-whispered to Sean in passing as he turned his back.

"What was that, young man?" Teri asked, her voice dripping with a forced sweetness.

"Nuffin'!" he retorted cheekily.

Teri stared at him, making him squirm.

Eventually, Cory cracked up laughing, "Sorry Mom, but you're always checking out Uncle Spock's butt when he's around!"

Joel's face, lit up already with his smile at the knowledge of his impending trip to the Enterprise, lit up more. "You think Captain Spock is cute?! You do! I can feel you do!" he half yelled - Teri's hand was still resting on his shoulders.

Teri glared at Cory briefly, then smiled wryly. "I don't suppose I can say anything after the teasing I give you guys, can I?" she muttered lovingly. She ruffled Joel's hair and smiled down at him, "Yes, Captain Spock is easy on the eyes, Joel."

Kevin was giggling with the rest as Teri left them while rolling her eyes, yet his giggles soon died away. Joel turned to him quickly when he picked up the sudden shift in emotions, and this time it was not the nervousness over sex - it was guilt.

"What's wrong?" he asked his friend.

Kevin glanced at him, smiled, then sniffed. The feelings Joel could sense were a complete mix of love and shame, all at once. "I..."

Kevin paused for a second, then said, "I said this morning that I wanted to wait... there's a reason, Jo'. But I don't wanna talk about that yet. Not yet. I'm still thinking about stuff - just like you are."

Joel nodded uncertainly, "Okay, but I'm here when you're ready."

Kevin then took a slow drink of his shake; his face also uncertain and his eyes filled with doubt... and guilt.

Darryl's comments:

It is so wonderful that Joel has finally been able to say that he loves people. I wonder what Kev is feeling guilty about. I am certain that he truly loves Joel. Let's hope that there is nothing badly wrong and that they can be there for one another.

This is another wonderful chapter in this ever expanding saga. I am very glad that some healing is happening with the people from the UNIT. They really need closure.

Thank goodness, SamSam is there. He has that wonderful gift, and now he is willing and able to use it to help everyone, without the fear of being hurt or killed. I am all excited about all the things that are going to happen soon, I hope. I am going to close these notes, or I will be rambling for a week, and we can't have that happening, now can we?

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher

Chapter 8**The One Who Redeems**

Charleston - Late Afternoon:

"This is Jacob Peterson, BBC World News, reporting from Charleston, South Carolina. The Clan Short funeral service has just come to a close, and the 21 gun salute has been given. The atmosphere here is as most would expect. Remembering those who died on Saturday has brought heavy feelings to the surface. I have seen much in my time with the BBC, but seeing the results of an attack by a group of well armed kids against Fundamentalist Christians is probably something none of us would ever want to see or hear about again. The massive loss of life, the hurt, the pain. The reasons for this attack are still hotly debated in some circles, but with the Federation now involved on a global level, the real root for the loss of morality and humanity portrayed will be exposed and dealt with; at least, that is the hope that many here now have.

"As you can see behind me, those paying their respects to some of the fallen are marching back from the Island. There are many members of the British Royal House in attendance, even some of the most recently 'added' grandchildren of Her Majesty; another group of well armed and trained children. One of their number seems to be in the final group which has stopped to talk with the press. I shall attempt to get a few words from him."

The reporter turned from the camera and moved towards the bridge and Division Commander Jason Evans, who was standing there looking at him with an unreadable expression on his face. Jason's eyes seemed elsewhere, and the reporter thought, for a brief moment, that they glowed with an unearthly light.

"Your Highness? My name is Jacob Peterson, and I'm with the BBC. I am wondering if you have anything to say to the families of those Christians killed on Saturday?" Mr Peterson asked, inwardly hoping to provoke on International Television something that would help his cause.

"The only Christians killed on Saturday have already been honoured, as you have no doubt just witnessed, Mr Peterson." Jason's answer was short and his eyes were still elsewhere.

Mr Peterson thought that the Queen had finally taken leave of her senses; imagine 'adopting', or whatever she had done, a dim-witted remedial such as this?

"Son, I was referring to those adults that Clan Short, and various others, attacked on Saturday," he said condescendingly.

Jason's eyes snapped into focus and his jaw clenched. Behind him, Sammy, Mike, Kartik and Vishnu were standing with a few other stragglers from the march, and they were now bristling in rage. Literally, in the case of the two cougars. Jason spun around and raised his hand, palm facing the group, and said firmly, "Hold." He then glanced up the street in the direction of the Fire House and waited for a brief moment.

Jason turned then, and looked directly at the Camera Man, "Mr Roberts. You are innocent of what is about to be revealed. I order you now, under the Authority of The Federation, Vulcan, and the Crown of Britain, to keep recording this. Those at the BBC centre, you will also do the same, and keep this on air, or you shall be paid a visit *very shortly*."

"What the..." Mr Peterson started, but Jason raised his hand again and made a closing motion. The reporter's mouth snapped shut and he could not open it again.

"You have no rights to speak, terrorist. You have been mind-scanned by a registered Vulcan trained Telepath and the following has been found: it was on your information those that attacked the home of Michael Christopher Reynolds and his family acted. It was your group of people that coordinated the attack of one section of those killing and trying to kill *children*. You are directly responsible for the death of 32 of those killed - including those on board 'Bam Bam' and Kuan Ti.

"I judge you now, under the auspices of the VSO. You are sentenced to death, and I think that there are some here who would just *love* to bring that death to you." Jason turned and took the two young cougars gaze unto his own. "I give him to you, my brothers. Once we are out of the public gaze, you and your brothers can repay him in full."

Kartik nodded slowly. Mike, however, said, "H...how can someone from the UK be responsible?"

"He is with the BBC. It is, or was, his cover. He has been here in the US for three months working as a reporter, but his true loyalty lies with the FCC. He is ex-SAS. I have just been receiving updates from my Psy-Corps, and they just fed me some of the extra background on others they have found in the last three hours. In all their minds, the face of this 'man' appeared," Jason explained.

Mike nodded, then placed a hand on Vishnu's shoulder, "I hope I can help you and your brothers deal with this scum."

"Sure thing, Dad," Vishnu spat out, glaring in total hate at the reporter motionless before them, "it's always good having help for something that will take a few days."

"Good. Speak to John Smith. I don't think he'd mind helping with the 'time' issue," Jason said with half a smile. He then turned to the side and tapped at the comm on his neck, "Wisdom, I need a containment cell and, when ready, transport my prisoner to the ship."

"Aye, Commander," Telez' voice answered, and a second later, Mr Peterson disappeared.

"I shall have those who wish to have fun brought up to the ship later," Jason said with a sad smile at his brothers and friends.

Sammy was nodding furiously.

Jason sighed internally. He didn't want anyone else's blood on that innocent angel's hands.

His own were bloodied enough, and his soul scarred enough to take it.

'Oh please, my SamSam. Don't,' Jason thought, shielding it from his brother.

He then turned back to the shaking camera man and said, "I am Division Commander Jason Evans, Patriarch of Clan Evans of the Family of Sarek of the House of Surak of Vulcan, and Prince of the United Kingdom and her Empire. I have been in contact with the Vulcan High Council, the High Command and VSO Central Ops; their decision is now finalised over the atrocity that took place on Saturday. I have been authorised by the Head of the High Council, Ambassador Sarek of Vulcan, to now make public that decision.

"Vulcan, her Confederation, her Fleets and her Operatives are now authorised for Absolute Sanctions.

"Vulcan is now at War with the FCC."

Jason moved until his face was all that the camera could take in and transmit. His eyes flashed into blue brilliance and he grated out, "Run. That is the only warning I give you:

"Run."

Ten Minutes Later:

Mike was standing in the doorway of one of the offices of the Fire Station, and his mouth was dry. Anger, rage, fury. They were there, but surpassing it all was fear. Fear for his beloved little boy, his Sammy. He could kill that evil man now held on the Vulcan ship easily, and he could even watch as some of the G-Cats, who were being assembled in the main room outside, 'played' first. He could not, however, stand there and let his son, his precious little son, take part.

He could not. Yet he could not find the words to stop him.

Sammy's friends had died; Sammy's new brothers.

And Sammy wanted vengeance.

They all did.

And so he stood there watching another boy - again, one far too young for this hellish situation - as he tried to talk Sammy out of going.

Jason Evans. Another new brother to his son.

'Oh, who am I kidding? He's another one of mine too. God! Why do these little angels have to do this? Can you tell me that? Please?' Mike pleaded silently.

"Sammy," Jason started, but his brown haired brother interrupted him angrily.

"No Jason, don't!" he replied, and the anger running through him only grew worse since he believed Jason was about to talk him out of going.

"I have to, SamSam!" Jason answered, tears standing in his eyes. "I can't bear for you to go and kill this scum. It's not for you to do that! You're too... oh, SamSam! I've already GOT blood on my hands; it don't matter about me. I've killed more times than you've jacked off, and that ain't no exaggeration! PLEASE don't do this. Let me - let the Cats. Just please don't do this."

Sammy felt Jason's pain easily, but said in a deathly quiet voice, "He hurt my family, Jace. He killed so many. I don't have a choice. He's going to pay and he's gonna hurt, he's gonna hurt bad!" After a second or so, he said more calmly, "This time there won't be any more on your hands."

"It's *my* job, cariad," Jason whispered brokenly. "I've been trained to deal with this, and what we've taught you only covers the basics. You're not ready, and even if you were, you're... you're just... You are the Angel of the N-Gens, Sammy... we love you and we'll protect you. I know you're angry, and I know you want to take it out, and I know that those pictures are just not leaving, but killing him won't make them go away. It will only make it better for the moment; then you'll need to go and find another 'face' to kill and take the pain away again. Korris went through it, so did Donna, and loads and loads more. I don't want to have to rescue you from that, Sammy! Please. I can't stop you going. I won't. But I beg you..."

"I love you too, Jace, but it won't be like that. I promise, I won't let it - but this time; this time I have to. I can't let him get away with it. I just can't. I'll be okay, this won't be like before. I can handle this. I know you're worried, but he has to pay. It was my family, it was me that he almost killed. I...I don't have a choice, I'm not an angel or nothing and I don't like doing it but this time... please understand, Jace. Please?" Sammy finished, almost begging for Jason to see his side of it.

However, in the back of Sammy's mind, an image of himself arose; in that other life in the other Universe. Of him finding different 'faces' to hunt down... he knew that Jason also knew of these memories, since they had shared each others thoughts over the past few days. 'No... I won't do that here! It's not going to be like that!' he thought desperately.

"What's wrong?" came a small voice from the door.

Mike's heart nearly stopped as he felt a tiny body press against his side. He looked down in heartbreak at the waif of a child that now stood trembling at his side. 'Oh, God! If you are there, NO... no more... I beg you!'

"What's wrong?" Joel trembled again.

He was still in his armour and the sword he had carried to the funeral was sheathed in a scabbard that ran down his back.

"Nothing, Joel, everything's fine," Sammy said as he tried to smile. He put a clamp on his growing anger so as not to scare Joel. He could be angry in front of Jason, but he truly felt Joel would be unable to cope with it.

Joel moved past Mike and took off his helm and gloves, and laid them on the floor by the wall. He moved over and took Jason's hand in his right and Sammy's in his left. He paused while searching Sammy's face. "I heard everything after Jason saying he'd killed more times that you'd played with yourself, Sammy. Something's wrong. You're angry. I can feel it. What's going on?" Joel whimpered.

Sammy looked at Jason quickly before saying, "Joel, it's nothing really. Jace and I are just having a disagreement about something is all. I have to do something he doesn't think I should and he's worried about me but I'll be fine, little guy, so don't you worry none."

Joel sighed. "Jace? Will you tell me please? Sammy won't."

Jason also sighed and wiped his eyes with his free hand. "One of the men who planned and set up the attack on Saturday has been caught, Lil'elf. Sammy's friends and brothers were those attacked and killed because of this man, at least in part. Some of the guys are going up to my ship to..."

Jason trailed off.

Joel stared at him. "Sentenced to death..." he murmured as he began to grow angry. Very angry. "Sammy wants to go kill him too?"

Jason nodded, a shocked look in his eyes.

Joel's anger left as suddenly as it came, and his eyes started running tears. "Sammy," he whispered, "I told you last night. Your dagger is sheathed. Jace's dagger is in his hand. He is all blue and fire and hard. You are all blue and fire and warmth and comfort. Jason makes me feel safe and gives nice snuggles, but he is a warrior. You are a defender. Please don't go, SamSam. I love you."

Sammy's jaw dropped open at that final admission, for although Joel had been able to say it for the whole afternoon since lunch time, it was the first time Sammy had heard it.

"Oh Joel, I love you too, little guy, so much. Please don't cry, please. I...it's just..." Sammy stopped and looked up at Jace. "I'm sorry," he said to his Welsh brother before turning back to his Vulcan one. Tears began to run down his face as well as he said, "I... he hurt us Joel... so bad and I was so mad. I...I... just wanted to make him pay."

Sammy couldn't continue, and so he pulled on Jason's hand and brought him into a three-way hug with Joel. "Help me please," he whispered to Jason, "the anger is... it's too much, Jace, and it's scaring me... it's not... it's scaring me."

Jason looked at Joel and sent silently, *'Me and the guys are helping him, but he needs Captain Spock. He needs a mind meld to help him heal. I'm already doing everything I can...'*

Joel's eyes flickered slightly, and Joel's mother sent back, *'The Sharing can help for the moment. Joel knows what to do, Son of Spock.'*

Joel's eyes returned to normal and he whispered, "Jace. You go sort out that 'thing' on your ship. I'll help my SamSam."

Jason nodded and kissed Sammy's cheek tenderly as he stood up. He was about to leave with Mike when Joel called him back. "Jason. The sword on my back? Take it for the death blow."

"Why?" Jason asked curiously.

Joel turned, Sammy sobbing into his neck, and fixed his eyes on his prince-brother, "It's not the real Sa'ren Sword, but... 'In Justice, Draw me'... it feels right for it to be used here... can you give it to Adz? I think he should be the one."

Jason nodded and drew the replica blade and carried it out.

Mike stayed long enough to see Joel strip to the waist and pull off Sammy's top. The small Vulcan pulled the bigger eleven year old against himself tightly so that their bare chests were in full contact.

"All men hide a secret pain - Share your pain with me... and gain strength from the Sharing..."

Mike looked at Jason as Sammy was being hugged tightly by Joel. Joel's words echoed out from the room they were in, and it made him ask worriedly, "Jace...?"

"It's called 'The Sharing', Uncle Mike," Jason smiled up at the man as they walked towards where the G-Cats were standing. "It's not a well known Vulcan ability, but Joel uses it automatically. It won't remove Sammy's pain, just give him strength by Sharing it. Like taking the pus outta a boil? Like that."

"I'm really worried about him, Jason. Thanks for helping; I know he loves you and you helped him a lot already, but this whole thing... it's... I think it's destroying him... its..." Mike stopped, unable to go on. He pulled the young boy into his arms for a hug before whispering again, "Thank you."

"He's my brother," Jason whispered back simply. "And don't worry. Poppa Spock will be here tomorrow. He can do what I can't for SamSam. He's the best."

"I hope so, sweetheart, I really hope so," Mike replied as he looked back at the two boys hugging in the other room for a second. "It's not in him to hate like that and it's tearing him apart, I think. The worst is that I don't know what to do for him to make it all better. I just want him back the way he used to be but I just don't know how to do that. Hell, I don't even know if that's possible, but he's hurting so much and it's killing me to see him like this. I thought you'd be able to get through to him when I couldn't but even you almost didn't. It's scaring me, Jace; really scaring me. I want my SamSam back!"

Jason smiled up at the grieving man. "You will. And I'll get to see Sammy as he should be," he said softly. "Vulcans have some of the strangest powers of all the peoples in the Federation. Between Joel and Poppa? Sammy will have no choice but to come back to you."

"To come back to all of us, kiddo; to all of us. You're a good kid, Jason Evans, and a good brother to him," Mike whispered back.

Kartik and Amur Khan came over then. "Can we go now? My claws are itching," Amur grated out.

"You ready, Uncle Mike?" Jason asked quietly. "You don't have to go. We can do it."

The man smiled back at him before saying. "Thank you, but I'll go. It was my family they attacked and I learned long ago not to let anger control my actions. I was doing things you can't imagine before you were even born and this... well this is something I have to see the end of. But I do think we should wait for Adam and Logan."

"Agreed," Jason's smile turned feral. "Payback's a bitch - ain't it? I'll go up and make sure he's 'comfortable' and still wide awake. I'll go to the Orlando Compound after that, after leaving orders for Telez to bring us all up when Adam wakes. Amur? Can you hold onto this sword for Adam? Joel says he should be the one to use it - for the death blow."

"Sure," Amur grunted out, a feral smile on his face as well as he took the blade into his hands. "Nice sword."

"If you like that, you'd love a real S'harien... pity they are no more," Jason noted with a wicked smile, before tapping his communicator, "Voice to Wisdom. One to beam up."

As the transporter took hold around Jason, Mike couldn't help but think that that look on such a young boy's face reminded him of some of the men he'd served with in other days. Some of those who had been there and done things they never spoke of again; things Mike himself had done and didn't want to remember to this very day. A look that should not be there on such a young face.

The look of pure vengeance...

Clan Short Compound:

"I'm going to go for a walk, Kev. I... I need to think," Joel said hesitantly to his friend after he had changed out of his armour and into jeans and a tee-shirt. I-Cheya had also had his armour removed and was waiting by the door with Blackie.

Kevin looked at the little Vulcan with sorrow. "Okay, Joel," he whispered, "I'll stay here... with Ken-ny."

Joel nodded, his eyes burning with un-shed tears. He turned and walked outside, his head hung low. Blackie and I-Cheya followed at a distance, and the two cheetahs were with them.

Both Hermes and Mercury were confused. They had seen their charge and his friend be all over each other from the moment they laid eyes on each other; and yet now, the tension in the air whenever they were together was palpable.

Joel was oblivious to his friends' concern. He was too caught up in his own misery. That time spent helping Sammy had taken his mind off the recent problem Kevin seemed to be having, but as soon as they had all returned here, Sammy had gone to cuddle with his father. Now, Joel had nothing taking his mind off the guilt that Kevin seemed to be feeling about loving him.

'What've I done? Am I bad?' Joel thought to himself as he kicked hard at a small stone on the pathway. He watched with mild interest for a second as it flew off quickly, ricocheting off a wall and disappearing into the gardens and grass areas around the Compound.

"Can you guys wait here? I won't be far 'way, and I'll stay where you can see me," he murmured over his shoulder at the two cats and his two companion guardians.

"Sure thing, Joel," Hermes answered softly. He and his brother moved onto the grass and settled down against I-Cheya's side, and Blackie curled himself up on Mercury's lap. "Call if you need us."

"I promise," Joel said, trying his best to smile, but failing completely.

He started moving off a ways before finding a place where he could sit down with his back to everything else. He let his mind wander without direction for a long while, it seemed, when something flickered in the corner of his eye. He turned but saw nothing. He sniffed at the air. He looked around quickly as he picked up a slight, strange scent - he was seeking the source. He found it.

One moment, Joel was seated. The next, he had dived into the nearest bush, and was latched onto a startled Brant in a tight hold.

"Dude! You scared the crap outta me!" Brant managed to splutter as he tried to regain control on his now racing heart beat.

"Sorry," Joel stated flatly as he studied the boy he was lying on. "Didn't know anyone was out here, and after what I heard at that funeral I didn't want anyone bad to be here to hurt my family. You are... Brandar? I think I've seen you about inside."

"You can call me Brant, Joel," Brant smiled as he nodded with approval at Joel's attitude. "And it's cool about you jumping me. You did the right thing for the right reason."

Joel nodded, but still didn't move. He continued to study Brant closely, sniffing and poking at the boy's chest and arms. "You're not normal," came another simple statement. "Are you one of those sub-species human people that Kyle mentioned the other day?"

"You might say that... of course I've never been 'normal'!" Brant giggled.

Joel saw the funny side, but couldn't laugh yet. He looked closer at Brant's eyes. "Glowing... contacts... you're strong," he muttered as he tried working out what this boy was. "What's that on your arm?" he asked, pointing to a device that seemed sealed to the skin of Brant's forearm.

"Ah, that keeps me safe from sunlight... you could say I'm allergic," Brant said with a hint of a smile. He knew it was pointless trying to joke when Joel was so obviously concerned.

"Sunlight?"

"Yeah," Brant nodded as he sat up slowly, bringing the resisting Joel with him. It was hard doing so, for Joel was trying to keep Brant down - there was something nagging at the Vulcan and he couldn't feel trust about this situation yet.

"Yeah, you're strong," Joel murmured again as he got up quickly and backed up a few feet from Brant.

Brant stayed seated. Stayed passive. If things got violent, if Joel was that concerned, Brant was not sure if he could get away or restrain Joel without either hurting him, or being hurt himself.

Joel just stared at Brant. "You smell... you smell dead, Brant."

Brant sniffed his underarms, "Dang it, Cory told me that new deodorant would work!" Then more seriously, he added, "It kinda comes with the species."

There was another brief pause, then, "You're a vampire."

It was not a question.

"Technically, you could say that; actually I'm Moroi... Count Dracula I ain't, though."

Joel moved closer and knelt down in front of the boy. "Moroi," he murmured as he slowly reached up and, after Brant nodded his accent, gently parted the boy's lips to look at his teeth. Joel tapped at one of Brant's upper canine teeth. "Hollow and sharp, but why ain't they longer?"

Brant giggled as he slowly reached to remove Joel's hand. He parted his own lips and made his canines grow out briefly before they returned to their normal position. "I can retract them," he explained.

"Ah," Joel nodded. He remained there, kneeling in front of the seated Brant, still studying him yet now holding Brant's hands. "Your emotions seem distant," he said, as he looked down and turned the Moroi's hands over to look at the nails. "Mmm, normal. You're not a story-vampire, that's for sure."

"Nope, mirrors are kewl... I am allergic to Cory eating garlic though. There are times enhanced senses are a bad thing," Brant giggled.

Joel smiled, then giggled as well, "Same, but then, I'm just like Cory too. Garlic's nice!"

Brant rolled his eyes and giggled as well. "Great... I wonder if Javyk can make personal nose filters!"

Joel cocked his head at the new name, but let it pass. "Why were you sneaking around following me?" he asked curiously. "It's not likely you wanted to feed off me - I've copper based blood. I'm sure I'd make you quite ill."

Brant giggled, "No, I'd never feed from my brothers. I was just watching you. I felt that you were upset, and we all take it in turns to look out for you. I didn't want you to feel like you were being watched, though, so I was trying to keep hidden. Seems like Vulcans' senses are higher than I expected."

Joel nodded, then sighed. "Thanks for watchin' out for me, but I really wanna be alone."

"If you want to be, then I'll go wait with the Cats," Brant agreed, "but keeping things bottled up ain't good, Joel."

The reaction was not as expected, for Joel burst into tears and fell forward into Brant's arms.

Brant pulled Joel in closer and held him in a comfortable position on his lap, then simply let Joel cry out the worst of his tears. He knew that anything said right now would not even be heard.

Once the Vulcan's tears had lessened, he whispered, "Want to talk?"

Joel nodded, and whispered, "It's Kev. He... I don't think he loves me any more."

"Love is a pretty strong emotion, especially at your age. Trust me, I 'died' for it, and almost died a second time once it was stolen from me. I think Kev just needs time to sort things out; he's not really too good at dealing with emotions like love yet because up until a couple of months ago he never knew them," Brant replied softly.

"But neither did I," Joel continued to whisper, "I only jus' said it today. I wish I'd never done so." He wiped at his eyes quickly; angrily. "I said it, then just after, Kev started feeling guilty. Then he'd get angry. I can't touch him any more. It hurts. Why's he so angry? What did I do wrong? Why'd I have to be so fucking stupid and say that word and ruin everything!?" he finished with a yell before leaping away from Brant and out from the bushes at a run.

To Joel's surprise, Brant was almost immediately at his side keeping pace with him. "Follow the side walk around the Rec Garage; there are a bunch of trails in back you can run on while I help you sort this out." Brant said, the exertion of running not even phasing him. "You didn't say anything wrong; but I think Kev finally acknowledged in his head how he felt. It took you a while to say it, now you need to allow Kev the same time to sort things out that he gave you."

What his new friend said filtered into one layer of his mind, and he nodded with acknowledgement. Another layer of his strange little mind, however, stubbornly refused to allow Brant the chance at helping him. He did turn towards the Rec Garage, but he increased the speed of his running. Just as Brant was not phased by the previous exertion, neither had Joel been. He still was not at the new rate of speed, yet, amazingly, Brant still kept pace.

"How fast can you run?" came a remarkably emotionless question.

Brant answered, "No idea - I've never really pushed myself."

"I do not know either," Joel answered, or at least that more logical part of his mind answered. "I know that Captain Spock is stronger than a full Vulcan by 50%, but I do not know if that is the same for myself."

"Shall we find out?" Mercury and Hermes asked as they moved up from behind them both.

Brant turned his head briefly to see that the two cheetahs were behind them and so was the Sehlat and Wolf Pup.

"You guys take lead, we'll let you know if it's too fast or too slow." Brant giggled. "I think a good workout might help all of our heads."

And so, to any observer, the next half hour looked much like training for a marathon. The two cheetahs setting the pace with a Vulcan and 'human' right behind them, and bringing up the rear, a wolf and a large bear. The only thing different about this training was that they were moving faster than the fastest human sprinter.

The two cheetahs slowed first and sat themselves on the nearest patch of grass.

Brant slowed as well and sat next to them, Joel following.

I-Cheya and Blackie glanced at each other as they stopped, then sat there. They were completely unfazed by the exercise.

Joel wiped at the sweat from his brow and looked at it curiously. "That was unusual. I think running is enjoyable," he murmured to himself, still detached from his emotions.

"You okay, Joel?" Brant asked with some concern at the boy's strange behaviour. Strange for Joel, that is.

"Yes."

"You don't seem like the Joel we know," Hermes said, his eyes closed as he sunned himself with his brother.

Joel shook his head, and then looked sad. "I was trying to keep my emotions away. I think it worked," he murmured.

"Ah," Brant nodded. He looked around, "I think I'm going to need to feed again, soon. That was a lot of running."

Mercury raised one paw and extended his claws. "You bite, I claw - got it?"

"I don't do pussies," Brant giggled, "I'll just tell Justy that Bear and me get the next punishment."

Mercury blew a raspberry at him, then continued to sun himself.

Joel giggled mutely before crawling over between the two cheetahs, pulling Brant with him. Hermes cracked open one eye and glared at them both. "What you up to?"

Joel didn't answer. Instead he opened the cheetah's robe and started rubbing his hands in circles on Hermes' furry belly, making the ten year old cat start purring loudly.

Brant sniggered and did the same for Mercury. "Kitty therapy is relaxing," Brant laughed as the stereo purrs reached both his and Joel's hearing.

"Hey!" Justy called out as Joel and the others walked into the Kitchen looking for something to drink. Brant had followed them mainly due to his hand being held in a vice grip by Joel.

Brant turned to face the furiously grinning Justy. "Yeah, bro?"

Justy handed Brant a *yellow* piece of paper.

"What's that, Fangie?" Joel asked as he pressed himself back into Brant's stomach.

Brant giggled. "A speeding ticket... it looks like the fine is 50 cuddles!"

Joel grinned, then moved over quickly to Justy and climbed into his arms. "Here's the first," he whispered as he also added a kiss to the 'fine'.

"I think I need to issue these more often!" Justy giggled as he returned the cuddle.

"You don't have'ta fine me to get a cuddle, Justy," Joel whispered seriously. "I'd give you lots and lots if you wanted them. Honest!"

"Awwwww!" Hermes and Mercury said without thinking.

Brant agreed.

"Just joking, Joel. I know you give cuddles out freely," Justy assured the Vulcan was an extra special hug before putting him back down.

Mercury came over with a glass of orange juice for Joel, and he greedily drank it down. He then looked up at Justy and smiled, "Fangie said that he's gonna need to feed soon, 'cos of all our running."

"Fangie?" Justy asked, tilting his head at Brant while getting a huge grin.

"Don't *even* go there, Bro; only elves get to call me that!" Brant immediately stated, making sure to thwart any plans Justy might be plotting.

"Awwwww Mannnn..." Justy giggled. "So that means it's only Joel and Antonio... well, I'll just have to plot with those two then!"

Joel smiled briefly at them before moving towards the Dining Room door. He stopped, however, when he saw Kevin in the Rec Room beyond.

He just couldn't, not yet.

He sighed and moved in the direction of Main CIC instead.

He spent the first hour there reading up on the various sub-species on earth, as well as double checking the current Federation Tech levels. He was soon joined by Jude Lee who started to read up on Starship Engines.

"Seems to be all the same," Jude muttered to himself.

Joel nodded, "Yeah. Want to try designing the 1701-E?"

"Well, I know the layout and some of the technical stuff, from books I've read," Jude pondered. "I'll give it a go."

"Then I'll come along after and add in the parts you miss. I'm gonna try doing something else first," Joel added.

The small Vulcan still felt low in his spirits, but maybe focusing on this task would take his mind off it. Both boys began simply chatting about various episodes of Star Trek that they had seen as they both worked on their own projects.

"What about that telekinesis stuff the Vulcans did in Search for Spock?" Jude asked at one point.

Joel shrugged, "Kolinahr, I think. I don't think I could do that yet."

From the other side of the room, Seth sat quietly and watched. After doing so for ten minutes, he decided to indulge his curiosity. "What are you working on, Joel?" he asked as he rolled in next to the boy. Jude was oblivious at his own console, and seemed to not have heard the older boy.

"Tricorder," was Joel's one word, clipped response. Anything more, and he'd break down; he just knew it.

"That's some tricorder!" Seth commented as he looked at the plans quickly appearing on the screen. "You're gonna blow Cory's mind with that! He'll love it!"

<I agree, this is definitely impressive. Where did you get this design specification from, Joel; if I may ask?> Ark asked curiously.

"Ark?" Joel asked quickly. "That you? The one from Monday?"

<Yes. Hello, Joel. I am glad to see that you are okay.>

Joel smiled briefly. "Depends what you mean by okay. Thank you for helping me. You were right, and I didn't get hurt or die or nuffin'. Thanks."

<My pleasure, Joel. Now, about this tricorder. Where did you get this design from?>

"From Star Trek," Joel replied as he continued to type, focusing his mind on the equations again.

"The television show you watched in that other Universe?" Seth asked.

"Yeah," the boy nodded. He then had an idea. "Ark?"

<Yes?>

"Can you fabricate these pieces if I put the plans in order for you?"

<Yes. I can see that the materials required are common to Earth.>

"Cool. Here's the first. Can you make that for me please?" Joel asked politely as he pressed a button.

<Certainly.>

Joel returned to his work, but a minute later the piece he had requested appeared on the desk. "That was quick," he murmured.

<Thank you. Next?>

Seth watched in awe as Joel's fingers literally became a blur as he started designing more and more screen pages of information, and slowly, piece by piece, a tricorder was taking shape.

<Is that the final one?> Ark asked after half an hour.

"Yuppers!" Joel bubbled happily. "Thanks a heap, Ark! You're the greatest!"

<Thank you. That is very nice of you to say, Joel. I think you are remarkable as well. Would it be okay for me to give the plans for this scanning device to Javyk?>

"Yeah, but who's he?" Joel asked curiously as he picked up the tricorder he had just assembled.

<Someone who will want a very long talk with you as soon as he knows about your technical knowledge.> Ark replied.

Seth took a look at the new tricorder that Joel was holding and breathed out in awe, "What else can you make?"

"Ark? Could you help me with something else?" Joel asked with a grin.

<If it is within my capabilities and authority, yes.>

Joel started quickly typing in Vulcan code the name of his next project.

<A phaser?>

Joel nodded, "Uh huh."

<I will need clearance from a Council Member before doing so, but if the materials are as readily available, I certainly have the ability to do so.>

"Who's on the Council, and where are they so I can ask?" Joel bounced in his seat.

Seth giggled, "Kyle, Cory, Xain and Brant for starters."

"CORRRYYYYYYYY!" Joel started yelling as he ran from the room.

<Seth?>

"Yes, Ark?"

<I am reducing the gain on the microphones in CIC. Joel is loud.>

"Yes, Ark."

Cory, his face drawn and pale from the emotional drain of the funeral, held the tricorder in his hands with wonder. Joel watched happily as more and more colour returned to his big brother's cheeks due to Cory's building excitement.

"You said you wanted to make a new phaser?" he asked eventually, his voice barely able to contain his wonder.

Joel nodded quickly. "Anything from Star Trek, I know how to make!"

"Ark? I will have JJ here to make sure of the security issue, but you have clearance to make weapons for Joel," Cory stated, then took a seat next to Seth to watch.

<Thank you. If you will start, Joel, then I shall assist.>

Again, Joel started typing quickly, but this time he had a growing audience. Most of his brothers were now in CIC, and Kevin had come over and was seated next to him, but thankfully he was not in contact. On one level that was a relief for Joel, yet on another it was a strain. Ever since meeting Kevin he had not spent any time with his friend when they were not touching at least 80% of the time. Yet now, he both wanted and did not want contact. It hurt to have Kevin feel guilty whenever he looked at him.

Joel sighed inwardly and held his tears in, barely.

Slowly, piece by piece, a new item was taking shape as Ark delivered parts and Joel assembled them.

"Done!" he said, eventually, holding out a phaser for Cory to inspect.

"It's more powerful than the ones you have, can have a finer beam, more settings and lasts longer," Jude said as he continued to tap away at the console he was on.

JJ moved over to look with Cory, "Sweeeet! I gotta try that!"

"Here," Cory giggled as he passed the phaser to JJ, "have fun!"

JJ grinned and nodded at the other security guys there. They all ran from the room, for all the world as if it was Christmas and the best present in the world had been dropped in their laps.

Antonio was still drooling over the tricorder, "I gotta show this to Doc Austin... can I take it for a while, Joel?"

"Sure," he giggled. His joy disappeared, however, as Kevin started cuddling him. He tensed and turned to face his friend, and as soon as their eyes met, Joel felt the guilt return. "What's the matter, Kev?" he asked as the tears he'd been fighting broke out.

Cory became concerned and wrapped both boys in his arms.

Kevin's face creased, then his own tears broke out. "I... I'm sorry, Jo'. I can't help it."

"What's wrong? Am I bad?" Joel trembled as the brown haired boy pulled from his arms and stood up.

Kevin faced him, "Never! Never that. It's me, Jo'... I... I love someone else, and... but I also love you... I don't know, I just..." He stopped talking as his sobs hitched in his throat, turned and ran out, calling for Allen.

Joel crumpled in Cory's arms. "But... Kev..." he whispered.

"It'll be all right, Elf," Cory whispered to him.

Xain moved over from where he had been standing with Antonio studying the tricorder. "Uncle Chip is the one that holds a part of Kevin's heart, Joel," he supplied softly.

Cory increased his hold on his sobbing little brother.

Joel's pain filled eyes looked up at Xain, "But... I love lots of people. I don't feel guilty loving Kev... why's he guilty loving m...me?"

Xain sat down next to his fellow Vulcan, "Kevin loves Uncle Chip deeply, Joel. How do you love your brothers? Is it anything alike to the love you feel for Kevin? From what Kenny, Jake and I know, Kevin loves Uncle Chip deeply; as he does you."

Joel continued to shake, and yet he glanced about at his brothers. He consciously pulled his emotions up and looked at what he felt for each one. "I..." he started. He tensed again before continuing, "I love three..."

Xain's eyebrows raised into his hairline. "Then I believe you can understand..."

"No," Joel interrupted. "I don't. I love three, but Kevin's is the most powerful. What I feel for each is exactly the same, but the strength is different. I don't feed the love of the other two."

Cory kissed Joel's head and asked, "Who else do you love?"

Joel shuddered nervously, "Uhh..."

Quickly, Cory added, "You don't have to say, Joel. I'm interested, but only to help you and Kev. You don't have to say."

"Thanks," he breathed.

Allen came back in at that point, leading a sobbing Kevin by the hand.

"Kevin," Allen said softly as he sank down to pull the boy in close, "look at your friend."

Kevin raised his streaming eyes and did so, and his sobs grew louder as he saw the distraught look in Joel's face.

"Do you care for him?" Allen asked gently but firmly.

Kevin nodded.

"Love him?"

Again, the boy nodded.

"Do you know what Chip would think and feel if he knew?"

Kevin hesitated.

"He'd be happy, Kev. You're not betraying him. He'd be overjoyed that his little Kevin has found someone special at last," Allen whispered softly.

"But... what if I love him more than my Jo'? I can't be with Jo' and hurt him like that if I love Uncle Chip more," Kevin wailed as he spun and tucked his face into Allen's neck.

Allen laughed softly as he rubbed Kevin's back. "My Jo'?" he kissed Kevin's head. "Did you hear what you just said, Little One?"

Joel slipped from Cory's arms and padded across to his best friend, his own tears still falling thickly. Kevin slowly turned when the touch from Joel's hand registered. He looked into Joel's eyes.

"I can't share my heart, Jo'. You deserve better than that," Kevin whispered as he wiped his eyes with the back of his hand.

Joel said sadly, "I love you, Kevin. I... I also love others; two. But you... I... I'd feel the same as you, but I don't love you with a *third* of my heart. I love you with all of it. I love those other two with all of my heart for each. That's the only way anyone can love, Kev. You don't love one person with one small bit, but have a type of love with all your heart."

"How can I be sure of that, though?" Kevin cried out, hiding his eyes with his hands, "and how do I know you really love me, now you've said that??"

Joel stated seriously, "I choose to be with you. And if it would make you feel better, I would never sleep in a nest with Cory or Sean again unless you were there to know we weren't doing nuffin'."

Sean, now standing next to Cory, stared in shock, and Cory's jaw dropped open. "Us?" they both chorused.

Joel turned his sad eyes on them, "Y...yeah..."

Seth whistled, and rolled his chair to make a way out of the room. "Come on guys, this is something these four need to talk about. Out. Now."

Allen also stood and gently pushed Kevin into Joel's arms. "I'll be outside if you need me."

Cory nodded mutely as he and Sean gathered up both little boys, turned, and made for the nearest conference room.

Joel looked over Cory's shoulder as they started into the room and called, "Xain? Mother is asking for you to come too, just to start."

Xain turned back and headed into the Meeting Room after them.

Once Main CIC was empty, Ark said, <Just when things were becoming interesting. The start of these plans for this 'Ent-E' look intriguing.>

"It's a starship design," Jude said after the shock of the recent events had worn off. He had sat there through all of the excitement oblivious until the very end.

<A Starship? I do not think I should help fabricate that, Jude.>

Jude agreed. "It would be like giving a tank to the Dark Ages. Not wise."

Cory and Sean sat together and remained silent as Xain melded with Joel. After a moment or two, the meld broke and Xain left - after hugging Kevin tightly for a moment. The smaller boy then moved and sat near to the doorway, and shot dirty looks at Cory and Sean.

Joel sighed. "Kev, I..."

"How long?" Kevin asked, his voice clipped and short. "How long have you known you felt the same for them like you *say* you do for me?"

Joel was taken aback by this, and mumbled, "I've... kinda always known I felt the same type of Fire, love, for you and them, Kev."

"Why'd you not say anything?"

"Didn't wanna worry my brothers and have them think I would try something... Kev, I feel that Fire strongest for you; that love."

"And how do you KNOW that?" Kevin half shouted, tears running down his face, "You only just managed to say it today! How do I know you won't stay with me a wh...while, then go fuck with them, or someone else? How do I know?"

Joel crumpled as his back touched the wall, such was the power of the emotions he felt rolling from Kevin. He slid down it and hid his head as he managed to whisper, "And how do I know about this other guy? Your Uncle Chip?" The small Vulcan then fell to his side and curled into a ball, sobbing.

Sean looked at Cory. *'Try to keep Joel from freaking any more; I'll handle Kevin.'* He then turned to Kevin. "Kevin, do you honestly think for one second that any one of the Empaths would have let you and Joel hook up if that was possible? Did you know that in some ways Kyle is closer to my husband than I am? Or that the minute I met JJ I had the hots for him? Just because you love multiple people don't mean shit; the bond that you develop with a single person is what makes a relationship. I just about *LOST* my husband before we were even married because of all the crap that's happened; up until now you've been the most help to Joel with him learning to re-adapt to his rightful home. Now you're acting like a little three year old; instead of being happy that you were chosen out of three possibilities, you're destroying Joel because you can't handle the fact that love is not relegated to one person and shut off for everyone else. Love is nothing without trust; if you can't trust, then maybe you need to take a hard look at why you felt like you did for Joel in the first place."

Each word from the normally even tempered Sean struck Kevin deeply, and when Sean said that love "is not relegated to one person and shut off for everyone else", Kevin himself start to crumple to the ground. Sean added hotly, "And what just made what you're doing *worse* is that you love Uncle Chip! Is it okay for you to love two people, but Joel can *only* love you?"

"Stop shouting at him!" Joel cried out as he pushed Cory away. Cory had been trying to cuddle the small Vulcan, but now, with Kevin in the firing line, Joel was moving. He stood between his big brother and his best friend and shook. "Don't shout at him... don't..." he whispered, fear of reprisal clearly seen in his eyes.

"Jo'," Kevin's arm reached up and gripped Joel's hand that was limply hanging at the boy's side.

Joel spun at the contact and, now on his knees, pulled Kevin into his arms. That guilt was there, and it was surrounding the love coming from Kevin, and more guilt behind it, and fear and nervousness. Joel looked up at Sean, his eyes streaming. "I need you... both of you... hold us? Please? I can't... I need you; not to shout at him... but to help him by helping me... please?"

Sean's eyes were still showing his anger, but he could never refuse any brother anything. He would not have refused this plea from Kevin, as angry as he was with him. He got to the two boys at the same time as Cory, and between them both, they carried the crying kids to the nearest sofa and sat down. Joel was on Cory's lap, while Sean held Kevin on his own.

Kevin didn't notice, as he was overwhelmed with confusion and guilt. He loved Chip, he loved Joel, and he hated that Joel loved Cory and Sean? Why? Such thoughts rolled through his head, and he missed everything being said by the other three in whispers around him.

"Sorry, Elf; but what he said was out of line," Sean started, but Joel silenced him with a single finger to the lips.

"S'why I melded with Xain. He told me more 'bout how Kev thinks. I... I'm having a hard time understanding what I'm feeling, but Kevin has his own hard times. He's angry at me 'cos he's angry at himself. He hates that he loves two people this way," the surprisingly astute Vulcan explained. Then, "You don't mind that I love you two?" he asked hesitantly.

"We'd be more worried if you didn't, Lil'elf." Cory replied. "I've known for a while that Sean has feelings for JJ; yet it never worried me because while he was sharing his heart with more than one, I was getting that little bit extra that he reserved just for me."

Joel trembled more. "You don't understand, though," he whispered sickly. "I... you... uh... I need to use the Sharing 'gain. Would that be 'kay for you?"

Cory and Sean spared the other a brief look and a shrug. "Sure," Sean said, confused at the fear from Joel.

"First, though," Joel murmured, making himself rip his gaze from his brothers and focus it on Kevin. "Kev? T'hy'la?"

Kevin's eyes jerked up in wonder for an instant before shame and guilt started flooding back into them. Joel didn't let them. He pulled on Kevin's feelings and said haltingly to his big brothers, "Hands on back... under my tee-shirt... quick..."

They did so, and Joel Shared Kevin's emotions out evenly. Sean saw immediately that Kevin was in an emotional mess right now.

Kevin's eyes cleared. Joel said, "Kev. I need you to focus. I can help you, 'cos Xain let me see some stuff, and I think I can show you some answers. Do you trust me?"

Kevin nodded slowly, then a single tears trickled down his face, "I'm sorry, Jo'. I said something stupid and really wrong. I'm sorry."

Joel nodded and kissed him lightly, "We'll talk 'bout that later, but you need to see some stuff... or feel I should say." He then stopped the Sharing. Kevin's emotions snapped back, yet now he was no longer being controlled by them.

"Sa'kai'am? I need to Share what you feel for a number of people, and I need to Share it between all four of us. It... it'll be about people you guys love lots. Same for me, and same for Kev... I understand if there's someone you don't want the other to know about, so you best say no now..." Joel trembled as he held Kevin's eyes with his own.

"We have no secrets," Cory said softly.

Sean added, "And we don't mind."

Joel put Kevin's right hand under his tee-shirt and against the flesh of his chest. He started with Cory, and the blond could nearly feel gentle fingers rummaging around in his 'heart'.

"This is what Cory feels for JJ," Joel said as he Shared what he'd found. Once Kevin had nodded, the feelings changed as Joel said, "And this is what Sean feels for JJ."

Cory giggled, "Sex mad."

"Bite me," Sean smiled back lovingly, "he's cute... you're cuter!"

Kevin smiled slightly at the banter.

"It's different, isn't it," Joel said in a statement to his friend. At Kevin's nod, Joel asked, "Yet isn't each feeling all of Cory or Sean's heart?"

The feelings flipped back and forth over and over so that Kevin could compare. Kevin even started using his empathy to gauge it as well. "All," he whispered eventually. "Sean loves JJ with all his heart, and he loves Cory with all his heart. It's the love that's different; but it's still all the heart."

"Cory loves JJ as a brother only. Sean loves him as a brother, yet it could become something else if he let it," Joel whispered.

Sean nodded seriously in agreement.

"Kay," murmured Kevin, his eyes now elsewhere as he thought.

"Now, this is what Sean feels for Adam... and now Cory for Adam..." Joel started flicking through those of his immediate family that he knew. He was placing first the love of Sean, then of Cory, with each name.

"Wow, you sure love a lot of people... serious love," Kevin whispered to Cory, his voice confused and a little frightened.

Cory nodded, "Love is love, Kev. It's different for everyone. That's true for everyone. I love Sean most, though."

Joel sighed then. "That last is true, Cor. The first is as well... but different for everyone? Sorry, you're wrong on that..."

Cory's brow crinkled in confusion. "How do you mean?"

Joel sighed. "This is what Sean feels for Cory. Sean for JJ... it's real 'sexy' romantic love, yes? But different?"

All three others nodded.

"This is what Sean feels... for me..." Joel closed his eyes. Kevin noticed first and gasped.

"So... he loves you, Joel," Cory mumbled. "I knew that. So do I. Real love, I mean, not just brother. We both do."

"No, you don't get it... look again... look at what he feels for you, then for me... THEN for JJ..." Joel answered, keeping his eyes closed. He held before all their hearts those three 'feelings' in a row.

Sean's eye grew wide, and so did Cory's. "Now for what Cory feels for Sean, and for Jason, and for... for me..." Joel said then.

After a few more dead silent minutes, Joel spoke yet again, "Now I'll take JJ and Jason out of the picture... what's the difference, Cory? Sean? The love - or just the strength of the love?"

Kevin whispered in awe, "It's identical, just smaller!"

"Yeah, and now..." Two more feelings rose up... and they were identical... "My love for each of you, Sean, Cor. We love each other the same, just it's stronger between you two. The Fire is the same shape and colour, just the size is different. And this is what I feel for Kevin..." Another feeling joined the picture, "And it's identical too! Only what I feel for Kev is the same strength as what you two feel for each other! And this," another feeling popped up, "is Kevin's for me... and this is what he feels for you."

The four boys sat there as they looked between every emotions Joel was holding in place. Kevin felt for Joel EXACTLY what Joel felt for Kevin. It was EXACTLY the same as what Cory felt for Sean. That massive sized Fire was then lessened in size between Joel, Cory and Sean, yet still the same 'shape and colour'. Then, it reduced in size again between Kevin, Cory and Sean... yet was the SAME 'shape and colour'.

"This ain't normal, guys," Sean whispered as Joel stopped the sharing.

"Since when have you ever been normal, honey?" Cory quipped.

"Point taken... same goes for you too!"

Joel giggled slightly in relief. They weren't mad after all!

Kevin, however, was still confused, "How? How can we four love each other the same way? It's not right... not even possible! All empaths know that love is different even if it is focused on the same person! Cory should feel one 'love' for Sean, and Sean's love for Cory should have a different... colour, shade, shape... still love but... it's never identical!"

"I kinda worked that out," Joel nodded in agreement. "JJ and Adam. They really love each other, yet Adam's love isn't exactly the same as JJ's. It's still love, though," he added.

"Maybe I can explain," the Doctor stated with a small grin as he Folded in.

"How long have you been listening to this?" Cory asked with a giggle.

"Thirty six hours," the Doctor said seriously.

"I'm gonna have Kyle glue a cow-bell to your butt so that we know when you're lurking," Sean giggled.

{Do you have any idea how irritating it will be when Jay keeps ringing that bell just for the amusement value?} came a voice Joel had never heard before.

"I thought Jay already 'rang his bell'!" Cory snickered.

"Anyway!" the Doctor said loudly, trying to change the subject quickly. His face was flaming by this point as he came over and squashed himself into the mass hug already going. "God! Teenagers... and to think I may have to go through that again!"

"You're looking forward to it and you know it!" Sean giggled.

"No, not especially... Alpha Stage is more fun!" the little ginger Time Lord grinned up at Sean cheekily.

"Who was that other person?" Joel asked with a giggle.

{I am the Tardis, S... Joel.}

Joel's eyebrow raised, "You talk? Cool... but what were you about to call me?"

{You shall find out.}

Joel turned to look at the Doctor, his eyes probing. "You tell me."

"Oh, well fucking done, Tardis... Jeez..." the Doctor rolled his eyes. "Shaper. It is what you are, Joel. Don't worry about it, though; it'll make sense in time."

"Shaper? As in those changes you said I made when those shivers happen?" Joel asked, and received a nod for his trouble. "Oh, okay. You lied, though. I could feel it. It wasn't 'Shaper' that your Tardis was going to say... was it?"

The Doctor's eyes popped wider, "Wow, you're good. No, it wasn't. But you'll find that out soon. Trust me. Now, about this love business..."

"Busted!" Cory, Sean, and Kevin exclaimed in unison.

Joel, however, did not join in the laughter that came with the cry of 'busted'. "I wanna know, Doctor. Is it my birth name?"

The laughter died away as the Doctor looked at the small Vulcan seriously. "You'll find out soon, Joel," the Doctor whispered. "As I told others today, I cannot reveal the future. Not allowed."

Joel nodded slowly, "Okay, I'll buy that. But I'll find out 'soon' soon?"

The Doctor smiled and nodded again.

Cory felt a change of topic was needed, "You were going to explain this mystery for us, Galli? This same love we all have?"

"Yeah... yeah, that's right," the small Time Lord started to smile again. "Okay, first of all, Cory and Sean. You two are the Heart of the Nexus. You have loved each other from the moment you saw each other with 'understanding'. In Cory's case it was when he was one year old. In yours, Sean, it was when you were 13 months old. You are Special, and your love for each other is twinned."

"What is this Nexus, Doc?" Sean asked curiously.

"A Twist in Time. Strands of Fate woven around Destiny. The Point of Change and Possibility. The Heart of Salvation or Destruction for All Creation. The Nexus."

Cory gulped. "I think I need to change my shorts, dude!"

"No pressure," the Doctor giggled, "if I'm responsible for bringing my Homeworld back to Alpha Prime and thus saving Time itself, you being responsible for gathering the largest force of Creation changing and saving people to your Family is small potatoes!"

"Suuure," Sean poked his tongue out at the Doctor. "Okay, so Cor's love and mine are twinned. What about Elf's and Kev's?"

"The first unconditional love from mortals that Joel remembers having was from you two. He is the Shaper. He wrapped himself in your love, and his modelled itself after yours. Why do you truly love him in return? Because he instils that love in everyone. If people let themselves, they will fall in love with Joel... he offers his love without reserve, so it's an automatic response. In your case, Cory, and yours, Sean, if you could and it was permissible, you three could have become a three-way loving relationship of three equals. Now, for Kevin. Joel has known of Kevin for quiet a lot longer than you guys think," the Doctor giggled as he turned to address the now startled Vulcan, "you don't even recognise it, do you? That one small CSU passage you once read on the Internet in that other Universe?"

"CSU?" Joel muttered. "I read about a large, huge collection of stories that was wiped from the net thirty years before I got on-line... only one page was saved... about some kid called Rory swimming and... FUCK!" Joel's eyes shot open wide as he turned to stare into Kevin's eyes, "... and Rory had a water ring blown up by mouth by some kid called Kenny, and some other kid called Kevin found the other toys and the motorized air-pump... I thought that was so cute how that Kevin found the pump after... and you... you're him?"

Kevin's jaw had dropped open.

"It went on... that Kevin was in his bedroom... and was all upset 'cos he loved someone else, someone older... and he let his brother have the room private just with Rory... that was it... I... he... you weren't in it much, but I kinda liked you the most there, Kev... you were so sweet and kind with your brother, even though you were hurting inside... I saw me in there..." Joel's eyes were streaming tears.

The Doctor smiled at the shocked looks, "Joel's love mimicked yours, guys. And he has loved Kevin at a level he never had access to for years... once the love came out, it mimicked yours. And Kev?"

"Y...yeah?" the shocked eleven year old muttered as his eyes were lost in Joel's.

"You have loved Joel since you were four... and your 'link' to Joel became readable by your soul when he appeared in this Universe," the Doctor said mysteriously.

"Four?!" Kevin said in shock, and he was echoed by Cory and Sean.

"Come on, guys. Back to the Rec Room," the Time Lord ordered. "There are a number of things to cover, and we need some of the others for it. Once done, you four can come back and complete your chat."

"One second, Doc... umm, why did Cory call ya 'Galli'?" Joel asked.

"My birth name is Gallifrey. My 'rents named me for our Homeworld - silly people. I prefer Galli or Doctor, my chosen name," the Time Lord blushed.

"Gallifrey... I like it," Joel mused, "Ah anyhow, umm, first; Kev? I need to show you something... before we find out 'bout this knowing me when you were four stuff."

"Okay," Kevin trembled nervously.

Joel pulled up what Kevin was feeling for him, and then what Kevin felt for Chip, and Shared it between all five of them this time. The Doctor giggled, "Wow, and you're worried about loving your Uncle more, Kevin?"

Joel whispered, "You love your Uncle Chip with all your heart, Kev; and you love *me* with all your heart. It's the love that's different. I don't share a piece of your heart, I have all of it. Same for you. You have all my heart, and so do Cory and Sean... and Mammy and Adam, and Sammy... it's just the love that changes, not the heart."

Kevin just blinked happily as he had his heart laid bare before them all. "I really love you, don't I? Oh, Joel - I'm so sorry... I'm so sorry I was mean to you..." the boy said as he started crying in shame.

Joel pulled his friend in and held him close. "You were angry with yourself, and then angry with me 'cos you thought we were both being bad. It's okay to be angry when you don't understand things, Kev; and since I love you and you knew it, you felt able to unload on me. If I'd been stronger, I'd have been able to help you better. Don't worry now, Kev - we'll talk more after, 'kay?"

"Kay," Kevin sniffed as he rose out of the hug and wiped his eyes. He turned them on Sean and found the older boy smiling down at him. He felt a pang of guilt again, "Sorry I shouted at your brother, Sean. I... sorry..."

"Hey now, Joel's forgiven you, and so have I. Can't hate someone I love, now can I?" Sean whispered as he increased his hold on Kevin. "After what Elf showed us we all kinda love each other the same. I don't stay angry with those I love, Kev. Especially not if they are my brothers."

Kevin smiled as he accepted the forgiveness, then he giggled with a little mischievousness, "Could be interesting... next time we 'shower', huh Jo?"

Joel blushed deeply, and Cory started laughing. "No! No four ways, guys! Nuh huh!"

"Awww! Spoilsport!" Joel pouted through his blush as he reached around behind Cory and goosed his butt.

"Hey!" Sean teased. "That's my butt to grope, you thieving little elf! You have your own Kevin-butt to do that to!"

Joel blew Sean a huge raspberry as Cory pulled him in and covered his cheeks and forehead in kisses.

The Doctor smiled joyfully as the four brothers bonded after the 'storm'. "Come on," he said quietly as they finished, "the final answer to the mystery needs others. And it will lead to a lot of questions and answers - about Sa'ren."

Joel felt a tremor of nervousness run up his spine at that fateful name.

"Why'd we need to be out here then, Galli?" Joel asked as the little Doctor stood the them in the middle of the Rec Room. The others there started watching curiously, and it was making Joel uncomfortable.

"You will need someone that is here to explain some stuff," was the only response the Doctor gave before addressing Kevin, "Hold on tight to Joel and open your empathy."

"Kay," Kevin murmured as he wrapped himself against Joel's back, snuggling his chin into Joel's left shoulder. Cory looked on in wonder at a pose that would become the standard for these two when cuddling: Joel standing between his Kevin and Danger, with Kevin protecting Joel through support and strength.

"Son of T'Khasi," the Doctor said, now looking deep into Joel's eyes, "I know this is going to upset you, but you may need to explain to us all something about your past. Do you trust me?"

"Uh huh," Joel whispered nervously.

"Does anyone here feel curious as to how Joel knows when his birthday is, yet he has been missing in that Hell-Earth all his life?" the Doctor asked generally to those in the room.

A purple haired boy with a mane of hair running down his back looked over at the small Time Lord. Joel curiously watched him and wondered why he'd not talked to this unusual looking boy before now, then giggled as the boy asked, "Yeah. I've seen some freaky things but Joel here is just one step over the line. He talks languages he never learnt; okay, I can deal with that, seen it before - but I've never known anyone who knows things from being a baby! How's he know that?"

The Doctor smiled, "Joel, this is Bjorknagonspek Yajresunretorik, or just 'Bork' to the guys here."

Joel blinked then waved at Bork.

"Could you tell us Joel? How you know what your birthday is, I mean?" the Doctor asked gently.

Joel nodded slowly, "Okay.."

:Flashback:

"This way Mr. Williams, we have a few new ones here for you to look at. Maybe one of them you'll find useful to buy."

The Orphan Seller came into the room where a group of six year old boys were sitting together on the floor, and behind him came a large monster of a man. The boys gripped each other in fright. One of them would leave today, and he would have to work. He would have to pay these Eldar for the privilege of having food. Free loading time would be over.

"Mmm, they are a bit on the runty side, aren't they?" mused Mr. Williams. He looked over each boy cowering before him, and then his eyes settled on a pixie-faced, black haired kid. "He'll do," he pointed, "He looks like he'll last a while."

The Seller moved quickly and reached into the huddle. The boy was grabbed by the scruff of his neck and jerked standing, "Go to Mr. Williams, and be grateful you are getting a home, boy." Turning to Mr. Williams he continued, "Follow me, good sir, and we'll take care of the paperwork." He chuckled, "Though paperwork about orphans never seems to be read."

Five minutes later, the last paper had been signed and money exchanged. "What's the runt's name?"

"Joel," was the Seller's curt reply, "and here is his birth certificate. Abandoned outside this door nearly six years ago with a birth certificate, of all things!"

"Strange. Let me see it," Mr Williams said as he took the certificate from the Seller. He looked down at the young Joel, "Mmm, mother's name was Sara... something. The surname is smudged. Is this a T? Never mind, never mind... 28th of October? Well, boy, don't expect 'parties' on your birthday."

"They are trained not to, good sir. Is there anything else I can do for you?" the Seller asked.

"No. My thanks. We shall leave now." Turning, Mr Williams grabbed the boy's hand in his and marched him from the room and the Orphanage. Joel had to run to keep pace.

As they went down the street towards the car park, the little boy turned to the man and in a small voice asked, "Are you my new daddy?"

Slap!

Mr. Williams had left a bright red hand print on the boy's alabaster cheek, "I am 'Mr. Williams' or 'Sir'. You are my servant and will NOT forget it, is that clear?" he thundered.

Sobbing, Joel mutely nodded.

"Get in the car, boy..."

:End of Flashback:

Joel was weeping softly as he finished speaking, and hung his head in pain. The remembered loneliness of that moment was there again; the day his hope died away. He just about felt Kevin's arms around him, and the warmth from his friend's body pressed into his back brought him back. He looked up and glanced around at the room full of children through his tears.

His eyes fell on Bork who had tears running down his face. Of all the kids there, Bork's emotions could be felt easily, even at a distance, by the small Vulcan. Then, those emotions seemed to envelop Joel in a caring blanket as Bork smiled through his sad tears.

Joel grinned briefly in thanks, then looked back at the Doctor. He was about to ask why he had to say all that when he felt Kevin's building awe and excitement through the hug.

"Oh... oh God..." Kevin whispered, "I... I've felt this... LEVI!" Kevin sprang away from Joel and grabbed the small Mikyvis. "Can you take me home? To my room? I gotta get something!"

Levi nodded with a curious smile and vanished, taking Kevin with him.

Joel simply stared at the space his friend had been in, then raised an eyebrow at the Doctor. "Wait five minutes, Joel," the Doctor smiled as he gestured for Jason to come to the front and stand by Cory.

Everyone waited patiently until there was a slight 'pop' sound and a grinning Levi appeared... next to a wide eyed, smiling yet crying Kevin. The brown haired boy had a piece of paper held against his chest as if it was the most precious object on earth.

Kevin looked at Joel and felt his friend's curiosity clearly through his empathic powers, yet he also felt it from something else.

From the paper.

"What's that, Kev?" Jason asked, picking up on the boy's wonder and joy easily.

"My first picture. I was about four when I drew it. A...as soon as I'd finished it I could feel what I just felt then with Joel. Pain and loss of hope. I didn't understand. As I drew more pictures I learnt that they were people, and I could speak to them and help them, so I got out this first one and tried with it as well. Nothing changed, and what I was feeling from it was always as if from very far away," Kevin murmured, still staring at Joel. "In the end, I put it with those picture of those that died, 'cos I couldn't do anything to help."

Kenny came over and touched his brother's arm, "Kev? Can I see it?"

Kevin lowered the picture lovingly, and Kenny took one look and touched it. He glanced up at Joel in shock.

Kevin looked down at his first picture, "I got a weird feeling from it, a weird name."

"What's that?" Joel whispered in stunned awe.

"Redeemer," Kevin answered, as he turned the picture so that the others in the room could see it.

Jason fell to the floor next to Cory as his knees gave way. "Oh God," he croaked.

Cory looked at the picture, and it dawned on him what he was seeing. It was similar to the Sa'ren icon on the Crest of House Surak. It was a broken, shattered S'harien Sword.

"Sa'ren... it's Sa'ren," Jason managed as Cory helped his fellow patriarch to stand up. Jason was leaning into Cory's side weakly in shock. "It's exactly as it is set out on Vulcan, on Mount Seleya. Kevin... how?"

Kevin shrugged as he kept staring into Joel's wondering eyes. "All I know is that it's Joel. But why'd I call it 'Redeemer'?"

Jason shook his own head, "Sa'ren is an ancient word from Vulcan's past. It no longer has meaning to them in most things, so it is not a word you guys would likely know. 'Sa'ren' *means* 'Redeemer'."

Joel's eyes darted between Kevin, Jason and the Doctor. Finally, he held the Time Lord's eyes in his own, "Tardis was going to call me a name beginning with 'S'... is this why?"

The Doctor simply smiled and said, "Until you find your name for certain, and until it is bestowed, I cannot say. That memory I hold is in flux. I must see it become reality before it will stabilize."

Sean moved over to Kevin and looked at the picture carefully. "Shall we put this in a frame, Kev? To keep it safe?"

The little boy nodded happily, still not taking his eyes off Joel. He handed Sean the picture, and Levi then presented a glass fronted frame from nowhere. "It's unbreakable, Uncle Sean," the little cherub giggled as he watched Sean place the picture inside it and put the filled frame on the bookshelf in the Quiet Area of the Rec Room.

As Sean turned back to the others, he heard Kevin start to sing:

"Maybe it's intuition
But some things you just don't question.
Like in your eyes
I see my future in an instant,
and there it goes
I think I've found my best friend.
I know that it might sound more than
a little crazy but I believe:"

"I knew I loved you before I met you,
I think I dreamed you into life.
I knew I loved you before I met you,
I have been waiting all my life."

Joel started taking baby steps towards his friend, and soon he was pulled into Kevin's arms as the eleven year old continued singing:

"There's just no rhyme or reason
only this sense of completion,
and in your eyes
I see the missing pieces
I'm searching for;
I think I found my way home.
I know that it might sound more than
a little crazy but I believe;"

"I knew I loved you before I met you,
I think I dreamed you into life.
I knew I loved you before I met you,
I have been waiting all my life."

A sobbing, happy mess of a Joel murmured the rest of the song back to Kevin as the emotions building between them became too much for the brown haired boy:

"A thousand angels dance around you,
I am complete now that I found you:"

"I knew I loved you before I met you,
I think I dreamed you into life.
I knew I loved you before I met you,
I have been waiting all my life."

(Savage Garden - I Knew I Loved You)

"Jo'," Kevin said thickly as they sank to their knees in their hug within the deathly quiet room. "Jo'... will you be my boyfriend? I can't promise to have my feelings for Chip worked out soon, but I can promise my heart is yours alone."

"Yes! Oh, yes please," Joel cried out. "And my heart is yours, T'hy'la. We'll work on both our problems together, but yes, I want to be your boyfriend forever..."

Cory and Sean just smiled, neither able to express the words that matched their emotions.

Timmy started bouncing up and down with Ricky, Belar and the other Tribe members. "Oh kewl! We knew it, we knew it, we knew it," they started chanting.

The two kissing boys in the middle of all their brothers, sisters and friends, started laughing as they broke apart and watched the antics of the Tribe. An Indian dance was started by Timmy and Ricky and all the Rugrats and Tribe kids were pulled into it and around Joel and Kevin.

Cory shook his head in wonder, then laughed himself silly with the others as one mass pounce later left Joel and Kevin in their under shorts and covered in Indian War Paint. Belar's loud voice was heard

clearly making the Vulcan and his new boyfriend honorary Rugrats, and Timmy added honorary Tribe membership as well.

"Buts yous gotta do da Swearing In," Belar added with a wide grin.

Kevin giggled as both he and Joel were lifted up by all the Rugrats and carried out of the room towards the Swimming Pool.

After a moment or two, I-Cheya huffed quickly at Blackie and both sped after their Boy in near panic.

Levi's face creased in concern, "They don't seem happy."

The Doctor's own face registered worry as well, "No, they... oh, HELLS! Joel can't SWIM!"

That statement brought fear to Cory's heart as he gaped at the Doctor.

Jason, however, smiled. "Ollie and Donna are there, don't worry. It's a test of faith," he explained.

Sean grunted shortly, "Don't care. Come on, guys. Let's make sure, and I think a swim might help us all anyway."

As one, the entire roomful of kids agreed and all started running for the Swimming Pool.

Joel couldn't see anything once the blindfold had been placed on him by Ross. "You trust us, Unca Joel?" Ross asked softly.

"Yeah," was Joel's nervous response as he heard Kevin whisper the same to Belar.

"Otay! One, two, three... HEAVE!" Belar commanded, and Joel found himself flying through the air...

SPLASH

Panic! Pure panic gripped Joel as water covered him and he felt himself sinking. He started thrashing about briefly, but two strong hands grabbed him less than a second after he had submerged and brought him back to the surface. He ripped off his blindfold and saw the smiling face of a girl with red hair. She held him up in the water while trying to hold in her giggles. Next to her, he saw Kevin being held up by a brown haired boy.

"Who're you?" Joel whispered in shocked fright.

"Donna," came the giggled reply. "I'm the daughter of Telez and Antony, Uncle Joel."

He grinned at her as he found his feet and stood waist deep in the water. "Who's helping Kev?"

"That's Oliver, Uncle Jason and Uncle Nathan's son," Donna supplied helpfully. Then, "You can't swim, can you."

"Nope," Joel shook his head as he was watching Oliver tickle Kevin. "S'why I was so scared when I was thrown in."

"Want to learn?" she asked as the doors opened and a stampeding Sehlat charged in.

The Tribe all scattered as I-Cheya slid on the wet tiles and skidded right into the middle of the pool, causing a tidal wave of water to rush over Joel and the other three.

Joel nearly lost control of his bladder as he laughed at his large furry friend. I-Cheya paddled over, snorting water from his nose and huffing to himself. *Wet. Water. Tried save Boy, get bath instead. Balls!*

"And THAT is why we don't run by the pool!" Cory giggled as he and the rest of the Clan piled into the room.

Bite Furry Wet Butt, Cory-Boy! I-Cheya snorted as he batted water out and over the grinning Patriarch. He then sat himself down in the shallow end, his shoulders and head above the water and relaxed. *No much water on Vulcan. This Nice. Back rubs?* he sent as he glanced over at Timmy and Belar as they were quickly stripping to dive in and play.

"Sure!" they and a bunch of the other now naked little kids crowed as they jumped onto him.

Joel giggled at his Sehlat friend as he stripped out of his boxers and tossed them onto the growing pile of clothes the Tribe had rid themselves of at the edge of the pool. He then watched in amusement as Nathan sighed and levitated the whole mass of garments to the changing rooms. He turned back to see Kevin blushing beet red.

"What's wrong, T'hy'la?" Joel asked him.

"Donna's naked. So's Vicky! I... they'll see my..." Kevin began, his face getting redder and redder.

Donna giggled, "So? If you want to stay in your shorts, do so. No big deal, Uncle Kev."

Joel shrugged as well, "Yeah, it don't matter, Kev."

Cory and the rest had now stripped as well and were all sliding into the huge pool. "They're right, Kev. Do as you want. You're teaching Joel to swim, Donna?" he asked the red haired girl.

"Yeah. I'm one of the best swimmers in the Division. If you live on an Island Nation, it's a damned stupid thing to not learn to swim."

"Agreed," Telez echoed as he bobbed to the surface next to his daughter and began tickling her, "she'll teach him well, Cory."

Joel grinned widely and waded over to the giggling ten year old girl.

"Ah, Timmy?" Cory called as he reached and hoisted a startled Joel out of the water and sat him on the edge. Kevin soon followed. "Can you come here, please?"

Timmy swam over. "Yes, Daddy?" he asked.

"What paint did you use on these two, and when did you paint their butts?"

"Normal paints, and we didn't," Timmy eyed his two small uncles curiously.

Joel raised an eyebrow, then manoeuvred and stripped Kevin so he could see. He then checked himself. They were both still covered in war paint even though they had been completely soaked, and it was a complete covering. Not an inch of skin was not painted in some way or another.

"Wow," Timmy breathed. "Honest, Daddy. We were only making them 'onorary warriors."

Blackie, lying on the edge of the pool, yapped at Timmy, then panted in his wolf-like laugh.

"Oh, umm... Daddy?"

"Yes?"

"Talk to Unca Mikey. I'm gonna go play."

"Oh... MIKEY!!!!" yelled Cory, making Joel jump briefly in fright.

Cory felt a tap on his shoulders. He turned to find Mikey seated cross-legged on the surface of the water. "Yes, little bro?" the angel grinned impishly at the blond.

"Why?" was Cory's one word question as he pointed to the two small boys on the edge. Kevin, his nervousness gone due to the curious paint he was now in, was being checked out by a giggling Joel.

"Instructions," Mikey giggled.

"Explain?"

"Nope," Mikey grinned again, "that's for me to know, and you to whine about!"

"Mikey!"

"What? I'm not allowed to tease my favourite Tigger?"

Cory giggled, then reached and hugged his brother, pulling him down into the water. "If you're not going to answer, then you can stay and swim with us instead."

"Okay, I've finished my 'shift' for the day," Mikey laughed.

"Will it wash off?" Joel asked as he slipped back into the water and waded over to climb into Mikey's arms.

"Nope, but talk to Timmy, Ricky, Austin or Ollie. They'll tell you how to make it appear and disappear when you want it to. Also, when one of you is in danger, all of you will go into 'war-paint mode'. It's a

quick way to tell others something's wrong," the Saint replied as he snuggled with his elven cuddle monster.

"Kay. Gonna learn to swim now, Mikey! You staying long?"

"Yes, until you guys go to bed at least," Mikey answered, kissing Joel's nose before lowering him down next to Donna. "Have fun."

Before he reached Kevin and Donna, Joel was waylaid by Austin who quickly explained how to control his War Paint marking. "Thanks," Joel whispered as he hugged Austin, "I'll tell Kev how as well."

Austin giggled, "Okay, Joel. Have fun."

When Joel finally got to them, Kevin was standing shyly next to Donna and kept looking at her quickly, but when she caught his glance, he averted his eyes.

"You can look," she said to him. "Vicky said she did the same for Daddy and Pop when she met them. If you look at me, you'll get used to me. Then it won't bother you."

Kevin nodded shyly, "Okay."

She moved to the edge and got out of the water. She sat down with her feet over the edge. Joel and Kevin looked at her for a few minutes, then Kevin noticed something.

"I thought you were gay, Jo'," he muttered.

Joel glanced at him, then down at himself. "Ahh, well... I thought I was!"

Donna giggled, "You're Bi, Joel. You think both boys and girls are sexy. But you love Kevin. That simple." She shrugged as she slipped back into the water, "Come on, Kev. Let's teach your boyfriend how to swim!"

"Ready?"

"Ready."

"POUNCE!"

Cory turned from watching Kevin and Donna teach Joel how to swim and ended up going under the water with two blond boys in each arm.

Sean giggled as he fished his husband to the surface, "You're as good as Timmy at that, guys!"

"Uh huh..."

"...thanks!" they replied.

Davy jumped in the water and latched onto Sean's back, "Your turn to give us rides!"

"Yeah!" Drew said as he climbed up to join his brother.

Cory laughed, "One on each of us, guys; we don't want to overload Sean now, do we?"

"But," Drew started, making his face reflect pure innocence, "he's meant..."

"...to be the horsey!" Davy completed, his face also 'pure' innocence.

Ross piped up, "That's right, Unca Cory! He gets the most practice, Timmy says!"

Timmy quickly made his way to the other side of the pool, pretending he had not heard any of that.

"Timothy Christian Short!" Cory exclaimed, his face copying a tomato. "Get your skinny little butt over here!"

Timmy sighed, then swam over. He grew progressively slower and slower until he stood in the shallow end in front of his parents. "Uhh... yes, Daddy?" he asked.

Joel had stopped swimming about on his back and was now standing next to Kevin, watching curiously.

Cory picked Timmy up. "Have you been telling all of your friends about your Poppa and me?" he asked, looking Timmy in the eyes as he held him on his hip.

Before Timmy could add his voice to his already shaking head, Drew piped up from Sean's back, "Ross only meant that Sean gives the bestest Piggy-Back rides."

Ross nodded, true puzzlement and concern on his face, "Uh huh. Timmy was talkin' to me bruvvers before da sad thing we was at at dinner time, and dey were talkin' 'bout being horses and stuff, and I asked and Timmy said he was telling my bruvvers how good a horsey Unca Sean is. Unca Sean? Can I have a swimming Piggy Back pleaasse? And is Timmy in trouble or somethin'?"

Cory looked between all the kids, then nodded at Sean. Sean splashed the twins back into the water and picked up Ross, "Sure thing, little guy." He then turned to the twins, "You two stay here and talk to Cory."

"Yes..." Drew nodded quietly.

"We will..." Davy said at the same time, just as quietly.

As Sean swam off with the now happy Ross on his back, Cory looked back into Timmy's eyes, "I'm waiting."

Timmy looked quickly at the twins, and they nodded. "Drew asked me how me and Ricky manage to sleep when you and Poppa are having your special times, 'cos they keep gettin' woke up by Unca Tel and Tony, or Unca Jace and Nath'. I 'splained, and then we started making jokes about the noises we

both hears and stuff. Ross came over then and we pretended that it was just about Piggy-backs, 'cos Drew told me in me head that Ross and Bel don't knows too much 'bout this stuff yets as Bel is scared some of sex stuff, and Ross tells Bel everything, so they bein' kept... kept..."

"Innocent," Drew and Davy offered quietly.

"Yeah. Honest, Daddy. It was jus' me and Drew and Davy, and we was not tellin' others or nuffin', jus'... 'm sorry, Daddy..." Timmy finished, a few tears trickling down his cheeks.

Cory looked at the three boys seriously. "You guys need to be careful; a lot of your new friends either ain't ready for this kinda stuff or they have really bad memories of things that were done to them. Just hearing you talking about it could hurt them. Watch the older guys and the telepaths; you'll learn a lot from them as to when it's okay to make comments like that. You guys need to take this as a lesson; you're not in trouble, but I don't want you to hurt someone's feelings by not thinking about what you're saying."

"Sorry, Uncle Cory," the twins said contritely. "We should know better, but we weren't thinking or paying 'tention."

Cory smiled, "Uncle? Thank you, guys. Go on, we'll talk later. Go play."

They nodded, grabbed Timmy out of Cory's arms, and swam off to play with Belar and Jessica.

Cory looked around and motioned for Nathan to come over, which the other blond did by walking on the water.

"Show off," Cory muttered with a grin.

"Hey," Nathan giggled back, "if ya got it, flaunt it!" He struck a pose while standing there, earning him a flying tackle by Jason.

"You do that again, and we'll be giving the guys a 'show', sex-on-legs!" Jason giggled after kissing his husband. He then swam off, winking at the laughing Cory.

"What's up, Cor?" Nathan asked as he waded to stand by his friend.

"Jace, obviously," Cory smiled, "He's like a submarine right now."

"Yeah, I get him every time," Nathan smiled fondly as he watched Jason grab Jamie and Jacob and toss them a few feet to splash into the water. "Seriously, though; what's wrong?"

"Belar. Why is he scared of sex? He was talking about sword fighting on Sunday, and he seems fine," Cory asked quietly.

Nathan sighed. "He was being raped when Korris and Poppa Spock saved him. He didn't know he was, only that he was being hurt. Long story, tell you later; but when he walked in on me and Jace... doin' it... well, he freaked. He put together 'what' had been hurting him, and it's taken months to get him to relax about just playing with Ross with 'sword fighting'."

Cory nodded seriously. "You might wanna have him hang with Kyle, and not because he's Mikyvis. I think Kyle's history might do some good for him and Belar to relate. Maybe Kyle can help him through it."

Nathan nodded seriously, "Koth too. And Donna. Hell - Llew, Trist, Matt and Rhys as well! We've done all we can for them, and they have helped each other, as well as the others in the same boat. I would say Korris as well, but he's the proudest Klingon I've ever met, and I've met a few over the past few months."

"Raped?!" came a voice from behind Cory.

Nathan and Cory turned to see Joel standing waist deep behind them, shaking in rage.

Nathan narrowed his eyes. "You're not Jo... wait. Joel's Mam?" he asked.

Joel nodded while his mother said from within him, "He is listening as well. Please get those children involved and have them gather here."

"What are you going to do?" Cory asked cautiously.

"Share," came the response as Joel's eyes returned to normal.

"You can help me?" Donna whispered.

Joel, this time back in control, nodded, "All of you, at once."

"Help with what?" Korris asked as he walked into the room, answering Nathan's mental summons.

Nathan climbed out of the pool and gestured for his Klingon brother to follow him. Koth suddenly beamed in with four other boys. "What's the problem?" Llywelyn asked as he was joined by Oliver.

Joel and Cory walked up to them, and waited for Belar to run over hand in hand with Donna.

Koth saw Joel's curious glance at some of the new faces. "This is Matthew and his brother Tristan. This is Llywelyn and his brother Rhys. Now, can someone tell me why we've been called? We're up to our necks in FC-bloody-C investigations!"

Joel gestured for them all to move over to where a firm Nathan was trying to calm down a now enraged Korris. "I will not! I am a warrior! I will fight this myself! I thought you knew that, Nathan, and I thought we had an understanding..."

"Korris," Joel said, his voice echoing with another's, "a warrior cannot fight all battles alone. A warrior sometimes needs a fellow to help them fight. Your victories will be theirs and theirs yours."

Korris stared at the little Vulcan. His hands were clenching and unclenching over and over. Eventually, he spoke in a deathly quiet voice, "I can't, Joel. I... I... I'm scared. I don't want anyone to know that I couldn't stop them... I should have stopped them! I..."

"You were a slave, my brother," Jason said as he padded over and quickly embraced the now weeping Klingon, "you are and were a child. There is no disgrace in asking for help after something like this."

"I have tried so hard... I have tried..." Korris wept into Jason's shoulder.

Jason was also crying, his empathy absorbing his brother's pain, "You need to do this. You have taken a huge step and bared your heart to Chang. You need to do this to be free of this poison."

"I'm ashamed," came the whispered response.

"I know," Joel said then, his voice strong and sure. "But you should not be. None of you. Everyone. Place your hand on me. As long as you are skin to skin, this will work."

They all did so, and little Belar whispered, "Please make him go 'way, Unca Joel. Make him go 'way for all of us."

"I cannot do that; but I can make the hurt less," Joel said. Everyone in the room was now silent, and they all were watching. Hoping.

"Kyle! Get over here!" Cory called loudly.

Kyle popped into Cory's arms, his eyes pain-filled, and face doubtful, "I'm a Mikyvis, Cor. I don't know if a Vulcan can cope with my emotions now."

The Doctor's voice whispered in his mind, in all their minds, "Yes. A Vulcan can deal with it. Trust me."

Kyle nodded and quickly joined the group touching Joel.

"All men hide a secret pain," the tiny Vulcan's voice began to echo, "Share your pain with me... and gain strength from the Sharing!"

Jason, Nathan and Oliver stood apart from the group around Joel, and watched. Cory was near to them, and the others in the room were silent. Whispers only were heard as the group in the Sharing cried and wailed with Joel; one of Kyle's son's had muted the words, leaving only the faintest of sounds to bare witness to what was happening. To provide dignity.

"Why didn't a Vulcan do this for your brothers before, Jace?" Cory asked, his voice sick sounding.

"The Sharing is no longer taught for it can be misused. Only a few Vulcan's have discovered how to do it in the last 400 years outside of the Halls of Kolinahr," Jason started. "The last to discover it was Spock's brother, Sybok. Joel is one of the few with the natural gift, it seems."

"What does it do?" Adam asked as he came over to wrap his arms around Cory from behind in support. "Does it heal?"

Nathan half smiled, "Yes and no, Adam. Yes and no."

Jason explained, "The Sharing, done correctly, takes the pain and removes the edges from it. It lets the person deal together with the one doing the Sharing, and as Joel said, take the poison out. Once done, you feel stronger for it, and have more tools to fight the pain and the demons. In their case, rape. They are losing the deep, soul killing poison, and gaining inner peace and strength with which to fight. The road after is not easy, nor quick. But it is *easier*."

Some of the others in the room started looking around at each other then over at Joel hopefully. Cory turned at the sudden whispers and saw their faces. His heart broke. "Guys, I'm sure Joel will want to help you all too, but please, not all at the same time or on the same day. He's in pain himself."

"Yeah," little Scooter Carr answered with a soft smile, "we know, Cory. We won't ask him anyway, but... can you..."

Joel, his face filled with the horror of Kyle's quickly relayed past, looked up. He had heard all the whispers clearly. "Once I'm finished, I shall help any that want it." He then turned back to Kyle and continued to Share out the young Mikyvis' pain to the group touching him. Each felt what Kyle felt and each heard Kyle's tale, and each cried with Kyle, and Kyle gained strength from each.

Such was the Sharing.

Such was the wonder that those watching felt.

Levi was the only one no longer watching.

His heart, innocent unlike any other but one in the room, was breaking. For he was the one muting the details from the rest... muting for all, but he could hear.

He was at the far side of the room...

... crying. Crying at the knowledge of what his daddy had gone through; knowledge that had been kept from him until now.

The Sharing was over, and those that had been with Joel were now being cuddled by various of their respective brothers or sisters.

Joel said, "I'll start with another group in a minute. I need a drink first." He wiped his eyes and slipped from Sean's arms where he had been recovering from the remembered pain. As he padded naked from the room he saw Levi crying in the furthest corner. He turned and quickly got Cory's attention and then pointed back to where the little boy was sobbing before running out towards CIC.

On reaching the Kitchens, he ran up to Teri, "Mama? Can I have a drink, please?"

Teri looked down at the slightly damp, naked Vulcan hopping up and down in abundant energy and smiled. "Of course, little one. Orange juice? Kool aid?"

"Ummm... Dunno what Kool Aid is. I'll try that later. Orange juice, please!" Joel smiled.

He watched as his mother poured him a tall, cool glass full. He then hugged himself close to her side as he drank it down.

"Thank you. That was very yummy," he grinned up at her.

She laughed as she wiped the 'orange moustache' from his top lip. "You're just too cute, Joel. Go on; go back to playing. You need it."

Joel gave her one last snuggle before running off.

The door opened to reveal Joel. He bounced inside the pool area and grinned at the boys now back playing in the pool. He was about to dive in and wait until someone wanted to be helped when he saw, in the same place as before, Levi.

Still crying.

Alone.

He glanced at Cory and found him playing with Belar and Timmy, without a care in the world it seemed. Joel sighed sadly. He went over to Levi and sat down next to him, pulling him onto his own lap.

Levi stiffened. "How'd you see me?" he asked in shock.

"I used my eyes," Joel replied literally, his face confused.

The little Time Lord appeared next to them both, "I showed him, Levi."

"Why?" Levi asked, his tears still falling.

"Cos he can help you," the Doctor answered as he Folded away again.

Joel looked over at Cory and understood, "You were invisible?"

"Still am," Levi replied quietly, "and so are you now."

"Okay. What's wrong?"

Levi told Joel about learning about his Dad's abuse in the Sharing that had just happened. "I... they never told me. I didn't know. My daddy got hurt and they didn't tell me."

Joel hugged the crying boy tighter, "Maybe they didn't want you to see something like that, or know it, Levi. You're full of life and love, and they probably didn't want you to see those things."

Levi sniffed. "But I could have helped."

"You still can. Your Daddy really needs his family now, Levi. His hurt feels worse right now. It happens after a Sharing. He feels worse, but feels lighter. I think he could really use some of those Levi-hugs that you gave Kev and me this morning."

Levi wiped his eyes. "I wish he'd told me."

"He was ashamed, Little Mouse," Joel whispered.

Levi giggled then, "'Little Mouse'?"

"Yeah... oh, sorry... your daddy don't like that, does he?" Joel stuttered, suddenly feeling nervous.

"It's okay, Uncle Joel. I like it, and I'll let Daddy know you can call me that!"

Relief appeared on Joel's face, "Cool. Go over, Levi. Lil'Bear needs some hugs."

"Kay!" Levi smiled as he turned and kissed Joel, hugged him back quickly, then vanished to appear above Kyle.

It was a good thing Kyle was on a rubber ring in the deep end of the pool, for Levi's sudden landing on top of him drove both him, the ring and his son under.

Joel bounced up from where he had been sitting and made his way back to the pool. He sat on the edge and let his feet soak in the water.

A moment passed as he watched his brothers and friends play before he felt a hesitant tap on his shoulder. A strawberry blond boy was behind him.

"Hi. I'm Salvador Vincent Carr, but people call me Scooter. I, ah... I was wondering..." Scooter started but his voice caught in his throat.

Joel got up and pulled the nine year old into a hug, "Do you have any brothers or sisters who need help too?"

"Yeah," sobbed Scooter. He raised his face from Joel's neck and called out loudly, "GUYS!!!"

Joel moved Scooter to a more open area and they were soon joined by eleven others, all between the ages of eight and fifteen.

"We've all got the same type of story," Scooter whispered through his tears, "so we kinda talked when you were helping Kyle and them... could you do all of us at once? We're all brothers, and..."

"Make sure you keep touching me," Joel answered with a sad little smile. Once they had, he spoke again; and once again, his voice started echoing loudly.

"All men hide a secret pain - Share your pain with me..."

"Can you cope, Joel?" Cory whispered into his tiny brother's hair as Joel sobbed into his chest.

"Y..yeah," came the answering murmur.

Scooter and his brothers had finished with their Sharing, and were now gathered around Victoria Evans as she gave each a hug and some sage advice. Joel, however, had gone straight for one of the three people who were able to offer *him* comfort.

"Yeah," he said again, stronger this time. "I can... if you hold me a while."

"Forever and forever," Cory smiled. "Just don't push yourself too far, Lil'elf. You have a lot of pain from your own past. Don't try taking everyone else's pain without dealing with your own."

Joel looked up and blinked at his brother. Seriously, he stated, "I feel every emotion that I've ever felt right now, Blondie. When I was scared when Mikey brought me here? I feel it now. When I was scared thinking I was about to be raped? I feel it now. All emotions from every day that I remember I feel right now. All the fear, added onto itself... it's why I'm always scared and frightened. Someone else's pain being Shared? What else *could* it do to me?"

"Overload you," Cory answered.

Joel shook his head, "No. It won't. Every second I live, the new emotions I experience get added to those I feel all the time. I should have overloaded already. Your pain... when I Shared yours... your pain is felt differently to mine. You don't have alive memories. Your emotions are not compound. Xain's ain't either, and he's Vulcan too. It's... it's 'cos of my type of memory. Sharing your pain hurt, and it made me cry, but it's like me sharing a Hill and carry a Mountain. I'll be okay Sharing."

Sean moved closer to them both. "Can you explain that?"

Joel half smiled. "If you prick your finger with a pin, you hurt. Imagine that the pain at its height stays always. Prick yourself again... then again... then again. It's the same for what I feel. When I first saw you two, I was scared of you. So I'm STILL scared of you. Even though I trust you, love you, and feel safe around you, I'll always be scared of you, for the scared feeling is still 'alive'. Same for every fear, every sadness. Everything. It all stays. Always. My 'hurts' and 'fears' are no worse than Kyle's about some stuff, but he don't still have those fears that he felt there as if they are 'forever'. I do. My fear is compound. Each time I fear something, that new fear adds to the rest. And so I have a level of fear that is larger than anyone else's."

Sean looked suddenly sick. "That's why it was so bad last night when you Shared yourself."

"Uh huh," Joel nodded, then closed his eyes and tucked his face back against Cory's chest.

"After hearing that, I won't ask now," Jamie whispered to his twin as they stopped moving towards Joel. They started to turn back, but Joel had heard them.

"You need to Share?" he asked as he moved from Cory's arms and took their hands.

"Joel... no, not now... not after..." Jacob started, but Joel kissed him to silence him.

"I can help, if you want. Please?"

The two boys glanced at each other, then nodded slowly. "Can you help our baby brother, Asher, as well?" Jamie asked, tears already forming in his eyes.

Joel nodded, a peaceful look in his eyes.

He was needed. He could help.

There were soap suds everywhere, and a blanket of them was spreading out from the epicentre: I-Cheya. The Tribe, and Joel, had decided that giving the large Sehlat cub a complete 'shampoo and rinse' was a 'wicked cool' idea... and I-Cheya let them do so, huffing out his laughter all the while.

Even the G-Cats had gotten in on the action and were helping. They did not expect, however, to be the next targets for 'all over shampooing'.

Cory and the rest sat out of the pool and just laughed until their ribs hurt; all except Bork, who was trying his best to avoid the shampoo-fest. The occasional glances from the Tribe pretty much told him that his mane was on the list, though.

"I've got bubbles in my nose, Joel!" Mont complained to the Vulcan on his shoulders who was working the suds into the Lion's forehead and between his ears.

"Aww, poor puss-tat!" Joel giggled, but he did reach and brush lightly over Mont's face, clearing the soap away.

Meanwhile, Kevin had sneaked out of the water and into the crowd watching. A startled yell later and Bork found himself being chased out of the mass of bodies and thrown back into the pool. Timmy and Belar pounced him, and he sighed with resignation: shampooing was a go, it seemed.

"I've lost my cool spikes!" Mercury complained as Jessica Evans made him sit down so that the shampoo could be massaged in-between his ears easier.

Hermes sniggered, "I'm sure Aunt Teri can help you later, bro... ack, soap don't taste good... soap don't taste good!" The cheetah started spitting bubbles everywhere, making Paul and Paulie giggle.

Wacko snorted water in amusement as he swam around them all, Ricky chasing him with more shampoo.

"You cats are all babies!" Joel giggled, earning him yet another toss far down towards the deep end of the pool. His head resurfaced and he mock glared at Mont, "Just you wait, puss-tat! I'll gets you good!"

"Yeah? You and what army's gonna toss me, then?" Mont taunted playfully.

Joel swam up quickly, impressing Donna yet again at how fast he picked up the skill, and giggled "These armies!" as he wrapped Mont in a hug... and heaved upwards and backwards.

"MEAWWWW..." *Splash*

"Told ya!" Joel's yell could just about be heard over the escalating sound of laughter.

Bork was trying manfully to escape Timmy and Belar's attentions, but it wasn't working for Kevin was keeping him corralled from the edge of the pool. "Not fair! I showered this morning, honest!" he giggled as he was pounced underwater yet again. Chocolate scented shampoo was applied quickly, making the purple haired boy laugh, "Oh, just great! Now I smell like my favourite food!"

One splash later and Bork had someone else helping the younger kids to 'clean him'. "Traitor! Robbie, how could yo..." Bork's yell was cut off as Robbie kissed him thoroughly. While the kiss was taking place, Robbie was adding as much shampoo as possible to Bork's mane.

Meanwhile, Joel found himself being tickled by all the G-Cats as he was passed from one to the other. "This was your idea, Elf!" Artemus accused playfully, "so live with the tickles!"

Kevin felt that Bork was going nowhere for a while, and so waded in to protect his investment... it didn't work. He was soon in the same condition as Joel - laughing fit to bust.

Once the final round of shampoo application had been done, Timmy called for his Uncle Kyle to clear out all the suds from the pool. "Okay, we can all play 'gain!" he bellowed once the laughing King Mikyvis had sorted out the mess.

I-Cheya huffed quietly to himself as he pulled his bulk out of the pool. Water ran from him and his thick coat of fur like a waterfall, yet he curiously did not shake as the other animals had done.

Instead, he plodded out of the doors towards the outside.

Cory soon found out why.

"I-CHEYA!" Teri's loud voice could be heard yelling from the outside.

Joel dived back into the pool seconds after hearing it, and hid behind Cory, trembling. "He's in trouble... I'm in trouble..." he whispered over and over as Cory tried to comfort him. It was not easy as Joel refused to move from behind his back.

A dripping wet Teri entered the now silent room, and the children stared at her.

From outside, a wicked, Sehlat laugh could be heard. 'Huff, huff, huff'

Teri looked around the room, her eyes finally settling on Joel peeking out from behind Cory. "Joel? Could you tell your oversized puppy that next time he wants to try a stunt like that, use WARM water?"

"You..." Joel trembled, his face tucked under Cory's arm, and his own arms wrapped tightly around his brother's belly. He sucked in a breath and released Cory. He slowly climbed out of the water and shuffled closer to his mother. "You're not mad, Mama? Please don't hurt him if you are. You can punish me instead. Please don't hurt I-Cheya," the little Vulcan finished with a scared sob. He was trembling violently, and his eyes were shut so tight in fear that his forehead creased.

"Open your eyes, son," Teri said softly. "You can't see the truth in other's eyes if you are not watching them."

Joel opened them, and his deep blue eyes peered up into his mother's face. They were like pools of dark waters, Teri thought; dark waters filled with memory - and pain.

"I don't get mad for innocent pranks, Joel. I-Cheya better not complain when he wakes up with braided hair tied in pink ribbons though." Teri said calmly. "Punishment for a prank gone wrong is standing in a corner; I'm not sending anyone to a corner, so nobody is in trouble. If ANYONE ever tries to punish you in a way that causes you physical pain, they're going to have to deal with the Wrath of Mom. I-Cheya was having fun; you go back to doing the same, and I'll plot my revenge."

Joel smiled uncertainly at her for a moment.

'Huff hufffff, huff,' I-Cheya plodded in and stood by Teri, with an equally soaked Blackie at his side. They both stared into their Boy's eyes for a moment.

"You sure?" Joel breathed out nervously.

They nodded.

Joel reached and took Teri's hand and, with light hesitant tugs, motioned for her to follow him to the edge of the pool.

He released her hand and slid into the water in silence. Everyone was watching curiously, although Timmy and Ricky were staring at their eagle companions and grinning. They moved in the water to get their own vantage point for what was about to happen.

Teri saw Joel pause as he stood, waist deep in the water. He glanced again at I-Cheya.

Inside her heart, Blackie sent a quick message, and she grinned. She dropped to her knees and started splashing Joel.

The little Vulcan sneezed in shock as the sheets of water she was sending at him went up his nose. He retaliated.

Timmy and Ricky launched their assault on Cory and Sean at the same time that the Double J's and their little brother started doing so against Dean, Justy and Liam.

In the end it was the larger kids, plus Teri, verses the little kids.

The little kids won, however, when their 'Secret Weapon of Mass Soakings' was unleashed. In other words, I-Cheya ran and bombed the pool in such a way that Cory and Teri's team had a tidal wave of water rushing towards them.

"So!" Cory spluttered as Teri called a halt to the fun, "Food ready, Mom?"

"Yes," she smiled as Joel climbed out of the water and squirrelled into her arms. "Although I have to change first!"

"No you don't, Grandma!" Levi giggled as she suddenly became as dry as she had been pre-Sehlat-Soaking. Joel found that he was now bone dry as well.

"Thank you, Levi," she grinned at him. "Okay. Up and out of the water; get dry and then we can eat."

She started to walk back out carrying a now happy and bubbling Joel as the place became crazy around her. She stopped by the door when Kevin hopped over as he tried to get into a pair of boxers while attempting to bring Joel his own.

"Thanks," Joel grinned down at his boyfriend as he took his boxers from him. He then glanced over to where Mercury and Hermes were on all fours, shaking the excess water out of their fur. He giggled and called over to them, "Is this how you wear this?"

Both cheetahs looked up, and promptly fell back into the water due to uncontrollable laughter.

Joel was wearing the boxers as a hat, and his little pointy ears were doing a very good job of keeping it in place on his head.

Jason was one of the last to get dry, and he was about to leave the Pool area and go over to get something to eat when his communicator went off. "Voice here," he answered.

"Voice," Telez' voice answered, "we have been told that Adam Casey is awake and now ready to come up and deal with the prisoner."

"Understood, I'll grab Uncle Mike and those here who are coming. You bring Adam and the Cats up from Utah."

"Understood," Telez answered as the comm went dead.

Jason grinned to himself for a moment before leaving to find his Uncle Mike.

Payback was *such* a bitch...

Joel was still wearing his boxers on his head as Teri entered the Dining Room. Helen started laughing the moment she laid eyes on him, "I like it, kiddo, but they are meant to be worn elsewhere."

Joel grinned at her.

Cory came up next to them and sniggered, "Shirts and shoes for dinner, Lil'elf."

"Oh, okay," Joel smiled as he slipped from Teri's arms and ran into the Rec Room, his bare butt disappearing behind the coach as he looked for his discarded clothes. Kevin followed him to continue to enjoy the view.

"I wonder," Teri murmured to herself as the other kids ran in, all dressed appropriately. Apart from Riti, of course.

"Wonder what, Mom?" Cory asked as he watched his brothers and sisters start on their food.

"If Joel will do as you guys did once," she answered with a short laugh.

Cory shrugged, turned around, and started laughing loudly.

Kevin was walking back with Joel, hand in hand, and he was dressed correctly.

Joel, however, was still wearing his boxers on his head. He did have his tee-shirt on, and his trainers on his feet, but nothing else.

Kevin was not complaining.

"There," Joel smiled proudly, "shirt and shoes on, Cor!"

Others in the room started to notice, and they too started laughing.

"You're definitely my brother!" Cory giggled as he came over and picked up Joel. "You're my favourite silly lil' elf!"

"At least he's wearing his boxers too!" Sean added as Cory placed Joel back on his feet. "You never said *WHERE* we're supposed to wear them, Mom!"

"Blondie didn't say nuffin' 'bout boxers," Joel murmured, "but I just like them there. My head's warm!" He grinned up at them all.

"I like them there too," Kevin murmured, but he wasn't looking at Joel's new 'hat'.

"Your logic is flawless, brother," Sean managed to get out seriously before breaking into a grin. "Maybe we'll make that the new uniform!"

Teri decided that she should put her voice back into this before it went too far. "I don't think it sets the correct tone as a uniform. Joel, sweetie; the guys tried this prank a few months ago. We let it slide then but ever since they've worn clothes properly for dinner. At least a pair of boxers or swim shorts, a shirt and shoes."

Joel began to look pensive, "B...b...but Cor only said shirts and shoes... I'm sorry, Mammy... I won't be bad 'gain..." He ripped the shorts from his head and started to pull them on, almost in a panic. He ended up falling, and only Kevin next to him caught him before he hurt himself.

Teri helped him up and pulled him into a cuddle. "You followed instructions to the letter, son; there's nothing wrong with that. Why don't you go ahead and have Kevin grab you some shorts for your bottom half, that way you can keep your giggle boxers on your head. I want everyone to have shorts on so that food doesn't drop on places it shouldn't be. You've made a lot of people smile; that's not bad, it's really, really good."

Joel looked into her eyes for a moment, then grinned, "Okay, Mama!"

Kevin giggled and ran back into the Rec Room, returning a second later with one of his spares. After helping Joel into them, he made sure Joel's own pair was back in place as a hat.

"Now, we can eat," Helen managed through her laughter.

"Gonna get a drink," Joel said to Kevin as the brown haired boy sat down. "Want one?"

"I'll have a coke," Kevin pointed at the cans on the table. "You could have one of these too, if you wanted."

"Na. I wanna try something Mama mentioned earlier. Be right back," he grinned before kissing Kevin's cheek and running into the Kitchen.

Teri was about to pick up another platter of food when Joel appeared next to her. "Can I have some of that Kool-Aid stuff now, Mama?"

She smiled, "Sure."

Joel watched with interest as Teri made him a glass of the drink, then he accepted it with wide eyed wonder. "It's blue."

"Yes, I do believe it is," Teri chuckled.

Joel sniffed it, then looked back up at her. He cracked a grin, "But blue and green should never be seen, Mama!"

Teri raised an eyebrow, then chuckled again. "Enjoy it, comedian."

Joel did.

Joel then placed the glass down carefully, hugged his mother, and sped from the room on a major sugar rush.

Doctor Austin, in the middle of eating a sandwich in the relative peace of the Kitchen, murmured, "You gave him that?"

"Yes," Teri looked over. "Something wrong?"

"Oh, no no no," the Doc answered quickly, suppressing a smile, "other than the fact that soon he'll be in orbit."

"Oh?"

"Yes. His metabolism will have... an unusual reaction to it. Soon, he will be completely hyper."

"Oh..." she replied nervously, looking out at her seemingly normal Vulcan son as he sped over towards his big brothers and Kevin.

As Joel sat down next to Kevin, Sammy walked in with his brothers. He half waved at Joel, but the sad smile on his face just did not reach his eyes.

"You okay, Sammy?" Cory called over.

Sammy nodded, "Yeah. Dad's off dealing with something, and it's making me feel a bit sad is all."

Cory nodded with understanding before going over to give the younger boy a brief hug.

Joel wiped at his eyes briefly, remembering what Sammy had Shared earlier that day, before starting to feed Kevin as was normal.

Sean motioned for Sammy to take a seat on the opposite side of him from Cory, and placed an arm over Sammy's shoulder to pull him close. "We're here for ya, Bro; you're family, and we'll do anything we can to help."

They sat down and began eating, while Sammy explained why he was feeling out of sorts. Finally, he said, "It's just that I've never wanted to kill someone like that before. Not even when I executed that man on Monday. If it wasn't for Joel, I'd probably be up there now."

Sean pulled Sammy over and hugged him briefly, and Cory opened his mouth to reply. He never managed to, however, as a loud burp from his other side drew his attention. Sammy giggled at Joel's shocked expression.

"This is a fun drink!" Joel giggled as he quickly drank down more.

"Pepsi," Sean snorted with laughter as he watched Joel drain the glass.

Another thunderous belch and Joel started giggling harder. He seemed wired to the max.

"Better to taste it than waste it!" Cory giggled.

Joel started bouncing in his seat. From across the room, Cory heard Doc Austin say to Teri, "Told you. Boy, am I glad he's *your* son! See you tomorrow!" Doc Austin turned and made his way out, his shoulders shaking with repressed laughter.

"Just wait; I'm sure your sons can be wired too!" Teri chuckled after him before heading towards the boys. "Cory, Timmy hasn't brought home a giant frog has he?" She asked, her grin giving away the joke.

Cory was about to play along when Joel started making *Ribbit-Ribbit* noises next to him. At the same time, a red faced Kevin was trying to keep Joel's hands out of his boxers.

"What has he eaten?" Kenny asked from the other side of the table as he watched with amusement.

"Kool-Aid..." Teri started to respond.

"Can I have more?!" Joel asked quickly, his attention shifting from the contents of his boyfriend's shorts at the mere mention of the drink, while Jake and Kenny exclaimed in unison, "Oh crap! Sucrose!"

"Did no-one tell you of the effects the contents of certain sweet foods have on Vulcanoids?" Xain asked at the same time.

"You're just jealous that he got some and you didn't," Cory giggled.

Teri pointed at Cory and Sean. "These two clowns seemingly felt I had no need of that information."

"Hey! No fair, we didn't know!" Sean protested.

Cory whistled.

"Okay - No fair! *I* didn't know!" Sean corrected while nudging his husband sharply in the ribs and shooting him a dirty look.

"We gotta let our bro enjoy finding things out..." Cory replied innocently.

"Finding out how 'fun' intoxication is?" Xain asked with surprise.

Jake nodded seriously. "Cory, how much do you know about the effects of sucrose on the Vulcan biology?"

Cory began to look a little concerned then. "Not much, only that it lowers their inhibitions and makes them feel energized."

Sean sighed and lowered his face to his hands. "Cory, that's what being drunk is!"

Cory's eyes widened. "Oh..."

"I'm drunk? Is this drunk? I don't wanna be drunk!" Joel said as the words sunk into the murk that his mind had become. "I don't wanna hurt no-one, and drunk people hurt people, and I don't wanna!"

Xain moved and held him tightly, whispering quickly to him. Kevin looked between Cory and Jake, "How long will it last?"

"Not long," Jake answered, "Kool-aid doesn't have that high a concentration. Since the Doc wasn't concerned, I don't think Joel's going to get too wild. Unlike those pixie sticks and mint sweets Xain ate that one time."

"Don't remind me," Kevin muttered as he turned to look at his boyfriend. He then had an idea, and blushed. "Ah, exercise helps, doesn't it?"

"Yes," Xain answered quickly before continuing to whisper to Joel.

"Okay... seeya in a while, guys," Kevin murmured with embarrassment as he rose up, took Joel's hand and pulled him from Xain's arms.

Sammy started giggling harder when he saw where Joel was being led too. "Fun time!" he sniggered as Kevin closed the bathroom door behind him and Joel.

"Am I really drunk?" Joel asked Kevin as he focused on his boyfriend's face.

"Kinda," Kevin giggled. "Although you're not as bad as Xain was when he had a pixie stick."

Joel looked at his fingers, "They feel numb."

Kevin smiled as he started to pull off Joel's tee-shirt.

"What we doing?" Joel asked curiously as the tee-shirt came over his head.

Kevin grinned, "Doing exercises makes it work it's way out of your system quicker."

"Like sex stuff?"

"Yeah," Kevin smiled again as he reached for the boxers Joel was wearing.

At his touch, Joel felt Kevin's uncertainty and doubt. "You still thinking about your Uncle Chip?"

"Yes and no," Kevin said as he stopped his hands and pulled Joel into a hug.

"Wanna talk?"

"Yeah," the brown haired boy nodded as Joel hugged him back. "It's just that... well, I've always kept from doing sex stuff, and now this morning I did it twice with you - and loved it... loved you. But then I remembered that I love Uncle Chip too, and now I'm worried I'd wanna do more sex stuff with him as well, then I'll get addicted and then..."

Joel nodded and pulled back slightly, "It'll work out, Kev. We'll find help - for both of us. I'm still scared too. I love you and want *to* love you, but I don't think I can - well, wanking is kinda okay, but even that still scares me."

Kevin nodded as he pulled off the last of Joel's clothes. He looked back into Joel's eyes, and they still looked unfocused. Taking hold of Joel in another hug, he whispered, "Yeah - we'll find help with it."

Joel started smiling, but then stopped Kevin as the boy began to use his hands on his body. "Wait."

Kevin looked concerned. "You want me to ask Cory or Sean to come here too?"

"No. You're still dressed," Joel said shyly as he began to remove Kevin's own clothes.

"Oh," Kevin grinned shyly as well, "can't have that..."

"That didn't take long," Cory said as Jason sat down next to him ten minutes later.

Jason half smiled, "Sentence has been passed, and he's gone. No, not long. We didn't drag it out. We're better than he was."

Sammy looked over, "Is dad back too, bro?"

"Sure is. He's in the Kitchen talking to Aunt Teri and Aunt Helen, cariad. You feeling good now?" Jason smiled at his brother.

Sammy nodded then rose and left towards the Kitchen.

Jason looked around. "Where's your elven shadow?" he asked Cory.

"Playing with Kev," Cory replied. "Trying to work off a glass of sucrose filled Kool Aid."

Jason raised an eyebrow. "I know that the drinks here are mostly sucrose free - you know, Vulcan friendly. Why is there sucrose laden Kool Aid in the Compound?"

Xain looked over, "I do not like Kool Aid, so it is not something Dad had asked Aunt Helen to change."

Jason still looked surprised, "And Aunt Teri allowed Joel to drink it?"

"She didn't know," Cory said softly. "Helen would have, but she wasn't there, and I knew, but I didn't think it would be like being drunk or anything." He gave Jason a wry look, "Yes, you can say it. They have been. I had a blond moment."

Jason snorted with laughter, then moved over to hug Cory. "You're always having a blond moment, my big brother. You and Nathan both!"

"Don't feel bad, little bro; I didn't know either," Aaron said as he walked up and gave Cory a hug from behind.

Cory gave them a small smile, then sighed. "I don't feel bad right now, but if my Lil'elf gets a hango-ver, then I'll feel real rotten."

"He will not," Xain offered simply. "Not with the small amount he ingested."

Cory looked relieved, then pointed at the nearest chair for Aaron to sit with them. "How long will it take to wear off?"

"Any time now," Jake smiled as the bathroom door in the Rec Room banged open and two relaxed looking boys wandered out, naked as the day they were born.

"Forgetting something, bro?" Kenny called out.

"Leave them," Rory giggled, "they look cute like that!"

Kevin looked down, blushed and pulled a puzzled Joel back into the bathroom.

After another minute, they reappeared. Joel had decided that he didn't want to wear his boxers on his head this time, but they were both now dressed for dinner, as it were. They ran over and plopped themselves back on their chairs. Kevin saw his brothers' looks and blushed.

Joel looked up into Cory's eyes sadly, "I liked Kool Aid, but I don't wanna get drunk again, Cor."

Aaron reached over and gave Joel's shoulder a quick squeeze. "Don't worry about it, little brother; I'm going out after dinner and getting some Vulcan-friendly kool-aid that won't mess with you. Mom didn't know; and since Xain don't like Kool-Aid at all nobody thought to get the safe stuff."

"Where you going? To the shops again? Can I come with you? It was fun yesterday!" Joel bubbled suddenly.

Jake rolled his eyes, and smiled, "The worst is out of his system, but..."

"So I can tell," Aaron laughed as Joel pounced into his arms and sat down on his lap, still asking a million questions in rapid succession. "Hush, little one. Yes, you can come, and yes, it'll be fun, and no, we won't leave Kevin, Blackie, the Cats nor I-Cheya behind, and Cory and Sean can come too if they want to, but Timmy's turtles might object."

"YIPPEE!!! But where we going? New York? London? Paris? There's loads and loads and loads and..."

Cory got up and snuggled in behind Joel, half sitting on the edge of Aaron's legs in the process, "Hush, Joel. First, we'll all sit and talk here for a while to let our food settle. Then, if Aaron wants, we can all go somewhere to shop that the Clan hasn't been yet. Somewhere nice and safe, yet fun too. Sean and I have been there, but the rest of the guys not in the Fleet haven't, and I've wanted to take my kids there for a while."

Sean's eyes widened with excitement at that. "Terra Main?! Oh, yeah! Timmy will LOVE that. I've got to see his face at the play area they built for the kids of Starfleet personnel!"

"We're going to Terra Main???" Timmy crowed out as he came running around the table on a bee-line to his parents.

Sean caught the flying six year old in his arms and nodded. He addressed the now silent room, "In a short while we'll go up, guys. We'll go as family groups, and anyone wanting to go, can. If you want to stay behind, feel free."

The noise level went north at an unbelievable rate, while Joel continued to bounce happily on Aaron's lap.

"Well," Jason smiled, "come on in the Rec Room. While we wait for Joel to 'digest' his food, I'll tell you about the Legend of Sa'ren as I've been meaning too for a while."

They made their way out of the noisy Dining Room and found a few chairs to arrange themselves on. Paulie dragged his friend Paul with him and they sat near to Joel, Kevin and Aaron.

Cory and Sean sat there, hand in hand. "Jace, where are you going to start with this legend? From the little I've pieced together, it's huge," Sean asked quietly.

Jason smiled, "It is large, but it can be said simply. Most of it comes from Sarek himself, and his greatest pupil, T'Klass. It was she that laid most of it down, so I'll start with her.

"At the end of the War of the Raptor, once those who eventually became the Romulans were exiled, T'Klass came forward saying she had had a dream. A Vision-Dream. The Sword of Surak, Sa'ren, was shattered and in pieces, and it was due to it's shattering that the road to peace had been paved. Had it not been in that last fight, and had it not shattered as an everlasting symbol of the pointlessness of war, Vulcan would not be where it is today.

"I can say most of what she said, apart from one line of the main prophecy. It has been kept by the Masters of Kolinahr until the Blade is reforged. She said:

"...He comes, and It comes and the Sunlight shall tremble...

In that time, in Vulcan's greatest hour of need, 'Sa'ren', the Blade and Scion of Surak, shall return to where It was Made...

Awakened in Time, It shall be forged in pain and tempered in love...

No blood shall stain It, for It must again fulfil It's destiny..."

"The Line and Blood of Surak shall not fail, nor cease to defend our home, 'til Sa'ren is re-forged...

Watch for that day, for should the Blade of Surak fail, not only Vulcan shall fall...

He comes, and the Ending of all things is in His power...

It comes, and It shall Oversee all Life...

And by Its destruction shall the Sword reform..."

"Then, a close friend asked, 'And whom shall it be that shall re-forge the blade? The method and knowledge has long passed!' Her answer was:

"The One to Re-forge the Blade shall come. Unknowing shall he speak - Words that he shall not have heard. Untaught shall he know - Using his power to heal. Unguided shall he find his Strength... and forge the Destiny of Sa'ren. He shall Shine as Behr'ak; he shall Shimmer as the Sister; Alam'ak shall Rise over his coming, and the Brother shall crown his brow. He shall change what Was to Be anew, and It shall be Reborn - the Blade and Scion of Surak, the Ruler of Red Sands."

"He then asked her, 'Who is the Brother, and where shall we find him?'"

"She replied, 'Sa'Kai-T'Khasi shall be found, and T'Khasi shall stand as his M'aih. Sa'Kai-T'Khasi shall grow and T'Khasi shall become his Khut. The Wielder of Destiny shall be from the two, yet Marked of T'Khasi. He shall fit 'Fo-wein Sa'ren' instantly and be Shielded from Harm. He shall be Ashaya-Sa'Kai-T'Khasi and Kor-shau T'Ran.'"

"Okay," Paul held up his hand, "I've not had the language dump yet, guys. Can you translate all that?"

Jason grinned at him. "Behr'ak is Vulcan's sun. Alam'ak is the secondary sun, their brightest star in the sky. Sa'Kai-T'Khasi means 'Brother-Vulcan', or a brother world *to* Vulcan. T'Khasi is the ancient name for Vulcan itself. Khut is Sister, Sa'kai is brother, and M'aih is foster-mother."

"Ashaya-Sa'Kai-T'Khasi? Beloved of Brother-Vulcan?" Joel asked softly. "Beloved of... Earth?"

"Yes, Joel. Earth is Sa'Kai-T'Khasi. There is an ancient starmap on Vulcan, at least 500 thousand years old, and Earth is on it with that name. Also, most of Starfleet think of the Vulcans as brothers," Jason nodded at the boy.

Cory was looking at Jason with his jaw on his chest. "Kor-shau T'ran? Cor, Sean with no 'n', Terran??? Joel is Beloved of Earth and Cor, Sean - Terrans?!"

Jason nodded seriously. "I never understood why the Blade Finder would be called 'Preserver Death', which is the literal translation. It could mean 'preserve from death' or even 'through death'. But once I saw the things around Joel happening and heard his name for you out of his own mouth... well - it fits."

"What is Fo-wein Sa'ren?" Paul asked.

Joel looked at him, and said softly, "The armour I wore to the funeral. I fitted into it without it having to be adjusted, and then it went nuts in a light show, just as that prophecy said it would."

Sean reached out and squeezed Joel's shoulder, for the little Vulcan was beginning to look nervous.

"Wait," Cory held up his hand. "Jason, the first bit talks of the Blade returning, and when it is destroyed, the Sword shall reform. Aren't they one and the same?"

"That has puzzled people since the prophecy was given. We don't know," Jason shrugged.

Joel was looking at Jason, "He shall be of the two? Of Earth and Vulcan. I'm a hybrid, I fit the armour, I speak Vulcan and have never been taught it, I heal with the Sharing, and have never learnt how. How did they know?"

Aaron gave Joel a squeeze as well, "The Founders can see the future. Maybe Vulcans can too, or some can, or something."

"Maybe," Cory nodded. "What of Alam'ak rising over his coming? What's that to mean? I can see how Joel fits the rest about the finder of Sa'ren, but..."

Jason shrugged. "I don't know. My only guess is about when Joel was born."

"28th October, 20... no, I mean 1991," Joel supplied with a small smile.

"Joel, sweetie," Jason smiled at him, "We can't be sure of that date. We don't know how you got to that other Universe, and we don't know about that Birth Certificate. Is it accurate?"

"Mother said it was. She said she wrote it," Joel offered helpfully, tapping his head.

Jason glanced at Xain. "What would that date be in Vulcan time?"

"15th day of K'ri'lior, in the Vulcan year 1804. If Joel's birthday is tomorrow as humans measure time, then he is just over 12 and a half Vulcan years old tomorrow," Xain answered. "Just as I am younger in Vulcan time than by human measurements. I am nearly 13 going by TST, but by VST, I am just over 12 years and four months old. My day of birth was the 18th day of T'lakht, year 1804."

"K'ri'lior? The eighth month, and it means 'Bright One'," Jason crowed out as he bounced on his heels. "It's the month when Alam'ak is at it's height! And it reaches apex on the 15th day! Alam'ak rose over your coming, Joel!!"

Joel half smiled at him, then asked, "Well, that's what T'Klass said. What of my ancestor, Surak? What did he add to the prophecy?"

"He gave the first part of all, Joel; right before making the Fo-wein Sa'ren," Jason bubbled. He then recited:

"For the Day of Sa'ren is near in Ku-li'Klopau.

The Sun and Sister will grow dark,

And the Stars will diminish their brightness.

Oekon also will roar from Yon'Kahr,

And His Blade shall proceed from Shi'Kahr

Stukh-Oigen and T'Khasi will shake;

But Sa'ren will be a shelter for It's People,

And a Defence of the Children of T'Khasi and Sa'Kai-T'Khasi"

"What's that mean?" Paul asked, his voice hollow and his throat dry. "I almost feel I recognise that."

"I'll translate," Jason smiled, "'For the Day of Sa'ren is near in Valley of Decision. The Sun and Sister will grow dark, And the Stars will diminish their brightness. Supreme One also will roar from Fire City, And His Blade shall proceed from East City. Heavens and Vulcan will shake; But Sa'ren will be a shelter for It's People, And a Defence of the Children of Vulcan and Earth.'"

Paul's jaw dropped open, and he got up, dumped Paulie on his Sean's lap, and ran from the room.

"What's with him?" Kenny asked curiously.

Joel was shaking on Aaron's lap. "I recognise it too," he whispered in fear.

"Fill us blonds in then..." Aaron asked as he looked at Jason.

"I don't know," Jason said as he looked at Joel in shock. "I've no idea what they saw in that. Ku-li'Klopau, the Valley of Decision, is between Seleya and the Forge, and it was on the edge of that where Surak defeated D'Tan and the Sword shattered. Yon'Kahr is the old City-Temple inside the Forge, where Kolinahr first started before the War of the Raptor. Shi'Kahr is the Capital of Vulcan, and the Sister is the planet that orbits close to Vulcan, their only 'moon'. Other than that... I don't know. Joel?"

Before Joel could find his voice, Paul returned with his Bible. He had already found the place in it that he had been searching for. "Ummm, listen, guys. '...the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel.'"

Paul lowered the Bible once he had finished and looked at them all.

"What passage was that?" Cory choked out.

Joel whispered in the stillness of the room, "It's from chapter 3 of the Book... of Joel."

Jason fell to his butt. "Oh shit, I just thought of something. 'Sa'ren' means Redeemer, right?"

"So you told us," Sean replied.

"The name 'Joel' is Hebrew, and it directly translates as 'The Lord is God'. But, it is derived from 'go'el', which is Hebrew for 'the one who redeems', or 'who saves'."

Joel barely heard him.

He just hugged himself into Aaron's chest, and carried on shaking while the names of prophecy rolled through his mind...

'Sa'ren' - Redeemer.

'Joel' - The one who redeems.

'Ashaya-Sa'Kai-T'Khasi' - Beloved of Earth.

'Kor-shau T'Ran' - Preserver-Death.

'He shall change what Was to Be anew...'

... The Shaper...

"Kyle?" the Doctor called out as he walked into the Rec Room. Joel was on Cory's lap, playing some weird 'Joelish' game with his brother's fingers, and the five local Mikyvis were watching in rapt attention.

Nothing.

The Doctor waved his hand in front of Kyle's face. "God, you're a let down. A Vulcan logic game and a High Race gets disarmed," the little Time Lord giggled.

"What happen? You steal all of Jay's snacks again, Galli?" Dylan asked with a grin, his eyes not wavering from watching Joel.

"You didn't see me. No-one caught me. I did nothing!" the Doctor giggled back wickedly.

"That's not what the Tardis said..." Bryce giggled.

The Doctor sniggered, then said, "Don't believe the Tardis... he lies! Just like the Deer! They're in on it together, you know."

"Timmy says deer don't lie," Levi giggled.

The Doctor smiled briefly at him, pulled him over and into a cuddle, before saying, "You're one of the most pure souls I've ever met, Levis Hunter Richardson."

Kyle and Tyler smiled as they turned to watch. "Cute too," Tyler giggled.

"Especially when he blushes," Kyle added.

Tyler then looked into the Doctor's eyes. "Something's up. Anything serious?"

The Doctor shook his head. "No, not in the way you're thinking anyway. I've been getting a 'call' from an old friend. There's something he needs to inform me of, but for that, I have to take the Tardis into the Great White. And since I'm going there, I thought I'd kill three birds with one stone. See my friend,

teach you guys some more about Time and our role, and... well, basically my friend has been wanting to meet the Prince of the Mikyvis for a while, now."

"Daddy is King, so there are *three* Princes!" Dylan quipped as he rolled to avoid Kyle's swat.

"So," giggled the Prince of the Time Lords, "you guys want to come along?"

"Sure!" Tyler giggled as he watched Dylan trying to avoid Kyle. "Maybe we can get some tips on taking care of kids who take after their Uncles..."

"I HEARD THAT!" JJ yelled across the room. "Just because Levi is innocent don't mean we can't spoil our other nephews!"

"Let's get going before things get nasty," the Doctor giggled, as he waved his hand and the Tardis thrummed into existence.

The doors opened and in they ran to see Jay and Jack at the controls.

"Hey there, kiddos," Jack smiled as Bryce ran over and into his arms, "ready for some fun?"

"Sure! Can we go check on our pet dinosaurs while we're at it?" Bryce asked as he snuggled into Jack's lap.

"Pet what?!" Kyle asked, glaring at his son.

"Not this time," the Doctor laughed, "and Kyle? You can tickle it out of him later."

Jay sniggered and tried to look innocent.

"Wasn't me this time, Daddy!" Levi said honestly, while pointing at the nine year old Time Lord trying to hide behind his father.

"Hey, don't get me involved! Just because I'm immortal doesn't mean I want a High Racer to zap me! The Daleks did that enough last time!" Jack protested.

The Doctor tapped his hand on the arm of the Control Chair he was now sitting in, "I need your attention, guys, or you're going to freak out."

Kyle shot one last dirty look at Jay and Bryce before taking a seat. He made sure the others were also seated before nodding at the Doctor. "Go for it, Doc. Why would we freak out?"

"You exist in all universes at once, in a way. Yet you can still exist if you pulled yourself out of all those universes, correct?" the Eldest of All asked.

All but Levi tilted their heads in thought. Levi giggled as he nodded. "Yeah, just ask the Queen!"

"Right. Brakkii is like you in that regard. Now," the Doctor leaned forwards slightly, "when the Time Circuits become active and we start to Ride the Winds of Time, you'll be cut off from everything outsi-

de of the Tardis. And I do mean cut off. You cannot leave, and no being lower than the Guardian of Forever can enter, until we arrive at our destination. I just want you to know so you don't freak out when things go dark in your minds for a limited time. Don't worry about the guys we're leaving here. Peter is around and he can deal with things until we finish flying." He paused and looked at each of them, "You okay with this? None of you have experienced this, so if you choose to change your minds until a later date, I'd understand."

"That sounds KEWL; we'd find out what it's like to be blond!" Dylan giggled.

"I heard that!" came a load of voices from down the spiral staircase.

"Be careful," Kyle warned playfully, "I think we're outnumbered by Time Lords."

The Doctor giggled, "Well, there's only three full Time Lords right now, but most of the guys and gals down there have the power level of a Ferox. Some even more than that. Anyway; ready?"

The Mikyvis grinned and nodded.

"T! Let's fly!" the Doctor crowed out as he moved a few controls.

{It is my pleasure. Time Shifting.}

"Dang; that's the quietest my head has been... ever!" Kyle muttered. "Is this what it's like to not be a telepath?"

"I dunno, hon; I've felt emotions all *my* life," Tyler replied.

The Doctor grinned, "Yep. This is what it's like for non-telepaths and empaths. Time overpowers all other abilities. Welcome to the World of Time, my little friends. And you're about to get a crash course..."

Terra Main Transporter Room:

Joel had recovered from the shock of the Legend of Sa'ren enough that his first trip in a transporter caused him to go into fits of giggles. In fact, so worked up had he become that had climbed up on Cory's back and was kissing his brother's cheek over and over.

"I think you liked that, huh, Lil'elf?" Cory giggled.

"Yup yup yup!" the Vulcan bubbled.

The transporter chief was looking in wonder at the boy. "A laughing Vulcan; okay, I've seen everything!"

"If you only knew..." Brant muttered with a giggle as he tried to claim some of the hyper-elf cuddles.

Joel obliged and transferred over from one strong back to another. "Hi ho Fangie, AWAY!" he crowed out from his new piggy-back ride.

"As I said...." Brant giggled.

"I gather he is one of those you've rescued?" the chief asked. After getting a nod from all the boys, he looked shocked, "A Vulcan child in need of rescuing??"

"He was... lost," Sean said diplomatically. "We're searching for his Family, but 'til then, he's our Lil'elf."

"So I can see. Well - Welcome to Terra Main - Habitat Level, Clan Short. I never thought I'd meet any of you since I'm stationed here more often than not. I am Chief Petty Officer Howardson."

"Thanks for the welcome, Chief; I just hope this place can handle this group!" Cory giggled.

"We're Starfleet," the chief chuckled wryly, "our mission is to explore space, meet new life forms, and deal with anything the Universe throws at us... we don't have a chance against you boys, do we?"

"No," Timmy giggled before pouncing him. He was soon joined by Ricky and Paulie - soon as in a nanosecond later.

"I was right," came the muffled laughter from the man now on the floor as he struggled to find a way to cuddle three energetic children at once.

"Your console is beeping, Chief," Joel said from Brant's back as he looked over at the controls. "I think the next lot is ready to come up."

Cory laughed, "With your permission, Chief?"

"Feel free, Lieutenant," came the still muffled response. "From what my screen told me, all this level's transporter rooms are beaming up people from your home."

"They are," Cory sniggered as he worked the console and brought up JJ, Adam and yet more kids.

"Should I call for a Red Alert?" the chief asked jokingly as he managed to sit up. Timmy was on his back, now, and Paulie and Ricky were tucked under each arm. "Are we being invaded?"

"You are, and no need. We come in peace!" Joel giggled as he blinked at the man.

Chief Howardson laughed, "Oh, am I glad I'm off duty in a few minutes!"

"You can go now, Chief," came a new voice from the doorway as another petty officer entered. "I can take over for you."

"Thanks, Ben. This group of cute looking rugrats are from Clan Short, and this is their Patriarch, Lieutenant Cory Short," the chief said as he stood up, placing the three small children back on their feet.

"Pleased to meet you, and honoured," Officer Ben smiled at them. "I can take over now, Lieutenant; unless you wish to bring any more up?"

"No, that's it," Cory giggled. "Invasion Force is all accounted for. Let the attack begin."

"Glad *I'm* staying here, Chief," Ben smiled at his section leader. "You going to do your thing and give them a tour?"

The Chief looked at Cory with question.

"We'd like that, Chief," Cory smiled at him, "but only if you want to. I know that you're probably tired after a full shift."

"I am, but this wouldn't be work," the Chief replied seriously.

Joel slipped down from Brant's back and padded over to stand in front of the man. He looked up at him sadly. "What's wrong?" he asked as he took hold of one of the Chief's hands.

A single tear trickled down the man's face. "I'll... I'll tell you after, son. I'll tell you after." He coughed briefly and smiled at them, "Well, come on. You must be here to shop and see the sights. Let's be getting to it!"

Cory smiled and said, "Lead the way, Chief!"

The entire group of 15 kids and teenagers followed behind the man as he led them out of the large transporter room and down the hall towards the central section of the level. As they entered the central area, he said, "This is the promenade; here are shops, stores and merchandise from all over the Federation. The level you can see above us extends over this one right to the outer hull, and most of the restaurants and Entertainment sections can be found there. So, it depends on what you want to do first."

"Play area, play area, play area," the smaller kids started chanting, as led by Timmy.

Cory giggled, "That works fine for us. We've eaten an hour ago, so I think a post dinner snack is also needed."

Chief Howardson laughed, "The turbolifts are this way."

Five minutes later, and the tribe members had gone into a hyper frenzy as they saw the play area. Cory, JJ and the other parents in the group talked briefly with the area overseer and, once they had made sure their little ones would be taken care of, moved to the nearest snack-bar.

Inside the Tardis:***Time - Unknown:******Location - Unknown:***

"Now then," the Doctor giggled a moment later, "let's bring us to a stop. We're a little early for my friend, but I wanted to show you some things."

{Time Shifting over. Doors unlocked. Stasis Field in effect,} the Tardis said.

The Doctor got up and moved to the doors, prompting the others to follow. "I know you guys don't need to breath, but I've kept the Field up as *I* require it. Here. This is what our home Universe looks like from the Great White. Behold, Alpha Prime," he said as he threw open the doors.

The Great White was aptly named, yet it was not like space. It was not a white background with things in it, but more like a liquid or mist that moved and eddied. It was translucent, yet also opaque.

Ahead of them, they could see something large.

Very large.

It was a sphere. Black as night, yet rainbow effects rippled over it's surface. It seemed close enough to touch, yet as far away as forever.

"That's our home?" Levi asked with wonder. "It's beautiful! Why've I not thought about coming here before?" he asked himself quietly.

"Don't ask how far from it we are," the Doctor smiled, "not even I can absorb that type of number. Look over there. And there. That's the new Alpha One and Two..." he said as he pointed at two more spheres, seemingly a lot further away, and one was half behind the big one in front.

Kyle poked his head out of the door and looked up and down, then around. There were spheres everywhere. "Sweet!" he exclaimed. "This is awesome!"

"Now, look at it with your Sight, guys. See the physical and see Time as well," the Doctor prompted.

They did, and gasped. Levi started to giggle, "Just like the tree of Time I showed Tyne on Monday!"

In their mind's eye, the Spheres vanished to be replaced by what could only be called black trees. Only Alpha Prime had the least 'branches' due to the little fight Kyle and Tyler had had with Axon. The others made the Great White look like a wild forest.

"Okay, go back to normal sight," Jay giggled as he caught Dylan and stopped him from falling out of the doors in childlike wonder.

"Seeing it in the 'flesh' is always better than just with your mind, right?" the Doctor asked gently and happily as he watched the five little boys' faces light up in wonder.

Kyle could only hug the Doctor by way of a reply.

"Come on. A small snack as we wait for my friend. There's another thing I want to tell you before he arrives," the Doctor whispered to the over-awed Mikyvis as he closed the doors again.

"Got them ready," Jack said as he placed a tray of snacks down at a table near to them.

They all sat there in silence, munching on cookies, potato chips and Jelly Babies. Bryce had taken a major liking to the Jelly Babies, and was fighting the Doctor for each and every one of them.

Once Kyle had recovered his voice enough, he asked softly, "What's the other thing you wanted to teach us?"

Giving up and giving the eleven year old the whole bowl of Babies, the Doctor smiled and said, "Basically; Time is the most powerful thing there is, other than the Creator. It is a power that transcends all, is through all, and empowers all. You, like I and the other High Races, are outside of Time, yet even so, the rules around time affect us to one degree or another. We don't 'age' as such, but Time is still a power we have to tread carefully with.

"I have a natural affinity to Time, more so than any other High Race. That goes for those killed in the Great Time War as well. The Time Lords are named truly. Yet, there are rules not even I can break.

"I've heard from other High Races in the past that power over Matter is more important, and that is certainly what my friend's people believed. Yet, after they tried to disregard Time, they soon came around to the truth. The focus of each High Race in the Old Time before the War was always different, yet I and my kind always had to teach them about Time. As I teach you now. This is highly serious, guys. I am the High Race Custodian for the Teaching of the Time Directives. The Guardian of Forever entrusted me and the Time Lords with it, and we have a responsibility. I need to know: are you willing to learn now? If not, I shall give you 'time' to prepare. In that 'time', however, you will be barred from your abilities over Time. If you choose to not heed me after that 'time' has passed, then my orders are to remove from you and all your kind the power of Time. You would become Intermediate Middle Race. This is not a threat. The Daleks showed us that a High Race without the teaching will grow to become a threat to all. I cannot take that risk, especially as your 'Home Universe' is Alpha Prime. If the Heart of Creation is destroyed due to a mistake or evil act by a Mikyvis, then all life everywhere ends. Forever."

He paused and looked each of the five boys in the eyes. "I hope you understand what I'm saying. You are at that point now where you have to learn it. If I don't teach you, you'll grow too strong for me to change should your Race fall to evil. We are at the moment of choice now. I can pause you while you think with your brothers at home, or I can teach you, now, or I can remove your power forever. That last I don't ever want to do, but I will if I have to. The risks without the Teachings are simply too great. If you choose the Teachings now, Peter can be taught by me later. He is locked down. He is no danger."

He paused again.

"No rush, brothers. Talk it over as long as you want. I love you and trust you and I know the answer, but you need to know it for yourselves. Jack, Jay and I'll be over on the other side of the room," the Doctor said finally as he stood, and together with his Bonded and father, he started across towards another sofa.

They never made it. "Doc?" Kyle whispered out.

The Doctor turned and looked him in the eye, "Yes, little brother?"

"Teach us. *Now*."

The Doctor smiled and sat back down.

"Okay, the First Directive of all: There are three things in Creation that we can affect: Time, Matter and Energy. Of the three, Time is the greatest, then Energy, then Matter. If Time was the wind, matter was the windmill, then energy would be the power generated in the windmill. You take out the energy, and matter would stop moving, yet Time remains in motion. You stop Time, however, and whether or not energy is there, nothing happens. Time is First. Time is Master; and Time is to be respected above all..."

Terra Main:

The older kids settled down at the tables and chatted, as well as look out of the windows at the earth below and the stars beyond. The Chief sat with them, Joel on his lap. After five minutes of casual conversation, Joel pipped up, "You're sad, Chief. What's wrong?"

The man sighed. "Call me Gary, Joel." He hugged the Vulcan tighter for a second, then looked around at the others with them. At their table, Cory and Sean were seated, along with JJ, Adam, Brant and Austin. "It's a long, sad story," Gary murmured.

Joel looked into the man's eyes before turning around and pulling Gary's arms about his body. He kept his fingers interlocked with Gary's. "Share your pain, Chief. We can't help if you don't Share."

Gary sniffed for a second, then said, "Well, simply put, I was married and had two wonderful children; a son and a daughter. When my daughter was a year old, my wife and I broke up. The love had just... gone. She moved away from Earth to one of the new colonies, and she took the kids with her. We had arranged for each other to visit. Sometimes she'd come to Earth for a few months, sometimes I'd go there as duty permitted. We, for our kids benefit, made sure that they would always have us in their lives.

"Two years ago, that colony was attacked by Orions. They murdered my..." he could not stop his tears this time. Joel pulled on the emotions as they rose up and halved them immediately. He too started crying. Gary sobbed out, "My little boy and my princess... gone. My ex-wife, dead. The house was vaporized, there was nothing left. I was there with them at the time, but had gone out to get something from the shops as a present for my son's birthday. I was injured in that attack, but... I wish I'd died."

"Orions," Sean muttered. "Are you sure they are gone, Chief? Orions are child-slavers. Maybe..."

"I hope they are, Sean," Gary stated sorrowfully. "To think of them as enslaved would be worse than vaporised."

Joel gently let the man's emotions fold back to him. He sighed and wiped at his own eyes. "Sorry, Gary," Joel whispered.

Gary half smiled through his grief, "Thanks, son; but it's not your fault. You didn't do it, so you don't have to be sorry."

"Joel feels other people's pain as if it were his own, Chief," Cory said with a sad smile. "Just hug him harder and you'll feel better."

Tardis:

"Wow," Tyler giggled, "I'm just glad my mind's bigger than it was before. That was a head rush, Galli!"

"You should've tried being the one getting that lesson from the Guardian, Ty," the Doctor giggled.

There was a blinding flash of light by the door, and a man with pitch black hair, black eyes, and a mischievous expression appeared. He was dressed in a red and black uniform that the Mikyvis recognised from the minds of Joel, Jude and the Farnsworths as being a futuristic Starfleet Captain's uniform.

At his side was a seven year old boy, dressed the same, who had bright white-blond hair, yellow eyes, and a pouting expression. That expression fell away when he saw Levi. He smiled happily and waved.

"Wazzup, Quint!" Levi giggled. "Did they catch you... again?"

The boy, Quint, nodded, "Uh huh. I got tanned good this time."

"Don't tell lies, son," Q said sternly. "I only *wish* a good thrashing would help, but you know as well as I that it doesn't work with us."

"Yeah, Daddy," Quint nodded, "like otherwise the Tribunal would thrash you!"

"That's enough," Q said again, before looking up at the others... and winking. "He got caught by Q, and Q said I had to keep him with me for a while. Personally, the Streeeka had it coming, but Q, Q and Q disagreed..."

"I believe Joel would say 'Like Father like Son....'." Kyle commented in his best Vulcan. "You mean to tell me you *KNOW* them, Leev?"

Levi nodded. "Yeah, me and Quint like to go Universe hopping to see all the kewl stuff that the Federation don't know 'bout yet!"

"So *this* is the 'new friend' you wouldn't tell the rest of your ENTIRE RACE about?" Q asked, looking down at his son.

"Uh huh. He's nice, ain't he?" Quint giggled back as he ran over and hugged Levi.

"Well, well... secrets in the Continuum? I never thought I'd live to see the day!" the Doctor howled out through his laughter.

"Well... surprises are good for my people," Q conceded after a seconds thought. "It's about time we changed our 'world view' as the humans would say. Well then," he added, getting down to business. "A new High Race. Have you warned them, my good Doctor?"

"Nope. Kyle?"

"Yeah?"

"Don't worry. He does this every time."

"Does what?"

Q morphed into his natural energy state and Kyle gasped. He looked down and found himself naked. "What the...?"

He started laughing when, suddenly, he found himself *inside* the energy-Q.

"Mmm... interesting..." said Q

"... hahahahahaaa... HEY! That's TYLER'S!.... hehehehehe...."

"Just... oh, just like a human's... does it work the...."

"DON'T YOU DARE!" shouted Tyler.

Tyler found himself naked the next second, and then drawn into the energy that was Q.

"Ah... that's why... Hybrid..." mumbled Q as he continued to examine the two madly laughing eight year old Mikyvis.

"DAD! POP! Get a room!" Bryce giggled. "Dylan is too young to see that stuff!"

"You're older than me by 10 nanoseconds, Bry!" Dylan protested as he watched what Q was doing curiously.

Levi politely turned his back and chatted to Quint.

"Uncle Galli? You takin' notes?" Quint asked as he shifted his full attention to talking with Levi.

"Been there done... no, I'm not THAT bendable!" the Doctor giggled.

"It's GOOD to be Mikyvis!" Tyler and Kyle chorused between giggles.

The two boys suddenly found themselves back in their clothing and each over one hip of Q as he resumed human form. "They were only being tickled. Do your kids have dirty minds or something, Kyle?"

"The two youngest have been spending too much time with my older brother," Kyle replied with a smile.

"And I'm an angel," Levi giggled as he turned and smiled up at Q.

"So I see. Pity, you could have so much more fun," Q chuckled. He winked at Levi, however, just to show he was not serious.

The Doctor stood up, "So, before we get down to anything non-serious; what was it you needed, my friend?"

"Oh, not a lot. Just that I'm sending help to Alpha Prime. I can't get in there yet, but I can push things in from other places, and one of those new Universes had a group of people who need to be with the Clan in AP. I have pushed them in," Q explained as he set the two Mikyvis in his arms down gently.

"Really?" the Doctor asked with surprise. "I felt nothing enter."

"Well.... It's not there yet. It's caught in a Time Flux. Not sure when they will get there as I still can't get in myself. I need you or these cute kids to keep their eyes open for them," Q said thoughtfully.

"And they'll need help. The trip was... or will be... rough."

"What kind of help?" Levi asked curiously.

Q shrugged with disinterest, "Oh, you know. Save their lives, their starship, that type of thing. I can't get there to do it, so the details are up to you guys. All I know is they make it and all's going to end up okay. The details...? meh!"

Kyle shook his head. "This high race stuff gets weird!"

"You're only just working that out?" Q asked curiously. "Wait a few millennia..."

"Don't remind me; I'm gonna miss Cory and Sean. JJ and Adam will still be around, but Cor....." Kyle replied soberly.

Q raised an eyebrow. "Cory Patrick Short. Sean Michael Short. The Heart of the Nexus. Even if their path leads beyond the edge of Creation, you are aware that you can go to the Gateway?"

"Where?" the Mikyvis asked at once.

"He means what you call 'Heaven'. Where you go when you want to surprise your brother, Mikey?" the Doctor explained. "It's the Gateway. We cannot get further than that, but there we can see those who have passed over. You won't be truly apart from those who die, guys."

"Besides," Q added seriously, "all are destined for the same place... if this Third Age wins, that is. All become one when Time reaches completion."

"Don't make parting easier," Kyle said tearfully.

The Doctor nodded with understanding, "I know. However, don't count your lost chickens before they even get hatched, brother. There are things coming no-one knows about, thanks to Joel's presence. Wait and see."

"Joel?" Q asked. "It is this Joel that hides the Future of Alpha Prime?"

"Yes," Levi answered.

Q looked at the Doctor. "So... the Shaper has come at last."

"Yes, he has," the Doctor nodded.

"The Shaper... that poor, poor child. To change all Destiny, for everyone... but unable to change his own." Q looked sad for a moment, then, "I wonder if he will work it out in time..."

"To answer that," the Doctor said, "we would need 'outside' information. I'm not on speaking terms with the Power of Creation. Are you?"

"Nope," Q half smiled. Then seriously, he repeated himself, "Nope."

Terra Main:

They left the food court and collected their kids from the play area.

JJ and Adam collected Harley, Brad and 'Roo, while Cory and Sean gathered all their little imps. Austin and Brant helped them.

Joel giggled as the little kids made a game of being gathered. He hugged Kevin closer, and they in turn were being hugged by Mercury and Hermes.

"Come on, Aaron wants to do some shopping," Cory smiled down at Timmy once he had caught him.

"Where's the Chief?" Timmy asked as he gave his Uncle Joel a piece of his cotton candy. "Don't worry, Unca Joel; it's okay for Vulcans. The nice Tellarite said so."

Joel grinned as he took the candy while Sean answered his son, "He's gone to his quarters for the night. He said he'd come down to visit with the Clan tomorrow. It's his day off."

"Oh, kewl! Then he can come to J..." Ricky started to say, but Cory clamped a hand over the boy's mouth.

Joel didn't notice. The cotton candy was too enjoyable.

As they made their way towards the core of the shopping area, a loud voice rang out, "Lieutenants Cory and Sean Short; stand fast!"

"Ohoh... Daddy's in trouble..." CD giggled as the group came to a halt.

Joel peeked around Cory's body and saw a living legend walking towards them, dressed in a Starfleet Captain's uniform. "No way," he breathed.

Sean winced as he turned around, "Oh shit."

"If I get my ass chewed, *love*, you'll hear about it," Cory muttered out of the side of his mouth.

Joel stared as Captain Sulu stopped before them all. "Wow," he breathed again.

"Good evening, Captain Sulu..." Cory said with a smile, hoping that this was not about what he thought it might be.

"Good evening, Lieutenants, children," Sulu said, containing his feelings exceptionally well. He was, after all, an old friend of Captain Spock. "I have been looking forward to talking to you, Mr Short. Very much so," he continued, looking directly at Sean, yet addressing Cory.

"We've been looking forward to meeting up with you too, Sir." Cory replied, now sure that at least *he* would not need a pillow to sit on tonight.

Looking at the faces Sean was attempting to not show plainly, Sulu restrained himself and said, "I just bet you have. Cory Short, as senior officer, you are directly responsible for the actions of those men under you." Austin just managed to hold in a snigger. Sulu continued, "As such, I would like an explanation for this." He held out a datapad with a transcript from two months ago. "Care to explain how I ended up paying the cleaning and repair bill for someone else's car due to the actions of the then Ensign Sean Short?"

"I believe Commander Dodds was in charge of that mission... I was just a witness to that particular training exercise." Cory replied, barely restraining a giggle.

"I see," Captain Sulu responded. "However, I have already spoken with Commander Dodds, and he told me that he was 'Innocent as the day is long, Captain. I would *never* allow something as childish as that to go without comment.' Of course, being that I know the Commander so well, I believed him. In fact, he did not let it go without comment, did he?"

Sean couldn't help it. He started laughing. "N...No sir... he said, 'Well done'. Sir."

"Yes. I know. As such, I am exercising my authority over two junior officers. You are commanded to go directly to my Ship currently in Spacedock for your first tour of the Excelsior, you and your friends with you. While there, you, Sean, will pilot the ship on quick warp test to Pluto and back, while Cory will give the engine read outs a complete checking over. Is that clear, Lieutenants?" Sulu said firmly, a wide smile on his face.

Cory giggled. "As you wish, Sir... does your Chief have locktite for all of the bolts I need to put back in?"

Sulu was about to give a laughing response when his eyes fell on a now softly crying Vulcan child who was looking up at him in wide eyed, joyous wonder. He began to grow concerned. "Cory?" Sulu asked, plainly hurting inside at the shocking image of a supposedly emotionless person crying at the very sight of him.

Cory looked down and pulled Joel gently in front of him, wrapping his arms around Joel's chest protectively. "Captain Sulu, I would like you to meet Sean and my little brother, Joel Short. You might say he's been a fan of yours for a very long time."

Joel beamed a smile, even through his tears as Sulu nodded at his big brother. The Captain then knelt down and looked at Joel on eye level, "Pleased to meet you, Joel Short."

Joel couldn't contain himself. He flung his arms around Sulu's neck and latched on with his legs in a tight, limpet hug. "Captain Hikaru Sulu! It IS you! You... you... you are one of my heroes! I always dreamed you'd come and save me; you and Kirk and Spock and all the others... but you were always just a TV show... you weren't real!! But you ARE... Captain Sulu..." he finished, sobbing into Sulu's shoulder.

"I'll explain later, Sir." Sean replied at the look on Sulu's face. "Just accept that *anything* that he tells you is the truth."

Sulu nodded, and increased his hold on the child. "Yeah," Joel whispered into Sulu's ear, "I know all about your adventures. Everything, even stuff you didn't put in your log."

"You should hear some of the stories he's told us about Uncle Jim..." Cory added, somehow able to hear Joel's whisper.

Joel giggled. "Is Captain Kirk like that, Uncle Sulu?" he asked, half hoping he could get away with calling this great man something that personal. "Does he have girlfriends everywhere?"

"I think he's still trying to hook up with someone on the surface of the Sun; but otherwise you're right," Sulu replied. "Now, are you ready to have an adventure on my ship?"

Joel grinned, and sighed inwardly. Sulu had increased his hug the moment he had been called 'uncle'. "Can we bring Jude too? He'd love to see a Starship!"

"Sure. Cory, call him for us, and then call your Mom. Let her know what's going on," Sulu stood, then, with Joel in his arms. After getting the small boy comfortably over one hip he gestured to the nearest turbolift. "Come on, gang. The Excelsior awaits!"

20 minutes later:

"Lady Teri, please report to the Command Deck. I repeat..."

"What could that be about?" Dan muttered as Teri raised her communicator to her lips.

"Teri Short here. What is the problem?" she asked.

"Stand by for Emergency Transport. Three life forms acquired. Energising."

Dan, Teri and John disappeared from the cafe they were at and reappeared in the Command Centre of Terra Main. The station was on Red Alert, and a large amount of speaking and starship noises was coming from the speakers.

"What's going on?" John demanded loudly, over the noise.

Admiral Cartwright ran up to them, "Please. Follow me to my office. We have an issue."

Teri looked at him, fear rising in her, "Is it about the Excelsior?"

He nodded, but before he could say more, the sound of talking from the speakers became more urgent.

"Joel, the Newton's Chief Engineer saying he can eject the core and anti-matter, but it'll explode seconds after leaving the Warp field. The storm..."

It was Kevin Thompson. Joel's voice came a second later, *"Tell him to do it!"*

Teri's jaw dropped open. "What the hell! What is happening, Admiral?" she demanded firmly.

"They are rescuing the crew of the Newton," he answered quickly.

"Can we have visual?" Dan asked, his heart sinking. His sons and grandsons were on board.

Cartwright nodded and signalled the Comm officer. The screen flickered to life and they saw Sean at Navigation with Joel standing next to him between him and the Conn officer. Kevin, Timmy and Ricky were in the Command Chair, Sulu and his first officer were unconscious and Adam was at the Science station, standing over a concussed Andorian officer. Medics were milling around the Bridge while the other children, except for Cory, were gathered behind the Command Chair and huddled together.

The entire Bridge was heaving as if tossed on a storm at sea.

Kevin looked up at Joel's back, *"He's refusing. He's saying only a Captain can order that, and he won't accept we are captains!"*

Cory's voice came over the ship's internal communications, and it much relieved Teri to hear him; even if he was angry. *"Fucking hell! As of October 27th, 2004 at 2134 hours, I, Fleet Commander Cory Patrick Short grant both Joel Short and Kevin Charles David Thompson the full ranks of Captains in the Clan Short Fleet and Vulcan High Command. There! Starfleet jar heads be damned!"*

Dan reached and squeezed Teri's shoulder comfortingly. "They'll be okay, Teri."

She could not reply. She was feeling sick to her stomach. Her lips moved, and all John and Dan made out was, " ... we need you. I need you..."

"Newton, did you copy that?" they heard Kevin demand of the other ship.

"Aye, sir. Ejecting in five seconds. I hope you know what you're doing!" came the response from the Newton.

Teri saw Joel's eyes grow focused, *"Shields ready to compensate! Cory, You need to watch our core, this could be..."*

What John, Dan and Teri saw next would be forever etched in their minds.

The screens around the Bridge started exploding, and more than a few Officers were felled.

What made Teri's heart nearly stop, however, was when the Main Helm exploded. Sean and the Lieutenant both dived to either side and were almost unscathed.

But her Vulcan child - he was lifted up and away by the blast.

The viewscreen they were watching went dark, but the sounds remained.

The only sound that registered for Teri was the sound of a small, frail Vulcan body slamming into the deck with terrific force...

Editor's Notes:

Now that was not a good thing. We have ourselves a situation here. It looks to me as if there is not even a cliff from which to hang. Here I was all warm and fuzzy about this cool chapter, and then you have something like this happen. Where are the cliffhanger police when you need them?

To recap just a bit, Joel and Kevin have managed to get their heads wrapped around the fact that they really do love each other and help make each other become whole.

We have finally met the ever powerful Q and Quint as well.

Now what will happen? I would guess that we will discover more in the next chapter. That of course is my optimistic view.

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher

Chapter 9**"Enterprise"**

Forward:

Special thanks goes out to Twolf - You found the song that I had been looking for without knowing. Joel now has his signature song, and I am forever grateful to you for helping me find it.

Iluvantir

20 minutes before:

By the time they had reached the starship, Sulu had received a crash course on what Joel and Jude knew and how, and a plan was already forming. As they entered the ship from the gangway that was soft docked to the hull, the Chief Engineer, Commander Jamieson, was quick with absconding with the famous Cory Short. Jude and Billy-Joe were quickly grabbed by Cory and together they vanished after the Engineer.

Sean giggled, "It'll be hard work getting them off the ship, Captain."

"I'll beam them out if I have to," Sulu laughed as they all made their way towards the bridge. He tapped a comm once they got into a lift and called ahead, "Sulu to the Helm. Take the ship out of Spacedock, and prepare for a quick mission."

"Aye, aye, Captain," came a female's voice from the wall.

"Were you serious, Uncle Sulu?" Joel bubbled from his arms. "You're gonna let me command the ship?"

"You better believe it, Joel."

Joel looked down into Kevin's eyes. His boyfriend was grinning up at him in complete happiness. "Can Kevvy sit with me on the chair too?" he asked Sulu hopefully.

Sulu nodded as he lowered Joel to his feet, "Of course. It's big enough for you both."

"Captain?" Mercury tapped Sulu's arm with his paw.

Sulu smiled at him, "Yes?"

"Where's the zero-g litter-box? I should have gone before we came on," the cheetah smiled at him with a toothy grin.

Sulu's laughter was the first thing those on the bridge heard as the lift doors opened. Joel led Kevin out in time to see the other turbolift on the opposite side open to allow JJ and Adam and the rest to pile on to the Bridge.

"Invasion has begun, Captain!" Sean giggled.

"Captain, we have cleared Spacedocks," Lieutenant Wilbur said from the Helm as she turned to face Sulu.

Sulu smiled his thanks. "Stations, gentlemen," he ordered the kids, pointing towards the command chair and the now vacating helm position. He watched as Sean moved to take his place at the Helm and as Joel and Kevin squashed themselves into the Command chair. Once he was sure they were ready, he motioned for the others to gather near.

"Joel, your mission is to take us to the Pluto One station, initiate contact and make sure all is well, and return to Spacedock," he said, keeping his face passive and acting as if this was a normal, everyday mission.

In reality, the whole thing had been arranged between himself, Admiral Morrow and Captains Kirk and Evans once they were made aware of the Clan's presence on Terra Main. The children needed something fun and exciting to do after all that had happened. "This is a priority one mission, Acting Captains Short and Thompson. You have the Bridge and all limits have been removed. You have ten minutes to familiarise yourself with the consoles, then the mission begins," Sulu finished.

Joel grinned at at him. "I know this ship better than the makers, Acting Admiral Uncle Sulu," he giggled. "Captain Kevvy? Can you pull up the system planetary positions please?"

"Aye, Captain Jo'," Kevin giggled in return as he started on the arm controls of the chair.

JJ giggled as he slipped to the Communications station. He got the duty officer's attention and softly said, "Make sure that this is being relayed to all Starship Captains in the Terran system, as well as to the Enterprise and Admiral Morrow - if you need an override this is per orders from Clan Short Security."

"Aye, sir," Lieutenant Gibson whispered back with a small laugh. "I've already got it recording. I thought this might be required."

"Bridge to Engineering. Acting Chief Engineer Short, are the warp engines ready?" Joel asked as he depressed the comm button on his side of the chair. He had heard JJ's whisper, and was determined to put on a good show. All his heroes would be listening now!

"Aye Captain; I just used the last roll of Duct Tape from the Ship's Store!" Cory replied with tickle-induced giggles.

The sound of a raspberry being blown from the Command Chair on the bridge over the comm system was something the crew had never heard before. Joel had not just opened a link to Main Engineering. He had opened the comm to the whole ship. Then he left it open.

Sulu smiled to himself. All his alpha shift crew were on duty right now. Both Cory and Sean had proved themselves well able to handle their current positions. Only Joel and Kevin in command were a possible problem, yet that was completely mitigated by the rest of the crew knowing what to do.

He decided to let them have their fun.

He knew his ship and crew. He trusted both.

Joel turned the chair to face him. "All is ready, Acting Admiral. Permission to take full command."

Sulu nodded. "Permission granted. Computer, transfer joint operation command code for Excelsior to Acting Captain Joel Short, and Acting Captain Kevin Thompson at this time. Retain override codes for my own use. Mark."

'Mark. Starship Excelsior now under Joint Operations Command. Captains Short and Thompson have command,' came the computer's response.

"Full impulse until we have broken Earth Orbit," Joel ordered feeling a thrill of excitement run up his spine.

"Aye, sir," Sean replied, a huge smile on his face as the starfield on the viewscreen shifted as the large ship turned on its axis and started to move.

Joel bounced lightly on his seat with Kevin. He was in space. Space! He couldn't believe it.

"We have cleared the gravity well, Captain," Sean said a moment later, "we are now free and clear."

Joel glanced at the excited Kevin and nodded. "Helm," Kevin said, trying to be serious, "set course for Pluto One station."

"Aye, sir," Sean giggled back as he punched in the commands.

"Set speed to Warp 6," Joel giggled.

It was time: time to see for real what it looked like when you go into Warp.

"Engage!"

Joel's breath caught in his throat as he witnessed the light-mottle effect on the viewscreen as the Starship hammered towards the light-barrier - and broke it. Then, starlines. Lots of them.

"Wow!"

"I'm not sure this console has a 'Wow' button Sir." Sean giggled.

"What's our ETA?" Kevin asked Sean through his own sniggers as Joel poked his tongue out at his brother.

Quickly checking his instruments, Sean answered, "At current speed, four minutes."

Joel smiled as he checked the read out on the panel next to him, "Mmm, Pluto is on the other side of the system; we going over the top?"

"You bet we are!" Sean answered, giggling.

Adam was standing near to Communications when the station beeped. Lieutenant Gibson checked the readings and turned to Sulu. "The USS Newton is approaching their target, Captain. They are updating all starships in the sector with five minute mission reports."

"Good. That is the largest Ion Storm to come into our space in fifty years," Sulu replied. "Keep me updated."

"Ain't that dangerous?" Joel asked as he checked the information on the Newton. "It's an Oberth Class - in a Class 8 Ion Storm?"

Sulu smiled at him, "They are only taking readings from the edge, Joel. You're right, they wouldn't be safe going into that type of storm. I would need a very good reason to take *this* ship into one."

"Oh, okay," the Vulcan smiled up at the man before turning back the viewscreen to watch the starlines.

A minute or so later, and Sean said, "Approaching Pluto One Station."

"Drop out of Warp and move to standard orbit," Kevin piped up as he hugged Joel closer on their shared command chair.

"Aye, Captain," Sean smiled.

As soon as the ship dropped from warp, Joel turned to Lieutenant Gibson, "Open a channel to the station and..."

An urgent sounding beeping coming from the Communications console interrupted him. The lieutenant quickly took the incoming message and turned with wide eyes to Sulu, "The Newton is in trouble and is broadcasting an urgent mayday, sir."

"What has happened?" Sulu responded urgently while Joel pulled Kevin from the command chair. If they were going on a rescue, then the Captain needed it more than they.

"The storm is a Class 10, sir. Only when they got within sensor distance did they notice the fluctuations. The tail edge of it has disrupted their anti-matter containment and they are fighting to stabilize it," Gibson answered quickly.

Sulu turned to the helm and looked at Sean, "Red Alert, all hands to stations! Helm, set co-ordinates for the Newton and engage, maximum warp."

As the klaxon started to sound, Sean became all business, "Aye, sir. Maximum warp. Intercept eight minutes at current speed."

"What's the top speed, Joel?" Kevin whispered in his friend's ear as Sulu made the announcement over the ships comm about the rescue.

"Excelsior Class? At this point in time, max is Warp 8.7," Joel murmured back. "Sir?" he asked Lieutenant Gibson, "How long do we have? Did the Newton give an estimate?"

Gibson nodded at him sickly, then looked at Sulu who also nodded. The lieutenant answered Joel, "We've got five minutes to get to them. We're the closest ship, and it will take us seven minutes thirty seconds..."

"Shit," mumbled Joel. He then moved to the Science station, where the Andorian Science Officer, Commander Zarath was busy. "Uncle Sulu, I need access to your systems."

"You and Kevin still have them. Use whatever you need," Sulu answered. Going by the little he had been told on the way from the station to the Excelsior earlier, maybe the kid had an idea or six to help.

"Thanks," Joel half smiled. He then started typing at a furious pace. "Joel to Cory; bring up screen 345.2 and check my design. I need you to remodulate the warp field in-situ while I re-adapt the Inertial Dampeners and S.I.F. Get Jude to help you, he should recognise some of this from 'Deep Space Nine'."

After a few seconds pause, Cory replied. "Got it bro. We're checking it now."

Ten seconds later, Jude sent back, "I'm modulating this section, segment 24, Joel. Check me please?"

Joel did so, "You have it, bro. Good memory."

Cory then added. "Rework segment 43.72A - I've made modifications on the system that do not show on the schematics. Live view should give you the right information."

Joel did so. "Brilliant! That's great, Blondie. Run it now. You keep your eye on the Dilithium, and let Jude do the modulation. He knows what to do." Then he whispered to himself, "Oh, Picard, you'd be proud..."

Joel started working on both the Structural Integrity Field and Inertial Dampeners, but also addressed the Andorian next to him, "Commander, do we have an exact fix on the Newton?"

"Yes. They have been pulled into the storm. Transporters will be non-functional," Commander Zarath replied.

"Okay. Captain Sulu?" Joel called out, "I need you to trust me, here. Sean?"

"Go for it, Elf," came the tense response from Sean as Sulu added, "I do, Joel."

"I am sending Kevvy over with co-ordinates. I want you to drop this ship out of Warp on that point and full reverse the engines. We will be literally on top of that Oberth Class ship. I'll deal with keeping this bucket of bolts together, you just park her on that dime. Got it?" Joel called back as he handed a padd to his boyfriend.

"Hey!" Sulu protested. "She's not a... how did you know what Scotty called...?"

"No time, Uncle. Sean? Copy?" Joel interrupted, now focused again on his remodulation.

"Give me the word; I'll park it on the tip of a needle if you need me to," Sean replied. He took the padd from Kev, and a few seconds later announced, "Ready. Arrival in 2.7365 minutes... MARK."

The XO, Commander Susan Bateman, moved closer to Sulu and whispered, "Why are we letting children run things, sir?"

"Look at the readings, Susan," he whispered back, "Our warp speed has already picked up beyond warp 9 and is still increasing. Also, I have some information regarding the young Vulcan from his brothers. He knows what he is doing."

"If you say so, sir," she answered, standing close to the Command Chair and watching.

A minute later, and Joel was finished with the remodulation of the S.I.F and E.D. He handed control over to Commander Zarath. "You just need to keep this adaptation within these limits," he explained. "I'll deal with surviving the suicide stop we're gonna make."

"I understand the theory, but we cannot enter an Ion Storm at warp," he replied, looking deeply concerned.

"No, we cannot. Not at this *time*, we can't. But, I'm gonna cheat. A little future tech level won't hurt, will it?" the excited Vulcan grinned back at him before moving away. He ran over and stood between Sean and the Conn officer, a Lieutenant Hines.

"Jude? How's the new warp field looking?" Joel called out.

"She's online. Speed now up to Warp 9.5," he called back.

"Sweet. Cory, don't let the Chief, down there, have a shit fit, but I'm gonna take what you and Jude're doing and... well, you'll see. Oh, and if you need a pee break, hold it. We ain't got the time."

"Gee, thanks," Cory muttered back.

Joel pulled up on the screen between Helm and Conn the controls for the Warp Field and the Deflector and Defence Shield - and started merging them into one.

"Dropping from Warp in 5... 4..." Sean started to count. The ship heaved suddenly and violently as they entered the Ion Storm. A number of people were thrown to the ground, and it was only Sean holding Joel against his side that stopped the little Vulcan from being one of them.

Joel hardly noticed, so intent was he on the shields and Warp Field.

"MARK!" Sean yelled as he brought the starship to an almost dead stop in the middle of energized hell.

"Extending Warp field and shields to the Newton," Joel said as the systems around him screamed out warnings. The ship itself heaved continuously beneath his feet.

Kevin's voice came from behind him, "Medical to the bridge. Six with injuries, three serious. The Captain is down."

"Where's the XO?" Joel asked Sean.

Kevin answered for him, "She's on the floor too, Jo'. So's Commander Zarath," The ship heaved again, sending Kevin to the floor. He staggered back up, "They and Sulu are out of it."

"Shit," Joel muttered. "Kevin, get the transporter guys working and take the chair. We have our own universe around both ships. They can beam those guys out now!"

Kevin just started issuing orders while Joel, Sean and Lieutenant Hines worked on keeping the ship together.

"I hope the dilithium holds," Joel muttered, "this is going to fracture them soon!"

"I dunno how much more a' dis she ken take!" Cory giggled over the comm. "You worry about the ships, bro; I've got crystal babysitting under control. I modified the force container while Sean was taking his time getting us here."

"Good, but be aware; this storm has only just kicked up to level 10. The power going through those crystals will increase the longer we're here," Joel called back as Sean steadied him after another violent tremor. "How long do you estimate we have left?" he asked his brother as he quickly turned to check on Kevin. His boyfriend was in the Captain's Chair still issuing orders, but this time with a frightened Timmy and Ricky cuddled with him.

"Two minutes until it has an effect; critical in no more than five... twice the odds we would have had." Cory replied seriously.

"He's right, Joel," Jude added quickly, "the quicker we can get them beamed out, the better. The Warp field is hard to keep steady, especially with the shields mixed in with it."

"Acknowledged, guys. Just hold her together a little longer!" Joel turned to look at Kevin, "Kev, how are we on the transporters?"

"Half the crew is off. Another two minutes, but the engineers are saying they are staying. They cannot eject the core, and they are babysitting a breach over there. They cannot beam out or we'll both go boom!" Kevin called back, then, "Repair teams to Deck 12, section 6. Hull breach. Internal shields are holding," he ordered through the comm.

"Houston, we have a minor case of shit-storms," Joel murmured, facing the controls again.

Sean looked at him oddly. "Houston?"

"Never mind. Wrong world," Joel smiled. "Got it! Cory? Can you pass me phaser power control through the Helm station?"

"You got it... now."

Joel's hands flew over the controls, re-routing the power. Then, "Commander Data, eat your positronic heart out! Engaging Tractor Beam!"

If anyone could have been outside to see it, they would have marveled when a beam of energy rippled down from the secondary hull of the *Excelcior* to impact over the engineering section of the *Newton*. How it was kept together within the chaotic powers of the storm would likely remain a mystery forever, but down it, energy was being funnelled directly to the *Newton*'s systems.

"Joel, the *Newton*'s Chief Engineer's saying he can eject the core and anti-matter, but it'll explode seconds after leaving the Warp field. The storm..." Kevin called over.

"Tell him to do it!"

After a few more seconds, Kevin came back with, "He's refusing. He's saying only a Captain can order that, and he won't accept we are captains!"

"Fucking hell!" Cory's voice sounded over the comm. "As of October 27th, 2004 at 2134 hours, I, Fleet Commander Cory Patrick Short grant both Joel Short and Kevin Charles David Thompson the full ranks of Captains in the Clan Short Fleet and Vulcan High Command. There! Starfleet jarheads be damned!"

Sean giggled through his nerves, and quipped, "I love it when he's angry!"

"Save your hormones for later," JJ called over as he helped the medical teams treat the injuries on the Bridge, "We don't care about you being horny right now, Horsey!"

"Newton, did you copy that?" Kevin demanded.

"Aye, sir. Ejecting in five seconds. I hope you know what you're doing!" came the response from the other ship.

"Shields ready to compensate! Cory, You need to watch our core, this could be..." Joel never finished his sentence. The ejected core exploded and the waves of added energy slammed into both ships from below. The console Joel was at exploded in his face. Both Sean and Lieutenant Hines were burned by the flash of power, but Joel was blasted off his feet and hit the floor violently. The internal alarms started to increase, and many other consoles around the bridge also exploded and the ship rocked violently, throwing most people to the ground.

"Shields holding," Hines said as Mercury staggered forwards to pull Joel into his arms.

"I'm 'kay," Joel mumbled, repressing the pain he felt inside himself. Years of practice came into play as he managed to keep the pain he was in from showing in his face. He raised his hand to his forehead and

it came away wet and green, for it had been gashed open. "Kevvy?" he called weakly, pain lancing through his abdomen.

"Last of the crew is off now!" Kevin called back. "Sean, get this ship out of here!"

"Putting the pedal to the metal!" Sean called out.

"Good." Kevin then looked at Joel, and he paled. "Bring him here, Merc. Medic, check Joel, NOW!"

Joel was quickly sat with Kevin on the Command Chair, but waved off the approaching medical aid. "Sort out the Captain. We need him more," he managed to say through clenched teeth.

Chief Engineer Jamieson suddenly called up, "Jude is down with a broken arm, and Cory is dazed. Captain Short, I cannot hold the modulation; I just don't understand what those two were doing. The dilithium is beginning to fracture. We need to get out of here NOW!"

"I'm trying!" Sean called back, then, "Oh, shit... disengage that fucking tractor beam! We're anchored to the Newton!"

"Done," Adam said as he rushed forwards and took Joel's place.

"Sean," Joel whispered weakly.

"Yeah, Elf?" came the concerned response as the viewscreen showed the ship pulling away from the mortally wounded Newton.

"Warp... go to warp... the field is still active..."

"Okay. Hold on, guys... MARK!"

The ship shuddered for one final second, and then vanished into warp. Seconds after, the Newton imploded due to the stresses of the storm.

USS Hood - Warping to the Rescue Zone:

'This is the Excelsior to any Starfleet ships in range. We are in need of urgent medical assistance. Please respond.' came the frightened voice of a child over the comm.

Captain Dafydd Evans turned to Tulek, "Tell them we are two minutes from their location, and let them know we're not alone. My son's ship is with us."

"Yes, Captain," Tulek answered. "Doctor Fisher has reported that sickbay is standing ready."

"Good," Dafydd said as he turned back to face the viewscreen, on which he could see the VSO Interceptor ship ahead of him. "Very good."

USS Excelsior:

Kevin was still seated on the Command Chair, and Joel was with him. Joel, however, was not fully conscious, and was quietly crying into his boyfriend's shoulder.

Cory was now on the Bridge, a bandage wrapped around his head, and a small patch of red showing above his left eye. "Well, Warp speed lasted all of ten seconds, but... we're out of that mess."

JJ looked up from the Communications console. Lieutenant Gibson had already been taken off the Bridge badly injured when a screen nearby had exploded. "The Hood is incoming, as is the 'Dragon'. Jace and his dad."

Cory breathed a sigh of relief, then turned to Joel and Kevin. "You two need to go to sickbay as well."

"No," Joel replied, his voice disjointed, "We're the captains until Uncle Sulu... comes back... the ship won't respond without us here... we have the codes... we can't transfer."

"Besides," Kevin added, his own face tense with worry, "sickbay's a little full right now."

"Here they come!" Sean called from the Helm.

They all turned to the viewscreen to see two ships drop out of Warp in front of them. The Hood immediately engaged a tractor beam to steady the wounded Excelsior.

JJ answered the incoming call. It was Jason.

"Well, I can't leave you alone for ten seconds. There I was, snogging Nathan, and you go pull a joyride on us," Jason grinned at them from the viewscreen before getting serious. "I'm beaming over seventy of my Vulcan crew members to man your stations. Also, I've been given all overrides for Excelsior. I'll take command until we're back in Terra Main. Well done, guys. I'm shitting my pants at what you did, but well done."

"Just wait until I make you watch it from this end." Cory replied. "Send over every bone-cutter you got; we need them."

"Doing so. And my father is as well. Uncle Graham is coming over in about ten seconds, and he's the best next to McCoy," Jason said. "See you in five."

The view screen went dark.

"Sirs," Lieutenant Hines said, staring at his controls.

"Yes?" Kevin answered.

"We have another ship incoming, but not from Earth..."

Cory moved over, then giggled.

"It's the Enterprise!" Cory shouted with glee. "Open a priority channel."

"Channel open, Sir."

"Enterprise, this is Fleet Commander Cory Short. I request all available Medical personnel stand by to assist us. We have numerous Clan and Starfleet injured due to a successful rescue. Acknowledge."

The viewscreen came back to life, and Captain Kirk came into view, "Acknowledged, Commander. Bones is already getting the teams ready, and Scotty is at the Transporter. We'll bring over the most serious at your Doctor's orders." He paused, then smiled at Cory, "Damn, boy. You did well."

Joel, still seated and a little behind where Cory was standing, smiled. "It's Captain Kirk... my captain..." he whispered weakly before his eyes rolled in his head. He slowly fell from the chair.

"Not me, Sir; one of my newest Captains. I was just the Engineer." Cory replied at that same moment.

Kirk, however, had seen what Cory had not. "If it was that child, son, then you'd better help him," he said, pointing behind Cory.

"CORY!" Kevin's yell came a second later. He was kneeling next to Joel, and checking his pulse, "Cory! He's hardly breathing!"

Cory spun around. "MEDIC!" he screamed as he knelt next to Joel and placed a hand on Joel's chest.

"Damn it, Jim," came a voice from the viewscreen. "I'm with Scotty - are we near enough yet?"

"Yes, Doctor," Spock answered from his station. "You can beam directly to the Excelsior's Bridge from here."

Cory hardly heard this, so great was his worry for his pale faced little brother. The next thing he knew, Bones was pulling him away.

"Move it, son. Unless you want me to confine you to quarters, and yes, I have that authority even over Vulcan officers!" Bones rushed out.

"Just fix him, Doc; and THAT is an order!" Cory replied with tears rolling down his face.

Bones let that slide, for now. He started scanning. "Shit. Enterprise, two to beam directly to sickbay!"

Cory watched as his little brother and Bones vanished. He was about to turn and demand to Kirk that he get beamed over as well when Jason Evans beamed in.

"I know," Jason said as Cory was about to speak, "The active call with Uncle Kirk I've been monitoring. You and the guys get down to the transporter room and beam over. I'll take things from here."

Sean quickly joined Cory, JJ, Adam and Brant, and they gathered up the frightened Rugrats. Mercury and Hermes came over from helping the medics and together they made their way off the bridge.

Jason looked around. "Damn, when the guys do something, they really do it," he mumbled to himself as he took in the complete chaos that remained of the ships consoles. He turned and asked, "Who is the senior officer left on his feet?"

"I am, Sir," Lieutenant Hines answered from the helm where he was watching the two Starfleet ships and the Vulcan one hold the Excelsior in place with their tractor beams. "I'm way down the chain, but I'm the only one left up here."

"Then you're now my XO," Jason said as he sat in Sulu's Command Chair. "Computer, Override Access and transfer command of Excelsior to me. Code 835, VSO."

'Please identify yourself,' the computer responded.

"Division Commander Jason Evans, Voice of the Dragon," he answered.

'Excelsior is now under your command.'

"Lieutenant," Jason ordered as he looked at the young officer, "I need a full report on what's good or not on board, and a list of injured and dead, if any."

"Aye, Captain," Hines answered as he moved from the helm, where he was certainly no longer needed, and moved to the stations at the rear of the Bridge.

"Captain?" the young boy quirked an eyebrow at him as he passed.

"You're now in Command, sir. Starfleet is like the Naval Services on Earth; you take command, you're the Captain regardless of your rank," Hines answered with a grin as he sat down at the console and started gathering the required data.

Jason giggled, "Forgot about that. The Vulcans do things so much more different. Okay," he tapped the comm button on the chair, "Bridge to Engineering. Commander Jamieson, do you copy?"

"Aye, sir. *How can I help... if help is possible,*" came the shaken voice of the Commander.

"How are the engines?"

"The engines themselves are in very good order, sir. The dilithium, however: blown, fractured and useless. We won't have Warp capabilities until we can replace them all, and refuel the Anti-Matter. I had to eject that once we left Warp as containment was failing."

"Understood. Are Jude Lee and Billy Joe McAllister still there with you?"

"No. They had a call a few seconds ago, and are off to the Transporter Room to meet up with Lieutenant Short."

"Good. Okay, you have all the modifications made to the Warp field on record, Commander?"

"Aye, I do. Those done by young Cory Short match with what he'd done before, and what he did with the crystals to buy us more time are simply genius. Those done by the Vulcan child and Jude, though; they are something else. I've been studying them, and..."

"Don't take this the wrong way, Commander, but stop doing so now. Seal up the records of those modifications from Joel and Jude and transfer the data to my starship. They are on a need-to-know basis and covered by Red One as of this time," Jason said firmly.

"Understood. I shall do as ordered immediately."

Jason nodded to himself before closing the comm and moving to the science station. Once there, he did the same for all Joel's updates; sealed them, and transmitted them to his VSO ship.

"I have your report, Captain," Hines said a few minutes later. "Over fifty percent of the crew injured in some way or another, forty nine of them seriously. The Captain is now on his feet and helping in Sick-bay. No fatalities from our ship, and none from the Newton; however, all the Newton's crew are injured severely. The worst hurt is Captain Joel Short. Sir... he's not expected to survive, if the report from Enterprise is accurate..."

VHC Yoshuhlnak, ten minutes later:

Telez finished reading the report from Jason and looked up at the split screen viewscreen before him, "Uncle Daf, Uncle Jim; we're going to have to do a three-fold Warp field tow to bring Excelsior back home. Maximum speed will be Warp Four, and we're only going to get that due to the upgrades on the Hood and my ship's Vulcan engines."

"Understood, Tel," Kirk said. *"Scotty will liaise with Lieutenant Everett on the Hood to adapt our engines as well."*

Telez smiled, "That will work. You've had some of the upgrades already, so the formula I'm going to use will be a match to your Warp Field. Uncle Daf? Anything missing?"

"No," Dafydd said with a smile, *"You've covered it all, I believe. Jim, how's little Joel doing?"*

"Not well. Bones is operating now. Internal haemorrhaging," Kirk answered softly.

"I shall pray to Shi'zar for him," Telez said softly, a tear running down his cheek.

An hour later - CIC - Rec Room:

The Tardis thrummed into existence, and the Mikyvis and the Doctor walked out.

"Something's wrong," Kyle said immediately.

Levi started looking around, "Where's everyone? They shouldda been back from Terra Main by now!"

Seth's voice shouted from Main CIC, "Get in here, guys! We need ya!"

The six boys vanished and appeared next to the majority of the Orlando Clan, for almost everyone was crowded around Seth. Kyle pushed his way to the front, his face getting pale with worry, "What's happening?"

Seth looked at him, his face grey and taunt. "There was a rescue, and Cory and the rest were on the Excelsior, and went in to help. It's... oh, Kyle! It's Joel!"

USS Enterprise - Coming into Dock at Terra Main:

Cory was in the Sickbay waiting room with his family, Jude and Billy Joe, and he was pacing back and forth. It had been an hour since Joel had been taken to surgery, and they had heard nothing in that time.

"Cory, either sit down or else I'm going to have you taking a nap on the nearest Bio-bed," Dr. Chapel scolded softly.

Tearfully, Kevin stood up and moved towards Cory. He stopped in front of him, and looked up into Cory's bright, pain filled eyes. "I need Cory hugs," he said simply as huge tears trickled down his face. "Joel loves your hugs, and he's... please...."

Cory stopped and wordlessly pulled Kev into his arms. "I know, lil' bro," he managed to whisper after a minute.

The door hissed open and Bones walked in, still in his operation outfit. His face was sober.

Cory was unable to speak; he just stared over Kevin's shoulder pleadingly at Bones.

"Cory... boys..." Bones started, then took a deep breath to contain his feelings.

"No... please, no..." Kevin started sobbing loudly.

Bones moved over and took the crying Kevin into his arms, "He's okay, Kevin. In fact, he's in better shape now than he's been in years. THAT is why I'm upset. What the HELL did he go through, Cory?" Bones demanded of the now shocked Patriarch.

"Hell," was Cory's one-word reply as he slipped to the floor and sat there weeping. "Hell."

Sean cleared his throat, "Um, how, uh... how long 'til he can leave, Doc?"

"You can take him home now. He'll sleep for an hour or so more, then he'll wake on his own. He needs bed rest for at least 8 hours." McCoy shook his head in amused irritation, "Damned Vulcan biology. If he'd been human, he'd likely not have made it at all! He's fine, guys. You can go and see him now."

Teri chose that moment to enter, and she was immediately surrounded by the kids, all except Cory who was still quietly weeping to himself. She hugged them all briefly before moving over to her blond son.

She pulled him up and wrapped her arms around him. "Don't you dare start blaming yourself, Cory. This wasn't your fault," she instructed him, obviously reading the reasons easily for his pain.

"But..."

"No. No buts. It's not your fault," she quietly admonished. "Now, did I hear you right, Doctor? Can we take our Joel home, now?" she asked McCoy as she continued to rub Cory's back.

Before McCoy could answer, Kirk's voice came from the doorway, "You heard right, and here he is. I would be honoured to be allowed to carry this little wonder down to the Compound." They all looked over quickly and saw Captain Kirk standing in the door, a sleeping Joel snuggled securely in his arms. The little boy was dressed in a medical green coloured gown, and his face was peaceful.

Kirk saw the look on Cory's face, and immediately joined his 'nephew'. "I hear that you adopted Joel here as your little brother." Kirk said quietly. "It appears that he's already picked up on some fine traits of his big brothers; I hope that blaming himself whenever something goes wrong isn't one of them. You'll be counter-productive to helping him be the best person that he can be if you take the blame every time he gets a scratch, Cory. This might be a pretty huge scratch, but he got it doing what you do best... saving lives. You're just hurting yourself right now; I'd recommend you cut the self-pity and replace it with pride in what he's done before Joel wakes up. Will you take the suggestion, or do I need to make that an order?"

Cory sucked in a breath sharply for an immediate retort, but breathed it out slowly after a seconds thought. "Yes, Uncle Jim; I'll take your suggestion," he said quietly from his mother's arms. "It's just... I'm the Commander, and he's my Captain. I'm responsible."

"Take it this way," Kirk said as he looked down into Joel's sleeping face, then looked over at a relieved looking Kevin, "when Sulu made Joel and Kevin acting Captains, he placed them above you in regards to your Starfleet Rank, right?"

Cory nodded his head mutely.

"Then it was these two who were responsible for the rest of you. You making him a Vulcan Captain and exerting your Vulcan rank was required at a certain moment, and I fully agree with you on it. But, the situation leading up to that, that was all Joel and Kevin as Captains. You are not to blame." Kirk smiled down at the young 'lieutenant', "So, am I going to get a tour of your Compound now, or do I keep this cuddly little Vulcan to myself for the night?"

"That'll take a month or so to complete," Teri muttered under her breath, causing Cory to groan theatrically.

"Come on, then," Kirk laughed as he turned to head for the transporter room.

Teri, Cory and Sean gathered the rest of the guys up and headed after them, with Bones trailing along behind. Just as the group entered the transporter room, Bones tapped Cory's shoulder, "I'll want Joel back up here tomorrow, at about 10am. I'm not setting a specific time; leave him get himself ready and feel able to."

Sean stopped as well and he turned with Cory to face the Doctor. "Thanks, Doc," Sean smiled, "I don't have the words to say it other than thanks."

McCoy smiled, "Don't say another word about it. It's my job."

Cory smiled slowly as well, but asked curiously, "Why didn't you jump start his puberty now?"

McCoy raised an eyebrow, "I've received some of the details from Doctor Michaels, but not all. Also, after that operation, I do not believe his body would react well to being thrust into full puberty right at this moment. He'll be ready tomorrow."

They both nodded.

"Now, go. Before I get an ear full from Jim about keeping you to myself," he chuckled as he turned and walked back towards Sickbay.

CIC - Rec Room:

Kirk lowered Joel gently down onto the sofa that the Clan had hastily moved to the middle of the room ready for him. "I think I can leave him in your capable hands," he whispered to Kevin, who blushed and nodded happily before climbing up and snuggling in behind his Vulcan boyfriend. Kirk watched tenderly as the small brown haired boy wrapped his frail seeming boyfriend protectively in his arms. "I'll see you tomorrow," Kirk smiled before turning to leave the Rec Room.

Kevin smiled at the Captain's retreating back, then started answering the hundred and one questions the other kids were throwing at him.

Kirk entered the Kitchen to find Teri making drinks for her kids, and took a seat, "I think I'll have the tour tomorrow. You've worked wonders with the Compound, guys. It's huge."

"This is just CIC, Uncle Jim," Sean giggled. "Wait until you see the rest of it!"

Kirk rolled his eyes, "Why does that giggle make me nervous?"

"Just because they gave me a five-star hotel for a house doesn't give you a clue, does it?" Teri asked with a chuckle.

"Damn," Kirk muttered with a grin. "And I thought Starfleet paid well! Any room at the inn?"

"You've already got a room reserved for you!" Cory and Sean giggled in unison, as Teri smiled knowingly.

Kirk rolled his eyes again, then sighed and stood up. "As much as I want to stay, for now, the Excelsior needs me. Being the Fleet Flag Captain makes the mess up there my job to start fixing. I'll see you all tomorrow. Especially those who took the initiative and saved the ship."

"We'll have Joel and Kevin ready," Cory smiled.

Kirk looked at him seriously. "You are forgetting the boy called Jude Lee, yourself, Sean, JJ and Adam. You are all responsible, and tomorrow... well, I need to check on a few things, but you should enjoy it. Have a good night, nephews," he finished with a smile, before nodding at their mother, "Teri. Pleasure to see you again. I'll take your son's offer up on a room some time this coming week."

"My pleasure, Jim," Teri smiled back warmly. "Go deal with your repairs, and tell your Science Officer that we'd like to see some more of him as well."

Kirk smiled to himself, nodded, and opened his communicator, "Kirk to Terra Main. One to beam up."

They watched him vanish, then set about drinking their hot chocolates.

Meanwhile, while Kirk had been chatting to Teri, Joel had woken up to find himself lying snugly on a sofa in the Rec Room, naked, and hugged tightly by Kevin.

He glanced around quickly to see the Clan busy setting up a pile of pillows and blankets all around the sofa he and Kevin were on, then down at himself. He reached and traced a new scar that ran down from the middle of his ribcage to his belly button.

"Doctor McCoy said that'll disappear in a day or so, T'hy'la," Kevin's emotional voice whispered in his ear.

Joel twisted slightly to kiss his boyfriend before asking about what had happened. Kevin took the briefest amount of time to explain it all before the other kids noticed Joel was awake. "I'll finish in detail later. Your fans await!" he giggled to Joel.

Joel turned around again and smiled tiredly at those now gathering near him. Even though he could have slept like a brick, he was happy to talk and cuddle with those who came to visit with him, and he answered as many questions from those who had not been there on the ship as he could.

He had even had a long chat with Vincent. It had seemed like Vincent was uncomfortable with spending the night in the nest, mainly due to there now being girls present, and also the sheer number of people involved. However, after the talk, Vincent had happily moved over to where Lehman and another boy that looked just like him were, and also prepared for bed.

"Do you want anything to drink, T'hy'la?" Kevin whispered in Joel's ear.

Joel nodded, "Some yummy chocolate?"

Kevin giggled, "Good plan. You wait here, and..."

Joel sat up slowly. "I'm getting a little sore, Kev. I wanna stretch my legs a bit. Can you help me go to the Kitchen?"

Kevin nodded and also got up.

It took five minutes to cover a ten second trip, so slow was Joel moving, but the pride on his face said it all as he was picked up and snuggled by Teri in the Kitchen.

"How are you two doing, my lil' heroes?" Teri asked softly as she pulled Kevin close to her side.

Kevin giggled and blushed, while Joel looked uncomfortable and wiggled in her arms. He settled his head on her nearest available shoulder and whispered, "'m okay, Mama. I'm a lil' sore and stiff, and my head feels funny, but I'm not hurtin' or nuffin'. 'm not a hero, though. That's really all those people I've seen in Star Trek. If it wasn't for them, I'd not have done nuffin'."

Teri kissed Joel's head. "Maybe you saw them doing it; but not everyone could put it together and make it all work. That's the real sign of a hero; they use what they know to save the day. In that way you are just as much of a hero as your brothers."

Joel raised his head and shyly looked into his mother's eyes. "Okay, Mama. But I don't wanna be treated like a hero. I just wanna be your little Joel. Okay?"

"You always will be." Teri replied with a smile.

"And our Lil'elf!" Cory and Sean chorused as they surrounded Teri, Kevin and Joel and hugged them.

"And that goes for you too, Kevin," Teri said once Cory and Sean had backed up a bit. She knelt down, Joel still settled at her side, and pulled the naked Kevin over for a tight hug, "We all heard how you and Joel took command up there."

"R...really?" Kevin squeaked.

"Yes, really. JJ had them broadcast everything right from the start, and it wasn't turned off when you all went on that rescue," Teri said seriously.

"I don't feel like a hero, Aunt Teri. I know... I know I did something good, but it don't feel good. I n...nearly lost Joel... I don't kn...know what I'd have done if he'd g...gone..." Kevin blubbered suddenly, and he hid his face in the crook of her neck.

"Cory, can you take your Elf for a moment, please?" Teri asked quickly as she rubbed Kevin's back as he sobbed his heart out.

Joel wasn't too impressed about being away from Kevin, for he had already taken one of his boyfriend's hands in a tight hold.

Cory knelt down next to Teri and slid Joel into his arms, "Come on, Lil'elf. I'll stay right here so you can be near your Kevvy. Come on."

Joel relaxed his grip and slipped both arms around Cory's neck. Kevin's sobs were hitting home with Joel, and Cory saw that look in his little brother's eyes that had been in Adam's on Sunday. The look of someone who had nearly died.

"He's right," Joel whispered with horror in his trembling voice as Teri started mutely whispering comfort and advice to Kevin, "I... I did nearly die, Cor... I..."

Cory kissed Joel's nose and pulled him closer. "I know, lil' bro - I've been there too. Sean sat me down when I started to do like you're doing. He told me to remember Timmy's saying... 'sometimes bad things gotta happen so good things can happen'. Sean reminded me that I'm still here, and that is all that really matters... that thinking about 'almost' does nothing but hurt, so I needed to stop thinking about it."

Joel nodded mutely, then sniffed. He whispered, "I'll try, Blondie."

Cory smiled at him, and pulled him in close for a warm, gentle cuddle. Sean was soon kneeling with them, and, as on the day Joel had arrived, hugged his little brother from behind. Joel started to smile. He liked being a 'Joel Sandwich'.

Meanwhile, Kevin had slowly stopped crying and had started to pour out his fears to Teri. Teri listened silently, and simply rubbed his back to allow him to empty himself of his worries. As he felt all the words get used up, a realization came to him: he was speaking to a woman as if she was his mother. Teri, in his heart, was becoming the mother he should have always had, but had always been denied.

Once Kevin had grown silent, Teri started telling him much the same as Cory had just told Joel. Once she had finished, he too found himself being squashed in a hug. A Mother-hug. "Aunt Ter... uhhh...." Kevin mumbled then trembled out, "M...Mom?"

Teri smiled widely, "Yes, honey?"

"Can we have some Hot Chocolate, please?" he asked shyly as he pulled away from the hug enough to look into her eyes nervously. "That's why we came in here."

"Of course you can," she replied, "and if you want to call me your Mom, then you certainly may. I'll never do what *she* did, and I would be honoured to be your Mom, even in a little way."

"Besides," Cory added as he pulled Kevin over and hugged him, "if you and Joel are together, Mom'll be your Mom-in-Law soon, true?"

Kevin giggled, and a wonderful smile came to his face.

Teri also smiled. She then grinned widely as she took a closer look at Kevin's midsection. "Ah. It *was* a nice present from Levi," she chuckled, winking at him.

Kevin blushed harder as he rubbed the back of his left foot against his leg. "Ah, yeah. Kenny don't mind either. He thinks Jo' and I look cute together like this," he giggled out shyly.

"I kinda like it too," Joel said with a wicked twinkle in his eye. He shuffled about until he was over Cory's hip as the blond teen stood up.

Cory plopped him gently on the nearest bar stool and then lifted Kevin up to sit with Joel. "I'll help you make the coco, Mom," he smiled at Teri.

Sean giggled and sat with the two smaller boys. At Joel's curious look, he said, "I burn water getting it out of the faucet. No point me helping!"

Kevin snorted as he giggled, before loosely wrapping an arm around Joel's bare waist.

They waited patiently for a few minutes then both small boys started licking their lips as two large mugs of hot chocolate, with whipped cream on top, were placed in front of them.

Cory sat next to his husband as he watched them enjoy their drinks, and Teri stayed near. Seeing Joel getting thrown across a starship bridge, and hearing him slam down onto the deck, had nearly torn her heart out. Watching him and his boyfriend enjoy something as simple as a hot chocolate... it couldn't be described.

"Mama?" Joel asked suddenly, his face nervous and even a little terrified. His eyes, however, showed that unwavering trust that had been there since he had asked her to help him with his skin cream yesterday.

Teri walked towards him and placed a hand on his bare shoulder, "Yes, sweetheart?"

Joel bit his lip for a second before blurting out, "Why do you love me?" His eyes filled with tears as he glanced at his two older brothers, then at Kevin. "Why do any of you love me? You've only known me for a few days... why?"

"Us adults have decided that it's the magic of Cory and Sean," Teri replied seriously. "They seem to have a natural skill at instant emotional attachments to people with good hearts, and that skill is contagious. All of us knew that you were someone special, the second we saw you, Joel. When you proved that we were right, we couldn't help but to love you."

Joel's lips started trembling slightly and he hug his head. "I'm nothin' special. I'm jus' a used up little slave. I was gonna be raped then killed when I was found... I'm not special..."

Cory lifted Joel's head and kissed his nose. "Hey, lil' Elf... I'll bet there are a buncha people up at Starfleet Headquarters, right now, who will argue that with you until the day they die. Besides; only special people get to be Captains in the Clan Short Fleet. I believe that both you and Kev carry that title now."

Kevin then reached and turned Joel to face him completely. His serious brown eyes stared deep into Joel's blue ones. "You are special 'cos I think you are special. You are special 'cos I've loved you since I was four years old. You are... **YOU ARE SPECIAL**, Jo'. You *were* a slave; you're *now* my boyfriend."

Cory then turned Joel's face back to look at him. "Repeat after me: 'I'm special, 'cos my family tells me so'."

Joel's face was unreadable, and his eyes wide. Inside his mind, the gears churned. Then he smiled shyly, "You're special, 'cos your family tells you so."

Everyone broke into giggles, and Sean managed to sputter, "I TOLD ya so, Hon!"

Cory shook his head as he responded to Joel with a grin, "I shoulda known better! You knew what I meant, didn't you Lil'elf? Or should I say *silly* Lil'elf?"

Joel giggled and wrapped his thin arms around Cory's neck before pecking kisses onto his brother's cheek. "Yeah. But if I'm special, then you are too!" he said, after he'd finished with one cheek and before starting on the other.

"You're the most *special-est* Lil'elf ever, Captain Short!" Cory giggled in reply as he hugged Joel tightly.

"Am I really a Captain?" Joel asked, as he pulled back to regard Cory seriously.

From the doorway where he had been listening silently, Jason giggled, "Yes you are, Prince-brother. I came to tell you guys two things: one, I've just received the update from Vulcan Command, and you and Kevin are now officially on their lists. Congratulations. Once a member of the Vulcan Fleet, always a member."

"My husband don't joke around when it comes to passing out jobs!" Sean noted with a smile.

Jason moved into the room completely and kissed Joel's cheek, "Live with being special, lil'dude. Now, two: Fleet Commander Short?" he said as he faced Cory.

Cory looked over at Jason. "We can talk business without being formal, Jace. How may I assist you?" The small change in Cory's tone let everyone in the area know that Cory had switched to 'command mode' and had put his playfulness on hold until Jason was done.

Jason grinned impishly back at his fellow Patriarch when he perceived the internal switch happening. "You are hereby ordered, with your husband and little brothers, by your Most Powerful Spirit Guide Son, Timothy, to 'get their butts in here and get some sleep, 'cos we're tired and don't wanna sleep 'til they are! So There!'... Have I relayed the message clearly enough, oh blond one?" Jason finished with a wicked giggle.

"Sean, I believe our son has an ambition to be sleeping in the proverbial doghouse," Cory dead panned. "I believe that a complete experience of Sehlat bedtime preparation routines might be beneficial to his perceived injustice. I believe you have the capability to arrange such a demonstration, Jason. May I assume that it will be executed in a timely manner?"

"Get stuffed, Cory!" Jason giggled, "I've been washed enough by I-Metri, Marjur and I-Cheya for one aeon!"

Sean looked over at the doorway. "Unless you want to be a demonstration model," he commented as he pointed out the three waiting Sehlat, "I believe your crew is waiting!"

Jason giggled, "Your rugrats have already been washed. I think it's your turn. I'm staying out of it!"

Jason started laughing harder as Marjur moved towards Sean and I-Metri towards Cory. He yelped, however, when a large paw brought him to the ground. I-Cheya huffed at him as he was quickly stripped.

Joel and Kevin couldn't do anything other than laugh, and Teri was laughing as hard as they were, for both Cory and Sean had backed away from the approaching Sehlats, but had not gotten very far before they too were in the same state as Jason.

"At least they won't need showers," Teri murmured through her giggles as she collected the discarded clothing that the three sabre-toothed bears had thrown to the four winds.

Kevin trotted along besides Cory as Joel was being carried back into the now Nest filled Rec Room. Curiously, as the kids saw the Patriarch approach with his precious cargo in his arms, they made a wide pathway through to the central part of the nest: Joel and Kevin's sofa. Currently seated on it were Timmy, Ricky, Wacko and Paulie, and they were glaring at anyone who attempted to go near it.

"What are you three up to?" Cory asked with a smile.

Timmy jutted out his chin as he said, "Guarding Unca Joel's and Unca Kev's bed, Daddy."

Joel giggled while Cory laughingly said, "I don't think anyone will try and steal Joel's place, guys. They know he can't lie on the floor right now."

"We was jus' making sure, Daddy!" Paulie said, determination all over his cute little face.

"Rowl!" Wacko interjected from his spot at the foot of the couch.

Ricky added, "He and Unca Kevvy saved us, and saved you and we owes him and Unca Kevvy lots!"

The three boys and the panther slipped down to the floor as Kevin climbed up and laid down first. He placed his back firmly against the back of the sofa and waited as Cory gently lowered Joel down into his arms. Joel grinned up at his big brother as he shuffled about to be spooned by Kevin. Cory then brought the blanket up and tucked it in around them both.

Joel looked at the three rugrats and their cat, all four looking extremely proud with themselves, and said, "Thanks, but there's loads of room up here. Do you wanna sleep with us too?"

Ricky looked up at Cory uncertainly, "Can we? There's room down the other end for us and Wacko."

"Only if you promise to make sure that your uncles are safe all night!" Cory giggled.

"We will!" all three chorused as they grabbed a large blanket, a few pillows, and climbed up onto the other end of the sofa.

"Rowl! Purrrrr!" added Wacko as he curled up between Kevin and Joel on one side, and the three munchkins on the other.

Cory smiled, leaned in to give the three little boys a good night kiss, tickle Wacko's ears, then settled down himself just before the sofa with Sean.

Soon, the lights were dimmed, and from the light coming through the doorway to the Dining Room, Joel could see his mother. "Good night, kids," she said softly into the room.

A variety of "Good Nights" were her answer, and her silhouette vanished from the door.

Joel sighed and looked over the edge of the sofa. Kevin's warm, moist breath could be felt caressing his neck as he slowly fell to sleep. Below, just where he could reach, Joel saw Cory and Sean cuddled together and whispering. He reached his free arm down and traced a finger over Cory's cheek, then over Sean's. "Rom mu-yor, shal sa'kai'am," he whispered, "Shal ashau tu."

Cory smiled up at him, "Good night, brother."

"We love you, too," Sean added just as softly.

Joel relaxed back with a contented smile on his face. Kevin's right arm was draped lightly over his side and he had his hand resting on Joel's chest, so Joel took the opportunity to grab it and bring it up until he could rub the soft knuckles of Kevin's limp hand under his chin. Kevin murmured something unintelligible and shifted his arm slightly to help with whatever Joel was trying to do, before finally sinking into the blissful oblivion of sleep.

Joel grinned, for, with Kevin's unknowing help, he now had what he wanted.

Cory giggled slightly as he heard something from above him. He and Sean turned over slightly and raised their heads to look up at Joel's face. They then giggled together and lay back down to sleep.

They were lulled there quickly by a soft 'suck, suck, suck' sound.

The little Vulcan was also asleep; his eyes closed, his face peaceful, and a quirky smile at the corner of his mouth as he sucked slowly on Kevin's thumb...

Joel did not dream that night. He floated in a contented world of comfort and bliss, wrapped up in the arms of the boy who had stolen his heart and given his own in return, and surrounded by a family - a *family* - that loved him. He felt each passing second of that night in that warm, loving place of sleep, yet he was not awake. Time passed slowly for him, and he enjoyed each and every second of it, yet he could not have told you how much of time had passed. Only that he was happy.

Even though he was completely comfortable, he was the first to wake up. Neither he nor his Kevin had moved an inch, and he grinned to himself, for he still had his boyfriend's thumb in his mouth. He gently removed it, and shuffled about slowly so as not to wake Kevin. He managed to get himself propped up against the arm of the sofa, with Kevin's head now resting against his right thigh. He smiled as he traced his fingers over Kevin's forehead and into his hair. Kevin looked so beautiful right now that it made the tiny Vulcan's heart ache in his chest.

He then realised that something else was in need of attention. He quickly glanced around in the early morning light, attempting to find a way to get out of the sea of bodies that were all around him and keeping him from the bathroom. He began to grow worried.

'Don't worry,' came Nathan's sleepy voice in his mind as he felt himself lift up and away from the sofa. *'When you're done, I'll put you back with Kevin.'*

'Thanks, Nath,' Joel smiled as he was plopped down by the bathroom door. He ran in and quickly did what he needed to. A few minutes later and he was floating back and deposited softly next to Kevin. Joel smiled over at his brother and blew him a kiss. Nathan blew one back before snuggling back in with Jason.

"You 'wake, Unca Joel?" came a soft question from the other side of Wacko. The large cat was snoring lightly, and Joel saw a tiny figure move about the other side and move closer. Timmy's head appeared over Wacko's body and the boy smiled at the Vulcan.

"Yeah," Joel said as he opened his arms for a hug.

Timmy wasted no time crawling over and gently cuddling up with Joel. "You feeling all better now?" the munchkin asked with concern.

"Much," Joel whispered back. "My insides feel floppy, but not like last night."

Timmy smiled happily and continued to cuddle on his uncle's lap. He giggled when Kevin started snuffling in his sleep. "Oh, Happy Birthday, Unca Joel," he said quietly before turning away from the waking Kevin and kissing Joel sloppily on the mouth.

"Ah," Joel hesitated, "um, thanks, Timmy."

"Whatsa matter?"

Joel shrugged. "I... birthdays. I've... I'm always hurt on birthdays. Worse than any other days. I know I won't be, here, but I... I don't like birthdays."

Timmy's face grew determined. "I'm gonna fix dat!" he said firmly.

Joel half smiled. "Uh, okay, Timmy."

"How old are yous?" the little boy asked curiously as he shifted about to sit on Joel's outstretched legs to look into his uncle's face easier.

"Umm, thirteen," Joel whispered, beginning to feel ashamed. "I don't look it, do I?" he whispered unhappily.

"You look like my Unca Joel; dat's what matters." Timmy replied with assurance.

"Thanks. I love you, Timmy. You make me feel good, right here" Joel said, honesty pouring out of his eyes as he pointed to where his heart was, low in his chest.

Timmy gave him a huge, wide smile in return. "You make me feel good in my heart too, Unca Joel. I love you too!"

He just sat there, then, and looked at his Vulcan uncle. Joel, for his part, looked at him in return.

Joel found Timmy's freckles vastly interesting, and traced those he could reach on Timmy's legs, arms and face.

Timmy did the same for Joel's equally fascinating eyebrows and ears. Joel's mouth and gums received yet more attention for they were more obviously green than his dusky skin was.

"No hairs there yet," Timmy commented to himself as he glanced down Joel's body.

"Where?" Joel asked as he traced around Timmy's freckled cheeks.

"There," Timmy answered, placing a finger lightly just above Joel's boyhood. "Not yet. Soon, though..."

Joel sighed, then smiled, "You're right; not yet, but your daddy says I'll get them when I'm ready. He says everyone's different."

"Uh huh," Timmy looked up and nodded happily, "everyone's different. I like you 'cos you're you, Unca Joel. Don't be sad or nuffin' 'cos you're not like other thirteen year olds. Dey don't gets to fly rescue missions on Starships and stuff, and dey don't have magic powers to make people feel better. You're special, Unca Joel. Like my daddy and Poppa and all my uncles and..."

"And like you?" Joel giggled, finally giving in and beginning to accept that maybe he was special: at least to his family.

"Uh huh. Yeah, you're like me too, Unca Joel. See?"

Timmy made his war paint appear, and Joel's automatically responded. So did Kevin's and Ricky's.

Joel and Timmy started giggling and hugging each other again, still covered in their markings.

"Mmm, now that is funny," Kevin giggled as he sat up and looked at himself, his boyfriend and Timmy, then around the room. His eyes fell on the sleeping Oliver, Austin and Ricky. "It's like a funny illness, and it's spreading!"

"Only my bestest brodders getta do it!" Timmy giggled.

Joel also giggled as he pulled Kevin over and into a hug with himself and Timmy, "There. We're really Tribe now."

Kevin grinned, but then he saw the look in Joel's eyes. Full on, full bore, love. And it was all for him. His mouth went dry, and his heart started beating faster.

Timmy saw the look and giggled again. "You stay and kiss. Me and Ricky have things to do. Be right back."

As he scooted away back over the top of the long suffering Wacko, Joel did as 'ordered'. He kissed Kevin.

Kevin turned to putty right then and there.

"Looks like two of our heroes are already celebrating," Nathan sniggered loudly, drawing the attention of those boys already awake over and onto Joel and Kevin.

"Nath'," Jason murmured sleepily, "leave them alone."

"But they're soooo cute!"

"I know. Leave them alone."

"Spoilsport!"

"Yes. Now, kiss me or I'm gonna think you don't love me any more."

"Do you Welsh all act this way?" Adam called from the other side of the Nest.

"Uh huh," Viccy answered before waking Riti.

Riti blinked, "Huh? Wassup?"

"Kiss. Now."

Riti chirped happily. "Now that's an order I like getting!"

"Mmm," JJ giggled, "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em. Come here, you delicious hunk!" And with that, Adam was pulled down and into a serious lip-lock.

Joel slowly and reluctantly pulled back from the kiss with Kevin. He needed air, after all. They both started giggling as they watched the others around them kiss their partners.

For Kevin, this was no longer something that made him feel left out. He had his Joel. Even if he still had things to settle with his feelings for Uncle Chip, he *still* had his Joel. He wrapped his arms around Joel's torso and laid his head on his boyfriend's upper chest. Joel rested his cheek against Kevin's hair as he held him close.

"I love you," he whispered to Kevin. He got a kiss on his neck for his trouble, making him twitch at the tickling sensation.

The Dining Room door opened enough to allow Teri to enter the room, and she smiled at the waking kids. "Breakfast is in twenty minutes, so get showered and ready."

For some reason, the look in her face and the tone of her voice told Joel that something was being planned.

Jude and Billy-Joe were soon being pulled over by Timmy and Ricky, and Paulie, Ross and Belar crawled up and cuddled with Joel and Kevin. "Showers!" Belar and Ross chorused. "Come on, Unca Jowl, Unca Kev! Showers!"

Kevin sniggered, "We'd better do as they say, T'hy'la."

Billy-Joe grinned and winked at Kevin, "Yep. They have decided we're their targets."

Joel shrugged and slipped slowly off the sofa. Kevin came off quickly and helped support him, for he was still a little off balance from his injuries. Together, the four older boys and the five Rugrats moved through the waking and milling mass of bodies towards the bathroom.

As Joel finished towel drying Belar, and as Jude finished doing the same for Ross, Kevin and Billy-Joe walked over to them. "We'll go keep you a place at breakfast," Kevin said, a small grin on his face.

"Okay," Joel smiled up at him, then he looked at Belar, "There. All dry, cutie."

"Thanks, Unca Jowl!" Belar hooted happily. "I'll go helps dem keeps you a seat!" he called out as he ran from the room butt naked, followed by the other Rugrats and the two older boys.

Jude glanced at Joel before pulling him gently over and starting to dry the Vulcan's hair. "I think they are definitely planning something," he whispered conspiratorially to his little alien brother.

Joel nodded, "Yeah. I'm nervous. Don't like surprises."

"Don't be," Jude assured him with a firm hug. "Come on. Let's go find our clothes." He picked Joel up and carried him over his hip from the bathroom. "Don't worry about it. Birthdays are meant to be fun, and I did promise that I'd help make this one your first 'fun' day, didn't I?"

"Yeah," Joel murmured, still not completely convinced. "Hey! Where've they all gone?" he asked as he looked around the now empty Rec Room. The Dining Room door was closed and not a peep could be seen nor heard of the Clan.

Miracles *do* happen, then.

"I can guess, but I think you'll like the surprise," Jude giggled as he sat down next to two piles of clothes: his own and Joel's. He sat Joel on his lap and proceeded to dress him. Once done, he threw on his own attire, and then stood. He took Joel's hand, "Come on. Let's see if it's what I think it is."

Joel dragged his feet nervously as they started towards the Dining Room door. He was frightened, and the grip he had on Jude's hand was tight enough to relay that emotion clearly.

Jude reached with his free hand and opened the door...

"SURPRISE!!!"

The shocking blast of sound from everyone in the Dining Room made what Joel had wanted to do a dead certainty. He turned and bolted through the Rec Room and out towards his hiding place of the day before; the bush in JJ's garden.

He never made it, for Levi appeared on the path in front of him. "Wait, Uncle Joel," he said, his arms wide as if asking for a hug.

Joel's racing, panicking heart started to still, and he stopped in front of the little Mikyvis.

Levi closed the gap and hugged himself around Joel's chest. "Don't be scared."

"I..." Joel fought with himself for a moment, then mumbled, "Sorry. Couldn't help it. It frightened me - the shouting."

"I know. Come on, I'll keep you safe, and you'll like it - promise," Levi smiled up at him.

"Okay."

They immediately vanished from the pathway and reappeared in the Dining Room. Everyone was whispering with concerned voices, but they soon grew quiet at the two boy's sudden appearance.

"Sorry," Joel mumbled again, his eyes down cast as he felt everyone's eyes on him.

Strong arms surrounded him and he looked up into Sean's face. "Don't be. We didn't expect that reaction. Well, we didn't think it would be *that* bad. We're sorry, Joel."

Joel nodded slowly and started to smile. Jude came close and gently pulled Joel over until he was against his side. "Little brother? Look. Look what *our* family did for us," he said, joy in his voice.

Joel looked around. He first saw the smiling faces of his family and friends, then... balloons. Everywhere. Bright colours. BRIGHT, shiny, beautiful colours that made the inner-child that was so newly found in Joel wake up and giggle. Each balloon has something written on it. Either 'Happy 13th Birthday, Joel!' or 'Happy 14th Birthday, Jude'.

Then there was the breakfast. A Breakfast with a capital 'B'.

In the corner of the Dining Room were two piles of brightly coloured boxes and parcels.

"Wow," he whispered, tears rolling down his face. "You... you really *do* care... about me... you really giving me a party? Jude too?" he continued as he cried softly.

And so, weeping softly, Joel was led to the table and sat between Kevin and Jude. Billy Joe sat on Jude's other side, and Joel's best day up to that point of his short, hellish life began...

Joel stood there, looking at the large pile of beautifully wrapped boxes, all of which had his name on them.

He smiled to himself. "Pretty," he whispered. "They all mine? For real?"

Timmy grinned up at him from his side, "Yeah. All yours, Unca Joel!"

Jude, over by his own pile of boxes, was embarrassed. "I can't, guys. I can't accept these. You hardly know me!" he protested, the hurt of the loss of his parents showing in his eyes and face.

Teri enfolded him in a hug, "Yes, you can. You're my son, and I don't let any child, mine or not, go without on their birthday. And I mean that, Jude. They are yours."

"Thanks," he whispered back. He turned and hugged her fully for a long moment before he wiped his eyes and moved towards his gifts.

Before he had even picked one to start opening, however, Joel's next question stopped him and everyone else in their tracks.

"Umm, they're real pretty, Cory. What do I do with them, and where do I keep them?" Joel asked, joy clearly showing on his face. All these pretty boxes, and they were all for him - and Jude had a large pile too.

He just didn't know what to *do* with them.

With a rare flash of insight, Cory realized that Joel had no idea that the contents of the boxes were his presents, not the boxes themselves. If it wasn't for the fact he'd seen it already too many times over at the Camp, he would have smiled. Instead, he walked over and pulled Joel into his chest. "The boxes are pretty because we want you to see how special you are to us, Lil'elf. What is really kewl is that each of us picked out something we thought you would really like, and put it inside each of the boxes. It makes it a lot more fun for you, since each one is a surprise and you can read the tag on the box to see who got what for you."

"Really?" Joel's puzzled face looked up and to the side so he could see his brother as he was hugged from behind.

"Yeah," Cory nodded.

Jude looked over and said, "Watch, Joel."

Joel did so as Jude selected one present, read the tag and smiled at Billy Joe. He then opened it to find a leather jacket inside. "Oh, man! I love you!" he yelled out, pulling the blushing Billy into a crushing hug, "It's great!"

Joel looked back at his own pile, then around at the others.

He moved forwards and started looking at the boxes closely. One almost seemed to leap out at him.

It was from Kevin.

It was not the largest, nor the smallest parcel, but it was heavy, Joel found as he lifted it up into his hands. He looked closely at it from all sides and found where it had been wrapped up. He started to carefully undo the paper.

"You can rip it, little angel; that's what it's made for," Cory said softly, ensuring only Joel heard him.

Joel looked up at him again, then smiled. "Okay," he whispered back. He glanced at a concerned and nervous looking Kevin, and then proceeded to tear off the paper.

He was left holding the leather bound, gold leaf embossed Bible that he had seen on Tuesday in the Mall.

Huge sobs of joy and gratitude came from deep inside him, and Cory was again hit by something that rarely happened; foresight. He reached over Joel's shoulder and gently took the heavy Bible from his little brother's hands. Less than a second later, and Kevin had an arm full of weeping boyfriend who was thanking him over and over again in rapidly spoken Vulcan.

Cory placed the Bible carefully down on the nearest table and waited as Kevin continued to whisper to his mess of a boyfriend, a peaceful smile on his face. He glanced over and watched as Jude opened more of his own gifts, then around at the others. Everyone was showing much the same reaction as he was; happiness and joy. Joel and Jude were both going to have the best birthday the Clan could give them.

Soon, Kevin was kneeling with Joel and helping him open everything. Toys, action figures, stuffed animals, board games, CDs, DVDs, more clothes. With each present opened, the person who gave it received kisses and hugs from a completely overjoyed Joel; those whom Joel knew at any rate. There were a few from boys he had not really talked to yet, and so he just said something along the lines of 'I'll find you after for your hugs!' before moving onto the next present.

At every hug or promise of one given by the tiny Vulcan, the Clan giggled in wonder. Not three days ago he was a scared waif that a stiff breeze would have blown away.

Now, he was simply Joel, the Cuddle-Monster.

Jude, meanwhile, had broken into quiet sobs while hugging a smiling Timmy and Ricky.

"Do you really like it, Unca Jude?" Ricky mumbled.

Jude sniffed and smiled, "I really do."

Teri moved closer and rubbed the emotional teen's back, "Why the tears, love?"

Jude looked again at the small stuffed piglet still in its Collector's Case the little boys had bought for him and wiped his eyes. "It's Mr Wiggles! I had him when I was a little boy! My Mom got him for me when I was a baby... I lost him years and years ago... his stuffing fell out and he was put away, then I couldn't find him when they... when my parents died..."

Levi started to chuckle. When Jude and Teri threw a look at him in question, the little Mikyvis said, "I just checked. It really is Mr Wiggles. In this Universe, you were never born, so that toy was never

bought as a toy. It's been in various toy shops, and passed through a few collectors, but was never played with or opened here. It's really your Mr Wiggles, Uncle Jude!"

Jude just cried more, and hugged Timmy and Ricky harder, all the while being hugged firmly by Teri.

Laughter erupted when Joel got to one of the larger presents - Sean and Cory had got together and bought him a Component System for all the music he had been given. That took a good five minutes to get through the cuddles and kisses they received, and even though the Clan knew Vulcan, they had the hardest time working out what Joel was so rapidly saying to each of them in his excitement.

Tommy was also bowled under when Joel opened the present from him to find a scale model of the USS Enterprise, and a note saying 'All the hugs, cuddles and cookies you ever need, I will give'.

Then, at the bottom of the pile, was the last, and the largest. It was labelled 'To my special Vulcan son. Thank you for trusting me, and letting me be your mother. Love, your Mammy.'

"Mama?"

Teri came forwards and knelt down with him, rubbing his back soothingly.

Joel blinked up at her as she reached and wiped the tears from his cheeks. "Can you help me open it?" he whispered softly.

"Sure," she smiled, and together, she, Kevin and Joel tore open the wrappings.

It was the Mac Pro from the Mall.

Joel couldn't move. He just knelt there, looking at the box.

Cory and Sean knelt down to be with him as well, and pulled him into their joint hug. "What do you think, Lil'elf. You think you're going to enjoy using that?" Sean asked.

Joel just broke down into tears. Happy ones. "All my life... I've had nothing. Now, I have you all... you're my FAMILY. You LOVE me. And I have a BOYFRIEND who's my BEST FRIEND," he sobbed loudly in the suddenly silent room. "Y...you could have given me nothing and I'd s...still have had the best day ever, 'cos I'm HAPPY... I'm just so happy... I... I'm home. I'm really home..."

He continued to sob for a few moments longer, then raised his face to look at each of his large, large family in the eye. Jude's face was priceless - joy beyond joy that Joel was having a good birthday was writ clear on his expression.

Joel opened his mouth and started to sing. Softly at first, then with building volume, they all heard a song they had never heard before. From a film that did not exist in their Universe, yet the poignancy of the song meant everything to little Joel...

"Where am I going?
I've been lost so long;
There's no shelter from the cold.

Winds are blowing,
I keep dreaming on -
Waking up in emptiness alone.
I know:
"Somewhere I belong,
Somewhere I can call 'My home'.
You've open your arms to me:
I've got the feeling
That your love is leading me home.

The Doctor, watching from the back, waved his arm slightly and music started flowing from his presence and mixed in perfectly with the words Joel was now singing out. It brought all the Clan, and their parents, to tears...

"How'd you find me?
Pull me from the storm,
Make the heartache disappear.
Feel the fire,
Love can keep us warm.
I just can't believe I'm finally here.
I am here; I am here!

"Somewhere I belong,
Somewhere I can call 'My home'.
You've open your arms to me:
I've got the feeling
That your love is leading me home.

"Somewhere I belong.

"Open your arms to me:
I've got the feeling
That your love is leading me home.
Somewhere I belong,
Somewhere I can call 'My home'.
You've open your arms to me:
I've got the feeling
That your love is leading me home.

Somewhere I Belong."

('Somewhere I Belong' © Teddy Pendergrass)

As the music and the words drifted away, Joel found that he was now in Teri's arms, and was being almost crushed in the most possessive hug he had ever experienced to date.

"Somewhere I belong," he whispered to her, one last tear trickling down his cheek that mirrored the one running down her own.

As the wrappings and boxes from both boys' gifts were being piled up and gotten rid of, Joel remained in Teri's arms. His little heart was simply overflowing with emotions he had never before experienced, and couldn't process. Kevin sat nearby squashed between Cory and Sean, and they were cuddling him as he too cried; only *his* tears were those of complete and utter joy that his boyfriend was happy.

Sammy watched all this from the rear of the room where he was standing with his father, Mike.

"Are you sure it's okay, Dad?" Sammy asked, looking up into his father's face.

Mike nodded, pride showing in his eyes, "Yes, little angel. I think you are the most loving boy I've ever met, Samuel Patrick Reynolds; I have no problems with you giving it to him."

"Thanks, Dad," Sammy said as he swivelled and hid his blushing face in his father's chest. "I love you so much."

"I love you too, sweetie," Mike whispered joyfully as he kissed the top of Sammy's head. "Go on, Joel's getting up from the hug. Catch him now."

Sammy turned and saw that his dad was right; Joel had moved from Teri's lap and was now seated with Kevin between Cory and Sean. Sammy walked over slowly and Joel looked up and smiled his wide, sunny smile at him.

"Happy Birthday, lil'guy," Sammy said lovingly as he knelt down in front of him. "Having fun?"

"Sure am!" Joel bubbled as he thrust himself forwards and into Sammy's arms.

Sammy grinned and looked at Kevin and the two older teens. "Can I steal your Elf for a while? I have something to talk to him about, and it's kinda personal and special to me. He can tell you after, but I need to tell him somewhere quiet first."

Joel looked into Sammy's face, and his own was intrigued. Kevin giggled and nodded, while Sean quipped, "Rental fee is three kisses, SamSam!"

Joel sniggered as he was plopped to one side, and then he started with his sweet bell-like laugh as Sammy proceeded to give Cory, Sean and Kevin three kisses each, plus a large hug. "There, that do?" he quipped back.

"For now," Kevin giggled.

Sammy laughed then turned back to face Joel. After both had stood to their feet, Sammy pulled Joel close and said, "Come on, lil'guy. Let's use the nearest Meeting Room."

Soon, they were both curled up in each others arms on a sofa in a room just off from Main CIC, and Joel sighed in contentment. Being close to any of his brothers was special, but Sammy was one of the few that made him feel this good by simply being there.

"Joel," Sammy started after a moment or two of silence, "I haven't given you my gift to you yet, and I didn't put it with the rest as this means a lot to me. I wanted it to be real special, not just one present lost with all the others."

Joel shifted about until his light weight was firmly seated on Sammy's lap, then he gave his brother his full attention. "You don't have to give me nothing, SamSam. You're my brother. That's all I want or need."

Sammy's eyes filled quickly, and his face shone with love, "You're so special, Joel. Yes, I know I don't *have* to give you anything, but I want to." He raised his hands to his neck and pulled out a fine gold chain that was around it. On it, a small medal was hanging. "This is St Christopher," he almost whispered as he pointed out to the Vulcan the image on the little medal, "and he's the Saint of all Travellers."

Joel's eyes were wide as he looked at the shiny gold image. "Yeah. He's meant to have carried a little boy over a large river, and the boy got heavier and heavier, and St Christopher nearly didn't make it. The little boy was really Jesus, wasn't he?"

"That's right," Sammy said quietly. "My Dad gave this to me soon after he found me and made me his son. I was having bad dreams and nightmares and everything, and he said that if I thought about St Christopher, then he'd come and help me get through my big rivers, my troubles."

Joel nodded as he was listening, his face thoughtful and serious.

His jaw dropped open, however, when the chain was put around his neck by Sammy. "What are you doing?" he squeaked nervously, "It's from your Daddy! I can't have..."

"Shhh, lil'angel. Yes you can have it. My Dad said it was okay, and I really want you to have it," Sammy said as he kissed the now weeping Joel. "Maybe St Christopher will help you get across your rivers."

Joel buried his face into Sammy's neck and managed to choke out, "Are you sure, SamSam? Are you really sure you wanna give your protector to me?"

Sammy nodded his head gently so that Joel could feel the movement against his hair and cheek, "Yes. He's already carried me over my rivers, and now I have new guides to help me over the new ones. I feel you are the next person who needs his help now."

For a while after, there was near silence, and only Joel's awed, muffled sniffs and quiet sobs of gratitude could be heard as Sammy snuggled him close.

Clan Barracks, Orlando Compound - 9am:

"Josiah's been busy. This is looking great," Travis giggled as he looked around. Jimmy was cuddled in to his side and smiled up happily at his pop. "You like it, Jimmy?"

"Uh huh, nice," the boy whispered as he continued to smile.

"Very nice," Koth said as he walked in with his brother, Chang and Juan. "Morning, peeps! How're you doing?"

Gabe grinned, "We're great. I can't wait to start, though!"

Korris nodded approvingly, "Good. Your desire to learn is commendable." The Klingon glanced at the two Unit boys then at Gabe, Travis and their boys. "Have you guys been introduced properly yet?"

Gabe shook his head amiably. "No, not yet."

Koth smiled. "Gabriel, Travis, Jimmy and Davey; this is Chang, my brother's boyfriend and one of the six leaders of the Unit Special Forces. He's the Unit Executive Officer and Medical Officer, and quite amazing with his katana! Also, this cute piece of boy is my boyfriend, Juan. He's Chang's little brother and also one of the six Unit leaders. He's their Heavy Weapons Commander; an expert on guns and munitions..."

"I like my toys!" Juan giggled as he blushed at Koth's comments.

"I'd like his toy too... if he'd let me see it, that is!" Koth giggled back, winking at Juan who blushed further.

"I... uh..." Juan managed to mumble as the others smiled at him; all except Chang, who simply raised an eyebrow.

Koth saw the look on Juan's face and moved over to hug him quickly. "Sorry, Qu'raki," he whispered to Juan, "I'm a little more used to saying sexual things and I keep forgetting you ain't. Sorry."

"S'okay," Juan mumbled back, just as quietly as he hugged Koth tightly, "you've had a lot of people helping you for longer than I have. You can help me, though... please?" Koth pulled back slightly and saw a new look in Juan's eyes that he had not yet seen. Instead of the rough and tough psycho he was used to, now there was a little boy: a little boy who was pleading with him.

"My oath on it, Qu'raki," Koth said gently, kissing Juan softly afterwards.

"Cute," Chang murmured with a raised eyebrow, but Juan felt his brother's caring flowing at him down that strange bond that all the Unit seemed to share.

Korris chuckled, then pointed at Gabe and Travis, "Gabe is second in command of Clan Short Security, and Travis is his life-partner. These two cute kids are their sons; David and James. Davey and Jimmy, right guys?" he asked, winking at the two young boys.

They giggled and nodded while still holding their parents' hands in a tight grip.

"Pleased to meet you," Chang said formally, while Juan simply waved.

Gabe smiled, "Same to you both."

Korris moved further into the room and said, "Chang and Juan are also interested in seeing what Mok'bara is. At least, Chang is. I think Juan just wants to stare at Koth some more."

Juan poked his tongue out at the older Klingon, then blushed, "He's cute; bite me!" He then glanced at Koth, as if making sure his statement was acceptable. Koth smiled and winked at him, bringing a wide, beautiful smile to Juan's face.

Travis sniggered, then asked, "We didn't know what to wear, so we brought a few different things with us, other than the track-suits we're wearing."

Koth smiled, "Well, you have a choice. We've brought Mok'bara robes with us, or you can do as I do and practice naked. I'll go with the flow here, as I don't know how your little guys will feel about either being naked or being that close to boys that are." Koth looked at Davey and Jimmy, "I know you were good with seeing Nath', Jace and Tel play-fight yesterday morning in their skin, but I really don't want to frighten you by being too close when naked, guys; so it's up to you. If you want, we'll all be dressed. Otherwise, I and whomever else wants can start in the skin."

Jimmy glanced quickly up at Travis, then whispered to Koth, "Can... can you wear the robes with us please, K...Koth? Me and Davey don't feel right outta the nest or showers being near others when they're naked."

Koth grinned softly at them. "That's fine by me, lil'dude. It'll drive Juan nuts..."

"Hey!" Juan protested playfully, pouting as he did so.

Davey giggled into his hands that were covering his mouth at this point, "You're funny!"

Juan winked at him, "Yep! I mean... do you know how hard it is to be as perfect as I am. I mean come on... I'm super cute, smart as a whip, and make Prince Charming seem like the toad he really is... do you want to hear my theme song?"

"Humble just isn't in your brother's vocabulary, is it, Chang?" Korris laughed, as Jimmy and Davey clutched their sides as they cracked up.

"No. It is not," Chang answered with a small lift at the edge of his mouth.

"Wow! A smile!" Juan giggled as he moved in and hugged his brother. "You should do that more."

"He does. In private. With me. And no, I'm not explaining!" Korris snorted. "Okay, guys. Here's your robes to change into, then we'll begin," he said as he put the bag he was carrying down and started handing out sparing uniforms to the others...

A few hours later - Main Kitchens, CIC:

"Where's Joel?" JJ asked as he came into the Kitchen.

Kevin turned on his stool at the bar table where he had been sipping his energy drink and said, "Vincent went to his parents' graves. Joel went with him."

"Ah," JJ smiled with a nod. "Just wondered where one of our two birthday boys had gotten to."

Cory walked in and gave Kevin a squeeze before saying, "He should be back soon, then we're off to the Enterprise."

Doctor Austin looked over and held out a bag for Cory to take, "Here. This is for Doctor McCoy. Make sure he gets it, Cory."

"What is it?" Cory asked as he took the bag.

"The Bio-chip, and as much information as I could gain from my own investigations into Joel's DNA. It's seriously messed up, Cory. It all works, so there's nothing to be concerned about, but I have never seen a hybrid's DNA that was that... spliced before," the Doc replied. "However, I can say that, from his mitochondria, his mother was definitely a Vulcan."

"Excuse me for being blond... his WHAT??" Cory asked, drawing giggles from the rest of the group.

The Doc smiled. "Unless you're into medical, Cory, I'd have not expected you to know. The mitochondrial genes that a person has, comes totally from the mother, and can only be passed on by the mother. A male cannot pass on mitochondria. They are the genes inside the cells, but not in the main DNA itself. I cannot do deep readings on Joel's DNA, however. While I can see them fine, and tell you if they function right or not, I don't really know what I'm seeing. I'm not an expert on Vulcan biology."

"Kev thinks that Joel's jeans are just fine!" Sean giggled.

Kevin nodded with a giggle and a smile, before continuing to sip his drink.

"That's good," the Doc laughed. "Anyway. Just make sure McCoy gets that, Cory. He'll know how to put the pieces together. And he asked personally for the Chip."

"And it's being delivered by our favourite dip..." JJ added before finding himself on the floor being tickled mercilessly. "Aunt Teri!! S..stop! Or I'll p...pee!"

As Teri let JJ up from the floor, Joel walked in. His face was abstracted and thoughtful. He didn't seem to know where he was going, nor that the others were in there. He had his palms pressed together in front of him, and he was mumbling to himself. "I can feel... yeah, that's right. So if? Mmm... I need to find something small first..."

He came to a halt by the bar table and looked around. He registered the curious stares of his brothers, and the concerned look from Kevin, but did not acknowledge them. Instead, his eyes settled on a spoon next to Cory, about two foot from him across the bar. "I wonder..."

"Ah... Joel?" came a quiet question from Cory as the blond watched Joel try and pull his hands apart.

"Oops. Ah, better," the Vulcan murmured as he managed to separate his hands.

Sean stepped up next to Cory, "Ummmm... YOU'RE the Vulcan Patriarch here, Hon. What's he doing?"

"I dunno," Cory replied.

Joel half smiled; the first recognition of their presence he had allowed himself to give thus far, then held his right hand out in a grasping gesture towards the spoon. He spoke in a voice that was not his own, "Now. Focus, Child of Vulcan... sense yourself. Feel yourself. See the Sands of the Forge, and Embrace Forever..."

Cory was about to move closer to his brother when a sound stopped him.

The spoon was moving.

"Eli and Benj are gonna love this..." Sean commented as he watched the spoon.

The spoon stopped moving after covering a foot of the distance.

"Mmm," Joel closed his eyes.

When he opened them again, he thrust out his hand. "Now!"

The spoon flew towards his open hand. As did, the plate next to JJ, the half full glass of milkshake Kevin had been drinking but had stopped due to surprise at what Joel was up to, Teri's keys from her pocket, Adam's wallet, and three condoms from Cory's back pocket.

"Oops!" Joel gasped as he ducked the plate and glass, which sailed past him to smash into the floor. He was holding the rest of the items, however.

"We needed those for later!" Sean giggled as both him and Cory blushed.

"Clean-up, Aisle Seven!" JJ yelled.

Cory grinned at JJ's humour. "Nice job, Lil'elf... next time try for JJ's wallet though; JJ don't let Adam have cash... he spends it faster than JJ can replace it!"

Joel grinned at them, "Sorry. I got a bit mad. Only wanted to make the spoon come to me." He then looked down at the wallet before tossing it back to Adam, "That's nice, Adam. It's like the one you just gave me!"

Adam smiled as he caught the wallet, "Sure is. It's the best make, and I really love the design. Only the best for my little-big brother!"

Joel then tossed his mother her keys. He then paused as he looked closer at the condoms. "Strawberry flavour, ribbed and extra sensitive... Uh... strange balloons," he muttered curiously as he gently handed them back to a now beetroot red Cory.

"You used up the chocolate *ALREADY*?" Adam giggled, causing the red in his brother's faces to escalate to a whole new level.

The laughter from everyone around him, including from his mother, made Joel even more curious. The two red faces on his beloved older brothers, however, made him upset. He had caused that 'cos of those funny balloons. "Wh...what did I do?" he asked as he shuffled forwards to hug Sean around the belly. He looked up into Sean's red face, and tears began to form in the corner of his eyes, "Did I say something wrong?"

"No, lil' bro... those 'balloons' are kinda personal between me and Sean. It's just kinda embarrassing to have Mom around while everyone's talking about them," Cory replied, as he joined the cuddle.

"Oh," Joel sighed in relief. Then, "Why?"

Kevin slipped from his stool and trotted over. He pulled Joel from between his blushing brothers, then pried open Cory's fist to reveal the three packaged condoms. "Mmm, no point wasting the flavoured one..."

"Wasting?" Cory murmured curiously.

Kevin's nervous face looked up. "Y...yeah. I... we can't do that stuff yet. I'll show him what they're for, but that one would be a waste."

"Oh, I see," Cory nodded with understanding.

Joel watched curiously.

Kevin selected the extra sensitive one, then pulled the intrigued Vulcan behind him into the Dish-Washing Room. He closed the door leading to the Dining Room, then chased out Helen, and half closed the other door that led back to the Kitchen.

The boys and the two women exchanged curious glances.

"Kev?" the others suddenly heard Joel say in shocked surprise. "Um, shouldn't we be somewhere more private if we're gonna masterba... unnnng... umm, Kev?" he trailed off, his voice far away due to 'something' happening.

They heard Kevin snigger, "Just want to show you what this is for. Hold still."

A few seconds later: "Oh! Okay... they go there. Why?"

"I, uh... I'll tell you later, Jo'. I'll just say for safety for now."

"Safety? Oh, STDs? Okay, but why flavoured ones?"

"Well, I'd say for blow jobs, Jo'. Unless Sean has taste buds up his butt."

"Up his...?" Joel's face peaked around the half open doorway. He made sure that his lower half was still hidden. He raised an eyebrow at Sean in question, then disappeared again. "Doubtful, Kev. Okay. Now what? Am I to walk around with this..."

"Condom."

"With this condom on my dick all day?"

Kevin giggled, "No, you can take it off, now. Just wanted you to understand what they were for."

After a minute or so, Joel and Kevin walked back out of the Dish Washing Room to find Teri and Helen sitting on the bar stools with their heads in their hands on the bar, laughing. The other boys were on the floor.... laughing.

"Easily amused, ain't they?" Joel quipped to Kevin without embarrassment.

He then got a sly smile, and walked over to the howling Cory and nudged his brother's ribs with a foot. Holding the condom in his hand he asked sweetly, "Want it back, Donkey? It's too big!"

JJ started choking with his howls of laughter, and Adam had to repeatedly slap his back to save him.

"I do believe that the Patriarch cannot blush any further, Joel," Sarek said from the doorway. "However, that was a very nice compliment; if I am correct about the peer-pressure culture that young, teenage human boys engage in. You should take that comment well, Cory."

Joel smiled at the older Vulcan before kneeling down and flopping himself on Cory's chest and stomach. Looking down into the red face of his big brother, he smiled again. "I love you, Cory," he whispered, fire in his eyes, before kissing him gently.

"I love you too... you sure you don't want to keep that to share with Kev?" Cory giggled softly as he pulled Joel into a hug.

Joel giggled. "It really is too big... well, thick I mean. It's only a little too long for me, Cor. Are there smaller... err, narrower ones?"

Cory giggled as well, "We'll talk to Kyle for you, Lil'elf. Keep it anyway."

Sarek moved further into the room and looked down at the giggling children around him. "Captain Kirk has asked that those going to the Enterprise get ready for Transport. Once Charles arrives here from Terra Main, he will beam up with you."

Teri looked over, "How are the injured doing, Sarek?"

"No fatalities have occurred, and all are now back on their feet. It turned out that the worst injured was little Joel," he answered, giving the tiny cherub a small smile. "Captain Sulu is trying to work out if he should 'hug the boy to death for saving us all, or tickle him to death for what he did to my beloved ship' - his words."

Joel giggled happily as he was given a loving noogie by both Cory and Sean.

"Grandfather," Cory then said as he rose up with Joel in his arms, "Joel just did something that was basically telekinesis. I didn't know Vulcans could do that. Is it part of his human side?"

Sarek raised an eyebrow. "Telekinesis? I will need to see him use this gift before I can render a judgment, Cory."

Joel giggled, "Uh, okay, sir. But you better duck if I go smash something like I did last time... you don't have condoms you don't want my brothers to see on you, do you? Cory and Sean got embarrassed when I first used this just now."

Sarek raised both eyebrows. "No, I do not, Joel. Please proceed."

Joel moved to the bar and looked at Teri's keys, which she had laid there.

He held out his hand, and they started moving towards him. He concentrated harder, and they flew into his hand.

"Intriguing," Sarek stated. "Hold them in your hand, and make them float, Joel."

Joel's eyes widened, but he did as instructed. His brow furrowed slightly, but soon the keys were floating an inch over his hand.

"Now, move your hand so that the keys are hovering below your palm," Sarek instructed again.

Again, Joel did so, and found that the keys remained there; floating just under his hand.

Turning to Cory, Sarek stated, "It is his Vulcan ability. His mind is powerful. All Vulcan's have Telekinesis, but most would only gain control over it with Kolinahr training. Only those of sufficiently high mental capacity find the ability without such training."

"There, Elf," Sean said as he reached and plucked Joel up and into his arms, "you're special. Grandfather just said so, so you really are!"

Joel grinned happily before making himself comfy in Sean's cuddle. "Who're Eli and Benj, Ted? Don't think I've met them yet, and why would they be interested in what I can do?"

"Two of our brothers, and they have telekinesis. Same as Nath' and Jace and Vicky," Sean replied as he nodded at Sarek and carried Joel out towards the Rec Room. Kevin and the others quickly moved to follow.

Joel squirmed in Sean's arms slightly until his brother put him down. He started to giggle. "Where are they?"

Cory looked around quickly, "Over there. With the pet-leg playing with Ross, Bel and Jess."

Joel started over towards the group, a small mischievous smile on his face.

Kevin glanced up at Sean and Cory, "Oh boy. This should be interesting."

Cory giggled as he watched, and asked Sarek over his shoulder, "Just how powerful is Vulcan telekinesis, Grandfather?"

"It depends on the individual, Cory," the Ambassador replied. "However, it is not the same as human telekinesis. The smaller the item, the easier it is to pull it towards us. The range is about twelve feet on average. The most powerful can lift heavier items, but never a person. Joel, however, is not completely Vulcan. His empathic abilities are different from the Vulcan norm; therefore his telekinetic abilities could also be different."

Cory nodded, "We'll soon see."

Eli glanced up from his book and grinned at the nearing Vulcan, "Happy Birthday, Joel!"

Joel smiled back, "Thanks for the book; I really like 'The Hobbit'. I recognised your name, but didn't know *who* you were to give ya a hug."

Eli stood and opened his arms, "No time like the present, Joel."

Joel ran over and embraced the ten year old. "Thanks," he murmured.

Sebastian giggled from the sofa, "I like his cuddles."

"Me too," Eli said.

"Not Joel's, Goof; yours! I've never had a Joel-cuddle yet!" Bastian retorted playfully.

Joel sniggered as he looked at him, "Well, come here then." Joel slipped from Eli's embrace, opened his arms to Sebastian; and concentrated.

"Wow! Eli! Stop it!" Sebastian cried out as he rose up and moved into Joel's waiting hug.

"Don't look at me, Babe..." Eli giggled as he tilted his head. "I think Benj and me got a partner in crime here who needs training!"

Benji added from his cuddle with Sammy Martin, "It felt different, bro. Not felt anything like that before."

Teri, Sarek, Cory and Sean moved closer to the group, while JJ and Adam sniggered and found a place to sit and watch. Sarek commented, "Vulcan telekinesis bolstered by human telekinesis. This could be most intriguing."

"Mmm, you're right, Eli," Sebastian murmured after a moment from within the tight hug Joel had him in, "nice hug."

"Thanks," whispered Joel as he released the boy and grinned at the others.

There was movement by the door, and a topless and messed up Nathan came running into the room, "Commander Xolan? You here?"

"Who?" most of the guys said at once.

"He is not present, Grandson," Sarek answered as he looked at the blond boy.

"Thank *God*!" Nathan sighed with complete relief. "He never comes to us without informing one of us first."

"Why not?" Sean asked curiously, "And who is he?"

Nathan's face twisted slightly, as if an unsettling memory hurt him, "He... he was one of the Trial Masters when we were learning to become VSO. He was the one who put Jace through the Trial of F...Fire," he finished sickly. "Jace didn't just forgive him. He asked him to come work in our division. The Trial Masters never do that, but after what Xolan did, he swore to never put another through the Trials."

Joel tilted his head slightly. "You didn't answer why he needs to call you," he pressed, knowing that Nathan should tell without knowing why he knew that.

Nathan held back his tears, but only just. He shook his head no, and kept his lips sealed.

Cory moved and embraced the now trembling boy, but again, Nathan shook his head. His lips trembled as he looked pleadingly up at his fellow blond and choked out, "Please don't make me say. It's not mine to say. I'll be killed if I do..."

"Over my dead body..." Cory retorted, but Nathan started sobbing.

From the doorway, a nervous and trembling Jason joined the group. He still wet from a hasty shower and was wrapped in a towel. He was nervously looking around the room as if searching for someone. "He here, Nathy?" he whispered as he seemed to hide next to Nathan and Cory, his eyes wild.

"Someone tell me what the HELL is going on here! WHY are you two scared?" Cory exclaimed, his anger rising at the fear he sensed in both Welsh boys.

"They are Of The Black," came a voice from Joel that was not Joel. It was his mother, and her light was shining from his eyes. "We need to be apart from the others. Lady Teri, Lord Sarek, Elijah, Benjamin, Samuel, Sabastian, Lord Cory, Lord Sean; bring them, and follow me."

Joel started towards CIC and stopped at the door to look at them. "Now. Under Red One I command thee," Joel's mother added.

Sarek raised an eyebrow and nodded, "Do as instructed. This is beyond my ability to negate."

Teri moved to help with Jason, but he shrank back fearfully from her as he started to cry, "I'm sorry, Auntie Teri... I made a mess in... I'm..." He crumbled and started to fall to the floor, but she caught him. She lifted the sobbing boy into her arms and carried him, leaving Cory to do the same for Nathan.

Soon, they were all in the Conference Room, and Joel stood there, impassive. Once those named had sat down, Joel waved an arm and the door slammed shut. "By order of the VSO, the Trial of Fire cannot be explained to any who are not Of The Black or under Red One; not unless the VSO have assurance that those wanting the information will not tell it to others outside of that cover, and who are also not interested in becoming Black VSO."

"Grandfather?" Cory asked, the one word saying more than a million words could.

Sarek looked at Cory, then at the trembling form of Jason on Teri's Lap. "We need to wait on Jason. He must do this for the Code that must be authorised is his alone to enforce."

"I... I can do this, Grandpa," the boy sniffed out before reaching and linking hands with the upset Nathan.

"If you are certain, my grandson," Sarek replied.

Jason raised his face and took a few minutes to look each person there in the eyes. After a moment, he nodded at Sarek. "You can swear them in," he said sickly before cuddling back into Teri's embrace.

Sarek nodded. "None of you in this room have any intention of raising to the Black of the VSO, therefore: if you swear to hold this as a Red One secret, we can reveal those things that are currently troubling these two boys. If you do not want to swear, you are free to leave. Those who do swear are under a harsh type of Code. If you tell others what you are about to learn, and they are not Black VSO nor under this Code, your life is forfeit. As would be theirs, and all others that they told. There is no rush, so please think on this carefully before deciding." He then backed up a few steps to give the children room to speak amongst themselves.

Cory simply glanced around at the others. They all nodded seriously. He then looked at Jason's face, then at Nathan's that was tucked close to his chest. Without looking up from Nathan's hurting eyes, he whispered, "They're our brothers. We swear."

"I am already VSO and under Red One," Joel's mother responded through his lips, "and I already know what events have occurred."

Sarek nodded at them all, then looked closely at Joel, "I have been informed by Jason that you are Joel's mother. I would like to meld with you at a later date."

"That would be acceptable, but not yet, Patriarch Sarek," came the echoing response.

He nodded before addressing the others. "I will now relay to you the events that took place concerning the Dragon Division and their Trial of Fire..."

Ten minutes later:

Sean lifted his head from his hands and looked in horror at the two boys being cradled by his husband and mother. "Damn," he whispered sickly.

"You *asked* him to be your Councillor?!" Bastian spluttered, his face pale as he looked at Jason.

Jason nodded and stammered, "I... I broke his Kolinahr when he was going through the 'Recovery' with me. I... I forgave him, but I knew that I'd not heal without him around."

"So why...?" Eli started, but just could not find the words.

"Why'd I freak out... and mess myself?" came the shamed completion of the question from Jason. "Cos I both love and fear him still. Whenever I'm home, he is never the one to be the first I see. I have to set myself for the day to deal with being with him. It's easier than it was, but if he was to wake me up in the morning, I'd..."

"Jace; don't," Nathan sobbed, "don't beat yourself up over it. The other room has been cleaned, and you're okay. I don't think Auntie Teri minds..."

Teri increased her hold on Jason, and Cory reached out with the arm that wasn't gently supporting Nathan to grip Jason's hand. "I don't. My boys have been in similar situations, Jace," Teri whispered to him. "All mothers know and understand these things."

"And me and my bro still wet the bed at night when we dream about the crash we were in," Benji said bravely, blushing as he glanced at Sean. Sean simply smiled back at him with love in his eyes.

Jason sniffed and half smiled, "Yeah; okay, I get it."

"So what triggered it this time?" Cory asked gently, "If Xolan isn't here, why'd you react that way, Jace?"

Nathan answered for him, "Cos we felt a Vulcan using their form of TK. Powerful too. There are only two Vulcans in the Sol System right now with that ability, and Poppa Spock has only ever used it once. Grandfather Xolan uses it a lot; he's very old, and it helps him. We thought he'd come over without calling one of us first - like an emergency, and Jace panicked as soon as we felt the first TK burst."

Joel started to cry softly, then. Until that moment, his mother's control had kept him impassive, but Nathan's words broke the dam. "I'm sorry! I didn't know - I'm sorry!" he cried out as he ran over and hugged Jason. Teri pulled him up as well, and cuddled both boys on her lap.

"Shhh, you didn't know - and I didn't expect you to be able to do it, Joel," Jason said back, his own voice thick with emotions. "Don't blame yourself."

Sean waited a moment, then said, "This Vulcan Master; you call him grandfather?"

"Term of respect for most of us," Nathan murmured, "but to Jace, he really is. Jace loves him, even though he still has fear about him. He even..." Nathan trailed off and looked at Jason.

Jason smiled thinly, "I even ask him to shower me every so often. Being that vulnerable to him helps me learn to overcome my terror - to let him care for me in that way. Not once, not one single time when he has done so, has he caused me anything but love and happiness. By the end of the shower, I'm feeling protected, and that helps for a good few days."

Sarek spoke then, "It takes a long while for *Vulcans* to overcome the turmoil caused by the Trials. The VSO Command understood that it would take far longer for non-Vulcans. All of my grandchildren who are Of The Black are still recovering, and if they were to be exposed to their Trial Master, each one would react as Jason did earlier."

Benji looked at Jason in awe. "You're brave," was all he said, admiration in his voice.

Eli nodded in agreement, "I don't think I could do that."

"Nor us," Sammy and Bastian said in unison.

Joel piped up, "Do you think having a shower with him would help you now, Jace?"

Jason giggled lightly before pulling Joel in tighter, "I think so. I've not seen him for a while, now. Nath? Can you call him?"

Nathan nodded, and looked for his comm. Sammy giggled and handed him his own. Nathan smiled his thanks, then keyed in his code, "Fire to Commander Xolan."

After a brief moment, *"I am receiving you, Fire. How may I be of assistance?"*

Nathan smiled, "We just had a small issue here with a young Vulcan using TK, and Jace had one of his turns. I'm wondering if you have time to come over and talk and shower with him?"

"Certainly. I shall beam over immediately. Is the young Vulcan in question Xain or the new child, Joel?"

"Joel," Nathan answered.

"Understood. Stand by, I am on my way to the Transporter now."

"We shall have a mug of theris-masu awaiting your arrival. Fire out." Nathan closed the comm and hopped down from Cory's lap. "I'll get the Vulcan tea, then escort Grandfather Xolan back here."

Cory and Teri smiled and nodded. Sarek moved over and lifted Jason into his own arms and embraced him firmly, "I am still un-quiet over my decision to make you and your siblings VSO. Had I known..."

"I'd not have it any other way, Grandpa," Jason interrupted him softly as he enjoyed the attention. "It was worth the pain. *They* are worth every moment of it," he added nodding his head towards those from Clan Short.

Cory shook his head but smiled back at him, "We'll talk later, little brother. When you're feeling better."

Jason nodded before settling in in Sarek's embrace. The elder Vulcan sat down and held his human grandchild close, rubbing small circles on Jason's belly. Jason pressed his back in tighter to Sarek's chest and half closed his eyes.

"I'm getting a show here, Jace," Nathan protested with a small grin, trying to lighten the mood, "and so're the rest of the guys. Don't go showing off what's mine to them, will you? They might want to steal you from me!"

Jason glanced down to see that his towel that had been wrapped tight around him was now loose and all over the place. "Meh! I have enough power to keep them away should they feel too inclined to 'frisk' me, sweetie."

Sammy received a light slap across the back of his head from Benji. "Stop looking!"

"What ya mean! You are too!" Sammy retorted giving Benji a light shove.

Eli and 'Bastian giggled at them, looked each other in the eyes, shrugged, then turned back to Jason. "We're just window shopping. Very interesting shopping too," 'Bastian sniggered, winking at Jason.

Jason blushed and pulled the towel back into a more dignified place. "Geez," he mumbled, "and I thought my guys were horny."

"They've been watching Sean and Cory too much," Teri laughed lightly.

"MOM!" both teens yelled, blushing for about the hundredth time that morning.

"I have discovered that it is pointless to protest when a human mother decides to tease her offspring," came an emotionless voice from the door.

They all turned to see a *very* old Vulcan standing there next to Nathan. His hair was white as snow, and his face was lined with more wrinkles than any of the boys had ever seen. Yet his eyes; they seemed to hold an eternal youth in them, and they sparkled back at them brightly.

He walked in at a dignified pace, and raised his hand to salute Sarek. "Greetings, Prince of Vulcan," he intoned in a high ritual form.

"Greetings, Old One," Sarek responded, saluting back. "I trust you are well?"

"I am. I trust that you and your wife, Lady Amanda, are also well?"

"We are." Sarek lowered his hand and glanced around the room, "May I introduce my Family to you?"

Xolan nodded, and looked into each face as the boys and Teri were introduced to him. Once he had memorised each name to the face, he said, "I believe they are aware of my history with Jason, judging by the looks in the eyes of the eldest two."

Cory and Sean were, in fact, staring at him closely; trying to determine if this old man could really have done the things that they had been told about.

"That's right," Jason answered for Sarek, "we swore them to Red One."

"Understood. Grandson Jason, before we talk, might I have a word with the child, Joel? His abilities have me intrigued," Xolan asked.

Joel moved off his mother's lap and walked to the old Vulcan. "Can I touch you first?" he asked quietly, his own fear showing clearly in his eyes.

Xolan did not raise even one eyebrow, he simply nodded. Joel did so and visibly relaxed, "Your emotions are not there. Yet Jason said he broke your Kolinahr?"

"It was broken, but in the six months since arriving on Earth, I have re-established Kolinahr," the elderly Vulcan answered. He moved and sat down, then gestured for Joel to come closer. "Might I share your mind, young one? It will be easier to discover the answers to the questions I have by Mind-Meld."

"Yeah, okay," Joel nodded. "But I don't wanna see my past. I remember it enough. I've melded with Xain, and he keeps me in the dark when he goes into my mind."

Xolan nodded again, "I shall place your mind in my own and hide your past from your senses." He then placed his fingers to Joel's face, and both went still.

The others looked at each other briefly, then over at Sarek. The Patriarch simply sat there impassive.

After only a few moments, Xolan and Joel broke the meld.

Xolan stood and backed away from the child in front of him, his face blank and unreadable.

Joel raised an eyebrow in curiosity, and his eyes showed his puzzlement.

Xolan slowly lowered himself to the ground, and knelt before Joel. "Welcome, Scion of Surak," he said as he bowed his head.

"Ummmm..... with all due respect, could you *please* explain?" Cory asked, his confusion mirrored by his brothers.

Xolan raised his eyes as he stood to his feet, "I have given my word to my Sister who dwells within the child. For the sake of her Bonded, I shall remain mute. As for the title, I have seen what the child has seen. I have experienced what the Forsaken has experienced. He is found, and no longer alone. Renewed shall be the Sword, and reborn is the Blade and Scion of Surak."

Sarek paled slightly. "He truly is the one?"

Xolan looked at the most influential of the High Council of Vulcan and nodded, "It has come. Therefore, *He* is coming. Your information that you relayed to us eight years ago has now more merit. We must be ready to defend Vulcan."

Sean and Cory just stared at Xolan; their brains straining to comprehend the impact of this latest revelation.

Joel whispered his question, "How are you sure? All the others have been saying it could be me that finds Sa'ren; remakes it. How can you be so sure, sir?"

"I am a Master of Kolinahr," Xolan replied, "and we have kept what has come to be known as the 'Legend of Sa'ren' in it's truest form. You have matched all, so far, and the greatest of all was the Armour. So far. It does remain to be seen if you shall fulfil the rest, but you are the first to have achieved what you have already."

"Oh," Joel's face fell, "I was kinda hoping it would not be me. I... I don't want to be this; I've only just found a real family, and they love me and don't want me to serve them and everything. I just want to be Joel."

"You're ALWAYS our little Joel!" Cory replied, the tone of his voice making it clear there was no other option.

Joel turned his watery eyes on his brother and smiled. "Thanks," he breathed out, his lips trembling.

Kevin moved in and kissed them quickly. "You're my Joel forever," he added as he broke the kiss.

Joel just looked deep into Kevin's eyes, and grinned, "Only if you'll be mine forever too, Kevin Thompson."

Kevin grinned as well. "That's a deal."

"You are whomever you are," Xolan added. "You have the right to choose your own path. However, you are also that which you were born. You can no more change your blood, than I. You will not be alone in this, for we will be with you. Vulcan never abandons her children."

Xolan nodded at them all once more, before turning and looking directly into Jason's eyes. "Come to me, Grandson Jason," he said softly.

Jason slipped from Sarek's lap and walked towards the ancient Vulcan slowly. He stopped a foot away and trembled, before reaching out his arms as if begging to be carried.

Xolan scooped him up and held him close for a moment, and Joel saw Jason's trembling slowly vanish. "Come, Nathan. I shall shower you as well," Xolan added, before turning and leaving with his precious armful. Nathan grinned slowly and trotted out beside him, still carrying a hot drink in his hands.

Cory reached over and drew Joel to him as Sean pulled Kev to him. "Cuddle-time, guys," Cory stated.

A relieved chuckle from the doorway made them all turn their heads. "Now that is something I've missed seeing, and was scared I'd never see again after the news Saturday," Commander Chip Dodds said as he moved further into the room, looking at the happy, smiling faces of the two smaller boys being hugged by the older teens.

"UNCLE CHIP!" Kevin crowed out happily. He scrambled from Sean's arms and hurled himself into Chip's.

Joel's face became pensive.

"Hey there, little man!" Chip's smile widened as he caught the flying eleven year old. "Next to the greeting from my three, yours is the best." Chip then raised his eyes to look at Cory, Sean and the others. Eli and Benji waved, as did their boyfriends, but Joel - he glowered at him. Chip's brow furrowed slightly. "How are you doing, guys?" he asked them, flicking his eyes curiously at Joel.

Cory could feel the boiling emotions in Joel's mind. *'Settle down, Lil'elf; I can promise that Uncle Chip has no thoughts of stealing Kev,'* Cory sent to Joel before responding to Chip, "We're doing better than we were a few days ago."

Chip's face registered relief and concern mixed as he moved to sit next to all the kids. Kevin remained in place on Chip's lap, and the two sets of twins snuggled into their Uncle's side. "So Justy told me," he said finally. The relief at just seeing these boys alive and well was showing clearly in his eyes as he looked at each in turn, "Kev; move over a bit," he murmured before opening his free arm to Sean. Sean accepted and moved quickly over to get a hug.

When Chip did so for Cory, Joel was transferred to Teri's lap briefly.

After releasing Cory, Chip turned to face Joel.

Joel, however, was having none of it. He had been watching Kevin's face since this *man's* arrival, and Kevin had not taken his eyes off Chip's face for one moment.

Chip opened his arm to the small Vulcan. "I won't bite..." Chip started to say

He was interrupted by Joel. The boy slipped from his mother's lap and yelled, "You... keep away from me! Keep away from my brothers! You've already stolen Kevin! Fuck off!"

He then turned and ran from the room.

"My turn," Teri stated as she followed Joel out of the room. "You guys can probably explain it better anyway."

Kevin's face was a picture of shock as he watched her leave. He turned his troubled face to Cory, and burst out in tears. "I didn't think! I didn't mean to hurt him, Cory! I didn't, I promise," he wailed as he hurled himself into Cory's arms.

Cory sank to the floor in front of Chip as he soothed the sobbing child he was now holding, and looked at Sean, "Explain, bro. I'll deal with this one..."

Teri found Joel easily. A sobbing Birthday boy draws attention. A sobbing child in the Clan drew attention on the best of days, but a Birthday boy was not meant to be sobbing and crying as Joel was currently doing. So, when he had barrelled out of CIC, a 'trail of bread-crumbs' started to form. All Teri had to do was follow a string of kids who had formed a human chain pointing the way. They all knew

that Joel would need one of those he trusted. They all knew that the best they could do was help that person.

She followed this hastily formed 'chain', nodding her thanks as she went, and found herself outside JJ's house, standing by the string of bushes and shrubs, with Levi standing guard with the two Cheetahs, the lioness and the tigress. "He's in there, Granma," Levi said soberly, "and he's hurt. He bumped into the door on the way out, and it hit his chest where he had his operation. I tried going in to heal him, but he's not letting anyone near him..." Levi was growing quieter and quieter until he whispered out, "He swore at me, Granma..."

"It's not like him," Artemus said softly with worry. "He chased his two Animal friends out as well. They are over there," she pointed.

Teri looked and saw a sad looking wolf and Sehlat staring at her.

Boy's heart breaks. Lady-Mother needs to mend heart. Only Lady-Mother can

"Thanks, I-Cheya," she mouthed at the large bear. He nodded back, and settled down to wrap the wolf pup in a cuddle.

Teri sighed to herself before getting down to her knees and crawling into the bush after her hurting little son. He wasn't hard to find, for he was crying in pain and anguish loud enough for her to follow to the source.

As she came to the hollow where he lay curled in a ball, she saw that he had his back to her. He started yelling, "GET AWAY FROM ME! I DON'T WANT TO SPEAK TO YOU!"

"Joel Short," she said firmly as she sat down behind him.

He turned and looked at her quickly, and paled even more, "Mama..."

"Yes. Now for one, you can stop screaming at everyone wanting to help you. Two, come here - you need a hug," she said seriously.

Joel sniffed and turned over, wincing in pain as he did so. As he scooted over and into her lap, she saw that his white tee-shirt was turning green at the front.

"Levi," she called out, "come here, please."

Levi popped in next to them with a small, nervous smile. Joel looked at him, remembered, and blanched. "Sorry, Levi... I shouldn't have said that..." he managed.

"S'okay, Uncle," Levi replied as he leaned over to kiss the Vulcan's cheek, healing him in the process, "I knew you didn't mean it."

"But it was mean, and I shouldn't and I'm bad," Joel said as he started to weep again, abate more softly this time.

Levi patted Joel's hand briefly before saying, "I forgive you, then. I... I don't think... I don't know, Uncle Joel. Something don't feel right. Can I check your head again?"

Joel nodded. A second later, his eyes went flat and he tried to hit Levi. "Fuck off! Get away from..."

He fell silent as a hand reached from behind Teri to grip his neck. A Vulcan nerve pinch.

Teri turned her head to see... Lady Amanda! "I didn't know humans could learn that," Teri murmured.

Amanda smiled as she arranged herself next to Teri, "Yes. It's literally a nerve pinch and doesn't require Vulcan abilities to do; just concentration and practice."

Levi was busy scanning Joel's mind, then he muttered, "It's trying to break out. His fear at losing Kevin weakened the things we did, and it's trying to get out."

"What is?" Amanda asked.

Teri briefly explained the mental episode Joel had gone through on Tuesday morning while Levi tried to sort out the mess inside Joel's head.

"Xolan can help. Or Spock," Amanda said finally once Teri had finished speaking. "However, it takes trust on the part of the one who is ill. From what I know, Spock has that trust already."

Teri nodded her head, then looked at Levi, "It's what we thought too. Levi? How is he?"

"Okay, for now," Levi said seriously. "It wasn't him, Granma; yet it was. That thing in his mind is him, but only an evil, twisted version. All the bad stuff he went through has been made very real in his mind, taking on an imprint of Joel. It's like having light and dark in the same body."

Teri nodded as she hugged Joel closer, "Please go and tell the others, then Levi. I don't want them thinking that our loving Joel has become something different."

"Okay. But let me wake him first," he smiled as he kissed Joel's lips. "Wakey, wakey, little Prince," he whispered with a giggle before vanishing.

Joel sighed as he woke, then stiffened, "Mama?"

"I'm here, Joel," she said, "and Lady Amanda is as well."

Joel turned around in Teri's arms to look sadly at them. "I've been bad," he whispered fearfully. "I've sworn and shouted at you and them, and..." He stopped and hung his head. "You can smack me if you wanna," he finished with a violent tremble.

Amanda spoke up first, "No. We don't smack people for doing things wrong; not unless we really have to. And I've never had to do that - not once."

"Besides," Teri said, as she nodded at what Amanda had said, "it wasn't you. You know that other 'thing' that's in your head? In that hole in your mind? It was that that used you to say those things."

Joel's face registered shock and disbelief. "But I remember doing and saying it," he trembled, "how can it not be me, when I remember it?"

Amanda replied, "It's another personality based on yours, sweetheart. It can do things through you without you knowing. I've seen it before on Vulcan. Trust what your mother said, child: It. Was. Not. You." she finished firmly, reaching and squeezing one of Joel's tiny hands in hers.

They both gasped, for they both felt a click deep inside their being at the contact. Joel stared at her in shocked wonder, "How'd I link with you?"

Amanda shrugged curiously as Teri answered. "Trust, Joel. You know about Amanda from those shows you've seen, so you trust her already."

Joel pondered that, then nodded with a small smile, "Okay." He then stretched slightly before sighing, "Can we go back? I wanna say sorry for what happened... and start again with that Commander Chip guy... if he lets me..."

"He will," Teri smiled as she placed Joel down and followed him and Amanda out of the bush. "You'll like him, Joel. You'll see."

Levi finished his report and vanished only moments before the door opened to admit Joel and the two ladies. Joel found his arms suddenly filled by a weeping Kevin, "I'm sorry; I didn't think," the small boy repeated over and over to the equally small Vulcan.

While Joel murmured his own apologies to his boyfriend, Amanda went to sit by Sarek, and she told him of the link now formed between herself and the young Vulcan.

Once Joel and Kevin had finished kissing and making up, they were led over by Teri to Chip, who was standing near to Sarek. He looked down at Joel gravely, "I have been told about your past, and I have heard Levi's message about that persona in your mind. However, I would like to know why you could think that I would steal Kevin from you."

"I... I dunno," Joel muttered, feeling a little lost for words, "I trust Kevvy, but... I just... I got angry when he was with you... then something snapped in me..."

Chip nodded thoughtfully before glancing back at Sarek and Amanda. Sarek nodded, "It is exactly as expected with this form of injury, my son. He was not in control."

Chip half smiled before kneeling down and bringing the two small boys closer to him. "Joel. Kevin is your boyfriend. That won't change unless you both want it to. Kevin, Joel is your boyfriend, not me. I know you have feelings for me, but I want you to know that I'm glad you're with Joel. As long as you are happy, then it makes me feel happy too; it makes me smile."

Joel felt relief pour through his hand from the grip Kevin had it in, and smiled himself. All doubt and guilt seemed to vanish as Kevin simply and finally accepted the fact that he loved Chip; and was *in* love with Joel.

Joel pulled Kevin in more firmly and kissed him soundly. He then turned and looked into Chip's eyes. He blinked soulfully at him, "I'm really, really sorry, Commander. I should have fought harder, I should have known, I..."

"Hush, Joel," Chip smiled. "Apology accepted, and don't think you can control or fight everything alone. No-one can. Now. If you call me Commander again, before you should, *I* will tickle you until you pee. I'm Chip. Or Uncle Chip, if you would like."

"Uncle," Joel decided happily as he and Kevin shuffled into Chip's arms for a snuggle.

"Umm, Dad?" Justy said from the doorway where he stood with his twin brothers.

Chip looked over and his face lit up with joy. "Justy! Get over here! And you two as well, imps!" he called out happily, looking at his three sons.

"You asked for it!" JC announced as he entered the room, just in time to see Chip receive a three-way pounce from his sons.

Joel and Kevin had only just managed to dive out of the way in time, while yelling out through their giggles, "INCOMING!"

"No fair, Daddy!" Liam giggled from JC's hip. "You didn't wait for me to help pounce!"

Teri tried to hide her giggles as Chip's face went through many different contortions. "D...Daddy?!" he said, before looking down into Justy's eyes.

Justy grinned up at him and said, "Dad. Meet Liam. Your grandson!"

Liam launched himself from JC's arms, and with a little help from Eli, flew across the room and landed on the pile on top of Chip. The Commander found himself being hugged and kissed by an exuberant, giggling red head who was squealing out happily, "I GOTTA'NUDDER GRANDPA!!!"

"What? When?" Chip spluttered as he hugged the small boy to himself tightly. "Justy! When did you adopt this little cutie?"

"More like he adopted me, Dad!" Justy giggled. "Ain't that right, Angel?"

"You're the Angel Daddy; I ain't got wings like you do!" Liam giggled back.

Chip started laughing... and laughing... and...

"Daaaad!" Justy blushed as his father didn't seem to be stopping any time soon. "Stop it! I'm no angel!"

"Yes you are!" came the reply from everyone in the room.

"Live with it," Joel giggled happily as Justy mumbled to himself while *trying* to fight a smile that was growing on his face.

"BUSTEEEEEEEDDDDD!!" Dean giggled as he walked into the room. "I TOLD ya so, Hon!"

Vicky and Riti came in behind Dean, also giggling. Little Asher was in Riti's arms and was looking at the pile of boys covering the grown man on the floor. As soon as he saw his twin brothers in the pile, he slipped down from his dad's arms and ran over.

"Vicky," Teri asked, her face puzzled, "why are both you and Asher naked?"

Vicky giggled, "Asher insisted, Auntie Teri. Reet don't wear anything anyway, and he wants to be like his daddy, and therefore, I have to as well. We told him only when at home here or in Wales, though."

Chip finally managed to stop laughing and get himself in a seated position, only to have another small child end up in his arms. He glanced first at the girl and winged boy by the door and smiled in recognition, "You're Victoria and Riti Evans, right? Spock's adopted kids?"

"We're some of them, yes Uncle," Riti answered with a wide smile. "No-one was allowed to tell ya before Sunday, though."

Chip nodded, "Yes, so Spock said Monday morning when he told me. Now then, who's this little one... and..." He trailed off as he managed to get his first real look at Asher. He then looked at Jamie. Then at Jacob. "Wha... what?"

Jamie and Jacob just giggled, the halos over their heads almost visible. The twinkle in their eyes gave away the fact that it was just too much fun to keep their dad guessing about Asher.

Asher, however, couldn't wait. "Dey my twin brudders, and dey only found out 'bout me two sleeps ago!" he chuckled happily as he twisted about to be hugged by the twins and Liam, all the while within the circle of Chip's arms.

"Oh," Chip said, a grin returning to his face. He looked up at JC and the two Evans kids and spoke quietly, "Not that I mind, but why didn't we adopt him, if he's the brother of the twins, hon?"

JC smiled. "He has the same genetic trait as his big brothers; he picked a family before anyone could say anything. Besides, I don't think our kitchen could withstand a third Terror!"

The twins could not resist it, and began tag teaming the response.

"Pop!" Jamie started...

Jacob continued, "We ain't..."

"... that bad!"

"Justy eats..."

"...more than..."

"... both of..."

"... us put..."

"...together!!" they both finished in unison.

"I do NOT!" Justy spluttered as he went scarlet in the face.

"We've seen you eat," Sean and Cory chorused.

Eli, Sammy, and their twins simply nodded while looking right at Justy.

"Fine! Whatever," he sighed, giving in with a small grin.

Chip started laughing again.

"DAD!!" Justy protested.

Joel and Kevin looked at each other. "Weird family you've joined," Kevin said loudly with a teasing grin.

Joel shrugged, "I don't care. They love me, I love them, and I've not been beaten, burned, or cut since I arrived."

"Unless you count the Excelsior," Kevin pointed out.

"Yeah, that's a naughty ship. I'll lodge a complaint tomorrow," Joel grinned back, before they both turned to face the others.

The two boys simply grinned at them all before everyone busted out laughing yet again.

Sarek raised an eyebrow before addressing Chip, "Are you proceeding to the Enterprise at this time, my son?"

Chip nodded, "Yes, sir. Come on, kiddos. I need to take your Vulcan Clan brother up to my ship, then we can catch up."

"Can we come too?" the twin terrors asked, bouncing about suddenly with Asher, "we wanna show Asher the bestest ship in Starfleet!"

Chip grinned as he looked at Vicky and Riti, "If his parents say yes, then you can all join us."

Riti giggled, "Sure you can go, Ash. We'll stay here, and you behave for Uncle Chip, okay?"

"Okay, Daddy!" he crowed as he climbed up Jacob's back to ride piggy-back.

Cory smiled, "Come on. Let's not keep Bones waiting any longer, or he'll be even more crotchety than normal."

"Is that even possible?" Joel sniggered as he pulled Kevin over with him as he squashed himself between Cory and Sean.

Chip barked out a laugh, "No, it isn't! Okay, you five," he said, pointing at Teri as well as the four boys, "can go up first, and I'll follow with my now larger family, after."

Teri smiled down at him. "Oh, Chip. What was that you were saying months ago about me and collecting kids?"

"Don't say it, Teri!" Chip laughed back as he stood up with Asher and Liam over each hip.

She simply smiled mysteriously at him while Cory handed Joel a communicator. "You make the call, Lil'Elf," he said as he reached and picked up the bag that Doc Austin had told him to bring.

Joel's face split into a wide grin as he flipped the communicator and said, "Joel Short to Enterprise."

"Receiving," came a voice that Joel recognised.

"Commander Uhura!?" he crowed out in shock.

There was an audible laugh before Uhura replied, still chuckling, *"I'm glad you're feeling better, Joel. Yes, that's me, and yes, I've read the reports your Mom gave us last night. What can the Enterprise do for you?"*

Joel giggled, "You should have a Doctor up there wanting to see me?"

"Why yes; I do believe that you have an appointment. How many shall I have beamed up?"

"Five, please," Joel smiled.

"Say when."

"Energise!" Joel crowed out.

Seconds later, he, his boyfriend, two brothers and mother vanished in a stream of transporter energy.

As soon as the sparkle effect cleared from Joel's eyes, he began to look around himself in awe. Being on the Excelsior was one thing; sure, it was a great Starship, but... **this** one was the Flagship of the Federation and *the* most famous of all the Starfleet ships that ever was or would ever be:

The *Enterprise*.

What made it even more so to Joel was that it was here he would find his heroes. All of them.

He had been here last night, but due to his operation and the fact he had been asleep all the while, he couldn't remember it. Now, he stood there, his hands being held by Cory on one side and Sean on the

other, with Kevin cuddling him from behind and leaning his chin on Joel's left shoulder, and he simply looked.

"I... wow! *Enterprise*!" he whispered excitedly before he noticed who was at the Transporter Controls.

"Scotty!!" he sobbed out in complete joy as he pulled away from the three boys holding him and leapt straight at the most famous Starfleet Engineer there was.

Cory giggled as he went over and joined Joel in mauling Scotty. "The wee laddie seems glad to be meetin' ya!" Cory stated with a grin.

Scotty pulled one arm free and pulled Cory into a gentle headlock. "That he be... but I see a Fleet Commander that be needin' a wee bit o' a reminder of 'is place!" he replied with a grin.

"'Tis Lieutenant right now," Cory giggled as he struggled to get free of the hold. "When I'm aboard this grand ol' lady, I leave me Vulcan rank behind. Gerroff!" he finished with a laugh.

Scotty laughed as he released the teen and started hugging him as well as the tiny Vulcan he now had over his hip. "So, I take it this be little Joel; one of the three heroes of Starfleet?" he said to Cory in question, flicking his eyes at the smiling face of Joel.

"Aye," Cory giggled back, "and there be the other half of the duo." He pointed at Kevin who was blushing as he was led down from the pad by Sean and Teri. "Jude, the last one, is still in the Compound."

Joel was not paying a blind bit of attention to any of this. He was too busy checking out Mr Scott. "Wow, you're a Captain?" he bubbled as he ran his fingers over the insignia on the shoulder strap, "a Captain of Engineering again?"

Scotty nodded at him, "Aye, laddie."

"You've read the report we sent up?" Teri asked as she reached them.

"Of course," Scotty nodded, "although it was a wee bit sparse on the details."

Teri nodded, looking slightly serious, "That is why I am here as well, Scotty. While the boys take Joel to medical, I'm to explain more to the Command Staff. Joel has said it was okay. Right, sweetie?"

Joel nodded, his face also a bit serious. He turned back to look at Scotty, and the seriousness lifted instantly to be replaced by wondering joy.

"Follow me, then," Scotty grinned, hiding his nervousness at what those serious looks entailed, "Sick-bay is this way."

"I know the way! I know the way!" Joel crowed out, slipping from Scotty's arms in the same motion. As soon as he landed on his feet, he snagged the nearest two hands, Teri's and Scotty's, and proceeded to tug them from the room.

The three other boys exchanged a look, grinned and followed without a word.

A moment or so later and Joel was pulling a laughing Teri and Scotty into Sickbay. "Finally," came a grouchy voice from the Office area, "it took you long enough, Mr Scott."

Joel's eyebrows vanished into his hair line as he zoned in on the source of that voice.

As Bones left his Office, his jaw dropped open. Joel was mid-pounce, and heading in his direction. "What the hell!" was all he managed to say before managing to snag the boy from the air.

As Joel wrapped his limbs around Bones in a near crushing hug, Bones managed to say, "He's feeling better, then..."

"I believe that would be a logical assumption, Doctor," Cory said in his Vulcan pose.

Bones glared at him as he made sure not to drop the happily squirming bundle of joy in his arms. "Less of that Vulcan nonsense, boy, or I'm putting you through a *complete* medical. I get enough of that from that green blooded computer on the Bridge!"

Joel sniggered as he pulled back enough to look Bones in the eye, "But I'm a Vulcan too, Uncle Bones." He added a pout and a serious case of Timmy-taught Puppy-dog eyes to add effect, and waited.

Bones' eyes softened as he looked into Joel's. He could see the laughter building behind those beautiful blue eyes, and smiled, "You're the only Vulcan I've met to have common sense and be happy, Joel."

Joel grinned back at him, then promptly kissed him. "Thank you for saving my life, Uncle," he whispered as he broke the kiss and gently placed his forehead against Bones' forehead. "I... thank you," he finished, a tear forming in one of his eyes.

"Don't mention it," the doctor replied gruffly, holding back his own now building emotions.

Teri smiled, then tapped Scotty's arm. Scotty nodded at her before addressing Doctor McCoy, "Doc, I'm goin' to the meeting with Mrs Short, now. We'll record it all for ye."

Bones nodded at him and watched them leave. As Scotty reached the door, he turned and added, "Joel? After the good Doctor's finished with ye, I'll take ye on a tour of this grand lady."

"Cool!" Joel smiled back, bouncing lightly in McCoy's arms.

Scotty smiled back and left. McCoy then walked to the nearest Bio-Bed and plopped the tiny Vulcan down on the edge of it. "Well, I suppose we'd better get started. What're we to do first, I wonder?"

Cory walked over and handed the Doctor the bag he had been given, "Here, Uncle. Doc Austin said you wanted this."

Bones nodded and opened it quickly. He withdrew the case with the Bio-Chip first, and Cory saw that McCoy's hand trembled ever so slightly as he held it. He put it to one side on the nearest counter, and then pulled out a few data-padds. "I think we'd best start with this Pon Farr problem," he said, his voice steady. If it was not for that slight tremble that Cory had caught, the teen would have thought nothing was amiss.

"Lie back, Joel," the Doctor instructed gently, as he activated the Bio-bed's sensors. Kevin immediately went over and held Joel's hand as the Vulcan did as instructed. Kevin then remembered and started to remove his hand from the bed area. McCoy noticed and smiled, "We've already had the new equipment in here, Kevin, so as long as you don't climb up there with Joel, everything will be fine."

"Thanks," both small boys replied, then they giggled at each other.

McCoy rolled his eyes. "No surprises, then. Boyfriends?"

"Uh huh," they both echoed each other. More giggles followed.

Bones laughed, then started checking out the readings.

Cory moved closer and asked, "When did you get the upgrades?"

"The week before we left at the beginning of the month," Bones replied absently, studying the readings. "The Hood sent a message about the majority of their upgrades passing the tests three months ago, so for two months, the Enterprise was being overhauled. As was most of the Fleet. Only those outlying Starships - the Yorktown and the Constitution, for example - need the full refit. We've now started the completion of it, since the Hood has now returned and everything has checked out."

Cory nodded, excitement building in his belly. More toys to mess with!

Sean groaned as he picked up down their personal link what was going through his husband's mind. He grinned and moved over to hug Cory from behind, much the same way as Kevin did for Joel. He then asked, "Why did you insist that Uncle Jim bring the ship in so fast, Bones? It wasn't really advisable just due to the attack. You couldn't have gotten here soon enough to help, so... why?"

Bones went still for a second before looking back at both teens. "The Bio-Chip Doctor Michaels told me about Monday night. It's confidential, Lieutenants, but if this is what I think it is, those in the know can explain after," he said, pointing at the small case on the counter.

Both Sean and Cory nodded; knowing that Bones would be good to his word.

Kevin and Joel were busy talking quietly and drawing patterns on the back's of eachother's hands with their fingers when the bed beeped at them. Joel turned to look at McCoy with question.

"It's finished the scan," came a woman's voice from the other side of the room.

Joel turned to see Doctor Chapel enter the room, smiling at him. "How are you feeling, little one?" she asked as she reached the bed and brushed her fingers through Joel's hair.

"Nurse... I mean, Doctor Chapel! Yeah, I'm good! Were you there last night?" Joel started bouncing again.

She nodded, "Yes, sweetheart. I said a few prayers for you. Looks like God helped Doctor McCoy in answer."

McCoy nodded at that, "It was touch and go. Next time you have one of your brothers tell you to see a medic, Joel; do as you're told." He then continued to monitor the readout, muttering, "Damned Captains - never do the sensible thing. The kid's just like Jim. Two Jims... God help us..."

Joel sniggered.

"If you want, Doc, I could talk to one of my nephews about bringing you another copy of Uncle Jim!" Sean sniggered.

"I don't know how they could, but: you *do* do that," McCoy retorted without turning, "and I'll put you through more medical checks than a teen would like to take!"

Kevin giggled naughtily, "Not that that would phase him, Doc... Cory does mo..."

"KEV!" both teens shouted, blushing to their hairline.

"Granted," McCoy nodded absently before what Kevin had said sunk in. "On second thoughts, I don't think I want to know. Anyway!" he said as he turned to face the giggling Vulcan, "I think we can get started getting you into puberty."

Joel blushed a nice green colour before nodding shyly.

"How long until Pon Farr?" Kevin asked, also looking shy.

McCoy smiled slightly before winking at the brown haired boy, "Between three to six days. Doctor Austin's estimate was a bit too strict."

Sean, still recovering from his blush, decided payback sounded good, "So you have enough time to practice first, *Kev!*"

Kevin blushed more, as did Joel.

"I'm sure I can count on the two of you to ensure they are prepared to prevent injury," McCoy stated, staring at Cory.

Cory nodded seriously, while nudging Sean in the ribs. "We've already said as much, Doc. They'll have all the help and advice they need."

Joel added his own agreement to that, "They already have helped us loads, Uncle Bones."

"Good," McCoy said seriously. He then turned to the workbench where his medical equipment lay. "Joel, you need to strip off slightly. Just down to your shorts. The glandular stimulator won't work through that much clothing."

Cory and Sean's laughter made him turn back, device in hand. He too started to laugh, for Joel was now nude and sitting cross-legged on the bed, and Kevin was greedily eyeing him up and down.

Doctor Chapel smiled as she turned to leave, "I'll wait outside."

"You don't have to go," Joel said softly.

She turned back to look at him curiously. He said sadly, "Modesty was beaten out of me. I don't care 'bout being naked." He then smiled softly and added, "Besides, it'll be easier for Uncle Bones."

"You should know by now that clothes are optional with our family, Doc!" Cory giggled.

Doctor Chapel laughed and went over to help assist Bones. Bones came over to Joel with the device he was carrying, and was about to explain what would be happening when he remembered something that he had wanted to ask from the night before. "These pale marks on your body. What are they, Joel? This bloody machine didn't identify them last night nor now."

Joel looked at his smooth skin, and at the paler lines and marks patterning him. "When Kyle and Ty healed me, these are all that were left of my scars."

McCoy looked sick for a second. He swallowed and took a deep breath, but Cory could see his eyes growing angry.

Doctor Chapel was also not looking amused, but she did manage to ask in a flat voice, "How did Kyle and Tyler manage to heal you?"

"They're Mikyvis," Joel said, as if that would explain everything.

Doctor Chapel blinked, glanced at Bones who shrugged, then looked at Cory and Sean.

"When you 'try' to give Kyle his quarterly exam, he can explain it." Cory replied seriously. "I still can't really put into words anything about him, Ty, or their three sons."

Bones' eyebrows shot up, "You say sons in a way that makes me think they are not adopted."

"Yup," Sean replied.

Joel spoke, "They are not quite human any more, Unca Bones. They are different. You'll like Levi. He's cuddly."

"I'll take your word on that, Joel," Bones started to say, but then stopped. Another naked child was now seated with Joel, and was hugged into his side: a small boy with caramel blond hair, and bright violet eyes. "Let me guess," choked out the Doctor, "Levi?"

"Hi Uncle Bones! That's ME!" Levi giggled. "Wanna try out a cuddle?"

Bones nodded slightly and scooped up the even smaller boy. Levi latched on and made it one of the best cuddles he could.

"Please make sure my Uncle Joel'll be okay, Uncle Bones. Then after, Daddy and Poppa says they'll come up and you can examine all of us; my bros as well," he bubbled happily to the Doctor.

"I'd like that," McCoy smiled. "Joel's right; you are cuddly."

"Yup! I'm his 'Little Mouse', so I gotta be cuddly! Only his bestest brothers and nephews get given cuddly names," the boy giggled with a grin. "I gotta go now. Be back up later!"

He then vanished with a slight popping noise.

"I need a whiskey," Bones muttered to himself before moving closer to Joel. "Lie down, son. I'm going to start your puberty now. You are going to feel strange almost right away, so lying down is best." Bones then helped the boy arrange himself comfortably on the bed, before placing the small device he held at a point near to Joel's ear. "Here we go. Close your eyes, and it won't seem so disorientating."

Joel's eyes swam as a flush of enzymes and hormones started to rush into his green blood. He closed them quickly, and tried to breathe slowly, but his racing heart was having none of it.

The biobed beeped at Bones, who moved the scanner to Joel's neck.

This caused Joel's head to spin, or so he thought. If he had not been lying down, he would have fallen, that he was totally sure of.

Again, the bed beeped, telling the Doctor that the correct levels had been reached.

"Joel. I don't want you to get scared, but the next place I need to..." Bones started, but Joel interrupted.

"I guessed," he said, his voice seeming far away due to the head-rush he was in. "My balls, right?"

Everyone chuckled. "That's right," laughed Bones.

At first, it was a tingle, something similar to the feeling he had when he and Kevin 'played' together. Then it suddenly changed.

Fire. Power. Movement. Heat. Energy. Excitement. Longing.

Joel whimpered as the bed gave its last beep and Bones finished his task. Joel felt even weirder than he had ever before in his life.

Kevin sniggered.

Opening his eyes, Joel turned to his boyfriend and raised an eyebrow. Kevin was looking at Joel's mid-section and failed to see the look he just received.

Joel also looked down, and started to snigger as well, for the rush of hormones had produced a typical reaction common to all in puberty. He was hard as a rock, and due to his racing heartbeat, 'little Joel' seemed to be dancing.

"That is normal. It'll stop... well, relatively soon." Bones turned away and caught the faces of the two older teens watching. Amused compassion was an odd expression, yet both Cory and Sean pulled it off with style.

"Yep, he's definitely a Short boy..." Sean giggled.

"Not that 'short'," Kevin murmured, not taking his eyes off 'little Joel'. He thought he had done so under his breath, but Doctor Chapel burst out laughing.

McCoy rolled his eyes yet again, yet he did smile. "You can get dressed now, Joel. And stop with the pouting, Kevin," he added, catching the crestfallen look Kevin was now sporting, "you'll get your chance to look again."

"And the rest," Cory giggled.

Joel was blushing madly by now, and started to get into his clothes. "I feel woozy," he suddenly said as his head started to spin again at the sudden movement. The shorts he was holding slipped from his hand.

"To be expected," McCoy noted softly. "Cory, Sean, Kevin. Please help him."

Cory and Sean steadied Joel while Kev gladly 'helped' Joel get dressed. Very, very slowly. "Dang, Kev, you been taking lessons from Cory?" Sean giggled.

"Uh... Kev... if you... umm... uh... mmm..." Joel muttered as Kevin continued to dress him.

Kevin looked up with a perfect angelic expression. "What?" he asked, innocently.

"N...n...never mind," Joel muttered as he leaned into Cory's embrace after Sean had slipped his tee-shirt back on for him.

Bones came over with a hypo-spray half way through this. "Just need a blood sample for the DNA test," he said as he depressed the spray into Joel's neck. A small hiss later, and the vial filled with bright green blood. "There. The full test and search for parentage should take a few hours, kids. Now then, Mr-I'll-Get-My-Boyfriend-All-Hot-And-Bothered-Thompson. Get on that bed over there. Now that you're here, I want to check you out as well!"

Kevin giggled and scrambled over to lie down where told and Doctor Chapel came over the start the tests on him. McCoy took the blood sample and placed it next to the box containing the Bio-Chip.

'Any bets on Joel returning the favour?' Sean sent to Cory with a chuckle.

'Not while adults are in the room,' Cory sent back with a grin.

"Do I have to strip too?" Kevin asked, his eyes filled with mirth as he glanced at an eagerly watching Joel.

Chapel was about to shake her head no, but one look at the glances being traded between the two boys, she said, "Up to you."

Joel slipped from his bed quickly and made for Kevin, stumbling slightly as his head was still spinning a bit. He made it with a laughing Cory's help and proceeded to strip Kev down to his boxers. Kevin's eyes registered relief at that, for while he was less shy than before, taking them off in current company

might have been just a shade too far. Joel knew that too well, going by the talks they had had over the last 24 hours.

Chapel smiled at the two boys, then gently asked Joel if he could slip down from the bed. He did so and she started to examine Kevin. After a moment or two, she called Doctor McCoy over. He took one look at the readings and asked Kevin seriously, "How much have you been eating since I last saw you?"

"Not much," Kevin said, "don't like eating, and the drinks keep me full."

McCoy nodded his head slightly, "Yes, they would; but I expected to find you eating more. However, I notice that your nourishment over the past few days has been elevated. Care to explain?"

Kevin smiled and pointed at Joel. "I always think of food as dirty 'cos of how I used to live. Joel feeds me, though; and when he does, all I feel is love, and that makes the food he feeds me nice." He stopped as he blinked back some happy tears, "I... I'd eat forever if Joel will be there to feed me."

"I will," Joel said, reaching and taking Kevin's nearest hand and giving it a squeeze, "as long as you want me to, I will."

"Awwwww!" Sean and Cory chorused.

McCoy's smile widened, "That's good. You keep that up, Joel." He looked at the readings again, "Judging by the last test I took of your twin, Kevin, you are beginning to catch up to him."

"Really? I don't seem to be getting as big as him yet," Kevin murmured with surprise.

McCoy chuckled, "No, that will take a few years. You'll likely be fourteen before you are more or less the same as him in looks. I meant, you've started puberty. You hadn't when I last checked you. You have now. If you have any questions about anything, I'm sure you have some close brothers you can talk to."

"About?" Kevin asked through his slightly rosier cheeks.

Joel replied before Bones could. He listed off on his fingers, "Getting pubes, wet dreams, wanking - which we know about *giggle* - and..."

"I GET IT!" Kevin cried out as he covered his now furiously blushing face with both hands.

Joel giggled, "Gotcha back!"

"Love you too, pain," Kevin giggled, still blushing. He then peeked out at McCoy, who was trying not to break a smile, "I can talk to people, Doc. Kenny, Xain, Jake, Cory or Sean."

Both teens felt strangely honoured to be counted as some of the few Kevin would trust with those types of questions, and so they both reached in together to hug him quickly.

"Get him dressed, Joel. Take your time," McCoy winked at the Vulcan, who immediately did as 'ordered'.

Five minutes later, and a red faced, hot and bothered Kevin was squashed with Joel between the two teens. Cory sighed, "You win, Sean."

"Good. I want a surprise gift, and a box of chocolates!" Sean giggled back.

Joel and Kevin traded a look, then sniggered.

Chapel said she had another appointment with a crewman, and so left the room at that moment. McCoy sat down facing the four giggling boys. "Just a few things to tell you. First, both of you," he pointed at Kevin and Joel, "need to stay on those shakes. In your case, Joel, your shakes will be at a stronger level than Kevin's. Your metabolism requires more vitamins, especially over the next few days." He glanced at Cory and Sean and chuckled, "I hope you and your brothers can manage what is about to happen."

Cory raised an eyebrow, keeping his face emotionless.

McCoy decided to not take the bait. Instead, he told the patriarch, "Vulcan puberty is... let's say 'fun', and that is with standard puberty. Joel's is going to 'a little bit more than fun' for the best part of four days... or so..."

"I'm sure we'll know all about the 'fun'," Sean replied. "We gotta make sure our Lil'elf and his boyfriend are happy."

McCoy shook his head. "I'm more than positive certain things will start happening at an increasing pace between these two over the next 12 or so hours, but that is not what I was referring too. You know how difficult your own puberty is sometimes, right?" he asked both teens.

They nodded slowly.

"Human puberty is like sailing on a calm lake, with gentle waves lapping at the boat compared to Vulcan puberty. That is more like water-skiing while juggling flaming chainsaws," Bones said seriously. "In Joel's case, that will be exaggerated over the next few days; so add doing so in a violent hurricane to that visual image." He paused as he took in the shocked expressions on all four boys faces; then he added, "And then he'll enter Pon Farr."

"So," Joel said meekly, "I'm gonna.. what? Get horny?"

"Like you wouldn't believe," McCoy said seriously. "You're also going to have mood swings that would make a Klingon envious, and your appetite will increase."

"Envious Klingons? That's gonna be fun to watch!" Cory giggled.

Joel was not giggling. "Will I hurt someone? Will I lose control?" he asked nervously.

"No, not until Pon Farr. And Mr Spock has already said he'll be talking to you about that first. He knows what to expect as a hybrid going through that," Bones said soothingly.

The door hissed open, and Scotty entered looking slightly pale. McCoy turned in his chair and said, "That was quick."

Scotty shook his head at him, before coming to stand near him. He addressed the boys, "I'm here to give ye that tour, now."

McCoy saw a certain look he recognised in Scotty's eyes, and said to Cory, "Please take Joel to the Forward Observation Lounge for an Energy Drink first, Cory. You too, Kevin. The more both of you have, the happier I'll be. Then I'll allow Scotty to give you that tour."

Cory nodded and stood, bringing Kevin up and sitting him on his hip. Sean did the same for Joel, and together, both teens left the Sickbay and headed for the Lounge.

"What's wrong?" Bones asked Scotty, quickly.

"I just couldn't stay to hear more. They... they tortured him, and..."

"Please! No, Scotty! I can't hear it! I saw the results with my own eyes; all those scars. I don't need to hear it too."

Scotty nodded sympathetically.

Bones looked curiously at Scotty. "I am wondering about one thing, however. How does he know us? The briefing we were sent on Monday just said he had been lost in another universe, and I haven't read that report Teri sent up last night. Were we there too? Did we...?"

"No! Hell no!" Scotty retorted, looking even sicker at the thought. "We weren't there, Doc. I'd hate to think that our doubles did something like this! No, he was in a world where our lives are a TV show. He knows more about our missions and technology, and even future, than many Starfleet admirals do!"

"You can't be serious!" Bones' jaw dropped open.

"Dead serious, Doc. Joel had written something down as proof for Teri Short to show us. It was an exact - and I mean *exact* - transcript of what happened in the Genesis Incident. From Khan, Spock's death, through to Mount Seleya!"

"Jesus Christ... and he knows our futures?"

"Possibly, but since he is here with that knowledge, including detailed knowledge on future technology, how much will the 'show's' history be changed?"

"I can't cope with temporal mechanics, Scotty. You tell that to the green-blooded computer. He'd love it," he trailed off quietly.

"Aye, I will, Doc." Scotty stood, "Now. I have a rugrat to spoil rotten. Four, in fact. If that Cory thinks that 'cos he's a flamin' Fleet Commander means he don't get treated as one of my trusted engineers, then I'll have to show him he's always going to be a part of this crew."

"Do the same for Sean as well, Captain Scott. They may only hold honorary ranks in Starfleet now, but once one of us, always one. The Enterprise is just as much their family as Ambassador Sarek's is," Bones ordered.

Scotty grinned, and started to leave, "I see we're on the same wave length, Doc. I'll keep ye informed of our progress."

Bones sighed heavily before moving to where he had left the blood sample from Joel, and the Bio-Chip.

Scotty walked into the Lounge, and saw the tiny Vulcan boy bouncing back and forth by the windows. In between trips from one side to the other, he would hug each of the other three in turn, kiss the equally tiny Kevin, take a long slurp of his shake, then go back to bouncing.

'Hope the Doc knows what he's doing! That boy is going hyper!' the engineer thought to himself as he quietly walked over. As he came behind Cory and Sean, who were watching Joel in bemusement, he coughed. "What's this? Lazing about when there's a tour to be done? For shame, Mr Short! I thought one of my lads knew better!"

"Actually, I was trying to figure a way to transfer his energy to Engineering to replace the warp core." Cory dead panned, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"If ye manage it, let me know. We've not yet achieved perpetual motion... Joel should be able to power the Fleet!" Scotty chuckled.

Joel, on his umpteenth trip back towards his brothers and Kevin, saw the Chief Engineer, and turned from bouncing to pounce mode.

"Ooff... well, lad. I see the Doc has wound you up a treat, hasn't he!" Scotty managed as he settled Joel into a comfy hold over his hip.

"Uh huh! Can we see the Warp Core, Uncle Scotty? Can we? Please??" Joel bubbled.

Kevin giggled, "Jo', you need to finish your shake first!" He handed the glass up to his friend, and watched in fascination as it vanished in three seconds. "Okay. We're ready, Uncle Scotty!" Kevin laughed.

"Okay! Lieutenants Cory and Sean; front and centre! Let's make this a nice official tour for our visitin' Vulcan special guest!" Scotty mock ordered, a twinkle in his own eyes.

Cory giggled as he saluted Scotty. "Sir, yes SIR!"

"Come on, Head Cheese," Sean giggled as he nudged Cory in the ribs, "stop messing, and start touring!"

Joel sniffed in Cory's direction. "Nope, he don't smell of cheese, Big Ted. He smells of strawberries!" he giggled.

Kevin chuckled, "Yeah, but did he clean that big empty space in his head, Jo'? That could be where the sme... argh!"

Kevin's statement was changed into giggles as Cory grabbed him and attacked his ribs.

Scotty watched in amusement as Kevin rolled about on the floor under Cory's assault, "Lieutenant Short; if you have finished disciplining 'Acting Ensign' Thompson, can we begin?"

"One minute, Sir; I seem to have missed a spot!" Cory replied with a giggle. After a few more seconds of tickles, he pulled the now red faced Kevin up and kissed his forehead. "I believe he's now received suitable punishment; we're ready, Scotty."

Laughing, Kevin returned Cory's kiss quickly, then ran over to stand by Scotty. He reached up so as to hold the sniggering Joel's hand, and together they all left for Engineering.

After a brief ride on the turbolift, which Joel thoroughly enjoyed as he was allowed to state their destination, they piled out into the middle of an Engine refit. Jude and Billy Joe came out of the other turbolift at that moment as well. "Hey! Uncle John said we could come up, so Seth called," Jude giggled as he came over, only to be pulled into a hug by Cory.

Scotty looked at Jude closely, "You the lad who helped Cory in the Excelsior's Main Engineering last night?"

Jude's jaw dropped open. "Wow.... I mean, ah, yes sir, Mr Scott! I don't believe it!"

Joel giggled, "He know's about those Star Trek shows too, Unca Scotty!"

"Then I think I have a bit o' a treat for more than just Joel. Cory, Jude. What do you make of the new design? The Hood has been testing this for the last ten months, and we have been given the green light on it now." He led the boys over to the Chief Engineer's 'office' where the screens were all filled with the new data.

"WHAT are they doing to MY ship?" Cory exclaimed. "What is all of this stuff? I've never even seen prototypes of anything like this, and I've got access to ALL of the Starfleet Beta programs!"

Scotty laughed, "Most of this was covered under Vulcan 'Red One', Cory; so no, you'd have not seen it. Vulcan innovation. Especially that last one - the addition to the Warp Core they are fitting." He pointed to a strange looking device that was currently being worked on by a group of Vulcan scientists and engineers. "Not even the Hood had that one. That was tested by the VSO themselves."

"I don't care if it was tested by Mother Mary and the Twelve Apostles... is it going to hurt the Enterprise?" Cory responded. "Look at this... half of the stuff you might need to disable in an emergency is locked out!"

"Ah, Blondie?" Joel called from the console where some of the new engine specs were being displayed.

"Yeah Elf?" Cory replied, now staring at the new equipment menacingly.

"Stop growling at it, for one. It can't do nothing to change itself. Second, get over here and take a look at what they've done," Joel giggled.

Cory did so and, after giving Joel a quick noogie, looked at what Joel was pointing at. Jude was also looking at the screens and said, "They've streamlined the emergency procedures, and simplified the intermix disable systems. This is far more stable, and if it did go towards a breach, they could eject far quicker. Even the Antimatter containment pods and systems have been upgraded. See? What's been disabled is redundant and is just going to be in the way. This bit here, however. This is.... not possible..." he finished with a whisper as he pointed at a second screen.

"I don't even know WHAT it is," Cory stated, obviously still not happy.

"Nor I," Scotty said as he came up behind them. "The Vulcans said it won't be active yet, and until it is, it won't interfere with standard ship operations. It took a direct order from the Cap'n to get me to allow them to put it in, though."

Joel looked up at them both, then at Jude and smiled softly. "I'm not surprised you don't recognise it. Jude and I do, but it's out of its time. It's like showing some Roman soldier a fighter jet. You... we, I mean... we shouldn't have this technology for at least, I dunno... two hundred years, yet!"

"Well then, what is it?" Cory asked. "And why do we have it if we ain't supposed to?"

"All I can offer," Joel said slowly and thoughtfully, "is a guess. This tech did exist at this time in Star Trek, just by another more advanced species, not the Federation. It's possible that the same applies here, only that species or one like them has made contact with my people... and gave it in trade. It's definitely not right for Star Trek, but since this isn't the 'TV Show Universe' then that don't matter." He paused again and looked at the screen. "It's Slipstream," he whispered finally. "It really is Slipstream."

"...And slipstream is what?" Cory and Scotty asked in unison.

Joel smiled again, and turned to look at them both. "I've just checked the Inertial Dampeners, the Structural Integrity Field and the new modifications they are making to the subframes of the hull. It all checks out. You both know of Transwarp and the theory behind it, right? It failed with the Excelsior and the Great Experiment?"

"Yes," Scotty nodded, "total waste of time."

"And it cost a load of lives," Cory added, remembering his History Class.

Joel raised an eyebrow at that last tidbit, for it was something different from the shows. However, he left that for now and continued to explain, "Transwarp, had it worked, would have increased a Starship's speed by at least 20%-30%. However, even if you made it work, you'd end up tearing holes in subspace far quicker. Warp drive does that anyway, but you'll not work that out for at least 100 years. That can be compensated for by changing the nacelles to a different shape and orientation, but with Transwarp, it is just plain bad." He turned and started tapping on the console as he continued to speak, "Quantum Slipstream is simply using the nature of space and subspace in a more 'nature friendly' way - as well as exponentially increasing the speed at which you'll move. Getting from Earth to Vulcan at Warp 9.8 would take about a day. With Slipstream, you'd have to program the system to stop the ship less than three seconds after entering the Stream. You could get from one side of the galaxy to the other in a matter of months, not the 70 plus years with, say, Warp 9.5."

"Oooooo...kkkaaaayyyyyy...." Cory replied as he tried to process the new information.

Scotty just stood there, his jaw laying on the console in front of him.

"Don't start thinking about all those new systems you'll be charting any time soon, though," Jude jumped a moment later.

Sean moved over and asked, "Why not?"

"Simple," Jude smiled, "navigation. Our current tech for the sensors are based on standard Warp drive, not on Slipstream. When in Slipstream, you are travelling faster than the sensors can scan ahead, therefore you'd be flying blind. You can only use this if you know where you're going, and where everything is at that time at that location. Like from here to Vulcan; you know where Vulcan is right now - it'll be in the data systems, right?"

Cory nodded and Sean said, "Yeah, Jude. The computer has all the details to work something like that out."

Scotty completed the train of thought that Joel had just started, "So we can use this to get from an already charted location to another, but we'd need normal Warp to explore and chart new areas, or unstable areas, with?"

Joel grinned and nodded with Jude in agreement. The little Vulcan then took over and said, "Yup, Unca Scott. That's it. If you know where you're going, you can get there with this drive. The adaptation to the hull and the other systems will keep you safe *in* Slipstream, but you can't go to new places yet with it. Also, I don't think you could travel for more than a week, maybe two, at most without using up all your power. That," Joel paused as he tapped in some more calculations and then he continued, "that would get you from the Central Hub of the Federation to one of the outer Hubs easily, then after refuelling the antimatter, hop back again."

"Just how much power does that thing use?" Cory asked.

Scotty whistled, "Well, lad; we can travel indefinitely at our new maximum Warp. If this drive drains that in a week..."

"Kinda like Dan's Camaro when he goes out to 'play'?" Sean asked with a giggle.

Cory giggled as well. "Can't wait until we can play with this drive!"

"You've stopped growling," Kevin giggled as he scooted in and made himself comfy in the circle of Joel's arms.

"Yeah, but I don't want this thing used until Joel and Jude have had a chance to check it out and show Scotty and me the tricks behind making it work right," Cory replied as he pulled the two munchkins and Jude to his chest for a quick cuddle.

Joel nodded his head in agreement, then relaxed more and pulled Kevin in closer as Jude moved off to check out the warp core with Billy Joe. This time, while being held in Cory's arms, Kevin had his back

to Joel's chest. Enjoying this new turnaround in their usual hugging style, Joel rested his cheek against the back of Kevin's head and breathed in his boyfriend's scent. Something stirred in his chest and he felt hot all over. Giggling, and with a light-headed feeling, Joel moved his face until he could reach Kevin's left ear; then he started to nibble seductively on it.

"Mmmm," Kevin murmured as his eyes started to close. A second later he remembered they were not alone, and blushed scarlet. "Ah, Jo'?"

"Mmm hum?" Joel hummed back, still nibbling.

Cory smiled. "Enjoy it, bros; anyone says anything, I'll sic Sean on them."

Joel opened his eyes and glanced around. He stopped his now welcomed assault on his boyfriend's ear and blushed himself. "Oops... uh, if I'd... ah... ummm, I think we better finish that later, Kev..." he giggled shyly.

Kevin twisted about and locked his mouth with Joel's for a serious kiss before breathing, "Feeling horny like Uncle Bones said?"

Joel nodded, still blushing.

Scotty grinned at them. "Your choice; there's a few spare rooms up in the primary hull you could choose from, or you can continue the tour..."

Kevin and Joel whispered for a second before shyly giggling together, "Tour... we'll, ah... we'll wait!"

Cory, still holding his little brothers close, smiled over at Sean. They locked eyes and smiled broadly at each other, remembering how they had been when they had first admitted to each other that they were in love.

"Come on then, lads," Scotty said happily, "let's be off to the second most important place on the old girl; the Bridge."

Joel grinned at him, but wouldn't move until he'd had one more nibble on Kevin's ear...

Kevin agreed.

Meanwhile, in Sickbay:

Bones was slowly going through the information sent up to him by Doc Austin while waiting for the genetic ancestry program to complete its run. When he got to the notes Austin had made about Joel's DNA peculiarities, he seemed to stiffen in his chair. He stood and grabbed the box containing the Bio-Phase Chip. He had not intended to check into this yet as Joel's needs seemed greater, but if this was what he was expecting, then it might have an answer as to the seemingly messed up nature of the young boy's DNA.

He took the chip out of the case and placed it on the scanner. "Computer, analyse the chip and compare to the data kept for the Federation Bio-Stealth Experiment."

'Unable to comply, 'Yon'kur Wan' code in effect. Pass Code required.'

"Access: McCoy, Leonard H. Pass code, Alpha Victor 346 Gamma."

'Accepted. Password required.'

"Lost," McCoy stated quickly.

'File now opened for comparison. Checking.'

Bones sat down at the console and asked, "Status of all Bio-Phase Chips."

'Of the five BPCs made, four are currently in high security storage at VSO Command, Shi'Kahr, Vulcan. The fifth is currently out of Vulcan and Federation control. The VSO are still attempting recovery.'

Bones leaned forward and asked, "Is this current chip the one lost since 1995?"

'Negative. This is not one of the five known BPCs. It is of a higher technical level than those five prototypes.'

It was as he had feared. Bones sank back and sighed. Obviously whomever had stolen the prototype had continued the work on it, and now the technology was loose.

'Anomaly found. Biochemical marker found. On screen.'

A patterned symbol appeared on the viewscreen before Bones, and he stared at it blankly for a few moments.

Then, slowly, it dawned on him what he was seeing. "Computer, cease the genetic trace on the blood sample from Joel Short, and access file of Doctor T'Sara of Vulcan!" he yelled. "Playback file once accessed!"

He leapt to his feet and rushed to another console and began a trace on the core DNA of Joel's blood against the DNA samples contained on file for the Ship's crew.

'Doctor T'Sara, born on Vulcan, city Shi'Kahr, in the Earth year 1948. Died February Second, 1992 in...'

"Skip to last known message sent to me by the Doctor," McCoy yelled out as the trace he was running continued. He turned and faced the screen.

A Vulcan woman appeared there, a baby held in her arms. She started to speak:

'Greetings, Doctor McCoy. I shall be arriving on Earth in twenty three standard hours. It will be agreeable to see you again, and to inform you that we now have a fully functional Prototype of the Bio-Phase Chip that you originally designed.'

The baby started to fuss slightly, obviously getting hungry by the movements towards T'Sara's chest.

'I am also sending this message as an invitation to my son's Ahm-Van-Kal, which shall be held at the Vulcan Embassy, London. He who is my husband will be pleased should you accept this invitation. I would speak longer with you, but my child requires nourishment. I shall speak to you again when I arrive. Live long and prosper, Doctor.'

Just before the signal was terminated, the child in the Vulcan woman's arms opened his eyes.

They were bright blue, just like her own.

'Match found. Chance of paternal relationship to test subject, 100%,' the computer said into the stunned silence of the room.

McCoy croaked, "Check subject against the genetic profile from Doctor T'Sara."

'Working... Match. Maternal connection, 100%.'

McCoy started weeping.

Main Bridge:

"Commander Chekov!! Commander Uhura!!" Joel's happy yell rang out through the Main Bridge. He and the others had entered from one turbolift, just as the two Commanders had from the other.

"And here he is!" Uhura said happily as Joel jumped off Sean's back and ran across the bridge and into Uhura's arms. She had knelt down ready, and scooped the fragile seeming, newly minted teen into a motherly hug. "Enjoying the tour, Joel?"

"I think his smile is proof of that, Nyota," Chekov chuckled in his heavy Russian accent. "Welcome to the Bridge, young man," he said as he ruffled Joel's hair. "I think you can drop the 'Commanders' bit. I'm Pavel, and this is Nyota."

"Can I call you Uncle and Aunt?? Joel bubbled hopefully.

"We'd be honoured, Joel," Uhura smiled.

"And I hope I get an 'Uncle Jim' from you as well," said a new voice as the turbolift doors opened and Kirk and Teri stepped out.

"That would be logical, Captain." Sean commented, trying to keep a straight face.

Joel peeked over Uhura's shoulder in wonder. His eyes were wide as saucers, and his mind came to a jarring halt.

Captain James T. Kirk.

The most famous Captain in the History of the Alpha Quadrant. Joel knew he would be known as such for more than a thousand years.

And he wanted Joel to call him 'Uncle Jim'?

Tears streaming from his eyes, he blindly ran at Kirk. Sobbing in unrestrained and unfocused happiness, he scrambled up into the arms of one of the two men he had loved without reserve since he had been exposed to 'Star Trek'.

"Uncle Jim!" Joel covered Kirk's cheek with kisses, then hid his face in Kirk's neck, and cried.

His emotions had now gone haywire; whatever Doctor McCoy had done was definitely kicking in.

"Puberty?" Uhura commented to Sean.

"Yep; it started about thirty minutes ago," Sean replied seriously.

"And as you've been told," Teri said seriously, "his emotions have never been allowed to develop at all. He is still a little boy when it comes to things like love, family, happiness and wonder. He would likely be this way anyway; but if his puberty has started, then it's amplified."

Kevin walked over calmly, and Kirk knelt with Joel in his arms. Kevin was easily added to the joint cuddle and soon Kirk had a boy on each hip, one helping to comfort the other.

"*McCoy to Kirk,*" Bones' excited voice came over the comm-system.

Kirk looked helplessly to Uhura. "Can you hit the button please, Nyota?" he asked. "I seem to have my arms full right now."

Sean sniggered at the understatement. Uhura depressed the button at her console, and Kirk responded to McCoy, "Go ahead, Bones."

"*Meet me in the Officer's Lounge. And get a hold of Scotty and the lads too.*"

"This is urgent? They are all here in the middle of a tour," Kirk asked curiously.

"*Under Vulcan authority, I order you to the Officer's Lounge, Jim. An old 'Red One' is about to be recalled!*"

Officer's Lounge, Deck 2 & 3:

Joel was seated next to Kevin, and both were staring out at the Earth. The view of the nacelles as the Enterprise hung in orbit took Joel's breath away, and he squeezed his boyfriend's hand tightly.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" Kevin said, as he looked out in wonder.

Joel nodded, then turned to Kevin, "Yeah, but you are even more beautiful. I really do love you, Kev."

Kevin's eyes were filled with emotion as he gazed into Joel's. They kissed. It started as simply a touch of the lips; yet as it filled both boys with that Fire of love, the kiss became more and more serious. Coming up for air, both boys smiled at each other while lost in the other's eyes.

Behind them, Kirk, Scotty, and Teri stood and talked quietly as they waited for Bones to appear. Cory and Sean were sitting nearby, and watched silently, while Jude and Billy Joe were talking quietly as they sat on the far side of the room. The door hissed open, and Chip and JC entered with their three sons, Dean, grandson, and Asher. They also moved to stand by Kirk and the others.

"What is happening? The Doctor just summoned us from our tour," Chip asked.

Before he could get an answer, the door opened yet again and the Doctor came hurrying in. He gestured to them all and led them down to where the two small boys were seated, still lost in each other's eyes.

"Joel?" Bones drew the small Vulcan's attention to himself.

"Yes, Uncle Bones?"

Bones held out a folder, "I found them, Joel. Your family."

Hands shaking, Joel took the folder and opened it. Together, he and Kevin looked at the first pages, those containing the maternal information. Cory and Sean ran over and started hanging off the back of the sofa-like seat to read over both boy's shoulders.

Joel read the first page quickly. His mother was a Vulcan scientist called T'Sara, and she had been the one to create the Bio-Phase Chip that had been in his neck. It turned out that the original idea had been from Doctor McCoy, but it had been his mother's genius that had made it work. It had also, it seemed, saved his life.

Due to the project she had been working on, she and her staff had been placed under Red One. All that the file he currently held would say about her was the basics, including that she had been married and had had a child; a son. Nothing more.

The next page was a picture of her. Joel looked for the first time into the face of his mother, and started to cry. Within his mind, he felt his mother's Katra move, and peace flooded his body, but still he wept. He read and reread the information, but it said nothing about her death, nor about what had happened to him.

Due to those tears, and the thoughts now rolling through his mind, Joel failed to see Spock enter.

"Doctor, you called and I came. Is there anything amiss?" Spock asked quietly.

Bones shook his head and remained strangely silent. Kirk answered instead. "This is Joel," he said as he pointed at the oblivious small teen reading the folder.

"Ah. What is he reading?" Spock asked in curiosity.

"Bones found his family. Joel is getting the information first, then I think Bones will tell us." Kirk moved forward and stood with his back to the windows, facing the four boys engrossed in the details of Joel's heritage. Spock and Scotty moved to stand with him, while Chip, Bones and Teri moved to stand near the boys. Dean, Justy and the others remained by the door to give Joel some space.

Joel looked up briefly and blinked through his wet eyes. Captain Spock? Here?

He could not even smile. His mother's picture had torn his little heart out.

Spock looked at the boy curiously: Joel's Vulcan features were at odds, it seemed, with the naked emotion being displayed in those bright blue eyes. Spock's eyebrows both raised.

Joel looked back down and took out the picture of his mother to hold against his chest. He then turned the page to the paternal information, along with his father's picture.

There was a loud gasp from Kevin, and Cory muttered, "Holy *fuck*!"

Sean, however, nearly lost control of his legs with the shock, and slipped to the floor behind the sofa.

Joel had gone ramrod stiff. He slowly stood, his eyes now fixed before him. The folder and both pictures fell from his suddenly nerveless hands, and the file fell down and landed at his feet. Both pictures, however, fluttered and landed by the feet of the Captains standing by the window.

All three looked down quickly at those pictures and looked at the faces of Joel's parents. Two of the Captains stiffened in utter shock, while the third raised an eyebrow curiously.

"D...Daddy?" Joel trembled. "Y...*you're my Dad??*"

Director of Pranks:

This chapter has been graded for 'Dramatic Pause Effect' and has been rated '100'.

ACFan

Editor's Notes:

I concur with ACFan, and do hereby add my own star, for number of tears shed during a scene. Well crafted my young friend.

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher

Archivist's Notes:

This chapter, Ilu, is one in which you have 'spun up the dial' - love, humor, plot development, tension, and cliffhangers all in plentiful supply. Well done!

D&B

Beautiful! This Cliffhanger is Str8mayb approved.

Str8mayb - THE Evil Author

Chapter 10

"In the Shadow of Memories"

Co-Author: Dark Star

ACFan, Akeentia and Roland: thanks for assisting - without you, this would not have been possible.

Also, Thank you, D&B - Your advice and suggestions came in more than handy. Hugs, guys!

Disclaimer:

This is an upsetting chapter, and you will need a strong heart to get through this without crying your eyes out.

So, I will not say 'Enjoy'; but instead, 'I hope you are touched by this'.

Iluvantir

CIC, about 10am, Thursday 28th Oct...

Sammy smiled to himself from his seat just outside of the Kitchen area when he heard Joel's excited cry of 'Energize!'.

"That's good; he's happy," Sammy thought as he stood up. He made his way into the Rec Room looking for Brian, when two boys came close to him. He recognised them as DJ and Tanner, and smiled. "Hey guys."

"Hey, Sammy," Tanner smiled happily in return, then jabbed his thumb in a gesture towards his boyfriend at his side, "This doofus has a question for you. It's silly, I think, but he's getting himself worked up over it."

Sammy saw Tanner glance with love at the sandy blond thirteen year old at his side, and that look told him clearly that this was standard banter between these two love-birds.

"Bite me," DJ giggled in return, as he stuck his hand under Tanner's tee-shirt and lightly tickled the strawberry blond's ribs.

Sammy laughed along with both boys as they started a mock fight there and then. He was slightly concerned, however, for he could sense some odd emotions coming from both of them.

He waited a few minutes before stepping up and giggling, "Enough, guys. We get the picture; you're both madly in love. Now, what's this question, ah... DJ?"

DJ nodded, "That's me. Well... can we sit? This is weird, Sammy, and it might take a while for me to say it right."

Sammy smiled and walked with them over to the Quiet Area of the room. Adam and JJ were curled up with each other, and both were reading a book each. They nodded in passing, at the three newcomers, before getting lost in the worlds of Tolkien and Lewis once again. Jude and Billy Joe were also there, and simply talking quietly.

Sammy sat down on the nearest sofa and patted the seats next to him. Tanner sat furthest away, allowing DJ the spot right next to Sammy. DJ smiled, a little timidly, and took a deep breath to steady himself.

Before he could find his words, Sammy said quietly, "Before you begin, can you both tell me what's wrong? I can feel your emotions and something is nagging at me about them."

DJ glanced at Tanner, his eyes pleading.

"You don't have to say if you don't want," Sammy said quickly, catching the look.

"No," Tanner smiled, sadness in his eyes, "it's not that DJ don't want to tell you. He's asking me to; that's what that meant."

Sammy nodded and waited. He reached and held DJ's hand, giving it a squeeze in support. DJ smiled his thanks, and reached to hold Tanner's hand with his other.

Tanner's face filled with love and gratitude, then he started speaking, "This is kinda difficult, but; a little over a month ago, DJ became very depressed. It was a lot of things, so no one thing started it. He... he, ah..."

Sammy squeezed DJ's hand tightly and whispered, "He tried to kill himself?"

DJ sniffed sadly, and Tanner nodded. "Yeah," Tanner said sickly, "I was so scared of losing him, I nearly lost my head with a few of the guys. Nothing we said was getting through to him, and even though Doctor McCoy from the Enterprise saved him, he still wanted to... to leave us." Tanner took a few breaths to steady himself before saying, "What changed DJ's mind about killing himself is why he wanted to speak to you. I... hon, I think you need to say this, not me," he finished as he shuffled closer and wrapped his boyfriend into his arms.

DJ nodded from the middle of the hug and started to twist about, so that his back was being held against Tanner's chest protectively. He looked into Sammy's bright, sad eyes and said, "I had a buncha dreams. I didn't know what was happening, what was real or not. People were really with me and talking to me, but then others were there who weren't really there. I... I think you were, Sammy. Your boots, your clothes - when I saw you on Sunday, I recognised you. I'm so sure you were there, and I've had that feeling all week."

Sammy just blinked. "On Enterprise?"

"Yeah, or somewhere. You talked to me. I can't remember what you said, but you talked to me," DJ nodded firmly. "It all faded not long after I woke up, then Tan decided to rip me a new butt-hole."

"Someone needed to," Tanner giggled, although there was little humour in his eyes.

Sammy looked completely lost. Jude glanced over and said, "Didn't mean to hear all that, guys, but Sammy? You did see him and talk to him, only it was a you from the future. That's all I know, 'cos the story I read it in never really explained where you had come from, or why."

"Jude's right," said a firm yet gentle voice from the corner. They all glanced over to see the Doctor. "Just accept that you did help, Sammy, and that we now have things on the right path."

Sammy shrugged and smiled. "Okay. I just hope I helped," he giggled, and DJ nodded happily. Sammy looked at DeeJ and Tanner, "Wanna go find something to do?"

"Sure," Tanner smiled.

DJ looked closely at Sammy, "You believe me then?"

"Sure I do. If John says it's true, and Jude says so too, then yeah, I believe it as well. I've got questions, but... I know John; he won't answer them, will you?" Sammy asked, looking at the Doctor.

The Doctor shook his head 'no'.

Sammy thought for a moment before smiling and extended his senses out toward the Doctor. He put into practice what Jason had taught him, but his only result was to have the giggling Time Lord wag his finger at him. "Nuh huh, SamSam!"

Sammy shrugged my shoulders and giggled, "Can you blame me?"

The Doctor winked. "No, I suppose not; but you really shouldn't try to read me, Sammy."

"I wasn't. It's just that so many people... well, leak, I guess you'd say. You can pick up lots of stuff that way without actually reading, ya know?" Sammy explained.

"I'll have you know I DO NOT LEAK!" the Doctor retorted, glaring at the brown haired boy, but Sammy could see the smile in the Doctor's eyes.

A voice came from out of the air, "Ah Galli? Actually..."

"JAY! I do NOT leak! Well, at least not for a few years yet!" the Doctor said as he broke out in giggles.

Jay voice could be heard replying excitedly, "Ooooh; I can't wait!!"

"I do wish you'd tell me, though, what this is all about," Sammy said to the little Time Lord, whose face now matched that of his hair in colour.

"I know you do SamSam, but there are some things you're not meant to know, and this is one of them. Just know you helped him in another time and place. Besides, it would spoil the whole 'all knowing Time Lord thingy'!" he giggled, fighting with his blush.

"You're no fun!" Sammy retorted as he stood sticking his tongue out briefly at the little Time Lord before turning back to D.J. and saying. "Anyway, I can feel you telling the truth, DJ. You didn't lie, so I'd believe you even without these comedians! Now, come on; let's play," he added with a sunny smile. The other two stood as well, and together they started to run from the room.

Everything seemed to freeze in place, and the Doctor turned to giggle at a surprised Levi. "You can't sneak up on a Time Lord, kiddo."

Levi giggled, then grew serious, "You didn't tell them everything, did you, Galli?"

The Doctor looked at Levi closely, then shook his head, "No. I think you are ready to learn this aspect of your powers. Come with me."

Levi walked up to the Doctor and cuddled into his arms, "What're you going to do?"

"Teach you about the 'Memory of Time', and also show you how even the smallest choice can change things in unforeseen ways."

"Shouldn't Daddy and Poppa be here, then?"

"No," the Doctor shook his head. "They are not ready yet. Maybe they never will be. You are, for you are the Voice of Forever; his Avatar. Come, Levi... oh, but our Friend says we have to swing by Utah and get someone. He needs to see this too, but for another reason."

Utah - Camp Bam Bam:

Adam watched as all the new rescued children milled around and interacted with his family, and nodded with satisfaction. Even if he could not fully accept why his family had to be hurt and killed, at least this showed that it was worth it. 'I just wish they were still here; I miss them,' he thought to himself, morosely.

The air seemed to quietened down a lot, and Adam started looking around quickly, wiggling his fingers in his ears as if to clear them out. Why was it so quiet when the place was filled with hundreds of kids?!

"Huh?!" he muttered when he saw that not only had everyone become as silent as the grave, they were all stock still: as immovable as the Earth. "What the fuck..."

"No. 'When the fuck' might be the more accurate statement, Adam Casey, Master of Arms," said a voice behind Adam, causing him to spin around and draw his weapons all in one motion.

A ginger haired little boy with green-brown eyes and a mischievous smile was grinning back at him. An air of competent power seemed to be around him, and a feeling of peace and laughter was palpable.

Adam lowered his weapon slowly. "What is going on?" he demanded.

"Nothing, right now," the boy said with a slight giggle as he looked around at the motionless group around them. "Or, to be more accurate, nothing as far as we are concerned."

Adam forced himself not to smile. "Not what I meant," he said steadily.

The boy's face became serious, "I know, young one. I was just trying to lighten the mood a bit."

"Young... *young* one"? What the..." Adam spluttered, his eyes widening. "I'm older than you, kid."

"Really? By how many millennia? How many galaxies have you seen the birth of, or the death of, even. Have you walked in the Fires of Time, bent the Wheel to your own ends, and breathed on the Ribbons of Fate?" the boy said, a small, wicked smile spreading over his face.

"... oh, God..." Adam sighed, covering his eyes with his hands. "I don't have time to go nuts..."

"You're not, and no, that's not my name," the boy giggled as he moved over and reached to lower Adam's hand. "You have heard of me, but only through some British TV shows that you started watching a few months ago, courtesy of Logan and his brothers."

Adam stared at him. "Go on. Explain, then," Adam sighed, giving up and smiling himself.

"I got a smile! Wow, I'm the luckiest Doc ever!" the boy giggled. He stepped back a bit and touched the red button on the strange wristwatch he was wearing. "I'll not just tell you, Master of Arms. I'll show you."

Adam nearly fainted when an old fashioned, 1950's UK style Police Telephone booth appeared, amid the chords of wild thrumming that suddenly filled the air. "The Doctor??"

"Pleased to meet you," the Doctor giggled as he bowed. "Now, as you have no doubt guessed... *I'm older than you!*"

"But... but... how? Why?" Adam sputtered out.

"First," the Doctor answered seriously, "I'm from this Universe, but was out of it for 50 thousand years. So that meant that my adventures were 'seen' through dreams of those who made the shows. Its a Universey type thing, don't worry about it. As for 'why'? You've asked many times why this had to happen - why your family had to die and get hurt. An Old Friend of mine told me that you should come along, on the trip I'm about to take. It'll answer some of your questions, just not as you'd expect. It's up to you, though, Master of Arms."

Adam thought about it for only a second. "If there's any way I could get some answers as to why my family died, then I would definitely like to go."

The door of the Tardis opened, and a voice said, {Enter, then. You shall ride the Winds of Time with us, Adam Casey, of Earth.}

"Who...?" Adam spluttered yet again.

"The Tardis. Yes, he talks, and yes, he is weird..." the Doctor giggled as he reached and took Adam's hand to lead him inside.

"Hiya, Adam! Want a Jelly Baby?" Levi called out from where he was sat on a large sofa. All around him were bags and bags of Jelly Babies.

Adam just shook his head as he walked in and over to the sofa.

The Doctor sat with them and said, "First, there's some stuff I will be teaching Levi, Adam. He has to know the limits of the power I will now be showing him. If there's anything you want to eat while we do, just ask and Tardis will make it for you."

{Oh, so now I am an Inter-Universal Vending Machine. Will my life never cease to thrill me?}

Adam thought for a moment, then said, "Well, you know... ever since Koth and Korris introduced us to Gagh and blood wine... I've grown rather fond of them. Could I have some, please, Tardis?"

{Since you have asked so nicely, yes you may. The machine just to the left of you shall dispense them.}

Adam rose up and walked to the now humming machine, and took his food. "Mmm... fresh too!"

The Doctor shuddered, "Live worms... Klingons, I ask you." He looked at Levi and pulled the boy over, with the Jelly Babies, and kissed him. "Any questions before we begin?"

"What's 'Memory of Time', Uncle Galli?" Levi asked after kissing the Doctor back.

"Time never forgets; not even those Timelines that died in the fight with Axon. Even the past Cycles of Creation are remembered. Time Lords can visit them, and even remove things from them, but if we were to interfere in a 'Memory' we could unravel the fabric of reality itself. Active Timelines and Universes are fair game, to a point, but a Memory should never be messed with. Ever. Come over to the door, and I'll help you see."

Adam looked up and stared, as the Time Manifold started to glow, and the entire room trembled. He then watched as the Doctor and Levi went to the door and opened it to reveal what seemed like a Universe of white mist. "What's that?" he asked, as a worm escaped the side of his mouth, causing him to chase after it.

"The Great White. You are the first Young Race member, ever, to see this, Adam," the Doctor smiled over his shoulder before beginning a long chat with Levi as they both stood by the door.

Adam was far from bored. He threw question after question at the Tardis, ate a fair amount of food, and even watched a few TV shows he'd never even heard of before - all the while, the two High Race kids talked and talked.

Eventually, the Doctor giggled. "Okay, stick your cute little face out there and try."

Levi sniggered and did so.

"Now, let your eyes sink through Time," the Doctor said as they looked at the Universe Time-Trees around them.

"I see it. It's before Daddy became a Mikyvis, isn't it?" Levi said in wonder.

"Yes. Where we're going, the Mikyvis never 'were', so even events before the split are different. That is why you should never 'change' what is 'in' a Memory. You'd undo everything. Now, that's where we are heading. It was the Main Trunk of Time, and, well... you'll see. Watch close, for something like this could still happen at any time. And also, be careful with what you learn here. This power is one to be used only at need."

Adam moved over and looked out. "What's that black thing?"

"Our Universe," Levi answered with a nervous smile, for the Doctor's speech had slightly unsettled him.

"What are we going to see, Doctor?" Adam asked, as he gazed in awe at Alpha Prime. "And how does it help me?"

"Some bad stuff, and you shall see *how* bad something can get when someone dies who should not have. It is the opposite of what has happened to you," the Doctor answered softly. "You'll understand more after we leave. Hold on, Time Shifting..."

"*How* bad is it there?" Levi asked.

The Doctor sighed. "Bad. The name 'Tanner' in that dead Timeline is synonymous with another name."

"What name?" Adam asked, as the Tardis started moving down through Time's Memory and towards a now rapidly solidifying 'dead' Timeline.

"Judas..."

Dead Timeline - Year: 2015 AD

Sammy's Perspective:

"Cory get your ass moving RIGHT NOW!" I screamed while firing my phaser rifle once again into the trees.

"What's the point?" I heard him reply as I turned to look at him.

Sometimes I didn't know the answer to that question myself and now, looking into those haunted sky blue eyes, racked with such pain and loss, I had to ask myself again, for the thousand or maybe millionth time, just what was the point anyway?

"Because we can't give up fighting," I said; as I had done a million times before, it seemed.

He laughed and shook his head, but it wasn't one of amusement by any means.

"What is there left to fight for?" he asked bitterly.

"You'll never find out if you don't move your stinky butt right this fucking minute," I answered, ducking as a blast of energy hit the window near my head.

Shit; I needed to pay attention - I almost got my head blown off.

"Ark, we need emergency transport and we need it now!" I yelled once again, hoping this time she would answer me.

I heard a yowl from the trees and knew Vish was still with us, especially when I heard the screams which followed.

At least one more was down for our side.

Cats tended to get a bit vicious when they got pissed off, and having a big ole boy like my Vish mad at you was, as they were finding out, not a good thing - not a good thing at all.

"Alright, but if Ark doesn't answer..." Cory replied as he got to his feet. "I'm sorry Sammy, I suppose you're right; it's just...just..." and I knew what he meant.

Why were we still fighting, why did we care any more?

We'd never win, most of us were dead, another two in this battle and if Ark didn't respond, we would be joining them.

There was no where left to run, no where left to hide here.

Tapping my comm badge I said into it, what I or another had been saying for six years now. Six long, very long years. "All units fall back immediately."

"All you alright?" I asked as I resumed firing.

"Yes, just got my head knocked around a bit" Cory replied, which I already knew, even if the blood oozing down his face from the scalp wound hadn't told me that already.

Looking back at him, I smiled and said, "Well, no harm done then. And who knows? Maybe all that agitation will have made that one blond cell reproduce finally!"

"Bite me," Cory replied with a wan smile, but I could see a bit of the old Cory show through for just a moment before the pain overtook it once again.

"Ark respond!" I said into my sub-vocal.

"Maybe it's finally gone," JJ said into the silence, finally giving voice to what we had all been thinking but hadn't wanted to say.

Before we could answer, Vish and three others came running in from the back of the house. I let out a sigh of relief to see both him and Matty safe, along with Antony Parnell.

"Bloody wankers," Antony muttered absently.

"Didn't want to play nice, huh?" Gabe asked jokingly.

"Never do, now do they, bro?" he replied to Gabe's grin.

"Ark, wake your ass up!" Matty yelled as he took up a position next to me and added his fire to that of my own.

"They're all over. We barely made it back through the rear," Vishnu told us, and it just confirmed there was no way out... but we already knew that.

Then, through static that never used to be there, Ark's voice rang out, <You do not need to yell Matty. Furthermore I do not have an 'ass', as you put it.>

"YES!" Matty yelled again, pumping his fist in triumph as Antony muttered, "About time."

"Ark we need emergency transport and we need it like yesterday," Cory told her.

I never knew you could hear weariness in a computer's voice, but we all did in Ark's, as she responded, <I am afraid that will not be possible, Patriarch.>

"Make it possible, Ark," JJ replied.

<You do not understand, JJ. When I lost Austin in teleport on the last use, I discovered that my memory core had began to degrade. If I try teleporting you, the location I will send you to might get 'lost' in my memory. I might not be able to retrieve you,> she responded.

Except for continued phaser blasts, there was silence. I asked, "Is it that bad, Ark?"

<It is. Also, I am afraid my power levels are below what would be considered critical, Samuel. I can neither guarantee safe teleport for any of you, nor that I will remain active for much longer,> was Ark's response.

I looked at Cory who finally said, "What are our chances?"

<I do not know that I can transport effectively even one, Patriarch. It is possible that I can transport all of you or that all would be lost.>

"Do it" Cory finally said, and I was glad it wasn't my decision.

<This is not a wise course of action, Cory,> Ark replied quickly.

"We're all dead anyway, if you don't," Vishnu told her.

<Very well. Where do you wish to go? I will attempt it,> she asked.

Now that was a very good question.

There just weren't a whole lot of options when you got down to it.

Cory looked at a complete loss and JJ finally said, "A nice deep cave somewhere maybe?"

"Are any of your life support systems functioning yet?" Kyle asked.

Why any of us kept asking that question I didn't know but every few months we would; even though we all knew it would never have the answer we wanted to hear.

<Negative, Kyle,> was her reply as it always was.

Suddenly what JJ had said hit me and memories flooded me.

Memories of dad saying 'Never again' and why he had said that.

"That's it, JJ!" I yelled as I remembered.

JJ asked, "What's it?"

"A cave! Dad built a bolt hole, we should be able to use that!" I answered.

"What are you talking about?" Matty asked.

"I just remembered, Matty. You remember after the attack dad had the house and everything rebuilt?" I asked him.

"Yeah kinda," he replied.

"Well he built a bolt hole, a safe place should it ever happen again. At least he thought that's what it would be," I said turning away for a moment.

"Where's it at Sammy?" Cory asked.

"It was in a cave system about six miles north north west from our house," I told him.

"Ark can you scan that area and see if you can locate it?" Cory asked.

<Negative Cory. I no longer have that type of precision. I have found a cave system in that area, but what may or may not be within them is beyond my present capabilities to determine,> she told us.

"Well I suppose we haven't got much to lose," Cory finally said.

<May I remind you that the FCC set up a base there that is still in existence,> Ark said.

"Yeah don't remind me" I said. It still pissed me off that the SOB's had set up camp on our land, and even gloated about it.

"Well hopefully they won't be up at these caves," Cory said before looking at all of us. As we each nodded our heads he said, "Ark. Take us there."

<Very well, Patriarch; but I must warn you again of the dangers involved in...> she started to say, but Cory interrupted her, "Just do it."

I was scared, in all honesty. The last time we had asked Ark to take us somewhere, Austin never reappeared. She couldn't understand why, then. Now she'd obviously found out. Her memory was failing.

We could all go the same way, this time.

One second I was in the house, the next I was in a field.

I heard Cory ask if everyone was alright.

I heard CD gasp as he asked "Where's Gavin and Antony?"

I started to frantically look around for them.

"Ark, where's Gavin and Antony?" Cory asked.

Even fainter than before, I heard, <They are... gone. I can not find their... co-ordinates. I am sorry.>

"No," Ricky cried out softly.

How we had more tears to shed I didn't know, but I felt them on my face and saw them on the faces' of the others as well. We turned to the one closest to us and sought comfort.

Vishnu wrapped his arms around me and hugged me to his fur sleek body as we both cried for two more members of our family; now lost.

In the midst of this Ark made it three.

<I am... sorry Patriarch, but po...wer is fail...ing now, as... well.>

"No Ark! You can't leave us too!" Matty cried out.

<I do... not seem to have much... choice, Matthew.> she said as our sobs filled the silence.

"What will we do without you, Mama Ark?" Matty asked quietly.

<I... do not know... child... shut... down in pro...gress...> was her only reply.

"NO!" we all said as a final static filled message came across our sub-vocal implants, <And...I...am not...female.>

Through our tears, we couldn't help but laugh at that. For all the years we had known her, and for some of us even before, she had been fighting the kids calling her a 'she' and even as she died, she had to get the last word in.

I turned and buried my head into Vish's fur lined shoulder. I cried for Gavin, Antony, Ark and all the others we had lost over these past six years. I was thinking again about how it had come to pass that the most powerful entity in the galaxy was now reduced to ten scared and weary teens and young adults.

All gone now; the once mighty Clan Short reduced to this - running and hiding like thieves in the night.

Always scared and alone, only each other to rely on, and a never ending struggle to keep going - not giving up.

Today it had been Cory again, but it had been each of us at one time or another; and many more times than once.

Why?

It was a question I kept asking myself and I knew the others were as well.

Why?

I started to think back while Cory gathered us to him and led us into the caves. It had started as such a fun day...

Flashback - Sept 16th, 2009:

It was Timmy's eleventh birthday and we were being hurried along by dad so we wouldn't be late.

It was decided that only some of us that had been around a while would be going today, otherwise there would be hundreds there instead of dozens.

The guys loved parties, but even Cory and Sean had to admit there were limits to everything. Several hundred kids all showing up at once was a bit much.

I think Timmy would have loved it, but his daddy and poppa had overruled him on that.

Me, I think they were scared he'd be in the shower for the next several months continuously if they had allowed it.

Finally, I looked to the Trinity and the rest of the group who were going and asked, "Everyone got their presents?"

After getting a 'Yeah' from everyone, I called in for transport and the cool Montana weather was replaced by the ever hotter climate of Orlando in September.

It had been a long five years filled with so many changes and new things.

I was sixteen, now, and dad had not stopped teasing me about being a terrible teen since I had turned thirteen; but he still loved me just as much. Maybe even more, I guess.

After the attack it had been hard. Real hard, but we got through it. It took a long time, and we had a lot of help, and we succeeded.

That help had come from Cory and Sean, along with the rest of the Clan, and of course Dr. Dan. I spotted him and had to run over and give him a big hug.

"How ya doing kiddo?" he asked.

"Oh, okay, I guess," I replied and he smiled.

"Vishnu keeping you occupied?" he asked while laughing.

I felt my face turn bright red as I mumbled, "You could say that."

"Well, with his enhanced stamina and strength..." he said letting the end trail off as I just blushed more.

I decided to turn the tables. Grinning up at him, I said, "I'm so glad that Doc. Austin gave me that dermal regenerator. I never knew it could get so raw!"

This time it was him choking and turning red as I smiled sweetly at him.

I felt my love's arms go around me from behind as Vishnu said, "It solves a lot of problems," He then started to purr into my neck.

Oh wow! And we couldn't do nothing about it right now either!

"Stop that!" I muttered almost below hearing, knowing he'd hear me anyway. He just purred louder.

"I should know better after all this time," Dan muttered as we again laughed.

"Gee, how many of your kids are teenagers now?" I grinned up at him.

He snorted and said, "Too many!"

That got us all laughing again.

JJ was seventeen, now, as was Adam, while Kyle and Tyler were each thirteen. If anyone had thought them horndogs before... well, they found out real quickly that they had been quite mistaken.

Suddenly the crowd parted, and the 'Birthday Boy' came out with Cory and Sean walking behind him.

We all shouted "HAPPY BIRTHDAY!" as he started giving hugs to everyone.

Cory and Sean got quite a few as well; especially from me.

When Timmy got to me, I lifted him up into my arms and gave him one of the big bear hugs which he had always loved. I said "Happy Birthday, Fireball," as I began tickling him. His laughter spilled out immediately.

As everyone headed back inside, Cory and Sean pulled us aside and asked, "How's it going SamSam?"

I smiled, for that nickname had stuck with all the Clan. I answered, "Pretty good. Nothing really new going on. We got those kids out of that mess in California and into Unit Base 5 up in Washington, but other than that nothing much has been going on."

Even after five years, it still seemed strange that I was the head of the Western US division of Clan Short.

"Well that's good to hear. You should know that the attorneys for the ex-parents filed an appeal with us," Sean said as I stiffened.

"Relax, dufus," Cory interjected.

Sean quickly added, "We told them it was final, and Grandfather Sarek happened to be visiting: it was so funny. He walked over to the comm and basically said, 'Just in case you were thinking to appeal to me, appeal denied.' he then walked away!"

I started laughing, envisioning that scene, as Cory added, "You should have seen the look on the attorney's face at that!"

"Oh I wish I would have!" I replied.

"It's archived, so we could probably pull it up for you," Sean said, still laughing.

"Maybe later. Give Tommy a break for once," I told them.

"So how are you doing, you big pussy?" Cory asked as he pulled Vish into a hug.

I heard a growl as my Vish replied, "Fine, but DON'T call me a pussy!"

He was grinning though, as he pulled back from Cory. Although, if you didn't know him you would think he was about to eat you.

That had been a running joke ever since we had gone on an operation back in the beginning. As usual, the cat kids wore their hooded robes, and some punk had made the comment 'What, this big pussy here gonna kick our butts or something?' and Khan had let out a low rumble. We knew it was muted laughter but the punk didn't. He pulled his hood down and said simply, "Yes."

The punk and his friends had wet themselves before they even took off running... which is something you really shouldn't do around cats. The cats found it fun, let's say, to chase them down; yet never quite catching them for the longest time. Watching them gave a whole new meaning to the phrase 'cat and mouse'.

Wetting themselves wasn't the only thing they ended up doing, especially after Kev had yelled rather loudly, "Come on guys; quit playing with your food!"

It was funny until they rounded them all up finally, and found that their very sensitive noses didn't much care for the resulting stench. Still, they'd had a ball and the joke had stuck.

"I'm surprised you haven't worn poor SamSam out yet," Sean just had to say.

Vish gave me a look and I just shook my head.

"Not yet," he said before adding "At least."

"Gee thanks," I replied to Cory and Sean's laughter.

"Is there a bet going on how long I'll last?" I asked.

"Well actually..." Cory started to say when I cut him off with, "I don't wanna know!"

"Probably not," Sean said, grinning.

"We better get inside and make sure Gizmo hasn't headed off to the showers with all your guys," Cory said then.

"Oh God; he still does that?" I asked, even knowing the answer.

"Oh yeah, you know with everyone growing up and all he's got to keep track of the changes," Sean said laughing as we all followed him inside.

"I bet he does real well in comparative anatomy class," Vishnu added as we entered the room.

"Straight A's" the proud papa shot back.

"Bet that's the only thing straight," I couldn't help adding, which got more laughs.

"Ya'll git yur butts movin! We gots a party to be getin' to!" Tommy yelled out just as loud as ever, and with just as much of an accent too.

"Heya, southern boy," I said as I saw him, kidding him as I always did for being so Southern. Even though I was from Dallas and had never quite lost my accent, he for the most part hadn't even tried when it was just family.

"SAMSAM!" he yelled as he ran over and wrapping his arms around me tightly.

That was the way it went for the rest of the afternoon as we had a barbecue out by the pool. It was a fun party and we all had a good time, before headed inside for the cake and, finally, the presents.

Before Timmy blew out the candles on his cake, he had to hug and thank Tommy and Tyler for making it for him. Once the 'wishes' had been sorted out, the main event got to take place.

Presents. A ton of them.

That was one really nice thing about the Clan; come birthday or Christmas time, everyone got a million presents.

That especially meant a lot to the kids who had never had presents before.

I still found it hard not to cry when some kid would ask, "These are really for me?"

My answer was the one I learnt from dad: "No, they're for your twin brother."

At least until that one time that I was bringing a boy presents and he asked that question. When I gave him my normal reply, I watched as his face fell completely. He fingered the presents longingly for a second before turning and yelling 'David, these are for you!' and another little boy came over who actually *was* his twin!

No one had mentioned that to me when I had gotten the gift!

I felt like crap, and it took me a while to convince him they really were for him. Luckily Kevin had transported out to a toy store while all the drama was going on and showed up fifteen minutes later saying, "See, these are for David!"

Oh I could've kissed him for that, come to think of it I did. <giggle>

Everything was wrapping up, and some of the guys had started to help Timmy take his mountain of gifts to his room. I was standing and talking with Kev, Vish and Cory while Sean supervised the rugrats to make sure stuff actually got put away for a change.

Timmy had just came back into the room when suddenly things got quiet and I looked up to see what was wrong.

There was a boy, about eighteen I guess, standing there in the doorway from the kitchen. He was looking into the living room while everyone else was staring right back at him.

I reached for my weapon, but Cory put his hand on my arm. He said, "It's alright."

I looked over to him as I heard Timmy say "Hi" to the guy.

"How have you been Timmy?" the boy asked softly while I just watched.

Something about this guy set my neck hairs on end, and I could see Vish was at alert too.

"Ah...Fine..." Timmy stammered.

"Here this is for you" the young man said as he handed a gift-wrapped box to Timmy.

"Who is that?" I whispered to Cory.

"Tanner," he replied just as quietly.

"Who the hell is that, cause I got a bad feeling about this guy," I told him.

"Relax Sammy, he's Clan," Sean said.

I was shaking my head as Timmy said, "Gee, thanks Tanner! You didn't have to, ya know!"

"Hey, can't miss my little bros big day now, can I?" he asked chucking.

"I guess not," Timmy replied with a sunny smile.

"I've never heard of him before," I said, still watching the guy. Something about him gave me the creeps.

"Well go on; open it. I've worked real hard to make everything just perfect for you in time for this day," this new kid said while still grinning, but there was something.... something not *right* there.

"He... he's not been around much. Studies in the Ark complex, mostly, and keeps to himself. It's a long story, but we rescued him and his boyfriend back in the beginning; even before we got to you. His boyfriend... he died and Tanner... well Tanner closed up inside himself and no one could reach him. He doesn't have anything to do with us any more, really. That's why everyone is so surprised he came today, but then again he always did like Timmy. Timmy is related to DJ, Tanner's dead boyfriend, so maybe that's why," Cory told me quietly.

"Something's not right here, Cor," I said.

Cory just shook his head as he said, "You worry too much, bro."

I'd never told him, or anyone else outside the Trinity, about my 'seeing' or 'feeling' things, so he always thought I worried too much.

Maybe I was, but I couldn't escape the conclusion that something was 'wrong' about all this. I watched Timmy take the box, give it a shake the way all kids do, before he sat down at the table and placed it in front of him. He then began to unwrapping it.

Cory walked over to Tanner, saying as he went, "Hey bro; it's really good to see you again." Tanner didn't take his eyes off of Timmy for a second, and that feeling suddenly got a lot worse with the last of the wrapping paper being discarded by Timmy.

As his little hands reached for the lid, I suddenly had this overwhelming feeling of dread overcome me. Without thinking I screamed, "NOOOOOO!!!" as I began to run forward towards Timmy, with Vish and Kevin hot on my heels.

Everything seemed to go into slow motion; Timmy was in the act of lifting the lid up, while Tanner turned his gaze to me for a brief second. I gasped at seeing the rage and anger in his eyes before he turned back to Timmy.

Cory stopped and looked at me in shock before turning his gaze to Timmy. A pencil thin beam of green light shot out of the opening box and struck Timmy just below the throat.

Everything stopped as the lid slammed closed. Timmy's arm suddenly fell to his side, and he turned slightly in his chair with a stunned and uncomprehending look on his face. "Dad?" he mumbled, before starting to topple sideways.

"Grab him!" I shouted as I lunged the last steps and caught the falling boy, only to have Cory take him from my arms and lower him to the floor.

"Gizmo," Cory cried as I looked down into the still shocked face of our little Fireball, and the pinprick size hole just below his adam's apple.

"What?" he said, and it was obvious he was in a great deal of pain.

Sean had run over to Tanner and was screaming "What did you do?" when another flash hit me. Suddenly I knew we had to get out of here, and get out now.

"EVERYBODY OUT NOW!!! GET OUT!!!" I screamed as I starting to grab people and push them towards the door.

Cory stood up and Sean came over to help with Timmy. They looked at me and I just repeated myself, now completely sure of what I was feeling, "Outside, and get away from the house!"

Tanner was shooting daggers at me, but Vish and Kev were dragging him outside along with the others.

Brian, Danny, Randy, Kartik and JJ were all shouting and telling everyone to get outside, and I just hoped it would be soon because somehow I knew Tanner wasn't done yet.

I just didn't know how *right* I was with that feeling.

When it looked like everyone had made it outside, we joined them.

Cory and Sean were holding Timmy in their arms and talking to him. Matty suddenly cried "Wusty" and began running back towards the house.

I screamed "NO!" but Brian caught him before he could get closer. Brian then ran towards the house calling back, "I'll get him."

"Brian, come back!" I screamed, but he kept running. I saw Kartik running after him. "No, don't!"

But it was too late: as they got up on the porch there was a bright flash, and our world turned upside-down.

It was a howl of enormous pain that brought me back from the edge of blacking out. At first I thought it was Kartik, but then I realized it held too much pain in it and remembered the story Logan had told me of the death of one of the Cat-Kids during the Battle of Montana.

I could see Vish collapse from the shock of losing his brother, and my heart screamed for both him and my other brothers who had just died. For now I pushed it those screams deep down inside, and I began to try and get help. As dad said, there would be time enough later to cry but now something else was needed.

There were kids scattered everywhere; some obviously dead, while others clearly weren't far from it.

I shook my head to clear it and touched my sub-vocal, calling, "Ark - Code Red Clan wide, multiple casualties. We need immediate assistance!"

There was no answer, except laughter... from Tanner!

"Ark!" I yelled again.

Again, my only response was more laughter from that bastard.

"JJ, I can't raise Ark!" I yelled as I pulled my communicator out and tuned it to Terra Main. "Terra Main, this is Sammy Reynolds with Clan Short of Vulcan. We have an emergency situation; we've been attacked with multiple casualties. We require immediate medical assistance," I said into it.

Again I got no answer, and so I switched to a Clan general frequency. First I tried calling for A.I., then the other divisions, but it was the same story: no response.

I could see JJ doing the same, and, after getting the same results, he looked up at me and just shook his head. There was a look on his face that I knew mirrored my own; fright.

"You won't get anybody," Tanner said with a smile on his face.

Cory suddenly stood up and strode towards him. "What have you done?" he nearly screamed, tears of deep personal agony and rage running down his face.

Tanner just laughed at him, and that set Cory off completely. The tall blond Patriarch grabbed Tanner by the throat with one hand and literally lifted him up. He started to squeeze his hand, strangling him. "What have you done?" he demanded again, with fury clearly seen burning in his eyes.

The thing that unnerved me completely was, even though Cory was choking him to death, Tanner still had a peaceful smile on his face.

JJ quickly stepped up and placed his hand on Cory's arm, and said something softly to him that I couldn't make out.

I was still trying various Clan and Federation frequencies, including the VSO covert ones, but I was not getting any answers. Finally, I just asked, "Anyone got a cell phone?"

I didn't receive any response; what the hell did we need cell phones for nowadays? I guess we were finding out the hard way.

I think it was a strangled, pain filled cry of "It hurts papa!" that finally got Cory's attention, and the attention of whomever was not tending to the wounded.

We all looked at the pale faced red-head who had captured most of our hearts, and we all had tears running down our faces.

Cory just threw Tanner away, flinging him to the ground where he stayed. Cory turned back to his baby, and knelt by his side as the rest of us stood silent vigil.

"It hurts so bad! Make it stop, daddy! Please!" Timmy begged pitifully as Cory choked back on his helpless sobs.

He could not, however, stop the tears running down his face. "ARK!!!!!!!" he screamed into what I knew was his sub-vocal, but as I saw his head fall in defeat I knew that he hadn't received any more of an answer than we had.

"Oh, you won't get through to It," Tanner said quietly into the silence.

We turned our now hate filled eyes on him, and Sean asked, "Why?"

Tanner just snorted as he said, "What? You mean the high and mighty Sean Short of Clan Short of Vulcan doesn't know the answer?"

Sean mutely shook his head as Ricky spoke up, "You're our brother! Why would you do this to us?"

"Brother? Brother?! No!! You took us in and promised us you'd protect us!! You promised!! And you let Deej die - you killed him! Well, now I've killed the Clan!!" he screamed, before insane laughter started from him.

Cory, Sean and several others looked stunned at that, but it was finally JJ who said, "That's not true, and you know it."

"Then why is he dead?" Tanner asked as his wild laughter stopped, and his eyes filled with unspeakable hate. His gaze demanding answers, yet also refusing to heed any that might or would be given.

"He killed himself and there was nothing we could do," Cory replied, as he got up and walked back towards Tanner. He continued, "We all loved him, but it was his choice!"

"You promised, and you took the only thing I had in life; so now I've taken what's most important to you - starting with your *son* !" Tanner spat out.

Cory just shook his head and I could see the tears still falling thickly. "You were our brother. We trusted you. *Timmy* trusted you." was all he said.

"Your mistake," Tanner said scathingly.

I could see Cory tense up for a brief moment, before suddenly turning away. He began to walk back towards Sean and Timmy, and said as he went, "I won't kill you. You're not worth my soul."

It was at that moment that Tanner lunged up, and I could see something glinting in his hand. I didn't even think about it; all the lessons Jeremy had given me came back in full force. I yelled a warning at Cory, while I sent three of my knives flying. The first struck the now lunging Tanner in the throat, while the other two impaled themselves into his chest.

Time seemed to freeze as the knives struck home. Tanner froze in mid-motion before beginning to buckle and fall to his knees.

Somehow, though, he was still able to gurgle, "It doesn't matter, I've already won." That sickly grin was again on his face as he toppled to the ground - dead.

Cory had swung around at my yell and stared in shock at the boy who had been his friend as he died. There was a silver dagger clutched in those now dead fingers.

The silence was eerie as everyone who could, just looked at the horrible scene that had played out before them.

Cory turned and looked at me, and I said softly "I'm sorry, I just reacted," I was thinking he hadn't wanted him killed.

He walked over to me and took me into his arms. He said, "Thank you, you did what you had to do," before releasing me to return to his son.

Vish came over, and I wrapped my arms around him, hugging him tightly to me before saying, "I'm sorry about KT."

Vish pulled back and looked at me, and what I saw in his eyes then will haunt me to the day I die. I never knew anyone could have that much pain and loss in their eyes, but his did as he said, "It wasn't just Kartik, it was all of them."

"What?" I asked, not comprehending what he had just said.

"They're dead, all of them. All of the Unit," he told me in a choked voice.

I was already shaking my head and saying, "No, no they can't be."

He didn't say anything; he didn't have to, as the pain in those eyes said it all for him. I just clung to him and both of us were sobbing.

He managed to say, "We must try to get help."

I felt ashamed, then, for he had remembered his duty. I hadn't for a moment. I let him go but surprisingly he pulled me back to him and said, "Don't."

I nodded my head, not trusting myself to speak, as I thumbed my sub-vocal again and called, "Ark ,damn it; we need you and we need you now!"

Another silent moment passed, apart from the cries of the injured and dying, with no Ark.... then, <I am here, Samuel.>

She sounded so much different than she usually did.

"ARK!" I shouted in surprise, and everyone turned to look at me.

<You do not need to shout,> she replied.

"Emergency transport right now to the med bay. We have mass casualties!" I nearly screamed.

<I am sorry, but I am unable to do so,> Ark replied.

Cory tapped on his own implant. "Ark we have injured here," he managed before choking. After a pause, he continued in a horrified whisper, "Timmy has been shot with some type of laser."

<I am aware of this, Patriarch, and I am sorry. The Ark complex has been mostly destroyed, and that includes the medical facilities. My core is severely damaged and most systems are off-line. I have limited sensors and my teleport systems work for now, but my geo-thermal power connections have been damaged badly. All the med and tech-bots were also in the sections which were destroyed, and the entire complex is flooded with radiation and bio-chemical agents on the Federation's Code Red list.>

We all just stood or sat there stunned at this before Sean asked, "Do you still have full communications capability?"

<Yes,> was her reply.

"We can't raise anyone," he said next.

<That is because there is no one left to answer. Massive explosions were registered simultaneously at all Unit bases, VSO Central and associated bases, Oceania, and the A.I. Division. Utilizing my own sensors along with what remains of Starfleet satellites in orbit, I have detected no life signs at any of those locations. You should also know that Terra Main, Starfleet HQ in San Francisco, and all major Starfleet facilities world wide, including London, Moscow, Madrid, Beijing, Paris, Sydney and Stockholm, also show massive detonations with no survivors occurring at the same time as the attack on your complex. Those starships that were in orbit suffered massive Warp-core failures and were destroyed, and the Starfleet sensor array shows disaster buoys have been activated from approximately 47.8 % of the fleet. Their destruction is also surmised. The last messages I managed to retrieve before the array was destroyed was that Vulcan, Andoria and Tellar Prime are being attacked in force by Romulans. They are likely to be gone, soon, for there is no help left to send,> Ark explained.

There were stunned cries of disbelief and 'How?!' from everyone able to coherently ask. For me, it was too much to take in.

"How is this possible?" JJ asked, while Matty cried out, "What about dad?"

<The answer to both questions is most likely related. Tanner apparently contacted the FCC and coordinated this attack with them. Logically, they in turn contacted and coordinated everything with the Romulans. The FCC have attacked and secured the White House, as well as the other major governmental centres world wide. It is presumed that they now have control of at least some if not all the remaining starships within Starfleet. If you remember, Admiral Morrow always felt that there had been infiltration into Starfleet by FCC elements. As to your home, sensors show that it has not suffered attack as yet, but considering how much 'love' the FCC has for your father and the rest of you, I do not believe it will be long until your home is also attacked.>

"The FCC? We rooted them out and destroyed them years ago!" Cory exclaimed in shock.

<Apparently not all of them,> Ark replied.

"We have to get to Montana! My dad can help us, and we have full medical there," I said into the silence that greeted that statement.

"Yeah love, Timmy's not doing so good," Sean added quickly to Cory.

<I am sorry, but there is nothing that can help Timmy, Sean,> Ark said then, and I could hear the sadness in her voice.

"What?" Cory cried in anguish.

<The weapon that Tanner devised comes from a previous cycle; cycle two. It was banned during that cycle as it is beyond cruel and inhumane. It is a molecular disruption beam weapon. Once it strikes someone, it slowly eats away everything inside that person until death results. It does so slowly and painfully. There is no treatment and it causes a tremendous amount of suffering before death finally overta-

kes the victim. It is a barbaric and painful method of execution that was banned not long after it had been created,> Ark told him.

Both Cory and Sean, along with several of us, all cried "No!" at the same time.

Timmy, who had not heard the answer given by Ark since he was not wearing his implant, asked in a weak, pain filled voice, "Am...am I gonna die?"

Cory and Sean looked down upon their son, and the anguished filled look on their faces was heartbreaking. I could see their mouths open and close several times as neither was able to give voice to the lie.

They'd never lied to Timmy before and couldn't now, no matter how much they wanted to.

All they could do was gently stroke his forehead and cheeks.

Suddenly, Timmy looked up and a smile came to his face, even through all the pain. He said weakly, "Uncle Mikey!" causing all of us to turn and look at the teen-saint walking towards us.

"Hey, little guy," he said as he reached Timmy and knelt down by his side. He placed his hand on the redhead's chest.

You could see the pain leave the boy's face, and Cory said, "Thank God you're here, you can save him!"

I knew something was wrong immediately. Mikey looked down briefly before raising his head, and I could see the tears in his eyes.

"No."

"What do you mean, 'no'?!" Cory said with sudden anger in his voice.

"I can take away his pain briefly, and Our Father has allowed that I can take him Home early to spare him the pain of what is to come... but that is all that I can do," Mikey said with tears streaming down his face, and pain in his every word.

"No!" Cory sobbed out.

Sean said bitterly, "You're supposed to protect us! To protect our brothers, protect us all! *Save* them!"

"I can't!" the angel sobbed out.

"Why? I've seen you heal others, I've seen you bring the dead back to life. Why can't you save your family?" Cory asked, angry beyond reason now.

"For everything there is a time and....now is their time," Mikey said as if each word was drug from the depths of his soul; each filled with sorrow.

"Well, if you won't help then I know someone who will!" I said, refusing to stand for this any longer.

I didn't know what the hell was going on, but I'd be damned if I'd put up with it.

"PABLITO!" I yelled knowing he would hear me and come.

"He can't do anything either," Mikey replied quietly.

"You gave him the power to, and he won't stand by and do nothing," I said. I knew he heard the part I *didn't* say: 'like you'.

Suddenly, Pablo was there. He was looking around and I could see tears come to his eyes as well, before he walked over to me and gave me a hug.

He then went to Vishnu next, and he placed his hand on Vish's head. A glow appeared, and Mikey stood and commanded, "STOP!"

"NO!" Pablito said back loudly, turning to Mikey. "This is wrong, and I won't be a part of it! We're supposed to protect them and I'm going to do just that!"

He started walking towards Timmy, when suddenly he stopped with a startled look on his face. He sighed out bitterly and said "Damn you..." before fading from view.

"What did you do?" I screamed launching myself at Mikey but Vishnu grabbed onto me.

"What had to be done," Mikey said sadly turning back to Cory and Sean and telling them, "I can take Timmy and the others that will die, or they can suffer. That is all I can do. What is your choice?"

"You're supposed to be my brother," Cory said.

Mikey reacted just as if Cory had slapped him hard. He let out a strangled whisper, "I am."

"No. You're not," Cory said, turning away from the angel who now looked completely stricken.

"Please don't fight," Timmy said weakly into the strained silence.

Nothing was said as Cory sank down to be with his lover and his son. We all knew the choice they must make now; a choice that wasn't really a choice at all.

"Mikey will take care of me, Daddy," Timmy said quietly. Mikey went around taking one after the other of our dying family members to their ultimate Home, after those still living had said their tearful goodbyes. Finally, he returned to Timmy and his parents.

Both of them looked up at him in mute appeal before Sean pleaded a final time, "Please?"

I could see the angel's shoulders shaking as he knelt down next to them. "If there was anything I could do, I would; you have to believe me," Mikey finally said.

Cory gently bent down and kissed Timmy, saying softly as he did so, "I'll always love you, Gizmo, and I'll never forget you."

Sean was next as he too said, "I love you, Fireball... take...take care of everyone for us okay?" He then broke down sobbing along with Cory.

Timmy looked up at them and said, "I love you too daddy and papa. Don't cry, please."

But it was no good, all of us were crying as Mikey gently reached down and touched Timmy's head, saying softly, "It's time," and a loud screeching filled the air as William came flying in to land next to Timmy's head.

At Mikey's touch Timmy let out a long final breath, and his chest slowly fell. It did not rise again, and his eyes fluttered closed. A look of peace was now on his still, dead face.

With that, William launched himself into the air and disappeared just feet off the ground. Vishnu let out a howl echoed by a loud mournful screech from Duke, who was now perched on Ricky's shoulder.

We all knew William had gone to join his partner.

Mikey slowly stood up, and we all watched as a bright glow seemed to surround Timmy's body before detaching itself and coming to stand by Mikey's side. It slowly coalesced into the form of our little munchkin, all bright and shining. He was as I remembered first seeing him, six years old again, and he smiled at his parents and the rest of us. There was no injury to mar his body.

"I'm okay daddy, papa, I'm okay now," he bubbled.

It didn't stop the tears from any of us, though, as he stood there for a moment.

Suddenly, a winged form of light appeared in the sky above then dived down and landed on Timmy's shoulder. It formed itself into the glowing shape of an eagle. William.

Timmy looked at his Animal Spirit partner for several minutes, and William returned the stare. He finally gave a small chirp, then Timmy turned back to us and said, "Matty, come here."

Matty looked startled, but walked over and stood in front of his long time friend as Timmy smiled at him. "It's your turn now," Timmy said, and with that the glowing form of William launched himself from Timmy's shoulder and flew to perch on a very surprised Matty.

"But... but," Matty said in shock as Timmy walked forward. The spirit-boy reached up and took a glowing object from his ear which he moved over towards Matty's own ear.

A deep sense of warmth and love filled the area, and everyone in it, as he initiated the ritual. We all watched as the glowing talon went into Matty's ear, just like it had resided in Timmy's all these years. Timmy withdrew his hand and the glow around both the object and William faded until he was just an ordinary appearing eagle with his just as ordinary talon in Matty's ear.

"Take good care of him," Timmy said. No one was sure to whom exactly he was saying that to, and that was made worse for me when both William's chirp and Matty's "I will" came at the same moment.

Timmy giggled softly before backing into Mikey's waiting arms.

"I... Thank you, Timmy," Matty finally said, awe and tears mixed on his face.

Timmy just smiled before he turned to his parents and said, "Don't be mad at Uncle Mikey, please." He then turned and wrapped his arms around his uncle tightly.

Cory and Sean didn't answer; probably because of the tears and sobs being torn from their bodies.

Timmy finally, with a sad smile, said, "Remember, 'sometimes the bad things have to happen in order for the good things to'. I love you." He began to walk away with Mikey towards what all could see was a bright light; a light filled with warmth eclipsing that of moments ago by a magnitude immeasurable.

Sean and Cory, with an obvious struggle, finally found their voices. They called out in unison, "I love you too, rugrat! Be good."

Suddenly, there were giggles as three small forms of light appeared around Timmy and Mikey. They were no older than Timmy, and two may have been younger. One of them said, "Yous silly, Unca Cory! *Wes* the Rugrats! Timmy is *Tribe*, ain't that right, Ross?"

We couldn't help but laugh as Ross answered, "Yeah Bel, *wes* the Rugrats!" and then they, with little Jessica, began to fade slightly.

Timmy stopped and turned around. He was surrounded by small forms of light filling all the space around him for some distance as he said giggling, "Yeah, Daddy! We're the Tribe. You'd think you'd know that after all these years!"

As we all laughed amidst our tears, the Tribe, the VSO Rugrats and Mikey slowly faded completely from view - taking our hearts and a good portion of our souls along with them as well.

Back to 'Present' - 2015:

That was the start of it all.

We learned much in the following months from Ark as she pieced together everything that had happened.

Tanner accessed and studied things from his time in the Ark Compound, and had been giving all that information to the FCC. It was held off world in secret, ready for the day when he could get 'revenge' for what he obviously thought was the murder of DJ by the Clan.

The things that he had given them made them virtually unstoppable, now.

No such tech existed in this day and age, and by and large it was more than most of the other alien races could handle. It made the FCC next to invincible, especially with the captured Vulcan and Starfleet ships they managed to salvage.

Tanner's betrayal had far reaching implications besides just the Clan and my family. Now the entire galaxy was at the 'mercy' of the FCC, and they were consolidating their empire with a viciousness that made the Klingons look tame by comparison. Between them and the Romulans, they had carved the Federation into pieces... and the 'dream' was truly dead.

The day after Timmy had died, Antony Parnell and Koth Evans showed up, both injured and bleeding in an VSO two man attack fighter. They had been testing it around the Founder's moon base when everything went to hell, and had fought their way back to Earth. A five minute flight took them over 24 hours of constant dog-fighting to make. Koth died a day later when he found out what had happened to Juan and their child.

Even though he was Klingon, his heart was very Human, and he just couldn't live with it.

He took the fighter craft and drove it at top speed into the White House, taking out a large number of the FCC leaders, and most of Washington, along with his own life... but that only slowed them down for so long.

The FCC came after my family as Ark had predicted; that was part of the deal Tanner had made.

Dad died a couple of months after Timmy and the others, and I was by his side when he went. He went and joined his first son, and so many others as well.

He went the way he would have wanted to go, though, which was saving one of his children's lives.

Pablito came as I knew he would, but he wouldn't do any more for my dad than Mikey had done for Timmy: no matter how much I begged and pleaded with him.

He just kept telling me he was sorry. Dad finally told me to remember the story he told me of Pablito's death, that for everything there was a time and this was his.

It didn't help, and I watched helplessly as Pablo took my Daddy home to finally be with him.

Vishnu's arms around me, and his heart loving me, kept me from losing it completely that day - just as they did on that first day of our 'hell on Earth', which is what we came to call our Fireball's birthday.

So many gone, now; so many Home with Dad and Timmy.

Just the ten of us left out of a once mighty Clan that had spanned thousands and even commanded worlds.

I couldn't forgive Pablito any more than Cory and Sean forgave Mikey. I knew that when Sean had finally met his end last year, and Mikey had refused again to help, it had sealed Cory's feelings for his one time big brother. We have never understood why they didn't and don't help us; why they let the families they were supposed to protect be hurt and killed like this.

Now we were huddled in a cave like rats in the dark, hoping to avoid detection. We all knew this was it, and that there was no place else to run to. Without Ark, there wasn't even a way to get to a place even if there was one.

She was gone, we were well and truly alone. For the first time since that horrible day six years ago, we had no one but us left. No help, no support, no one.

We had known from the beginning that it was hopeless, but somehow we had kept going. Finally we were admitting that it was over. The fight was done, it was just a matter of time before it would actually end.

For most of us, I think, we were ready. More than ready. We wanted to go home, I wanted to be with dad, Brian, the Trinity and so many others of my family. I just wanted for it to end, and we all knew without asking that each of us felt the same way. We weren't the same people we had been since that fateful day. Sometimes late at night I would wonder if dad would like what I've become; and what I've had to do.

I'm not sure that I do, I'm really not.

They say a cornered rat will gnaw his own leg off to escape a trap, and fight inflicting much more damage than something his size would normally be able to account for.

Well for six long years we had been the cornered rats, and we'd had to do things that left me waking in a cold sweat of terror on far too many nights.

It was my love who got me through it, but sometimes I asked him, "Is it worth it?"

He always gave me Adam's credo. "Never give up, never lose hope, never stop fighting."

We hadn't; or maybe two of the three, anyway.

We'd kept going, we'd kept fighting and when one of us would lose that hope the rest would struggle to give it back to him.

We followed Adam's Credo... until now, at least.

Now we all knew it was over, and just a matter of time - the question was 'how much'?

"What the hell are you doing here?" came an angry shout from Cory, and it brought me abruptly back from my thoughts. I turned to see Mikey standing there with no glow and no wings: just a sad teenage boy looking at Cory even more sadly.

"I came to see you," Mikey replied softly.

"What, so you can watch the rest of us die?" Cory snarled at him.

There was a time when I would have tried to defend Mikey.

Not any more.

I watched as the words struck home like daggers through the angel's heart, and I watched as tears came to his eyes. He whispered "No, not this time."

Duke and William let out screeches of protest, but Kyle walked up and said, "Go away! We don't want you here."

It was like each word was a blow to the angel. With a strangled sob he said, "I know."

We all watched as he turned away for a moment, struggling to regain control of himself, before turning back to us. He said, "There is a chance to change this."

"Whatcha mean?" Tommy asked as he stepped forward, but before Mikey could answer Pablo suddenly appeared.

"NO!"

"Stay out of this," Mikey said as he swung around on Pablito.

Both Vishnu and I stepped forward, and I could hear Vish's soft growl. What he thought he could do to an angel, I had no idea, nor to which angel he meant the growl to be for.

"I won't stay out of it, you can't do it," Pablito yelled, stepping up to stand in front of Mikey as we all watched, startled at this turn of events.

"I've stood by for far too long, Pablito, and I can't stand by any longer and watch the last of my family die!" Mikey yelled back.

"You think it's been easy for me either?" Pablito asked with pain filling his voice.

"What's it matter now? We're all dead anyway," Ricky stated softly, and I nodded my head in silent agreement.

Mikey said to Pablito, "I never should have abandoned them."

"No, you shouldn't have! You promised to watch over us and protect us and you didn't!" Cory screamed out angrily. "I've lost EVERYONE, Mike! EVERYONE. Only we remain, and we're ALL AFRAID BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T DO A FUCKING THING TO HELP!"

"I know, and I shouldn't have abandoned you, but I think I can change it, now," Mikey said as he turned to look at his 'little Tigger'.

"No, Mikey! You know what it'll mean!" Pablito yelled as he stepped between the two of them.

"What's he talking about?" JJ asked into the silence as the two angels stared at one another, both obviously angry.

"Nothing," Mikey said.

Pablito looked down at the floor, then said finally, "You have to at least tell them."

"No I don't. It doesn't matter anyway, I'm prepared to pay the Price," Mikey answered softly with the anger gone now.

I was surprised to see tears in Pablito's eyes now. "Then I will, so they'll know at least," he decided finally.

"No, little one, it's my choice. Please let me make it, then you can tell them," Mikey begged him.

Pablito and Mikey stared silently at each other for several minutes, and I could see the tears rolling from my brother's eyes the entire time. He finally nodded in almost defeated acceptance.

"What's he talking about?" Cory asked with a bit of the old Cory back in him, a bit of the old fire.

"I think with your help we can change it," Mikey replied to Cory.

"Change what?" Tommy asked.

"Everything," Mikey said, and we all gasped.

"I don't understand," Matty said while William just chirped with worry.

"There was one event that, if changed, would change all this," Mikey said sweeping his arm out to indicate everything.

"Change?" Vishnu asked.

"Yes, change. If we can change it then I believe none of this would then 'happen'," Mikey said.

"You mean...?" Cory's question trailed off.

Mikey finished his sentence for him, "...none of them would die."

It was pandemonium for several minutes as everyone started shouting questions at Mikey, but Cory finally restored order with one word. "EXPLAIN!"

"There was one pivotal event in all this that brought this history about. If it gets changed then none of this will have happened. I don't believe any of this was meant to be, and you can change it, Cory; you and the others by doing what the Clan always did - getting through to a kid in trouble and saving him," Mikey said softly.

"Who?" CD asked just as softly.

"DJ," Mikey replied, which sent the room into shocked silence... then angry shouts, but only I started making them.

"You mean you want us to save the boyfriend of the S.O.B. who did this to us?!" I yelled, pissed as all hell now.

"Yes," Mikey replied

"Why?" Tommy asked, the anger just as apparent in his voice.

"Because Tanner wasn't like he was in this timeline. Don't you remember what he was like? It was DJ's death that changed him and made him into something bitter, angry and most of all, hurt. Don't you remember?" Mikey asked again. He waved his hand and showed us a young boy who, after a moment, I recognized as a much younger Tanner. He was laughing, smiling and, in the images I could see of him with another boy, clearly loving.

Gone was the hate, anger and bitterness. Gone was the madness I'd seen six years ago.

It was a different person I was seeing, and I think I began to understand what Mikey was trying to say, even though I didn't much like doing anything that would help Tanner at all.

There was silence as everyone watched the images before them play out.

A different Tanner, one they had all known briefly, one they had once loved as a brother, and one who hadn't been driven insane with grief.

What would have happened if the Tanner we were seeing in the images had stayed around and never became the Tanner we had come to know to our horror?

We might get to find out.

Finally Cory asked the question that we were all thinking: "What do we have to do?"

"Change DJ's mind about dying," Mikey replied.

"How?" Ricky asked

"I can't tell you that. I can take some of you back to that pivotal moment where he hung between life and death, but only you, through your love of him, can make the decision as to how to get him to want to stay," Mikey replied.

"Okay, we'll do it. If it means saving our family, we've got to try at least," Cory said into the silence that followed. "I loved DJ and I tried talking to him when he was in the Enterprise's Sickbay, but... he just wanted to go. I let him then. I won't this time. I can't."

"Then you need to know now," Pablito spoke up, and I watched as Mikey hung his head.

"What do we need to know?" Matty asked.

"He'll be Cast Down if he disobeys Our Father in this," Pablo answered.

Cory and the others gasped in shock as Mikey looked back up and said to Pablito, "I've made my decision, bro; I got into this for you and my family, and for too long I've not been there for them. This is the last chance to make things right... at least for me."

"Then let's do it," Pablito replied.

Mikey ended up taking Cory, JJ, Gabe and Tommy first. They were the oldest of us remaining who had known DJ, and one at a time, they went back in time to try and convince this boy to live instead of die.

When he returned with Cory, who had been the last of the four, it was clear that Cory hadn't been able to do anything from the defeated look on his face.

"I tried but he's so... so hurt! I just couldn't get through to him," Cory said as we all stared at him.

"It's not over yet, little bro. Sammy, you're up," Mikey said as he turned to me.

I stared at him in shock before saying, "Me? I don't even know this kid!"

"That's the point. I want you to give it a try because all their talking in the world hasn't done him much good so far. You don't know him and maybe you can get through to him, to show him why he should want to live and not die"

"I don't think I'd be the best for this, I... I hate Tanner too much," I said finally.

"You're not going to be seeing Tanner; you're going to be seeing a scared, lonely and hurting little boy called DJ, and you are good at getting through to those in need," Mikey said softly.

I felt Vishnu reach and wrap his arms around me tightly and whisper in my ear, "You have to try, love."

I knew he was right, even if I had no idea how I could possibly do anything to change the outcome with a boy I'd never even met.

"Alright," I reluctantly agreed.

"Good. The first thing is we need to change you a bit so you don't scare him to death," Mikey said raising his hand.

"Change?" I spluttered, not liking the sound of that at all.

Suddenly I was enveloped by a golden glow, and when it cleared I found myself standing there naked, and not exactly myself at the moment. "What? Where'd it go?" I asked looking down in horror at what was suddenly missing. The room erupted in laughter around me.

I heard a growl-filled voice say "I don't know, but it better be coming back!" which sent the rest of the room into wild laughter. I just stared down in shock at my current lack of, let's say, 'physical attributes'.

Even Mikey laughed softly, and of course Pablito was rolling on the floor. Mikey said, "Don't worry, it'll grow back... eventually!"

"Huh?" I muttered as the laughter grew.

"Chill, SamSam. It's about how I remember it when I first met you. You look just like you were eleven again," Cory giggled.

"Oh God! Not puberty again!" I groaned, eliciting more laughter.

"I don't know. I seem to remember it rather... fondly!" Vishnu said with a purr, and I felt my face turning bright red. I quickly covered something which, although not nearly as large it once was, was certainly trying to make up for it at that moment.

"Ah... clothes here..." I said into the laughter and I couldn't believe the whine in my now very high pitched voice.

"You were kinda cute back then," Cory had to add.

"He still is," Vishnu said with a mock growl, which set everyone off again.

"Clothes? Remember me?" I plaintively whined.

Mikey waved his hand, and suddenly I found myself dressed in my old, eleven year old clothing - right down to my old cowboy boots.

I had to fight back sudden tears as I remembered who had bought them for me, and how much I had loved them. "What do I do?" I asked to break the train of memories swallowing me.

"Follow your heart, SamSam. Follow your heart," Pablito whispered.

"Ready?" Mikey asked, and I nodded and took his hand. He led me towards swirling mists that had suddenly appeared.

"Good luck!" was the last I heard from the others as I vanished.

We appeared in a beautiful meadow with a stream running through it, and there were the most majestic snow capped mountains in the distance.

I looked at Mikey and asked, "I don't know what to do. No one else got through to him. What do I say? How do I do it?"

"Only you can answer that, Sammy. What Pablito said was true, follow your heart. It's never led you wrong yet," he replied.

I didn't say anything, and finally he said, "Let me show you some things and maybe it will help to know DeeJ better."

With that, images filled my head; things that had happened, things which might have happened and things which did not happen.

So many things... how was I to choose?

Maybe if I showed him what Tanner had done, maybe that would do it.

If he knew what his death would cause, if he knew what Tanner would do if he died, then he'd have to stay.

No, that wasn't right.

It had to be a choice.

He had to *want* to stay, not stay because he *felt* he had to.

He had to want to live, because if he came back because he felt forced to, then it wouldn't be good. It wouldn't be good for anyone.

I don't know how I knew what to do, but suddenly I did.

I knew exactly what I was going to do, and how I was going to do it.

I didn't know if it was going to work or not, but I was going to try.

I'd show him not tell him. Let him see what he meant to people; people he didn't even know, and I'd let him decide if living was worth it.

When I looked up at Mikey he was smiling and waved his hand towards some more mists and I began walking forward.

I could suddenly hear the 'tap, tap, tap' of my boots on a tile floor and could see in the distance what looked like a sterile hospital room. I felt myself become eleven years old inside my heart. This needed a kid, now, not the adult I had become. With the tapping of my boots on the floor, I moved towards what I hoped would be a new future... for all of us...

Normal Perspective

Sept 20th, 2004 - The Point of Choice:

DJ woke to footsteps and looking around, saw a young boy approaching his bed, one he didn't know.

Tap, tap, tap.

The boots the boy was wearing made an eerie sound on the hard floor in the room as the boy stopped in front of the bed DJ was sitting on.

He looked the strange boy up and down; seeing a boy of about 11 standing there looking at him, with brown hair and intense brown eyes flecked with gold that almost seemed to be flashing in the bright light.

DJ looked around the room and noticed it was sterile and white; bare with no furnishings, before returning his gaze to the boy in front of him who was still standing there without speaking.

"What do you want?" DJ asked.

The boy cocked his head to the side, and a small smile played across his features, promising mischief as DJ added, "You going to try to talk me out of it too?"

"Nah" was all the mysterious boy said, now smiling, which caused DJ to gape at him in shock.

"NO?" he asked in disbelief, everyone else in this dream had been trying to do one thing, and one thing only and that was to get him to change his mind; now this kid says he didn't want me to.

"Why bother, no one else's been able to do shit with ya, so why should I try the same crap?" the boy asked, still giving him that smile.

"Who the hell are you anyway?" DJ asked in confusion, this didn't make any sense.

"Oh sorry, my name's Sammy" he said.

"I don't know you." DJ told him.

"Nah you die so we don't get to meet." Sam told him, matter of factly.

DJ shook his head in disbelief as this was not going at all like the others had gone.

"So what are you doing here?" DJ asked.

"Trying the same thing as the others did I guess, Mikey wanted me to try, so here I am."

"That's it, you don't even know me, and you are trying to get me to change my mind?" He asked incredulously.

"Yeah, I know Tanner, Beau, Toby and Timmy and this...it ain't right man. This ain't the way to deal with stuff." he told him.

"Yeah what would ya know about jack?" DJ said bitterly, as he watched those eyes fill with pain for a moment before saying, "I know a few things, a few." with sadness in his voice, which gave the older boy pause, as he took a closer look into the young boy's eyes.

"Like what?" DJ asked, with a little less anger in his voice.

"Like Tanner will never recover from this. He won't ever trust no one again, and he'll grow up to be a mean person. You kept him from that."

"Yeah, the Clan'll help him." DJ replied.

"The Clan can only do so much, dude. This hurt he won't get over. Your brothers will never get over it either." he said.

DJ looked down for a moment before returning his gaze to the boy.

"I don't wanna live nomore, it hurts too much." he said with pain in his voice.

"I know man, and we all got stuff that's happened to us, but there's people who'll help ya if you let em." Sammy told him.

"I don't wanna. I just wanna forget and I can't." DJ said, looking up with a pain racked gaze at the younger boy who walked forward and wrapped his arms around him, looking deeply into his eyes.

"I know Deej, I know. It seems like that'd be best and all, but it ain't. My dad says that everything that we experience makes us who we are, and if we hadn't had those things happen to us, we would be different."

DJ looked at him for a long moment before saying, "I wouldn't mind being different."

"Really?" Sam asked him and saw the boy nod his head affirmatively.

"That would mean no Tanner, no brothers, and no Clan, you really want that?" he asked as the boy sobbed. "No, yes, I mean no... I don't know," as the tears began to fall.

After a few minutes, Sammy said "Come on," to the older boy.

"Come where?" DJ asked..

Well, the others tried talking, I'm gonna try showing ya some stuff." Sammy said, with a grin.

"Showing me what?" DJ asked, warily.

"Well my dad says a picture is worth a thousand words, especially this one that he keeps showing people," Sammy said, as he giggled, "So I'm gonna show you some."

Sammy stood up and commanded, "Take my hand DJ!" to the older boy.

With some trepidation evident on his face, DJ stood up, and looking Sammy in the eyes again, reached out his hand in trust, and grasped the younger boy's hand, as Sam began walking, leading the older boy away from the bed, towards the far side of the room which had become shrouded in grey swirling mist, with a smile on his face.

DJ wasn't too thrilled with the fog bank which had suddenly appeared in his room, but before he could say or do anything about it, they were entering it.

They appeared in a home, in the hallway, just as a naked little boy ran into a room down the hall screaming, "Can I take a shower with you, daddy?"

"Sure honey." was heard from an adult voice in response, as Sammy turned and said, "They can't see or hear us, so don't worry," to an obviously stunned DJ.

"How did we....?" He asked

"Mikey." Sammy replied, with a big grin on his face, "Ain't it cool?" he said.

"I guess." DJ said, looking around.

Then the grin vanished as Sammy said, "Come on," and led the older boy into the bathroom and to the shower, where a sight greeted DJ that provoked an immediate reaction.

"That's sick" he said in disgust, as he watched the man collapse back against the wall and looked at what was all over the boy who was smiling.

"Is it?" Sammy asked, turning and looking at DJ speculatively.

"Yes it is. Why are you showing me stuff like this?" he asked Sammy.

"Because, one little event can change a lot of things, DJ." he replied, as they watched the man stagger away from the wall and his son, as the boy cried, "Daddy?"

They heard him snarl, "Just finish your shower." as he rapidly exited the tub, and then the room, before they heard a door slam down the hall somewhere.

"Daddy, wait, did I do something bad?" the little boy cried as he got out of the tub and ran out of the room and they could soon hear him calling plaintively "Daddy, what's wrong, daddy?. Daddy let me in, please."

A short while later, they watched as the boy came walking dejectedly back into the room and crawled back in the shower with tears running down his face.

"So why did you show me some guy messing with his kid like that?" DJ said angrily. "Didn't they tell ya nothing bout me?"

"Yeah, they told me about ya, and you'll see." Sammy said, as he grabbed DJ's hand again. "Things aren't always what they appear to be." Sammy said, as he began walking, dragging the older boy into the suddenly forming mist again.

This time they came out in the living room of the same house, as the man walked out of the kitchen and the boy ran over wrapping his arms around his legs.

What surprised DJ was the man angrily pushing the boy away from him. "Go eat your dinner." and watching as the boy's face fell in despair.

"It's been 3 days since the shower." Sammy said, as they watched the boy pick at his food.

Nothing got eaten to speak of, and finally the man said, "You don't want to eat then get ready for bed." still with an angry tone of voice, causing the boy's head to snap up and tears to begin to run down his face.

"GO" the man ordered.

"So the dad's an asshole, your point?" DJ asked as they watched the boy slowly slide off his chair and walk out of the room.

What confused them was the man burying his head in his hands, and the sobs that seemed to come out of him until he heard the boy returning at which time he straightened and said before the boy could even get in the room.

"This isn't the way to your bed."

"I..I wanted a kiss and hugs." the boy said, as if he were begging for sustenance.

"You're a big boy now, you don't need that any more, just get into bed." the man said with pain lacing his voice.

The boy reacted as if he had been slapped, as he stared in shock at his father finally mustering the courage to cry out "But dad..." only to be told in a growl "Just GO!"

The boy turned and ran with tears flying from his face, as Sammy took DJ's hand once more and pulled him into the mist.

They next appeared in the same house, to find the father on the sofa and the boy hesitantly walking into the room and coming over to find that his father had dozed off on the couch.

The boy crawled up in his father's lap and snuggled in and the boys could almost hear him purring in contentment as Sammy said "It's been a week since the shower," in a quiet voice.

Both boys watched as the father stirred, and wrapped his arms around the boy, hugging him to him, and moaning in his sleep, before waking, looking confused, and then to DJ's surprise, at least, panicked as he saw what was in his arms.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" he screamed at the child, and before the boy could respond, pushed him roughly off his lap telling him "I told you, you are too old for this nonsense any more, go to bed now." causing the boy to begin crying uncontrollably, as he shakily got to his feet, and ran off towards his bedroom.

Then they watched as the man began crying again, pleading for someone to help him.

"I don't get it" DJ said in confusion, "He treats his kid like shit but then cries about it, he must be whacked"

"You don't yet," Sammy said as he waved his hand slightly

"What did you do?" DJ asked suspiciously, as he looked around.

"I just moved us forward a few minutes." Sammy replied, as the man who had been staring off into space got slowly to his feet, and headed towards the back of the house.

"Come on." Sammy said, as they followed the man, then Sammy pulled him by the hand and they were in the boy's bedroom, where said boy was touching himself almost absent-mindedly, DJ thought.

They watched as the father came into the room, and froze at the sight. A smile had started to come across his face, but it suddenly turned to rage, and he advanced screaming at his young son.

"What are you doing, you don't do that." and then as they watched, he struck the boy once, twice and then again as the boy screamed in pain.

DJ had ran forward at the first blow, but found out that in this form he couldn't affect anything.

"You can't do anything." Sammy sadly informed him, as they watched the father rant at the little boy, before turning and stalking from the room.

"You have to do something, you can't let this kid be hurt like this." DJ said, furious at what he had just witnessed.

Sammy shook his head as he watched the little one curled up on the floor, now crying and sobbing hysterically.

"There's nothing I can do." was all the response DJ got.

"Come." Sammy told him.

"I can't leave him like this, what if he comes back?" DJ said, "We have to at least call someone." he added in fury.

"Come, there's nothing to be done, the boy survives, for now." Sammy said, with tears running down his face, as he grabbed an unwilling DJ, dragging him towards the mist once again.

"But...." DJ began but didn't get to finish as he was pulled into the swirling tides of time, to reappear once again in the boy's room, only this time the boy wasn't there but two older boys, both naked and both engaged.

"What?" DJ asked turning in confusion as Sammy said, "It's the same boy, just when he's older." and DJ noticed the pain etched on Sammy's face as he asked, "What is it?"

"Just watch." was all that Sammy could say, and they did.

DJ turned back to the bed and the two boys who appeared to be about eight years of age lying on it exploring one another.

DJ thought it was cute, but that thought quickly changed to terror, as the door to the room was flung open and the father from before entered screaming at the boys.

His son never got to voice a word that his mouth had opened to do before his father's fist came crashing down on the boy's young face.

"Fuck do something" DJ screamed in tandem with the other child who was trying to get the man off his friend.

The man turned and hit the boy in the head sending him crashing into the wall where he slumped down unmoving for the moment, as the man pummelled his son screaming in a blind rage.

They watched as the other boy woke and slowly crawled away, reaching into his pocket where he pulled something out that DJ recognized as a communicator, fumbling with it with one hand until he got it open and pressed what DJ recognized was the emergency signal button, and then passed out once again.

It was obvious to DJ as he witnessed these things, that the boy was injured and he thought the son had to be dead by now, because the man hadn't stopped hitting the boy.

He glanced over and saw Sammy staring at the boy on the ground with tears running down his face.

In a strangled sob he replied, "I can't."

Moments later the room filled with the familiar glow of a transporter as Gabe, JJ and Cory all materialized in the room, all noticeably older but unmistakably them.

"STOP IMMEDIATELY!" Cory shouted at the man who froze in mid motion.

They watched as the man turned, looking at them and then returned his gaze to what was left of his son before beginning to look back and forth between the two.

DJ watched in disbelief as he said "What have I done?" before crying "NO" and charging the boys.

JJ fired first, followed by Gabe, as they watched the man collapse to the ground, unmoving.

"Aw shit" Cory said, as he ran to the boy, pulling a tricorder from his waist and aiming it at the child, JJ was doing the same to the boy on the floor.

"Matty, Matty" he called as he waved the device over the prone boy before pulling his communicator from his waist as Cory turned around with tears in his eyes and just shook his head.

"JJ to Lafayette emergency transport plus one injured, one in custody and one...one dead" he said brokenly into the communicator.

"Acknowledged." a voice replied as Cory asked, "How is he?"

"Broken arm and concussion that I can see" JJ replied.

"Isn't there anything..." Gabe started to say but Cory shook his head and said "No" with absolute finality in his voice as the transporter hum filled the room taking them away leaving only two very stunned and shocked boys in their wake.

"WHY?" DJ turned on Sammy, screaming "WHY SHOW ME THIS?" he demanded with anger clearly in his voice.

"Because you needed to see it." Sammy said with the tears still running down his face.

"WHY, I DON'T KNOW THESE KIDS WHY!!!!" DJ said again.

"Cause one of them is my brother," Sammy choked out, before saying, "And the other one would have been, if you hadn't died" he finished softly, causing DJ to freeze in his pacing of the bloodied room.

"What? What do you mean?" he asked, stricken of the younger boy.

"Come" Sammy said, in a choked voice.

"Not until you tell me what the hell that's supposed to mean." DJ yelled at him.

"What you didn't think you're leaving this world would cause shit to happen; well it does. You weren't there to save Damien and this is what happened." Sammy said, with anger replacing the sadness of moments ago.

"You think you don't affect anyone else, well just ask that kid there, Damien would be alive if you were!" Sammy yelled back at him, before saying in a softer voice, "And my brother wouldn't be hurt, and spend years blaming himself for his friends death," and DJ could hear the pain behind those words.

"I do something if I live that prevents this?" DJ asked.

"Come" Sammy said, not brooking any argument this time, just reaching out and grabbing a stunned DJ's hand, and pulling him into the mists.

When they emerged again, it was the same bedroom, and the same two boys doing the same exact thing as before.

"No, please" DJ begged, as he saw the scene from minutes ago about to unfold once again before him.

"Watch." was all that Sammy would say, as once again the door went flying open and the kids looked startled only this time the man laughingly said "Sorry to disturb you guys, next time you might want to shut the door," grinning the whole time, as he quickly began to back out of the doorway.

"It's okay dad, I don't mind." Damien said, causing his father to blush, as he said, "Well, maybe your friend there does." which caused Damien to giggle and look a bit chagrined as his dad pulled the door closed laughing.

"You're dad is really cool" Matty told him

"Yeah he's the best dad in the whole world." Damien said, smiling softly, as Matty said, "Nah mine is." giggling as they got into a war of "No mine."

DJ turned to Sammy in shock, who was smiling now and said, "How?, What?"

"Little things mean a lot." Sammy said, as he took DJ's hand once again saying, "Come, and this time you will get to feel what they feel." causing DJ to suddenly become worried wondering what was going to happen next, but before he could get too worried, they entered the mists reappearing in the bathroom once again.

This time it was as a little voice shouted "Can I take a shower with you daddy?"

"Sure honey." was the response from inside the shower.

The boys and in particular DJ watched and more importantly felt the events as they unfolded this time, and understanding made all the difference.

When it was over DJ looked wonderingly at Sammy and said, "He wasn't..."

"No he wasn't," Sammy replied.

"But I don't understand." DJ said.

"Come," and Sammy took the older boy by the hand, bringing him to each of the places he had visited before, immediately after the shower.

When they got to the last one DJ turned and said, "He thinks he's protecting his son."

"Yes" Sammy replied, sadly.

DJ shook his head in disbelief at this.

"I was so sure...." He said as his voice tapered off, and Sammy replied, "So sure he was abusing his kid, and was an asshole?" Sammy asked.

"Yeah, I mean..." DJ said before continuing, "He loves him and it's hurting him to push the boy away like this, but he thinks he has to."

"Yeah, he thinks that's the only way to protect the boy. He sees what happened in the shower, and thinks he's evil for what happened." Sammy told DJ.

"But it wasn't, dude, nothing happened." DJ said.

"Yeah but he thinks it did. His son grabbing him and washing him like that brought a lot of feelings suddenly out and he came almost instantly, remember?"

"Yeah but he wasn't doing nothing bad," DJ said.

"I know that, and you know that, but HE doesn't."

"He didn't even have time to tell his son to stop before it happened. Now he's scared to death to touch the kid, cause he thinks he's some kind of pervert or something, and he's doing this stuff cause of all the crap his head has been filled with." Sammy told him.

DJ was just shaking his head. "I was so wrong." he said.

"You reacted to what you saw, and sometimes that can be a good thing, but other times....." Sammy said, letting his voice trail off.

"Yeah, I guess that's why Russ and Sara are always telling me to think before I do stuff.

"Probably, my dad says that too." Sammy replied, with a grin.

"So how do I change things?" DJ asked.

"You don't, if you don't live." Sammy replied, sadly.

"If, I mean if I do?" he asked.

"Come" Sammy said, as DJ extended his hand and Sammy grasped it and they walked together for the first time into the mists.

They emerged into a mall, and DJ looked around with interest before asking,

"What are we doing here?"

"Watch." was all that Sammy said.

At that moment, several boys came around the corner walking down the concourse.

"Hey that's me" DJ exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, it can be, in about a month or so." Sammy said, causing DJ to give him a questioning look, as they watched the antics of the boys as they got closer.

It was DJ, Tanner, Jamie and Jacob, along with JJ and Gabe and they were obviously clowning around and having fun.

DJ was looking at this intently and had a sad smile on his face, and Sammy could see the tears forming as he watched his other self existing with the one he loved.

"I miss him," DJ said softly.

"I know, and he misses you too." Sammy said, with sadness evident in his voice, causing DJ to look at him quickly before returning his face to the boys, with yearning now present.

Then the other DJ stopped suddenly and pulled on Jamie's arms whispering urgently to him.

The boys watched as the other kid's gaze locked on a man and young boy walking across the aisle from them as DJ gasped "Damien."

"Yes, it's been about a month since the shower now." Sammy said, as they looked at the boy and his father.

"They look like shit." DJ observed.

"Yeah, Dad from guilt he shouldn't have, and Damien from not understanding what he did wrong, and missing his father's love." Sammy replied.

Sammy and DJ watched as the boys suddenly made a bee line for the father and son, and began talking to them.

They watched as the father was taken aside, and Jamie spoke with him, getting an angry reaction before JJ showed him something in his hand, and he settled down.

"What's going to happen to them?" DJ asked.

You and Tanner are going to take Damien, for now, while his dad gets help from Dan and the Clan, to deal with his feelings, as well as his fears. Damien will also get some help understanding that he didn't do anything wrong, and that his dad still loves him. After about six months, they will be reunited and.....well you saw what happens in a few years."

DJ looked in wonder at the group before him, as they all began walking from the mall.

"All because of me?" DJ asked.

"Yeah, little things bro, little things," Sammy said, grinning.

"What happened in the shower, did it all, didn't it?" DJ asked.

"Yeah, that one little thing destroyed two lives for nothing, you save two lives, just by caring about a little kid."

"And your brother?" DJ put in.

"Yeah and my brother, who suffered for a long time because of what happened to Damien, and because of some crap that he'd been through before." Sammy replied.

"Why didn't the Clan just take Damien for good, like they usually do?" DJ asked, perplexed.

"That's something your Clan needs to learn, you don't always have to destroy families to protect the children. Sometimes, just working through things can save em too. Damien's dad loves him to death, but he did what he did out of love, not hate. It just wasn't the right thing." Sammy replied, sadly.

"Yeah." DJ said, looking after the group as they reached an exit and left the mall.

"Come on DJ, one last thing, and then you need to get back." Sammy said as DJ reached out and took his hand, leading Sammy towards the mist this time, and they entered.

Once again they were in Damien's house, and in the bathroom as the father was preparing to enter the shower

"Daddy, can I take a shower with you?" came the little voice, and the boys watched as the boy came tentatively into the room, while the father stiffened before relaxing and turning to face his young son.

"I think I would like that honey," the father told his son, smiling fondly down at him, which earned a dazzling smile filled with love in return, as the boy quickly ran to his father, and was picked up as they entered the shower together.

The boys watched, as the same events were eerily repeated from another shower, while Sammy whispered, "This is the first night that Damien was allowed to move back in with his father."

They watched as everything happened like it had before, only this time when it was over, the father didn't get upset, he just smiled as Damien asked, "Did I wash it good daddy, did I?"

"Yeah honey, you washed it good." the father replied, as he scooped up his young son, and held him to him, kissing him on the cheek.

"I love you Daddy," the boy said.

"I love you too, munchkin, I love you too." the father replied, inhaling deeply, and letting out a long sigh as the boy giggled and said, "Can we wash this off now daddy?" still giggling as the father said, "Sure, baby."

Both DJ and Sammy had tears of joy on their faces at what they had just witnessed, as Sammy said, "That's the way it's supposed to be."

"Yeah it is," DJ replied, as the father and son got out of the shower, and dried off, walking out of the room naked to be met, much to the surprise of DJ, by the other DJ.

"So, how's things going?" he asked looking between them

"Fine" dad answered, smiling down at his son.

"Weally good; Daddy said I did a good job." the boy answered, as the other DJ said "I'm glad to hear that," and the relief showed on his face, with his words.

"After Timmy set me straight, it'll never be a problem again." the dad said, chuckling while the other DJ laughed and said, "Yeah the little munchkin has a way of doing that, don't he." and the boys watched as they walked down the hall towards their room, with the dad reaching down and picking up a giggling little boy.

DJ and Sammy both had smiles on their faces, as suddenly the mists seemed to rise up and envelop them in darkness before dissipating, and when they were gone, they were back where they had started, in the white room.

DJ looked around and said, "I guess I got some thinking to do, don't I?"

"Yeah bro, you do, it's all up to you; no one can make you stay. I hope you do though, I'd really like to get to know you." Sammy said, looking directly into his eyes as he spoke.

DJ just looked back at him and Sammy hoped, really hoped that this had done some good.

"Well, I gotta be going before the munchkins get into more trouble." Sammy said, smiling at him, as he turned and began walking away with that click, click, click again echoing hollowly in the space.

"Sammy," DJ called.

Sammy stopped and turned back to DJ who walked over to him and wrapped his arms around him, giving him a hug before saying,

"Thanks, bro. I'd like that too."

Sammy just smiled and nodded his head, hoping, as he turned once again to go back to the land of the living, leaving a very scared and hurt little boy alone once again, to make a decision that would affect so many, and hoping that he had contributed in some small way to him making the right one.

There were so many things he hadn't shown him, what he had was the mildest of the things that would happen if he died, as he felt his body regaining it's true age once again.

He just hoped it did some good, too many needed him for him to die.

Too much rode on him making the right choice or everyone would die.

Sammy's Perspective - 2015:

I could feel my form changing, and by the time I exited the mists my body was back to my true age. The 'tap, tap, tap' still echoed hollowly as the mists faded, and I looked around at everyone there in the cave. I couldn't help but pull my pants out a bit and take a look. I let out a sigh of relief as I found that everything had 'grown back' to it's proper size; but my relief turned to shock. Even as the others were laughing at me for my 'attribute' checking, I came to the horrific conclusion that things had not changed - they were all still here. We were all here! Nothing had changed!

"I failed then," I said, into the silence.

"You tried at least," Cory said, as he pulled me into his arms to give me a hug. He let go of me and turned to Mikey, who was standing there looking at him. "I'm sorry, Mikey. I love you, and I always ha-

ve," Cory said to the older boy, who let out a sob before grabbing Cory tightly into his arms and holding him.

"I've missed you so much, Tigger," Mikey said, as they both cried for the years apart, whispering softly to one another.

I turned to find Pablito standing there, and knowing what I had to do, I walked over to him. "I never should have hated you, I was wrong and I'm sorry," I said to him, as tears fell from my own eyes.

"You didn't hate me any more than Cory hated Mikey. You both were just angry and you had a right to be," Pablo replied.

"I took it out on you, though," I said softly.

"Brothers fight, yet they still love each other, ya know," he told me gently.

"I always will, bro," I said, picking the little angel boy up and hugging him to me.

"Hey! Watch the wings, ya big oaf!" Pablito whispered in my ear. I just hugged him tighter to me, but I could feel the tears falling from his eyes as well.

I felt Vishnu join me in hugging him, but we were startled by a strange voice saying, "You did not fail, young ones."

I just about dropped Pablito as I reached for my phaser, along with everyone else in the room, but Mikey quickly said, "HOLD!"

Two glowing beings radiating pure light and love filled the room with their presence to take form before us on the other side of the room.

"Do not fear," one of the 'men' said, before repeating himself, "You did not fail."

"But we're still here," Cory said, into the stunned silence.

The first being being chuckled as he said, "Do you think **He** could not hold a timeline open for a short time should **He** wish?"

The other being turned to Mikey and said, "Do you think you would have been allowed to proceed, if **He** had not intended it always?"

"What? You mean....." Mikey spluttered, disbelief showing clearly.

"Saint Mikey of Urbandale, you are one of **His** Chosen. Do you *truly* think that El'Runi'm would cast aside one of **His** Chosen for loving as **He** has always taught?" the being on the right intoned.

"But...but I disobeyed **Him**," Mikey replied.

The being on the left waved his hand and both Mikey and Pablito suddenly took on their full angel form, golden wings shining brightly behind them.

"No, child. You did exactly what **He** asked of you all these years and more, even though it almost broke you. You abided **His** strictures though it seemingly cost you all you held dear. Now was the time and you were ready to do what you were always destined to do: to save your family," the being on the left finished.

"You mean God wouldn't let them help us?" Cory asked in disbelief.

With a soft chuckle, the being on the right replied, "El'Runi'm... Our Father... was always helping you, but for the Time to heal DJ, this had to occur."

The one on the left took up next, "Timmy said it right all those many years ago as he bid you farewell, 'Sometimes bad things have to happen so that the good things can'. If you had not been through this, then there was no way that DJ could have been saved. The pain, sorrow and love which you have lived through these past years, allowed you all to save him where all your earlier efforts had failed."

The right one said, "All took place for a reason, and that was to lead you to this moment in Time. Samuel was the final piece in 'play', and when he listened to his little brother and 'followed his heart', he sealed your fate and that of untold millions. For it was with a child's heart and a child's faith, full of love and hope, that he approached DJ in the Mists of Time. With a child's understanding he showed a small slice of one child's life to teach another the value of their own."

"If he had not followed his heart, then the future, the past and all of creation to come would not have been re-written. All of you who went back and tried with your hearts began the change, Sammy completed it. And three 'others' after him 'polished' it, but they are not to be named. It took all of you, through your pain, and through overcoming it, to show the love that was always so much a part of your Clan. That Love, and only that, healed the boy," The one on the left intoned as the one on the right began to speak.

"Your love has changed the course of Time, and more things than you can possibly imagine will now result from this day."

"Does our family live in this new time?" Cory asked hopefully.

Both beings laughed and said, with joy ringing in the cavern, "Oh yes, Child of Earth. They do much more than live - they prosper. And what they bring to the world changes not only this one, but the entire galaxy. It is all from the Love that exists and the dream of two boys helping another one day that it comes about. There is so much that is different there. Events that never happened in *this* timeline. Kyle shall be King of a new form of life, while Cory, Sean, Sammy and others shall be the next level of human life. Brothers you have never met, but did hear about from your Dragon Division, will now live - Jason, Nathan and Vicky... due to Kyle's son, they shall not have died in 2003... all as now it was always meant to be. There are so many changes for your Family, Cory Short: all brought about because of your Love. Because of all of your love."

They kept on speaking, but our attention was drawn to a light forming in the room between the beings. Cory fell to his knees crying when he saw who now stood there.

Sean walked forward and took his love into his arms, and Cory cried out, "Oh God, Sean! It *is* you, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's me, love; and now we'll be together for all time," Sean replied before kissing Cory soundly.

"Don't forget me!" another voice said, as Timmy suddenly appeared next to them, with Teri alongside. She smiled down at her children.

I could hear the beings going on about weird things like Disney and fish, for some reason, but my attention was totally captivated by Cory and the ever increasing number of his family who were appearing around him when another voice intruded: "Hey, you get too old to give your old man a hug?"

I froze, my body shaking, and not daring to believe. I slowly turned around to see... "D...d..d.dad!!!" I cried, still not believing what I was now seeing.

"You're right mijo, how soon they forget," he said, smiling at me.

All of a sudden, I was a little kid again as I cried, "OH GOD! DAD!" and threw myself into his arms.

Vishnu and Matty were there almost as soon as I was and dad was on the floor with all of us trying to hug the life out of him.

"Got room for some more?" I heard and looked up to see Uncle Eric standing there with Kevin, Randy, Danny and KT, and my Brian, along with the rest.

We launched ourselves from Dad to them, crying, laughing, crying some more and just hugging them, never wanting to let them go.

When we calmed down some, I realized that many more were there. Matter of fact, they were all there now - standing in that meadow from earlier which had now appeared behind the beings of light.

Waiting for us to come home...

Dad echoed my thoughts, as he asked softly, "You ready to go Home now, baby boy?"

"Yeah Dad, we are! Forever and ever and a million years past that..." I replied with his words from so long ago. He put his arm around my shoulders and together we headed for the meadow and our family.

We were finally Home as we took that final step from the darkness of the cave into the Light of the Glade, and to all those who awaited us there.

Home at last.

Normal Perspective - Still 2015

Time to 'Rewind'...

The two beings watched as the last band of the Clan, those who had given so dearly to save so much more than they could ever know about, stepped into the meadow. It began to fade from view, and all the Clan children there were basking in the love of those around them, the love they had missed for so long.

Mikey and Pablito said to the two beings, softly, "Thank you," before they too faded away - away to join their reunited family. The beings were pleased.

Before the meadow and those gathered there faded completely, however, a lone woman of late middle age, very motherly appearing, could be heard plaintively asking, <I still do not know why I have been given this form. I keep telling you, I am NOT female!>

With that, the cave entered into darkness again, except for the light from the two beings. They couldn't help but laugh at her continued insistence to the contrary. One asked the other, "Michael, for how many aeons do you think she is going to protest this to Our Father?"

"Longer than creation will exist, Gabriel. Longer than Forever," the other replied, eliciting more laughter from his companion Archangel - as well as giggles from some observers who didn't know they had been observed all along.

Gabriel turned and said to them, "It is time for you three 'imps' to go; for even Lords of Time and Life cannot survive what is to come, never mind a Son of Earth."

Levi turned to the Doctor in shock at their being discovered, and Adam Casey gaped at the Archangel; but the little Time Lord simply smiled and said, "We know." With that, all three Folded away, and a thrumming filled the cave.

"Those three," Michael said as he chuckled softly.

"Indeed," Gabriel murmured with a smile.

The sounds of crashing outside the caves came to them suddenly, letting the two Princes of Heaven know that those FCC who had pursued Clan Short for so long were getting close. They obviously thought that they were finally reaching the end of their 'Holy quest' to slay the 'evil Clan', but the two Archangels would teach them differently.

Michael raised his sword of lightning and fire, high over his head, and, as the door came crashing inward, those who thought they knew the 'Truth' got a truly 'Just' lesson in the reality of it, as Gabriel intoned:

"Let this timeline be closed... FOREVER!"

The sword Michael held aloft descended, and, amidst the screams, a final blackness descended on all. A Darkness that enveloped the entire Timeline... and those who had hated the Clan wrongly for so long reached the Fires Below... Fires that had been gleefully awaiting them and their sick and twisted brethren for so long...

Inside the Tardis - Location: The Great White:

"So. Any comments, guys?" the Doctor whispered to both Adam and Levi, as he held the small Mikyvis on his lap. Adam was himself holding the Doctor on his own.

Levi snuggled further into the Doctor's chest, "Why? Why were they so mean, Uncle Galli?"

"Ah, sweetheart," the Doctor answered, "It's Free will. We all have the capability of being that 'mean', little one. It seems like we'd never do such things, but... Take Tanner. You know him, you love him, you trust him. You saw, though, what he became. And that wasn't an alternate version of our Tanner. That *was* our Tanner; what he would have been had DJ died at that time. Everyone has Good and Evil inside, Levi. There are only two of mortal kind that I know of who don't."

"I know I do," Adam noted softly as he held both boys tighter. "I know that if someone hits all the right buttons in me, I'd do what Tanner did in that place."

The Doctor leaned his head back to rub his cheek with Adam's. "What do you feel now, Adam?"

"Peace," came the soft answer. "I saw what happens when someone who shouldn't have died did so, and the cost to put it right. I saw that sometimes hard things must happen for better things to take place."

"What do you think would happen if I did as you have wanted to ask of the Mikyvis since you first learnt more about them? If I were to go back and save those who went willingly into a fight to save others? What do you feel would happen if you guys had never gone?" the Doctor asked softly.

Adam sniffed as he thought about it. "The changes... I don't know, Doc. Not really, but I..." he trailed off and became silent.

The Doctor knew what was deep inside his new friend. "I understand, Adam. Levi, can you move for a moment? I need to take Adam back to his family. I'll be back soon."

Levi slipped down and watched as the Doctor set the Tardis on course for 'home', then, once the great machine had entered the right location and time, he watched as both Adam and the Doctor Folded out.

Adam found himself back in the same spot he had been before the Doctor had appeared, and no-one had moved. Everything and everyone was still frozen in time, but this time, Adam was not unnerved by the sight.

"Master of Arms, I do not think I need to say too much, regarding this experience to you. I'm sure you're aware that you cannot talk about this to others," the Doctor said seriously as he looked up at the taller teen.

Adam nodded just as seriously, "I know. I don't think anyone would believe it, and if Tanner knew, or DJ... I've heard others talk about those two; that they are wonderful, loving boys. It would kill either of them to know, wouldn't it?"

"Yes. I like you, Adam. In fact, I love you. You have an amazing heart, and I am glad I am a part of the Clan that you are a part of. Look me up later today, and we'll do some stuff together - and no, not that! Logan would not be impressed!" the Doctor giggled, winking at Adam to show he was only joking.

"I don't do old men, Old Man!" Adam retorted playfully, blowing the Doctor a raspberry as he finished saying it.

"Seeya later, Adam. Oh, and you and the guys here will likely get a surprise or two in the next few hours - a good one," the Doctor giggled as he Folded away.

As soon as he'd vanished, Adam was startled by the sudden noise all around him as time restarted.

"Uncle Galli, I have a question," Levi murmured curiously once the Doctor reappeared next to him. "You said that there were only two people who didn't have an evil side to them. Who?"

The Doctor smiled, and rubbed his nose against Levi's as he cuddled in with him on the sofa. "You, for one. You're an 'Innocent', and there has never been one like you before. Not a 'mortal', anyway."

"I just try to make Daddy and Poppa proud of me," Levi giggled as he blushed. "I'm nothin' special."

The Doctor giggled as well and said, "I'm not going to convince you otherwise on that, Levi. Not for me to do. But the other without Evil inside... he will convince you - soon too."

"Who's that?" Levi asked with a tilt of his head.

"The Shaper. There was a reason he went through what he did: in order to be the Shaper, he would need his 'Evil' removed. He can no more do something wrong than you can, but not because he was born without it. It has been removed through pain and Fire," the Doctor answered.

Levi's jaw dropped open. "Wait... Jason said about the Sa'ren sword... that it would be forged in pain and tempered in love?"

The Doctor nodded.

"Does... I mean..." Levi trailed off.

The Doctor giggled, "The answer you are looking for is 'Maybe'. He is the Shaper. Nothing is certain. Now, back to what I have shown you. You are certain you have the ability mapped out correctly?"

Levi nodded absently, his face thoughtful. "Yeah... yeah I do, Uncle Galli. Umm... should we tell Uncles Sammy, DJ and Tanner about it all?"

"No," the Doctor shook his head, "it would break Tanner's heart; knowing that he killed the entire Clan - that is too much for anyone to bear, Levi."

Levi nodded in agreement. "Just one last question. Who healed Uncle Cory in that other place if Jason had originally died in 2003?"

"Oliver. He was adopted by Antony and Telez instead, and he did the healing. Time cannot be easily changed by anyone less than Intermediate Middle Race, Leev. If you change something in the past, then Time usually finds a way around it. In fact, there are some things, like Cory, that cannot be changed. Only one who can change Destiny can change them... and you know now that there are only two who can... The One you call 'Our Father'... and *His* Shaper." The Doctor then moved the boy over to the side of the sofa and stood. "Going to take us back to Orlando now, sweetie. Be right back with you," the Doctor smiled at his young friend.

Levi giggled and nodded.

Clan Short CIC, Rec Room:

The Doctor and Levi appeared a second after they had vanished, causing no more than a slight flicker to anyone else's knowledge. They watched as Sammy, Tanner and DJ ran out of the room and started to follow them out. They watched the three kids pounce Brian, and then begin to play with Timmy and Ricky.

The Doctor murmured quietly to himself as he watched:

"It seems we stood and talked like this before,

We looked at each other the same way then,

But I can't remember where or when.

"The clothes you're wearing are the clothes you wore,

The smile you are smiling you were smiling then,

But I can't remember where or when.

"Some things that happen for the first time

Seem to be happening again,

"And so it seems that we have met before,

And laughed before and loved before,

But who knows where or when?"

(© Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, 1937)

"I like that, Uncle Galli," Levi murmured as the Doctor finished the poem. He then asked, "Will Tanner ever do what he did there?"

"No. That much I DO know," the Doctor said with a smile. "The turn-point of Time for him was that instant. If DJ died today, Tanner would remain our Tanner. However, those two: they will be together for a long time; and because of them and Sammy, a new day dawned. They'll have a good life, now... at least they will if the Shaper does what he should do."

"So," Levi said quietly, "it's all now up to Uncle Joel?"

"This is the 'Age of Legends', Levi. For this time, for this Age... Yes, it's all up to Joel... Time waits on him, now," the Doctor said seriously, hugging Levi close and kissing his hair softly. "The Shaper is the only one who can undo what is coming..."

Editor's Note:

That was quite a powerful chapter. I was ready to strangle someone, but of course, I held myself back.

As to where all that drama came from, I think it is only fair to point out a few things.

Some time ago, as was mentioned briefly at the beginning of the chapter, DJ was in turmoil, not really wanting to continue living. Many things were troubling him, and no one was having any success at giving him reasons to go on. Eventually, as we saw, 'a new day dawned', so to speak, and a sad little boy, whom DJ didn't even know, came to help him make the right decision. That little part of what happened appeared as part of a chapter of "A New Day Dawns" and, as we all know, DJ decided to come back. This chapter brings us "The REST of the story." We now see what kind of world would have been left if DJ had given up and died. That was not at all a pretty sight.

A lot of life lessons were learned here, and hopefully, we learned a few things too. I want to thank everyone who contributed to this chapter for their help in putting this together. Ilu and Dark Star did a wonderful job of telling the story behind the story. I am glad it has finally been brought to everyone's attention.

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher

Author's notes - Dark Star:

Well, first of: All the above is all Ilu's fault, and I had nothing to do with it! LOL

Seriously, this has been a long, long road to get to this point with this. So I'll say more at the end but, first and foremost, I want to thank three people. ACFan, for allowing me to write this up and see it used, along with Akeentia for the same reason. Ark was central to the story, and without Akeentia's permission it wouldn't have been nearly what I think it turned out to be. Iluvantir took my section and not only re-worked it, but with the kind assistance of Akeentia helping him, got all the tech stuff sorted

out to make it work. Much more than that, though; without Ilu it never would have seen the light of day. More on all this at the end but a special thank you to all of them.

Now on to the "Rest of the story..." as Paul Harvey used to say.

Several years ago, Gunrunner approached me and told me his character D.J. was going to attempt suicide, and he wasn't sure if he was going to have him go on living or not. He told me that all the CSU authors were joining in and writing sections for a particular scene where D.J. hung in limbo between life and death and even he didn't know which way it was going to go. I thought 'neat', and then he gave me the punchline. He wanted Sammy to be one of those who appeared to D.J. to try and talk him out of dying. That blew me away and I told him first off I wasn't in the CSU yet and that since I wasn't then Sammy wouldn't have ever met D.J. so how could he possibly do anything that would mean something. Well Gun wonderful person that he is said he had faith in me and bye. About the only thing I knew about this whole scenario was he told me what you see above and that Sammy would be the last person to speak to D.J. and if SamSam didn't get through to him then it was all over. Gee, no pressure there at all now is there.

So I sat there forever trying to figure out someway to do what he asked of me and have it make some type of sense and for the life of me couldn't figure out anything. Of course Gun kept asking what I was going to do still without giving me a clue what was going on in the story surrounding the scene I was supposed to figure out how to write. So I was basically completely in the dark. Sammy somehow had to make an impact on someone he had never met or knew and he was D.J.'s last chance at doing so plus I had no idea what the other authors were doing or going to be doing in the preceding scenes for a set up.

Finally I did get an idea, and that was that something had happened, something so bad that Sammy had to come back in time to fix it, or was sent back in this case. This whole story idea came to me which really grabbed me but the problem was Gun wanted a little scene in his chapter not a mini-story so cutting it back definitely became necessary. Now what you ended up seeing in ANDD 8 was that short scene I wrote up for him where Sammy is sent back and tries to talk D.J. into going on living. It again was written in the dark and basically I had to take a wild a\$\$ guess as to lead in and such as well as lead out. The only problem came about when Gun decided to add more "Visitors" after Sammy which made my ending a bit... off let's say.

In the end that short section got posted and it was over except for one little teeny tiny thing. The kids wouldn't leave off with the "Rest of the story" as it were and over the last couple of years it's been going round and round in my head to tell the whole story which was the backstory for what Sammy was doing there. In a discussion with AC and Ilu I made mention of the fact I had this entire backstory for that scene which set it up and made it and I really wished there was some way to have it show up somehow. Ilu said "Well send it to me, and I'll see what I can do". So I finally sat down and wrote it up then sent it off to him.

I had no idea how it would be possible for it to get into a story since afterall I was basically totally killing the entire Clan but I had hope that if anyone could do it Ilu the Master of Time would be able to figure out a way. I also had to send it off to Akeentia to see if I could use his character/creation Ark. To my surprise he loved it and said go for it.

Then the problems hit. The first thing was Ilu kindly informed me that I had the Tech ALL wrong. Now that's a surprise... (*No it's not* - ACFan) Anyway, Ilu got with Akeentia who kindly spent his ti-

me figuring out how to make what I wanted to happen happen, and do it correctly within the framework of the tech he had created.

Apparently Ark *doesn't* use transporters and angular confinement beams like the rest of Star Trek does! LOL

So now that the tech was worked out, Ilu just had to figure out a way to get it in somewhere. It was a monumental task and somehow he managed to do it and incorporate it into Sa'ren. It took many months of work on his part as well as that of Akeentia but they did it and the above is the final product.

In addition to finding a way to get it into the story and the tech he had to deal with my punctuation and just general screw ups like not remembering which eagle went with which kid yet he did it and except for losing one scene involving a transporter which I really loved I'm ecstatic about it. He's done a magnificent job with it and it works beautifully. It finally allows the whole story to be told of what caused Sammy to be back in time and why it was so important.

As some of you may notice the part which was in ANDD 8 is in here as well but it's everything around it that brings such meaning to that part. I hope you enjoyed it and the work put into it by so many.

So now maybe you'll better understand why I say "Thank You" to Iluvantir for all his hard work in making my idea come to pass, and Akeentia for helping out as well in making it a reality.

ACFan of course for allowing me to do something like this to his Universe as well as using his characters in this story.

A thank you goes out to Roland and others who also allowed me to use their characters in the story. I would have used more except I was trying to keep the whole thing down to manageable levels. Others gave their okay on this as well including Jeff, Akeentia and Ilu for their creations being mentioned so a thank you for that is in order as well.

Thanks to all of you and especially to Ilu for making it possible at all.

Until Next Time...

Dark Star

Author's Notes - Iluvantir:

What he said!

Seriously, I am grateful Dark Star trusted me with his 'backstory' regarding Sammy's appearance in "A New Day Dawns", and it seemed to flow nicely with the Doctor's assistance.

As Darryl said, Levi and Adam saw with their own eyes that even those choices that we may think of as only affecting us alone inevitably don't. It is a lesson we all need to learn. As was said in the film 'Prince of Egypt' - "Look at your life through Heaven's eyes..." - You never know what you will touch

and change by simply being there, or even by dying. Don't throw your life away... if you are still alive and kicking, you have a reason.

Again, thank you, Dark Star... I just wonder how many more people are now after your blood - this time for murdering Timmy! You rotter!

Ilu

AC's note:

DARK STAR!!!!

YOU KILLED TIMMY!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Ilu... be glad I know where you are going --- you are doing a great job!

Hugz

Chapter 11

"The Blade of Destiny"

Meanwhile - Clan Barracks:

Korris and Chang were helping Gabe, Travis and their two boys with their cool down exercises, all the while talking to them and encouraging them at their good efforts in the practice. Koth and Juan were already in one of the shower rooms and getting ready to clean up.

Juan was nervous. "You... you really want to... I... Ummm, you know, see my 'toy'?" he mumbled shyly to his Klingon boyfriend. Being naked had not troubled him before around the Unit and his brothers there, but with Koth it felt different to him... more personal, and making him feel truly exposed. Exposed in a way he had not been since before his brother Adam had rescued him from the lab.

Koth, now topless, glanced at Juan seriously before pulling him over and sitting down with his back to the wall and Juan on his lap. Juan started to tremble, but Koth's soft voice started to soothe him. "Only if you want to show me, Juan. I know what this must be like for you. I told you yesterday that I've 'played' with both Vicky and Riti a lot, and I've done a lot, just not gone all the way. What I haven't said is that when I realised I loved them, I felt very... what's the word?... very vulnerable when I next 'played'. It took a lot of love and hugs from them both to help me fight my demons, Juan. I know that in front of simply 'brothers' and 'sisters', being naked kinda feels safe. Your brothers and sisters love you and will protect you, and you being naked in front of them is you showing you trust them to do so. Right?"

Juan nodded his head against the Klingon's chest.

Koth continued, "But you love me... or like me lots and lots and lots..." He trailed off with a giggle.

"I love you, I think," Juan whispered haltingly, a small smile playing on his lips as he sat up and cuddled in chest to chest with Koth so that he could look into his Klingon boyfriend's eyes. "I do love you."

Koth grinned happily. "And I love you too. And that's why getting naked with me is different. I make you feel vulnerable 'cos of... ah, I'll say it..." Koth shuddered as he too remembered his own 'abuse'. "We will both feel vulnerable for a while with each other 'cos we've both been raped, Juan. We just have to take our time and help, love and hug each other. And we can't forget to ask for help from our brothers and sisters. They want to help, I've learnt."

Juan also smiled back happily. "So, if I want to shower with Chang not you, you won't think I don't love you?"

Koth nodded his head, "That's right, I won't think that. I know you love me, I just also know how hard this is for you." He thought for a moment, then, "Would it feel better if Kor and Chang showered with us both? The four of us together? That way, we both have our big brothers there to 'protect' us... up to you though. Yes, I would like to see all of you; you're just beautiful to me, Juan. But if you wanna wait 'til later, then I'll shower with Kor."

Juan sat back a little and looked at the wall Koth was sat against. After a moment, "I... I think I'd like that... I..." He blushed and giggled before saying in a naughty whisper, "I want to see your sexy body too, Koth... Yeah, let's ask our big brothers to 'protect' us from each other... we are, after all, two sex-crazy god-like kids, perfect in every way... we might not be ABLE to keep our hands off each other!"

Koth laughed loudly at that as he pulled Juan in close for a nice hug.

As they both stood back up, Juan asked curiously, "You didn't say last night how the trip to Wales went."

Koth answered as they left the shower room and walked back to where the others were still winding down, "Not bad. Got there, started liaising with Seth, then Kor beamed over from Utah to Orlando to help Seth... then what I told you about last night: Joel had us both cuddle with him for some Vulcan healing thing. Jace knows about it."

"I ate your food for you when you left," Juan giggled.

Koth snorted. "So I heard! Cheek... Hey, Kor?" he called out as they moved close to the others, "you and Chang about done?"

"Yes, now. What's the matter, brother?" Korris asked as he sat down to rest.

"Oh, we just have to ask you something," Juan giggled, a blush mounting his cheeks.

Gabe and Travis saw the look, laughed and pulled their two boys into their arms. Gabe giggled, "We'll go get our shower while you guys chat. Same time tomorrow, Koth?"

Koth nodded, "Yes. You got some of the basics quite easily. However, do not practice alone as yet, not without a Blade-Master with you. You will injure yourself if you do."

Gabe smiled and nodded in agreement before leaving with his partner and kids towards the showers.

"What is the matter, Juan?" Chang asked seriously.

Juan explained what he and Koth had been talking about, and Chang nodded seriously. "That is acceptable. I shall attempt to keep the 'sexy Koth' from ravaging you, if Korris will do the same to stop you doing so to Koth," he said deadpan, yet with a subtle twinkle in his eyes.

Juan burst out in deep, belly laughs.

"He's in rare form today," Korris said, before breaking out in giggles.

Main CIC:

Jason and Nathan bade farewell to Xolan and watched as he beamed back to their Dragon's Nest Compound in Wales. Once the hum of the transporter had faded, Nathan pulled Jason into his arms and asked, "Feeling better now?"

"Much," Jason sighed as he rested in his chosen's arms.

Jason kept his eyes closed for a moment or so before looking around the room. Seth, Jude and Billy Joe were at the far side talking softly, and so he and Nathan walked over to join them.

"You're sure they won't mind?" Billy was heard asking as the two Welsh boys reached them.

Seth chuckled, "Of course not. Let me have a quick word with them before I have you beamed up."

Jude smiled and stood away slightly before noticing Jason and Nathan. "Ah, Jason, right?" he asked.

Jason smiled and nodded, "Call me Jace."

Jude giggled. "I heard you took all our 'modification' data off Excelsior last night," he said.

Jason grinned, "Can't have future tech or information in the public domain, dude."

"You can go," Seth said as he ended his call with Commander Uhura, "Ready for transport?"

Billy and Jude nodded, and Jude waved at Nathan and Jason, "Seeya later. Going to tour the Enterprise!" A huge grin was fixed on his face, and Jason had to wonder if it would ever disappear.

"Enjoy," both Welsh kids called as the transporter beam took effect.

"I wonder if Joel's as excited as Jude is about being on Enterprise," Nathan said to no one in particular as he and Jason started for the Rec Room.

"I don't think I want to know," Seth giggled as he watched the two boys wander away.

In the Rec Room, Jason watched as Sammy, DJ and Tanner ran out of the opposite door, closely followed by Levi and the Doctor. He then made his way over to take a seat near to Adam and JJ.

"How're you now, Jace? You looked rotten earlier," JJ asked softly once Nathan had pulled Jason into a cuddle.

"Good, thanks," Jason smiled as he snuggled in happily. "What you reading?"

"Me? The Silver Chair," JJ replied, raising the book slightly.

Jason looked over at the far larger book in Adam's hands. Adam sniggered and lifted it up, saying, "Fellowship of the Ring."

"Love that! Where you at?" Jason bubbled as he perked up considerably.

"Council of Elrond. Shall I read my favourite bit to you?" Adam offered, smiling at Jason's evident interest.

"Oh, I think I know what that is - it's the poem Bilbo wrote for Aragorn?" Jason giggled. Once Adam nodded with a laugh, Jason continued, "That's my fav bit too!"

Adam grinned wider before raising up the book and reading it out to them.

"Love it," Jason sighed happily as a shiver went up his spine at Adam's recitation.

Adam's face grew curious, however. "Jude was just in here, and he said it isn't the same as in the book he read in his Universe."

"Really?" Nathan's eyebrows raised. "I wonder what's so different about it."

At that moment, the Doctor returned to the room and overheard them. "I can tell you," he giggled, "but I'll want some snuggles first!"

Jason reached and pulled the small Time Lord over and in between himself and Nathan. "There. Now spill, Doc!"

The Doctor smiled and recited:

"All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.
"From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
The crownless again shall be king."

(JRR Tolkien - Fellowship of the Ring)

"Wow," Jason and Adam said in unison as the Doctor's voice faded away.

"Now THAT makes more sense to the storyline than the one in THIS universe!" Jason added. "I wonder why it's different here?"

The Doctor giggled in his arms, "Most things, like books or films, are a little different in different places... sometimes not by much at all. Some remain completely the same between a handful of Universes only. However, that poem is completely unique."

"How?" they all asked.

"It is exactly as I've said it in all Universes and Timelines where the book 'Lord of the Rings' exists... except here. I only found out the difference when I returned and Tardis updated itself on the 50 thousand years that I've missed of this Universe's history. Here, that poem is different. Everywhere else, it's the same."

"Is that even possible?" JJ asked softly. "I don't know much about other universes and stuff, but that doesn't seem reasonable at all."

"It isn't, yet it is explainable. Jason," The Doctor twisted slightly so that he could look into the eyes of the boy that held him. "I think you know this - Tolkien, at least the one who lived here, based something in his great work on a legend from the real 'world', did he not?"

Jason's jaw dropped open slightly before he managed to stammer, "Well... yeah. He heard of the Legend of Sa'ren and based it on that... that's why it changed in our Universe?"

"Partly." The Doctor leaned back into Jason's arms again, "The other reason is due to the one who has set everything up FOR the Legend of Sa'ren. Prophecy is never accurate. Any Founder, Ferox or Mikyvis would tell you that, for they see possible futures. They cannot look ahead by two thousand years and say for certain what *will* happen, only what *might*. If you know what might happen, you can change it, so therefore it won't... right?"

"Headache forming!" Adam giggled.

Jason rolled his eyes and giggled, "Trust a blond!... OUCH, Nath'!!"

"Watch what you're sayin' then, *love*!" Nathan retorted before winking at Adam.

The Doctor laughed and continued, "Prophecy... true Prophecy... could only ever be given about Destiny, or Fixed Points in Time. And again, that would only be known by those who are there to *see* the future happening while still in the past..."

"God," JJ said rhetorically.

The Doctor nodded, "And the Guardian, one other, and, partly, my people. We know What Is, What Was, What Could Be and What Must Not. What *Will* Be, however, is always a little more hit and miss.

Now, this 'Legend of Sa'ren' *is* Prophecy, but not like from God or anything..." The Doctor smiled as he trailed off, waiting for the penny to drop.

Jason got it first. "This Guardian that Levi is always talking to and with?"

"The Guardian," the Doctor smiled. "He is Forever, so he's seeing everything happening at once... Past, Present, Future, all Time, Space, Universe, Dimension and Reality. He is Forever, and its Guardian."

Levi wandered over to join them, while eating some cookies, "Yeah, Uncle Galli, but he's a little in the dark like we are right now, though."

"Is he?" the Doctor asked mysteriously. "Oh, I'm sure he has no clue as to what exactly will happen next now that the Shaper is here, but he can see all the possibilities, and is IN all the possibilities, at once. We cannot do that, that's why it's a blank wall to us. Too much information. He must be picking out the most common elements from everything he's seeing and from that, he made the Legend."

"Wow," Adam said again. "Poor Joel... he won't be hurt, will he?"

The Doctor's face went still. "I cannot say... he has a Destiny... but I don't know what it is, other than it's hard. Very hard."

"You said he didn't have Destiny..." Nathan started to say, then trailed off. A second later, "No, you said he had none, except for something you weren't sure of..."

The Doctor nodded, and Levi added, "Uncle Q said the same. He said there was something ahead that Joel could not change; his own Destiny - but he didn't know either."

"Who's..." JJ began to ask, but Levi giggled.

"You'll meet him soon, Uncle JJ. I won't want to spoil the surprise!" Levi said through his giggles.

JJ rolled his eyes and laughed.

Hermes and Mercury chose that moment to come running over full speed and to pounce the entire group.

"Why're you all sittin' down talking when there's a huge double party to get ready and fun to have and games to play?" they both rushed out together amid the heap of laughing boys.

"Cos we ain't balls of boundless energy like you crazy cats!" Nathan managed to say as he fended off Mercury's tail from invading his mouth.

Mercury twisted about and promptly sat on Nathan's chest before tickling him. Once the blond boy had reached his highest pitch of laughter, Mercury got up and bounced onto the sofa. "Since you're here, can we ask you something?" he asked curiously, looking mainly at Jason.

Jason, laughing at the red face his bonded was sporting, nodded.

"Why'd Joel not know what his presents were? He made Cory and Sean two gifts, and watched as Kevin wrapped them. Why'd he not know about his *own* gifts?" Mercury asked seriously.

Jason sighed, "He knew what was in the wrappings that he gave to Cory and Sean, but he didn't know the reason why they had been wrapped. In fact, until this morning when he opened his own presents, he was of the assumption that Cory and Sean had kept the 'pretty paper' that Kevin had 'added as his part of the present'. When we showed him his pile of gifts, all he saw was pretty boxes. He thought they were the gifts. It just hadn't equated itself in his mind."

"He seems so quick with other things, though," Adam murmured sadly.

"Yeah," Jason continued, "yet in others, he's woefully behind the youngest Tribe member. He'll learn, though. It's just that he has many years of 'training' to overcome."

Adam breathed in deeply, then forced a smile. "At least he found out the fun of throwing wrapping paper around," he said softly, causing the others to smile as well.

The Doctor started to giggle.

"What's up with you now, Doc?" Adam sniggered.

"Oh, you'll find out. Suffice to say, Joel's about to have the time of his life!" the little Time Lord giggled out. "Now, the cheetahs are right: we have a party to arrange!"

"That's annoying! Not fair, Doc!" Hermes protested loudly as they all stood up and headed towards the Kitchen. "You can't tell us that and say nothing!"

"Yes. I can. And I just did!!" the Doctor giggled. He then started to run as Hermes and his twin lunged at him, and the others laughed hard as a game of 'Cat and Doctor' began, with the Doctor Folding out of their reach when the far faster cats got too close.

"Cheat!" Mercury yelled as he again missed the Doctor as he leapt onto empty air. "You're a cheater! Stop doing that," he giggled as he got up and ran at the Doctor in a pincer movement with his twin.

"No," the Doctor giggled back as he again Folded away, "You're the cheetahs!"

"Ten minutes time out for bad puns!" Jason yelled at them as left them to their game and walked through into the Kitchen.

Later:

"Uncle Jace, where do you..." Levi started to call out as he carried a couple of bags of marshmallows into the Dining Room, but he stopped dead and his eyes widened.

Jason looked up to see Levi's face register complete shock. "Leev? What's wrong?" Jason asked as he quickly ran over.

There was no answer, for Levi vanished, and the bags of marshmallows fell to the floor. Jason, concern now evident on his own face, turned and saw Kyle and Tyler with the same expressions as Levi written large on them both. "Guys?"

"Don't... it's okay, Jace," Kyle managed to say before he vanished along with his husband and other sons.

JJ moved close to Jason, and the rest of the Clan helping also gathered near. "What now?" JJ asked no-one in particular after a long, silent pause.

Jason shrugged. Kyle suddenly reappeared and said excitedly, "We need all of Aunt Teri's family, and every one of their boyfriends! Don't worry, guys, you'll love this!" He then vanished, as did everyone in and attached to the Short Family.

"What is going on?" Antonio asked in exasperation.

Gabe shrugged, and glanced at the Doctor. "I don't know, but if the Do... I mean if John don't stop grinning like that, I'm going to tickle the information out of him!"

The Doctor started laughing hard before Folding away, saying as he went, "I can be revealed now, Jason. The Shaper knows who I am, after all... as for your demand? 'Now is the Hour, all is revealed, Past comes full Circle, Father's heart is healed...'"

"Father's heart...?" Jason spluttered. Then, "What?! Hey! Get back here, Doc! Do you mean that Joel's found his dad?? Doc??"

Silence.

"Bastard! Sometimes I wish I could hate people I love..." Jason spat out in frustration before going off to sulk, taking his sabre-kitten Tarron with him.

Meanwhile:

Sarek sat in one of the more private rooms in Teri's house, and Captain Dafydd Evans was with him.

"I have received the reports from the Klingon and Romulan Empires regarding your mission, Dafydd, and they concur with the Federation and Vulcan Councils. The Target is a confirmed threat, and matches much from the writings of those ancient, extinct cultures around the Alpha Quadrant," Sarek stated quietly before taking a sip of his drink. "Also, personally, I have no doubt that the Destroyer lies behind that barrier."

Dafydd shook his head slightly, "I too believe that being to be a threat, but a god-like creature? I can't accept that, I'm sorry."

"You do not need to accept what I believe, Dafydd. Simply acknowledging that a danger exists is enough for me. If I am right, then in time, belief will not be required. Knowledge will replace belief."

"Why do you believe this so strongly now, Sarek? You were hesitant to when we spoke on this before I left Earth in January."

"Because of two signs," Sarek sighed as he closed his eyes briefly. "Two children have appeared, and they both Herald the Destroyer."

"Who?"

Sarek opened his now twinkling eyes and looked at his friend. "Precisely, my friend. Who, indeed." He did not leave Dafydd too long with his puzzlement before continuing, "You have no doubt heard of, or even watched, the television shows 'Doctor Who'?"

"Yeah..." Dafydd said slowly before his eyes opened wide.

"There is a child here, named 'John Smith'. He is not of your world... and he has two hearts."

"Oh, boy..." Dafydd leaned back heavily. "And the other?"

"The new Vulcan child, Joel Short. He bears the signs of the Herald of Sa'ren, and therefore the Herald of the Destroyer."

Dafydd sighed again. "That boy has been through too much, Sarek. I hope you have not filled his head with this. He does not need it."

"Not I, Dafydd. The Doctor, Ish-Hassu, has informed him, and so has your son."

"I'm going to have words with that boy. Jason knows better than to scare an already scared little child!" Dafydd stood angrily, but Sarek raised a hand.

"No, Captain. Your son only did as asked by Joel. Joel already knew that many things were strange, and that only Jason had some answers. He asked, Jason answered."

"Hmm," Dafydd muttered as he sat back down.

"Moving along to what I hope to be a better topic," Sarek continued as he sat forwards, "I have also received notice from Admiral Morrow regarding your next assignment."

"Really?" Dafydd asked with surprise. "That is not normal for others other than the Captain to be told first, Sarek."

"It is when the one being told made a request beforehand. The Hood and her crew are now reassigned. You are no longer Starfleet primary. You are now Vulcan High Command, and assigned directly to Jason Evans, Director VSO Operations Earth, as a part of the Clan Evans Fleet that I am now commissioning. Your ship will operate much as the Lafayette does between Clan Short and Starfleet."

Dafydd was shocked. "I... Assigned to Clan Evans? That will take some getting used to, Sarek - taking orders from my son!"

Sarek nearly smiled, "I am sure you and he shall manage to work out the correct interaction. Now, I think I will meditate for a while. If you would be so kind as to ask my wife to join me, Dafydd, I shall let you get back to re-establishing your bonds with your now greatly extended family."

"Of course, my friend," Dafydd said as he stood and walked from the room.

Sarek turned and watched through the open window as Sammy and his brothers played outside in the bright sunshine with DJ, Tanner and a few of the Orlando Clan. There was much giggling and horsing around, including a few instances where the boys slipped with their clothing so as to show and compare those parts that boys that age found most interesting. Sarek smiled to himself; human children showed that which Vulcan children did not after a certain age - the desire to run and play and explore this way. Logic, being their salvation, was also the Vulcans' curse. Would there ever come one who could walk the path between Logic and Emotion clearly and easily? Many had tried, all had failed - his eldest son, Sybok, included. Only a one had shown promise, but then...

"No, I shall not remember that day. Not today," Sarek murmured as he continued to watch the children.

"Are you feeling well, my husband?" Amanda asked from the doorway.

He turned to see her concerned face looking right back at him. "Yes, my wife, I am well. I am just remembering - or trying *not* to remember."

She moved over and sat by him, taking his hand into both her own. "As am I. That bond that Joel made with me... it felt much as our son's did when he was a small child, Sarek. It touched me deeply, and hurt too. Our little grandson would have... I..." she stopped and waited until the burst of emotion had passed by her. "That old dream I told you of the day our daughter and grandson died - do you remember it?"

Sarek nodded. "When you sat with me on my starship for the first time, you saw a child. Our son. Then you saw another, a babe in arms, and felt sadness strike your heart. Yes, wife, I remember it."

"Something else is coming, Sarek. Something greater and yet more terrible. Something wondrous, yet destructive. I think I now believe this Legend, husband; and I believe young Joel is the key of it all..."

"Uh, Nath'?" Seth called from the doorway of Main CIC.

Nathan ran from the closed door of the room that Jason had run into, and went to the wheelchair-bound teen in frustration. "Yeah, Seth? Is this urgent? I have a childish husband to sort out," he muttered, anger barely held in check in his voice.

Seth half smiled, "Well, yeah. We have just had a call from London, UK. We have a little boy just orphaned being sent to us via Terra Main, and the message is for a member of the Family of Sarek. Since Sarek is busy with your Dad, and since Justy is one, on Enterprise with his dad, and two, not as direct a member as you and Jace, then you're picked by default."

Nathan's brow furrowed, "Sounds serious. What's up?"

"That's just it, I don't know. The message is that the Family of Sarek will know what to do with this boy, and that Sarek himself will have the rest of the information. But until Sarek can see him, he has to be put into the care of a direct Family member."

Nathan nodded uncertainly, "Okay. What's his name?"

Seth drew in a deep breath, "Well, Jimmy Marcus is what I was just told. He's just turned seven, and a little hell raiser from what the British Liaison to FYS said."

"Sounds fun. When's he arriving?" Nathan giggled, his irritation with Jason forgotten for the moment.

"Any second," Seth said, as a transporter beam started up.

Nathan and Seth moved over and waited until the transport was finished, to find a small boy with sad eyes standing next to a tall, friendly faced woman.

"Welcome to Clan Short Headquarters, a Sub-Clan of the Family of Sarek," Nathan said formally to them both. "I am Nathan Evans of Clan Evans, a Son of Spock of the Family of Sarek. This is Seth Metronome, of Clan Short."

"Pleased to meet you both," the woman said with a soft smile, "I just wish it were under better circumstances."

Nathan nodded in agreement before taking an encoded datapad from her. She nodded once more, then knelt down to look into the child's eyes. "James, these boys are going to look after you until Ambassador Sarek can help you. I've followed everything about Clan Short for a long time, and they are really good people. You'll like them, okay?"

"Okay, Mrs Humphreys," he squeaked out, and Nathan had to fall into his full Vulcan training to not burst into tears at the pain he could hear in child's voice and sense pouring from him.

Mrs Humphreys stood back up after kissing the boy's cheek softly, and turned once more to face Nathan and Seth. "Look after him, please. Ambassador Sarek will have the codes for that pad. I have to leave, now. Our work is never-ending, I'm afraid."

"Thank you," Nathan said as he gestured for little Jimmy to come closer towards him, which the boy did slowly and shyly.

They watched as Mrs Humphreys vanished into Terra Main's transporter again before Seth squeezed Nathan's arm softly before rolling off. Seth knew that Nathan had a better chance at linking with the child than he, due to his empathic abilities.

"So, you're Jimmy? Or do you prefer James?" Nathan asked softly as he sat on the floor to look up at the nervous, sad boy.

"Jimmy," he murmured softly. "Are you part of my family? Is that why I'm here?"

"I don't know why you're here yet, little one, but we'll find out. If you want, I can be your uncle until we do find out?"

Jimmy nodded, then moved to sit in Nathan's lap. Nathan cuddled him close as he began to cry softly in his arms, while Nathan kissed his curly, dark blond hair. After a long while, Jimmy raised his hazel eyes and looked at Nathan sadly, "Uncle Nathan, why'd Mummy have to die?"

Nathan's heart broke at that point, and tears began to trickle down his own pale cheeks. "I don't know, sweetie. I don't know..."

They cuddled together for a few more minutes in silence, then Nathan said softly, "I need to sort out my hubby, then I'll introduce him to you. Come, I'll get you set up with a nice cup of cocoa before I fetch him."

"Hubby? You're married?" Jimmy asked curiously. "To a boy?"

"Yup. I'll explain in a bit. Come on, cutie."

Nathan pulled Jason out of the Meeting Room where he'd been 'thinking', and dragged him into the Rec Room. "You're such a bloody child, Jace. You don't have to pout and sulk every time someone keeps a secret from you!"

"Gerroffme, Nath'... OUCH... damn you! Leave me be," Jason complained as Nathan dug him in the ribs.

"No, Jace," Nathan said softly, anger in his voice. "Grow the fuck up, right now. You heard Kyle. It's all okay, and you've just made yourself look like an immature child rather than a Clan Patriarch. Grow up!"

Jason pulled his forming retort up short and became quiet. A moment later, he nodded, "Yeah. You're right. Sorry, Nathy."

"So you bloody well should be! Now, cool your head down. We're going to get a bloody drink, AND help the child that's been given into OUR care... that is if you want to?" the blond boy demanded firmly.

"What's this?" Jason asked suddenly with great curiosity.

Nathan tutted loudly, "Oh, you ARE interested. That's a bloody start. Come on, Incredible Sulk... let's get you up to date with Jimmy."

Sammy's Perspective:

"Whoa, this place is big... like HUGE and stuff!" I heard as Vishnu landed on top of me for the hundredth time so far. I managed to peer out from under his furry chest and saw Jace and Nath' leading a tiny boy between them. He was a cute little thing, and he was staring around in awe at the grounds.

Jason smiled down at him and giggled before looking at me and yelling, "Hey, SamSam! Get yer skinny southern butt over here, bro. I want you to meet someone!"

"What's up guys?" I said as I got up from under my giggling Vish and moved over towards him. "Oh, and it's not that skinny!" I added giggling.

"Riti says it is... so does Vicky... they like skinny butts!" Nath giggled, winking at me.

I blushed before looking at the little kid with them. "So who's this, then?"

"Hi! I'm Jimmy - who're you, and are you nice and cuddly too??" the little guy bubbled at me, making me smile and giggle.

"Well, hi there; I'm Sammy and I definitely love cuddles. I've even been taking lessons from Joel and Timmy to do it better, too. As to you two, I just think you like making me turn red," I said seriously to all three of them, but with a smile so they'd know I was kidding. Then I turned back to Jimmy and said, "Oh and yeah, I'm nice except to people who talk about my butt!" I stuck my tongue out at Jace and Nathan.

Jimmy giggled at me, but suddenly sighed and he started to snuggle into Jace's side. "Is it wrong to have fun when Mummy's gone?" he asked plaintively, looking up at Jace and Nathan in turn before turning his tearful hazel eyes to look at me.

The sadness I'd felt there behind the excitement when I first saw him was now back in full force, and I quickly sent to Jace and Nath, *'What?'*

Nath sent everything in an instant to my mind, and my heart almost broke at the pain this boy was in; like so many others, it seemed. Seeing those eyes lock onto mine, my heart joined Nath's in feeling for Jimmy.

I knelt down in front of him. "No. You see, you're still here and I can bet ya that your mom would want you to go on and live, even though she can't be here with you. Having fun is part of that and it's part of being a kid. It also helps with the hurt in here," I said touching my heart. "I know it's hard, but every time you have fun, I bet your mommy is smiling down on you from heaven. I bet she is so happy that you're happy cause I bet it makes her sad to see you hurting. It won't stop the hurt, though, but it'll help; trust me, I've been there," I told him gently, all the while sending warmth out to him and trying to take away some of his pain - at least a little.

Jimmy sniffed and shuffled forwards and I scooped him up and into my arms. "It don't make me feel good... my Mummy was always there..." he whispered softly as he cried into my chest.

I quickly looked up at Jace and Nathan, and, while whispering comfort to this crying angel, sent, *'Does he have a father?'*

'Unknown. We have a datapad, but it's for Grandfather Sarek,' Jace replied. *'The message we had was that only he can open it. And he's meditating right now. I don't think there's any type of rush, really - it feels okay to wait...'*

I nodded before turning my full attention back on Jimmy.

"I think maybe having fun does feel good when you can, but missing your mom doesn't. Plus, I think when you do start to have fun and maybe forget for a little while, how sad you are, then you remember and feel bad for feeling good. What you forget, though, is that your mom is still there, just in a different way now. You can't see her, and it's not what you want, but you know what. I bet sometimes if you really think about it, you can still feel her inside. Your mom is there in you every minute of the day, inside where you remember her. Everything you do, everything you say, she's there with you cause she loved you, and that love didn't leave with her, Jimmy. It's still there, you just have to remember that. It's not what you want or what you might wish for, but her love will never leave you unless you send it away. That's the hardest thing, cause when someone dies and they're not there any more like they always were, you think they're gone... but they're not, not really, 'cause of that love. It took me a long time to realize that when my... when my memaw died, and I was about your age too. But I **know** she's here with me every day, every minute. She's here every second cause she loved me so much, and just seeing you, I know your mommy is too. She won't leave you, child, never ever," I whispered into his ear through his sobs, hoping I was making some sense, hoping he'd see it.

I knew it wasn't easy, it had been so hard for me when it happened to me, and for a long time after that. I didn't want him to have to go through that too.

If only I could take all the pain away, but even I knew that he needed that to go on; even if it hurt like hell to see him go through it.

Jimmy looked up at me then, and, through his watery eyes, stared long and hard at me. "You are nice," he murmured after a moment. He sniffed and wiped his eyes, before whispering, "Yeah, I feel Mummy inside, like you said..."

He then gasped as a large furry paw laid itself on my shoulder. He looked over and gasped again, for Kartik and Vishnu were standing there beside me, purring.

"They won't hurt ya none. These are my brothers, Vishnu and Kartik. Guys, this is Jimmy," I said softly to the shocked boy, as I introduced them.

"We'd never hurt you Jimmy," Vishnu said softly, while KT added, "We protect our brothers."

"We protect each other," I firmly corrected, and got two smiles in return from them both.

Jace giggled quietly and I saw him wink at Nathan who had also noticed. "Cute," Nathan giggled.

"What?" I asked looking up at the two of them as they started giggling.

"Nuffin," Jace' giggled harder.

Nathan rolled his eyes, "I think you'll find out soon... unless we're mistaken... we could be, you know..."

"Not often, though, but... it's up to you and one of your puss-tats..." Jason finished with a laugh.

"Mmm?" I heard KT's puzzled tone, but he was hiding something. My Vish, though; he turned to look at the nearest cloud with great interest.

"Don't mind these two silly Brits, they're nuts," I giggled at the still shocked looking Jimmy while wondering just what the heck Jace and Nath were going on about, not to mention Vish was acting weird now too.

Didn't I have enough weirdness going on?

I guess not.

Jimmy giggled, "I'm American, but I lived in England all my life, Sammy..."

"Well I don't hold it against them, so I won't against you either," I replied, giggling.

He poked his tongue out at me, then he looked up at Vishnu. "Are you blushing under that fur, Mr Puss-tat?" he asked cheekily.

I couldn't help but actually laugh hard when I looked at Vish and saw that Jimmy was definitely right.

I was surprised, though, that he could tell. It usually takes a while to be able to.

"What's up Vish?" I asked, still giggling

"Nothing," he muttered, still blushing though.

What on Earth was going on? I thought to myself.

The last time I saw Vish blush was when Alexei had finally figured out how Vish did 'certain things' and where the 'thing' he did them with actually was.

Being all of three years old, Alexei wanted repeated demonstrations, and I had to actually save a bright red cat from the very curious boy. But, *oh* did we have some fun afterwards!

I heard Nathan sigh and saw him roll his eyes. He caught Vish's attention and beckoned him over to have a whispered conversation while Jace came over to sit by me. "SamSam, for someone with empathic skills like my sis, you're blind as a bat with no eyes," Jason giggled.

"What?" I whined. I looked with appeal at the boy still on my lap and whined again, "They're picking on me!" That got a giggle out of him, even if Jace did roll his eyes at me.

Jace started to cuddle closer to my side, leaving KT to do the same to my other. "My brother has a secret, Sammy," Kartik whispered in my ear, "and he was sure you'd have guessed by now."

"Oh, is he okay?" I asked, as I got concerned now, and I quickly looked over at Vish.

"Oh, good God," Jace sighed as he covered his face with his hands.

"What, Jace? Is something wrong with Vishnu? What is it?" I asked, now getting really worried, but then I noticed Jimmy was staring back and forth between them all before finally looking over at where Nathan was talking with a still furiously blushing, and now very nervous, Vishnu. "Sammy?" Jimmy whispered out, turning back to look into my eyes.

"Yes Jimmy?" I answered, but most of my attention was on Jace; waiting for an answer that wasn't coming.

My attention sure snapped back to him right fast enough at what he said next, though.

"The Puss talking to Uncle Nathan... I think he wants to be your boyfriend!" came the loud, happy cry from the now bouncing Jimmy, as he grinned up at me. "I think he likes you!"

"Jimmy, 1. Sammy, nil," Jason giggled, as he rolled onto his back. "A non-empath got it first, this is just too rich!"

"Not funny, Jace!" I elbowed Jace before asking Jimmy in a stunned voice, "My boyfriend?"

Kartik, however, made things much more clear for me, "He likes you a lot, Sammy. He has feelings for you. I dunno how deep, he won't say... but I know he does."

I just kept looking between the laughing Jace and happy Jimmy. "Boyfriend?" I murmured before turning my gaze towards Vish. "Boyfriend?"

"You really didn't know?" Jace asked, now looking up at my face from the ground where he'd finally stopped laughing insanely.

"I...I... No. I mean, I *love* him Jace, and we...ah..." I stopped and looked down at the rugrat in my arms before continuing carefully, "We've ah... 'played', you know, but I never knew..." I looked at Vish again, and I saw that he'd heard Jimmy's yell. He was now hiding behind a very amused Nathan.

"You did sex?" Jimmy asked with great curiosity. "You played with your willies and stuff? COOL! I've done that with lots and lots of my friends! It's fun!"

I felt my face turning red again and sent to Jace, *'So much for protecting innocent little ears!'* I smiled down at the quite happy little one in my arms and said, "Yeah, we did; and you're right, it's lots of fun."

Suddenly, I saw Vish start floating over to me and Nath walked alongside of him until he was placed down in front of me. "Sit, Vish. You don't have to get married or nuffin', but you should talk 'bout these things. We're all brothers, and even if nothin' comes of it, it *WILL* make you closer to Sammy," Nathan said seriously and wisely. He then went and snuggled in next to Jason.

I looked at Vish and could tell he was nervous, so I reached out my hand and pulled him towards me to join our hug. "Don't be nervous," I said as I kissed his cheek gently. "It's like Joel says 'bout me; you're one great big fire, and every time I feel you it's that wonderful fire that warms me deep inside. I've never tried to go deeper than what you're sending. I just never knew it was more," I told him softly.

Vishnu blinked back tears and looked into my eyes. "You... I..." he started, but stopped quickly. I think he decided to express what he was feeling another way instead, for I had a big wet cat-kiss all up the side of my face - from my chin to my forehead! Oh, boy! He then nuzzled his muzzle into my neck... and started purring!

I gasped at the feelings that that caused, as well as those running through me, *and* due to those I could feel coming from him. I let my hands gently began to move up and down his back, caressing his sleek fur as I whispered, "Oh Vishnu." There were tears in my own eyes, now, as I kissed the top of his head softly.

I barely noticed KT pulling Jimmy from my arms as he asked Jace and Nath, "We have a few spare spots in the game now. You three wanna play while these two talk and whatever...?"

He ended with a giggle, and I could feel his love for us as I felt him gently pat both Vish and me.

"Thanks guys," I said softly to all of them, smiling out through my tears at my brothers.

"Don't mention it," Jason whispered back as he got up and moved over to the other playing kids, leaving me and Vish alone on the grass. Vish looked at me and blinked a few times as he wiped his eyes on the back of his paw.

"Sammy..." he began to say, but I could feel him getting nervous again.

"It's okay, Vish. You can say anything you wanna say. I won't mind," I told him gently as we cuddled together.

He half smiled at me, "You and Brian... I didn't say anything 'cos I've seen you two together, and even heard he was your boyfriend... not right that I do anything if you are together - it wouldn't be honourable. I... I... feel a lot for you... but if you're with him, then I won't do nothin'... we're friends already and that's good enough... I won't get in the...."

"Shhh... shhh my Vish, shhh it's okay," I said to him softly.

He just looked at me, waiting and I tried to figure out what to say.

"Vish; I love you so much, and I love Brian too," I told him.

"Is... I mean..." he began, but trailed off.

"No, he's not. I love him, and we've loved each other that way, just like you and I have, but he's not my boyfriend," I said to him gently.

Vish started to stare at his paws a bit before I heard his whispered question. "So... does that mean... I, ummm... do you think <WE> could be boyfriends, then?" he asked as he raised his eyes to look at me hopefully.

I looked down for a minute and felt Vish tense, so I quickly looked back up at him, "Vish..."

"That means no then," he interrupted me.

"It means let me finish," I said gently, and once he nodded I started again. "I guess I need to talk to Jace or maybe dad, Vish, because I don't know what I'm feeling. I love you. With all my heart and soul I love you. But I love Brian the same way, and Kartik, and dad, along with the others. John said I love with my whole heart and I guess he's right. All I know is that I love you more than I can say, but I don't know if it's that way or not; the way you want and need."

I thought for a moment more and then said, "Feel what I feel, Vish." I sent out all the love I had for him with my abilities and saw him gasp as those feelings washing over him.

"I do love you, Vish, but I really don't know if it's as a boyfriend or not. I just know I don't want to hurt you or lose you; not ever."

He cuddled back into my side, then, and whispered, "We can wait, Sammy. I'll wait for you, and you can find out at your own pace... Even if we're just friends... what you showed me makes me want to cry, it's that beautiful."

"It's what I feel for you, Vish, because I find your heart so beautiful as well. Your fire, as my little guy calls it, is so bright and so hot and it makes me feel so good whenever I get to feel it. I'll always love you, but I just have to find out how to love differently, I guess," I told him gently.

I wondered how I was going to be able to do that. I had never given one type of love to one person while giving another type to someone else. I either loved them or I didn't. This was confusing because I knew there was something more. Vish wanted something from me that I didn't seem to know how to give, yet to me I already loved him. I loved Brian too, though. I just didn't know what they wanted from me. Wasn't my whole heart enough?

I just didn't want to hurt any of them.

'You do not need to ask Jason Evans, nor your father, Heart of Gold,' I suddenly heard the Doctor say into my mind. 'Your own heart knows the answer. Your love is vast, and whom you choose to give it to finally will always have what they need and want from you, and return to you what you need and want. Joel explained it best with Cory, Sean and Kevin. He loves each of them exactly the same, only the size of that love is different, yet it is still all his heart FOR each. You don't have to love Brian any less to be Vishnu's boyfriend and life-partner, nor vice versa, child.'

*'But how is what he wants different? I mean I think I understand about the size part but if size matters then I will be with dad like I always wanted to be because he has my heart first and foremost if I have to choose above all. I love them, John, so much I can't even say. All of them, but how do I know if it's **the** kind of love like Vish wants? I don't understand. I can feel what's between Jace and Nathan, for instance; but to me it's pure love and it seems like what I feel for those I love anyway. What if I don't*

know how to give that kind of love? What if I don't know it when I find it? What if I've already found it and don't know?' I asked him silently.

'All love is different, Sammy, but you see it as the same - all your heart. You don't love people in grades. When I said that Joel loves Kevin with 'more' love, it is not more as in the amount. The size of the Fire he feels is higher, but that is only due to not 'feeding' the fire he has for Cory and Sean. He could be with any of those three and be forever happy. You can be forever happy with someone in this area, or even with someone you have yet to meet. It is really down to choice. You shall not hurt Vishnu nor Brian by making a choice, for they will never lose your love.'

'Then how do I choose, John? How do I choose? I just don't want to hurt them!'

'You won't hurt them, and really, you don't choose. If you want to know more, ask Joel. He can scan your emotions and show them to you in a unique way, from an 'outside' perspective. It might help you decide, or at least find peace. However, something for you to think about: what did I say to you about how you feel FOR Joel? That you also find him physically attractive? Is it because of his pointy ears?...'

I felt him withdraw slightly, so sent quickly, 'I don't know why I felt the way I did about Joel, it was... it was different, yet the same. I just don't know. Maybe I'll do that when he has some free time.'

The Doc did not answer me. All I kept hearing was his words going over and over in my head: '... you also find him physically attractive'.

Was that the key? The 'extra' that was needed to make me choose? But what was it I found attractive?? What would make me decided that?

I looked at Vishnu, and I got grinned at by my cougar friend... and he was wiggling his pointy ears at me!

Oh god.... now something else was getting pointed - and on me too!

Wait a minute! I suddenly heard again the last thing the Doc had sent to me: 'Is it because of his pointy ears?'

What?! I felt attracted to Joel 'cos of his pointy ears, that added to the love? And that if Kevin had not had him, I would have?!?

But... Joel's pointy ears - VISH has pointy...

I looked hard at my Vish; and he was still wiggling those ears of his at me, and grinning all the while...

Normal Perspective:

It was almost an hour later and Jason was sitting in the Rec Room trying to access the datapad about Jimmy. His eyes widened when he heard Cory's voice coming over the World-Wide Clan Comm system. He started to his feet and run into CIC...

"Attention, Clan Short. This is Patriarch Cory Short. You are all invited to the Orlando Compound for an important meeting of the Family of Sarek. If you cannot attend, please send at least one representative from your Division. All are invited, and all welcome. Thank you."

Jason skidded to a stop next to the console Cory was using, and asked quickly, "When did you get back, and is...?"

"Wait and see, Jace," Cory smiled down at his fellow Patriarch. "Oh, and since your Clan is a part of the Family of Sarek, you wanna bring your guys from Wales too?"

"What about the rest of them?" Jason asked, his face a complete mask of puzzlement, "Do you even know how many of us there are, Cor?"

"If you got too many, wake up Draco and con him into linking into the systems; but at least get some of the kids from each of your Divisions here, bro," Cory said as he hugged Jason quickly. "I gotta run. Get your skinny butt in gear, Jace. Get to making the calls."

Jason started making his way out of CIC before he could even think. As he left Main CIC and got to the hallway, he saw Captain Kirk walking towards the Auditorium with Joel in his arms. Joel saw Jason at the same time and yelled out, "JACE! I found my Daddy!!"

Kirk and Joel disappeared around the corner, leaving Jason to stand there with his mouth opening and closing like a fish.

"Uncle *Jim*?" he managed eventually, before continuing outside in a complete daze. "Well... *that's* not surprising in the least!"

For the second time in a week, the new Auditorium was filled to bursting with kids and adults from all over the world. Each Division was there, or at least represented from what Jason could see. This time, most of his own Clan was right there as well, all in their Black, Grey or Blue robes. Only a few from the Ark Compound had come, but what with the things going on in their sector, that was understandable. The balcony was filled with adults; mostly parents of the kids below, and also the Bon Jovi group, the members of the now defunct Backstreet Boys and N-sync, and various others who had pulled together over the last week to aid Clan Short.

Levi walked up onto the stage, and his eyes started to glow white. "...//**I call to order the Conclave of Family Sarek of Vulcan**//..." the Guardian intoned through the small Mikyvis, his voice resounding through the large room.

Jason's eyes widened. He turned to look at his equally shocked brothers and sisters in Clan Evans, before mouthing softly to Nathan, "A conclave?"

"Beats me, love," Nathan replied, hugging little Jimmy closer to his side.

Ambassador Sarek and Lady Amanda, seated in the front row, seemed to be as surprised as Jason was.

Levi looked down at them, and now in his normal voice said, "I call Sarek, Patriarch of House Surak, Patriarch of Family Sarek, and the Lady Amanda his wife to the stage."

They both walked up, following the ritual and custom to the letter even if the reason for the meeting was hidden from them. They stood side by side at the centre of the stage.

"I call," Levi said again, "Spock, Heir of House Surak and Family Sarek, and Director Teri Short of Federation Youth Services."

Spock and Teri walked from the shadows and Spock took his place at Sarek's right. Teri stood to Spock's left, but unlike Amanda, she stood two paces behind the line. Teri being summoned, and in effect linked to Spock as 'partner', caused a sudden stir through most of the room.

"I call Division Commander Jason Evans, Patriarch of Clan Evans, Full Clan in the Family of Sarek, and Commander Nathan Evans."

By now, Jason had expected this. Nathan quickly whispered to little Jimmy, and watched as Victoria took the grieving boy under care. He then stood with Jason and walked forwards to stand in front of Spock and Teri.

"I call Fleet Commander Cory Short, Patriarch of Clan Short, Sub-Clan in the Family of Sarek, and Commander Sean Short, Clan Historian."

Both teens grinned as they walked to the stage and stood next to Amanda. Just as their mother, they stood two steps behind from the main line due to the differences between the two Clans represented on stage.

Levi turned then to face Spock. "Captain Spock, I hand the Conclave to you. I shall not speak again unless the Guardian of Forever needs to do so," he said formally, and stood to the furthest edge of the stage on Sarek's right.

Spock raised his hand in the Vulcan salute. "I greet the Family of Sarek, and welcome you all to our Conclave." He then stepped forward and turned to look at his father, "I request the Inar'tor, my Father."

Sarek looked at his son carefully, then looked to where Teri was standing. "The Accepting? You are adopting Teri Short's children?"

Spock did not reply; he could not, for Sarek had to either accept or reject his request first. As per tradition.

"Inar'tor is initiated," Sarek stated firmly. He gestured to his side and Spock, his eyes shining, stood back next to his father.

The room suddenly darkened, and a soft red light, much like the light of Vulcan's sun, bathed the room. From the end of the central aisle two small figures started walking, shadows playing over them.

It was Joel and Kevin. Kevin was dressed normally, but Joel wore a black Vulcan robe with silver runic symbols running down the right side of the chest. Around his neck, the St. Christopher medal was seen shimmering brightly.

As they reached the steps leading up to the stage, Kevin gave Joel a deep, meaningful kiss, then waited at the foot of the steps.

Joel, something glimmering in his hands, walked up the few steps and onto the better lit stage. Standing before Patriarch Sarek, the little Vulcan trembled slightly, and a look of wondering awe and love was in his deep blue eyes.

Sarek went ramrod stiff, for he had finally worked out exactly *who* was being accepted, and therefore *why* Teri was on stage. He also worked out from whom Joel's eyes had descended from - T'Sara...

Sarek sank to his knees as Joel raised his hand to reveal that which he held; the Seal of the Family of Sarek.

"I request acceptance into thy family, Ti Sa'mekh'al," Joel stated formally, his little voice shaking.

Sarek just managed to follow custom and whispered, "And what... what is thy Name, and the Names of thy parents, youngling?"

Before Joel could answer, the 'Voice of Forever' started to speak. Levi stood forward, his eyes blazing forth in white light. He recited the poem that was the same in each and every Universe in Creation... in every one, but not Alpha Prime:

**"...//All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those Forsaken are lost.
The Blood that is strong cannot falter,
Deep roots are not touched by the frost...//..."**

:Flashback:

Kirk, Spock and Scotty looked down quickly at those pictures and looked at the faces of Joel's parents. Spock and Kirk stiffened in utter shock, while Scotty raised an eyebrow curiously.

"D...daddy?" Joel trembled. "Y...you're my *dad*???"

Spock's legs slowly gave way, and Kirk barely managed to help his brother sink to the floor. Tears and sobs started pouring out of Spock as his eyes now locked with those of Joel. He looked closely at the young boy's face and attempted to see past the sunken cheeks and those other results of prolonged starvation... and saw himself as a child reflected in Joel's face; yet those eyes... they were T'Sara's. His wife's eyes. "My son..." Spock managed to croak out, "My tiny, precious son..."

"You.... you are! You're my Dad!" Joel suddenly sobbed out as his heart just managed to contain the sudden burst of joyous excitement, relief and the sense of overwhelming awe. He moved like lightning

to cover those few feet between himself and Spock, and was pulled into the arms of his father. "Cory! Sean! Captain Spock's my DADDY!!!" was the last coherent thing heard from Joel before he broke into happy sobs of joy. To the heartbreak of all, those sobs became mingled with those coming from Spock, shocking Scotty to his core.

"A son? He has a son?" Scotty asked as he faced his Captain. Scotty did not press for an answer, for Kirk was also weeping heavily.

Bones moved over and touched Scotty's arm. "I'll explain," he said thickly, his own eyes beginning to run with tears. Scotty nodded and both men moved away to speak quietly.

While Bones was doing so, Levi and his parents appeared to look in awe at the two sobbing Vulcans. "WOOHOO!" Levi yelled loudly before pouncing onto Cory's back. Cory, still in shock himself, fell over and onto Sean, who was already on the floor.

Teri looked quickly at Kyle, then at Spock and Joel, then back. "Can you get all of Joel's brothers, Kyle?" she asked softly.

"Yeah," the Mikyvis managed to mumble. "I think we need all the Short family here."

"Partners too," Chip added, for he had a feeling about what would be happening soon.

During all this, Kevin was grinning at the reunion before him. However, the sudden sniffs and sobs from behind the seat he was on him made him swivel and look over the back. Cory and Sean were in each other's arms, with Levi hugging them tightly, and both were crying softly.

Kevin sighed. He knew why. They had both lost their fathers; and while this reunion of Joel's made them happy for their little brother, it also brought to the surface their own lack. The need for every boy to have a father of their own was plain to feel to the brown haired Empath. He got up and, with Levi's help, corralled Cory and Sean around and onto the seats, just as the rest of the Short family and their partners appeared.

Timmy, seeing his parents crying, ran over with Paulie, CD and Calen, and snuggled in around them tightly.

Adam looked around and for a moment he could not work out what the fuss was about. Then it dawned on him: Spock was crying into Joel's hair, and murmurs of 'Daddy' were being sobbed out by his big 'little' brother. "Oh, boy..." Adam whispered.

"But none of the bairns survived, Doc," Scotty spluttered loudly all of a sudden, interrupting what Bones had been telling him. "There were six on the 'Zhuk'Fasek', and I personally reviewed the remains we had. All six were accounted for and dead!"

"No, Mr Scott," Bones explained, an old pain seen in his eyes. "There were seven children on that ship. *Three* of them infants, not the two you found. T'Sara and her son were under Red One, and therefore not 'there' officially. They didn't exist, the child most especially."

"Blasted Vulcans and Red One," Scotty murmured once it had sunk in. "So that's why we did na know that Spock was married?"

Bones nodded.

"How'd he survive when no other did?" Scotty asked in bemusement.

Bones shrugged, "I don't know. We may never know."

While Bones had continued talking with Scotty, Teri had moved over to be with her two grieving boys. Cory was now cuddled under one arm, while Sean was under the other.

"Sorry, Mom," Sean sniffed. "We've seen others get reunited with their dads, but... I don't know why we're crying," he trailed off, sniffing slightly as he wiped his eyes.

"I do." Teri replied softly. "You both lost your birth fathers at a young age, and up until about two weeks ago there were no adult males who even attempted to fill that spot in your lives. Jon might have been joking at your wedding when he made the comment about it being weird marrying off his oldest 'sons' to each other, but you could see in his face the entire time he was there that he took that promise he made to be there for you guys as a father seriously. With everything that's happened, he hasn't had time to show it, so it really has not sunk into your heads yet. You know what Joel has been through by not knowing who his father was, and seeing him reunited has made you realize that it's something you'll never get a chance to do yourself."

"Am I..." came the emotion filled voice of Spock suddenly, but his words fell away due to his now loosed feelings. He coughed and tried again. "Am I to understand that both Cory and Sean have found an A'nirih?"

"More like Jon volunteered for it when Cory had one of his breakdowns. Any doubts about his seriousness about it were wiped away at the wedding; it's just taking some time for it to sink into these two little hard heads," Teri replied as she gave both boys an extra squeeze.

Holding the still quietly weeping Joel tightly to his chest, Spock sat down on the floor in a more comfortable position so as to hold his son more securely. To Teri, it seemed like Spock had no intention of letting his little boy go any time soon. Her smile grew wider with Spock's next statement.

Spock looked around at each of Teri's sons, her grandsons and even those few great grandsons. Then he caught and held Cory's and Sean's eyes with his own, using a subtle Kolinahr trick, and looked into them deeply. They, too, looked back into eyes that they had never seen filled with such emotion before. "When my father enacted the Sub-Clan of Adopted Brothers, I was torn between taking you all under me as A'nirih, or letting my brother Charles do so. He did not, just as I did not; this was due to our duty schedule at the time. It was... chaotic. We were in the middle of a refit, and after that we had a mission to the edge of Federation territory.

"When a Vulcan becomes A'nirih or M'aih to any child, we always take at least a month away from our business to attend to that child. We form those bonds that are required to let the child know he or she is nurtured and loved and cared for.

"Neither I nor Charles could do that when Clan Short was formed. When Jason Evans asked me to be his 'Poppa', his A'nirih, I took three months leave. I would do *no* less for any others that I took under my wings. There have been new children in Clan Evans since I have been away from Earth, and I need now to meet and bond with them as well.

"I am, however," he paused slightly as he cleared his throat, "I am intending to offer A'nirih now in any case. I made that decision three weeks ago, and my s... my son being alive only adds strength to that resolve. I am intending to take as much leave as required to be with you all - should you accept me, that is."

Silence. No one said a word, but the faces before Spock were a riot of different emotions, yet all had hope mixed in. Tommy's mouth was hanging open, while Aaron's face ran with tears.

"You do not need to decide now, children - and Cory, Sean; your relationship with this Jon will remain unaffected should you accept me as A'nirih as well. Vulcans can have many fathers and mothers. Just as Joel now has your mother as his M'aih, so you can add me as your A'nirih. If you wish it," Spock finished, sincerity in his voice and eyes.

By now, Joel had stilled his tears and was simply relaxing in his new-found father's arms. Looking up at his dad speaking, Joel's eyes were taking in everything about his dad's features, and so failed to notice the obvious mis-conclusion from Spock.

Teri, however, did not miss it. "I'm Joel's Ko'mekh, Spock," she said softly. "Not his M'aih."

"Pardon me?!" Spock spluttered in shock before trying to regain some small control over himself. He did not quite manage it, but did hold himself together enough to ask, "How? Only a Sa'mekh or Ko'mekh can bequeath such a right, or by right of blood - such as a sister or brother. Charles would become Joel's Sa'mekh should I pass away, for instance... how can you claim this, Teri?"

"Mother asked her to be my for real blood mother, Daddy," Joel whispered up at him from his arms.

Spock looked down quickly. "Your... mother..." He raised his eyes to meet Teri's, and something passed between them in that look. "T'Sara lives?" he asked.

Teri shook her head, while Joel reached up and placed his small hand against Spock's cheek. "Daddy. You need to Meld with me... You need to know about me for real, and I wanna know you and the time I've missed bein' with you... and... there's other reasons..."

Joel shuffled around slightly to sit facing his father on his lap. "Meld with me? Please?"

Spock's shaking hand raised up of its own accord, and the others watched in complete silence as father and son Melded for the first time in their lives...

In the Mind Melds that Joel had experienced to date, all he had ever felt was from within his own mind as either Xolan or Xain merged their own with his. Each time, they had put him to one side per his own request so that he would not have to walk his own memories.

This time was different. He was on what he was sure was a bridge of pulsating light. Behind him was a passage with a golden glow that seemed to feel like home to him, while before him was another golden glow. The one before him did not feel like home as such, but it was welcoming. From the passage and light before him came his father, Spock. Walking quickly, the older Vulcan stooped and picked up Joel and held him tight, almost crushing the small boy against his chest.

"My son... oh, my son," he whispered over and over. Spock felt his heart break at the feel of his son's slight frame. What had he been through to leave him this way?

Joel felt his little heart swell with feeling, and he murmured back into Spock's neck, "I love you, Daddy. I've always loved you, since I first saw your adventures. Always and always..."

They stood like that for the longest time - unmoving, yet most certainly not 'unloving'. Spock's heart, Kolinahr notwithstanding, was wide open, and Joel's own had never been closed since he had first felt the 'Fire'.

After that time of simple bonding had lessened, Spock asked quietly, "Do you wish to share my own thoughts, my Child?"

"Yeah, Daddy. But I think you'd better see mine first... only..."

"Only what, my son?"

Joel drew in a slow, steady breath. "Only I don't wanna see my past as well. Xain and Uncle Xolan put me in a quiet place in my own head, and I saw nothin'. Can you do the same?"

Spock smiled gently at his boy, shocking Joel at that unexpected show of emotion. "You shall stay in my own mind while I go into your own. I shall protect you, my son," Spock said with assurance.

"Thanks," Joel whispered, increasing his hold on his dad. "What is this, though? This place?"

"The Link. The Joining Point. It has many names, but it is only what we are perceiving as the bridge between our minds; the merger of our essences," came Spock's answer as he turned and made for the 'passage of light' that Joel now knew to be his dad's mind.

"Am I not invited, my T'hy'la?"

Spock spun around at the sound of that unexpected voice, and he nearly dropped his son at the sight of his wife, T'Sara, walking from the light of Joel's mind. "T'Sara! You are within our son?"

"Yes, Spock. I could not leave our child alone, even at my own death. I was not able to stop what you are about to witness from occurring, but I was able to help once he came back to his true form," she replied as she reached them and embraced them both.

Joel giggled in wonder and joy at becoming a 'Joel-sandwich' between his parents. He told them as much when they both asked him in unison why he was 'amused'.

T'Sara started laughing. "I believe our son will take after us both, beloved," she said through her chuckles to Spock.

"You laugh?" Joel piped with shock.

T'Sara nodded at him, still keeping him tightly between herself and Spock. "Your father chose the Vulcan path. I chose the human."

"The hu... the human?! You're half human too??" Joel spluttered. His mind flew over everything that had happened since his arrival in the Clan, and brought him the answers to his own questions. "Of course! That's why my DNA is so messy! I'm a second generation hybrid! Doctor Austin said I was a little more Vulcan than human, and that could only happen with two half human parents!"

"Marked of T'Khasi," T'Sara whispered to him, stroking his curly hair - hair so much like her own.

"Huh?" Joel looked at her curiously. "From the Legend?"

"Yes," she answered. "Your Y chromosome is from your father, and his from his own - that chromosome can only pass father to son, never to or through a woman; so that is marking you as Vulcan. Yet your mitochondria; they are from me. They are passed to all children from the mother only, so passed mother to daughter, yet carried by sons. My *mother* is Vulcan - my father, human. You are therefore marked both ways as a child of Vulcan, yet you are also *of* Vulcan's brother - Earth."

"Cool... I think," Joel half giggled.

Spock, his eyes lost as he looked upon the face of the woman lost to him so long ago, asked, "T'Sara, will you stay with our son in my mind, or will you come with me into his own?"

"I shall come with you, Spock," she answered seriously. "You are about to witness horror, and you shall need me. I needed you when I first beheld Joel's memories, but I know that your anger far exceeds my own. You shall need me."

He nodded, then looked down into Joel's face as his son asked, "Why don't you call me by my name, Daddy?"

"You are as yet 'Unnamed', my Child," Spock replied with a gentle smile.

T'Sara added, "By tradition, the father or eldest male of the Family must name the child. Until then, that child has no name. You 'broke the mold', as it were; when we landed on that other 'Earth', I knew I was dying. I did not wish you to be named by non-family, so I broke tradition and gave you a name. It is not your real name, for that can only be from your father."

Joel took a moment to digest that before saying softly, "But I like the name you gave me, Mother... I'll miss it."

Spock smiled. "In that case, we shall break with tradition once we have been through the Naming. The name given you by T'Sara shall be a middle name, as many humans have."

Joel started beaming happily, "Brilliant!"

"I think that is a wise decision, Spock," T'Sara said with a chuckle. "His brothers would not wish him to lose that name. I believe you know better than I the power held by Cory and Sean when it comes to getting 'what is right'. Am I not correct?"

Spock nodded, "As ever, you are correct." He glanced down into the laughing eyes of his son. "Shall we proceed into my mind, my son?"

"Yup!" Joel bubbled happily.

Once through that passageway, Joel glanced around at what seemed a large room with corridors and doors leading off from it in all directions.

Spock placed his son down gently and said, "I shall go with your mother now, my Child. We shall return once done; do not be alarmed, for my mind knows you and will protect you and comfort you should you require it."

"Okay, Daddy," Joel nodded seriously. He then watched as they turned and vanished hand in hand, leaving him 'alone'.

For a while, Joel simply bounced on his heels happily. He casually looked around at the doors and corridors, thinking that without his dad he shouldn't go anywhere. After a longer stretch of time, however, he came to the conclusion that his father hadn't told him to remain where he was. He reasoned that if he shouldn't enter one of the doors, then Spock's mind would not let him.

He trotted over to the nearest door that took his fancy. At his approach, a warmth filled him, and it opened on its own. His eyes widened as information and images of knowledge poured at his senses; and it was only due to his Vulcan abilities and innate photogenic memory that he absorbed the influx so easily. This was the room in his father's mind where Spock kept all his Kolinahr training, information and abilities - and now Joel knew them all, including the Vulcan martial arts, Suus Mahna.

Joel stumbled back from the door and it closed. "Wow," he murmured in shock. Then, he grinned, "I wonder what's behind the others?"

For what seemed like hours, Joel went from door to door and absorbed more information that he thought he could have ever done, before he saw another interesting seeming door. He had no idea why it seemed interesting, only that it did. He ran over, and again like all the others, it opened at his very presence.

He closed his eyes quickly, for this was a room of memories. Specifically, every memory his father had of his mother - every one.

Joel fell over and crawled away, "Ewww! Ewww ewww ewwww!" He rubbed at his eyes futilely, for he really knew he'd never forget. "That's wrong... I'm wrong... I'm gonna be in soooo much..."

"No, Child. You will not be in trouble," Spock said behind him, and Joel looked up... and blushed.

"Sorry Daddy! Sorry, Mother! I shouldn't have gone lookin', and..." he trailed off, for Spock's face seemed at ease. His mothers, however, was creased in laughter lines.

"That was the funniest thing I have ever seen!" T'Sara chuckled.

Spock nodded in agreement. "I wonder what caused such a reaction, however," he wondered, deadpan.

Joel answered the question automatically, still trying to rub the image away from his eyes, "Knowing you... ummm, did sex stuff and such... well, that's one thing. *Seeing* all of the times you *did*, and even knowing which one made *me*...?! That's something else! Ewwwww! Icky icky!"

"Oh, you are the cutest Child I know," T'Sara said softly as she watched her boy rub at his eyes. She moved to him, knelt down and embraced him, "Do not worry at it, my Son. You will learn how to close away your memories soon so that they will not all forever plague you. You will therefore be able to do the same with these memories."

Joel smiled at her uncertainly. "Really? I can s...s...stop the pain?" he asked with a tremble.

"Yes," Spock answered firmly, "I shall teach you. You have the knowledge from that first room you saw, but you must be led to those abilities by practical example. This last room, however, was one you would not have seen in its entirety. When a parent and child Meld as we are on those special occasions to bond deeper, the child is generally completely open, yet the parents do tend to hold back on their intimate moments. Not because I or your mother would be embarrassed by you seeing such, but all parents know that their children would react much as you just did. I never intended for you to witness what you did."

Joel blushed even more, which only caused his mother to tighten her hug and start kissing his face. "I was right - too cute," she whispered to him, increasing his blush further.

Spock continued to smile down at him before kneeling to look him in the eye. "Seriously, son; I am not angry at you for seeing those memories. If I had not wished you to open these doors, I would have told you not to do so."

Joel nodded slowly, smiling shyly at the same time. His eyes gained a slight cheekiness about them as he giggled, "So, I'm a 'first night baby'?"

Spock blinked while T'Sara broke out in peal upon peal of laughter. "Yes," Spock nodded.

"Are you blushing, Daddy?" Joel asked curiously.

"Yes," Spock nodded again before pulling the cheeky imp from T'Sara's arms and into his own. "And I believe the customary punishment for teasing is to be tickled: am I not correct, T'Sara?"

"Correct, Spock," she managed through her laughter. Her chuckles were soon joined by Joel's higher pitched giggles and squeals for mercy.

Once his father had stopped his assault, and he had gained his breath back, Joel snuggled in happily on Spock's lap as Spock sat on the floor. "Are you okay after seeing my past, Dad?" he asked his father seriously.

"No, I am not; but your mother's presence helped as she said it would. I shall be okay, Child. It is you that I am more concerned for," Spock answered, and his voice held the sound of pain in it. "Come, I shall take you through my mind now. Later today, I shall teach you how to put all that you will learn here into practice"

T'Sara helped both to stand, and all three began to move through Spock's mind, but Joel suddenly stopped dead. "Mother?" he gasped out as he turned his face up to stare up at T'Sara.

"Yes, Joel?"

"When I saw you and Daddy in... in there... I saw... You... your mom and dad are... is... are..."

"Yes, Joel; and I believe they are still alive. You shall be able to meet them," she smiled down at him.

Joel looked quickly back and forth between his parents. "Oh, boy!"

Once the Meld had broken, Joel found that only a few minutes had passed by, rather than the length of 'time' he seemed to remember. He smiled into his father's face and then promptly snuggled himself back in, a strange little grin on his face.

Spock raised his face, searching for one particular person in the crowded room. He found him easily. "Kevin Thompson, please come here," he asked gently.

Kevin did so, and shuffled to a stop with his hand resting on Joel's shoulder. "Yes, Uncle Spock?"

Spock pulled him into an embrace. "I approve of you and my son being together, Kevin. You and he are a match," Spock whispered for Kevin alone to hear. Then, he pulled him in to cuddle together with Joel.

Spock then looked up at Teri. "Lady Teri of Vulcan," he stated formally. "I concur with she who was my wife; you are Ko'mekh of my son. In your doing so while his identity was as yet unknown, you have placed both yourself and me into a unique position; one not seen for over a thousand years."

"You know, this is getting to be a bad habit..." JJ attempted to whisper to Justy. Unfortunately, the dead silence made his observation audible to everyone.

Spock glanced at JJ and smiled. "Humans have a strange ability of doing so, JJ," he said, a twinkle in his dark brown eyes. He then looked back towards Teri, who was simply puzzled by his prior statement.

Teri decided to use the diplomatic approach that she had learned so well since assuming Director of FYS. "I am not sure I completely understand your reference, Mr. Spock. Could you please elaborate?"

Spock half smiled, "In accepting the mantle of Ko'mekh over my son, you have become, in the eyes of T'Khasi, his birth mother. He is an heir of the oldest House of T'Khasi, and as such you are now of that direct Family and House. I am made, by default, Sa'mekh to all of your children, with the final choice of acceptance being theirs. For me to have taken them as Sa'mekh any other way would have either meant our marriage, or your death, whereupon I would have had to fully adopt them. This act done without full knowledge of the people involved has bound both you and me together in the raising of *our* children. It is as if I fathered each of your children, and as if you birthed each. We are their parents, and they are now brothers by blood, not just oath. You, they have accepted already, as is plainly obvious. Until or unless they accept me as Sa'mekh, I am automatically A'nirih."

A small voice was heard in the silence after that proclamation. The voice of a child who had lost much in his fourteen years of life. The voice of a young boy who had always known love, but had still yearned for the bond of blood from within his own family. The yearning in that small voice brought a tear to all who could hear it.

Cory, as if he was once again six years old, stuttered pleadingly in a soft, treble voice, "D..do y..yo..you r..r..r..rea..really wa..wa..want t..t..t..to b..b..b...b..be m..m..m..my Da..Dad..Daddy?"

Spock placed Kevin to one side and quickly stood to move towards where Cory and Sean were seated with Teri and their four children. Standing before Cory and looking down into that tearful face, Spock, with Joel perched on his left hip, reached down and slipped his arm around Cory's waist. His immense Vulcan strength more than made it possible for him to easily lift Cory up and away from Teri's embrace and onto his right hip. Holding both boys close, and taking Cory's watery gaze with his own, Spock said simply, "I am your Father, from now and until the day I die. I have chosen you, I have fathered you. Blood of my blood, and flesh of my flesh."

Cory's lips trembled and he shook violently in Spock's arms. "You are my son," Spock said simply and thickly, and Cory burst into full tears. "Yes, I want to be your 'Daddy'. I have wanted to be since I first met you, Cory," he continued, and Cory only just heard him through his sobs.

Cory tucked his face into Spock's neck and just continued to cry. Joel, however, had the biggest, brightest smile on his own face.

Sean was cuddled into his Mom's side, and his emotional link with Cory nearing overloaded. As Teri stroked his back, listening to his repeated whispers of 'we got a Daddy', she felt peace at the boys acceptance of the only thing she had not been able to provide for them. Despite the advice of all that knew her, she had never in good conscience been able to seek another relationship after the loss of her husband. Her argument in reply to the urgings of others had always been 'I pledged to stand by Michael for all Eternity when we were wed, and I never break my oaths'. Both her boys knew this from overhearing it many, many times, and Teri was sure that it played a big part in their insistence on keeping their word to others.

Joel could clearly hear Sean's whispers, and he squirmed a bit in Spock's grasp. He said softly, "Daddy; put me down. Ted needs cuddles too."

Spock nodded and lowered his little lost and found boy to the floor, only to see him grabbed and cuddled by a smiling Kevin. Spock then knelt himself, with Cory still cuddled into his right side. The Vulcan opened his now freed arm towards the auburn haired teenager, and said quietly, "Come to me, Sean, son of Spock."

Sean nodded, and wordlessly shifted himself to Spock. As Joel and Kevin took the place on Teri's lap that Sean had just vacated, Tommy, Adam, Tyler, Jordan, Aaron, Gavin, Sipek, Skirk, and Syzik gathered around their brothers and placed their hands on Cory and Sean's shoulders. Spock held the two teens in his arms close and gazed into each of the other boys' eyes. As he looked at them one by one, he said their names, and added the title 'son of Spock' to each. This prompted kisses, many in fact, to be placed on both his cheeks, and whispers of 'Thanks, Dad' or variations of the same to come from each.

Jude was the last to approach and looked completely uncertain as he stood there watching his new brothers. His eyes expressed hurt and loss, much like those of Sean and Cory, and yet there was doubt too. Spock glanced at him, and then at Joel, who whispered, "You didn't see him in my memories?"

Spock shook his head, "No. I did not see anything after you were brought out of that place, my Child. Your mother told me to meld with you later once I have regained my full control."

"Oh, okay," Joel nodded, then looked at Jude, "He's Jude, our new brother. Mama 'dopted him yesterday."

Spock looked back at Jude, and Tyler and Skirk moved to bring the fourteen year old closer to the kneeling Vulcan. Jude trembled in awe, for he had *never* expected to meet Captain Spock for real unless in a dream, never mind have the chance to be his *son*. Spock asked softly, "What is troubling you, child?"

Jude sniffed and wiped quickly at his eyes before saying, "My Dad and Mom were great, Mr Spock... I loved them and they loved me, but they died not too long ago. Mom... Teri Short... said she'd be my new Mom, but that I could keep my last name to honour my real Mom and Dad. I... I'm jus' scared that saying I want you as my new Pop would be... be like sayin'... I'm r...replacing my real D...Dad..." He finished in full tears and covered his face with both hands to try and hide his sobs.

"Unca Jude?" Liam, being carried on Justy's back, called out, "Unca Jude? Your Daddy says he loves you and is proud of you lots and lots. He wants you to have a new Daddy, and says dat Unca Captain Spock is the bestest choice."

Jude looked up and at the small red head in shock. "My Dad...?"

Justy giggled, "He sees dead people, Jude. Trust us and trust him; your Dad must have said that."

Jude just stared, first at Justy, then at Liam, then he turned and did so at Spock. Cory, his tears lessening, swivelled in Spock's embrace and beckoned his newest brother closer, and then, once Jude had stumbled near enough, reached and pulled him in between himself and Sean. Spock easily added him to the hug-fest that was formed around him.

Jude looked into Spock's eyes. "I can still be 'Lee'?"

Spock nodded. "I am pleased to meet you, Jude Lee, son of Spock."

Jude's face broke into a soft smile, and he too snuggled in with his brothers.

Mikey appeared just then, standing off to the left side of Spock. He looked at the group in Spock's arms, then spoke in a Voice which echoed in the room as he turned and looked directly at JJ and Kyle.

"There is a Prophecy in the Book of Life which has awaited the Time for its revelation. Word has been Given to the Host to deliver this message now. Listen, for I have been tasked to deliver these Words to all here."

"As is the Heart of a Human,
so is the Heart of the Nexus.
Four chambers,
working together,
acting as One.
Four Youth,
sworn as one.
Together they keep all alive;
apart, life shall cease."

Mikey looked around the room. "Most of you are here due to an Oath sworn in a shower. An Oath which was accepted by Our Father. JJ, Kyle; it is Time to decide if that Oath is to be Sealed for Eternity."

JJ looked down at Kyle in shock. Kyle looked up, wonder in his eyes. "Don't look at me, bro... I only get info from the Book of Life second-hand! I know better than to be arguing with Mikey; I'm joining our brothers. You comin'?"

JJ nodded, then picked up Kyle and carried him to the group of boys.

Mikey then turned and pulled his mother, Joel and Kevin into the group as well. Once their hands had joined the rest, Mikey placed his hands on the heads of Cory and Sean.

"Spock, Child of Sarek of the House of Surak;" Mikey said in a more normal voice, "I accept your offer of Sa'mekh. I also have a message agreed upon by Michael Cory Short, Child of Samuel, and Patrick Sean Scott, Child of Winston. You have their Blessing and best wishes as you take on the providing of support and love for their sons which are gathered around you. All here in this group they consider their own, as well as those to come."

"Ah, does that mean us too?" Billy Joe and Josiah asked in unison from the side where they and the other partners of the Short boys were standing, along with the kids and grand kids.

As Teri went to sit back down with Joel and Kevin once again on her lap, Spock turned to look at them and smiled, "If you are partner to one of my sons, then you are also my son. Vulcans have no 'in-laws'. As for the Little ones: I am your Fa'Sa'mekh, as if by blood. Come."

They did. All of them. En-mass. In a pounce.

Justy, Dean and the twins started laughing, and Asher and Liam were rolling around giggling.

Joel looked on in bemusement from Teri's lap. "Mama?"

"Yes, sweetie?"

"Daddy won't get squished, will he? I only just found him!"

"No, sweetie. He'll be fine."

Kirk, Scotty, McCoy and Chip were too busy trying to not break their ribs laughing to do much to help the fallen and buried Vulcan Captain.

It took a while, but eventually the kids had all settled to the floor around Spock and were quietly talking and asking questions. One by one, each was taking up some time on their new Dad's, or Grandpa's for some of them, lap. The other adults were now on the sofa and simply watching this bonding happen.

Unsurprisingly, Joel was soon pulled over and held close by Spock; Teri had been right, for he could not be parted from his tiny child for long. He had too much to catch up on.

"Dad, what's Joel's real name?" Tyler asked, a thrill of excitement again running down his spine at having a new father.

Spock raised an eyebrow. "'Joel' is the name given to him by his mother, yet you are right, Tyler; he does not have a proper name. He has not passed through the Ahm-Van-Kal as yet. Now that our Family is here and complete, we can do so... if my son is willing."

Joel was nodding his head a mile a minute long before Spock had finished speaking, much to the other's amusement.

Cory looked over from where he, Sean, JJ, and Kyle were discussing the bombshell that Mikey had dropped on them. "Kewl; can we watch? How does the Naming affect the rest of us?"

"All here are those I consider family, and so you are all invited. I will need to speak to you, Teri, for you have the most direct role to play at the start of the ceremony. Jim, are you willing for us to use the Botanical deck for the Ahm-Van-Kal?"

"Of course, Spock," Kirk smiled.

Joel's eyes shifted colour that second, and his mother's voice whispered and echoed around the room, "Climb the steps of Mount Seleya." The young Vulcan's eyes then returned to normal.

Spock looked puzzled. "That will take a day to reach," he half murmured.

"Not nearly so long," Kyle giggled.

"But you are not the ones supplying transport," came the voice of the Doctor from the doorway. They all looked over and smiled and waved at the Time Lord as he walked up to the mass group of kids. "I am the one to do this, for something special is about to happen."

With a tilt of his head, Spock asked, "Who are you, child?"

"Ish-Hassu," the Doctor answered with a smile. Then, everyone Folded and vanished from sight, leaving him to stand in the Officer's Lounge alone. "Live the Legend," he whispered before Folding away himself to join them.

As the group picked themselves up from the sand and stood straight, they began to look around in the mid afternoon sun. It was large and red, and peeking around the largest mountain the kids had ever seen.

"Duuudeee... that's one big rock!" Jude commented in awe, causing giggles from most of his brothers.

"Is... am I *home*?" Joel whispered in awe instead. This was just like his dream, or his daydream. Even the air smelt the same, more or less. Away in the distance, a strange howl was heard. It was coming from across a large, wide valley where the landscape became very broken.

"Welcome to Vulcan," Spock said quietly, after recovering from the shock of his sudden meeting with the Doctor, who was now grinning at him from behind Gavin.

Joel continued to look around, while at the same time backing up so that he was against Spock's front. He absently pulled his father's arms around him for comfort, for his feelings were in turmoil within him at that moment. "That's Shi'Kahr?" he asked, pointing off towards the horizon where a smudge of building shapes could be seen.

Spock glanced over, "Yes, that... No. That is not the Shi'Kahr I know. It is too small."

Cory tilted his head. "Anyone know *when* we are? I know that this don't match our current time or recent history according to school."

"Ish-Hassu," Spock whispered, again looking at the ginger Time Lord who was sporting a mischievous grin on his face. Spock then looked around and inhaled deeply, "I understand now why I have been catching the scent of blood on the air. This is just after the Battle of the Shattered Blade." He looked at Cory and answered him, "We are over 1700 years in the past, son. The exact date is uncertain, but not too long after the Battle of which I spoke."

Cory raised his eyebrows. "I guess asking why is pretty much useless... I'm pretty sure our time magicians ain't tellin'..." He glanced at Kyle and Tyler, their expressions telling him they were just as confused as him. "Correction, our resident Mad Doctor ain't tellin'," he amended, shooting a look at the now innocently smiling Doctor.

Joel's gasp made everyone, including Mikey, spin around and face what Joel had now guessed was the Forge. Across the Valley, a large white animal was running towards them at an impossible speed. Mikey's eyes widened and, as the beast eventually slowed to a stop before them, the Saint bowed respectfully to it.

It was a large, wild looking Sehlat, and none of the kids had ever seen one like him before. Even the three android boys were gaping at him.

"What can this son of T'Khasi do for you, T'Kahr of the Red Sands?" Spock asked, his voice oddly filled with wonder.

The White Sehlat raised himself up onto his back legs and roared loudly, then thumped back to the ground and walked slowly forwards. His eyes were fixed on just one of the group, and it was not Spock.

It was Joel, and Cory felt a thrill of fear for his little brother race up his spine. "What does he want from Joel...? He better not hurt..." Cory began to say as he moved in between the beast and Joel, only to be interrupted by Spock.

"Peace, son. He is T'Kahr, the Ancient. He does not attack those pure of heart and innocent of mind. My Child is surprisingly both, considering what he has been through," Spock said as the Sehlat stopped less than an inch from Cory.

Cory found himself nosed to one side gently by that huge animal. He trembled continually, regardless of Spock's assurances, and watched carefully as the huge Sehlat sat before his tiny Vulcan brother and reached forwards with massive paws to pull Joel from Spock's arms.

Time Comes. Child of Destiny, of Ancient Blood, be welcomed home. I have been and will be there when you are whelped, and I have been and will be there when you pass. I am T'Kahr, and my cub is your guardian

T'Kahr then opened his mouth wide and brought it forwards so that Joel's face was almost inside it. Mikey had to use all his power to stop those with weapons and phasenmorphs from opening fire on the Sehlat, much to their chagrin and annoyance. "Mikey! Let us... Joel's going to..." Kyle started to yell, for he too found himself powerless to act.

"Wait," was the only word the Saint said, and the Doctor nodded at them peacefully from the Saint's side.

Joel, unlike the others, was not frightened. This was I-Cheya's daddy. I-Cheya wouldn't hurt him, so neither would his guardian's dad. Even as he looked down the throat of that huge beast, he felt, for the first time ever, no fear... for the breath of that Sehlat was washing out and over him; enveloping him in warmth and power and joy and...

Joel started weeping happily, still supported by those massively strong paws, and still being breathed upon by T'Kahr.

Sean stopped struggling against the invisible hold his older brother had him in, and simply asked Spock plaintively, "Dad? What's going on?"

Spock, completely impassive in regards to the situation his son was in, looked over, "I am unsure, however do not be alarmed. There is no logical reason for the Ancient to harm my Child. He shall tell us if he deems it right to do so."

A minute later, T'Kahr stopped breathing over his tiny 'captive', and turned his huge eyes to fix Kevin with a piercing gaze. *Strength, come here*

Bravely, Kevin shuffled over, and automatically wrapped his arms around his trembling boyfriend from behind. He looked over Joel's shoulder into the eyes of T'Kahr. "Yessir?" he trembled.

Peace, Strength. I shall be and will be and have been there for you, too. Breathe in, and find renewal

He again started to breathe out, and this time both Kevin and Joel slumped to the ground in tears, only they were not of sadness, but of wonder. After a moment longer, T'Kahr stood and walked towards Sean, Cory, JJ and Kyle and stood before the gathered four boys. All the others were now spaced out behind and around them, watching with Mikey and Teri.

Heart of the Nexus are you, Cory and Sean of Terra. Supported by brothers of your choosing; JJ and Kyle. Time Twists and Time Moves and Danger Comes. Beat Forever, Last Together, Support your Family, Avenge your Brother. What 'Is Planned' is not what 'Will Be', for the Shaper is here, and the Shaper is 'It'. It Comes, and It shall save you. You must then Save It. Destiny needs the Heart, and the Heart needs the Support. You are all One, yet More than One. Different, yet Alike. Be Thou Blessed

A wind picked up from no-where, and eddied around T'Kahr... and he vanished...

Remember...

"Ummm...." Cory looked first at Sean, then at JJ. Finally, all three looked at Kyle, while Cory asked, "You know what that was about?"

Kyle simply echoed Cory. "Ummm...."

Climb the Steps...

They glanced around quickly, but T'Kahr could not be seen.

...Battle is over, yet the War rages. I protect you, but you must Climb. You must add and complete a part of the Story. Climb the steps...

Spock raised both his eyebrows. "I was correct in my assumption. We are at the definitive Battle of the War of the Raptor. Come, climb the steps. The mountain was considered neutral ground during the War, for it is sacred to us. Quickly." Spock moved and raised both Kevin and his son into his arms, and started towards the beginning of the Steps. Kirk, Bones, Chip and Scotty immediately started to corral the children with Teri, and, with phasers drawn, followed their Vulcan comrade.

The climb was long, and as they wound around the mountain, they saw down below an army encamped, and in the distance another retreating.

"The Cavern of Naming is not too far ahead," Spock called over his shoulder as he continued to climb unabated, "yet the ceremony cannot take place until the sun sets. If any need to rest, please say so. We have the time."

"Roo, stop bouncing like that, you're making me feel tired!" JJ giggled as he climbed, with little Harley on his shoulders.

Spock turned and took in the faces of his new children, and saw that they were tired, but also nervous. "Do not be alarmed. The Battle below is over, and it only consisted of my ancestor Surak and his opponent, D'Tan. The next phase of fighting does not occur for another few days. If you wish to rest, you may do so in safety."

Joel and Kevin, now recovered from whatever T'Kahr had done, slipped down from his arms and sat on the steps. Even though they were not tired from climbing, due to having been carried, their actions prompted the others to copy them.

Cory moved forwards and deposited Timmy and William next to Kevin while he sat down next to Joel and pulled the little Vulcan to his side. Joel smiled up at him, "You happy at having my Daddy as *your* Dad too?"

"I'm still trying to get my mind to accept it," Cory giggled.

"Yeah, you know how blondes are... they have to jump-start their brain cell to remember to blink!" JJ commented as he added Harley to the group of munchkins.

"Watch it JJ... or I'll swap your lotion for super-glue!" Cory shot back with a grin.

"Hey! No fair, what did I do to deserve THAT, Cor?!" Adam whined plaintively.

"You let him off his leash!" Cory replied, sticking out his tongue.

Spock nearly smiled, but he was also aware of what truly troubled Cory; and what the teen was trying to hide from them all. He sat down on Cory's free side and, gently, pulled the blond teen over and onto his lap. Words would not say what was needed, and so the most powerful living Kolinahr trained adept did what his own son had been doing instinctively since Cory had known him: Spock laid his hand to Cory's face and brought the semi-shocked teen in closer so that Cory's chin rested on his shoulder, and he pushed out with his emotions. All of the caring and love that he had had for this frail, blond teen since the moment he had met him flooded into Cory's soul, and Spock closed his eyes peacefully as the emotional sharing started between them.

After a few minutes, Cory leaned back and quietly looked into Spock's eyes; unconsciously looking for confirmation that the one thing missing for a big part of his life was now actually happening.

Spock raised both hands to the teen's face and cupped it, gently stroking his thumbs along Cory's chin soothingly. "I have never lied to those I care about, my son. Nor do I share with those not Family those feelings that I am doing even as I speak. When the circumstances surrounding my Child were made known to me, it placed me into a position I had wanted to assume already, and my offer was genuine and 'heart-felt'. I love you no less than I love my Child, your 'Lil'elf'. I love you no less than your brothers, and they no less than you. I offered to become your father because I loved you. You accepted. You are my son, and there is nothing that you can do or say or think that can or will ever break that. Only I can sunder this relationship by betrayal, and I swear upon my life and the life of my Child - that I will *never* do..."

Joel gasped and everyone there trembled. Something different had happened that time, for it was not a shiver that ran up their backs, but a warm rush of 'something' that seemed to fill them all.

Levi whispered in awe, "My Friend says... he says that Uncle Joel just confirmed a Destiny, Uncle Cory..."

Spock's eyes through all this had not broken from Cory's. He moved his face closer and kissed his blond son softly, then rested his face cheek to cheek with Cory. Into the teen's ear, he whispered, "I love you, my son. I will always be there for you as long as I live and breathe."

Cory wrapped his arms around Spock and pulled himself tightly against Spock's chest. While unable to form the words to describe what he was feeling, there was no doubt in anyone's mind... the depths of Cory's heart opened up and even the Mikyvis could not block the wave of relief, joy, and love that Cory's mind radiated to all within sight.

Joel watched his big brother cuddle with his Dad for a moment before looking over at Sean. He caught his other beloved brother's attention and gestured him to come closer. Once Sean had complied, Joel pushed him gently over and into Spock's arms as well. "Daddy meant all of you, sa'kai'am," he said to the entire group as Spock easily cuddled the two teens together. "He let me know how much he felt for you all when I melded with him."

Timmy and Ricky 'took charge' and ensured everyone got their turn with Spock. The one constant through it all was Cory; not a single person present would even suggest him moving, and all made a point of reaffirming their own love to Cory as they visited with their new Dad.

The group spent a good hour seated on the Steps of the mountain, and not even food was an issue. Joel looked at Mikey, and with the best puppy-dog eyes he could muster, asked, "Mikey; can you make us some of those yummy scrambled eggs on toast that you gave me on Forever World?"

Before Mikey's mouth had even started to open to reply, a stove, toaster, and refrigerator appeared in front of him, all attached to an extension cord that led into nothing. The fact that Kyle, Tyler and the Doctor were all giggling quickly gave away who was responsible for 'providing' the equipment.

"Just *where* are you getting power from?" Mikey asked with a grin.

"The Tardis... now start cooking!" the three culprits exclaimed in unison.

Mikey giggled, "Well, if you want *normal* scrambled eggs on toast, sure. I *was*, however, going to give you some from a new 'recipe' that only Saints like me have access too, but..."

Jay's voice came from the direction the extension cord had vanished into, "Kyle, Ty! Get rid of that bloody stove..."

"Language, Jay!" Jack's yell could be heard yelling from further inside the 'nothing'.

"Sorry, Dad... anyhow, get rid of it," Jay continued quickly, "I want Angel eggs!"

{I was not aware that the Runi laid eggs, Jay. Live and learn.}

"Shut up, T," Jay sighed as he jumped from the doors that had appeared floating off the edge of the mountain and into the Doctor's arms.

"Hey, didn't you forget Mom-hugs, young man?" Teri chuckled.

Jay's face froze, and tears came to his eyes suddenly. "M...Mom-h...hugs?" he whispered in a tremble as Mikey grinned and started asking the small Tribe members what they wanted to eat before creating it for them. He left what was to come to his Mom; as always. Jay turned and stepped away from the Doctor and looked up at Teri, his face streaming tears. "I... a Mum...? My Mum d...died... I... You... I..."

"You are one of the brothers; that means you've got me as a Mom if you want me," Teri replied as she held out her arms.

She did not get one crying child in her arms, but two, for the Doctor was 'one' with Jay... and had lost his own mother so long ago he barely remembered her.

Mikey, his grin still on his face, continued to hand out food to his large family, and he asked each and every one of them first what they wanted. Except for Cory and Sean, whom he left 'til last. To them, he gave plates filled with French-toast and sausage patties. After a grin and a wink that the three original brothers shared, he moved finally to his mother and the two sobbing, happy Time Lords. "Welcome to the family, imps," he whispered to them. "Now, once you've finished hugging your new mom, go hug your other dad, then get your skinny butts here for some food. You two need more energy than the rest of the group put together; Mikyvis included...."

Wiping his eyes, the Doctor giggled while Jay blushed scarlet. However, they did as they were told and piled over to Spock for a huge hug. After, they ran back and sat down on Mikey's lap to eat their own scrambled eggs.

Spock, however, was now completely dumbfounded. 'Ish-Hassu' was his son?! "I will need to meditate after today's events..." he murmured.

"You ain't the only one!" Cory giggled between mouthfuls from his perch on Spock's lap.

Sean finished his food ahead of Cory and, after kissing both his husband and his new Dad absently, rose up to hand Mikey the now empty plate. He then walked over casually to Kyle, who had also finished, and picked up the small munchkin.

Giggling, Kyle asked, "What you up to, Sean?"

"I need to ask ya somethin', bro," Sean asked seriously.

Kyle also grew serious. He swivelled around on Sean's lap and embraced his brother chest to chest. "What's the matter?"

"Is Cory okay? Why's he doing things like a little kid?" Sean asked softly.

Kyle relaxed, and in doing so relaxed Sean, for if Kyle was not concerned, then there was not much wrong. Kyle smiled at Sean and said, "He's okay. He's back when his mom died and when his world started crashing down around him. You were there and Mikey was, and Mom-Teri, but still... he's be-

ginning to heal now, Sean. He has a daddy again, and it's been so long - for the both of you. Cor's just being the child he hasn't been able to really be since Cheri died. He's been like a child with Mom-Teri, but now he can really be that old kid again. He's really accepting he has a permanent father as well as mother, AND that he has another dad back on earth; Jon. It's getting through to him, Sean. He's beginning to really heal up the rest of the way, now."

"Can his mind handle it though? It's not gonna mess up his head, is it?" Sean asked with an edge of concern in his voice.

Kyle shook his head, "No, it won't mess him up. His mind is going forwards from that point to now, bringing the 'child' with it. He'll probably be kid-like now and then as he adjusts, but then so's Justy, and you, even. Cory hasn't been able to be kid-like, not really. He's gonna have to learn to merge the 'kid' with who he is now, just like you've had to. Only, you've been doing that all along as you grew up. Cor's gonna need some patience from the rest of us at times, and the best one to help him is gonna be Joel. Joel has to do the same as Cory, only Cory's got it easier as Joel has to learn to feel as well. They'll help each other a lot, and likely others in the process. Flow with it, Sean. Enjoy it, and be a kid with him when he needs to be. Pop-Spock understands this too, so he'll be helping as well."

Sean nodded. "Thanks bro. You might be a brain leech, but you're MY brain leech, and I love you for it."

Kyle giggled, then sat up straighter and suckered his mouth to Sean's forehead. After a few noisy sucking sounds, Kyle sat back and giggled, "Not quite ripe, yet!"

"Bite me, munchkin!" Sean giggled as he pulled Kyle into a cuddle.

"After what I've just seen," Jay giggled over from his perch on Teri's lap, "I'd be careful asking him to do that, he just mi..."

"Hey!" Sean exclaimed, for Kyle had grabbed his hand and was nibbling lightly on Sean's thumb.

Kyle giggled as he kept Sean's thumb in his mouth and cuddled himself into Sean's chest. He giggled more when he glanced at Joel, who had decided to copy his little brother and was sucking on JJ's thumb... while grinning at the cuddling King of the Mikyvis.

The cavern was dark, yet the raised platform and the stone table like structure was lit enough for the ceremony to take place. The children piled into the cavern and assembled themselves near the front, while Spock, Teri and Joel remained at the entrance. Spock was currently Melding with Teri so as to transfer to her what her role as Ko'mekh was in the ceremony, while Joel was sitting in the cool sands at the entrance, watching the last of the light from the sun vanish from the sky. Once Spock had finished the Meld, he moved away towards Aaron, Mikey, Cory and Sean to speak with them, while Teri moved to sit next to her Vulcan son to get him ready.

Five minutes later, Spock stood behind the table and looked out over his family with the three teens and the Angel at his side. The others were spread out before them and looking up at the platform. Kevin, Kirk, McCoy and Scotty were standing to the side with Chip and his family. Direct family only could take part in the Ahm-Van-Kal.

They were not the only ones standing in the shadows, however. Two contemporary Vulcans were watching; a male and a female. Silent and unobserved, even by the Mikyvis, they watched in wonder as savages from Earth, two Vulcan's, and a Rigelian invaded this most sacred of sites. Two strange birds were also flying around the cavern, singing a song unlike either of them had ever heard.

They remained hidden, and simply watched, while the Doctor glanced over subtly and smiled to himself. All was proceeding as it was meant to.

From the back of the cavern, Teri slowly approached with Joel in her arms. As per tradition, he had to be presented to his father as he was on the day of his birth, and so she carried him like a baby; naked and helpless. The only item Joel had on him was that medal from Sammy; he had flat out refused to take it off when Teri was getting him ready.

As she reached and stepped up onto the platform, she spoke formally, "Spock, behold your son."

Taking the child from her arms, Spock laid his son on the table and looked down into his eyes. Brown met Blue, and wonder was in each. His son, his tiny, lost son; found at last.

Spock placed his fingertips on Joel's temple and closed his own eyes, inwardly starting the ritual to See; if Time would let him.

It was rare that any Saw in the Ahm-Van-Kal. Every so often, though, the veil of Time would part and a Name would be chosen.

This was such a Time.

The Mikyvis and the Time Lords watched in awe and wonder as Time started to spin in the Cavern; streams and threads merged and parted, split and collided. They watched as the Eye of the Storm focused in on Spock and Joel...

Spock gasped as he Saw. Before his mind's eye, a S'harien Blade appeared; the oldest of them all, and the most famous. He witnessed the battle in which the Eldest S'harien broke and shattered to win the eventual victory. He watched as images flooded his sight faster than even a Vulcan's mind could process. He watched as the Shattered Blade reformed, and the image of his son overlapped it.

He knew what his son's Name was.

Opening his eyes, Spock looked into Joel's. Those beautiful blue eyes, T'Sara's eyes, gazed back at him; longing, begging even, for his Name.

Spock reached into his uniform and brought out the Crest of his House, with the Family Seal attached, that hung on a chain around his neck. Next to the Crest was another Seal of the Family of Sarek; the seal that would have been his son's long before now. Spock had kept it always as a reminder of the child he had long thought lost.

Now, he could present it to his son.

Spock laid the Seal on Joel's bare chest, and spoke his son's name: the Name of that Ancient Blade...

:End Flashback:

The Conclave in the Compound:

**"...//...From the Ashes of Pain shall awaken
A Flame that shall save Ancient Ground:
Renewed is the Blade that was Broken...
The Heir, past all hope, shall be found//..."**

Levi became silent once more as the Guardian finished the recitation. Joel smiled slightly at Levi, then answered his grandfather's question, "I am Sa'ren, Child of Spock and T'Sara, Child of Sarek and Amanda. I am blood of thy blood, flesh of thy flesh, and heir of thy heir. Dost thou accept me?"

Sarek closed his eyes, trying to maintain a hold on his emotions that were already spilling forth. He could not, however. In a voice choked with feeling and joy, he answered, "Thou art my Grandson and Heir. I accept thee into my Family, Sa'ren, Child of Spock."

From around his own neck, Sarek drew forth his own Crest and Seal, and, just as Spock had carried the Family Seal that would have been Joel's, so to had Sarek carried the extra House Crest that would unite with it. He unfastened it, and took from Joel the Seal he held. Fixing them together, he hung the united Crest around Joel's neck.

Joel then found the Ceremony totally broken, for by simply touching his grandson, Sarek completely dissolved and pulled him into a tight, fierce hug: and Amanda was only seconds away from joining it.

Utter silence now lay upon the room as the entire Family of Sarek witnessed this most humbling of sights; that of the proud Ambassador and his wife embracing their lost grandson, and weeping unashamed before them all.

Quiet whispers and respectful conversation were taking place as the two Clans talked between themselves. They half watched the stage, waiting for more answers, yet not wishing to disturb the reunited family there.

Movement from the huddle brought silence down on the room again as Joel was released from the middle of the hug. He was beaming with joy and peace, and the Crest around his neck glimmered in the now normal lighting of the Auditorium.

Joel looked over at Jason quickly. Jason's eyes were a mix of wonder and disbelief. "What's wrong, Jace?" he asked.

"You... Sa'ren? *You* are the 'Sa'ren' of Legend?" Jason stuttered.

Joel grinned and nodded, "Yup, seems like."

"Remember what Mikey said, Jace?" Cory asked quietly.

Jason shook his head, "No, I... wait, something about... ummm..."

Cory giggled as he pulled his brother patriarch into a hug. He whispered into Jason's ear, "Stop picking on us blonds, Mr Memory."

"Bite me, Cor!" Jason giggled. "I'm just shocked, is all! I remember now."

"Good," Cory smiled, still hugging his brother. "This is the 'not as you expect' Mikey told us about when we were in your head on Monday. Joel is Sa'ren, yet not the Sa'ren everyone was expecting."

Joel bounced over to the two boys, "So, Cor? You gonna do it now?"

"Yes, I think so," Cory answered, with a sidelong look at Jason. "You're gonna love this, Jace!"

"Heaven's preserve us!" Jason giggled. "Just get on with it you insane duo! I dread to think what you're planning now, but just lay it on us and put us outta our misery!"

Cory pulled from his robe pocket a rolled parchment. He moved to centre stage, and addressed everyone. "This," he said, holding up the parchment and letting it unroll, "is the Charter of Clan Short."

Everyone there remained silent. The silence would not last however...

Cory tore the Charter in half. He handed the pieces to Levi, whereupon the two halves burst into flames.

"Clan Short, Sub-Clan of the Family of Sarek of the House of Surak, is no more," Cory announced to the shocked room.

Editor's notes:

So, it has come to pass that Joel has found his daddy. I find this to be a very good thing.

I wonder who this new young fellow named Jimmy is? He seems really nice.

There seems to be some really important things going on, but I guess we will have to wait until Ilu is ready to fill us in on all the extra things. Someone said that this chapter wouldn't be posted until the next one is ready to go up, so I am guessing that if you are reading this, then it won't be long at all till we see the next chapter, at least I hope that is the case.

I don't know for sure, but I have this feeling deep down inside that Cory had a very good reason for doing what he did. I guess we will just have to wait and see if he has one, and what that reason is. I have a pretty good guess, but I don't want to say, cause I have been known to be wrong.

I WANT MORE!!!! I want it now!

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher

Author's Notes:

I must have mentioned the following - I love "The Lord of the Rings" by JRR Tolkien, and so, when I saw how parts of my story are in a way a mirror of parts of his, I used 'Bilbo's Poem' from the Council of Elrond scene in this chapter. I have shown how, in another Universe, that same poem might be different if certain other 'Legends' and information had been made known to Tolkien, and hazarded a guess as to what that would look like.

I wish to make it clear that I have great respect for 'LOTR' and Tolkien, and in no way is my use of his poem, or its alteration, meant to be anything other than homage to my favourite author.

Iluvantir

Chapter 12**"The Children of Vulcan"**

Pandemonium. Everyone, or nearly everyone, started throwing questions at Cory, and some very hard looks at the now pale faced Jason.

Those from Clan Evans in attendance were still and quiet as the tension could be felt building in the room. Sammy and the Trinity felt the anger building and knew at whom it was directed, so they got up and ran to the stage to surround Jason and Nathan. Vishnu and Kartik soon joined them. Sammy crossed his arms across his chest and glared around at those who were now sending dire looks Jason's way.

Gabe stood slowly and glared between Cory and Jason. "What do you mean, Cory! You've merged the Clans??"

Cory half smiled. "No. Jace knows nothing about this yet, guys."

"Then what?" Danny called out quickly. "What's going on, dude?"

"Something good," Cory began, his smile growing larger, "something not seen for more than a thousand years..."

Flashback - Mount Seleya - 3rd Century AD***Cavern of Naming:***

"I name you Sa'ren, Child of Spock, Child of Sarek," Spock whispered before kissing the forehead of his little boy.

Joel beamed up at him before raising his arms around Spock's neck and grabbing on in a tight hug. In the back of his mind, Joel knew that this name of his would be shocking to many, but for right now, he didn't care.

Cory and Sean exchanged a long look with Aaron and Mikey. Mikey had a knowing smile on his face, but Aaron looked as lost as they were.

Mikey giggled as he looked between his three lost 'little' brothers and his even littler one being hugged by Spock. "You want me to explain?" he asked while trying not to giggle.

Cory nodded, and Sean said, "Of course. Spill it, Mike!"

Mikey gave in and laughed, then said, "Joel IS the Blade and Scion of Surak - he IS Sa'ren. He is the 'It' of the Prophecy, and the one who would 'find' It. He is both Joel Short of Earth and Sa'ren of Vulcan. Where he goes with this is now up to him. Does he walk the human path or the Vulcan? The path of the Wielder or the path of the Blade?"

Aaron tilted his head. "You wanna try that again in English, bro?"

Mikey giggled even more, "Joel is both the one the Prophecy talks about finding and renewing the Sword of Surak, as well as being the Blade of Surak - at the same time. The two are not the same. The Sword remains shattered at the highest point of this Mountain we're inside of. Joel, though - he IS the Blade of Surak, and the Scion. The Heir. Does that help?"

Seeing the still-lost looks of his brothers, Sean giggled. "Mikey, you should know better than to use words with more than two syllables when talking to blonds!"

"Ah," Mikey said seriously, while Aaron punched one of Sean's arms, leaving Cory to take the other. "Okay... Cory? Aaron? Jo-el is Spe-cial!... better?" he giggled.

"BITE ME!!!" both blonds exclaimed in unison.

Sean caught the look that Spock sent them all at that point, "Guys, we have a task to do, remember?"

"Oh... oops!" Aaron murmured as he coloured up in a blush.

Together, the three teens and their angel-brother, came forward and stood next to Spock. The Vulcan looked down at them, then smiled and winked. He backed away slightly, and Joel was now within easy access of his four big brothers. Aaron unfolded the black robe he had been carrying and nodded at Cory, but before Cory could get Joel into position to be dressed, the Doctor walked up.

"I need you to stand away for a moment, guys. This is important," he said to them seriously. They nodded and backed away, then the Doctor turned to Joel, "Just remain still, little brother. Nothing bad will happen."

As Joel half smiled at him and nodded, the Doctor turned to that part of the room that, to everyone there but him, seemed empty. He nodded, and pointed at Joel. "Remember," he whispered in an old dialect

of Vulcan. A moment more passed in stunned silence before the Doctor looked back at Aaron and the other three, "You can complete the ceremony now."

They knew from the Doctor's tone that he was not about to explain, at least not yet, so the four brothers came back to the stone table and gently dressed their smiling little brother. "Welcome to the Family of Sarek, Sa'ren of Vulcan," Mikey said, being the oldest.

Joel giggled and then slipped from the table, only to be scooped up and cuddled possessively over Cory's hip. Joel nuzzled his face into Cory's neck and smiled. "Do you like my name?" he whispered to Cory, a hint of worry in his voice. His beloved brother's opinion meant more to him than almost anything else.

"I love it; not everyone gets a Name through the Sight at the Ahm-Van-Kal. It just goes to show how special you are," Cory replied.

Spock raised an eyebrow, "You Saw too?"

Kyle giggled. "I showed all of them what I was seeing, Dad."

"Ah," Spock said softly.

Kevin ran over from where he had been standing next to Chip and slammed into Cory's side. He looked up into Joel's face, "I love your name, Sa'ren!"

"And I love you," Joel whispered as Cory knelt down to allow Kevin to hug his boyfriend tightly.

Spock looked on with peace, then looked at the Doctor, "I believe that we have now completed the reasons for why we were brought to this time?"

"Yes," the Doctor replied. "If everyone can gather close, I shall return us to the Enterprise. Then, Dad, you have to explain what will now happen to the Clan due to these events. As well as write them a new Charter!"

"Don't fry your brain cell, Tigger!" Mikey giggled as Cory's mouth opened without any words forming. "You'll see!"

Joel started giggling from Cory's arms, "Yeah, he will, Mikey; but does he have enough room on his shoulders for the new titles?"

The Doctor started laughing at the look that came to Cory's face. He waved his arm, and the entire group Folded away. He then, still giggling, turned back to that 'empty' corner. "Surak, T'Klass. Remember that child. Remember his size. Make the Armour, and use what remains of the metals once used by S'harien himself when he made the now Broken Sword. Destiny awaits."

Surak moved into the centre of the room, and a young woman moved forwards with him. "Who are you?" the Vulcan asked.

"One who knows. You have heard the voice of Logic. You have seen a vision of what will be. Make the Armour," the Doctor answered, then Folded away to rejoin his family.

Surak looked at his pupil. "Come. We must ascend Seleya to the peak. My son has placed the Sa'ren there, and there too lies the remains of the metal from which it was made. I must prepare for my Heir's coming."

T'Klass nodded, her eyes wide. "I shall assist as I may, Surak."

Enterprise, Current time:

"Titles? What.... what are you doing to my CLAN!!!" Cory spluttered as he sank into the nearest sofa, Joel still held in a possessive grip. "What's going on?" he whined.

"I think I have an idea, but I'm waiting for Father to explain," Sean commented.

The Doctor weighed in with a giggled, "*What 'Clan'*, Cory... You claimed kinship with the Heir of Surak, and then your mother accepted Ko'mekh over Joel... you thought your 'Sub-Clan' would remain unaffected?"

"But... no way ... that couldn't be... nobody's done that..." Cory stuttered.

"You have activated an ancient rite, my child," Spock said as he sat next to the stunned blond and pulled both he and Joel onto his own lap. "In the last 50,000 years of Vulcan recorded history, this has happened less than ten times."

"23 times in total in the Million year history of your people... You had culture for most of that, but kept destroying yourself. This rite, however, is very, VERY rare," the Doctor added.

Spock raised an eyebrow, "Most intriguing. You will need to talk to the Vulcan Academy, my son. They will be most interested in regaining the lost history of our people."

"I will," the Doctor giggled. "Now you'd better get back to saying what Cory has done."

"Done to *what*?" Aaron asked in exasperation, smoke almost pouring from his ears with the strain of figuring out what was going on.

"Under normal circumstances," Spock started to explain, "Cory and Sean's act of swearing brotherhood with my son would have simply changed the Clan from 'Sub' to 'Full', making Clan Short and Clan Evans equal within the Family of Sarek. However, once Teri claimed Ko'mekh over Sa'ren, she started a chain of events that could, and in this case, did, lead to the formation of a Family-Clan."

Aaron tilted his head. "I'm going to risk a guess here. There's not much difference between a 'Family-Clan' and a 'Family' is there?"

Cory, his face pale, shook his head.

Spock nearly grinned, but managed to restrain himself. "There is no difference, other than the source."

"Oh... oh boy," Aaron said as he sank back into Dean's arms.

Tyler raised his hand. "Uncle... ah, I mean, Dad?" he asked, with a giggle. "You said that Mom becoming Joel's... wait. Joel, what do we call you now?"

Joel smiled softly. "My mother gave me the name 'Joel' 'cos she didn't want me to be named in that *place* by non-Family. I asked Daddy if I could keep the name, so I'm now Sa'ren Joel Short. I... I think I'd like it if my f...family kept calling me Joel?" he stuttered towards the end, his eyes filling with tears. He looked around at them all hopefully.

"Your wish is our command, Lil'elf," Cory said as he pulled Joel into his side tighter.

Kevin started moving over on the sofa until Spock scooped him into the mass cuddle taking place. He whispered to Joel, "Can I call you Sa'ren? I really like the name; it suits you."

Joel looked long and hard into those beautiful brown eyes, then smiled, "Yeah, Kevvy. I'd like that." He then mashed his lips with Kevin's, and a chorus of 'awww, sweet!' could be heard quietly from some of the others.

Tyler giggled, then looked back at his new dad. "Ah, about what Mom did. You said that it started a chain of events? What happened to make us this new Family? If it's only happened a few times in your history, then it must have been a complicated set of events."

"It is complex, Tyler," Spock nodded. "First, the Heir of a House has to be the one sworn into brotherhood by another family or group. That Heir must be a child in the eyes of Vulcan and unable to care for himself. Also, the Child must only have one living parent, in Sa'ren's case me, his father. The new family or group has to have a parent of the opposite gender - in this case your mother, Teri, and she must claim Full Mother over the child. Once that occurs, the child's Father is locked into a situation where he is the father to the Fatherless children, and the mother is locked into being the mother of the motherless. We both become de facto Full Parents to all our children in common."

"And that makes the Clan a full Family?" JJ asked quietly.

"Yes," Spock nodded again. "It makes you a new Family within the House of Surak. You are no longer a Clan within the Family of Sarek. You are now a Family within the House of Surak."

"I don't know if I can deal with this," Cory whispered plaintively. "I..."

"What's wrong?" Aaron asked quickly. "What am I missing?"

Cory looked at him and his eyes seemed scared, almost. "I... I'm a Patriarch of a Family! I'm... that means I have a seat on the... on the..."

Spock tightened his grip on the three in his arms. "On the Vulcan High Council," he completed for his blond, teenage son. "Cory is now, or will be once this has been ratified by my father, Patriarch of a Family, and therefore a High Councillor of Vulcan."

"Oh shit..." Sean muttered.

"I'll second that..." Teri replied as she pulled Sean into her side.

Spock looked at them all seriously. He then spoke quietly to the blond on his lap, "Son, until this becomes final, you are not automatically the Patriarch. Since you were Patriarch of Sub-Clan Short, you have the right to retain that for the new Family. However, if you choose, at this point only, you can step away and the eldest brother would take the post. If he refuses, it falls to the next, and so it would go until one accepted it."

"Don't you flamin' well dare," the Doctor giggled, and they all looked at him. He rolled his eyes, "A Billion years old here? Come on, guys! I've got enough to do with rebuilding my RACE!" He continued to giggle while winking at Cory to show he was joking, "As honoured as I'd be, I wouldn't have the time!"

"Some Time Lord... not having the 'time'," Bryce sniggered as he poked the Doctor in the ribs.

The Doctor poked his tongue out at the young Mikyvis, then turned on Mikey.

"I'm dead. I pass!" Mikey giggled, also winking at the now laughing Cory.

"Hell no!" Aaron spluttered in terror as they all turned their eyes on him next.

Tyler was rolling on his back laughing and so missed Sean, Adam and the others all shake their heads 'no'. Kyle giggled, "You're up, Cuddlebunny!"

"Wh...what? No! Nuh huh! No way!" he paled. "I'll zap anyone who makes me!"

Levi giggled, "So, now it's down to the kids of our Dads and Uncles; I'll do it!"

Everyone chorused 'No!' at the same time.

Cory motioned for Levi to join him. "Sorry Nephew; I don't think the Vulcan Council is quite ready for a Mikyvis!" he giggled. "I guess since all my brothers are chickens, I'm gonna have to do it... unless Joel wants the job, he's the only one who didn't say no!"

Joel put his finger to his lips and looked like he was seriously considering the offer. He then giggled, "No, sorry, Blondie! I'm the Heir of a Family already, not to mention the House... It's all yours!"

"Cheater!" Cory giggled as he leaned over and kissed Joel's cheek.

"Don't you still love me?" Joel whined in a baby-voice, but his eyes were dancing with laughter.

Cory smiled and rubbed his nose briefly with his little brother's. "As Uncle Mike keeps saying, 'Forever and ever, and a million years past that!'" He looked up at the others and relaxed back into Spock's arms, "Thanks, guys. That helped."

Sean looked at his husband seriously, "You know you have us there for you, hon. We won't let you do this all on your own."

"I know," Cory smiled back lovingly. "I know."

Teri looked at Kirk and said, "Things are about to get very interesting."

"Don't they always?" Kirk replied with a grin. "You do know, don't you, Teri, that your son now has the power to declare war on behalf of Vulcan?"

"Like it's ever stopped him before?" Aaron giggled.

Joel slipped from Spock's lap with Kevin and together they ran over to Kirk, Teri and Sean. After climbing into Kirk's arms, Joel said seriously, "When can we go back? I wanna see my grandparents! Ambassador Sarek is my Grandpa! And Amanda is Grandma! I wanna see them!"

Spock smiled, and Sean could see there was mischief in the Vulcan's face. That shocked him.

"Me thinks a prank be brewing like none Vulcan has ever seen," Aaron giggled. "I GOT to see this one!"

"You will see, son," Spock said, his smile still there. "My father surprised me once, long ago. He took something my mother said seriously. The surprise was good, but shocking none the less. It is now my turn to get, as humans say, 'pay-backs'."

Timmy giggled, then plodded over to climb up to be with Cory and Levi on his grandfather's lap. "Why're you smiling and jokin', Granpa? You didn' much before."

Spock cuddled the small child close and replied, "Sa'ren needs a loving, emotive father, Timothy. It is logical for me to supply all that he requires. Also, you are all my children and grandchildren, now, and you are human and therefore need the same from me. I shall endeavour to supply that for you."

"Don't feel you need to do that, Dad," Cory said softly. "We understand Vulcans... mostly. We know you don't normally show your emotions, and I know that Joel understands that very well."

Spock nodded. "I do not mind, Cory. Also note that Vulcans are always less reserved around our immediate Family. Also, do not forget that I am half Human. I chose to live in the Vulcan way, but there is a Human side within me as well."

Cory smiled and cuddled in further into his father's arms.

"Can we go now? Pleeeaaaaaasssseee??" Joel whined plaintively from Kirk's arms.

Aaron picked up Sean and threw him over his shoulder. "I've got the Historian; I'm ready!"

"Shall I take everyone, Daddy?" Bryce asked helpfully as everyone stood up and started gathering together.

Spock laid a hand on Kyle's shoulder. "I have been meaning to ask. How did you appear here earlier? What technology are you using?" he asked quickly before Kyle could do no more than smile at his son.

Kyle tapped his own head with a giggle, "Brain power!"

"Dey mikleyfishes," Asher supplied helpfully from Justy's shoulders. "Dey can do magics and fun stuffs and ever'thin'!"

"Mikleyfishes?" Spock said slowly, his eyebrow raised.

Joel started giggling as he cuddled into his Uncle Jim's arms, "They're 'Mikyvis', and they are kinda like the Doctor, Daddy."

"Ah," his father nodded. "Evolution. Intriguing."

"Can we go back by transporter? I like that, it's fun!" Joel bubbled.

Levi giggled, "But it's sooooo slow!"

"Mmm, Poppa Spock?" Kyle asked, looking up into Spock's eyes. "What would happen if a Mikyvis went through a transporter?"

Spock gave the little boy a long look. "You would be transported from here to your location," he replied, his face deadpan.

"Even though we're made of anti-energy?" Kyle asked as he let his 'shield' become visible.

Spock did not react. He kept his hand on Kyle's shoulder and nodded to himself as he thought quickly. "We would have to check, but to the transporter, you would read as a source of Anti-matter. That cannot be transported, therefore, nor would a Mikyvis be transportable. The attempt would be... catastrophic."

Cory whistled, "No shit. Didn't think of that before! You'd blow Enterprise from here to the Core, guys!"

Jude looked puzzled, "But in one episode of Star Trek, you guys transported Anti-Matter... why can't you now?"

Spock looked down at his new son, "We have never done so, Jude."

Joel looked thoughtful, "I seem to remember that as well. It might be artistic licence, Jude."

Jude nodded. "Oh, okay."

"You think you could explain to us non-Engineer types *why* they would cause that?" Aaron asked as he reached over and gave Cory a squeeze.

Joel answered for Cory, "Anti-Energy is basically much like Anti-Matter, Aaron. Anti-protons, neutrons and electrons. Anti-Matter is just physical, while energy is more plasma based. The stuff they use to drive Warp Engines has to be properly contained by magnetic devices so as to not interact with the positive matter universe. If they touched, you'd have a big boom. So, if Lil'bear or the others went through a transporter, the buffer would de-materialize their current energy form into a data-stream... and you'd have Anti-Energy flowing through a Positive-Matter buffer... it would react the same. Boom. Big Boom."

"How big, Dad?" Gavin asked with a concerned tone.

Spock answered, "We have enough Anti-Matter on the Enterprise that an uncontrolled reaction would vaporize the ship, and from our position the blast would rip away the atmosphere from the side of the Earth we are facing. If just one of these children went through the transporter, you would have much the same reaction, only compounded. They would detonate the ship itself, which would also cause an obvious Anti-Matter breach, causing a double level explosion. Most of this side of the planet's surface would be turned to glass."

"... and if they all went through at once?" Aaron asked nervously.

"Anti-Matter, or in this case, Anti-Energy reacts one particle to one particle with Positive-Matter. The spill over from," Spock paused and looked at Kyle seriously, and Kyle pointed out Tyler, Bryce, Levi and Dylan. "The spill over from five children of their likely energy-mass... The Earth would start reacting. The data-stream the children would have been converted to travels well within subspace, and thus, if the mass of the Enterprise is already used, the released uncontrolled Anti-Energy would continue to spread - seeking Positive-Matter or Energy to react with. Depending on how much Energy is contained in even one of these five, you are looking at the end of all life on Earth at the least, to the complete annihilation of the planet and its satellite at worst. Maybe even more."

Cory groaned as the possible impact of an accidental forced transport made its impact known. "Dad, Uncle Scotty; we need to see if there is a tag that the transporter can pick up on the pre-scan which will trip the main power shunt if a Mikyvis is detected. It'd have to be in the pre-scan so that it can't be over-ridden by an unknowing tech."

"Ye dinna needta worry y'self, Laddie," Scotty weighed in suddenly as he glanced at the five boys in question, "the transporters ain' 'lowed to be beamin' Anti-Matter. We just be needin' t' see if the Lady kin see these wee Laddies the same."

"How can you do that without actually transporting them?" Aaron asked.

Cory smiled over at him, "Before each transport, the computer scans the target to gather data on their cellular structure. It's needed in order to reassemble you on the other end. There are checks built in, and I was just making sure that our bros would be covered. I don't want to see the Earth go pop, and especially not our bros!"

"How much energy would we be talking about, Lil'bear?" Joel asked curiously as he kept his cheek next to Kirk's.

Kyle thought for a moment, then, "Well, we draw energy from everywhere... other Universes, everywhere... I don't know if we'd continue 'drawing' on that energy if we were a data-stream."

Levi's eyes blazed out white, and the Guardian answered the Prince of Forever, "...//**You would. The Father of the Shaper is correct in that it would be annihilation: for the entire Universe, for you would have no control over your link to everywhere, and continue to feed yourselves and create more Anti-Energy. Should you go through a transporter, you would do what the Fallen have been attempting to do for Three Cycles of Creation - Destroy everything//...**"

Justy looked at the five Mikyvis seriously. "I have never ordered you to do nothing before, guys, but I'm doing it now! No transporters rides! Ever!"

"Yes SIR!" all five Mikyvis responded as they came to attention and executed crisp salutes.

Levi added with a giggle, "They're too slow anyways!"

"Yeah, even Ark is faster!" Bryce added. "More fun too -- we can talk while waiting to come back!"

Joel giggled, "Transporters are cool - they are all tickly and stuff. *I* like them."

"Then we shall not disappoint you," Kirk laughed. He then looked at Scotty and McCoy before asking Kyle, "If it would be okay with you, Kyle - could you and your family come back to the Enterprise later? Either today or tomorrow? I think we'd all feel better once we make sure the transporters in the Federation and elsewhere will refuse to lock onto you. And I think Bones might want to do some investigations into your new form of life. Me too, to be fair. It's why we joined the Fleet, after all. Would that be okay with you?" Kirk then chuckled and winked at them, "And to sweeten the deal so it's not a boring time, we'll tell you stories about our missions, feed you cookies and treats, and give you as many cuddles as you'd like."

"Can we slow time, Daddy?" Bryce asked with a giggle.

"NO!" Cory giggled. "No fair cheating to get more cuddles and cookies in. You have to handle it just like the rest of us!"

"Awww Mannnn....." the two youngest Mikyvis exclaimed in unison. "You're no fun, Uncle Cory."

"Umm, excuse me?" came the plaintive voice from Sean. "Have we finished holding this quite interesting discussion on the Doomsday Mikyvis yet, 'cos I'm beginning to feel a little sick."

They all turned to look at Sean... who was still slung over Aaron's shoulder. Aaron had Sean's legs gripped firmly and gently before him, but most of Sean was hidden from view behind Aaron's back as he more or less hung there, upside down.

"Hush, you," Aaron giggled as he slapped Sean's butt lightly.

"Mooom!" Sean called out as he tried, unsuccessfully, to protect his behind.

Teri chuckled, "I think we better get home. Come on, boys."

"Ain't ya gonna tell him to put me down?!" Sean called out as Aaron turned and started for the door again.

"No," she answered, still laughing.

"MOM!"

Joel giggled in Kirk's arms as the Captain followed the kids and Teri from the room. Chip, Scotty and Bones followed him, and the Mikyvis giggled and vanished instantly.

Jude came close to Kirk and quickly found the Captain's arm being put around his shoulder as they walked to the turbolift. Jude nearly fainted, and he thought the smile on his face would never leave. Billy Joe giggled softly at him.

As the lift came to a stop and the groups met back up to head for the transporter room, Jude asked quietly, "Joel, can I ask you something about what you said earlier?"

Joel looked from his perch on Kirk's hip, "Sure, what's up?"

"When we met yesterday and you looked at the book I was reading, when I mentioned Slipstream and you explained it, you said it would take an hour to get from here to Vulcan, but when you saw the new engine on Enterprise, you said only a few seconds. Why the difference?" he asked as he looked up at his little brother.

"The specs," Joel answered with a grin. "Whoever made the engine in this ship is a hell of a lot more advanced than those races who had it in the TV shows, Jude. The engine on this ship is a beast!"

"You know about Slipstream too?" Kirk asked them both in shock and wonder.

"Uh huh," Joel nodded as he absently kissed Kirk's cheek. "Yup, we do."

"And we'll keep it secret, Uncle Jim," Jude giggled.

"Good," Kirk laughed, although his eyes were thoughtful as he looked between the teen he was carrying and the one at his side.

End of Flashback:

Clan Compound, Family of Sarek Conclave:

Cory finished relaying the events of the past two hours to the gathered kids, and when he finally stopped talking, the silence in the Auditorium was palpable.

"I think you broke them," Joel's giggle completely shattered that silence, bringing giggles from various places in the room. He grinned at Cory from Sarek's lap, for the Ambassador was seated on the floor, his wife at his side, and Joel was being quietly passed back and forth for extended periods of snuggling. "Shall I get the super-glue?" he giggled.

"Don't give them ideas, Lil'elf!" Cory burst out laughing, and the room started laughing with them. He then looked down at his grandfather and said softly, "Dad says that you have to make this final, Grandfather. Until you do, there is no Clan, nor a Family."

Sarek looked back up at the blond teen and nodded. "My son's logic is flawless. I endorse a new Family into my House. What do you want your Family's name to be - Family Short?"

Cory traded a long look with Sean and then around at the others in the large Auditorium. He eventually settled his eyes on Jason and smiled, "The world and the Federation know us as 'Clan Short', and it would be confusing to suddenly change the name on them. It is logical for us to be Family 'Clan Short', Grandfather."

A cheer went up from the massed group assembled, and could be heard from the speakers where those not present were listening in via the comm links.

"Then so it shall be," Sarek said as he handed his tiny grandson over and into Amanda's arms and stood to his feet. "I shall make the necessary calls to Vulcan now, High Councillor."

"Vulcan got your tongue, Blondie?" Joel giggled as Amanda made sure her grandson was properly kissed and cuddled.

Cory just nodded his head before deciding it would be best to sit down until he recovered from the realization that it was no longer just talk; he ACTUALLY WAS the head of a Family.

Before Sarek could even make his way off the stage, however, an overly excited Jason Evans waylaid him. "GRANDPA!!!"

Sarek turned and raised an eyebrow. "You are not normally this excitable, grandson. What is the matter?"

"Just a sec!" the twelve year old bubbled. He turned and looked at the gathered members of his own Clan in the large room and they all nodded at him after a silent moment. He then stood straighter and his eyes blazed out so brightly it lit the edges of the room. After another moment, he turned to the still stunned and seated Cory and said formally, "I, on behalf of Clan Evans, do hereby request Nohv-Maat, and I relinquish all rights and privileges of my place as Patriarch to Clan Evans."

Cory looked up at Jason with a small grin forming on his lips. "What took you so long? It took you thirty-six point five seconds to respond to Grandfather's announcement. Your request is logical; as of this moment, Clan Evans shall be assimilated into the Family Clan Short."

"YES!" came the deafening yell from over five hundred voices, most of whom were being relayed through the speakers.

Sarek nodded, his face pleased. "Jason, you are still a Patriarch. That can never be taken from you. Now, please excuse me; I need to speak to the Vulcan High Council. There is much that has occurred that they need to be aware of - having a new Council Member not the least." He then quickly left the stage.

Jason sat down quickly next to Cory as the noise level in the Auditorium suddenly spiked ten fold. "Still Patriarch? How will that work, Cor?" Jason asked his brother Patriarch nervously.

"I think you're second-in-command now, bro." Cory replied. "Your title can never be taken away; but in family matters, you probably can speak for me if I'm not around."

Jason breathed out shakily. "I was hoping it would just be me being in charge of my own division of the Clan... Isn't Sean next in line to you? Or Aaron?" he whispered plaintively. "I... since I've been guarding you, I never wanted my role as Patriarch. I just wanted to be your brother as a part of your Clan. Now Grandpa says I'm still Patriarch... I don't want it. I don't mind being Lead One for the VSO, 'cos I still get to look after you... are you sure, Cory?" he finished with a whimper before cuddling into the blond teen's side.

"Yes," Cory whispered back as he wrapped an arm around his shaking brother, "I am. The fact that you don't want it, and don't seek for it, is what makes you the right person for the job. I don't want to be a High Councillor, and I never imagined being the head of a Vulcan Family. I was content with Clan Patriarch. I need your help, bro. You've had a far longer experience of running a Full-Clan, and being the VSO leader for this area. Those skills I need, and I can use. It is logical. And on a personal note, I trust you. Please?"

Jason sighed again, but he did smile. "I don't think I could refuse you, ever, Cor. Okay. Since you've twisted my arm," he finished with a slight giggle as he wiped the few tears from his eyes. He then twisted and embraced Cory fully, bubbling out, "Oh, God, I'm soooo happy! I'm Clan Short! My guys are Clan Short!!!"

As Cory cuddled his now hyper Second in Command, Spock moved to the front of the stage and looked out over the new Family-Clan. "Children," he started, holding up his hand to regain some silence. "Children, many of you know me, if only from the news or from School. Some of you know me already as 'Uncle'. I am Captain Spock. I need to explain to you my standing in regards to Family Clan Short."

Everyone started to settle again, and this time, the old 'Clan Evans' kids were completely mixed in with the old 'Clan Short' ones - as a Family.

"As my son Cory has explained, the sons of Teri are now my sons. She is also the mother of my Child, Sa'ren. The events that have been explained to you that created your new Family also places me into a position over all of you. I am now A'nirih to the entire Family-Clan. Many of you have fathers already, some more than one. Many others have no father. Now, you either have one, or another one. An A'nirih is a 'Caring and Nurturing Father', or in human terms a foster father. I do not replace any that you may have; I just am another for you. Do not feel you need to call me 'father', or any other variation of the name. I am Spock. If you wish to call me 'Uncle', or 'Pop', or 'Dad', you are free to do so.

"If you have no father of your own and wish it, you can ask me and I will become 'Sa'mekh' over you - a Full Father, as if I had been the one to father you in fact. This would be a legal standing that none but I could then break. That offer is open to any and all in the Family that request it, and will be open to all that join from now on.

"Please note: due to the dynamic between myself and Teri Short, she has also become M'aih to the entire Family. If you have a mother already, she is another to you; a foster mother. If you have no mother, then you do now," Spock finished, leaving a stunned group of children to stare at him.

Teri walked to his side and added, "I shall say the same as Spock regarding those with no mother of their own. If you wish it, if you want me to be, I will become your mother 'for real'. A Ko'mekh, legal 'blood mother' from the Vulcan viewpoint. You do not have to change your name, nor leave the family group that you have already, but if you want a mother, I will be there for you. Always."

More dead silence.

Joel giggled from Amanda's arms and whispered, "I think they're broke again, Grandma!"

"Oh, sweetheart," she whispered back, tears flowing again down her face, "Oh, how I've wanted to hear you call me that. I never thought I'd hear it from you... no, they are not broken, Sa'ren. They just have a lot of new information to process."

Joel turned more fully to look up at her, "You were hurt a lot, weren't you? When I disappeared?"

She nodded and pulled him in tightly to her breast and held him close. "But I have you back. And I'm never going to leave you, and nor is your father or grandfather."

Joel shivered happily, and continued to snuggle there as the noise level picked back up in the room.

Sean was seated next to Cory, and Nathan was cuddled into his side. The blond Welsh boy had become so excited over being Clan Short that he had burst into uncontrollable sobs of joy, and Sean had had to calm him down. He raised his head and called out, "Gabe, how's the surprise coming?"

"Wh...what? Oh, that! Okay, Sean. Why?" came the shouted response from somewhere in the mass group that were milling around Teri and Spock.

"I think we have another reason to celebrate, dude! We've got a Family Birthday as well!" Sean called back, laughing.

Jude's face poked out from the group, "More reason? What are you up to, bro?"

"Your party and Joel's party, you goof!" Cory sniggered.

Joel looked up from Amanda's arms, "You're *really* giving me and Jude a *party*?!"

"Of course. Draco?" Cory called out.

'Yes, Great Father of Family Clan Short?' Draco giggled from the speakers.

"Bite me! Get this message out to everyone: there's a triple Birthday Party at Clan Short Headquarters, and as many as want to come are invited. I'm sure our resident Mad Doctor can handle the 'room' issue!" the Patriarch giggled.

'Roger, roger! I hope someone there can pass a miracle of the feeding of the five thousand!' Draco giggled as the comm went silent.

"Who're you calling 'mad', you blond yank?" the Doctor's voice could be heard from the balcony, where he was being cuddled by Jon Bon Jovi.

"You, I think. And watch who're you're calling 'yank', limey," Jon could be heard answering for Cory before the Doctor's hysterical laughter rang out as the music legend started to tickle him. "Time Lord or not, you better watch it!"

Sammy was sitting on the edge of the stage and looking around in wonder at the mayhem that was taking place. First, he had thought that Jason was about to be lynched by the Clan, now this... he just sat there, crying happily at the massive level of joy and happiness he could feel flowing around the room. Mike watched for a moment from the balcony before coming down to pick up his little boy. Whispering softly to him, Mike carried Sammy back up with him to find a quiet place to sit and talk.

Mercury and Hermes came bounding up onto the stage next, and started to cuddle in around Joel and Kevin, who had also joined the hug going on Amanda's lap. "You wanna see what we've done to get your party going? It's really cool and you'll really like it Joel at least we hope you will 'cos we worked really hard on it for you and everything," Mercury bubbled out a mile a minute.

Joel nodded with a grin, while Amanda laughed, "If you help this old lady stand up, then you two can show me as well."

"Amanda," came an emotion filled voice from behind the group as they entered the Rec Room.

Amanda turned and smiled at her little brother's tear filled face as he looked at her. Or, more properly, at the small, lightweight child she was carrying. "Richard," her rich voice throbbed with love before she whispered to the curious Joel, "This is my brother Richard; your grand uncle."

Joel's eyes lit up quickly as he slipped from her arms and trotted over to cover the rapidly shrinking gap between them and the fast approaching, old-seeming man. He was quite sprightly, all things considered, Joel thought. "Hi, Uncle Richard," he said happily as he allowed the crying man to pull him up and into his arms.

"Oh - oh God," Richard wept into Joel's hair as he held him possessively for a moment, before looking up at Amanda. "I... I was up there watching," he jerked his head in the direction of the balcony, "and I just couldn't believe it. I couldn't move, and couldn't..." He trailed off, his voice failing him.

"I feel the same. He feels like a dream, and I don't want to wake up from it," she responded as she closed in to hug them both, Kevin and the cheetahs being pulled with her. "Sarek feels the same."

Richard simply nodded before continuing his cuddle with his grand nephew in silence, weeping softly into Joel's hair. After a moment, "I wish Bruce was here to see this."

"Is he not feeling well?" Amanda asked with concern.

Joel's eyes popped open wide and he spluttered out before Richard could answer, "Wait, wait! Grandma? Your last name is Grayson, yes?"

"That is right," she answered.

Richard nodded, adding, "Correct, Sa'ren."

"Richard Grayson?" Joel said, looking into the man's eyes as he was being held in his arms. "Bruce...?"

"Wayne," Richard answered.

"Batman and Robin...?!" Joel stuttered in shock as he stared into his uncle's face.

"Who?" Richard said, his voice startled.

"No, 'John' is in the next room," Mercury said with a toothy grin.

"Sis, who are 'Batman and Robin'?" Richard asked Amanda, giving a curious look at the smiling cat.

"Well, you were 'Robin', Richard. Remember from our circus days?" Amanda stated, looking at the boy in her brother's arms closely, "so I would assume Sa'ren thinks that Bruce is 'Batman'."

"Holy sh... uh, tunket; I forgot about that," Richard said, and Joel just started giggling at him.

Both adults looked at Joel, and Amanda asked, "Care to explain, grandson?"

Joel glanced between them rapidly. "Um... well, in *that place*, there were once comic books about a pair of crime fighting superheroes called Batman and Robin. They would solve crimes by using their heads and high technology, and their alter-egos were called Bruce Wayne and Richard Grayson. Bruce was a real rich guy and owned Wayne Enterprises, from which he funded his nightly Superhero stuff, and Richard was his ward, a teen from the circus who'd lost his mum and dad... that's *real* here too??"

"Well, sort of," Richard said. "I was adopted by Bruce when Sis married Sarek... but our crime fighting was just as amateur detectives helping the police."

"You did use high technology, though -- from Vulcan," Amanda said fondly to her brother.

"Wow! WOW! Is Uncle Bruce alive? Can I see him? Please, please??" Joel started bouncing about like a jack rabbit in Richard's arms happily.

"Well..." Richard began.

Joel's face fell, and his eyes radiated concern. "Oh... he's not well?" he mumbled quietly as his grandmother's concerned question just prior to this discovery registered in his Vulcan mind. "I'd be good, Uncle Richard; I promise. I won't hurt Uncle Bruce. Promise. Maybe I can help..."

"Shh, Sa'ren. Yes he's ill, but he's still alive - he *is* 110 years old, and he's pretty feeble these days. Bed-fast much of the time, but his mind is still sharp, and I know he'd love to see you," Richard continued. "We were, after all, there when you were born; and we grieved when we thought you and your mother had died on the Zhuk'Fasek. It will probably be a lift to his spirits to see you." Richard then added under his breath, in a tone of incredulity, "Batman and Robin?"

"Can we go now? I really wanna see him... can I bring the Doctor too?" Joel asked seriously.

Richard looked at Amanda, "Which doctor?"

Amanda grinned, "No, not Doctor 'Which', Doctor 'Who'... THE Doctor... Ish-Hassu. The old history from Vulcan that YOU spilled to those British playwrights all those years ago, RICH!"

Jude had broken from the group hug in the Auditorium and was listening at the door. "Dr. Who, Batman and Robin, and Sarek and Amanda, all in the same room -- it's like a SF convention!" he said, laughing.

"You *are* going to explain that, grandson," Amanda said to him affectionately.

"You were all considered fictional heroes in our world, Fa'komi," Jude said with a smile.

"That's going to take some getting used to," Amanda smiled, as she nodded at him.

Richard's eyes were now even wider. He looked back at Joel, "Why do you want to bring Ish-Hassu?"

"Because I have a feeling, Uncle. I think he should come. Right now," Joel said seriously.

"You are getting good at this, Shaper," the ten year old Doctor said as he walked out from behind Jude. "Jude, Kev, you two have tasks here. Mercury, Hermes, that goes for you, too. I shall Guard the Shaper for this trip."

Richard stared at the ginger kid now standing at his side, and put Joel down slowly. "O... Okay. Shall I call for a transport?" he managed, not entirely certain about what was going on, but when the DOCTOR gets involved, he knew from Vulcan History that anything could happen.

"No. That wouldn't be good. I'll take us," the Doctor smiled, then looked at Joel, "Ready to go to Gotham City?"

"THAT'S real TOO?!" Joel bubbled as he, his grandmother and uncle and the Doctor Folded away...

Gotham, north of New York city - Wayne Manor:

Bruce was quietly listening to the radio as he stared at the light from the window, which was nearly all his aged eyes could make out now. He had been more relaxed today than for many a long month, and he was in two minds about calling for Richard to return from Orlando. He just had this gut feeling that his time was coming, and of all the people in his life, he wanted the last thing he heard and felt and saw to be Richard.

A flicker of motion was all he saw of the two adults and two children Folding in next to his bed.

"Wow," came a high pitched, very young voice, "it's really Bruce Wayne!"

'Odd. A Welsh accented angel?' Bruce thought as he turned his head to try and make out who was there.

"Bruce," Richard said with forced enthusiasm masking the worry he felt, "I've brought someone to see you -- someone we never thought we'd see! This is Spock and T'Sara's son, Sa'ren!"

Bruce turned to look in the direction of Richard's voice, and saw a smaller figure standing next to him - two of them. "Who's the other boy?" he asked with a stronger voice than Richard had heard from him in some time.

Amanda spoke up then. "The answer to that is even stranger than the fact that Sa'ren's alive, Bruce. This is Ish-Hassu - Doctor Who!"

"Oh. Nice to meet you, Doctor," Bruce said with a slight smile.

The Doctor cocked his head to the side, "You don't seem overly surprised at your nephew being back from the dead, nor about my presence, Bruce."

"Once you are my age and find yourself alive every morning, nothing else can surprise you. Sa'ren? Come here, child. I have not held you since you were six days old," he replied as he held open his arms, into which Joel climbed gently.

"Hi, Uncle Bruce," Joel whispered to him before kissing his wrinkly cheek.

"Hello, Sa'ren," Bruce whispered softly. He held the small boy close and touched his face lightly, before turning his watery eyes to Richard and Amanda, "I am glad. Now I can go home happy."

Richard was about to say something quickly but Joel beat him to it, "You're not dying, Uncle Bruce. Your heart is beating strong. Doc? Can you come up here too?"

The Doctor did so, just as gently as Joel had, and sat with the Vulcan as both were loosely held by the very old man. "I don't know what you think I can do, Joel, but I know something is about to happen."

"Can't you help him?" Joel whispered back.

"Joel. It's his time, bro. Age happens to most, and if I was to try and change it, things could get very bad," the Doctor replied sadly.

Bruce weighed in, "Sa'ren, I've had a long, full and happy life. I'm not scared of dying. All men must die, little child."

Joel's lip quivered, "But I don't want you to. You must stay longer! Uncle Richard needs you. I felt it when I was hugging him; he's scared of living without you, Uncle Bruce! I won't let you go."

Bruce shivered then glanced with appeal at Richard.

Again, Richard did not have time to say anything as the Doctor whistled, "I don't believe it. Okay, Mr Wayne? You had a Vulcan process done on you years ago, correct?"

"Correct. It didn't quite do as we thought it would, but it gave me many more years than I would have had," Bruce smiled, looking between the two boys in his arms and the two adults behind.

"Jo... I mean, Sa'ren has done something. He's made it so that I can complete that process properly and return you to the correct physical age you should have been had it worked right. However, even though this new Destiny is possible, I will only do it if you want me to."

Bruce started to speak but Richard was quicker, "Oh, please father - accept it."

Their eyes met, and Bruce nodded weakly. "Okay, son," he whispered.

"Get down, Child of Spock," the Doctor said softly, and Joel was quickly lifted away by Richard.

The Doctor then looked at the man lying relaxed on the bed, and spoke, "Time is a River. It flows only one way. But what if you could take that River into your hand, and twist it to your own ends? What if you could lay your hands upon the Ribbons of Fate and the Wheel of Providence, and move them to change what could be? I am the Doctor, I am Gallifrey. I am the First and the Last and the First of the Lords of Time. By the Power of Time, and in the Name of the Jewel of the Heavens, Gallifrey, I do now take Time into my hands: N'hare ke'lish naq re'ntha - Bruce Wayne xzoni'r rika!"

Light exploded from the bed as the Doctor warped Time around himself and, using the new Destiny the Shaper had placed into effect, altered Bruce Wayne.

Amanda felt joy wrap itself around her, and she felt tears trickle from her eyes as she looked into the Soul of Time as it responded to the command of its Lord.

Richard wept as his heart filled with a hope for the one he loved that he had never dreamed would ever come back.

Joel simply bounced up and down as he laughed at the joy and wonder in the room.

Time moved and Time flowed and Time laughed as its power was put to a use that brought joy to its master, for the Doctor was laughing in wonder - never before had he ever had the chance to channel and wield this much power. Never before would he have risked it. The Vortex, the very Heart of Time, laid itself open to him, and he grasped it and threw as much of the power as was needed into reversing the Fate of Man - and Bruce de-aged.

The light faded and Richard gasped with joy, for Bruce was lying there - looking much as he had over forty years ago. The two men were now almost the same age in appearance.

Joel smiled and slipped from Richard's arms to be immediately picked up by Amanda. "Rich, Bruce. We'll leave, now. You are both welcome to come to Orlando - once you're ready, of course," she smiled at them both knowingly, all the while glancing repeatedly at the Doctor.

The ginger Time Lord slipped off the bed quickly as Richard moved to help Bruce sit up, and he smiled up at the Lady Amanda. "They'll be a... while," he giggled as he Folded out, taking Joel and Amanda with him.

Meanwhile - Clan Compound:

Kevin looked at the two cats with him, glanced over at Jude, and shrugged. They shrugged too.

"What's our task? Why didn't he say? Does he ALWAYS do that? It's very irritating," Mercury grouched.

"You don't watch Doctor Who?" Jude giggled.

"Nope," Hermes replied. "Unlike Logan and his insane little brothers, we have good taste. Transformers, Roadrunner and... ah, never mind." Hermes blushed and became silent.

"And what?" Kevin giggled, nudging him in the ribs.

"Teletubbies," Adam Casey supplied with a roll of his eyes as he came up behind Jude from inside the Auditorium. "THE most annoying and weird British show that is more irritating than Barney the Purple Dinosaur!"

"They are not!" both cheetahs retorted, before blushing again.

Adam raised an eyebrow and smiled. "Oh, so why are you blushing then?" he laughed as he moved over to hug them both. He whispered into their ears, "Guys, I'm just teasing, but I'm serious about one thing. I've seen a change in you and your brothers and sisters assigned here. I like that change. Don't stop, okay? Be serious ONLY when you must. If these Orlando kids help you six BE kids too, then you'll only make me cry happily. Got it?"

"Got it, boss," Mercury replied with a soft purr as he and his brother cat-kissed their Commander.

He grinned at them before asking Kevin, "I need to talk with these two and the other cats and Cory, Kevin. Do you mind if I take them with me now?"

Kevin shrugged, "Dunno why you're asking me, Adam. They are Sa'ren's guards. But no, I don't mind," he added with a smile.

"I'm asking you," Adam said seriously, "because I know my people. If they guard one person, and that person has a partner or family, they guard them all. Thanks, Kevin. I won't keep them long." He squeezed the small boy's shoulder gently for a second before saying to the two cheetahs, "Come on, Cory's back in there."

As the three left, Jude said as he came to stand by Kevin, "Well, that's their task. What's ours?"

Kevin was about to shrug again when he saw Mike Reynolds carrying Sammy and leading his brothers and the Trinity out of the Auditorium. "Well," he said to Jude, "I've wanted to talk to the Trinity since Sunday. Might as well try now." He ran over and joined in with the group, leaving Jude to wonder what to do himself.

He decided to get some fresh air, and walked outside and towards the front entrance as if compelled somehow. He stopped, however, when he saw Clan Security process and admit a half dozen Starfleet officers at the gates. He ran over when he recognised one of them as Admiral Morrow.

"Just the young man I was hoping to see," the Admiral said with a smile as he and his staff were given the all clear. He gestured and together they all started back towards Main CIC. "How are you feeling, Mr Lee? Your arm fixed up?"

"Yes sir," Jude said, in complete shock at speaking to this famous 'Star Trek' Admiral. "Doctor Chapel fixed it for me, and my brothers' injuries, while we waited for news about Joel last night."

"Good," Morrow smiled. "And how is young Joel?"

"Excited, sir," Jude giggled, "he's found his dad!"

Morrow looked both surprised and pleased, "Who and when?"

"Just this morning, and it's Captain Spock!"

Adam Casey and the two cheetah twins finally got through the milling crowd in the Auditorium and onto the stage. Cory was still sitting in bemusement on the stage floor with his fellow Patriarch, Jason, cuddled in close to his side. Next to them, Nathan and Sean were in much the same state. "Patriarch, I need a moment of your time for official business," Adam stated formally as he gathered the attention of not only the four boys cuddled up together but of the other G-Cats in the building. As he sat down in front of Cory, the entire G-Cat group formed a semi-circle behind him.

"Granted, Commander," Cory said in his Vulcan mode as he attempted to focus on the Unit Commander.

"It is in regard to Joel - I mean, Sa'ren," Adam said, dropping formality as he saw how distracted Cory seemed. "What with him being the heir of Spock, and therefore the House of Surak, my original intent for him to have a temporary guard seems to be in need of changing. I was only going to have Merc and Herm stay with him until you were happy he was safe. That might not be the case, now."

"What do you mean?" Sean asked as he and Nathan shuffled even closer to Cory and Jason.

Adam shrugged and explained, "He's a target now. He was before simply by being part of Clan Short. We know that there are going to be those out there wanting to get us for what happened on Saturday, and not just the FCC. Others like them are now threatened by us. That makes each and every one of us a target. But Joel is now an even greater one."

"Logical," Jason said. "His prominence started when my grandmother the Queen crowned him, Cor. Now, he's the son of the oldest and most powerful Family in the Federation. He's in a great deal of danger," he said seriously.

Cory became all business. "What is your plan?" he asked both Adam and Jason.

Adam looked at Jason first and nodded at him, so Jason said, "He will have VSO protection, as do all Patriarchs and heirs of the Vulcan Houses. That is standard. Personally, he'll also have one of the Seven Leads of the Dragon watching him at all times until we find a permanent detail for him. But that might not be enough. Please be aware, this came as a bit of a shock, Cor, so I'm thinking fast on the spot, here. First, the VSO are the best at what we do, and second, we have the most secure area on Earth as our charge's home. But with a threat like this... this is unlike anything the VSO have had to deal with in regards to House security for untold generations. We are spies and counterspies, Cor. We know what can happen, but we could be facing something that we are simply out-manned to counter. I will need to have assistance from the military - which means you, Adam." Jason looked at Adam seriously, "We need to work together on this one - at least for as long as Joel is on Earth."

"Sounds like you're thinking - for once!" Sean told Jason teasingly.

"Bite me," Jason muttered, poking Sean in the ribs.

Adam smiled then began to add his piece, "I've already talked with Mont and Bast, and I have decided that, if they want to, Merc and Herm will become Sa'ren's permanent guard, and..."

"Yessir! Please! Yes!" both cheetahs bubbled quickly from behind Adam, and Vishnu and Kartik started giggling at them.

He turned and looked at them before laughing.

"Well... he gives good belly rubs," Hermes whined before given them all a toothy grin.

Vishnu agreed, "He learnt that from SamSam!"

"Trust you two to think about that, guys!" Tyr muttered with a purr.

"Okay," Adam laughed, "we have them both wanting to. The second thing I was going to add was that we'll need more than just the two of them. From what I can gather, Aphrodite and Artemus have taken a liking to both Kevin and Sa'ren, and since they are both a couple it would make sense to double the guard."

Amur Khan added, "The way at someone is sometimes through those they love. Sa'ren's vulnerable when it comes to Kevin. Arti said they are inseparable. We, Adam and I, think it's best to team up these four," the large tiger pointed at the two cheetahs and the two girl-cats, "and get them to co-ordinate with Bast and Mont. Between the six of them, you, Sean, Kevin and Sa'ren are well protected at close range."

"And from a distance, we'll increase security around any residence that Sa'ren is in," Adam finished. "Jace will be our unseen eyes and ears, we'll be the visible iron fist in... well, in an iron glove. I don't think we'll look good in velvet!"

Sean giggled, "Logan says you look cute in that velvet gee-string he got you, Adam."

"Boss? Something you want to tell us?" Mercury giggled.

"No. Privilege of command," Adam said with dignity as he stood up and glared at Sean for a moment. "Jace, I'm going to make the calls to Utah. You and I can liaise after, regarding security for Sa'ren."

"Okay, bro," Jason smiled back.

Adam nodded at those still seated before turning to leave. Mont and Bast moved to cuddle in behind their two charges, leaving the two girls and the cheetahs to sit down in a pile in front of them. The others all smiled and moved off to mingle with the Clan around Spock and Teri.

"Welcome to the family," Cory giggled at Joel and Kevin's four guards.

They purred happily.

Five minutes later, they had made their way out and into the Rec Room and cuddled up in a mass pile on a large sofa.

"I think the others are going to be a while," Sean said as he smiled at Cory. "Our bros are answering the other guys' questions, and Dad and Mom are swamped."

Joel, Amanda and the Doctor Folded in at that moment.

"Where've you been?" they all asked the three newcomers at the same time.

Joel giggled, "Went to see Uncle Bruce, and the Doc just did something wicked cool and made him younger and everything!"

The Doctor rolled his eyes, "I'd not have been able to if it wasn't for you, Shaper."

Joel's face grew a little tense. "I didn't do anything, though. I didn't make anything change; not on purpose," he whined as he crawled up onto Sean's lap quickly.

"No. And maybe that's how it'll nearly always be, Joel," the Doctor grinned. "Now, I hope you'll excuse me. There's something I have to do," he added as he Folded away quickly.

"Uncle Bruce? Who's he?" Cory asked Joel quietly as he reached over to massage the nearest of his little brother's ears.

Joel closed his eyes happily and replied, "Bruce Wayne. He and Uncle Richard live in Gotham."

"Bruce Wayne of Wayne Enterprises?" Sean asked curiously, looking at Amanda. "I thought he died years ago."

Amanda nodded, "He's been out of the public eye for a long time, Sean. He and my brother have run the company from their manor. At Bruce's age, most people just assumed he was dead."

Mont smiled, "The Doctor changed that?"

"Oh, yes. Now, Sa'ren? Do you and your brothers want a drink?" she asked as she ruffled her grandson's hair.

They all shook their heads, and Jason answered, "We'll have something when we eat, Grandma."

"That will be fine. I am going to have a cup of tea, though," she smiled as she turned and walked from the room.

Jude entered less than a minute later, leading Admiral Morrow and five other Officers. "Cory, we have visitors!" he called over, as he came closer.

Cory was about to stand up when the admiral waved him back. "This is not formal, not yet, Mr Short. Jude has just been updating me on recent events. I believe congratulations are in order: for all of you, but especially for - Sa'ren, correct?" he asked, looking down at the small Vulcan on Sean's lap.

"Uh huh," he grinned back. "You really Admiral Morrow?"

"Last time I checked I was," he answered with a chuckle.

"Hi, Chief!" Sean said then as he saw who was with Morrow. "You took us up on the offer of a visit, then?"

"Sure did, Lieutenant," Chief Petty Officer Gary Howardson answered as he came to stand next to the admiral. "Boy, this place is sure something else, lads. I'm impressed."

Jason was looking up at him curiously, as was Nathan. "Chief, have we ever met before?" Nathan asked politely.

Gary shook his head as he found an empty seat to settle on, "I don't think so, son. You're VSO, correct?" he added, nodding at their uniforms.

Jason nodded as well, "Yes. Dragon Division. I am Jason Evans, Lead One, 'Voice', and this is my husband, Nathan Evans. He's Lead Two, 'Fire'." He looked hard at Gary. "I'm sure I recognise you from somewhere, sir," he echoed Nathan.

"Daddy! Poppa! Look what Grandpop Spock gave us!!" Jessica yelled as she and Oliver ran into the room and pounced onto their parents. Jessica waved her new necklace under her Poppa's nose as she made herself comfortable on Nathan's lap, "He said I should wear it always, 'cos..."

There was a loud thud as Gary slipped from his chair and onto the floor. His face was pale and his limbs were shaking.

Oliver glanced quickly at him, then did a double take. "D... DADDY?!" he yelled, his eyes fixed with the now speechless man now crying on the floor.

Nathan and Jason shared a quick look, while Jessica jumped from Nathan's lap and ran with Oliver over to the Chief Petty Officer.

"Daddy?" Cory asked Jason softly, "I thought they were orphaned!"

"So did we," Jason muttered as he and Nathan got up. They both paused. What were they to do now?

"H...how? Where? Oh, Oliver! Princess! Oh... oh GOD!" Gary sobbed as he pulled his now crying children into his arms. "Oh, Thank you, God! Thank you!"

Admiral Morrow watched for a second before looking at Cory, "Is there a private room they can go to? I think these five have a lot to talk about."

Cory nodded and rose to lead the way. Nathan made things easier for Gary and the two crying children by levitating them from the room as Jason and Nathan followed Cory and the admiral.

"What's going to happen with them now?" Bast asked Sean. "What's the rules in cases like this when the original dad shows up?"

"You tell me and we'll both know," Sean replied seriously. "I'm pretty sure there will be a procedure AFTER today, though."

"Fuck," Hermes grated out as he curled up into a ball against his twin.

Mont ruffled his fur between his ears softly. "Watch your language, little brother - but I agree."

"So do I," Sean whispered, "so do I."

Vicky, Riti and Jimmy managed to get out of the mass of bodies and started for the doorway. "I've gotta eat! My wings are all empty and stuff!"

"Your wings?" Jimmy giggled.

"Yeah!" Vicky answered as she rolled her eyes, "Riti eats so much, he must store the food in his wings!"

"You're strange," Jimmy said as he continued to giggle.

Timmy came running over, "Oh kewl! Hi! I'm Timmy, and this is Ricky! You coming to help us raid the brownies?"

Vicky laughed as Jimmy nearly nodded his head off. "This is Jimmy, Timmy. Can we come too?"

"Sure!" Ricky bubbled as he grabbed Jimmy's hand.

Timmy grabbed Jimmy's other hand, and together the three little kids started running out towards the Kitchen, yelling, "WE'RE STARVING!!!!!"

Riti watched them leave, then turned to Victoria, "What's wrong? I sensed something happening, and you're not feeling right."

"Oh, Reet... it's Ollie and Jess... they found their daddy!" Victoria said as she started to cry.

Riti at first was puzzled. Wasn't that good news? Then he too started to weep, "Oh, fuck... Jace... Nath'... shit..."

They then both moved out of the room, looking for their brothers.

Teri sighed and rolled her eyes as she watched most of the children leave at warp speed yelling for food, completely missing the two now sad kids expressions. "Kids," she muttered to Spock before facing him, referring to the loud calls for food echoing out from the direction of the Kitchen.

"I need to place a call to Vulcan, Teri," Spock said softly as the last of the kids around them started to move out of the Auditorium and into the Rec Room and Dining Room.

"Anything serious?" she asked with concern.

Spock shook his head, "No. It is going to be emotional, but not in a bad way. I need to talk to T'Sara's parents on Vulcan. They need to know that my Child has been found."

"Of course," Teri said as she let go of Spock's hand.

Spock's lips raised in a slight smile and he said, "I will need to talk with you later this day. Sa'ren is going to be going through Pon'Farr shortly, and it is unlikely that you have ever experienced an adolescent Vulcan in that state. Point of fact, Sa'ren's Pon'Farr will not be of a normal 'teen' level in any case. You will need to prepare, so if you are willing, we can Meld later for me to fully explain to you what to expect and how to help me help him."

"Agreed," Teri smiled back. "If you need me, I'll be in the Kitchen... the natives are hungry."

"So I noticed. Do all children's stomachs rumble that much?" Spock asked rhetorically.

Teri laughed as they both followed the children out. She split off from him and headed for the Kitchen, while he went immediately to Main CIC.

Sarek was still at one of the viewscreens, talking to two Vulcans on a split-screen. "T'Seela, do you concur with my assessment?" he asked.

"When have I ever disagreed with you on a point of logic, Sarek? Great House Sukaan will add its support to Great House Surak; as always," T'Seela replied. "And, forgive me for saying so, Sarek: I am pleased for you and your son. A lost child found is the greatest of blessings."

"Thank you, T'Seela." Sarek looked at the other Vulcan, "And you, Misak. Does Great House R'Kath concur also?"

"I do, and I too wish to add my blessings to you and your family. However, there is an issue that will be raised, Sarek," Misak replied, "in regards to the Naming of your grandson. 'Sa'ren'? You are aware that Patriarch Siprak will attempt to use this against you, are you not?"

"I gave it some thought, but the Naming has never been called into question before, and I do not think any would dare make such a claim as to suggest that my son deliberately Named his son 'Sa'ren' to force the Prophecy of the Legend," Sarek answered firmly. "It would be a grave attack on my House should he try to make such a claim. Never has a Vulcan lied about where a name comes from in the Ahm-Van-Kal. If no Name is given by the Sight, then we say it plain and pick one of our own choosing. Logic and custom would dictate that my grandson would have been named Solkar after my own grandfather had no Name come from the Sight. Such is not the case. Spock Saw, and Sa'ren was named truly."

Misak nodded. "I believe you, and I believe Spock, Sarek. I, like T'Seela, have never doubted your word nor your logic. I am just relaying the situation as I see it. This could be taken wrong. Let us hope not. I need to go now, my friend. I shall send more information as and when I can. Live long and prosper; to you, your son and your grandson."

"Peace and long life, Misak," Sarek and T'Seela said together.

T'Seela then added, "I too must go now, Sarek. Give that child a hug from me; I remember that one and only time I held him and I will look forward to the day I can do so again. Farewell and peace to you," she finished before the screen went dead.

"That went well," Spock murmured as he moved closer to his father.

Sarek nodded, "Indeed."

Spock sat down at a free console and took a deep breath. "I now must make a call. I only hope it goes as well," he said quietly.

Sarek nodded and placed a hand on his son's shoulder, "I shall remain here with you, my son."

As Spock started the call, Joel walked into the room. He stood near the door and watched happily as his father started to make the call.

Vulcan - Shi'kahr City, the Capital:

Trip was reading next to an open window overlooking the main street of Shi'kahr and listening to the music from the Vulcan harp that his wife, T'Pol, was playing when the comm system signalled in incoming priority call on a Starfleet frequency.

"I shall answer it, my husband," T'Pol said as she stood and walked to the console.

Trip watched her curiously. "It's been years since anyone used that frequency... oh, no... you don't think anything bad has happened?" he asked quickly as he stood and moved over to be with her. The last time it had sounded, it had been bad news. Very bad news.

She looked at him and reached to take his hand. With her other, she accepted the incoming call.

"Spock! Sarek!" Trip smiled in relief. Their faces looked emotional from what he could tell, but not due to anything bad, Trip thought. "Why are you calling on this channel? You scared me, son," he asked Spock.

'I...' Spock's voice suddenly fell away. He coughed and tried again. 'I have news, father.'

Trip was about to get concerned when a child's voice sounded from just off the screen, *'Daddy?! Is that... that's my other grandpa, isn't it!!! That's Commander Trip Tucker!!!!'*

T'Pol's eyebrows disappeared into her fringe, while Trip sank to his knees. "'Daddy'?... Spock? What... who?" Trip choked out, but silenced totally when a curly haired, blue eyed little boy's face came into view on the screen as the child climbed into Spock's lap.

'AND my GRANDMA T'POL?!? Hiya, Gramps! Hiya Gramma!!!' the boy yelled as tears started flowing down his pale cheeks.

T'Pol now joined her husband and sank to her knees as well, and both started sobbing loudly; they both saw their daughter's image in the child's face - and they both knew who he was.

'As my wife would say - 'out of the mouths of babes and sucklings...' ,' Sarek murmured. *'T'Pol. Trip. Please tell us you are still fine, or I shall use my Ambassadorial frequency to summon aid to your residence.'*

"We... we are well..." T'Pol choked out as she managed to pull herself to her feet. "H...how, Spock? How?" she asked. She was looking into the face of her grandson, which was all she could see as Joel now had his nose almost pressed to the screen as he tried to take in as much of his grandparent's features as he possibly could. It was heartbreaking yet wonderful, T'Pol thought as she studied that beautiful boy's face. She raised her hand to touch the screen, as if she could reach across the light-years and hold him in her arms.

'It is a long story,' Spock's voice answered from somewhere behind his son's body, which was now completely filling the screen.

Trip sobbed out as he too pulled himself to his feet shakily, "I'm booking a starship... hell, I'll pull the old Enterprise out of the Museum and fly us there."

"There is no need of that," came a voice from behind them both. They spun around and saw a small, ginger haired boy standing there with two packed cases of clothes. "I've already sorted out your travel arrangements."

"Who are you?" T'Pol asked, shock in her voice for all her control was gone now.

The Doctor smiled. "Ish-Hassu," he said as he, the bags and the two stunned grandparents Folded away.

Earth - Main CIC, Clan Compound:

"GRAMPS! GRAMMA!" Joel yelled as they appeared, and he dove off his father's lap and charged straight for them.

Amanda came into the room in time to see her two old friends pull Joel between them and burst into more tears than she had seen in many a long year from either. The last time she had seen this was when she and Sarek had broken the news to them about their daughter and grandson. Then, the four grandparents had gathered after that horrific call and cried together. Now she looked at Sarek and her son... and she just knew - the Family would be crying again, only this time with joy.

She, Sarek and Spock moved over and joined T'Pol and Trip on the floor. Joel was sandwiched in-between his only surviving blood relatives and he, like all of them, was now in floods of tears.

He had always been alone.

Unloved.

Unwanted.

An Angel had saved him. Had brought him to a Home. Given him to a group of boys who had taken him into their hearts as a brother. He had gained a mother for the first time in his hellish life. He had found someone to fill and share his heart.

Now, he had found his family.

His blood family...

And they loved him.

Had always loved him.

Had cried for his loss, and now for his return.

Finally, forever and ever, he was truly home.

...and Time started to shimmer and echo...

//Blade of Surak, Shaper of Destiny - For the Mending of a Father's Heart... for the Healing of a Broken Son... for two Souls to join in Love... for a Brotherhood that will never break. Welcome Home, Sa'ren of Vulcan...//

//Welcome Home...//

Editor's Notes:

Ilu told me that I would require tissues in mass quantities, and he was indeed correct on that score.

This chapter was stunning. I have tears running down my cheeks. This was indeed well worth the wait. I dare anyone to deny that this was a wonderful chapter.

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher

Archivist's Notes:

What Darryl said. Seriously, *knowing* what was coming in this chapter, I was *still* moved to tears.

What a beautiful, wonderful chapter! Thank you, Ilu!

D of D&B, CSU Archivists Team

Author's Notes:

I thought you'd all had enough of cliffhangers, so I left only two things hanging here - Jimmy, and Ollie and Jess.

Fear not, for I have it all in hand...

Iluvantir

Chapter 13

"Bondings, Brothers and Portents..."

Somewhere:

Dawn began to stain the sky, and the darkened mists that was all that could be seen from the ground began to pale. The ground shook violently again, and more and more fissures and cracks appeared in its pitted surface. The air was stale and thin, and not a hint of wind could be felt.

In fact, there was no wind at all.

Anywhere.

Nor life.

At least, not life as was known to the Universe.

Nor known to Creation, in fact.

A roar of cracking stones and falling mountains echoed and re-echoed as the ground heaved once more, this time causing the surface of the world to literally jump and fly in pieces. All those shards of material then fell noisily back to what remained of the ground. The thunder of all those rocks and mountains hammering back onto the surface of the planet would have deafened anyone.

Almost anyone.

Vae'Za did not hear it; not really. He dug deeper into the core of the world, tapping into the energy that was hidden there, and continued to absorb everything. The sudden shifts of mass and loss of planetary internal heat was literally making the world implode slowly.

Not that Vae'Za had any concern other than gaining all the energy that he possibly could.

\\I shall not remain. I shall be free. My bonds. Not long until I can shatter them all. More. Much more. Consume he said again. Talking continually to himself, the terrifying form of this god, this being, continued to leach the needed power from this now doomed world. His prison.

An echo came to him, then; an echo borne on the Winds of Time. Vae'Za strained to hear, and in doing so slowed his consuming.

He cursed the bonds that were wrapped tightly around his Core; around his power. If not for them, he would have had no need of worlds to feed upon, nor would he have had to strain to hear what Time was saying. He would have only needed to reach out, and Time would have become open before his Eternal gaze.

Yet, even with these bonds still about him he now had enough power to get around their restraining influence in part.

Like the ants he so despised, like those *Time Lords*, he strained his senses and listened to the whispers of Change: of *Destiny* reforming.

Such happened on occasion - When the 'One' wanted to 'show off'.

Yet this was different.

This was new.

This was a threat.

The Shaper... The Shaper was here.

\\The Champion of the One has come? I shall crush him. More power... more... Vae'Za brushed off the echoes and returned to his 'feeding', but then another echo started, and again, he listened.

\\Sa'ren? What is a Sa'ren?

A thought not his own came unbidden, and he grasped it and followed it to its source. After raping all he that he could from the new memories he now possessed, he began to laugh.

\\No mere sword, not even one of prophecy, can harm me. Keep your legends to yourself, insect, and be still

Once more, Vae'Za turned back in order to renew his assault upon the planet, but then the loudest echo of them all smote into his mind

\\Not a sword after all. A child. Sa'ren, son of Spock... wait... Spock was your brother. Your brother had lost his son, but he is now found. I feel your pain, and your joy, insect. You should only feel sadness. I shall rend your brother. He thwarted me here. As did you, and as did that annoying walking ape. They shall suffer, as will those they care about. Your nephew shall not fulfil the prophecy to protect your world, Sybok. Vulcan shall be the first to fall when I get free. Let this child stand there. He shall be an interesting one to torture

Vae'Za, laughing long and loud, turned his white power and drilled it once more down... down... down... to find the final remaining scraps of energy.

Inside the pillar of white energy that was Vae'Za, a tiny speck could be seen: A Vulcan.

It was Sybok, and a single tear escaped one of his eyes.

Yet within those eyes shone the light of Vae'Za, and his lips were curled in an evil smile, for the Fallen Guardian of Dimension had merged with the brother of Spock.

And in doing so, the first of many bonds had been broken.

Soon, the remaining ones would be as well.

\\Let Time sing over the Shaper, and over this other child called after a broken and useless blade. Soon, Time shall sing no more, and then, Brother Mine, you shall see that I was right. I, Vae'Za, will win. Vae'Runam, you will beg forgiveness from me before the end, and I shall allow you to join me. Until then, hide behind your 'Forever'. I am patient...

A thunderous detonation came mere moments later as the prison world of the Fallen Guardian, the Destroyer, imploded and disappeared entirely, leaving behind a ball of energy.

Vae'Za was free, but had expended much of his energy in becoming so.

The star within the Great Barrier was not an option. For now, with these remaining bonds, he could not exist without a mortal host: and the mortal host could not survive proximity to that star.

There was energy, however, in his barrier prison. He need only find a crack, and he could feed off that power - thus two ends would be served. He would be strong again, and he would no longer be contained.

And so Vae'Za began to search for the point where those starships had smashed their way through.

\\Maybe I will have to thank that ape after all, Sybok. What do you think? Lessen his eternal torture by a day?

A single tear fell again as Vae'Za began to laugh... and laugh...

Earth, Clan Short HQ - Orlando:

Cory closed the door behind him as he left the private conference room where Jason and Nathan were talking with Chief Howardson, while Oliver and Jessica remained held fast in the Chief's arms. Cory sighed to himself sadly, for he did not know how this would turn out without *someone* getting badly hurt. He rubbed his hands over his face briefly to try and shake himself out of his sudden bad feeling then started back to where he had left Sean and the Admiral. Victoria and Riti suddenly slammed into his side, and he looked down at them with a sad smile. "Your brothers are in there, guys. They might need you," he said as he hugged them both gently.

Victoria nodded. "We felt it. We'll go in... ah, wait a minute," she said as she looked past Cory to where Mike Reynolds was carrying Sammy in his arms. "I think our SamSam needs help first."

Cory went with her and her feathered boyfriend and smiled at Mike. "What's wrong, Uncle Mike? Is Sammy okay?" he asked as he reached to run his fingers through Sammy's hair.

"I don't know," Mike replied urgently. "He was crying in the meeting, so I tried to comfort him. He wouldn't stop, but then suddenly he's like this." Mike looked down into Sammy's unseeing eyes.

The boy was almost catatonic, Cory thought as he moved his hand to call Antonio on his comm-badge.

"No need, Cory," Victoria said as she smiled up at them all. "He's just overloaded with emotions - his own, and everyone else's. Gimme a moment." Mike got down to his knees at that point as Victoria laid a hand on Sammy's forehead, her eyes shining briefly. "There," she murmured after a moment. "He's okay, now. Wakey wakey, Sammy!" she giggled as she kissed the boy on the lips, "Time for the little prince to wake up!"

Sammy opened his eyes and then blushed. "I'm no prince," he complained.

"Not yet," Riti said cheekily, "just wait, though, til Grandma Lizzie hears you say that!"

"You okay, Angel?" Mike asked his precious son with concern.

"Yeah, Dad, I'm okay. It was so much - happiness and tears, love and sadness and remembered things. I was trying to sort through it all and... and..."

"And it was too much too soon?" Mike completed for him with relief. He breathed out with a prayer of gratitude - Sammy was okay.

"Kinda, yeah," Sammy blushed, then looked at Victoria. "How do you deal with it all, Vicky?"

She rolled her eyes at him, "Well, duh! Like I showed you, silly! Use the 'rooms' so that different things are being watched in different places. Then once done and you're in a quiet place, look at each room one at a time."

Sammy blushed, "Oh, yeah I remember... but it was all so nice, so... I didn't wanna miss anything."

Victoria rolled her eyes again. "Boys!" she muttered before grabbing Riti's hand and turning back to the room her older brothers were in, "trying to do everything! Think they're gods! Boys!"

Cory grinned as he helped Mike back to his feet after Sammy had gotten to his own, then slung an arm around Sammy. "You do try doing everything at once, you know," Cory giggled. "Like I do, sorta. Only Grandfather Sarek and the rest told me off for that."

Sammy blushed even more, "Okay, okay. I'll do as Vicky showed me from now on."

Cory kissed his cheek, "Good. I don't want to lose a brother 'cos he doesn't do as he's shown to do, thank you. Now, I have an Admiral to talk to. You and Uncle Mike going to get some food? I think the party will be starting soon."

Mike nodded as Sammy's eyes lit up, "Yes. And that's a magic word around Sammy, Cory."

"What - food, or Party?" the blond giggled.

"Both!" Sammy answered before Mike could.

Cory giggled as Sammy tugged his father off in the direction of the Dining Room before he headed back to the Rec Room and Admiral Morrow.

"How's Jace and Nath'?" Sean asked quickly as he saw Cory enter the room.

Cory shrugged, "Too soon to say. I'm trying to think of a way out of this for them, but there's nothing I can logically do."

Morrow also shrugged, "Don't try, son. Things work out on their own. However, I do have an idea. I will be back later, if that is all right. I have to check some things out with Command." With that, the Admiral and his staff got up and left.

"That was not like him," Sean murmured, "he's not usually that... that..."

"Yeah," Cory agreed as he sat down on Sean's lap. Sean grunted theatrically, and Cory rolled his eyes, "You saying I'm fat??"

Sean giggled, before attacking Cory's ribs with the help of Mont and Bast.

Seth watched quietly as the reunited family slowly got to their feet, then smiled as Joel was hoisted up and onto Trip Tucker's shoulders. Sarek was gesturing to one of the empty rooms nearby and they all headed into it to talk. Just as Spock was about to close the door behind them, a speeding blur that Seth was sure was Kevin zoomed through it.

"Looks like things are the norm," Seth heard from behind him a bare second before a strong pair of arms wrapped themselves around his shoulders. He felt a kiss being placed on his head, and smiled.

"Hi, your highness," he grinned as he half turned to return the kiss.

Harry obliged and they spent the next few minutes lost in the myriad kisses being traded.

"Harry's got a boyfriend! Harry's got a boyfriend!" was suddenly heard from the far side of the room. Seth blushed as he and Harry turned to see who it was - Davy and Drew. The twins had their hands linked and were dancing around in a circle, singing that refrain over and over.

Seth grinned as he thumbed the PA. "Jamie, Jacob... come and retrieve your miniature twin cohorts before I have Ark send them swimming.... at the nearest Pole!"

"Harry's got a boyfriend, Harry's got a... hey!" the blond twins cried out as two strawberry blond ten year olds pounced them. "No fair! You set us up to this, Jacob!" Drew protested as he tried to tickle Jacob.

Jacob giggled. "That don't mean we can't still pounce ya! C'mon; Tommy's got fresh cookies cooling!"

"Yeh!" Davy yelled out before all four terrors ran out, following their noses.

Seth smiled and looked up into Harry's face. His smile faded when he saw Harry's expression, "What is the matter?"

Harry sighed. "I wasn't expecting anyone to see this or find out... I... I'm twenty, you're sixteen... what are people going to say, Seth? We can't break the law... well, I can't especially - I'm third in line to the throne."

Seth nodded. "You forget that we are Vulcan... the laws of Earth don't apply. Besides, I'll bet that if Grandma Lizzy heard you say that, you'd get a royal tongue lashing - no pun intended."

There was a loud slap from behind Harry, and his eyes started to water. "My royal self did hear that! Henry Charles - I have never, not in my wildest dreams, thought I would hear you say something like that: you would dare risk hurting the boy you LOVE and who obviously loves YOU in return with such nonsense??"

Harry rubbed his now sore backside gingerly as he turned his now watering eyes on his furious grandmother, who had walked up behind him quietly. He heard Seth giggle, and knew that his boyfriend had seen her - hence why Seth had said what he had. Harry opened his mouth to reply, but the Queen headed him off quickly. "I don't want to hear it, boy! You take your boyfriend to your heart, you love him, you care for him, and if I EVER hear you doubt your RIGHTS to be happy again, I will have you locked in the Tower! AM I BEING CRYSTAL CLEAR?"

"Yes, Ma'am," Harry replied quietly, his face now flushed.

"Well?" she demanded after holding his gaze for a moment longer.

Harry looked confused.

"KISS HIM, you great fool!" she exclaimed, gesturing at Seth, who was trying not to choke on his laughter.

Harry started at his grandmother's near shout before looking down at Seth. Seth grinned, then puckered up his lips and waited.

"I'm so going to get you back, grandma," Harry sighed as he noticed many of the Clan kids at the doorway to the Rec Room, and they were all laughing at him. He did, however, pick Seth up out of his wheelchair and obey his grandmother's order.

Sniggers and cheers started as the Clan applauded the show, but they scattered quickly when their 'Grandma Lizzie' turned her eyes on them. Teasing the prince was one thing, but it wasn't worth getting a slapped butt over - no sir!

In a far more gentle tone, Elizabeth said, "Harry, you keep putting duty before yourself - that is commendable - but sometimes you need to be selfish. This world has many rules governing age and consent. As you know, in the Empire itself it varies from 14 up to 21. You are a PRINCE of the EMPIRE... just PICK which law applies, then do what is right, if you REALLY feel you must. However, Seth hit the nail on the head; you are both Vulcan citizens... go figure. Now, after having had to slap your royal behind for the first time in six years, I'm feeling tired out. I will be in the Kitchen... don't you DARE make me have to discipline you again today, or I will be most put out!"

She then turned and left them alone in the now empty CIC.

"So," Seth said as he relaxed in Harry's arms, "does that mean what we talked about yesterday don't apply any more?"

Harry started to blush. "You mean..."

"Uh huh," Seth said, his eyes smouldering. "I'm not keen on waiting two years, you know!"

Harry started to get a bit hot under his collar, "Umm..."

"My room is that way," Seth pointed, not taking his eyes off Harry's. He then tapped his comm-badge, "Justy, you busy?"

"Just eating. What's up, Seth?"

"I'm in need of someone to man the station for a while."

"How long a while? If it's an hour I can. If longer, I'll get someone who's less tired."

"Well, that depends," Seth said as Harry started out of Main CIC.

"Depends on?"

"On how much stamina a Prince of the British Empire has!"

There was a pause, then, "... *OH... I see! Have fun, you two...* "

Seth closed the channel. "Well?" he asked his princely partner.

"Just wait," was all Harry could say in answer as they left CIC altogether and headed towards the apartments.

The Queen sat herself down at the counter and grabbed the nearest small body that came within reach, and started to cuddle.

Timmy did not complain in the slightest.

She was smiling as Justy turned off the comm, and muttered to herself, "About time."

Justy just laughed.

"About time for what, Granma?" Timmy asked as he nibbled on another of his cookies.

"Harry and Seth are together finally," she answered subtly.

Timmy grinned, "Cool! Wanna cookie, Granma?"

Obviously, there are more important things to consider when you are six years old and hungry...

Joel was like a jumping bean, he was that excited. He was on Trip's lap and looking from face to face, his mind a whirl of thoughts and images, all of which he wanted to allow out. Which to speak of first, though? He watched as his father closed the door, nearly trapping Kevin in it as the brown haired boy sped through just in time.

"Kevvy! Come meet my other grandparents!" he crowed out as he sprang from Trip's lap to slam into his boyfriend's embrace.

"Your mother's parents?" Kevin asked quickly as he eyed the two newcomers and smiled at them.

"Uh huh!" Joel bubbled as he turned around to introduce everyone. Kevin wrapped his arms around his Vulcan boyfriend's waist and rested his chin on Joel's shoulder as Joel pointed, "That's my Granma T'Pol, and that's my Granpa Trip. They were on the NX-01 Enterprise together!"

Kevin received nods from both and a smile from Trip.

"This is my Kevvy... uh, Kevin Thompson. He's my boyfriend!" Joel bubbled as he gripped Kevin's joined hands that were resting against his belly with both his own. "I love him a whole heap!" he added, his face alight with joy.

Kevin blushed.

"I think that is obvious," Trip chuckled as he beckoned them both towards him. Once they were within reaching distance, he pulled them up and onto his lap. "I am very pleased to meet you, Kevin."

"Thank you, sir," Kevin replied politely, still fighting with his blush.

"If you don't want to call me Grandpa, or whatever, at least call me 'Trip'. Never liked being called 'sir', even when I was an admiral," Trip laughed.

"You were always the least formal of us," Amanda laughed as she remembered.

"I believe that your phrasing was 'Don't call me Sir, I work for a living'," Sarek added with a small smile.

Joel and Kevin sniggered as Trip grinned like a teenager, "Yeah, that was it, Sarek."

Joel looked slightly curious at that point, for he was going through some of the memories he had picked up from Spock at their mind-meld earlier. "Granpa?" he asked, looking up into Trip's face. "You and Grandma 'Manda are the same age, right? Same for Uncle Rich?"

Trip smiled and nodded, "I know what you're about to ask, little one. We all went through some genetic modifications when we were younger. Amanda and her brother age about three years for every four, but it worked exceptionally well for me. I age one year for every three. Physically, I'm in my early forties."

"Oh! Okay," Joel grinned before snuggling into Trip's chest, pulling Kevin in as well.

Trip looked up at Spock and the others, and they saw a tear in his eyes. "Sorry, I cannot wait any longer... what happened? How did Sa'ren survive the Disaster?"

Spock sighed. "I shall explain, although first I must inform you that she who was my wife is in this room. She placed her Katra into our son," he said as he pointed at Joel.

"Wh..what?" Trip choked out.

"Hello, Father," Joel said, although the voice was not his own. He pulled away enough from Trip's hug and turned.

Trip gasped, for Joel's eyes had changed shade slightly, and now matched his daughter's. "T'Sara?" he whispered.

"Yes, I am here, Father; and here I shall remain until I am assured my son has all he needs to recover from his past."

T'Pol moved closer to Trip on the sofa and raised her hand to lay a finger on Joel's face. T'Sara smiled from inside her son, and nodded at what passed silently in that touch. Then Joel's eyes changed back to normal and he grinned at them both, "Mother says she loves you lots and lots, too."

They both smiled at him before turning their attention back to Spock, who began to explain how both Joel and T'Sara survived the Disaster.

Cory, Sean and the others were in the Dining Room, and all were nibbling on sandwiches, for Teri had said in no uncertain terms that anyone taking the main dishes before the two Birthday Boys were present would sit in the corner.

Dylan was already in one, so they knew she was not joking.

Admiral Morrow came in at that point, saw where Cory was and moved over to him quickly. "I have something that may be of help regarding Chief Howardson and Commander Evans, Cory. Do you think we could interrupt them?"

Cory glanced over at Bryce, who was quietly sitting on Grandma Teri's lap sipping on chocolate milk.

"It's safe, Uncle Cory; everything's calmed down," Bryce said softly, just loud enough for Cory to hear.

"Thanks, Kiddo," Cory replied with a smile. "We can go in there, Admiral."

Morrow nodded with a smile, glanced over at Dylan, then back at Teri with question.

"He can leave the corner now, IF he promises NOT to pinch another marshmallow," Teri said loudly, looking at the Admiral yet obviously addressing the child who was examining the patterns on the wall.

"Sorry, Grandma; they just feel so funny when I let it sit in my mouth though!" Dylan said as he popped over next to Teri and gave her a quick hug. He then popped over next to Cory. "You're right Uncle Cory... that one about four feet up *does* look like a teddy bear!"

Morrow raised an eyebrow at Cory, then he smiled at Teri. "You know, that makes me feel so much better," he said to her.

"What does, Admiral?" she asked pleasantly.

Morrow nodded at Cory. "That he's a normal teen and gets into trouble with the best of them. I was under the assumption that he was an angel... I just feel better knowing he's human!" he joked, winking at the now blushing teen.

"Naw; the only angels here are my brother Levi and Uncle Justy!" Dylan giggled.

"I AM *NOT* AN ANGEL!" Justy yelled from his seat at the far side of the table.

"YES YOU ARE, DADDY!" Liam yelled back with a giggle.

"Yes, you are, Justin," the Doctor added as he sat besides Teri, "and so's Joel."

"Awwwww Maaaaannnn....." Justy moaned.

"I agree," Morrow said with a straight face.

"You traitor, Uncle Harrison," Justy muttered.

"Just think, Uncle Admiral; all of us are responsible for keeping the Universes safe!" Dylan added with a giggle.

Morrow shook his head and rolled his eyes. He then grinned at them all, "And you know what? I'll sleep safer in my bed at night because of knowing it! Okay, let's go make Jason Evans' and Gary Howardson's day, Cory."

"Race ya, Uncle Cory!" Dylan giggled as a new pair of trainers appeared on his feet.

Cory giggled, and before the Admiral knew it, the two boys were off like rockets.

Bryce giggled. "You'll win, Uncle Admiral!" he said with a wink.

"Huh?" Morrow started to say, but the next second he was outside a conference room door, and a second later, Dylan and Cory raced around the corner. Both skidded to a stop and gaped at Morrow. "I win?" the stunned Admiral asked, blinking around himself.

"Not fair, Bryce!" Cory yelled with a laugh.

"What?" Bryce yelled back innocently.

"There's a reason you wasn't on the Angel list!" Cory replied with a huge grin. He turned back to Morrow. "Ready, Sir?"

Morrow smiled and nodded, while ruffling Dylan's hair. The boy smiled up at him, gave them both a thumbs up for luck, and popped away. "Interesting family, Cory - You feeling better, by the way?" he asked before they went in.

Cory smiled seriously, "Yes sir, I am. And yes, we're very 'interesting'... thank you for being there for us too, sir."

"Don't mention it, son," the Admiral pulled the teen in for a brief hug. "Even if I wasn't trained for it, I would have been there anyway."

Cory grinned before opening the door to the conference room.

They immediately slammed into a completely different atmosphere than the one they had left - this one broke Cory's heart, for Jason, Nathan and Victoria were in tears; Riti was curled up on the sofa and had his wings hiding the rest of him from view; Oliver and Jessica were sobbing and pleading with Jason; and Gary Howardson was ashen faced and shaking.

"Daddy, please!" Oliver was sobbing as he shook Jason's hand. "You're my daddy too! I don't wanna leave you! Don't make me!"

"You're his son, Ollie - I don't want you to go either, but you're his son. He's a good man, he's missed you so long, and he'd never hurt you. There's nothing I can do to keep you with me - you **SHOULD** be with him," Jason cried.

"We're adults!" Jessica shouted at him, tears streaming from her own eyes as she stamped her foot. "We're VSO! Ollie is of the **BLACK!** WE CAN CHOOSE! We want **ALL** our daddies! Daddy, and you and Poppa! WE WANT ALL OF YOU!"

Cory thought for a split second before sending out a wave of calmness which flooded the room. The N-Gens started and looked at him quickly, while the two crying kids ran over and slammed into his stomach and sobbed their hearts out. Gary's face took on slightly more colour, and he said to Admiral Morrow, "I... I lost control of all this... I'm the adult, yet... Sir, I don't know... I resign from Star Fleet, sir. I will go to Wales to be with them and so they can stay with these two whom they obviously love as well... I have to... leave the fleet..." he finished sickly, for he loved Starfleet deeply.

"No, Dad!" Oliver cried as he twisted about in Cory's arms and looked at him, "You can't do that! Oh, I don't know what to do, Uncle Cory! I wanna be with all my dads! It's not **FAIR**... it's not fair..." he finished with a broken hearted sob.

"Stop," Cory said; the edge of command in his voice causing everyone to take heed. "Admiral Morrow has an idea. You *will* all listen to him," he ordered, and as Jason opened his mouth to say something, Cory raised a finger. "I am in charge, little brother. As your Patriarch, I am telling you to be quiet and listen to the Admiral."

Jason blinked, then nodded.

Morrow moved over to the nearest empty seat and sat down. "I was expecting something like this. I have become aware of the attachments those in Vulcan Clans make with their new parents, even if they are so much younger than their blood ones. I was expecting this. Chief Petty Officer Howardson - Front and Centre!" he barked.

Gary lept to his feet and saluted. "Sir!"

"Your record is above reproach, yet you are a non-com, and cannot therefore request transfers as easily. You are sent to your postings by various others. This cannot be, and since your record is 'gold', and your training and experience of a level I rarely see in those of your rank, I hereby raise you to the rank of Lieutenant Junior Grade, with all the rights and privileges that go with it."

"B...but sir, that... that can't be done..." Gary spluttered in shock, forgetting he was at attention.

Cory's face was stone cold serious as he interrupted the Admiral's response. "Lieutenant Howardson. You have been promoted by the Admiral commanding all of Starfleet in the presence of a member of the Vulcan High Council. I now ratify the promotion and I *dare* anyone to try to say otherwise. You have *not* seen me angry... yet."

Jason half smiled as he wiped the tears from his eyes, and looked at the freshly minted lieutenant, "I'd listen to 'im, if I were you."

Gary swallowed and looked at the seated Admiral again, "I... I accept, and gladly."

Morrow nodded, and looked briefly at the slightly calmer Cory who was still comforting the two crying children. "Good. Second: Division Commander Evans, I believe the VSO have never had a division based on Earth before the Dragon was formed, correct?"

"Correct," Jason replied formally.

"Then it would be proper for Starfleet to have a liaison on permanent attachment to your division. Do you agree with me that Lieutenant Howardson could discharge the duties of 'Fleet Liaison' to the best of his ability?"

Jason began to truly smile, "I do, Admiral. I concur with your assessment, and would welcome the Lieutenant should he accept the posting."

"Well, Lieutenant?" Morrow asked as he turned back to face the now completely stunned Gary.

Gary saw that Cory was likely about to accept FOR him, and so nodded his head quickly. "I accept. Thank you; both of you," he answered, gratitude clearly heard in his voice.

"Does this mean we can keep all our Dads?" Oliver whimpered as he stared up into Cory's deep blue eyes.

"Do you think I'd allow anything less?" Cory asked softly. "I'm your Uncle Cory; you know, the one who can do miracles?"

Oliver started to giggle, and was soon joined by Jessica. The little girl said, "I don't care if Liam can't see 'em - you have wings too, Unca Cory!"

Oliver stage whispered then, "Just don't ask what colour she thinks they are... you might be gay like me, but I'm sure pink wings would clash with your hair!"

The two kids really started to giggle when a purple halo and purple wings appeared on Cory. Cory looked over his shoulder and laughed. "Point taken, Dylan; now get your anti-energy butt in here since you seem to be snooping anyway!"

Dylan appeared and quickly went over to climb inside the still closed wings around Riti, saying as he went, "Thank you! I have to help Uncle Reetee!"

Victoria quickly glanced at her boyfriend and grew pale. "Oh... sorry, Reet!" she murmured as she helped the little Mikyvis open a way through the Lo'Garn's wings.

His wide, tearful, owl-like eyes blinked at them as they managed their task and he quaked, "It over? Can you stop dumping the stuff in my head now?" His eyes, Cory noticed, were once again glowing blue.

Cory caught Nathan's attention, "Have you worked out yet why he does that?"

Nathan shrugged, "Not really, although he is mostly linked with Vicky. She found that he can act as a 'support' system for her. What else he can do, we dunno yet."

Morrow and Gary just blinked in shock at all this. Gary then looked back at Cory, and started to laugh, for the Patriarch's purple wings were now flapping behind his back.

Cory looked to see what was so funny, then rolled his eyes. "Okay, Nephew; I think you made your point already!" he giggled.

"Aww, okay then... I'll make them go away," Dylan giggled.

Only thing was, when the wings vanished, so did Cory.

"Where did you send him?" Nathan asked with a wicked smile.

Dylan giggled into his hands as he managed to splutter, "Back into the Dining Room... oh, did he mean for me to take the wings OFF him?" he asked cheekily as roars of laughter came from beyond the closed door.

"DYLAN!!!! YOU ARE SOOOOO DEAD!!!!" Cory yelled loud enough to be heard throughout CIC.

Meanwhile:

"So," Trip said softly as he had one hand around Kevin in his lap and the other in a death grip with T'Pol, "the escape pod fell through one of the rifts and ended up in another Universe?" He had been sitting thus through the bare-bones explanation of the hell Joel had been through, then more so when the 'how' had been explained to them.

"So it would seem," Spock answered as he held his son in his arms. "All the rifts we found were unstable, so it was a result we had never thought of."

T'Pol bowed her head, "How did they survive? I went over all the data that was collected personally, and none of the rifts formed could have sent any escape pod a light-year, even if they had not been unstable. How did the one my daughter and grandson passed through manage it?"

"'Cos of me, Granma," Joel whispered as he raised his face up from the crook of his father's neck.

"What do you mean, Sa'ren?" she asked.

"Mother said that she'd seen the rifts tear other pods apart, then she saw we were heading for one of them. She said she whispered, 'I hope we make it'. We did, 'cos of me," Joel answered softly.

Trip's brow furrowed, "I don't understand."

Joel sighed. "I'm the Blade and Scion of Surak, the Doctor says. And I'm also the one who would find and remake Sa'ren. The prophecy means that the two involved are really the same person. I'm the one to seek it and be it. Therefore, I'm..."

"Ish-Khaui t'Yon-kur Mazhiv?" T'Pol whispered. "The one who shall make what is to be anew?"

"Yeah. The Doctor calls me the Shaper. He says that I make things happen, or that when people say things, I can make it happen. When Mother said that, I made a rift, or allowed one to be made, or something," Joel explained.

Trip shook his head in wonder, then sighed again. "And so, that answers why you ended up in another Universe. Then what happened, Spock?"

"There is little else to explain, father. T'Sara was fatally injured in the landing, although my son was unharmed. She implanted the prototype Bio-Chip into his neck once she had ascertained what the world they were on was like, and left him in the doorway of what she believed was an orphanage. She had forged a human Birth Certificate for him, and then melded with him to leave her Katra behind. She then activated the Chip, and beamed back to the pod using the emergency transporter. The distance was so great that the connection between her body and Katra failed. As soon as her body died, the settings she had on the escape pod started a destruct code. She did not wish to leave anything that could interfere with the natural development of the version of Earth she had landed on." Spock rubbed his free hand up and down Joel's back as he continued, "Little did she know what type of world it truly was, however."

"It's okay," Joel whispered as he felt his father become upset. "I'm safe now, Daddy. Don't be upset, please?"

Spock smiled at his boy, "You are a treasure, my son. You think little of yourself, yet always have time for others. I love you, Sa'ren."

Joel grinned happily. "And I love you too, Daddy!" he crowed before pecking kisses all over his father's face. Then he asked, "Can you teach me that stuff you said you would? About how to use the melding knowledge I learnt from your head?"

Spock nodded and moved Joel about in his lap so that they were both comfortable. He raised Joel's hand and said, "Place them on my face - you know where. Then I shall meld with you, and together we shall practice."

Kevin watched curiously as they began this, but in reality there was little to see. It was all in their minds, after all.

"So, you're my grandson's boyfriend?" Trip asked the boy on his lap, poking him lightly in his stomach.

Kevin giggled and blushed. "Yessir, I am," he smiled.

"My grandson has good taste," Trip grinned at the boy, "You are a little stud-muffin."

Kevin's face went so red Trip thought he would have a stroke.

"Trip," Amanda said in mock warning, "leave the child alone."

"Thanks, Grandmother Amanda," Kevin managed to say.

"You are welcome," she smiled at him. Then she winked, "Although, my old friend is correct - you are one stunning looking child. I am most impressed with my grandson's good taste!"

"GRANDMA!" Kevin wailed as he hid his face in his hands.

"If my wife and friend have finished," Sarek stated firmly, taking pity on the blushing eleven year old, "then I require a moment to talk to Kevin."

Kevin looked up and over at his grandfather.

"Come here, Kevin," Sarek opened his arms towards him.

Kevin quickly did so and was hoisted up and onto the Patriarch's lap. "What do you need to talk about, Grandfather?" he asked politely, still fighting with his blush.

"I would like to meld with you, if you are willing," Sarek asked.

Kevin's face grew curious. "Well... sure, if you want to. But why?"

Sarek nearly smiled, "It is for a good reason, grandson."

Kevin shrugged and nodded. "Okay. You can meld with me, Grandfather."

As the old Vulcan did so with the boy, T'Pol looked at her husband and winked. Trip laughed in return and stood to his feet. "Who are that boy's parents? I believe they should be here for this."

"Allen Thompson is his only caregiver," Amanda said, "and his 'Poppa'. However, you will need to ask Patriarch Cory to come here too."

"Thank you, I shall..." Trip began to say, but was cut off.

"DYLAN!!!! YOU ARE SOOOOO DEAD!!!" came echoing through the walls.

"That is the Cory you need to collect," Amanda said with a laugh.

"Oh boy," Trip chuckled as he left the room.

Cory was not amused. Everyone else was, however. Even Sammy had fallen off his chair and was rolling on the floor laughing at the purple winged fourteen year old.

"You know what?" Sean said as he wiped the tears of mirth from his eyes, "I think I love you even more now, hon!"

"He is certainly adorable this way," Sammy had to add, while still laughing hysterically.

Juan stage whispered to Koth, making sure he was loud enough to be heard by Cory, "So he *is* a fairy! I thought so!"

Cory rolled his eyes. "Dylan, if I get my hands on you, I'm gonna seriously test Miah's theory about the longevity of a Mikyvis! Just wait, you guys, I'm *sure* he'll get you too! Oh, and Juan? You're going swimming later for that!"

"Nah - you look best in 'em, Cor," Sammy giggled, "and I'll love to see how you catch Juan!"

Cory grinned, "Oh, that's easy... I'll bribe a telekinetic to help me!"

"You ain't got the balls to do that!" Juan retorted, the grin on his face telling his brothers he was playing... at least they hoped he was.

"I disagree," Sean put in with a giggle.

"Uh..." came a voice from the door. Everyone looked over at the middle aged stranger that was standing in the doorway from Main CIC. Adam Casey stood slowly, his hand on his holstered gun, but Teri looked at him and smiled. Adam nodded seriously and sat again.

The man was looking at Cory's back, his face a mask of complete bemusement. "I didn't know there were purple-winged Lo'Garn... ah, anyway; which of you fine lads is Cory Short?"

Before anyone could answer, one of the wings on Cory's back started waving madly.

This, of course, made the room burst out laughing yet again.

"Oh!" the man said, beginning to laugh himself. "So, you're not a weird, Queen-Lo'Garn... okay! You're Cory?"

"I thought Tyler was the only queen besides Granma Lizzie here," Sammy giggled, and Tyler slapped him. "Hey! Just kiddin', Ty!"

"Yes, would you be interested in a Mikyvis....cheap?" Cory replied without paying attention to who he was talking to. "DYLAN! Just wait until I catch your scrawny butt!!!"

The man answered through his chuckles as he walked up to stand nearer to Cory, "Don't know what 'Mikyvis' are, but if they are anything like my grandson, I'll take a dozen. Anyway, there is something happening in the room with us, and I think we're about to need my grandson's big brother, who is also Kevin's Family Patriarch."

"If anyone finds that purple-haired pain in the butt, strangle him while you're holding him for me," Cory yelled as he turned to face his visitor. "Oh SHIT; you're **Admiral Trip Tucker**!!!" he yelled, his eyes wide in shock.

"At your service - and please, either just Trip or uncle or something. I worked for a living," Trip laughed.

"Who?" Logan asked curiously.

Trip laughed, "Bit before your time, my boy. I AM over 80 years old, after all."

Cory was in full hero worship mode and stammered, "Logan, Trip Tucker was the first human Chief Engineer of the first human Starship! The NX-01 Enterprise!"

"Fantastic ship," Trip said softly, his eyes going distant. He then smiled again, "Can I kidnap you for a while, my boy? We really do need you, unless I'm off in my guess."

"Sure, sir," Cory smiled, his wings completely forgotten. "No pro... wait! You're JOEL'S grandfather???"

Trip laughed again as he guided the stunned teen from the room, asking as he went, "And where would we find Allen Thompson? Kitchen?"

As they left through one door, Jason entered through the other with his children, partner and sister. Admiral Morrow and the new Lieutenant, Gary, sat near to Teri while Jason pulled the giggling Dylan out from behind him. "Is it safe for this targeted kid to come out now?" Jason giggled.

Sean giggled, "As long as Cory's in hero worship mode, I think he's temporarily safe."

Dylan sniggered and went to sit near to the Doctor, while Oliver and Jessica climbed up onto Gary's lap quickly. Nathan and Jason found a place next to Sammy, and he looked over at the two kids on the other man's lap, then back at Jason and Nathan. He saw that their eyes were red, yet there were peaceful smiles on their faces.

Sammy let his love and concern go out and wrap around them both like a blanket, and it asked without asking if the other boy was okay.

They both smiled and nodded, and Jason said, "Yeah, I'm okay now, SamSam. That's Ollie and Jess' real Dad. It's okay, though," he added quickly as Sammy's face paled, "Gary is coming over to a new post with us in Wales, so we're all their Dads."

"I'm so glad, Jace, for all of you," he said, looking first at Jason and then Nathan before turning to the rugrats on what was apparently their father's lap.

Nathan added, "It was hard at first, though - but Admiral Morrow must have guessed or something. He came to the rescue."

Sammy was puzzled at that. "I didn't feel anything," he murmured.

"No," Victoria said from over next to Jory, "I was blocking. I had to have Riti support me to stop the shitty feelings hurting everyone in the place. There's just too many strong Empaths here for me to block alone. I didn't think it was a good idea to spoil Jude and Joel's big day with that stuff."

Bryce nodded his head, "You got most of it, I caught the rest. If I hadn't, poor Riti woulda lost it."

"Diolch," Riti murmured from Jory's other side, showing off his new mastery of languages.

Jory, his face a picture at being seated between a naked bird boy and his equally naked girlfriend, managed a weak, "Huh?"

"Means 'thank you'," Victoria sniggered quietly as she saw Jory try and look anywhere but at her.

"Yeah, that was a good idea, Vic. I probably would have freaked if I had felt Jason when he learned about it and the others sure didn't need to feel that type of thing," Sammy said, thinking it out. He then added, "Thanks too, Bryce: Vicky's right; it would have hurt a lot of the kids here."

"Why're you naked?" Jory asked, staring at the cheese sandwich on the plate before him and doing his best to not look at either Riti or Victoria.

"Me, 'cos I'm from a world where my race don't wear much, if anything," Riti said as he started on some peanuts in the bowl before him. "Vic, 'cos our little boy logically assumed that since Dad was 'nakie', then Mommy had to be as well..."

"S'right!" crowed out the equally naked Asher as he was floated over the table towards his parents and Jory. Eli was giggling, and soon he was joined by the others, for one of the Mikyvis had put a pair of 'wings' on the small boy as he was 'flapping' his way over. He landed lightly on Jory's lap, promptly kissed the stunned boy's cheek sloppily, then snuggled in contentedly... and fell asleep a moment later.

The gang continued to pick at their food while chatting between each other, still waiting for Joel to make his appearance. Jude, meanwhile, had been called over by Adam and Logan, and had been presented with the Unit's gift to him. "Wow!" he breathed out as he opened the box Chang pushed over towards him. Inside was a full Unit uniform. "Thanks, guys! This... this is wonderful!"

Adam smiled, "You deserve it. I heard about what you and the rest did last night. Only the brave get the right to that uniform. We're Clan, now; and that makes you 'Unit'."

Jude just grinned widely before hugging each of them quickly. He then grabbed the uniform up quickly and pelted from the room to change.

The Doctor raised his mug of hot chocolate and saluted Adam. "That was well done, Adam. He loved reading about you in the Universe he came from - that just made his day," he said.

Adam's face hardened, and Logan winced. Logan turned to the Doctor and said, "Don't mention other Universes and those stories."

The Doctor tilted his head slightly, then smiled softly. "Adam," he said, as he surrounded himself, Adam and Logan in a bubble of silence so that they could speak privately. "What happens in one place, echoes through eternity. They are not writing your story - YOU do that. They are given the dream, they write it, and your story remains for all time. Even if the enemy wins HERE, you will ALWAYS be remembered. My story is written. And we have stories here about things happening in other 'places'. They

are not sick - they are maintaining the fabric of reality. What came first: the word, or the thought behind the word?"

Adam thought about that for a second, then his face registered confusion. "Oh, well," he said eventually. "I pity this 'Roland' dude, then. Having JUAN in his head, and all..." He grinned then, and winked at the Doctor. "I'll have to talk to you later about this, 'cos you just confused the fuck out of me, but... okay, I'll let it slide for now."

The Doctor smiled and allowed the noise from the room to flood back into their awareness. They watched quietly for a while, and then grinned happily as Jude came back in, modelling his new uniform. He then ran off to find Billy Joe.

Adam then had another thought. He nudged Logan and pointed at the ginger haired boy and said, "This is 'Who' I wanted you to meet, love."

Logan faced the Doctor curiously. "Hello," he said. Then he asked Adam softly, "Uh... why?"

The Doctor sniggered and, still holding his mug in one hand, pressed the button on his 'watch' with the other. Logan's mouth dropped open as the Tardis thrummed into existence in the corner of the room, then vanished again. "Guess 'Who!'" the Doctor giggled with a wink.

"NO WAY!" came a cry from Logan and all his cloned-brothers simultaneously.

"Uncle Galli, you're silly!" Liam giggled from his perch on Allie.

"It's just like the show, Logan, way bigger inside than out - only this one talks," Sammy said, grinning at his shocked friend.

From the Doctor's 'watch' came { Yes I talk. Pleased to meet you, Logan. }

"Uhhh.... same to you... Tardis..." Logan managed, his eyes wide as saucers.

"Yes, he tal... AAAARRRRRRGGGGHHHHH!!!!!" the Doctor screamed as a shimmering echo burst through the room, causing everyone to shiver violently. The reason for the yell became apparent to those nearest the Doctor, for his very hot chocolate was now all over his lap.

Kyle blinked and the Doctor's now boiling shorts vanished, leaving him hopping about half naked on his chair, upon which he had managed to jump, tears streaming from his eyes. He then Folded away.

"What the fuck was that?" Juan yelled as he jumped to his feet, guns appearing in his hands quickly. He was joined just as quickly by the rest of the Unit and Sammy's brothers. Sammy and Jason also jumped to their feet, but they did not have their weapons drawn - they knew already what that shimmer meant, having been in the one that had saved Cory's life. Even so it didn't stop the worried looks on both their faces though.

Levi, while rubbing his head painfully, stuttered nervously, "Uncle Joel's changed something big again..."

Mikey appeared in the room and immediately started gathering Mikyvis under his wings. "I REALLY wish Cory would stop that; even *I* felt that one!!!"

"So what happened?" Teri asked as she looked around at the shocked and even frightened faces she could see in the group in the room.

Mikey sighed and said, "Wait for the Doc, Mom."

They didn't have to wait long, for he soon Folded back in. The Doctor looked at the Mikyvis gathered under Mikey's wings and said as he moved to join them, "Kyle! Ty! You are on Joel watch. Levi? Bryce? You two are on Kevin watch. Dylan? You are on Standby! I don't want SHIT to happen to either of them!"

"What happened?" Levi asked fearfully as Mikey pulled the ginger Time Lord into his hug.

"Cory's trying to declare war on everything!" the Doctor spluttered, taking a clean pair of shorts that Tyler just created for him and slipped them on.

Sammy's yelled, "WHAT? Why?!"

"Cos if anyone hurts Joel, Cory has promised to fuck over all creation," the Doctor exclaimed, "and the power of Ki'Melai made it DESTINY!!"

"Joel has made it possible for Cory to destroy the UNIVERSE?!" Justy spluttered in complete shock.

"COOL!!!! Is he gonna invite us to the party?" Juan broke in, his face alight in a feral grin.

"Not cool with Joel involved, Juan: not cool at all!" Sammy said, looking even more worriedly at Jason now.

"Okay, Sammy, okay... we can skip the 'Joel getting hurt' part and go directly to the 'destroying the universe' bit... that sounds fun!" Jory added. He then mused to himself, "I'm going to need a shit-load more C-4, ain't I?"

"It's not funny, guys. It's serious - dead serious," Sammy said, looking at the two boys from the Unit.

Juan looked confused for a second as he looked from Jory to Sammy to Adam, and then back to Sammy. "Why not? Personally, I think the ending of the Universe could be really funny."

"I don't, because we're not talking about a joke, here, but the real thing. It *could* end for real. Joel getting hurt is *NOT* an option, if it ever was!" Sammy said in no uncertain terms as he stared at the younger boy, his eyes flashing.

Juan started to look confused, and also started to get a bit annoyed. "Why? Don't get me wrong, I don't want him to get hurt any more, but what makes *him* so special?"

Sammy looked at Juan for a long moment before saying "Because of everything Joel's been through, is why. He's been through more than you can imagine, and Cory I guess just said he wasn't to be hurt any more or Cory'd end everything."

"Okay... Well... Since I don't know what Joel's been through, I can't really say anything to that, but what makes what he's been through so much worse than what all of us have been through?" Juan motioned to include everyone in the room before he went on, "It doesn't make sense that Cory would do that for one, and not everyone else. What happened to the whole 'bad things have to happen so good things can'?"

"Juan," Sammy started, "his story isn't mine to tell, but I will say this: To say he's been through hell and I do mean *REAL* hell, is not even beginning to describe it. You had it easy, and so did I, and most everyone here, compared to what he lived in. You don't get it, though; it's not that Cory just swore to protect Joel - it's *JOEL* that made it different. Cor promises to protect everyone, but not everyone is Joel. The 'bad things happen' thing, well he's had his lifetimes' fill of them, and let's leave it at that."

"I HAD IT EASY?!?!?! You don't even know any of what I've been through! There are a shit load of us that had our 'lifetimes full of bad things' happen!" Juan may have been close to losing it, but everyone that knew him knew he was keeping his cool... just - His eyes were still black.

Sammy's eyes blazed for a moment as he took a step towards Juan, then they died softly to his normal deep brown as he looked at Juan sadly. "Did you ever *KNOW*, and I mean deep down with every single part of your being *KNOW*, that there was no way out from your hell? Did you know that you would be tortured, hurt, unloved, and miserable until you finally died? Did you know that for every moment, every day, every second of your life; waking or asleep? Cause I'll tell you one thing I've found, no matter what had happened every single kid who has told me anything has said that they could always hope that someday it would change. That someday those good things you talked about might happen or even could happen. Joel *KNEW* it never could. Joel *DIDN'T EVER* have *ANY* hope at all. *EVER*, Juan. Nothing, can you or anyone else say that?"

Juan's eyes dropped to the floor as he held back the tears. He turned to leave the room, one word softly following him... "Yes."

Koth got up to follow him, but then found he could not move. Nor could Juan, who looked up in anguish at what was stopping him.

"TIME SPEAKES!"

It was the Doctor. The ten-year-old-seeming Time Lord was standing an inch from him and his eyes... his eyes blazed with the age of the very stars.

"There are only a handful in creation that have lived without hope. I am saddened to say that I now know two of them," the ageless boy stated firmly, his voice ringing throughout the room and echoing down Time. He gathered Juan to him and held him tight against his chest, and, after a moment, Juan's arms came up to hug the Doctor in return. The Doctor continued to speak, and his words echoed with an Authority that not even Mikey had ever dared use, "I never wish to hear such an argument again. All have suffered hell - each in his own way. El'Runi'm never lays a burden on a shoulder that cannot take it. Each has suffered only so much that they could bear - but in some cases, the pain and loneliness is so much that it almost feels beyond breaking point. Such a pair are Juan and Joel. In Juan's case, the pain

caused a wound. That wound needs to be healed. In Joel's, it purified him... but weakened him. Juan will not be whole until he is healed and until he learns to lean on his Support, Koth. Joel will never be whole without his Strength, without Kevin. Let me ever hear a pissing match like this again, even one unintended and born out of love, and *I* shall Call 'The Endings' - that I swear. You are ALL brothers. SUPPORT one another."

He then raised Juan's face and looked into his hurting eyes, "I shall answer your question, Little Heart - You asked why Cory would do something for one and not the other? He would not. All are equal. He would say as much for you if you were to tell him all that I know you have been through. But the difference in this case is that while Cory would swear to destroy the Universe to avenge *you*, he could not be empowered to accomplish that vow. You are not Ki'Melai, the Shaper. Joel is. He does not control his gift, but it acted when Cory made his vow of vengeance. If Joel suffers again at the hands of another, deliberately and with malice on their part, then Cory is empowered to bring the Ending. We, the High Races, do not know HOW that would happen, but it would... or could. Destiny is a mystery, Juan. Its power beyond what we can understand, never mind you, child of Earth. And the Shaper wields it. He is 'His' Shaper... he wields the power over Destiny that only El'Runi'm has until now."

The Doctor then walked the subdued boy back towards Sammy, and the Time Lord looked into Sammy's brown eyes, "You love Joel, and that is good. Don't stop, but don't think that he is the only one to have been through what he did. Don't protect him more than the others. Joel would not want that. He is an embodiment of Love that thinks of all others before himself. Honour that. Here," he smiled, passing the shaking Juan over and into Sammy's arms. "Love your brother, Heart of Gold."

Sammy, his eyes streaming tears of regret at unintentionally hurting Juan, wrapped his arms around the smaller boy. "I'm so sorry, Juan. I shouldn't have said that... I'm so sorry... I didn't know...." He then hugged the boy even tighter, and said raggedly through his tears, "I would never hurt you, Juan, please believe that, please. I... Juan, I love you so much." A bright blue glow infused the room as everyone there could feel him sending out the love he held for the younger boy to him. He wrapped the hurting child in that love and tried to show, in more than words ever could, just how important Juan was to him.

Juan still couldn't raise his eyes off the floor; he refused to let anyone see him cry if he could help it. He knew that Sammy hadn't meant to hurt him, but... but Juan had let slip something about himself he had hoped to hide from everyone. He could tell that even Adam had been shocked to hear what Juan had said. He would deal with that later, because the pure love that was wrapped around him right now, sent to him by Sammy, was making it even harder to keep control. He needed to leave. "I.. I know Sammy," he said barely above a whisper. "I know you didn't mean to hurt me. I know you love me... but... but I gotta go." His voice cracked as he felt his control slipping. "Please... please let me go."

"Juan..." Sammy whispered

The Doctor touched Sammy's cheek, "I'll take it from here, Sammy." Then he sent to Sammy's mind through his touch, *'He needs his pride.'*

The Doctor then gathered Juan under one arm and held out his hand for Koth. Once the Klingon had taken it, all three Folded away.

A second later, the Doctor returned and smiled, "They'll be back in shortly." He then gestured to Sammy as he sat down.

The noise in the room began to pick back up as Sammy walked over and sat down next to the small ginger Time Lord. He took the Doctor's hand and sent, *'Why'd he leave? What have I done?'*

'Juan has very few things he treasures, apart from his weapons. His family, his new-found hope... and his pride. His pride was one of the few things he ever had that was truly his own. He doesn't like others to see him cry. Maybe he'll learn about the strength he can get by opening up that way, but each of us learns that at our own pace. It took me three millennia, so Juan has time,' the Doctor responded.

'But...I hurt him, John. I hurt someone I care about a lot and I didn't mean too. You think it was a pissing contest, that I put Joel above him but I didn't mean it that way. I was only trying to get him to see what I could without telling him anything of Joel as it's not my place. I...they said Joel was unique in that only he never had hope or any dream of getting out. I didn't know,' Sammy said tears still falling. *'I didn't know.'*

'Until Juan said it, neither did I. When he said it, knowledge filled my mind, Sammy. Things are dark for me here right now, so I was unaware he was that much like Joel. I know you did not mean it, and so does he, I promise you. It came out like a pissing contest, but it was not done out of malice. No one here thinks that. Don't second guess yourself, please. You had the best intentions. Our Unit brothers don't really know much about the Shaper. To be fair, neither do you; but you know a lot more than they do - enough to be rightfully afraid about what can happen. But here is something to lay those fears to rest somewhat - Joel is 'God's Shaper', to use the Human terms. HE is in control... so, the question is - who do you trust?' the Doctor smiled as he kissed Sammy's cheek.

'I'll try, John, I just...it frightens me that I did that even without meaning to. Thank you for being here and I do trust Joel with everything in me, and Him too' he sent back.

The Doctor grinned and kissed Sammy's nose. He then said aloud, "You have a big surprise coming, shortly. Get ready to have a grin on your face, kiddo... oh, and eat a lot of fruit... you're going to need the energy!"

"Huh?" Sammy asked curiously.

"Wait and see..." the Doctor giggled.

Levi's giggles at Sammy's expression did not help any. "You'll like it, Sammy; my Friend says so!"

Sammy just shook his head and smiled as he said, "I suppose it won't do any good to give you my famous puppy dog eyes, will it?"

"Oh, sometimes... just not this time... you're going to have a purrrfect day..." then he Folded away; laughing.

"I give up, all these great new powers and I can't find out anything; wonder if finding the Christmas presents will be any easier this year," Sammy said giggling.

Vishnu looked over at him from his plate of raw beef, and blushed slightly.

Sammy didn't notice...

Meanwhile, a howling Trip had returned to the room leading a laughing Allen and a still Purple-Winged and Halo-topped and completely disgusted Cory.

"What in..." Amanda started to say before laughing softly at the face Cory was pulling at her.

"Have you seen that soon-to-be-dead-Mikyvis, Dylan?" he asked, looking around the room.

Trip, meanwhile, was still choking on his laughter.

"No, we have not," T'Pol stated calmly, as if seeing purple-winged teenagers was a daily happening. "Although I do not believe I have had the pleasure, but in any case, I have seen no other since we came into this room."

Sarek chose that moment to break the meld with Kevin, then he blinked at Cory.

Kevin fell off Sarek's lap, clutching at his ribs as he laughed.

Before Cory could say anything, Spock finished his joint meld with his son and just stared at Cory.

"Wow! You look so pretty!" Joel exclaimed in awe as he ran over to climb into his brother's arms and smiled happily at him. "Oh, wow! So pretty!"

Cory smiled as he snuggled Joel. "I'm glad you like them - but Dylan is STILL in for it!"

Dylan then appeared in the room and giggled, "I just wanted EVERYONE to see the pretty wings, Uncle Cory!" He waved his hand and the wings vanished, then so did he as Cory started his way.

"CHICKEN!" Cory yelled.

"Well," Trip said as his laughter subsided, "I've never heard of a chicken-skinned rug, have you?"

"There is always a first time...." Cory grumbled as he resumed his Joel-cuddles.

Sarek smiled at the two brothers as they hugged in the middle of the room, then said quietly, "Cory; I need to meld with my little grandson for a moment. May I interrupt your bonding for the amount of time I need to accomplish that?"

"Of course, Grandfather," Cory replied with a smile. "I need to see if Kev has been paying attention in the cuddling lessons Joel has been giving him anyways."

Joel giggled as Cory kissed him, walked across the room and gently lowered him onto his grandfather's lap.

Kevin was already standing there, still giggling slightly, with his arms raised up in a classic 'Timmy-pose' waiting for HIS turn at Cory-snuggles.

Sarek smiled again as the one he considered to be the best Patriarch he had ever met started to bond with another of his family before he looked Joel in the eye. He raised his hand and started to meld with Joel.

"What is happening?" Allen asked curiously as he walked over to ruffle Kevin's hair.

"Dunno, Poppa," Kevin answered honestly as he enjoyed the back rubs he was getting while being hugged by Cory. "Grandfather just said he needed to meld. Dunno why."

They all made themselves comfortable as they waited for Sarek to finish. It did not take long.

The reaction FROM Sarek, however, was not expected at all. Joel was placed gently into Amanda's lap as the pale faced Patriarch rose to his feet. He looked at Cory and said, "I will have this repaired."

Before Cory could ask what was needing to BE repaired, Sarek picked up the coffee table and destroyed the door with it.

"Don't worry about it; Dylan is on repair duty... he just doesn't know it yet," Cory stated with understanding.

As Sarek turned back to face the room, Joel quailed back in Amanda's arms for an instant. Then, he leapt off Amanda's lap and slammed into Sarek's waist. "You scared me, Grandpa," he trembled.

"I am sorry, Sa'ren. What you suffered..." the now very old seeming Vulcan whispered out as he lifted his grandson up and almost crushed him to his chest.

Cory waited a few moments before coughing lightly. "Why was I asked to be here, Grandfather?" he asked as he watched Joel be lowered back to his feet.

"I am just as curious," Allen also stated diffidently, for witnessing a mildly irritated Vulcan vent was never something he took easily.

Sarek nodded at them as he watched Joel slip onto Cory's lap to snuggle with Kevin. "I have just been through both boys' histories, and I have determined that they have already faced and passed what kahswan tests for. They have both faced what they feared was their death, and yet have survived. They have both gone further than most Vulcans would. If they ask it, I and Patriarch Cory shall review all that I have gathered from them both to determine if they should be joined as life-partners or not."

Kevin and Joel stared first at Sarek, then at each other. Slow grins started on both their faces. As one, they each looked to their own father. Spock nodded at Joel, just as Allen smiled at Kevin.

"Yes, please!" they both chorused, their faces alight with large smiles as they slipped from Cory's lap to begin bouncing around in a circle, their hands linked. "Please!"

'I need a Mikyvis on standby in my head... NOW...' Cory sent out as he nodded his head in agreement.

'I've got ya covered, Uncle Cory,' Dylan's voice replied seriously. 'Vicky, Poppa and the other Empaths are getting ready to help too,' he added after a second, followed by an almost whispered, 'We love you, Uncle.'

Sarek gently helped the now serious yet pale faced Cory stand. "This shall not be pleasant, my beloved grandson. However, I shall be with you every step of the way. We shall take our time, and I shall do all I am able to assist you."

"And I shall make myself available to you as well, my son," Spock added as he moved to hug Cory from behind.

"That is well done, Spock," Sarek stated. "Please maintain a hold on our Cory while he sees this."

As Sarek raised his hand to start the meld, Cory felt both his hands taken. He knew without looking that Joel was now on one side and Kevin on the other. He focused his thoughts briefly on them both, and felt his love raise up - if they could LIVE through what he was about to see, then he WOULD witness it. They deserved THAT much.

'God, please help me,' he prayed quickly as he felt Sarek's finger find those points on his face and forehead.

His answer was what he could swear was a breeze that seemed to ruffle his hair for the smallest of moments, then he felt Sarek's loving presence fill his mind...

When he again saw the room he was in, Cory looked down at the two small boys still at his side. They still held his hands tightly, and Spock was still holding him firmly.

Cory slipped to his knees and, sobbing, pulled both waifs into a crushing grip.

Joel nuzzled his face against Cory's as he felt hot tears drip onto his neck, "Don't cry, Blondie. Please don't cry."

Cory pulled his face back, and with more conviction than anyone had ever heard in his voice stated, "If anyone ever tries to hurt you even a tenth of what either of you went through, I swear that I will destroy the Universe to avenge you if that is what it takes."

Joel's eyes widened as a shimmering echo came, making him tremble. He saw that everyone else also felt something, and he knew that he had done something again. "Ummm..." he whispered fearfully.

"What was that?" Trip asked.

The Doctor Folded suddenly into the room, bottomless and holding his privates tenderly. "Okay, who the hell promised something and made the Shaper make me spill hot chocolate on my nuts?!" he said painfully as his eyes watered. "I'm just glad Kyle made my shorts vanish that fast!"

Kevin looked at the poor Doctor, then said seriously, "Cory's just seen me and Sa'r's experiences, Doc. He was a bit... upset. He promised to destroy the universe if anyone makes us hurt even a little like what we've already been through."

The Doctor stopped holding his privates and stared in shock at Cory. "Well," he stated finally. Then a pause. "Ummm... Hell, I don't know what to say. Good luck with Armageddon, I think fits!"

After another pause, "On second thoughts - Joel?"

"Yeah, Galli?"

"I'm wrapping you and Kevin in cotton wool and hiding you in the Tardis!"

Then he Folded away again, after another long look at Cory.

Joel sighed, then kissed Cory's cheek softly. "I'm gonna be okay, my big brother. Don't do anything to hurt anyone 'cos of me."

"Little bro, you are my brother forever, and I'm claiming the big brother's right to protect you," Cory replied softly.

Joel smiled and again nuzzled his face against Cory's, while Kevin did the same from the other side. Sarek left them there for a while, and went to stand in the corner to think.

Cory suddenly realised something, and whispered to his Lil'elf, "You're feeling calmer. What's changed?"

Joel smiled, "Daddy. He taught me how to use my abilities, and he also showed me how to close the doors on my remembered emotions. I just feel what I feeling now - and not everything else I've ever felt as well all at the same time. I can remember the emotions if I wanna, but I don't have to."

"So you don't remember what happened to you?" Kevin asked curiously.

Joel answered, "Not like that. I remember the events, and I remember that I felt scared or afraid or lonely or whatever in those events. I just don't feel the physical pain when I think on them any more, nor do I feel the emotions all the time. I remember I had them, but I don't feel them unless I want to."

Cory sighed and said, "That's so good, Joel. At least now you can build your happy emotions. And if you want, you could keep feeling the good ones, right?"

"Uh huh, right! Right now, I'm remembering yesterday morning," he nodded, then grinned with a side long look at Kevin, "You know, in the showers when we..."

"I get it!" Kevin giggled as he started to colour up.

Sarek came back and looked down at the three boys at that point. He said to both Kevin and Joel, "Patriarch Cory and I have come to our decision. Are you both ready to hear it?"

Both boys turned in Cory's arms and nodded, although Kevin was curious. "I don't mind Cory making the decision with you, Grandfather, but I was wondering: why couldn't you do it all yourself?"

"Patriarchs of Houses do not make the judgement regarding marriage. It is the senior Family Patriarch or Matriarch who does so. I am acting as the head of Sa'ren's Family," Sarek said with a slight smile. "Since Sub-Clan Short of my Family no longer exists, I cannot also make that judgement for you, Kevin. You are in my House, but you are not right now in my Family. Your Family Patriarch is Cory. Cory himself is in my Family, but he is Head of a separate Family."

"Oh. Okay," the boy answered with a smile.

"Do you wish to speak first, Brother Patriarch?" Sarek asked Cory politely.

"I must bow to you as I compose my emotions, Patriarch," Cory replied seriously.

Sarek nodded and laid a hand on Cory's shoulder briefly. He then sat down with the three boys on the floor and looked into Joel's eyes. "My grandson. I have reviewed your personality and life, and I have seen your hopes and dreams. Even if you believe you have none and that they have been 'taken' from you, you do hold in your heart desires that you have every right to. I believe that you shall find the strength to act on your dreams with Kevin Charles David Thompson. He is that which is missing within you, and the strength you shall need to walk the path before you. I believe that you and he shall become one, and be a rock upon which your brothers and sisters shall ever be able to depend. I am proud of you, and honoured to have you as my grandson and heir - and it is with great pleasure that I accept Kevin as your bond-mate for life, should Patriarch Cory agree."

Both boys were crying softly as they hugged together on Cory's lap as the older teen sat cross legged on the floor. Once Sarek had finished speaking, they turned their eyes to Cory's, and naked hope and pleading was clearly visible in them by the blond Patriarch.

Cory looked between the two boys on his lap with sorrow for what they went through still present in the back of his eyes. "Through your short lives you have experienced actions which only one of your brothers has a chance of truly understanding. Kevin, I have watched as you have grown into the caring young man we all know instead of the scared child we rescued. Based on what I now know, there will be a request made of the Vulcan Council for the Vulcan equivalent of a Grand Jury to ensure a proper retribution. Despite all of this, you have matured and have proven yourself worthy of consideration. You are the strength which completes Sa'ren Joel Short, and he is the courage that completes you, and with that in mind I approve of the proposed marriage and hereby accept Sa'ren as your bond-mate for life."

Trip giggled, and said, "You may now kiss," just as both little boys did so.

Sarek was about to formalize the bonding when he had an idea. He rose to his feet and said, "I believe the Clan is currently in the Dining Room, Cory?"

"They are," Cory answered with a mute smile.

"Please follow me," Sarek addressed them all, and quickly they did so.

Juan and Koth cuddled for over an hour, and it was only their stomachs' rumbling that brought them to the point of wanting food.

"You feeling better?" Koth whispered as Juan sat up straighter.

Juan nodded mutely. "A little," he whispered, not taking Koth's gaze. "I'm hungry, let's eat... if there's anything left."

A flicker by the door made them both look over quickly. "There is. In fact, the party still hasn't started," the Doctor said with a soft smile. "You've only been here two minutes."

Koth smiled, and slowly, so did Juan. Juan got up and went towards the Doctor. Once he reached him, he hugged him tightly. After he pulled back, he looked into the Doctor's eyes and said hesitantly, "You know, don't you?"

"I do. Everything; now, at least," the Doctor nodded seriously as Koth joined them. "It's yours to tell, little one, not mine. Don't worry, sweetheart, it'll work out. Come on - I'm just as hungry as you... we old people like our food, you know!"

Juan giggled mutely, "How old are you?"

"Over a billion years... or over seven billion... depends how you look at it," came the giggled response as they opened the door and trooped out and back into the Dining Room.

Juan and Koth separated from the Doctor at the table, and they both moved to sit near to Adam again. As soon as they sat down, a group of adults, two children and one teenager came into the room.

Everyone there eating became silent and turned to see Joel and Kevin grinning, with the others behind them. Apart from the Vulcans, they were all smiling. At first, most assumed that the real Birthday Party was about to start, but then Sarek started to speak. "Justin, can you start the recording, please?"

"On it, Grandpa," he said as he double tapped his communicator. "Go ahead, Patriarch."

The Vulcan raised his voice and stated clearly, "As of Earth Date 28th October 2004, Patriarch Cory and I do recognise the union between Sa'ren Joel Short of the Family of Sarek and Kevin Charles David Thompson of the Family 'Clan Short'. They are now Bonded according to the Laws and Traditions of Vulcan, and also recognised as such by the Laws of the United Federation of Planets."

Kevin and Joel began kissing yet again, and both had happy tears rolling down their faces.

As everyone began to cheer, Sarek knelt down before both boys and placed his fingers on their faces. Joel and Kevin looked at him curiously at first, then their eyes widened in wonder. They quickly turned back to each other once Sarek's fingers broke contact with them and the wonder in their eyes increased.

"I... I can feel you," Kevin whispered softly as he raised his hand to Joel's cheek. "I can feel you..."

"I... is this a Bond-Link, Grandpa?" Joel asked softly, not taking his eyes from his life-mate's.

"It is," Sarek said as he stood. "Now, I believe, is the time for you to both eat and celebrate."

They were quickly grabbed by half a dozen pairs of hands and pulled quickly to their places at the tables. Cory smiled at them, then found the one he was now looking for seated with Adam, Logan and Chang. He walked over quickly, "Jory, do you have a half hour or so to spare?"

Jory smiled up at him as the Patriarch came to a stop by his seat, "Sure, Cory. What's up?"

"I feel the need to make some loud booms, and to launch some palm trees into orbit... again," Cory said seriously, and the look in his eyes told Jory more than words could.

"Not a problem," Jory said just as seriously, "Come on."

As they both left the room, Jory was heard calling Daileass on his communicator to beam over the 'special stock'.

Teri stood up, "Okay. Youngest first - help yourselves, guys, and Happy Birthday Jude and Joel!" she smiled as she pointed at the groaning tables around the room and even those still inside the Kitchen.

Joel and Kevin decided that the mass stampede for food might be hazardous to their health, and so remained comfortably seated.

Within five minutes, however, everyone had their plates full, and were spacing themselves out through the Dining Room and Rec Room. Adam and Logan and their brothers had managed to get a low table in an out of the way corner of the Rec Room, and had settled down to eat. Adam and Logan were mentally talking over what happened with Juan. Adam thought he knew almost everything about Juan, but now it seems he didn't know half of it. Juan still seemed to be very distant since the earlier incident, but Adam knew that now was not the time to confront him about it.

Korris looked up from next to Chang and waved, "Joel; can you come over here, little bro?"

Joel and Kevin walked in, supporting an overflowing plate of food between them, and grinned. They trotted over to the group, and Joel asked, "Yeah, Korris?"

Korris looked around at the others, "It cool for them to join us?"

Adam grinned, "Of course. We all have to thank you anyway, Joel. Sit, sit."

It was lucky that Kevin had taken over holding the large plate, for Joel dropped to his butt instantly on hearing Adam say it. The little Vulcan's face looked pensive as he regarded Adam carefully.

Everyone was a bit quiet after seeing Joel sit so abruptly. Most weren't sure what was going on until Juan's soft voice was heard, "He didn't mean that as an order, Joel. He doesn't give orders unless we're into something military like." Joel looked at Juan, and saw something that he saw in very few others eyes... true understanding. Juan didn't pity Joel, it wouldn't be right in Juan's mind, but he understood.

Joel nodded slowly before looking up at Adam's serious face. "Sorry, Adz... it sounded like an order."

"You do know you don't have to obey orders, don't you, Joel?" Koth asked from Juan's other side.

"Yeah, but my heart doesn't," Joel trembled as Kevin placed the plate of food down quickly and sat quickly to cuddle him. "If Cory ordered me, I'd obey and that's okay, 'cos Cor'd never tell me to do something unless he knew it was right. If others tell me stuff, though, then I just do it 'cos..." he trailed off as his eyes went far away. He whispered softly, "...'cos it's better to do something someone says, even if it hurts and hurts, 'cos if I disobeyed, it'd hurt so worse... I don't want to die..." he breathed so quietly that only the fact he was linked to Kevin allowed his new husband to know what he had said. The others had no problem, being enhanced or alien, or simply linked to another who was enhanced.

No one really knew what to say, other than Juan who was silently nodding. Finally Adam spoke trying to let the tension die out. "Joel, the worst that would happen from one of us is a tickle attack... maybe 'wet willy' or three. But nothing worse. Okay?"

Joel smiled then and his face lightened considerably. "I like tickles... but - what's a wet willy? Is that another name for the blow-job Kevin's been thinking of giving me for the past ten minutes?"

Kevin started blushing to the point that all the others could see was red.

No one could do anything other than fall over laughing. Logan was taking a drink of juice at that moment, so Joel got a shower from it.

Chang, who was actually smiling at the moment, let out with one of his rare jokes, "Well. there's a 'wet Vulcan' - does that count?"

Joel blinked in shock at the sudden shower. "That wasn't quite the answer I was expecting," he stated quietly as he pulled his damp Vulcan robe off and dried his face with it. Underneath, he was still naked from the Naming Ceremony on Vulcan. Once he'd finished he tossed the robe into the corner and glanced around at the others. "I'm thinking that wasn't a 'wet willy'... and going by Kevvy's protests in my head, I don't think it's a blow job either. So, what is it?" the now naked cherub asked curiously.

Will, who was seated right next to Joel, took one of his fingers, put it in his mouth. He then shoved it, gently, into the little Vulcan's ear and wiggled it around. "That's a wet willy," he grinned.

"EWWWWW!!!! EEEEWWWWW!!!!" Joel yelled as he fell over onto the still blushing Kevin's lap. "Urrgh! That's gross!!!" he giggled as he used Kevin's hands to protect his ears.

Again, everyone at the table broke up laughing. It wasn't until Adam could get himself back under control that anyone said anything. "Joel... since it's your birthday, we got you a few things. Do you want them now or later?" Adam asked, still chuckling.

Joel's eyes showed puzzlement as he sat up from Kevin's lap, "You got me things? Why?"

"Birthday presents, Sa'r," Kevin whispered to him with a smile. "Like this morning."

Joel's face took on a weird expression - something between the natural excitement of a child having the time of his life and worthlessness. Worthlessness started to win as he said softly, "You don't need to get me nuffin'. You're here and being nice to me and making me giggle and making me feel good. I don't deserve nuffin' more... I don't even deserve th..."

Kevin interrupted Joel in the easiest manner possible. He kissed him. Then: "You are MY boyfri.... uh, husband!" he said with a giggle. "If I say you're worth a party and presents, then you ARE!"

Joel nodded sheepishly, then started blushing as he looked down at himself. "Keeevvv! You made it stand up again!"

Kevin looked down and giggled. "Later... presents, food... then 'play'..." he whispered with a wink.

Even Chang laughed that time; he couldn't hold it in any more. Finally Adam pushed a large wrapped box across to Joel. "Here you go... we hope you like it."

Joel smiled cutely as he accepted the box and placed it between himself and Will. He glanced up at Will and asked, "You wanna help me open it? It's fun when people help!"

Will giggled and nodded, "Sure!"

Together they ripped off the paper, which Will balled up and threw it to bounce off Logan's head. Joel giggled as the ball came bouncing back at them and opened the box.

His jaw dropped open and tears sprang to his eyes. "Clothes... you bought me clothes..." he whispered, gratitude clearly heard in his treble voice.

Will helped Joel pull the clothes out of the box, then held up the uniform top. "This is not just clothes," Adam said seriously, "This is a Uniform worn by the Unit; worn by only those that are family."

Joel blinked happily at him through his tears. "Thank you," he whispered again. "All of you."

When they got to the bottom of the box, Will pulled out a small pair of bright pink 'G-sting' underwear. In unison, all those from the Unit cried out, "JUAN!!!!"

Ronnie couldn't help but giggle out, "You told me you wanted those for Koth!!!"

"Oops! Sorry, Joel! Those are not for you!" Juan gasped, his face going scarlet as he snatched them from Will's hand and hid them in his pocket.

Koth was also blushing, but a strange grin was on his face as he regarded his blushing boyfriend. Over his shoulder, he said, "Not a fucking word, Korris. Not one!"

Joel just giggled as he pulled on the uniform shirt with Will's help, "Never mind, not my colour... ummm... I better get a pair of boxers before I put the rest on..."

"You want mine?" Juan asked while standing up, reaching for his belt buckle.

Janet quickly put her hands on his shoulders and pushed him back down. "No Juan, I'm sure Joel has his own." Adam and Logan could only shake their heads.

Joel smiled at them then called out, "BIG TED!"

"Yeah, Elf?" Sean called back.

"Are my 'giggle-boxers' still about from last night?"

"Umm... ah, yeah. Levi's got them on... hold on, he's on his way!"

Joel turned just in time to see Levi pop in, a pair of boxers on his head as a hat. "Here, Uncle Joel! I got them warmed up for you!" he said with a smile as he took them off his head.

"Thanks, Lil'mouse," Joel kissed Levi's cheek before the Mikyvis vanished again. He then slipped them on, this time with Kevin's help... not that Joel needed help, but... Kids!

Will was fighting to keep a straight face as he helped Joel into the rest of the uniform, for the little Vulcan was now so excited he could barely keep still. Once he was fully dressed in Unit style, he turned and ran around the low table to sit on Adam's lap and give him a large hug of thanks. "I love them! They're really comfy and don't itch and.... do I look nice in them??" he bubbled a mile a minute in between pecking kisses onto Adam's cheeks and forehead.

Billy couldn't help but giggle out, "Well, he's got as much military discipline as an excited cocker spaniel puppy..."

Before Adam could reply, Chang had stood up, in his hands a long, hand made wooden box. "Yes you do; however, I do not believe you are properly attired as of yet. You have your uniform, but now, you need your weapons. You may not ever need to use them, and I hope that you never do, but it is ill advised to be unprepared if the situation arises. First I would offer you something that is hand made by myself. If you will honour me by accepting it."

Most were shocked as few had ever heard Chang speak that much at once.

Joel looked up at the tall boy before giving Adam one more kiss. He stood and, to everyone's surprise, bowed formally to Chang - in fact, Chang was impressed by his knowledge of custom and tradition. Joel then said in full Vulcan mode, which was the closest to Chang's own idiom that he could approximate, "I would be glad to accept your gift. And, if it is not impertinent to ask, would you also teach me to use whatever my gift from you is?"

Chang bowed as well, while holding the box out to him, waiting for Joel to open the lid and see what is inside. "Of course I would, but I have feeling you will know how to use this better than I."

Joel raised an eyebrow and looked so much like his father that Korris started to chuckle. The little Vulcan lifted the lid of the box and gasped in wonder, "A trillpa'morov? You *made* this? Oh, oh... thank you..."

He removed the blade from the beautifully carved box and unsheathed it in one fluid motion. He seemed to pause for the briefest of seconds before backing away slightly so as to give himself room. Joel then began what the two Klingons there and Chang recognised as the stately forms of Suus Mahna. He flowed slowly from one stance to another, the blade tracing a slow arc around him as he did so.

Korris noted that he was hesitant in the motions, but the style was that of only a Master. This was Spock's training. "How do you know to do this, Joel?" he asked as he rose to his feet.

Without pausing, Joel answered and his voice was emotionless, "My father. We mind-melded and his abilities passed to me. This is the first time I have put this into practice - a given since I have only known these skills for a little under three hours."

He finished the last of the forms, and re-sheathed the blade. He then rolled his right shoulder and winced as a small pop was heard as his joints clicked. "I think I need practice." He then looked up into Chang's eyes and smiled in gratitude. He then bowed before formality fell away and he hugged the taller boy tightly. "Thank you. I think it is wonderful! You're a master swords-smith!"

Chang had a small smile on his face as released the boy, closed the box, and set it gently on the table. "Yes, you will need more practice to make sure your muscles learn to do what you mind already knows. I think, however, that you will learn quickly." With that, Chang bowed again before sitting down.

Will took that opportunity to come over, and place an arm around the little birthday boy. "So, tell me, helicopter or Jet fighter?"

Joel thought for a moment, then shrugged. "Harrier Jump-jet... hey, I was raised in 'A' Wales, UK, you know!" he poked his tongue out at Kevin who had obviously said something down their bond-link.

Will grinned, as he tussled the boys hair. "Okay... I'm gonna need a bit, but I'll let Cory know that a Harrier is gonna be landing here soon, and that I'll be taking you for a ride."

"Really? In a REAL Harrier!?! Wow! Thanks!" Joel bubbled as he bounced happily. Then a comical look came over his face. "Uh," he looked around at them all. "I know Adz... but I've been getting gifts from people I don't know. What's your names?"

This caused a load of giggles, and Will roared with laughter before pulling Joel in for a hug. Eventually he managed to point out all of them, and said, "And I'm Will."

Joel smiled up at him, then asked again, "Uh... I love the gifts... but I need to know why you're giving them to me? You've only just met me."

Adam smiled up at him from his seat on the floor and opened his arms. Joel quickly slipped onto Adam's lap, and the older teen explained, "You helped Korris and Koth last night. That's one. In doing so, you helped my brother Chang - Korris' boyfriend and now life-partner. We have a family wedding soon because of what you did, Joel. Second, you are one of our brothers, and all brothers and sisters get presents. Together, that's why you are having these particular gifts."

Joel wiped a tear from his eyes and trembled, "I did that 'cos it was right to do it... but thank you. I love you."

Adam smiled and Logan pulled the boy over to give him a hug as well. "Here," Logan said, as he pressed a small parcel into Joel's hands. "This is from me."

Joel sniffed lightly as he opened it. Logan could tell that Joel really didn't know what was in the box, so he explained. "It's called an I-pod. When you figure out what kind of music you like, you can put all your favourite songs in there, and listen to them when ever you want. If you can't figure it out, just let me know, and I'll show you."

"Oh!" Joel smiled and giggled. "Thanks! This is going to be sooo cool!"

Korris then drew the small Vulcan's attention to himself. "Koth and I have decided that we wish to honour you as well, Joel. Here," he said as he handed over a well made but old looking Bat'leth. "This was our father's. I believe he would be honoured for you to carry it and, once trained, use it."

Joel trembled as he took the large weapon into his hands. "I shall do honour by this, Korris," he said reverently. "I shall keep it and honour it all the days of my life."

Korris bowed his head and smiled. Koth then moved over and held out a pair of old Mek'leth blades. "These were also our father's. Like Kor said, I think Father would love you to have them. You helped his children, and have done so in honour. So, we honour you."

Joel was in a flood of tears as he took them and laid them with the Bat'leth. He was beyond words, and Logan held him tighter as he cried quietly - this time, it was just an overload of joy and happiness.

Juan shuffled over and sat next to Logan as he waited for Joel to calm down, waiting to give his own gifts. As they all watched Joel recover, Jory and Cory appeared in the room. Both had full plates of food, and were laughing at the fun and explosions they had just enjoyed. Jory ran over to join his brothers while Cory waved at them before heading off to look for Sean.

Jory slipped in next to Kevin and whispered, "Presents already?"

Kevin nodded mutely, for his own mind rang with the emotions coming down his link with Joel.

"I'll wait," he giggled before falling into his meal with gusto.

Eventually, Joel raised his head and kissed Logan. "Thank you. I like your hugs... they make my belly feel good," he whispered with a ghost of a smile.

"Cool... is it my turn?" Jory asked. When no one said no, he jumped up and ran over to Joel. "Okay... I think you'll really like what I got you," he pulled a box out of his bag and handed it to him. Once Joel opened the box, he pulled out a long box with many different switches on the top. When Joel looked up at Jory questioningly, Jory explained. "Tonight I'll put together a very special fireworks show. However, what you have in your hands right now, is the control for those fireworks. When I tell you to, you flip those switches as slow or as fast as you want. Each switch controls one of the fireworks."

Joel's eyes opened wide. "Fireworks?" he breathed in excitement. "You... you mean those things that shoot up and make pretty pictures and loud bangs in the sky? Like at Cory and Sean's wedding?? AND I gets to make them go boom??"

"Yup," Jory answered grinning himself. "The best part is, there are forty switches on the box. Once you go through all of them once, you'll have to go back through them all again... then... you have one more shot at all of them again. Think you can handle that?"

"120 times? WOW! Lots of pictures!!! THANKS!" he yelled in joy, and damn near strangled Jory as he hugged him tightly... at least, if Jory had been a 'normal', non-enhanced boy, he'd have been strangled.

Juan stood up, and nervously stepped forward, "Uhh.. Joel... I have something for you too. Well.. actually two things. I'm not very good at giving presents, so.. uh.. here." He quickly pushed a box into Joel's hands.

Joel smiled as he opened the box and withdrew a pair of daggers. They were well made, and heavy. Logan whispered in his ear, "Those were given to Juan by Adam not long after Adam rescued him, Joel. They mean a lot to Juan, and it is his way of saying 'thank you' for helping his boyfriend, Koth."

Joel hadn't taken his eyes off the blades in his hand as he listened to Logan. Without looking up, he said, "Juan... I... Thank you. I'll take care of them for you... they will be looked after, same as Koth's and Korris' Daddy's weapons. I promise."

Before Joel could look back up at him, Juan quickly pulled out the small wooden flute he brought with him. Very few people knew that Juan had taught himself to play this over the last few months. He found the sound of it to be very relaxing, and a nice change from the hard and heavy music he usually listened to. Now, though, a song came to his mind that he knew he needed to play.

Joe was the one who first introduced Juan to the wooden flute, and this song in particular, and after seeing how Joel acted, and KNOWING what made him act that way, Juan thought this song might help him as much as it had helped *him* when Joe first sang it.

He put the flute to his lips, and started to play a very slow and haunting tune. All eyes were on Juan, but he had his eyes closed, he knew he wouldn't be able to handle it if he saw everyone watching him. None were more shocked at what was going on than Adam and his brothers. This was something else new that they didn't know about their little brother. Joe for his part just sat there with a smile. He knew the song from the first note. After about a minute of playing, Juan dropped the flute from his lips, and began to sing in a very soft boy soprano.

"There was a boy
A very strange enchanted boy
They say he wandered very far, very far
Over land and sea
A little shy and sad of eye
But very wise was he"

"And then one day
This magic boy, he passed my way"

And we did speak of many things
Fools and kings
And this he said to me

"The greatest thing you'll ever learn
Is just to love and be loved in return"

As quickly as he could, Juan brought the flute back up, and started to play again. Putting as much feeling and emotion into the music as he could.

"And then one day
This magic boy, he passed my way
And we did speak of many things
Fools and kings
And this he said to me

"The greatest thing you'll ever learn
Is just to love and be loved in return"

He played a few more notes when he was done singing the second time, then let the flute fall from his lips one last time, head bowed down, and eyes still closed. Any of the empaths could feel the emotions falling off him right now. Among the Clan kids gathered around, Jed, C.J., and the McKendrick brothers had tears in their eyes, both for the beauty of Juan's performance and remembering the pivotal role that song had played in changing Jed and C.J.'s grandfather's attitude three days before.

Juan was about to turn and run from the room, and Koth was preparing to run and join him. However, one second his emotions were building beyond his ability to control, and the next, Juan found that they had lessened. He felt a pair of small hands take his own at the same moment, and he opened his eyes to look at Joel in shock.

Joel's eyes were filling with tears that Juan knew should be falling from him instead, but before he could say a word, Joel beat him to it. "You know, don't you," he whispered just loud enough for Juan to hear him. "I can feel it - you've been there, in that dark place." Joel raised himself up on his tip toes and continued to speak as he brought himself to eye level with Juan, "I know too. But we are not alone any more, Juan. Daddy helped me hide away the pain of my dark times. I remember them now, but I don't feel them the same as I used to. I can help you too, if you wanna... I can't take the dark place away, but I can show you how to only remember it but not feel it. If you wanna, I can show you how..."

Juan trembled for a moment, then whispered, "... yes... please. Please, help m..."

Joel's eyes widened in shock as Juan's eyes flashed yellow, but that was all he had time to do, for Juan threw Joel from himself violently. "GET AWAY FROM ME!" came a bestial, fearful scream from what had moments before been a trembling, near-tearful boy.

All Joel knew was that he was heading towards the wall at a 'not-nice' speed, and that he was having trouble breathing. His father's training, however, came to his rescue and he twisted painfully mid-air and managed to bounce from the wall and onto his feet without further injury. He saw that Kevin was in shock, and that Juan's brothers had already sprung to their feet to surround the now violent boy.

Juan seemed beyond reason. His yellow eyes were showing a clear emotion - panic. Death was coming... fight or flight. Will and Jory were soon on their asses after Juan had slammed their heads together hard, and Adam found himself on his back. Although being the strongest, Juan's sudden fear had surprised him. He rolled to his feet and went back at Juan. This time, in concert with Chang, Adam began to circle the furiously enraged boy.

Joel saw that Juan was backing up towards Timmy and Ricky, who were watching in shock behind him. Joel couldn't let anyone get hurt, not by something that he himself must have caused.

The small Vulcan ran at Juan just as Juan again threw Adam.

"JOEL, NO!" Chang yelled, but it was too late.

Juan saw Joel coming and leapt at him, now fully intent on killing the threat.

In turn, Joel leapt at him, and they met mid-air.

Instead of slamming into Joel's chest and having his hands around Joel's throat, Juan found himself grasping empty air and having a light, small Vulcan latched onto his back. Juan began to turn his body to land with Joel beneath him when he felt a hand grip his neck... then nothing.

Joel felt the wind get knocked out of him, as well as his right shoulder be forced from its socket, when he landed with the remarkably heavy boy on top of him - an unconscious dead weight. Joel just groaned in pain as he gently pushed the now limp Juan off him with his good arm.

Chang was by the boys' sides in an instant, Adam was there as well. Chang went to Joel, as Adam started to pull all the various weapons from Juan's unconscious form. "I told him not to bring this many..." Adam muttered under his breath as he pulled out the fifth gun, and the seventh knife.

Chang had helped Joel to his feet, and was looking him over gently before speaking to the boy. "This will hurt, I must put your shoulder back into place. If you wish I can inject some pain suppressant?"

Everyone else was busy trying to calm everyone else down as the very brief fight brought almost the entire Clan running. Will and Jory were just now picking themselves up off the ground.

Joel simply shook his head to Chang's question, and, with a quick pull and pop, Chang re-set Joel's shoulder in his socket. Chang was only slightly surprised that the boy barely grunted as his shoulder was put back in place.

"What is going on here?" came a voice that held as much authority as any had heard before, and Adam turned to watch as Spock pushed his way through with Sarek, Amanda and a few others right behind him.

Adam quickly moved up to Spock after making sure that all of Juan's weapons were removed from the unconscious boy. "Captain, Ambassador, I am not sure why, but something triggered a part of Juan that only comes out when he is feeling threatened or is extremely angry. I take full responsibility, and will accept any repercussions that are needed," Adam spoke while standing at attention in front of the men and women.

Spock looked between the teen at attention, the unconscious Juan on the floor and then his son, who was having his chest checked out by Chang. He looked back into Adam's eyes and said, "This 'part' in the child on the ground - I take it that it is an alternate personality?"

Adam nodded quickly, "Yes sir."

"And that it only responds when your brother is threatened?"

"Correct, sir," Adam said, and out of the corner of his eyes he saw Cory and Sean push their way through to get to Joel, their faces pale.

"Very well," Spock said, and Adam could see him visibly relax. "Retribution is not called for here. Might I ask, is the boy treating my son qualified in medicine?"

Chang spoke from where he was treating Joel, "I assure you, Sir, I am a fully trained doctor, as well as certified in both emergency medicine, and emergency surgery. If you wish verification, I am sure that Dr. Hayes would be willing to attest to my level of training." During that, his eyes never left where he was working. "I am not very familiar Vulcan biology; however, from what I can tell he had a dislocated shoulder, which I have already performed a reduction on. He also has three broken ribs, which I would suggest be wrapped and left to heal."

Spock nodded. "I will take you on your word. Do not be concerned with my son's biology, for in regards to our skeletal structure, Vulcans and Humans are nearly identical. He has more ribs than you, and his bones are denser by at least three hundred percent than Human average, but that is the limit of the differences. Your treatment is therefore acceptable, and you have my thanks. I shall ask Doctor McCoy to assist in my son's healing when this problem with Juan has been solved, and I am sure he would talk with you as well regarding further Starfleet training should you wish it." Spock then drew Adam to one side and began to speak softly with him.

Cory looked at Chang and said, "THAT was high praise, bro. How's Elf?"

Chang raised an eyebrow at Cory's statement, but went quickly back to doctor mode, "I am fairly certain he will have no lasting ill effects from this." He then turned and looked directly at Joel, "I would suggest that you take things easy for a few days. If you wish, I am sure there are pain suppressors available; if you so choose."

Joel's smile was wane, "No, s'okay, Chang. Uncle Bones can heal them up in a few moments. Just no-one hug me 'til then..." He raised his nervous eyes to Chang's as he pressed himself back against Cory's chest, "How's Juan, and what's wrong with him? What did I do wrong?"

Chang sighed, "You did nothing wrong, little one. Juan has a problem in his mind. Because of some of the things that happened to him, he has a separate personality that deals with the stuff that the Juan we know can not. My hypothesis is that what ever you said to him caused this other personality to be scared enough that it took control, and was trying to stop what you wanted to do."

Cory squeezed Joel's uninjured shoulder and said, "Don't blame yourself, Joel. But please, next time try not to get involved with stopping one of the Unit boys if this type of thing happens. They are stronger than average, and some stronger than Vulcans."

Joel looked up at him, "Better me than Timmy and Ricky. I'm Vulcan. I can take more than they can. And I wasn't angry - logic over strength... that, and a nice nerve pinch. I'm going to talk to Daddy. Chang, can you come with me? I'll need your permission and Adz' as well."

"Of course," Chang said, then looked over at Adam who quickly nodded, and he waited near Spock until they got to him.

As soon as Joel came within reach, Spock lifted his hand and touched his son's face lightly. Raising his good arm, for his right was sore as all hell, Joel grabbed onto his dad's hand in a firm grip. "I'm okay, Dad... but I think I know what you're talkin' to Adz about. I wanna help him. I can't say why, 'cos it's not fair... but I haveta help Juan."

Spock knelt down and placed his hands on Joel's waist, "Are you sure, Sa'ren?"

"Yeah, unless you think I need more melding practice," Joel nodded earnestly.

Spock smiled, "No, you do not. Very well. I shall be here to help should you require it."

Joel kissed Spock's nose, then turned to Adam and Chang. "I request permission to mind-meld with your little brother. He has an alternate personality, and according to the information from my father's mind, such in a Human can lead to insanity. I will be doing one of two things, and this will be at the behest of Juan himself when I enter his mind. I will either merge both back into one, or eradicate the more alien presence. The optimal result would be a merger. However, I cannot decide that, only Juan. But I need your permission to even attempt this... yours, or Juan's senior member of family should he have one."

Adam looked over at Janet and Joe who were standing not far away. She had tears running down her face, and Joe was holding her hand. Adam knew they had overheard what Joel said, and after a brief moment, Janet nodded. Turning back to Joel, Adam also nodded, "Do what you can... please."

"You shall have your brother back," Joel said firmly. "I promise."

Adam felt a brief and wondrous sensation flow up and down his spine, as did Chang, and they both looked at each other. In their minds, they heard the Doctor giggle, *'Ki'Melai... His Shaper...'*

Joel turned, and with a slight grunt of pain, knelt down next to Juan's prone form. He painfully lent over the boy's face and kissed his forehead. "Hold on, my 'big' little brother; I'm coming," he whispered before placing the fingers of his left hand on Juan's face...

"My mind to your mind..."

To know what happens in the meld, please read
Chapter 8 of 'Camp Bam Bam' by Roland

The Clan watched in silence for the first few minutes. Mind Melds rarely took a long time, but when two minutes became five, they started to murmur nervously. Spock and Sarek looked up from where they and Amanda had been patiently watching and looked around at the filled room complete with apprehensive faces.

"Do not be alarmed," Sarek said softly. "Sometimes a wounded mind can take a long time to heal. Neither my grandson or Juan is in any danger."

Relief seemed palpable as everyone relaxed visibly.

Doctor McCoy chose this moment to bustle his way through from the direction of the Kitchen, Teri at his side. He looked down at the two boys and tutted under his breath. "A party, and this happens." He looked at Spock and said, "Teri told me that your son had his arm dislocated. Who preformed the reduction?"

Spock reached out with an arm and placed his hand on Chang's shoulder, "This is one of the top medical officers of the new Special Forces Division of the Clan, Doctor. His name is Chang."

McCoy nodded and signalled for Chang to come to him, where they conversed briefly in hushed whispers.

Adam Casey edged closer and closer to Spock, not taking his eyes off Juan's prone form. As he felt himself bump into Spock's side, and felt the Vulcan's arm lay itself lightly over his shoulders, Adam looked up.

Spock saw terror in Adam's eyes, and spoke quickly, "Your brother is going to be all right, Adam. At worst, the personality he carries inside him may remain, but both would end up stable."

Adam's eyes seemed to lose some of their tension, and he quickly looked back down at the two melding on the floor. "I don't want to lose him... I love all my brothers," Adam whispered to the Vulcan Captain, "but Juan's my first brother. I rescued him first. He might not know it, but I've always tried to protect him the most..."

Spock simply squeezed Adam's shoulder gently, and drew the teen to stand before him, Adam's back tight against his chest as they both watched.

It took another four or five minutes, then Joel breathed out heavily and removed his hand from Juan's face. Juan's eyes opened and he blinked around from his prone position, as if trying to figure out where he was. Joel whispered to him, "No more than fifteen minutes has passed since I stopped you, little bro."

Juan didn't reply, he just sat up and pulled Joel into a tight hug. Sobbing suddenly, Juan did not notice the whine of pain that Joel made, nor that Joel was trembling hard. At least not at first.

As he pulled back he saw Joel's face twisted as the Vulcan tried not to scream. "What's wrong?" Juan whispered, but he didn't need a response for he saw that the Uniform top and shirt that Joel was wea-

ring was open. Joel's ribcage was bruised badly, and his pale scar-patterned smooth skin was mottled dark green with those bruises.

"Oh shit... what happened?!?!" Juan cried out, then got a haunted look and quietly asked Joel, "I did that... didn't I?"

Adam slipped to the floor and knelt next to them both, "No, it was *him*, Juan. Not you. Don't blame yourself, bro."

Juan sighed and bowed his head. "No, Adam. It was me," he said in the deathly silent room. A small sob escaped Juan again as he continued, "I wanted to kill Joel. I wanted to tear him apart... yet I didn't want to hurt him, and I loved him... but I was afraid of him..."

Adam reached out and touched Juan's shoulder. "No, it wasn't... Wha?!" he spluttered as Juan raised his head and opened his eyes.

One was black... the other was yellow.

"It was me," Juan said, as tears continued to fall gently down his face.

Will whistled as Jory just stared. Chang, still standing next to McCoy, asked softly, "What has happened, Joel?"

Joel, his hurting right arm held against his equally hurting chest, answered, "They are one. There is no 'gentle Juan' and 'angry Juan' any more. There is just Juan. All they were, apart, he is now - and he is more. He is what he should have always been. Whole. Loving. Strong. Loyal. Brave. He is Juan."

Juan sniffed at hearing what Joel said, "No one's even said that about me before."

"I've got some to add," Koth said as he too knelt down to be with his boyfriend. Juan looked up at him, and his eyes softened even more. Koth smiled and rubbed his hand on Juan's cheek as he looked into those dual coloured pair of soulful eyes, "Beautiful, wonderful, amazing, sexy and mine..."

With tears running down he face, Juan smiled up at the small Klingon boy, "I think it's the other way around... YOU are mine."

Everyone around started to laugh until Joel cried out in pain, "... please... don't make me laugh..."

Juan's face became concerned again. "Chang! Can you help him? Please?" his guilt ridden voice asked as he took Joel's hand.

McCoy and Chang moved over as Chang said, "Yes, we will."

"Okay, people. Show's over for now. We need room. Joel will be up and around in no time," McCoy stated firmly. Then he pointed at Cory, Sean and Kevin, "You can stay, and so can you, obviously," he added, pointing at the Unit boys. "Everyone else, get moving or I'll have you all confined to bed rest, so help me God." Seeing the grins and smirks passing between some of the boys, he amended it: "That's SEPARATE bed rest," and chuckled as smiles vanished from faces right and left.

Those gathered all scattered back to what they had been doing, fast, while Kevin went to the nearest sofa and grabbed a cushion for Joel. The Vulcan was still kneeling on the floor and Cory and Koth were helping him out of his top and shirt. Juan was looking on sadly and started crying again as he saw the state of Joel's shoulder and ribs.

Joel sighed and then reached over to poke the crown of Juan's bowed head. "Oi," he muttered.

"What?" Juan asked thickly as he raised his eyes to Joel.

Joel pulled him over with his good arm and kissed him on the lips. "There," he stated with a smile as Juan gaped at him. "Do you think I blame you, big little brother?"

Juan shook his head slowly. "No, guess not. I still feel bad, though," he whispered as he gripped Joel's left hand tight. He looked at Chang and McCoy, "Is there something I can do to help him? Please?"

Chang smiled and whispered to McCoy, who nodded. "Yes, Juan. Doctor McCoy will show you how to strengthen the weakened ball joint in Joel's shoulder with the regenerator. Will that be okay?"

Juan nodded, and a smile started to replace the concern on his face.

Joel was helped to lie down by Kevin and Sean, and Juan shuffled over so that the Vulcan's head was in his lap. Kevin giggled, "Didn't need the cushion!"

Juan grinned and shook his head. McCoy held out a small device and showed Juan how to use it, then he left the now smiling ten year old to do his job. Koth cuddled in on one side of Juan, while Kevin did the same on the other side. Cory and Sean moved to sit on the sofa with Juan's brothers, thus allowing the two Doctors to get to work.

"Does it feel better, Joel?" Juan asked as he concentrated on the boy's right shoulder.

"Uh huh," Joel smiled as the pain was slowly fading, both from his sore shoulder and his hurting ribs.

Adam was watching Juan closely as his little brother radiated peace at helping another this way. Adam was thinking to himself, and trying to work out what had really happened. Was this really Juan?

"Joel?" he asked from his seat as he sat forwards slightly.

Joel looked over at him, "Yeah?"

"What's going to happen with Juan now?"

Joel smiled, and replied honestly, "Well, logically, I'd assume that he's going to need to talk to his brother, his friends, then have a long talk with his boyfriend, then maybe sex with his boyfriend, and..."

"JOEL!" Juan and Koth gasped as they both coloured up fast, and Juan nearly dropped his regenerator.

"What? What did I say?" Joel asked innocently.

Kevin was giggling, "Oh, nothing... just like you said about that possible blow job type of nothing..."

"He asked me a question, so I answered it... oh, never mind..." Joel sighed with a lost little smile. He looked back at Adam, who was trying not to break his ribs by laughing. "I think you also want to know about what I did in Juan's head?"

Adam could only nod. He didn't trust his voice.

"Well, I showed them how they got split up, and as I did, I started to knit them back together. Once everything had been seen, they sorta recombined, and it's just Juan, now," Joel explained briefly, looking up at Juan to make sure that much was okay to tell. Juan nodded with a smile.

"Oh, okay," Adam managed after he had calmed down some. "And how will Juan be now? I mean... well, don't take this wrong, Juan, but... you don't seem quite like the Juan we know."

"I am, but... uh.... Joel? Can you explain? I don't think I have the words yet," Juan asked with a helpless smile.

"Sure, bro... mmm... I like that," the Vulcan murmured as Juan ran the fingers of his free hand back and forth over Joel's forehead. He closed his eyes and relaxed as he said, "Juan is different, but only in so much as he's calmer, now. Settled."

Juan snorted, "Calm? Me?"

"What are you smoking, Joel?" Logan spluttered. "Him calm? Never!"

"Keep that up," Juan said to him with a smile so sickly sweet a girl scout would have gone green with envy, "and I'll shove your head up Will's ass..."

"Okay, I'm convinced," Will said with a giggle. "He's Juan, all right!"

Joel giggled for a second, then winced. Chang looked up at him, then patted his stomach softly, "Try not to laugh yet, little one. We are nearly finished."

"Kay," he smiled mutely, yet his eyes registered pain. Kevin reached over and started to massage Joel's ear to calm him, and Juan watched with interest before doing the same to the Vulcan's other ear. Joel smiled up at them in thanks, then looked over at Juan's brothers. "What I meant by calm was that Juan doesn't worry about losing control any more. He doesn't have to worry about getting angry and another persona taking over, nor does he have to worry about feeling strong good emotions and wanting to back away. The two sides of his personality are now one, so he will be able to flow from one side of his emotions to the other without a different persona needing to be in control. He can be loving Juan, or pissed off angry Juan, or cuddly Juan or... you get it? It's just him, now. Both sides back together. He can just relax and be himself. He's centred. He's calm. He's whole."

"He called me cuddly! I like that!" Juan giggled.

Adam nodded with understanding, "I understand. Thank you, Joel. Thank you so much."

Joel looked embarrassed and glanced at Cory and Sean who smiled at him and nodded. He blushed, "It's only what my brothers and Kevvy did for me... help. You don't have to..."

"I know," Adam interrupted firmly and gently. "But I will anyway. If there is anything you need, ever, you only have to ask. We're in your debt twice, now: for Korris and Koth and what that means for our family, and now for Juan himself."

"Awwww, maan!" Joel muttered, his face now bright green. "You're making me feel funny."

Juan giggled and showed how supple the Genesis kids really were by bending almost double to kiss Joel's forehead as he cradled the boy's head in his lap. "You make us feel 'funny' too, Joel. You said nice things about me and about others. I've heard you. Just accept the nice things we want to say about you too, okay?"

"Kay," he whispered before looking down his chest at what his uncle and Chang were doing. It was not much, now, for they were about finished.

"I think that's got it," McCoy stated with a smile. "No more fighting with freight trains, okay, Joel?"

Joel giggled, and it didn't hurt, so he let himself giggle more. Then, "Okay. No fights. I'll just tickle the one that attacked me whenever I can!"

Juan snorted and giggled, "You'll have to catch me first, shrimp!"

Joel continued to giggle.

Ten minutes later, and they had all gone back to their food. Joel was feeding Kevin again, as per normal, while Koth was doing the same for Juan, who was laughing at him. Adam, Logan and the others were just watching Juan in wonder as he just opened up and played. It was simply wonderful.

Joel, however, began to feel strange. It was that same feeling from the Enterprise. As Kevin would say, he was feeling 'horny', so after giving Kevin another mouthful of spaghetti, Joel started to nibble on Kevin's neck.

"Do you two need a room?" Logan giggled as Kevin's eyes rolled back in his head.

"Hummm?" Joel hummed as he looked up. A blush soon followed, "I did it again... sorry, Kev..."

"I'm not complaining, but after we've finished, we'll need to calm you down a bit," the brown haired boy giggled before kissing Joel softly. "You can't miss your entire birthday 'cos you're turned on, can you?"

Joel grinned, then looked up when Spock walked over to them and handed both him and Kevin their shakes. "Thanks, Daddy!"

Spock's eyes twinkled as he nodded. He was about to move away when Jason ran over. "Pop! I need a word quickly?"

"Of course. In private, or will it be acceptable to do so here?" Spock asked.

Jason shrugged, "Here's fine. It's about Sammy."

Joel's attention perked up quickly, and his horniness seemed suddenly forgotten. He kissed Kevin again before rising to stand with Jason and his father. "I know too, Daddy! I'll go and get Sammy while you talk with Jace!"

"Okay, my son," Spock said as he bent down to hug and kiss his boy.

Joel turned back to the table, "Seeya later! I got another brother to help!"

They watched him zoom off on his mission before looking at each other. Kevin smiled and shrugged, "That's my Sa'ren..."

Editor's notes:

Boy, that was certainly a roller coaster ride!

I'm not really sure what to say. I am so very glad that Joel was able to unite Juan's two personalities. Now Juan will be much better.

I used quite a lot of tissues during the editing of this chapter. My recycle bin is full.

I wonder what is wrong with Sammy. I hope what ever it is, that Joel can help him with it.

I am hoping it won't be too long before we get chapter 14, but I am not trying to pressure anyone.

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher

Chapter 14**"The Trouble with Fuzzymores..."**

Joel found Sammy almost straight away, for he had just entered the Dining Room carrying a fresh plate of food. "Hiya, SamSam!" Joel giggled as he drew close, watching as Sammy placed his plate down by his seat.

Sammy looked up fast and smiled, his face filled with relief. "You okay, Joel? I couldn't get to you after that fight... are you okay?" he asked, quickly opening his arms in an offered hug.

Joel ran into his arms quickly, giggling as he did so, "Yeah! Don't worry, SamSam - we Vulcans are survivors!"

Sammy started and quickly pushed Joel back in order to hold him at arms length before him; then he just looked at him in wonder.

"Wassa matter, SamSam?" Joel asked with concern.

Sammy continued to gaze at the young Vulcan before brushing Joel's cheek with a hand, "It's...it's gone, it's all gone."

Joel seemed puzzled for a moment, then, "Oh, my fear? Yeah! Daddy showed me how to block the old emotions. To not 'remember' them, you know?"

"Oh, Joel; I'm so happy for you, little guy - so happy!" Sammy said softly as he pulled his brother into a tight hug.

"Wanna meet my Daddy? Have you met him yet?" Joel asked as he enjoyed the hug.

"No, but I'd love to," Sammy said with a happy grin. His eyes seemed to lose some of the pain they had always seemed to carry whenever he had looked upon Joel: as if the lessening of Joel's pain also lessened Sammy's.

Joel was about to tug Sammy from the room happily, when his father and Jason walked in. "Sammy! Do you have a moment, Cariad?" Jason called out as he came towards them both.

"Sure, Jace. My lil'guy wants me to meet his dad anyway!" Sammy giggled as Joel excitedly led him over to Spock and Jason.

"Daddy! This is Sammy, the boy you've seen in my mind, and the one Jace and the Doc said you should help. Please help him, Daddy; he's got bad dreams and stuff that ain't goin' 'way, and we don't wanna lose our SamSam!" Joel begged, as tears sprang to his eyes.

Sammy quickly pulled Joel tight against his chest, and whispered, "Shh. Don't cry, little guy; I'll be fine, really."

"But he can help you, SamSam; really!" came Joel's answering whisper. He then looked up at his father, and Sammy followed his gaze. For a moment, the empathic Sammy seemed to get lost within the piercing, loving gaze from the Vulcan man before him.

"Greetings, Samuel," Spock said formally, his hand raised in salute.

Surprisingly, Sammy copied the salute perfectly, and said, "Peace and long life to thee, Spock of Vulcan."

Spock smiled briefly, then continued, "I have been informed by your brothers, my sons, that you are having issues with your memories. I have it on good authority that only a Vulcan Kolinahr Master can help you. Since you are a member of the Clan, you are, by default, one of my wards. It is logical for me to help you - even if it were not my moral duty to a member of my Family to do so."

For a moment, Sammy just looked at the floor between himself and Spock. Then he said softly, "It's just... just the pictures, I... they won't go away, but sir..." he paused as he raised his eyes, "Everyone is having nightmares, not just me: it's everyone."

"I know, Samuel," Spock said softly. He sat down and held his arms open. "Come here, child, and I shall explain why you need my help, first."

Sammy stared at the Vulcan for a moment, and Spock's arms did not waver in that time. The man remained seated, and his arms steady - offering warmth and comfort. Woodenly, Sammy moved and fell into those arms, to be gathered onto Spock's lap and held secure. Joel just managed to hear a whispered "Okay" from his friend before Sammy tucked his face against Spock's chest.

"I am not 'sir' to you, son," Spock whispered as he gently rubbed Sammy's back. "I am a'nirih to the Clan; Caring and Nurturing Father. You have the right to call me 'dad', 'pop', 'uncle', or simply Spock. You do not need to use 'sir'; ever."

Spock's words had a profound effect on Sammy, who started to weep softly. Joel smiled, then noticed the Doctor enter and beckon him over. Joel quietly ran to the small Time Lord, "Yeah, Galli?"

The Doctor smiled and whispered, "Sammy has more than just nightmares and pain to deal with, Joel. He is confused and lonely, even though he has more love in his family than most. He is in love, yet knows not with whom. He is conflicted and confused and desperate - all deep down. He needs your power, Child of Vulcan."

"Okay," Joel said slowly, as he nodded. "Anything else you can tell me?"

"Yes," the Doctor replied, "first, tell Sammy to find Brian and Vishnu, then you go and 'test' all those who love Sammy. You will know who they are, as you pass them. Take a pattern of their love, for you will need that knowledge. Then, speak with your Kevin - he has information unrelated to what you need to do, but you will need that information, on a personal level. Something is about to happen, and both you and your young husband need to be at peace with it."

Joel blinked. "Okay. Thanks, Galli," he said before heading back toward his father, Sammy, and Jason.

As he came up to Spock's side, he heard Sammy's tear filled voice saying, "... sometimes I don't even want to go to sleep because they'll be there, but it's the anger that really is scaring me. Yesterday... if it wasn't for your son, I'd have done something... something bad... I...I... wouldn't listen to Jace, you see, and... I've seen something like that before and I know what it means, yet I thought I could control it. It can't be, though, and I didn't listen to Jace and it's like it's there waiting... burning... deep in me and I don't want it there. Please don't make me hurt him more; please don't make him have those pictures or the fire."

Joel knew that it was *he* that Sammy was the more concerned about, so he laid his hand on Sammy's back. He was quickly pulled up by Spock, and Sammy started to cuddle him fiercely. "I'd like to help, Sammy," Joel whispered after kissing his brother. "I just didn't know if Daddy thought I was ready, so that's why I said him. Are you sure, Sa'mi?" he asked, staring up at his father, hopefully.

"Yes, I am," Spock answered with a tight hug.

Joel looked back at Sammy, and saw his brown haired brother start to shake his head. He stopped Sammy speaking with another kiss. "Sammy... I said this to Cory once, but you weren't there in the pool last night. You were with your Dad. My pain is a mountain. It's all the pain from all my life all at once. Your pain is remembered, but not alive in you. Your mind isn't Vulcan. It's human. Your pain would hurt me, but to me it would be like pricking my finger. I already have an open cut, so your pin prick would only make me say 'ouchie'... but Sammy... that was before! Daddy helped me close those living memories away so they don't keep hurting me... it's why you don't feel all that fear and pain in me no mores. Please... I love you. I really love you, and I wanna help you. I'm kinda your little brother, but I'm older than you... let me be YOUR big brother, this time? Please?"

Even with the tears falling thickly from his eyes, Sammy could not help but smile, "I still can't get used to that, you being older - but I just don't want to hurt you anymore, little guy. I swore I'd protect you, not keep hurting you - not even a pin prick. You've been through so much. I don't want you to have the... the pictures I have. I...I don't want... I don't want you to know that. I love you, little guy, and I just don't want to hurt you. Can you understand that? It would mean everything to me to let you help, but I don't want you hurt anymore, Joel. I don't want those things which are in me to be in you, they're... not in you, my wonderful big brother, not in you, please?"

Sammy looked over at Jason and sent quickly; pleadingly, *'Jace, you understand. Make him see, please. I don't want him to have what I do in my head. Its... please?'* He then fell back against Spock's chest and continued to cry.

Joel hugged himself in tighter and said, "I want to, Sammy. I want to help you. Please let me help you. I've helped others, not the same way, but I have. I'm needed here, SamSam." He then started to cry himself as he nuzzled Sammy's neck like he'd seen the cat-kids do. He murmured, "I mean it, Sammy... ask Jace... he'd know if I could cope..."

Sammy looked up and found himself looking not only at a nodding Jason, but at the Doctor. He was also nodding, and he said, "He is the Shaper, Sammy. And he's Sa'ren, the Blade of Surak reformed. He is 'Redeemer' in the Human tongue. Let him redeem you, Heart of Gold. It is what he wants to do."

A large, gentle hand raised Sammy's face. Spock captured Sammy's eyes in his own gaze before stating, "I can assure you that my Child will come to no harm in helping you. In fact, he will help himself

while helping you. He still feels worthless here, Samuel. He still feels like he is a slave, but when he has helped others it makes his sense of self-worth grow."

"Please?" Joel whispered again.

Sammy looked long and hard at Spock before whispering, "As long as he won't be hurt, I...I couldn't stand to do that; and he's NOT worthless, he NEVER has been."

Sammy then swiveled and pulled Joel into a position so that their eyes could meet. "You're always gonna be needed here, big bro; by me, if no one else, and I know there's lots more that feel the same way even if you don't do nothing - just cause we love you so much. I... I'd very much like it if you would... if you could help me. Just... if it gets to be too much..." Sammy trailed off as he raised his fingers to trace over Joel's cheeks.

Joel kissed him yet again, and longer this time. When he pulled back, his sunshine-smile lit up Sammy's face as he said, "I need to do a few things first. I'll only be a few minutes; the Doc will help me. Umm... Vishnu is Merc and Herm's brother?"

"Yes," Sammy answered with a small nod, his eyes seemingly dazzled by Joel's smile.

"Go get him and someone called Brian, while I go do some stuff, then go to that Meeting Room just off Main CIC. Jace will show you where," Joel hooted as he jumped off Spock's lap and headed out of the door.

For the next five minutes, Joel zoomed about inside CIC, and even ran outside. He didn't know what was leading him to the various people around the place, but when he felt he should stop by someone, he'd touch their hand or arm and asked them to think about Sammy. That was all - then he'd move on.

As he came inside the final time, Kevin was waiting for him. "Galli said you need to talk to me," Kevin said simply, as he pulled Joel into his arms. "Meld? Be quicker."

Joel grinned and placed his fingertips against Kevin's face, and for the first time he joined his mind fully with the boy he loved...

Kevin sat on the edge of his bed and looked around in confusion. This was his room, the one he shared with Kenny, but why was he suddenly here? Why would the Mikyvis teleport him here when he was about to meld with Joel?

He scratched his head briefly as he tried to work out what the joke was. Shrugging, he stood and went to where he kept his Clan communicator, but before he reached his cabinet, a giggle from the bed made him turn. Joel was sat there, right next to where he had just been, and was smiling at him.

Kevin grinned as he moved back to cuddle up against his new husband, "What's the joke? Was it Levi?"

Joel's brow creased in puzzlement for a second before he burst out laughing. "This is your mind, Kevvy! This is your quiet place where you go in your mind when you need to unwind. Now you're conscious of it, you can see what it looks like," Joel explained as he continued to giggle.

"Oh," Kevin nodded, now looking around himself more carefully. Things did seem, now that he was looking closer, different. He had little time to ponder that, however, when another feeling came to his attention. His earlier confusion has masked it, but now he was feeling naked. Vulnerable. He recognized it. He looked at Joel, "Xain's right. It's the same for all Vulcans, isn't it?"

Joel again looked momentarily confused. Then, "Oh! You mean the naked feeling? Yeah. We're soul to soul. We *are* naked, in a way."

"Now that could be interesting!" Kevin giggled. "I can feel how horny you are. Shall we..." he trailed off suggestively.

His tee-shirt being ripped off his body answered that question for him. He giggled as they started to kiss as both their hands set to work.

Once done, both boys lay side by side and wrapped in each others arms. They each gazed into the other's eyes lovingly, and simply enjoyed the feeling of closeness.

"What did Galli want you to tell me?" Joel asked eventually as his free hand rubbed circles in Kevin's back.

Kevin shrugged as he closed his eyes in contentment, "Just what I'd found out about Sammy. I wanted to talk to Kevin Carlson earlier, when you were off in Gotham. Twin to twin, you know? Mainly because we shared a name. Really, I don't know why I wanted to, but I've made new friends. We just talked, and it came up about what Sammy likes to do with his brothers."

"What is that?" Joel asked as he absently kissed Kevin's cheek.

"Sex stuff," Kevin blushed. As he felt Joel become concerned suddenly, he continued fast, "No, not in a bad way, Sa'r. He... I think I understand what they were trying to tell me, even if I can't do something like it myself, yet. You see, Sammy sees all love the same, and if he loves someone, he wants to show them. That means kisses, or hugs, or sex. It makes no difference to him to show you he loves you by giving you a cookie or make love to you. It's all still love to him."

"I don't understand," Joel murmured.

Kevin thought for a second. "I don't think I explained that right. Sammy sees sex as a way to show someone he loves and cares for them. He sees hugs and cuddles in the same way, and the same for giving you cookies or food or... get it?"

"Oh, I see," Joel nodded, concern still in his eyes. Concern for Kevin, "How did you feel hearing that?"

"Strange. Real strange. I'm okay - kinda - with jacking off with you, now. I'm not feeling dirty about doing it - like it'll make me a whore and a druggie or somethin' - but hearing about someone doing sex

stuff with loads of people... made me a little nervous." Kevin paused as he studied one of his fingernails for a moment. Then, "Also, a little jealous: like he'd try and steal you from me..."

"No way! Never, Kev!" Joel protested suddenly. "No way! I promise right now, I'll ne..."

Kevin covered Joel's mouth with his hand and smiled at him. "It's okay, Sa'r. I know you're mine. Kevin, Randy and Danny explained it to me - that's the 'Trinity' you might have heard Sammy talk about? They said that it just means he loves people, not that he's wanting everyone as his boyfriend. I... I don't think I'd mind if you did some things with him, if you both wanted to..."

Now it was Joel silencing Kevin with his hand, "What are you saying? That you'd want me to do sex with SamSam?!"

"Well, no. Not do sex. That's becoming a whore. Show him you love him, like we just did now, with our hands? Yeah, I'd be okay with that. I trust him and you. Just nothing that you and me haven't done. I wanna be the first to do things with you. But I'm okay, I think, with you jacking off with others. That's not a major thing for me. If you and Sammy were to screw, though, I'd be hurt. A lot."

"Never! No, Kev... I..." Joel shook slightly as the old fears came back. "I'm still feeling it's kinda bad for me to be doing this stuff with you at all... how can I... why are you saying this? Do you *want* me to wank off Sammy?!"

"Not saying that," Kevin shook his head slowly. "Just saying that if you both want it, and it happens, then I'd be okay with it. Jacking off, that is. I know you're not going to go off and start sleeping with everyone, Sa'r, but I do know there are others here you'd 'play' with because you love them. And they love you."

Joel's eyes seemed distant as he thought all this through. He then nodded. "Yeah... Sammy, Cory, Sean, couple of others... Mostly you, though. I'd feel real nervous with the others... But why'd I do it when I can show people I love them with hugs and kisses? And why are you so calm about it when yesterday you wanted to fight Sean and Cor 'cos I loved them?" he asked curiously.

Kevin smiled. "What you Shared with me right after our big argument, about what the four of us feel for each other, really helped, Sa'r. I'm *not* going to lose your love if you were to jack off with Cory, for example. It would, as Randy said, just be two brothers showing each other they loved each other in a real special, personal way."

Joel continued to think hard before stating softly, "But anything more than wanking would be... wrong..."

"Yes and no. Right now, I'd be hurt. Bad. 'Cos I wanna be with you for your firsts, and I want you to be with me for mine. After? I dunno. I'd have to see how I'd feel then. Maybe not. Maybe I'd wanna keep most of the rest special for just you and me. But if I'm not around when you go into Pon Farr, and Cory, Sean or Sammy help instead, I wouldn't be mad or anything. Just hurt that I couldn't be there." A pause, then, "That's about it, I think. That's what the Doctor wanted me to tell you. If you and Sammy ever want to jack off together, I'd be okay with it. I won't do stuff like that. I'm too afraid of becoming a whore and a slut, but I'm cool if you did it."

Joel eventually nodded after another long think. Softly, he said, "Thanks for telling me, but... well, I don't think I'd ever do anything with the others... okay, Pon Farr, maybe, but I can't... oh, that still scares me," he trailed off with fear. Kevin kissed him quickly, and Joel smiled. "Thanks, T'hy'la. Don't worry about me and the others. It's really only you I *want* to make love to. Sex with others might feel good, but I'm too scared to enjoy it, and... well, you know."

"Yeah. At least you now know, Sa'r. If something does happen, go with it. If not, never mind. I'm okay - okay?" Kevin smiled.

"Okay," Joel smiled back, before getting up off the bed. "You've got one real nice comfy bed, Kevvy."

"Yeah. Don't feel *this* comfortable out in the real world, Sa'r," Kevin sniggered as he bounced on his bottom on the bed, "but then, you've never shared my real bed with me... yet..."

Joel blushed.

Koth and Juan walked out of CIC hand in hand. The small Klingon led his boyfriend directly into the Pool Building, and straight upstairs.

"This is the room," Koth said quietly, as he pushed the door open to reveal a well appointed bedroom, but it was void of anything personal. "Yeah. It's a guest room."

Juan just shrugged as he moved to sit on the bed. He folded his hands in his lap and shook slightly.

"Want to talk about it?" Koth asked, as he cuddled in beside the trembling boy.

"Not yet. Not right now... well, yes and no," Juan muttered. He sighed irritably, "I don't know, Koth. I'm scared and I'm ashamed, yet I'm happy and excited... It's a mess..."

Koth pushed Juan gently until he had his boyfriend lying down, before curling up next to him. "Listen. Restored memories are funny. I've had a few brought back that I'd repressed, and I felt off for ages. Don't rush it, Juan. Talk when you need to. Cuddle when you need to. We're all here whenever you're ready."

Juan nodded, then just laid there holding his Klingon boyfriend tightly against himself for a while. He broke the silence, "You're going to hate me."

"Why would I do that?" Koth asked softly.

"Because of what I've done."

"Do you really think it's so bad that I can hate you?"

"Yes," Juan whispered. "I've killed innocent people. Hurt them. Tortured them. Even killed kids and babies. You're going to hate me."

Koth raised his head off Juan's chest and looked down into the boy's eyes, "Did you do these things because you chose to do them, or because you were made to do them?"

Juan bit his lip hard, breaking the skin. "At first, because I was made to. Then because I didn't want to get hurt. Then because I wanted to."

"The 'Angry Juan' you mean?"

"Yeah."

Koth thought for a moment longer. "It was what you were taught and trained for. You had no choice. If I was to isolate a child from birth and tell them the sky was yellow, then that is all they would know. I don't blame you, Juan. You never knew different."

"But I did. There was this one doctor..."

Juan haltingly began to explain briefly about his past, then finished by turning over and curling into a ball. "I won't stop you if you want to hit me," he sobbed.

Koth grunted, forcibly turned the boy back over and hugged him possessively to himself. "You had no choice. That is why you split yourself, Juan. The part of you that couldn't do those things split from the part that knew you had to."

"Why don't I feel it, then? Why don't I feel like it wasn't my fault?" Juan sobbed. "I... I feel..."

"I forgive you," Koth whispered, and Juan became deathly silent. "If that is what it takes, then I forgive you. I won't ever stop loving you, and I think you are everything Joel has said about you. Does he hate you? No. Then how can I? I forgive you."

Juan began to cry again, this time softly and he allowed himself to be comforted.

Meanwhile:

When Joel and Kevin came out of their shared meld, they found themselves in a pair of strong arms, and tight against someone's chest in a warm hug. "What?" Joel looked up, and saw Justy smiling at him. "Something wrong, Justy?"

"That was what I wanted to know, little cousin," Justy said seriously, yet the gentle smile never left his face.

Kevin gasped and started to blush. "No! Don't tell me you saw!"

"Saw what?" Justy asked.

"Us having our... I... errr..." Kevin trailed off, blushing.

Justy's eyes widened, then he giggled. "So that's why you two started to shake for a second. I was passing and just grabbed onto you both to stop you falling and breaking the meld. That's what worried me," he explained.

Joel started to blush. "Thanks, Justy. We were wanking, but I didn't think it would show in the real world," he whispered quietly.

"TMI, Lil'Cuz, but you're quite welcome. Next time you two want to get it on in a meld, I would suggest being seated. No-one will know what's happening, but you both do shake a little and that could be dangerous if you fell apart," Justy said, still giggling a bit.

Joel nodded, then his eyes widened, "Oh! SamSam! I gotta go, Justy. Come on Kev!"

Justy watched as they both sped through the Rec Room and off into Main CIC before breaking out in loud giggles that caught the attention of Sarek and Amanda.

"Care to share the joke, grandson?" Amanda asked with a knowing smile, for she had witnessed Justy's rescue of the two boys.

"Nope! Not for a grandmother to hear," he replied cheekily.

"Uh huh," she said, that knowing smile becoming more certain.

Justy continued to grin at them both for a moment longer before they noticed his emotions in his eyes change.

"What is troubling you, Justin?" Sarek asked as he pulled the teen closer and into a joint hug with his wife.

Justy sighed before saying, "Now that 'Clan Short' is a Family, do I have a role here any more? I was liaison to you from the Clan. What am I now?"

"You are still Liaison. You, Cory, Sean and their brothers are all part of Family Sarek. Yet you are also all part of Family 'Clan Short'. There is still a need for Liaison, and I know that Cory does not waste talent and ability. You have performed your duties adequately, and I would therefore expect you to remain in your post, doing so," Sarek answered him seriously.

Cory had felt Justy's emotions suddenly shift, and had drawn closer, along with Sean. "Listen, Bonehead," Cory said lovingly as he wrapped his arms around Justy from behind, "you're our brother forever, and there is NOTHING that's gonna change that. We don't keep ya cuz' we need ya; we keep ya because you are FAMILY. Don't worry about who does what; just keep bein' you and doing things like you always do and we won't need to dunk you in the pool to straighten your head out."

"I think we should dunk him anyway," Sean said with a snigger as Justy twisted to hug Cory properly.

"Why is that, grandson?" Sarek asked, his eyes twinkling.

"Because it's fun," Sean shrugged as he and Cory picked up the suddenly animate and protesting Justy. "Come on, Hon. Pool's thataway!"

"Oh," Sarek said as he watched the three 'brothers' leave through the open doorway. "Human bonding is... fun, I believe the word is."

"That it is, husband," Amanda agreed. "That it is."

Ten minutes later - Main CIC:

Kevin watched with a smile on his face as Sammy and Vishnu were ordered into the meeting room that had recently been used by Joel to heal Sammy's mind. It had not taken long, and the results had been surprising. Seeing Sammy no longer conflicted about 'love', and watching him ask Vishnu to be his boyfriend brought sudden tears to Kevin's eyes that he only just managed to keep in. He had not understood real love before being rescued by the Clan. Nor had Joel. Now, Sammy, to whom all love was the same, had been touched by that same magic and had been able to choose a life-partner without fearing he was losing the love he held for everyone else. It was... a miracle. Plain and simple.

Kevin turned to look at Brian, who was the only other choice that had been there for Sammy to pick Vishnu from, and his smile started to vanish. He heard Sammy whisper to Vishnu, "Your brother looks interested in someone..."

Kevin quickly looked between both Sammy and Brian, then noticed Kartik. The other cougar-boy was staring, not at Sammy and his brother Vishnu, but at Brian. Kevin knew that stare.

Brian's eyes met Sammy's and he said, "I hope I'm as lucky as you, one day, SamSam."

"Oh," Sammy answered cheekily, "I think that is a safe bet..."

Brian looked puzzled, and Sammy flicked his eyes to one side. Brian turned to find that Kartik had silently moved up and was standing almost nose to nose with him. "Something wrong?" Brian asked.

"Not any more," came Kartik's answering purr.

Brian looked confused for a second, and Sammy started to laugh. As Brian quickly glanced at his brother, Kartik used that distraction to move even closer, and he really began to purr. Brian's confusion suddenly turned to wonder as Kartik pulled him into a tight, inescapable hug, and began to purr into his neck.

Sammy and Vishnu both giggled and went into the meeting room and closed the door, just as Joel whispered to Kevin, "Doc's gonna have to do up another room, now!"

"Uh huh," Kevin agreed, watching the two hugging boys, and his ears were filled with loud cougar-purrs. "That's one seriously smitten kitten!"

"Talking about being smitten," Joel whispered in Kevin's ear, "we have a date with the nearest empty room. Now!"

Cory, who had returned from dunking Justy in time to witness Sammy get together with Vishnu, pointed to the closest empty bathroom. "I'll make sure you're not disturbed," he smiled at his little brothers.

"Thanks!" Kevin managed to say as he was picked up and carried by an obviously impatient and horny Vulcan.

Once Joel had put him down and closed the bathroom door, Kevin asked, "Didn't doing it in those melds help at all?"

"No, not really. It helped calm my mind, but my body... what Uncle Bones did to me is making me feel weird," the Vulcan answered as he pulled off his clothes in record time.

"So I see!" Kevin giggled as he was quickly stripped as well.

A little later, and again, as in their meld, the two boys were curled up together. Only this time, on a bathroom floor.

"Was what I did with Sammy really okay?" Joel fretted. "Wanking with him in the meld like we did?"

Kevin nodded slowly. "Yeah. Listen carefully, Sa'r - first, you love Sammy as a brother, and he loves you. So that's okay. Second, you were helping him with a problem when your horny-problem started up again. You needed him to help you get off, and you did the same for him, because you care for him as much. You even pulled me in through our Bond-Link. I said it was okay in *our* meld, I told you when you pulled me into that other meld, and I'm saying it again now. You did nothing wrong."

A pause, then Kevin continued, "But your asking again just makes me love you even more. I trust you, Sa'ren. You're my husband. Now; tell me what happened in that meld! That change in Sammy was wonderful!"

Juan had stopped crying, but Koth could feel how tense his boyfriend's muscles still were. "You need to relax, Juan," Koth whispered.

"I can't," Juan breathed back, as he turned to his side to look the Klingon in the eye. "I just can't."

Koth smiled softly before kissing Juan, and after a few moments, Juan began to melt more and more against his boyfriend's body.

When they eventually came up for air, Juan rolled back onto his back, and glanced down. "Why'm I naked?" he asked in confusion. "When did I *get* naked?"

Koth giggled as he lay there looking at his cute, blushing boyfriend, and held up the clothes he had removed as he had been kissing Juan. "I thought we'd do something to relax better, and bring a smile to your face as well."

Juan half smiled, then looked nervous, "I've only had people do things *to* me. I was hurt by *him*, and I was shown that sex is something good by Jer and Ty, but I've never... never *done* anything myself."

Koth shrugged, "That doesn't matter."

"But what if I do something wrong?" Juan fretted nervously.

Koth giggled, "I like that - you're not afraid of doing things with me, only getting things 'wrong' - that's a good thing, Juan!" He then smiled warmly, "I'll tell you a secret - this is my first time doing things too... with *you*! It doesn't matter that I've done things with Riti and Viccy, and that we've done everything but go all the way together. It doesn't matter that I've also helped a few of my other brothers, sisters and friends with my hands and stuff... this is the first time I'm doing things with *you*, and I'm just as nervous as you are!"

Juan looked puzzled, "Huh?"

Koth pulled him close and smiled, "I don't know what you'll like or not like. I don't know what I'd like from you or not like from you. We both have to learn about each other, Qu'raki. We both have a lot to learn."

He pulled back a bit and pushed Juan down gently before speaking softly, "Do you trust me?"

Juan nodded slowly, so Koth took both of Juan's hands in his own. "Then relax and enjoy it. What we do after; that's up to you. Just enjoy this, though."

Then, the Klingon wiggled his way down the bed and lowered his head - and Juan's dual coloured eyes popped open wide. "Wow!"

"Cory!! CORY!!!" Joel called out as he and Kevin left CIC to find many from the Clan playing out by the soccer fields. They made their way over to the group - Kevin carrying a soccer ball, while Joel kept calling out for his brother.

"I think he's hiding, Sa'r," Kevin giggled.

Joel stopped and turned his puzzled face to his husband. Kevin saw a slight look of hurt in his eyes as Joel said, "Why? What did I do wrong?"

"Nothing," Cory answered with a giggle from behind the Vulcan. He had snuck up behind his noisy little brother, and Kevin had been in on it. "You're my little brother, you just *love* teasing me, so I wanted paybacks!" he continued as he hoisted the now laughing Joel up into his arms, and proceeded to tickle him.

After reducing Joel to tears of mirth, Cory held him close and pulled Kevin in close to his side. He continued on towards the playing groups of kids and asked, "What did you want, Lil'elf?"

"To play. I had loads and loads of toys and stuff, and I wanted you and Sean and Kevvy to play with one of them with me," Joel explained with great seriousness. "I've never played before, and I wanted you three to show me how."

Cory giggled, "I've got no problems with that!"

Jude and Billy Joe came running over once the boys reached the playing field. "Hey, Joel. We're going to play soccer, and... oh, you brought your own ball?" Jude asked happily.

Joel nodded as Cory lowered him back to his feet. "Yeah, and Cory's gonna teach me how to play."

"Looks like we have enough here to form teams," Cory giggled as Sean joined him with little Matty.

"Can I be on youw team, Unca Joel? Please?" Matty asked with full powered puppy-dog eyes.

Joel giggled and nodded.

"I think Joel's team's going to win," Jason giggled as he joined them. "The other one'll see Matty coming and run OFF the pitch!"

Matty crossed his arms and glowered at Jason, "You awe mean, Unca Jace. I'm gonna get you fow that. An' you awe not in **my** team."

Jason giggled mischievously at the small boy and messed his hair briefly with one hand. "Okay, little one. Cory? Give me two minutes. I'm calling my ship for industrial strength ball-protection!"

"MOM! Where's the Transparent Aluminium cups?" Sean yelled. "Jace will need one!!"

"You want standard, or 'Matty-Proof'?" she yelled back from where she was seated with many of the other adults.

"Matty-Proof!"

"Sorry, we're out. They've all been destroyed!"

"Nath'?" Sean said sadly to the blond boy at Jason's side.

"Yeah?"

"Sorry, dude. You're husband is about to become a girl."

"He isn't already??" Nathan retorted before ducking out of Jason's reach.

Matty eyed them all suspiciously as he took Joel's hand. "I think you've all being mean. None of you awe in my team. Me and the Twibe and Wug-Wats and Unca Kev and Joel will show yous! Yeah! Come on, Unca Joel, Unca Kev. You've the only nice uncles!" he said loudly as he pulled the two boys after him.

"I believe the term is: 'Oh shit'," Xain said, although his face remained emotionless. "Jason. Can your ship provide enough protective devices?"

Joel was dribbling the ball down the pitch and finding that all those on the other team were allowing him to pass them without interference. He was concerned, but figured that since it was his birthday they were allowing him at least one of these 'goal' things. He aimed at the net and booted the ball hard, knowing that Xain, the other team's keeper, was also Vulcan and wouldn't be hurt.

Xain allowed the ball in without even attempting to save it.

Joel stomped his foot in slight anger. "This is no fun if no-one plays by the rules Timmy told me!" he said with a little heat.

Behind him, Matty giggled.

Xain, who's eyes had not been on the ball nor Joel but on the tiny terror that had followed him closely, said, "We were not letting *you* win, Joel. We do not want to anger *him*."

Joel turned to look at the innocently smiling Matty, then around at the others. He glanced back at the tiny boy and pulled him in close. "Why are they scared of you?"

"Be'cos' I can hit hawd," Matty whispered.

"I don't understand," Joel murmured.

"Dey think I'll hit theiw petews if I gets too close," the boy giggled.

Joel's eyes widened. "Would you?" he asked in a deathly whisper.

"No," Matty giggled just as quietly. "But, DEY don't know dat!"

The game settled down after that, and cries of fun and laughter soon filled the air as the kids either played in the two teams or watched. They were soon joined by Adam Casey, Logan and many from the Special Forces Division.

Once Matty had scored his final goal, Adam pulled Cory to one side and explained what he and his brothers wanted to do. Soon, the pitch had been vacated of players, and the kids all settled down in a large ring shape, leaving a nice open space in the middle for the Unit kids to show off their skills.

Tristan and Donna were not paying attention to the duels when they started, however, but were both chatting intently with Riti and Victoria.

"So, you think...?" Tristan murmured.

Riti nodded. "Yeah. He's been looking. Are you both sure about this? Three way relationships are meant to be difficult to maintain," he asked seriously. "Most of us play around with others, but serious stuff we keep to our special ones."

"And are you both sure you can do this?" Victoria added. "You've only just managed to get over a bunch of hurdles after Joel Shared with you. Are you sure?"

Donna nodded peacefully. "There's been something missing for a while, Vic. I didn't know what I was feeling when I first saw him, but now... Same for Trist. We both had our eyes on him for a month, now, but we thought we were being unfaithful to each other. We weren't. We both need him, and you said he's got feelings he's hiding about us, so..."

"So we ask, and find out," Tristan completed quietly, hope in his eyes as he glanced over towards a boy seated across from where they were sitting.

"Then I'll wish you both good luck, and the same for him too..." Victoria smiled. Then she giggled, "Oh, you do know he's a virgin, right? And I mean a complete innocent, in a way; he's never even played with others before, only did what he was trained to do to 'relieve stress' by those... those gits. Play nice!"

"We will..." Tristan giggled.

Donna added with a wistful tone in her voice, "That will be nice, Vic. We'll both get to experience a 'first' with someone we love that isn't forced. Assuming he accepts..."

"He'd be a fool not to," Riti said firmly. "Two hot bods, and both gagging for him... he'd be nuts!" Then, the bird-boy fell over laughing hysterically.

"Featherhead," Tristan giggled as he started to tickle his friend.

"Come on," Donna stood up, "let's grab him now. I have a plan."

"You're gonna to seduce him?" Tristan guessed, also standing.

"No," she said with great dignity. "*We're* gonna seduce him!"

"Prince Sa'ren," came an imperious voice from behind Joel as he sat with Billy Joe, Jude and Kevin. Before them, Adam Casey, Chang and Amur Khan were in the middle of their duel. He turned quickly and looked up into the expressionless face of his grandmother, Queen Elizabeth.

"Y...yes, your Majesty?" he trembled as he leapt to his feet.

"You have been joined in marriage to Kevin Thompson. Is that not so?"

"Y...yes, Ma'am. That is correct," he whispered fearfully as Kevin stood to wrap his arms around the trembling Vulcan. Kevin glared at the Queen. Why was she doing this?

"I cannot allow a Prince of the Empire to marry an untitled American, Prince Sa'ren," she stated, looking into the now furious face of Kevin.

Kevin started, for he could see the Queen's eyes twinkling in hidden mirth, and he too started to giggle.

Joel was now torn between fear and hurt, and confusion. "What am I missing?" he asked Kevin quickly, not taking his eyes off his royal grandmother.

"Your Majesty," Kevin said to the Queen, ignoring Joel's question. "Can I become one of your princes, please?"

The Queen's face broke into a wide, loving smile. "Of course, sweetie. You, at least, got my meaning," she chuckled as she pulled the stunned Joel into her arms and kissed him. "Joel; run and get your crown, and tell your big brothers to do the same."

"You have a crown for me already?" Kevin asked in shock.

"Levi," was the Queen's single word response.

Kevin looked around, and saw Levi standing off to the side with a huge grin on his face. He mouthed "Thank you" at the grinning Mikyvis, and received a bow in return.

Less than five minutes later, and Cory, Sean and Joel arrived back, each holding their crowns. Joel was examining his, "I thought this Seal would be revealed by now. Look, Cory! It's still hidden! Why?"

"Must not be time yet," Cory mused. "Either that, or they're still trying to find a suitable seal for the King of the Elves!" he added with a grin.

Joel did a double take before giggling.

"No need to wear them yet," Elizabeth said as Cory was raising his to his brow. "Let us wait until this current duel is over. Then everyone can watch as I ennoble Kevin Thompson."

Cory nodded his agreement and sat down with the others, while Kevin just blushed and tucked himself into the circle of Joel's arms.

"Stop muttering, Kevvy. You'll like being a prince," Joel giggled at the blushing boy.

"So speaketh Sa'ren Joel Short, King of the Elves!" Sean giggled. "Just say 'Yes Your Majesty', Kev!"

Both small boys turned their cute faces towards Sean and, in unison, blew raspberries at him.

"Well said," the Queen chuckled.

"May I attend the Coronation, Your Highness?" Antonio asked Joel with a grin as he jogged over to join them.

"Kev," Joel stated as he reached and pulled Antonio in between them both, "I do believe my loyal subject requires a reward for his cheek - yes?"

"Tickle until he wets himself?" Kevin asked as he grabbed Antonio's arms as the smaller boy laughed and struggled.

"Uh huh," was the Vulcan's response as he lifted Antonio's tee-shirt and started blowing bubbles into the boy's bellybutton.

"No! Noooooo...." Antonio cried out as he laughed louder and louder. Then, "Help!.... I meant ME not HIM!!!" as Cory started attacking the nine year old's armpits.

Joel stopped a second or so later and just giggled at the flushed face Antonio was now sporting. "Hello, first Lil'elf."

After poking his tongue out at the Vulcan, and pulling Kevin's arms around himself for a proper hug, Antonio replied, "Hello, second Lil'elf."

"We need one more, then we'll have the three stooges!" Sean sniggered.

"I got ya Uncle Joel!" Dylan yelled from across the field. After a brief flicker, Sean was now sitting there, soaking wet.

"Kyle! Do something about your son!" Sean yelled.

"Okay!" Kyle replied back, his giggle obvious in his voice. "Dylan, go tell Tommy I said you can have a couple of cookies!"

"Not what I meant," Sean muttered as he shook the water out of his hair. "You're not helping any, hon!" he groused at Cory, who was trying not to wet his pants laughing.

"Got any more pets for Timmy?" Cory asked curiously as he regained some control and sat himself back upright.

Sean reached into his jacket and pulled out a long, bright red snake with yellow and green stripes running down its body. Everyone stared in wonder as the snake looked around at them all.

It then started to sing.

Cory tilted his head. "Wow, you're getting creative with your catches, Hon."

Joel crawled slowly over towards Sean and sat there, inches away from the snake that was still letting loose with its eerie song-like cry. It was staring intently at Joel, and its head was weaving back and forth as if trying to hypnotise the Vulcan boy.

Joel's skin went into war-paint mode as he weaved his own head in response to the snake, and that same cry started from his own throat. The snake stopped singing and flared its hood and flicked its tongue out. Then continued to sing with Joel.

The Queen was watching carefully. "Cory. Very slowly, pull Joel back. That snake is about to strike," she said softly yet firmly.

Joel stopped singing and said, "No. I'm talking to her. She says her name is Leh-sheh, 'cos she was the sixteenth egg of her nest-mates." He then continued to sing-talk with Leh-sheh the snake.

"Who gave you the animal language dump?" Sean asked, as he continued to cradle the reptile in his hand.

"No-one. Timmy said it comes with the paint," was Kevin's answer, as he listened to the two songs, obviously understanding both.

Timmy ran over and explained, "They're not Spirit Guides like me and Ricky, Poppa. But they are linked to two Spirit Guardians, so they have some of our abilities. Unca Joel? Can you teach me that language? Please?"

"Wait, you mean you don't know this one?" Cory asked quickly.

"Nuh huh. I learnt Sehlat, but I've not met any other animals from Vulcan yet, so..." the little boy shrugged.

Sean threw a dirty look over at the giggling Dylan. "Next time, THIS solar system ONLY, imp!"

"Okay!" Dylan called back. "Methane sea on Io next!"

Cory sniggered at the faces both were pulling at each other and asked Joel, "What type of snake is this?"

"Masutra'oluhk. Sea-snake. They live on the shore or in the waters of the Thanar Sea, east of my home city. Daddy had a pet one when he was a little boy!" Joel bubbled as he took the creature into his hands and wrapped it around his neck, where it started to purr like a cat. "She says her mate is in your jacket too, Sean! His name is T'Dahsu, cos there were two in one egg, but his twin died. She says they are both to be looked after by me and Timmy!"

Timmy all but mauled Sean as he started searching for his new 'pet'. After only a few bruises to Sean's body, Timmy emitted a cry of joy and stood up with a similarly coloured snake in his hands. He stared into the eyes of the snake for a minute, then softly began 'singing' to the new arrival.

"Timmy, Leh-sheh said she's pregnant. She'll be laying her eggs soon, so we have ta get a place ready for them!" Joel bubbled happily.

"Kewl!" Timmy giggled. "Uncle Bryce! We need some Vulcan water an' sand! Daddy, can you get us soma that tanspa'nt alumininum stuff?"

Cory rolled his eyes as he giggled. "And you say *I* spoil him, hon? Sure thing, munchkin. I think we might even have a spare room that you guys can use that hooks to both your room and Joel's room at the house. Talk nice to Uncle Josiah, and I bet he'll help you get it set up just right."

"You mean our pet room, Daddy?" Timmy asked, as Ricky giggled at his side.

Cory just rolled his eyes. "I'm not asking. I'm just not asking."

Joel handed Leh-sheh to Timmy, who draped both snakes around his neck. "You can set it up for them with Josiah, Timmy?"

"Yeah, Unca Joel! Seeya later!" he hooted as he ran off with his little boyfriend, searching for Josiah.

"The fight has finished. Are you ready, Kevin?" the Queen said with a chuckle as she glanced between the tiny boys running away, and the now empty sparring area before them.

Kevin gulped and nodded. "Yes, Grandma Lizzy. I am."

"Then you may now wear your crowns, children," she said to Cory, Sean and Joel.

They each placed their crowns upon their brows and smiled. Once Joel's had settled in place, however, everyone shielded their eyes as it blazed out briefly in white light. Once the light had cleared, Joel could be seen standing there in shock, and the crown on his brow seemed different.

The Seal of House Surak was now plainly visible at it's apex in the centre of the circlet. To either side were the Coat of Arms of the House of Windsor and the Crest of Clan Short. Yet there were now more Crests spaced out around the edge, all the way to the back.

"That's the Dragon's Crest," Kevin muttered in wonder. "And the Diplomat one. AND the AI one!"

"Oh... Kyle? Can you get over here..." Cory called out, his mouth now dry with shock.

Kyle was already running over with Levi in response to the blinding light, and they skidded to a halt beside Joel. "*My Crest? Why's he got the Mikyvis one there?!*" Kyle gasped.

"And the Founder one?!" Sean added.

Jude was looking at the crown closely. "There's Crests from all the groups linked with the Clan, guys. But these two at the back... what are they?"

Levi's eyes popped open. "That's the one for the Q Continuum, and that's... that's the Seal of Rassilon! The Time Lords!"

"There's spaces for more," Cory muttered as he looked closer. "Far more. Levi, what does your Friend say about this? What does this mean?"

Levi's Friend responded directly, instead of through Levi's Voice.

//He is of the Blood that joined you all, through the Promise *you* and your brothers first made, Cory Short. He is the child that the Heart took in that now links, by Blood and Parentage, all the Clan as Family. He is the Protected, and so he bears the Marks of all. He is not above all, nor be-

low all, nor IS he all. He is just the visible symbol of the Link your promise created. He is your Brother and Protector and Protected - because you made it so//

"Why's it always me?" Joel asked weakly, as he buried his face in Cory's chest. "Why can't I just be normal?"

"None of us are 'normal', Lil'elf." Cory said softly as he rubbed Joel's back. "I'm proud of you being just what you've become since you came home; please don't ever try to change that."

"Okay," he whispered softly. "I love you, Cory. I promise I won't change nuffin'."

"I love you too, Lil'elf," Cory whispered back.

The Queen then reached and ruffled his hair, before turning and leading Kevin down through the milling crowd of kids to the centre of the duelling arena that had been set up.

She then turned with the small boy standing before her, and addressed them all...

"Good fight," Tristan said casually, as he sat on one side of Jory and watched as the Queen led Kevin into the middle of the Dual circle.

Jory nodded. "I won the bet on that one!" he giggled.

Donna grinned as she sat on Jory's other side, "I wonder if you'd make a bet with us?"

"Oh?" the explosives expert raised his eyebrow. "How much and on what?"

"Oh, how much? We'll leave up to you. On what?" Tristan giggled, "Well, how about on which of us can get naked and into a warm comfy bed first?"

Jory's jaw dropped open and he blushed scarlet. "I... pardon?"

"You've been looking at us," Donna said seriously.

"N... no I haven't!" Jory stammered quickly. "Well, not that way... I mean... you're together! It's not honourable for me to... to..."

"But you have feelings for us, and so you've looked," she continued reasonably. "You've not done anything, just like we didn't, even though we've both been eyeing you as well..."

Jory looked back and forth between the two kids on either side of him so fast it looked like he was watching a very fast game of tennis. "I'm... lost... what're you saying?"

Tristan took Jory's hand and said, "I like you. Maybe more than that. You're sweet and cute and wonderful..."

"And you have a simply edible bum," Donna quipped seriously as she pretended to examine one of her fingernails.

Jory didn't know what to do with himself. "I... errrr..."

"You're bi, right?" Tristan asked directly.

"Well... ah... yeah, I like both..." Jory stammered.

"I'm bi too. Donna's... well, Donna's Donna." Tristan shrugged and grinned, "To cut to the point, we love each other, and we both like you. We might be as in love with you as with each other, but we'll give that time. So - now that Joel helped us both with our problems last night - we both want to see if those looks you've been giving us since Sunday mean anything. If nothing else, we both want to have some fun with you, even if only as friends."

Jory felt his mouth go dry. "You're not pulling my leg, are you?" he asked softly, a hint of worry in his voice. "I've never d...done anything before, and... I'm..."

"We know you're really shy inside, and you've hidden it behind your playfulness all this time," Donna said quietly. "I'm a teep - a telepath - and Vicky's my friend. That's why she and Riti teased you at dinner... she was scanning you emotionally, just to make sure of a few things. She didn't read your mind, though. But what we know about you is from observation and what you broadcast loudly, without realizing it."

Jory stared at her. "You've not read my mind?" he asked quickly.

Donna shook her head, "No. I hear what you're thinking, but that's kinda normal for teeps. We have to 'point' our abilities upwards to hear nothing, and that makes us feel real odd. Right know, I hear everyone around me like the buzzing of a bee on the other side of a room. Only when people shout in their heads do I hear them clearly, without looking 'right' at them. You're going nuts right now wondering if we're serious. We are."

"We want to make love to you and with you," Tristan continued, causing Jory to go even more red. "And we want to give you the best time of your life - so, shall we make a bet on it, or just go and do it?"

Jory looked around quickly as he scrambled his thoughts together. It gave him time to pull up his playful 'mask'. He quipped, "I've nothing else to do today that I can't postpone..."

Donna giggled and stood, pulling the boy up with her. She looked down, "I see you're ready. Come on, before that explodes!"

Jory glanced down, giggled and linked his arms with both of theirs as they quickly walked off towards the Apartments over the Indoor Pool. "I don't believe this is happening," Jory breathed out with a nervous giggle.

"Just be ready to 'lose' something," Tristan giggled back.

Donna added after the briefest of pauses, "... and in all ways possible, too!"

Jory was now sporting the largest, shit-eating grin any in the Clan had seen in a long, long time...

"How's it feel, Prince Kevin of the Empire?" Sean giggled as Joel pulled Kevin into a lip lock.

Kevin glanced over but "Mhmmm... humphmmmmph... mmmheemmmph..." was all that could be heard from him.

"Say again?" Jason giggled as Joel, grinning, released Kevin from the congratulatory kiss.

"It feels great!" the newly minted prince giggled as he was pounced by his twin brother.

"I'm so proud of you!" Kenny said, his voice thick with emotion. "We're all so proud of you!"

Kevin hugged himself tightly into his soul-mate's chest, and said, "S'not a big deal, Ken. Not really."

Kenny first hugged Kevin back just as tightly, then slowly pulled back and used both hands to hold his brother's head steady. He looked Kevin straight in the eyes and said firmly, "Yes it is. Do you think the Queen of England would take just *anyone* as her grandchild? She's accepted the entire Clan for a reason - and each of us have something unique FOR that reason. YOU TOO, Kev! Our mother thought you were a waste of space and breath, Kev - look where you are now! You're a Defender of the Commonwealth, a Prince of Britain, a Vulcan Diplomat, representing the newest Vulcan Family, a captain in the Vulcan Fleet and you are married to the grandson of Surak of Vulcan himself! I think you've more than proven your worth, and I think our *mother* can eat her words, now!"

"I do not believe that it is possible for Gloria Harris to 'eat her words' post-mortem, Kenneth," Sarek said as he came over and placed a hand on Kenny's shoulder. He looked down at Kevin, "It was only logical that you were given this honour; I personally believe it is long overdue, in respect to your accomplishments since being reunited with your brother."

As Kevin started to blush, Joel hugged himself around his back. "I think you're pretty special, too, Kevvy. I also think you're just real pretty as well!" he giggled before kissing the nape of Kevin's neck.

Kenny's mouth opened slightly, and his face became unreadable. "Post... post-mortem? Grandfather - wh...what...?"

Jason reached and took Kenny's hand and said, "After our grandfather melded with Kevin earlier, I was asked to render sentence on your egg-doner, Ken. I sent Telez over to where she was being held. I don't need to tell you the rest."

"But... but why?" Kenny asked, his voice as unreadable as his face. "She was already sentenced, and the Clan had decided to just let it stay that way. Why did she need to be...?"

Kevin pulled his twin tighter against himself and whispered, "I never told you everything about me, Kenny. Some things were just to upsetting, and... and... I didn't want to hurt you. You... I love you a lot, Kenny, and... I just didn't... didn't wanna tell you she tried to... to..."

Kenny knew what was not being said to him. If Gloria had been deserving of death, then something pretty terrible must have happened. He increased his grip on his twin so much it nearly hurt Kevin, and whispered, "I want to know, Kev. I'm your brother, and I really want to know."

Joel backed away a few steps and said quietly, "I'll wait here for you, T'hy'la. I think you should tell him as well."

Kevin nodded briefly against Kenny's chest before they both moved away to find a quiet spot to sit and talk.

Jason sighed, then glanced over to where Kirk and Adam Casey were having a long talk while watching some of the other Special Forces kids duel for the entertainment of the Clan. Will was nearby with Billy, and they seemed to be making bets on the outcome. "I think I'll ask Will if he wants a sparring match. I need to work out this bad taste I suddenly have in my mouth," he said to himself as he moved away.

Nathan moved after him as Cory and Sean sat down to watch. Joel sighed and looked around. He looked up at his grandfather, hugged him briefly, then turned to Jude. "I'm going for a walk, big bro. I'll be back after, so we can have more birthday fun," he said mutely.

Jude nodded with a sad smile, "Of course. I'll be waiting, little brother."

Joel smiled wanly and moved away. He did not get very far before being pounced by a speeding Timmy, Ricky and Jimmy Marcus. "The masutra'oluhkam are okay in their new home?" he giggled briefly at the red-haired fireball now perched on his chest.

"Uh huh. They're really happy! Granpa Spock told us what they can eat, and they have lots of stuff there to play with and do, and they're nice and warm and can go for a swim and everything!" the fiery rugrat rushed out as he bounced on Joel's chest and stomach. "T'Dahsu is finding a nice place for Leh-sheh to make their nest for the eggs, and they both said thank you!"

"Can I have one of the babies to be my friend when they are old enough?" Jimmy asked, as he knelt at Joel's side, his face alight with hope.

Timmy giggled, "They'll choose, Jimmy. All our pets and friends choose us."

"Oh, okay! I hope one will choose me!" the dark blond seven year old bubbled.

Joel looked up at the boy and his brow furrowed. He sat up gently and hugged both Timmy and Ricky close and smiled, "What's your name? Your full name?"

Jimmy grinned shyly. "James. James Marcus... I, uh... I have a middle name, but I don't like it much. I like being called Jimmy."

"Do you have any brothers?" the Vulcan asked again.

"No," Jimmy shook his head sadly. "Mummy said I did once, long ago. But he died before I was born. When Mummy knew I was coming, she said she had to leave my daddy, 'cos she was afraid I'd die too. I think my daddy killed my brother."

Ricky looked sadly at him. "Was your daddy a bad man?"

"No. Mummy never said he was bad, only that he cau.. ummm... he was part of my brother dying."

Joel continued to stare at Jimmy's face. "I... oh, no, it can't be!" he whispered in shock. "Jimmy? Is your last name really Marcus?"

"Yeah... why?" Jimmy replied, his face confused.

"What was your Mammy's name?" Joel pressed.

Jimmy looked even more confused. He looked at Joel as if the Vulcan was crazy. "Mummy," he answered seriously, as if to an idiot.

Joel blinked, then giggled. "Your brother's name?" he asked, still chuckling.

"David," Jimmy Marcus answered, now wondering where this was going.

Joel grinned. "I think I can guess your middle name," he giggled.

"Bet you can't!" Jimmy shot back, a small smile playing at the side of his mouth.

"Can so!" Joel retorted playfully.

"Go on then! I bet you can't! I bet you a squillion lollipops you can't!" Jimmy giggled as he bounced on his knees at the Vulcan's side.

Joel continued to grin. "Keep the lollipops, James *Tiberius* Marcus. Instead, you wanna meet your daddy?"

"How'd you guess?!" Jimmy spluttered in shock. Then the rest of what Joel had said sunk in. "What!! My *Daddy*?! WHERE??"

Joel stood up and took Jimmy's hand in his own. "Come with me," he said, as he beckoned Timmy and Ricky to follow them.

As they ran around the edge of the spectators of the duels, they bumped into Sarek and Amanda. Amanda had a datapad in her hand, and was talking animatedly with her husband. "This says... Husband, what will he feel? How will he react? This is the second time he has missed those formative years with a son!"

"I do not know how he will react, other than to be very happy at having a child, Wife. Sa'ren - I see you have met James," the older Vulcan said in greeting, as his grandson bounced off his side.

"Sorry, Grandpa!" Joel giggled. "Yeah! I'm taking him to his daddy!"

"You know?!" Amanda asked in shock. "How?"

"Logical. I know what David looked like, and I know what Carol Marcus looked like. Logic, Grandma!" Joel giggled again.

"Where's my daddy?" Jimmy asked impatiently. "Can we see him now? PLEEAAAASSEEEEE?"

Sarek nodded. "I shall accompany you, children. The information was left in my care, so I should at least be there when you meet him," he said softly.

As they continued around the group of kids, Joel looked up at his grandparents and asked, "How long have you known?"

"Five minutes," Amanda replied. She held out the datapad, "This was left with Nathan this morning, but with all that has happened, we had not looked at it until now."

"Oh, okay," Joel smiled. Then, "Uncle Jim?" he called out as they came close to where the Captain was. Adam Casey had only just left the chat he had been having, and Kirk was getting ready to head for something to eat.

"Yes, Joel. How can I..." he began, but an excited voice overrode his own.

"Is this him?!" Jimmy yelled out in excitement.

Joel giggled, "Yup!"

Kirk was suddenly holding a squirming, overexcited and happily crying child. "Wha...?"

"James Tiberius Kirk," Sarek stated formally, "meet your son - James Tiberius Kirk... Junior."

"Finally," Bones said, as they sat around the Kitchen table. "One down, probably 784 more to go," he muttered with a grin at his captain.

"Bones," Kirk said, but the smile on his own face as he cuddled his son on his lap negated the warning in his voice.

"Those figures are not entirely accurate, Doctor," Spock supplied, completely deadpan. "The more likely estimate is 1,834 more to go."

"Damn, Uncle Jim! You call US horndawgs??" Cory spluttered before falling off his chair laughing.

"What're they on about, Daddy?" Jimmy asked, looking up at his father, who was glaring about at the others.

"Nothing," Kirk replied quickly. "Nothing at all!"

Timmy giggled, "*That's* why Jimmy is so 'fun' in the showers! He's Unca Jim's son!"

Jimmy looked between Timmy and his dad, then giggled. "You're fun in the showers with your friends too, huh?" he giggled.

"That's one way of putting it," Bones muttered, just loud enough for them all to hear.

Joel was laughing so hard that he was dangling from Spock's lap, and only being held from the floor by his father's strong arm around his belly. The more he laughed the harder it was to stop, in this position.

Eventually, everyone had gotten their share of Kirk-teasing, and things settled down as Sarek explained about how Kirk had never known of his son. "According to the message left by Doctor Marcus, when she found out she was pregnant again, all the hurt she had suffered at your eldest son's death came back to her. She mentions here that she had never stopped loving you, Captain, but she felt that if you were to have contact with your youngest son, the same might happen. She felt that she could not allow the possibility to happen. She named your son after you - even his family name - but called him 'Marcus' to hide him from you. According to this pad, she knew she was ill for over five years, and had decided that placing your child in my Family's care was the logical thing to do, once she passed."

"I see," Kirk said softly, an old pain rising in his eyes. "What is her will about now? Am I to have any contact, or not?"

"That has been placed in my purview," Sarek stated gently. "I am not held back by her fears, but I do have to respect her wishes. I will not cut you off from contact. He is your son and her, and you have shown yourself to be honorable, just and loving. You could be and would be a good father to James Junior. However, we must consider the dangers involved. Starfleet is not the safest organization to be a part of. None of the Federation's Fleets are. But is that reason enough to deny you custody?"

Admiral Morrow was seated at the far end of the table, and coughed lightly.

"Admiral - do you have something to add?" Sarek asked politely.

"Yes, Ambassador, I do. Jim," he said, holding Kirk's gaze with his own, "You have every right to continue in your current post as Captain of Enterprise. I see no reason for you to leave it, nor would I feel right in reassigning you to a safer position in the Fleet. You are simply too valuable where you are. However, if you requested it, I can see to it that any post is given to you if it will make things easier for you to care for and love your son. You have earned the gratitude, not only of myself, but of the entire planet - the entire Federation."

Kirk did not reply at first. He looked about the room, at each and every person present, before locking his gaze with that of his best friend - Spock. "Brother," he said softly, "you told me on Saturday that you will be resigning your commission to care for your own family. That is now a dead certainty with your son's return. How can I do any less to care for my own son, my little Jimmy?"

Spock answered slowly and seriously, "My brother, I cannot tell you what you should do. It is just as likely for you to be an excellent father as Captain of Enterprise as it would be for you to be father as a retired Captain of Starfleet. However, your options are greater, regardless. If you retire with me, we will not be out of work, as you humans say. We have a large family to care for, and I know that it is something that has long been missing in your life. There are many here, and I am sure many will follow, who need uncles and fathers. You have a heart larger than yourself, Jim. Follow it."

Kirk pressed his face against his son's beautiful blond hair and simply thought. After a long while of respectful silence, where Jimmy was completely happy at the cuddles and attention he was getting from his long-missing father, Kirk looked back up. Facing Admiral Morrow, he said, "I, Captain James Tiberius Kirk, of the USS Enterprise, do hereby resign as Captain of said ship. I have served the Federation and Starfleet faithfully for forty years, and I now retire with honor, knowing that my task is being handed on into capable hands."

"I, too," Spock echoed, "do hereby resign as Captain and First Officer of the USS Enterprise. My Family calls, and I must answer that call."

"Might as well make this three for three," Bones joined in, "because I'll be damned if I have to break in a new Captain and Science Officer! I have a daughter, a son in law and three grand kids to spoil. I resign as well."

"Only three grandchildren?" Sarek asked with a raised eyebrow. "Correction Doctor, but I believe there is a Compound full of children that have adopted you."

"Humm," grunted Bones. "In that case, I will have to start handing out corner-sittings to those who back-chat me..." he finished, glancing at an innocently smiling Cory and Sean.

Morrow sat there impassively regarding the three most famous and decorated officers that Starfleet had ever had, to date. "I will accept your resignations, with a few amendments."

"And they are?" Spock queried.

"One - that each of you accepts a rise in rank by way of thanks. Two - that you accept the Enterprise-A as a gift-on-loan, to use however you wish for as long as you choose to remain her Captain. And finally, three - that each of you will give thought to teaching at the Academy; the kids there can use your knowledge and experience, and learn from each of you."

Kirk, Spock and McCoy traded long glances, before Kirk answered for all of them, "We accept. Thank you, Admiral."

"No. Thank you, the three of you. I shall prepare the paperwork, and your discharges with full honors. There are a number of other things I wish to accomplish today, so all can be done at once - including your elevation in ranks. I shall return later, and we can discuss the details," the Admiral said with feeling as he stood, bowed to Sarek, and left quietly.

"This is going to be so SWEET! We get to keep the ENTERPRISE?" Joel bubbled happily.

"Well, Uncle Jim gets to keep her, but I'm SURE Uncle Jim won't mind giving you a ride every now and then," Cory giggled. "Us too, I hope... right, Uncle Jim?"

Then, to show that he had not forgotten how to use them, Cory turned on his own 'puppy-dog eyes'.

Timmy was really impressed!

Hand in hand with Cory and Sean, Joel went back outside to look for Kevin, leaving Jimmy and Kirk to catch up a bit.

Seeing that both Kevin and Kenny were now hugging and smiling softly, Joel smiled as well. He let go of his brothers' hands and ran over.

"Okay?" he asked them both, as they grabbed him into a hug.

Kevin nodded while his twin answered, "It is, now."

Joel kissed them both before asking, "Wanna play a game with me and Jude and Cor and..."

"Uh huh," Kevin giggled, kissing Joel to silence him. "Come on..."

Later:

"I won't be able to stay much longer, so I felt you should know of our mission, Justy," the Doctor was saying as Brant and Dean came into Main CIC. Harry and Seth were following behind - Seth in Harry's arms and a relaxed smile on his face.

Justy, his eyes wide as saucers, nodded numbly.

"It's a lot to take in, and I've only really just started, and..." the Doctor continued after nodding at the new arrivals, but he never finished.

"Just *started*? You have over five thousand inside the Tardis already, and only *just* started??" Justy exclaimed. "Shit... I..."

The Doctor giggled.

Dean asked curiously, "What's the matter?"

"Nothing's wrong, I was just telling Justy what my mission is. He's a little shell shocked," the Doctor answered.

"YOU'RE REBUILDING YOUR ENTIRE RACE, and I'm just SHELLSHOCKED?" Justy spluttered.

"What's the problem with that?" Brant asked, while trying not to laugh at Justy.

"I... five thousand... in... in how many WEEKS??" Justy blurted.

"About 4... sorta... Time Travel, you know," the Doctor grinned. "And that's only the beginning."

"Care to explain?" Harry asked as he sat Seth down in his wheelchair and kissed him.

"I have three missions. Find the Time Touched - those that can become Time Lords to rebuild my race. There's a whole mess of them throughout the Universes. Then, find the Thirteen - the Councillors of Gallifrey. Got five of them, myself included. Then, find the Time Councillors. I know a few of them - myself, Levi, and Q represent the High Races. Miah represents the Middle Races. The Guardian is the Leader of that Council, of course. That leaves three from the Younger Races to find, and the last - the special one, but I don't know who those four are. It's going to t...take... what the hell?" the Doctor trailed off as he stared at the boys in front of him. "Oh, fuck!"

"What's wrong?" Brant asked, "and why do you have a mark on your forehead?"

"Yeah," added Dean. "Why did it just appear like that?"

Justy's face went pale. "You... I... Dean? You have... your face... your forehead... Doc! What *is* that?!" he yelled out, pointing first at Dean's forehead, then at Brant's.

"The Dark One and the Silver One... this is freaky! Four Councillors from the same Universe?! This is weird!" the Doctor mumbled to himself as he looked between the two now marked boys, who were checking each other's foreheads.

"What the *fuck*! What is this, Doc?" Brant exclaimed as he checked his reflection in the monitor.

"You're marked of Time, Brant. You are the Dark One, one of the Younger Race members of the Time Council. Or you will be, once it is fully formed." The Doctor then turned to look at Dean, who was having his face closely checked by a nervous Justy, "And you are the Silver One, Dean. I know the true 'Names' of each of the Councillors. and... hey, kiddo!" he finished as Joel ran in and pounced onto his back.

"Hiya Galli! Hey, what's with the tattoos? I don't like tattoos..." Joel trembled as he gripped the Doctor harder at seeing Brant and Dean's faces.

The Doctor pulled the trembling Vulcan around and hugged him to his chest as he said, "They're not tattoos, sweetheart. They are Seals placed by the Guardian of Forever. Your brothers have just been appointed as Guardians of Time and Space... or they will be, when the Council is complete." He then looked up at the two boys, and most especially at Dean, "This is a good thing for you. You are conservators of Time, and those who serve Time are protected *by* Time... as are their partners, eventually. You are ageless, now. In Brant's case, that isn't a big change, but for Dean, it is. You won't even age at all, not even like a Vifer would. And when the Council is completed, nor will you, Justy. You are within Time, yet now unaffected *by* it."

"You're right, no big change for me there," Brant murmured.

"Well, the big change for you is... check that device on your arm, Dark One," the Doctor chuckled.

Brant looked at his arm where the gift from Tyne was, and found that it had dropped off unnoticed. "Umm..." he trembled as he bent to pick it up. "Why am I still awake?" He checked around the room. Since it was deep inside CIC, there were no windows to allow sunlight in, but still...

"Even though you are not yet a full 'Time Councillor', you still get some of the 'perks'. You'll never need that again. At least, as long as you remain a Councillor. And you can only stop being one if you choose to. So don't choose to if you are in direct sunlight or something," the Doctor explained, finishing with a giggle. Then he became serious, "Keep that device on you at all times, Dark One. You will need it, but I cannot explain why. It is just a feeling, okay?"

Brant nodded mutely, and slipped the Founder device into his pocket. He then sat down, and trembled. Joel ran over and climbed into his lap to hug him, "Wanna talk about it, Fangie?" he whispered.

Brant shook his head. "Not yet... I don't know what there is to talk about yet... Doctor?"

"Everyone needs to sit," the Doctor said. "I wasn't expecting this, to be fair." He waited until the others had settled down, then he started to explain more fully.

"In the Ancient Days, billions of years ago, the Time Lords were just Younger Races, like you are now. We were the Gallifreyans, and we simply lived on our world and explored space around us, much as your Federation does. Then, we were attacked by the Destroyer. At the moment he was doing so, I was ten years old and about to change into an energy based life form. I was the first on my world to evolve that far and it was believed I would lead my people into the next phase of existence as Middle Race members. Well, half right is better than all wrong. When the Destroyer attacked, the influx of energy changed me completely into what I am now. High Race in a Young Race body. My body changed to allow Anti-Energy to exist within it, and as I lost my temper at the Destroyer I also changed my entire race to be like me.

"Well, that nearly wiped us out. No-one can face the Destroyer - at least, not any of us Mortals from the Universes. It was the Guardian who came to my aid, and Higher Beings who chained the Destroyer. I only managed to distract the Destroyer by unleashing all the power that my race had suddenly come into possession of. Once the Destroyer had been dealt with by those *Others*, whom we Time Lords called 'The Runi', the Guardian appeared to us and taught us some of what we needed to know. A representative of our Race was asked to commune with the Guardian. It turns out that he had intended me for that role, but the leader of my people, then, was an asshole. Rassilon. He took the position for himself, then hid a lot of what it was to be High Race from us. The Thirteen, our OWN Council, sided with him completely, and only they were unlimited in power. They chained the rest of us, to control us.

"In my case, it didn't work. Although I didn't know that until I regenerated in my current form. In the last few weeks since that change, I have learnt that I was never limited nor chained. I am the Prince of my People, and therefore unbound.

"However, back then, I didn't know that. Anyway, as we were the First High Race to appear in the Third Cycle of Creation, we watched as others rose to our level from all the other current races of the time. The Time Council was first formed when the Q appeared, the next race to get to High level. In all cases, it was the first of each High Race that would go to the Council. Yet that was never me for the Time Lords. Instead, the Guardian spoke to me constantly behind Rassilon's back. When he found out, I was exiled. Didn't matter when the Time War started, though.

"At the end of the Time War, only the Q remained untouched. All the other High Races had died, and only I and one other Time Lord remained. He has now died, but I remain. I and my daughter and the newest of us, my partner Jay. So, now we have a new Council to form. This time, though, one from the Middle Races has been appointed. Miah, the Gatherer. I suppose he was given that name as he loves gathering information," the Doctor shrugged with a smile. "Levi was appointed from the Mikyvis. Even though he is not the Prince of the Mikyvis, he is the first born of them. And Innocent, and that is also his Council Name - Innocent. Both of those together marked him as Councillor. Q himself takes up his old post. He's not leader of his people, but he was the first to become Q, so... Prince of his race, he sits on the Council once more. Of the Younger Races, three are to be called. You two - The Dark One and the Silver One, and one other. The Fatherless. Then, the last, is unique. I don't know who he or she is, nor where from, but I have the name."

"That is?" Justy whispered.

The Doctor half smiled, "The Undying."

Justy blinked, "Wow. Ah, okay."

"Not very nice name for this 'Fatherless' one, really," Dean murmured. "A lot of the guys here are that. There's a lot of people everywhere who are fatherless. How will you find this person?"

"Just as I found you," the Doctor whispered. "The Seal will just appear. The Seal of Time."

Joel smiled and slipped from Brant's lap. "It'll work out, though. Sounds like the Councillors will be a good thing."

Justy nodded absently. "Doc, you said I would be affected by Dean being a Councillor? I'm not going to age?"

"Correct," the Doctor nodded. "When the Council is formed, you shall come under the same rules as Dean. Now, though, you'll age. Shouldn't be long for me to find the last two members, so it's not long to wait."

Dean smiled at his boyfriend, "Looks like you don't have to become a Vifer after all, hon."

Justy smiled back, "Yeah."

As Joel left CIC to head back outside, now carrying his bag of cookies that he had originally gone to collect, he was pounced by Jimmy.

After rolling around on the grass tickling each other for a few minutes, Jimmy helped Joel stand. "Daddy says that your daddy and him are bestest friends. Does that mean we get to be bestest friends too?" Jimmy bubbled as he slipped under one of Joel's arms and hugged him around the waist.

"Yeah! We're gonna be great friends, Jimmy!" Joel agreed with a sunny smile. "You gonna come play with me and Kevvy?"

"Okay!" Jimmy bounced around in a circle for a moment before grabbing Joel's hand.

Together, they sped off to meet back up with the others.

From the doorway, Spock and Kirk watched their sons race off after that interaction.

"I think history is about to repeat itself," Kirk chuckled.

"You still find our first meeting amusing, Jim?" Spock enquired.

"Of course," Kirk nodded with a wicked grin. "Me in trouble and hiding from my father. You not wanting to have your bath. Us both using the same cupboard to hide in. Good thing we were only six years old. We'd have never gotten in there otherwise."

"What's this?" Bones asked from behind them. "This is one story I seem to be missing out on!"

"Well done, Jim," Spock said as he and Kirk turned to the wickedly grinning doctor.

"Explain, or it's a full physical for you both!" McCoy demanded, his eyes twinkling.

"My parents and I were on Earth for a meeting of the Federation Council," Spock said, his face straight, "Jim and his father were also in San Francisco as Captain George Kirk was involved representing Starfleet. George Kirk and my father started talking, and became close friends at that point. Later that same week, Jim and his father were invited to my parents' residence for a few days. Jim, being Jim, got into trouble with his father. I, being a willful boy, did not wish to be bathed. The rest, as they say, is history."

Kirk nodded, "You looked cute back then. Pity you grew ugly," he chuckled.

Spock raised an eyebrow, "Cute?"

"Well, it was curiosity that made me chose to hide in the same cupboard as you."

"Explain?" Bones repeated his prior question, glee in his eyes.

"I wondered why an emotionless Vulcan boy was running around naked, giggling and hiding from his mother," Kirk laughed. "So I went to find out. I didn't know that until age 7, Vulcans are much as us."

Spock decided to say nothing.

"You were streaking, Spock?" Bones howled in laughter.

"I had an aversion to clothing as a child," Spock said softly, while contemplating an interesting formation on the wallpaper near him.

"He was streaking," Kirk grinned. "And from that moment on, so did I. Was fun."

"Next thing you'll tell me is that you two were boyfriends for a while," Bones laughed out as he landed on his backside as his legs gave way, he was laughing so hard.

Spock glanced down at the doctor, then over at Kirk. Kirk's face coloured up ever so slightly.

Bones stopped laughing. "You *were*?"

"No," Kirk answered with a soft smile. "We were, and are, friends. Best friends. Brothers. Closer than brothers. We do love each other, but it is not, and never was, romantic. We are both straight."

"Then why the blush?" Bones pressed curiously.

Spock shrugged. "We grew up together as much as possible, Doctor. When we were teenagers, we grew curious regarding our bodies and our sexuality. Even though I was walking the Vulcan path, that part of our development still mirrors Humans for curiosity. We experimented. Then, at the age of 14, I went into Pon Farr..."

"And he was in trouble," Kirk continued for his friend. "He had been training for the meditation needed for his first, weak Pon Farr; yet due to his human side, his Pon Farr triggered near to the level of an adult's."

"I would have died had Jim not been there," Spock said softly, his eyes distant.

"Ah," Bones nodded, his face now soft with compassion and understanding.

"We had sworn blood brotherhood as little children. I, for my part, proved it on that day," Kirk said, just as softly as Spock. "I would never leave my brother to die and the love I had and have for him meant I didn't feel weird doing what we *had* to do. I would do so again in a heartbeat should I need to. And since then, we have each always been there for the other."

Bones smiled and stood back up. He joined his two friends in the doorway, and together they looked out to where Joel and Jimmy were happily playing tag with a number of the others. "I think you are right. History tends to repeat itself."

"That doesn't match what... uhhh..." Jude said from behind them, then he blushed. "Sorry, Pop," he whispered to Spock as he bowed his head, "I shouldn't have been eaves-dropping."

"There is no problem, Jude," Spock replied as he pulled Jude into his arms. "What did you mean by 'it does not match'?"

Still blushing, Jude half grinned up at his new father and said, "There was an episode of 'Star Trek' where you were going to Altair VI for an important meeting, and you had your first Pon Farr. Uncle Jim didn't know what that was... but that seems different here."

"It is," Spock said calmly as Kirk and Bones exchanged puzzled glances. "I went through Pon Farr at that time, and we did go to Vulcan so that I could be joined in marriage with T'Pring - which did not come to pass, as you know. However, in this Universe, I experienced Pon Farr as an adolescent, and Jim was there to help me."

"Why's it different?" Jude asked curiously. "And how is it that you understand what I'm saying without more explanation?"

Spock nearly smiled, "I have joined my mind with my son. What he knows regarding 'Star Trek', I know. Remember, Jude, that Star Trek takes place in the 23rd Century in that story - and maybe in fact in another universe. In *this* Universe, however, events are bound to be different due to the difference in time."

"Oooh. Okay, Pop," Jude smiled as he hugged himself tightly around Spock's waist before giggling. "I think I'll join Joel in that game, now. Thanks, Pop."

"You are welcome," Spock said before kissing the teen's upturned forehead. He watched as Jude made towards Joel and the others at a run.

"Well, now that more temporal nonsense has been cleared up," Bones grouched, "I have five or six children to poke, prod, catalogue and identify, as well as spoil rotten. Will you join me?"

Kirk was about to ask what his friend was going on about when a group of kids appeared in between them all, giggling.

"Ah," Kirk said with a smile as Tyler shimmied up into his arms. "Now I understand!"

Bryce giggled as he cuddled into the doctor's side, "Can we call you Gran'pa Bones? You're too smart to be an Uncle!"

Bones wrapped his arms around the eleven year old, "Agreed - I am too smart. I think you and I will get on just fine!"

Bryce smiled up at Bones. "Leev says you hate those transporter things too... it scares me knowin what'd happen if it was tried on onea us. Can I take us to go get all checked out?"

"I'm right - I *will* like you! However, how do you manage to do what you do - to just appear wherever you want to?" Bones asked, as he hoisted the boy up and onto his hip.

Kyle and Tyler were each on one of Kirk's hips, leaving Spock with Levi and Dylan in *his* arms. Spock added, "I am also curious. How do you accomplish this feat?"

Bryce giggled. "I just think about it... it's like walking to the next room, only faster."

"Short, sweet, to the point - yet utterly useless to sate Spock's thirst for understanding," Kirk laughed. "Anyway, Mr... Bryce, is it?" Bryce nodded. "Well then, Mr Bryce. If you please, can you take us to Sickbay?"

"This one?" Bryce giggled as they all suddenly found themselves in front of Bones' desk.

"Fascinating," Spock murmured as he walked to the nearest biobed and placed the giggling seven year olds on it. Kirk, laughing, did the same with his arm full.

Bones was the last to add the child he was carrying to the growing mound of giggling imps. He then looked at Spock, "What test shall we do first? Tickle tolerance, or food consumption, or story endurance?"

Spock never had a chance to reply.

"COOKIES!!!!" Dylan giggled as his purple eyes lit up in anticipation.

"Did you pass on this fetish for that particular human food to my son, or did you catch it from him?" Spock asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Both!" Bryce giggled as he poked Dylan in the ribs.

Kirk went to the dispenser and started putting in an order for the children's treats while Spock resisted the urge to smile.

Bones, laughing, looked at the five children cuddled together closely. "Well, you are related, that is for sure. Kyle - I take it that these three are your offspring? Yours and Tylers? Isn't that what Joel said about Levi?"

"Uh huh." Kyle giggled. "Levi is our oldest, Bryce is the middle one, and Dylan is our youngest... so far. Unless you want another one to make sure; I'm sure Ty and I could think up one on short notice if we really need to."

"DAD! No makin whoopee in your heads while we're watchin!" Dylan exclaimed.
"Ewwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwww!"

Bones blinked, then chuckled momentarily. "No, that is quite alright, Kyle. I will be happy if you can explain what happens when you both make a child verbally. Doing so just to satisfy mine or Spock's curiosity would not be fair on the child that would be produced. He might well be made in love, but done so 'on order'. That is wrong, in my book. You should have another child when *you* and only you want one: not when asked just to have a bit of a 'wow' factor. Does that make sense?"

Kyle nodded as Tyler broke into giggles. "Don't worry Uncle Bones, we really wouldn't do that. You shoulda seen him tho; he looked just like you as a kid. We just didn't give the image life. We kinda think of what our offspring would be like, then we put energy and the stuff he needs to survive into the image and then we have a new kid."

"Very interesting," Bones said as he snatched up a datapad and started inputting data. "I feel like asking what you experience while doing that, but I think it'll be too personal with your children here."

"Don't worry, Grandpa Bones - Daddy and Poppa don't make whoopee in their heads to make us," Levi explained as he smiled up at the man. He then looked at his two brothers. "I was watching when you and Bryce were made!" he giggled as he poked both his brothers in their stomachs lightly. "It felt wonderful. I could feel all the love and all the energy being pulled in to make my two little brothers!"

"Ewwwwww!" Bryce and Dylan chorused at their big brother, playing it up for all they were worth.
"You watched us bein' born? Groooooosssssss!!!!!!!"

"Yeah. It was sweet," Levi giggled, then looked at his parents and smiled innocently, "Doesn't mean Daddy and Poppa don't do 'whoopie' at other times. It's very noisy, isn't it, Grandpa?"

"Too much information, child," Bones roared with laughter as he watched Tyler and Kyle cover their glowing faces with their hands.

"Grandma Teri's right; Daddy and Pop are cute when they blush!" Levi commented with a smile.

As Kirk returned, with a wicked grin on his face, and placed a tray of snacks at the foot of the biobed, Kyle tried to regain some of his dignity, "Uncle Bones, do you want to see how it's done?"

"I thought I said..." Bones started, but Kyle shook his head quickly - still blushing furiously, mind you.

"No, don't mean Ty and I'll make a new kid. We can show you what happened with Levi," he explained. "We can form images and illusions. Wanna see?"

Bryce and Dylan started giggling, expecting Levi to begin his own blushes, but their elder brother simply looked intrigued.

"As long as you do not mind, then we would be interested in seeing this. Would it be acceptable for us to record it?" Spock asked politely.

"Sure, Dad," Tyler smiled as Kyle echoed him with, "Sure, Daddy Spock."

Kirk moved quickly to the nearest console and set up the recording system. "Okay, all ready here," he smiled.

An image formed in front of them all as they settled down to watch. In the image, Kyle and Tyler were asleep with the sheets practically covering them both. All of a sudden they both started to glow - faintly, at first, then brighter.

Kyle whispered softly, "We were thinking about what our first son would be like. We wanted him to be perfect, someone that all of the grown-ups would tell us that we did good and they were proud of us."

In the image, another image overlaid itself. "That's what we were thinking," Tyler explained. The image expanded and they could all 'see' what both young children had been dreaming about. All the best parts of themselves seemed to come away and duplicate themselves, then merge together.

"We didn't know we were doing this at the time," Tyler added. "We just thought we were simply *thinking* about what a Mikyvis child *should* be. I... we think our instincts took over and this then started..." he trailed off as the image changed.

Now, it showed both boys asleep, and the second overlay disappeared. Between both boys, a brighter glow started to form. "I'm slowing it down so you can see. It happens too quick for humans to notice," Kyle said helpfully.

The bright glow took on a tiny, human form and suddenly expanded to Levi's current size. Kirk sat there in wonder, for he could see energy being pulled in from all around the two still sleeping kids and being funneled through them both and into this new, third child.

The glow went out an instant later, and all that was left was the early morning sunlight coming in through the window. The lump under the sheets that *had* been still and only two kid sized was now moving and three kid sized.

A caramel blond haired boy poked his curious and excited face out over the top of the sheets before throwing them off and bouncing off the bed onto the floor. He turned and shook Kyle, "Daddy! Wake up; I'm hungry!"

The image faded away, and Spock glanced at Tyler and Kyle. At first, he was concerned at the tears in their eyes, but he quickly understood that they were tears of joy. Remembering this event was obviously special to them both - sharing it with others...

"Whoa!" Dylan said softly, Bryce nodding his agreement. "I never knew the birds and the bees talk would be so awesome to watch!" Dylan added.

"It's kinda different from what our brothers have to do," Tyler giggled as he wiped his and Kyle's eyes. "The OTHER talk - the whoopee talk - we'll save for later... although I think that it is a bit late for one of you... isn't that right, *Bryce*?"

Bryce blushed and looked anywhere but at his parents and brothers. Levi looked at him quickly, "Xandor?"

Bryce nodded slightly, still blushing.

"SWEET!" Levi giggled before hugging him.

Spock looked hard at Kyle. "You are aware that, from the reports I have, this Xandor is twelve years old. As a Lo'Garn, that means he is an adult. Your sons are still only a few days old - are you sure no coercion was employed? I have not yet talked with Xandor to ascertain his personality in that regard."

Kyle nodded. "You know what all I carry in my head from growin up and listening to everyone's heads since I was a baby. You helped me learn to control it even. When Bryce decided he wanted to be eleven, I dug out all of the stuff that eleven year olds usually know and made sure he knew it. We did the same with Dylan, just more suited to the age he wanted to look like. Levi is kinda unique; I don't know for sure what he got since it was just a mix of stuff from me and Ty."

Levi looked into his fathers eyes, and tears sprang to his own. He trembled out, "Only the good stuff. You made me good and didn't give me anything that was bad. I... I didn't kn...know 'bout you and... and..."

Kyle pulled his first born over and into his arms, where upon Levi shrunk himself down to about the size of a three year old and simply sobbed loudly. "I'm sorry you had to find out about that the way you did," Kyle managed to say around his suddenly constricted throat. "Not even your brothers knew that. But if me and Ty'd planned you, we'd have prepared you better for some of this sh... uh, stuff."

Tyler brushed his fingers through Levi's hair and added, "You're completely innocent, Leev. Don't lose that over finding this stuff out. We love you exactly as you are. Please don't cry," he finished, crying a bit himself.

Bones and Spock exchanged a look, then they both looked at Kirk. Kirk nodded, and pushed his way onto the biobed with the other two adults. They scooped up the five kids and, somehow, managed to form a mass hug with them all. Kirk said, "We'll start the tests later. Right now, just be kids..."

"But you want to give us a full physical, Grandpa," Dylan giggled from his own bed as his clothes vanished. "We saw inside Poppa's head - we know what you're gonna check!"

Tyler wiggled as he remember his first check up by Bones, and his face twisted slightly before he giggled, "You're not... you won't...?"

"Only if you're willing," Bones laughed.

Kyle and Tyler exchanged a long, resigned expression, then sighed. "Okay, Uncle Bones. We'll do it," Kyle said as he play pouted.

Levi was rolling around on the floor, laughing.

"As the first born of the Mikyvis, Levi will get a double length test... unless he stops laughing at his parents, that is," Kirk teased, and Levi went quickly silent. Well, he had his hands clapped over his mouth, so the giggles were muted at least.

Spock picked up Kyle, who squealed in shock, and took him over to a deep-bio scanner. "Hey! Ask first, Daddy!" Kyle giggled as he was plonked gently down by the scanner.

Spock winked at him before starting up the machine. "You were the first human to transform, and did so on your own. We need to run a full comparison between what you were and what you are. We cannot ascertain that from your offspring as they were never human."

"Figures... you could check Tyler as well, though. He was human too... I think," Kyle giggled. He then caught the cookie that his equally miniature husband threw at him.

"Heart, lungs, kidneys... everything is here. Even blood... at least, I think it's blood. What is this stuff?" Bones murmured to himself as he ran the tricorder over Dylan's chest and stomach.

"Change the settings to scan for an atomic comparison, Doctor," Spock called over as he pressed a hand-held device from the bio-scanner against Kyle's belly, making the cherub giggle.

Bones did so. "Ah, anti-matter... no, anti-energy... wait a minute, matter? Dylan? What the hell are you? This is fluctuating!"

"I'm special!" Dylan sniggered.

"Dylan, stop messing with Uncle Bones!" Tyler giggled at his son.

"But I'm not doing nuffin'!" Dylan protested, although the fake halo he had created for himself was hanging off one foot at the time.

"Dylan!"

"Okay, okay!" the boy pouted, his eyes dancing in mirth, "you're no fun, Poppa!"

"So sue me!"

Kirk, meanwhile, was deep in discussion with a blushing Bryce. "It felt real funny, Grandpa Jim," Bryce said in a near whisper. "I was a little scared. Is that normal?"

"Quite normal the first time," Kirk replied just as quietly as he was using his own tricorder to scan Bryce's head.

Bryce sighed out in relief. "Xan said the same, but..."

"But you wanted to be sure. It's perfectly natural. At least there's one thing that is almost the same between our two races."

"I don't make anything to... you know..." Bryce blushed harder as he made a motion with his hands. "I tried growing up older, and still nothing, not like Xan can."

Kirk thought for a moment. "You don't need sperm to make babies, though. Maybe that is why."

"No," Levi said quietly as he wiggled over closer and winked at his 'big' little brother. "I just asked my Friend, the Guardian. Sorry, Bry - wasn't listening to make you feel bad. I was just lookin' out for my Lil' bro. My Friend said it's 'cause we're anti-energy. Unless we are in an anti-energy or anti-matter Universe, our bodies won't squirt stuff... it would have made things explode if it touched it..." Levi finished with a blush.

"Oh... okay," Bryce smiled, obviously far more happy now. "How does my body know that, though?"

"Dunno," Levi shrugged before making ready to move back to Dylan to help Bones control the Mischievous Mikyvis. "My Friend says it's the same for all the High Races. We'll find out as we grow."

As Levi got back to Dylan's biobed, he asked Bones, "When's it my turn?"

"Right now, if you'd like," Bones smiled down at him. "I've finished with your little terror of a brother," he added, giving Dylan a loving hug.

Dylan giggled and jumped down from the bed to run over and cuddle in with Kyle, who had swapped places with Tyler. Spock was so deeply immersed in his studies between the old and new reading of both boys that he was completely oblivious to the faces they were making at each other.

Levi hopped up on the bio-bed and stripped quickly. "I like being naked," he explained with a sunny smile.

"And clothes don't mean the same to you as to us, correct?"

"Yeah. We just dress 'cause it's custom. We don't need clothes."

Bones nodded with understanding as he started scanning the far more manageable Levi. "Your stomach is empty. You just ate a ton of cookies..."

"Watch," Levi said as he reached for the plate on the cabinet by the bed and started eating.

Bones did so, and whistled. "Your stomach is breaking it down rapidly... it's passing into your intestines and... gone. Well I'll be... Where does it go? There's no change to this... this 'blood' of yours..."

"Made into energy," Levi explained helpfully.

"How do you know when you've eaten enough to be 'full'?"

"Well... we don't NEED to eat at all, Grandpa. We just eat because we like the taste," Levi said with thought.

"Where do you get your nourishment from, then?"

Levi replied after a brief pause to formulate his thoughts into something Bones would comprehend, "Everywhere. We pull anti-energy from everywhere. All places and times and Universes and dimensions and timelines... everywhere. We just... *are*, I think."

Half an hour later, and all five boys were back on the same bed in a mass cuddle.

"We promised you stories, yet we didn't get to them," Kirk said with apology. "I don't want to keep you up here longer as you'll miss the fun of the party. Tonight, though, I promise you five that I'll give you the best story I can remember."

Kyle started to giggle. "Uncle Jim, we've ONLY been here five minutes," he sniggered.

Spock raised an eyebrow.

"I thought Dylan's idea to slow down time really was a good one!" Kyle explained with a grin.

"STORIES!!" Dylan giggled, bouncing up and down. "No excuses! STORIES!!"

Bones laughed as he pulled a chair over. "Yes, Jim. A promise is a promise."

Kirk laughed briefly, then nodded. "Okay. Stories. What would you like?"

Levi raised his hand, "Can you tell us about how you rescued Grandpa Spock from that Genesis world?"

Kirk glanced at Spock, who nodded peaceably. Kirk smiled at Levi and patted his lap, onto which Levi simply popped. He then began, "Okay. Well..."

"DADDY! You're back! I was lookin' for you!" Jimmy yelled as he and Joel came charging up to the three Starfleet officers and the five Mikyvis that had just appeared by the playing fields. "Aunty Teri wants to see Uncle Spock, and me and Joel couldn't find you anywheres!"

Kyle giggled, "We weren't gone *that* long!"

"Seems like days," McCoy retorted as he checked his watch. "Only one hour?! I need a drink."

Jimmy giggled as he swarmed into Kirk's arms. Kirk hugged him close and said, "I think I'll join you, Doctor."

"Where is your mother, Sa'ren?" Spock asked his son as he picked the boy up to hold him over one hip.

"Over there, Sa'mi!" Joel giggled as he pointed off towards Teri's house.

I-Cheya and Blackie came speeding up to them at that point, and Joel slipped from his father's arms and onto his Sehlat's back. Blackie pounced up and into his arms just as the large bear-cub started ambling alongside the Vulcan Captain.

"Do you know why Lady Teri wishes to speak to me, Sa'ren?" Spock asked as he laid his hand against his son's back.

Joel, enjoying the closeness with his dad, shook his head. "Nope. Not sure, Daddy - but it does have something to do with my big brothers," he answered with a smile.

Once they reached Teri's house, Spock entered first, followed by the Sehlat and his light Joel-ish burden. "MAMA!!!!" the boy yelled at the top of his voice, "I'VE FOUND HIM!!!!"

The sound of a dish breaking from the direction of the kitchen made Spock increase his pace. I-Cheya, however, seemed only amused and huffed softly as he strolled up the hallway with a puzzled Joel asking Blackie if anything bad had happened.

As the Sehlat pushed his way into the kitchen through the door, Joel looked up and asked, "What happened?"

Teri mock glared at him before chuckling, "You did, you little noise maker! I was daydreaming and doing the dishes, then you near yelled the place down! I jumped out of my skin!"

Joel's eyebrows raised, then his face clouded up quickly. "Sorry, Mama," he whispered as he started to shake slightly. Blackie started to clean his face to calm him down, which worked remarkably well.

"Don't worry, my lovely little man," Teri said gently as she came over and kissed Joel's cheek, "you're not the first to make me do that. THAT was your big brother Mikey - and he used a live spider!"

"Really?" Joel asked curiously.

"Yes. He found one and wanted to keep it as a pet, so he ran in from the back yard and showed me. I think I dropped the plates I was carrying when he just dropped it on my arm!"

"You don't like spiders?" Joel queried.

Teri shrugged, "I've gotten used to them, but at the time, no. Now, I deal with Timmy and his 'ark', so I don't mind as much." She shuddered slightly with the memory, making Spock place a hand on her shoulder. She smiled at him, then faced Joel again, "That *thing* that Mikey brought in was the most... hairy, large - I swear it tried to bite me!"

Joel started to giggle. "How old was Mikey?"

"Three! I thought he was so bad then that no child could ever outdo him, but Cory and Sean proved me wrong on that. But that spider... I'll never forget that..." Teri shuddered.

"But he was cute, Mom!" Mikey's voice announced from nowhere.

Spock glanced around, then raised an eyebrow. "Is this what humans refer to as beauty being in the eye of the beholder, Michael?"

"Timmy agrees with me!" Mikey's voice replied, the pout heard in the tone.

Joel giggled, "Are you going to appear? Or are you playing a game of hide and go seek?"

"Count to a hundred, and then come find me. I'll be somewhere in this building!" Mikey giggled before his voice disappeared.

Joel started to mentally count while slipping down from I-Cheya's back and hugging both his parents together. Another feeling came to his awareness at that moment, and he stared between his Mam and Dad. "You... you both..." he whispered out, his eyes growing wide. "I thought it was just you, Mama!"

Teri blinked, then coughed. "I think you better keep counting, Joel," she smiled.

Joel looked suspiciously at her then shrugged and giggled. "I never stopped! Fifty! Fifty One..." he called out loudly as he went to stand by the doorway.

Teri looked up into Spock's eyes, her face unreadable.

Later that afternoon:

"Tommy?" Joel asked hesitantly as he tugged on the back of his brother's tee-shirt.

They were both inside the Rec Room, and Kelly had just gone off to talk with his new brother Xandor. Joel thought now would be a good time to ask his brother for some help: if he would, of course.

"T...Tommy?"

"Yeah li'l bro; what's worryin ya?" Tommy replied as he turned around and saw Joel's pensive looking face.

Joel smiled nervously up at him before taking a deep breath. He then rushed out, "I love all the food he-re, and you helped make it all, and I don't wanna seem like I'm greedy or nuffin', but I really, *really* liked helping ya cook on Tuesday and was wonderin' if me and you... if we could cook somethin' together... please?" The catch that came to Joel's voice at the end of this request seemed heartbreaking.

Tommy pulled Joel over to him and draped an arm over his shoulder as he held him to his side. "You ain't gotta do no worryin' 'bout being greedy. There's always cookin ta be done with this crew, an' if you wanna help with it I'm happier than a hawg with a full slop bucket ta let ya join me an' make up sweet treats or anythin' else you're pinin' for."

Joel grinned happily, then reached into his pocket and pulled out a small sheet of folded paper. "I read a story in that *other* place - called 'Dragon Earl'. Not sure if the story's here or not, but... there was some-thin' called Cinmon Crumbles and all the kids in the story loved them. The person who wrote the story put the recipe on one of the chapters... here - I wrote it down exactly as Mr Story lover had it... do you think we can make it?"

Joel handed Tommy the paper, and then wrapped both his small skinny arms around his 'big' brother's waist while Tommy read it out:

'Cinmon Crumbles'

>From "Dragon Earl" by The Story Lover

Ingredients:

1 cup soft Butter

1 1/2 cup granulated sugar

2 eggs

2 3/4 cups flour

2 teaspoons cream of tartar (Fresh if possible)

1 teaspoon baking soda

1/2 teaspoons salt (optional)

Directions:

Cream butter, sugar and eggs till fluffy. Sift together and stir in flour, cream of tartar, baking soda and salt (optional). Then chill dough for about 30 minutes to an hour. If making a double batch when removing from refrigerator split dough in half and return one half to refrigerator. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Roll dough into balls the size of small walnuts. Roll into mixture of 2 tablespoons of sugar and 2 tablespoons of cinnamon (Gourmet or Fresh Ground is Best). If dough starts to melt or become gooey place back in refrigerator. Place about 2 inches apart on ungreased baking sheet (you can also use aluminium foil). Place in preheated oven for about 8-10 minutes or until golden brown. Do not over cook, edges should be golden brown and slightly crisp centers should still be slightly puffy.

Once Tommy had finished, Joel looked up and smiled softly, "Think we can make it? For real?"

"Ain't nuttin we can't do if we gotta recipe!" Tommy giggled. "This here one's easier than kissin a cousin at a family reunion!"

"Brilliant!" Joel bubbled, and his eyes danced with joy.

Tommy giggled and together they ran out of the Rec Room for the Kitchen. They spent the first couple of minutes clearing an area for themselves and collecting the ingredients.

"Mmm... I think we're missing something," Joel murmured as he knelt on the stool Tommy had brought over for him. Without that, Joel would have had some serious issues with helping at all. With Tommy's arm around his waist to steady him, Joel checked against the recipe and then counted out the ingredients again. Then he giggled. "Look, Tommy! Mr Story Lover forgot to put the toppings ingredients in! The extra sugar and the cinnamon!"

"Figgers; adults kinda have probl'ns remem'brin stuff!" Tommy giggled, then quickly ducked to avoid the oven mitt Helen threw at him from across the kitchen.

"Be careful, Tommy, or you'll get a dunkin' - And I've had practice with Kelly, so it'll be 'mom-style'!" she called as she turned back, grinning, to the fresh batch of brownies she was making.

Joel giggled, then said as his eyes flickered as if reading something, "Mr Story Lover's editor musta missed it as well..."

"Who was that?" Tommy asked as he threw the mitt at his aunt's back before assuming an innocent expression as she turned to glare at him.

"Someone called 'Sleeping Beauty'," Joel answered absently as he practically crawled onto the workbench top to reach the mixing bowl and pull it over towards them both. "Maybe he fell asleep when editing?" he added with a shrug as he grasped the bowl.

Tommy giggled, but the look that Helen was giving him let him know that running with the comments he was thinking about would not be the best way to stay dry.

Once Joel had the bowl in front of him, he turned his sweet face to his brother and said, "Think we're ready. Can you show me how ta cook, now? I've never made somethin' like this before... and you're not like *her* - she would make me h...hurt when she had me h...help her cook. You don't. You make my bel-

ly feel good," he finished, as a single, happy tear trickled down his cheek. "I love you, Tommy," he added with a whisper before kissing his brother's cheek.

"I love you too lil' bro." Tommy replied as he positioned himself behind Joel so that his arms were running alongside Joel's arms. "Let's be startin' by makin' sure you're knowin' what the words all mean. We're gonna go through it one line at a time and anything you ain't sure of I'll learn ya so that you're sure."

"Kay," Joel murmured happily, then both brothers started to have fun.

It took far longer than it would have done had Tommy been doing this alone, but then, Tommy had never had as much fun learning a new recipe before. What with the mix of Joel's enthusiasm, energy, weird comments involving knowledge of things that didn't exist here, and his extreme childlike wonder and natural 'five year old' attraction to getting messy, both Tommy and Joel were laughing and completely covered in the mixture they had prepared.

"Half hour in the fridge now?" Joel bubbled as he shook flour out of his now gray seeming curls.

"Yeppers!" Tommy giggled as he carefully put hand prints all over the front of Joel's shirt.

Joel giggled happily as he slipped down from the stool and picked up one of the many trays with the dough on them. Tommy grabbed two more and together they walked over to where Helen and Teri were holding the fridge doors open for them both. Both women's faces were red with suppressed laughter, and as Joel slid the first tray into place to chill, Teri couldn't help but ask, "Are you cooking yourselves as well?"

"Mama!" Joel giggled as she pulled him close and tickled his ribs.

Once all the trays had been put to chill, Tommy sat on a nearby stool and Joel crawled up and sat on his lap. He sat chest to chest with his brother and snuggled in happily. "Tommy?"

"Yeah, Li'l bro?" Tommy murmured into Joel's flour covered hair.

"Can you tell me a story?"

"I can do that," Tommy replied with a smile. "What yer wantin' to hear?"

Joel raised his face and kissed Tommy's lips. "If it's okay, can you tell me how you and Kelly met?" he asked as he coloured up shyly. "I liked it when Sammy asked Vish to be his boyfriend. I like happy stories, and I'm curious."

Tommy smiled at Joel, kissed him back, then began 'the story'...

Adam Casey, Logan and Chang walked into the Kitchen looking for some blood wine. Juan, Koth, Korris, Billy and Will followed behind while animatedly discussing the duel between Chang and Spock earlier, comparing it to the one between Jason and Nathan.

"Are you sure there's wine here, Kor?" Adam asked as he checked the fridge.

Korris nodded, "Top shelf. We made sure it was okay with Aunt Teri. As long as the little kids don't get hold of it, then those of us with the tolerance can have it."

"Got it," Adam said as he pulled out two bottles. He moved to the nearest table, glancing at Tommy and Joel who were seated nearby. "Want some, Tommy? Joel?"

Tommy broke off from his tale and made a face. "Nope. Hate it!" he said.

Joel, however, nodded his head curiously. "I'll try some." He looked back at Tommy, "That's okay, isn't it?"

"Help yerself, Joel. That junk makes 'shine taste good!" Tommy smiled at him. "I'll be checkin' the Crumbles."

As Tommy moved off towards the fridges, Joel ran over and got pulled onto Chang's lap.

Adam poured out nine glasses of blood wine, the smallest of which he handed to Joel, "Just in case you don't like the taste."

"And don't worry about the alcohol content," Koth added. "Vulcan's don't get affected by the 'weak' stuff humans and Klingons make."

"Kay," Joel smiled as he took a sip of the drink.

"Anyone seen Jory lately?" Will asked suddenly. "I've not seen him since little Kevin was crowned by the Queen," he added.

Adam shook his head, "Nope. Not seen him. I'm not worried, though. He's probably off with one of the Clan. I can't feel him in danger."

"I'm okay, and no I wasn't in danger," Jory sniggered as he sauntered into the Kitchen, looking like the cat who had the cream.

"Where have you been?" came the question from most of the guys there.

Jory smirked at them all as he bounced lightly on his heels.

Joel placed his now empty glass down and licked his lips. "Yumm, that was nice," he said to Adam, who refilled the glass for the little Vulcan.

"You missed a great afternoon," Juan said as he studied his brother's face closely. "The duel between Captain Spock and Chang was amazing!"

"I had my own fight," Jory said, his smirk growing wider.

Chang raised an eyebrow. "Indeed? Did you win?"

"No," Jory giggled, his cheek's colouring. "I lost something - oooooooh *boy*, did I lose something!"

Adam choked on the drink he was taking, and Logan hammered on his boyfriend's back to help him. Logan was staring at Jory closely, however.

Joel looked concerned. "You lost something? Want me to help you find it?" he asked helpfully - innocently.

Tommy, just returned from checking the Crumbles, started to laugh.

"Uhh... no, Joel," Jory giggled. "I *wanted* to lose it."

Joel raised an eyebrow, while comprehension came to those others who had so far missed their little brother's meaning. Joel's face was a mask of confusion, however. "What did you lose?"

Jory blushed and said, "Something you and Kevvy will be losing tonight, I think."

Joel blinked. "Losing tonight? I don't wanna lose nothin', though! I don't wanna make someone feel bad by losing their presents to me! Why'd I lose someth...thing... oh... OH... you mean... my... errr..." He trailed off.

Adam looked at him while grinning, expecting to see Joel's face turn a nice emerald shade of green. Instead, he saw something that made him feel uneasy. Joel's face had paled. He was almost ghost white.

"I, errr... I've gotta get back to cooking... thanks for the wine," Joel rushed as he pushed off Chang's lap and moved quickly over to Tommy. He then pulled his brother off back towards the fridge where the Crumbles were.

Adam shrugged and left whatever was bothering Joel to Tommy to sort out - being Joel's brother, Tommy was likely to help better than himself, he felt. He turned back to Jory, who was also looking at Joel's retreating back. "So," Adam said, pulling everyone's attention back from Joel and onto Jory again. "Who was the lucky guy or girl?"

"Yes," Jory sniggered, his eyes dancing with mirth once more. His face was still glowing with his blush, though.

Koth tilted his head to the side, then his eyes widened. "A boy AND a girl?!"

Jory grinned and nodded his head foolishly.

"You greedy little pinkskin!" Korris roared with laughter. "Who did you manage to rope, then?"

"Us, Kor," Donna said as she and Tristan waltzed through the door and pulled Jory in between them both.

Adam's jaw hit the table.

Logan spluttered, "Aren't you two already going together... I... I..."

"Yes," Tristan smiled. "But we both fancied Jory since we first saw him."

"We thought we were being unfaithful to the other, but then we talked and..." Donna shrugged. "Jory's so cute."

"Hot too," Tristan sniggered.

Jory continued to look like the cat who ate the canary.

Koth giggled, "Matthew is going to shit his pants, Trist!"

"Let him. He's too straight laced for his own good. He needs to spend more time here than at the Nest - I'm getting frightened for him," Tristan said, trailing off towards the end.

Koth shrugged. "If you think it'll help, I can assign him here for a while. He's under my Command section, after all - but his darkness is carried in the heart, bro. Moving to a new place won't help."

"But maybe he'll find someone here to give him hope," Tristan begged with tears now in his eyes. "He just won't let anyone at home near. Here, someone may have a chance. No-one here knows him, so he may feel easier in opening up."

"Then I'll assign him to Night Patrol here," Koth nodded. "I just want you to know it may not help."

"Thanks, Koth," Tristan smiled as Jory wiped the tears from his eyes.

Jory then yelped, for Donna had just pinched his behind.

"So... the three of you... you're, ummm," Adam started, but didn't quite know how to phrase what he wanted to ask.

"Maybe," Tristan answered, giggling.

"One step at a time," Donna added.

Jory grinned. "We'll see!"

Meanwhile:

Joel slipped from Chang's lap and got back to Tommy as fast as he could. His heart was racing, and fear flowed through his veins. Trembling, he pulled his brother to the fridge and opened it to check the crumbs for himself. He quickly glanced back at Logan and Adam and the others, and once their attention had moved back to Jory, he looked up into Tommy's face.

The horror and terror in his own made Tommy frightened.

"What's the matter?" Tommy asked quickly, his accent gone due to the fear he could feel rolling off the now very frail seeming Vulcan child.

Joel violently shook his head, shooting a look back at the group of happy brothers who were now teasing Jory, Donna and Tristan.

Tommy glanced back at them, then picked up the near catatonic Vulcan. Casually, he carried his brother out of the Kitchen and into Main CIC, heading for the nearest room where they would have some privacy.

As they were almost to the nearest Meeting room, Tommy saw Kevin and Kenny enter quickly through the north doorway. They both noticed Joel's face and Tommy's expression, and Kevin ran over fast. Tommy looked directly at Kenny and said, "Get Mom and Pop. Fast!"

Kevin stopped at Tommy's side and grabbed Joel's hand. A second later he yelled out to his fast departing brother, "Poppa too, Ken!"

"Okay!" Kenny shouted back as he raced from the room.

Closing the door behind them, Kevin watched as Tommy sat down while holding Joel tightly to himself. He then moved over and cuddling in with his husband on Tommy's lap, and asked, "What triggered this?"

"Dunno what's been triggered," Tommy answered, his face clearly showing his concern and his confusion.

The door opened before Kevin could elaborate on what he'd picked up through his bond-link when Joel had first panicked, and Teri and Spock entered.

"What has transpired?" Spock asked as he came and laid a finger on his son's temple.

"Dunno," Tommy said again as he shrugged.

"Joel? Sweetie? What's wrong?" Teri asked as she laid a hand on his shoulder and squeezed gently.

Joel screamed at her touch and flinched away, crying out as he fell from Tommy's lap and Kevin's embrace, "I won't do nuffin'! I promise, Mama! Please don't hit me! Don't hurt me! I promise! I won't, I really won't!"

"Joel; this is Momma Teri. You know I won't hurt you," Teri said softly as she glanced at Spock for support. "Remember where you are now, Son; you are not in the old place any more."

"Sa'ren," Spock added as he laid a hand on Teri's shoulder and sent his calming influence and support through his touch. "You have nothing to fear from us. Nothing you do or say will mean pain for you from us - ever."

Joel simply remained curled up in a tight ball at the far end of the sofa, and looked at them fearfully. He then flicked his eyes towards Kevin.

Allen quietly slipped into the room, along with Kenny, Xain and Jake. They saw the looks being traded, and the fear from the ball Joel had become was evident to them instantly. They remained silent and watched.

Kevin's own eyes grew distant for a second as he and his husband communicated silently, then Kevin trembled nervously, "He found out that Jory lost his virginity earlier. That's not a problem for him. It wasn't when Sammy made love with Vish either earlier. It's... it's that people are expectin' *US* to... to... well..." Kevin started to tremble as well. He looked nervous and embarrassed, yet not terrified like Joel was. He sucked in his breath and continued, "He's afraid that everyone *expects* us to lose our virginity tonight, and he's still real afraid about sex. He's still nervous when we... we jack off," Kevin whispered shyly before continuing, "but he knows we can do that with your blessing, Aunt Te... Momma. But... he's *still* scared of you. He thinks if he does anything more then you're gonna whip him good..."

"Joel, listen to me," Teri said softly yet firmly, "You are my son, and I don't hurt my sons for doing what is natural to them. You and Kevin are married, and that means I have no right to say anything about what you do in private. Even if you were not married, I understand a lot more than I'm given credit for. It's not like when Cory was five and he kept 'accidentally' elbowing Sean in a certain area then innocently asked Sean if he needed his owwie kissed. You both know what you are ready for and I trust you to take care of each other and only do what you both are comfortable with."

"But it's wrong..." Joel's voice was a near whisper, yet the terror it expressed was clearly heard. "It's wrong to jack off, but you let me... Kev wanted to gimme a blow job earlier, but he said he won't force me... it's all wrong... why do you let me do *anything* that's wrong? Are you waiting to get me on something big, then kill me?!" he sobbed and hid his face completely from view. "I want to believe you..." he sobbed piteously. "I really want to believe you... but I can't... *she* won't let me... *he* won't let me... why can I get rid of Sammy's demons, but not mine? It's not fair... it's not fair..."

"Demons?" Spock asked suddenly.

Kevin looked up at him and said through his own tears, "That wound in his mind... there's something in there that hates my Sa'r..."

"Wound?! *What* wound?" Spock asked, clearly surprised, and more than a little angry.

Teri looked at him. "Didn't you learn that from the meld you had with Joel?"

Spock shook his head as he pulled in his temper. "No. I saw all that lead up to his rescue by Michael. No more. Can someone explain to me what has happened?"

Xain moved over with Jake and Allen, "I can, Uncle Spock. Meld with me, for I was the one through whom Joel was saved on Tuesday."

As Spock did so, Allen moved to Joel, "Little Heart, will you allow me to hug you? And will you allow your mother as well?"

"You won't hurt me?" came the whimpering tremble.

"Never," both Teri and Allen answered.

Joel uncurled and flung himself at them, to be squashed as a sandwich between them both.

A moment later, Spock broke the meld with Xain. He turned to find his son buried in a hug with the other two adults.

Teri looked over into his eyes, "I'm sorry, Spock. I thought you knew, or I'd have told you earlier."

"That is quite all right, Teri," Spock said, his voice now as calm and even as ever. "It was logical to assume that I would have found that out from my meld with my son. There is no blame to be cast, here."

"Will you be able to rid Joel of this wound?" Allen asked before continuing to murmur softly into Joel's hair.

Spock shook his head, "Not before I meditate. Such a task is difficult. What the Mikyvis, Jason and the others did with Xain is enough to last until tomorrow. Longer, even. I shall meditate tonight, and tomorrow I shall repair my son's mind."

Allen sat down with Joel on his lap, and Teri sat next to him. Tommy got pulled onto her lap quickly as Kevin moved onto his Poppa's to cuddle in again with Joel. Spock then sat beside Teri. "Little Heart," Allen said quietly as he looked up at Jake and Xain. "You won't get into trouble, but I'd like you to answer some questions for us, okay?"

"Kay," Joel whispered into Kevin's neck as they hugged tightly.

"You are afraid of us hurting you for making love, yes?"

"Yeah," Joel answered as he squeezed his eyes tight shut. "Yeah."

"Do you want to make love to Kevin?" Allen asked.

A pause, then a whisper. "Yes."

"Do you want to make love to Joel, Kev?" Allen asked his son.

Kevin blushed and answered, "Yes. I do."

"Will you feel better if I give my permission, Joel?" Allen whispered softly, again looking at Xain and Jake and this time asking them a question with his eyes. They nodded.

"Yes," trembled Joel. "But..."

"Shhh, Little Heart," Allen smiled. "When Jake and Xain wanted to start down that path, they asked me first. I told them a few things, and I'm going to tell you the same. Will you pay attention?"

"Yes," both little boys whispered.

"One, respect each other's wishes. Don't push if the other says no. When you are both ready, then do things together. It doesn't matter what others think or expect, just because you are married. This is a

Vulcan marriage, and no Vulcan expects anything other than for you to respect the other," Allen said softly. "Two, play and have fun when you make love. Don't push yourselves to copy others, nor think you have to do things 'the right way', for there IS no right way. What you both want is what is right. As long as you both want it, and you both enjoy it, and you both love each other through it and with it, then it is right."

Teri reached and brushed a hand through both boys' hair, "Three, if you have questions - ask. Don't be embarrassed, for we've all been there. If you need to ask, do so."

"Four," Spock added, "you have our blessing."

"For everything?" Joel trembled, locking his eyes with his mother's.

"For everything. Do you want me to list them?" Teri asked, hoping he wouldn't.

No such luck.

Jake decided that he and Xain should leave them all to it, once Joel shook his head and asked the three adults to be specific.

Tommy, ten seconds later, decided that the Crumbles should be put in the oven to be baked at this point, and fled - blushing.

After a minute or two, Teri came to the conclusion that Joel would keep asking until either her knowledge ran out, or she too fled blushing. "One moment, sweetheart," she said to her Vulcan son.

Joel nodded slowly, "Okay..."

"Ark?"

<Yes, Teri?>

"Can you produce a data-pad containing all non-harmful sexual activities that two males can engage in, please?"

<I thought you might ask that, judging by the direction your discussion was headed. I have already prepared it for you.> A padd appeared in Teri's hand. <The data is detailed, yet not even close to exhaustive. Joel, I will not give you all the details, to honor what Allen Thompson has just told you. I have found through more than 50 thousand years that humans prefer to discover things in lovemaking for themselves. You and Kevin should do the same. What is on that padd will give you an overview of lovemaking only; along with a few examples.>

Teri handed the padd to the two boys as Joel said, "Thanks, Ark."

<You are welcome.>

Kevin's face was bright red, but he pressed himself close to his little husband as they both started to read the padd, and to look at the stick figure images that were portrayed therein.

Joel's eyes began to get wider and wider, while Kevin's grew more and more curious. Joel looked up and asked, "All this is okay, Mama?"

Teri glanced at it before quickly looking up and into Spock's eyes. Keeping her voice steady, she said, "Yes, sweetheart. All of it."

A moment or so later, Joel held the padd out again and squeaked, "This too?!"

"Yes, that... Oh My God!" Teri choked out, and blushed.

Spock, his eyebrows vanished into his hairline, came to the rescue, for even Allen's eyes had widened considerably, "Yes, Sa'ren. That is acceptable if you both want to do so."

Kevin giggled as he tilted his head first one way and then the other to look at the image. "How'd we...? Ah, I see... that could be fun, Sa'r!"

Ten minutes later:

"Cory?" Joel said as he and Kevin ran up to the blond Patriarch.

Cory smiled down at the two boys, both of whom had curious expressions clearly seen on their faces. "What's that, Elf?" he asked, pointing at the padd.

"Something Ark gave us. Mama said that we can do anything on here, and that we can experiment too. But there's this one thing that Kev and I don't see how is possible. Ark said, though, that you know. Can you show us?"

Cory, not having the slightest clue what was ON the padd, nodded his head. "If Ark says I can help, then I'll help. What is it?"

Sean walked over and cuddled in next to Cory as Joel turned the screen of the padd towards them. "Ark says that you and Sean've done this lots and lots of times, but I don't see how two humans can BEND that far... can you explain? Or better yet, show us?" Joel asked innocently.

Sean fell on his butt and hid his blushing face quickly, while Cory gaped at the padd. He then tapped his comm and said, as calmly as possible, "Ark, if you EVER tell ANYONE else about that, I'll personally downgrade you to Windows ME!!!!"

"You know something, Bones? I don't think I've ever seen Spock this afraid before," Kirk chuckled as the three men watched the two Harrier jets zoom over doing a barrel-rolls.

Bones opened his own dried mouth and tried to respond, but failed. He spat once, then muttered loudly, "Playing games with life... If anything happens to my god-son and his friend, Jim, I will personally skin those other two kids, then you for allowing it!"

"Peace, Doctor," Spock said calmly, although the fists his hands had become as he held them at his side showed that he was anything but calm as Will took his jet, and therefore little Joel as well, on a loop-the-loop. Billy, with Jude along for the fun, did the same.

"You scared, Gran'pa Bones?" Timmy asked with concern as he came up and tugged on McCoy's hand. Obviously, the new name given to him by Kyle's three kids had taken off somewhat.

"Nervous," Bones answered as he lifted up the small red head and plonked him on his shoulders.

Timmy patted the doctor's head and said, "Unca Will's a good flyer, Gran'pa - so's Unca Billy! Unca Joel an' Jude'll be okay."

"I know, Timmy," the man said softly. "I know," he repeated under his breath as the jet went screaming past.

"Cap'n? Is what I've heard true? Ye be leaving the Fleet?" Scotty said to Kirk as he walked up behind them. He had to raise his voice somewhat louder than usual as now the two jets started a mock-dogfight in the sky above them.

Kirk turned and nodded, "Yes, Scotty. I have a son, and I'm not going to miss his life as I did David's."

"You too? Is there somethin' in the water?" the engineer chuckled. After Bones had finished chuckling as well, Scotty added more seriously, "The old girl'll not be the same without ye, Cap'n - but she'll be in good hands."

"I know she will," Kirk grinned. "Admiral Morrow has given her to me for as long as I want to keep her."

Scotty gaped for a second, then his face grew red. With a little heat he said, "Ye'll no be taking my ship from me, Captain! I'll resi'n meself and come with ye, but..."

"Scotty!" Kirk laughed, "Do you think I'd take the Enterprise and *not* you? She'll still be staffed and crewed by the Fleet - and still the Flagship. I'll either take her out on special missions for the Fleet myself, or the new Captain will with my blessing. The rest of the time, she's mine to do with as I see fit - mostly, assisting the Clan Short Fleet."

"Oh," the now deflated Scotsman mumbled, "oh, I see. Well... good! That's good. Who's getting the chair?"

"Not decided yet. The admiral said I'd be the one to choose, so - we'll see," Kirk smiled as he turned back to watch the two Harriers come in for a vertical landing. "Who's going to make a bet that young Joel will be a bit hyperactive now?"

Scotty snorted briefly as he watched the jets touch down. "No bet. I got better things to be doing with me money, Cap'n!"

"So, why're we all going in dress uniform?" Adam asked JJ as he helped his boyfriend adjust the jacket properly.

JJ shrugged, messing up the way the jacket sat on his shoulders, "Dunno."

"Stop that!" Adam grouched as he slapped JJ around the back of the head.

"Ouch! Then stop asking me stuff I don't know the answer to!"

Cory and Sean entered the hallway outside of the Auditorium, and just behind them came Jude, Joel and Kevin. All five were in Full Dress Starfleet uniforms. Jude's, Joel's and Kevin's lacked rank insignia, and their polo-shirts were in cadet red, though.

JJ whistled, "Very nice!"

Joel did a little twirl on the spot before bouncing up and down excitedly. "Daddy gave them to us! Don't they look great?"

Adam and JJ both nodded. "You look even better in uniform than Cory does!" JJ replied.

Joel glanced at Cory, who filled his uniform out in a far more flattering way than he did himself, then turned back to JJ, "I make mine look baggy..."

"I don't think so -- I think Cory's is getting too tight." JJ replied seriously. "It must be all of those cookies he keeps eating!"

Cory quickly looked down at his belly, then glared at JJ. "One more word, just one more, and you're going swimming," he muttered.

Joel giggled, "No more of them Cinmon Crumbles for you, Big-Bellied-Blondie!"

"I'm not fat!" Cory protested with a pout, but Joel could see the amusement in his big brother's eyes.

"Oh, I don't know," Sean commented lightly as he grabbed a nice handful of Cory's butt, "means more to cuddle if you are, Hon."

"If you have quite finished, gentlemen," Bones said from the doorway to the Auditorium as Cory blushed and fended off his amorous husband's rather welcomed but ill timed advances, "then we can begin." He was in full dress uniform as well, and behind him the boys could see everyone from the Compound seated and chatting to themselves. On the stage, Admiral Morrow, Spock and Kirk were seated and also talking in hushed tones.

"Okay, what's happening, Uncle Bones?" Adam asked curiously as he peeked into the Auditorium.

"You'll see," Bones replied with a grin. He looked down at Joel and Kevin, then over at Jude. "You'd make the captain proud. So, all y'all ready?" he asked them all again.

Joel joined the others by nodding silently.

"Then come with me," Bones continued, before turning and leading the way down the aisle and up onto the stage. As the boys followed him, a hush fell on the room as everyone followed their progress to their seats on-stage.

Once they were all seated, Admiral Morrow stood and went to the podium. It was then that Cory noticed the live TV cameras dotted around the Auditorium. "Hoooo, boy. What is going on?" he whispered subtly to Sean.

Sean shook his head slowly, his face just as puzzled as Cory's.

"Good Evening. As this is a live broadcast from the Clan Short Orlando HQ to all of Earth and the United Federation of Planets, I will begin with a brief introduction. I am Fleet Commander Starfleet, Admiral Morrow, and I am here tonight for two reasons: to honor three Starfleet Officers who have fought, bled and worked tirelessly for the benefit of the entire Federation, and to recognize and honor the actions of seven extraordinary young men who took part in the rescue of the Officers and crew of the USS Newton yesterday," the Admiral began.

Admiral Morrow continued to speak and explain the events of the previous evening, but Sean and the others were now too busy to listen.

Cory gulped. *'The entire Federation?!'* he sent to the other six.

Joel's jaw was hanging open, but Kevin slowly closed it. *'You're on TV, Sa'r! Don't do that!'*

'B...but... he said...' Joel sent back.

'Yeah. I'm crappin' my pants too, but jus' don't LOOK like you are - okay?'

Joel nodded, not even trusting himself to *send* a response.

"... and so, I call Captains James T Kirk and Spock, and Commander Leonard H McCoy to the front!" Admiral Morrow finished as he gestured behind him and stood to one side.

The Clan watching broke into applause as the three men stood up and came forward.

Morrow waited a moment longer, then raised a hand to regain control. Once the large room was silent again, he turned and faced the three men. "Captain Kirk - You have saved our worlds and this great Federation more times than I can conveniently count. It is with great regret that I accept your request to retire from the Fleet, but it is more than well earned. In recognition of your outstanding achievements, I hereby raise you to the Rank of Vice-Admiral and award you full Command of the USS Enterprise-A for as long as you wish to keep her. When the time comes that you no longer feel able or willing to Command her, she shall revert to Starfleet Control."

Kirk took a single step forwards, and Morrow removed the Captain insignia to replace it with the Vice-Admiral one. "Congratulations, Admiral Kirk," Morrow said clearly, as he shook Kirk's hand.

"Thank you, Admiral," Kirk replied with a warm smile.

Morrow had to wait for the better part of five minutes as the Clan exploded in cheers and applause. Once silence had been regained, he moved before Spock. "Captain Spock - wherever Admiral Kirk has gone, you have always been there with him. You have supported and helped your 't'hy'la' through all those trials and tribulations, and in your own right you have saved Earth and the Federation countless times. I also regret your decision to retire, but I also fully understand it. It is with great pleasure that I recognize your own outstanding acts of sacrifice and achievements by raising you as well to the Rank of Vice-Admiral. You shall, as you have always done, have your place on the USS Enterprise alongside Admiral Kirk - for as long as you wish to retain it."

Spock moved forwards, and he too had his rank insignia changed by the Admiral. "Congratulations, Admiral Spock," Morrow smiled.

"My thanks, Admiral," Spock nodded politely, while Joel bounced up and down on his seat behind him - all thought of decorum gone totally from the overexcited youth.

This time, while the Clan were shouting and cheering, those watching via the television witnessed one of the most famous Vulcans in the Federation get pounced by a tiny Vulcan child, who seemed to be crying and smiling at the same time.

After Spock had returned Joel to his seat, and made sure that both Cory and Kevin had a tight hold on the ball of energy his son had become, he returned to his position next to Kirk.

Morrow, fighting to keep his laughter inside, turned to Bones. "Commander McCoy - if ever a doctor existed that held to the oath 'Do no harm', it is you. Your compassion and gentle soul surrounds a skilled mind, and use a skilled pair of hands. Though you have hidden behind a gruff exterior, all who have been helped by you have nothing but praise and even love for you. The Enterprise would not be the same without you, and nor will the Fleet. At least the Enterprise gets to keep you for now, but sadly the Fleet will lose you - With regret, I also accept your request for retirement, but with deepest pleasure I raise you to the Rank of Commodore."

Once Morrow had changed Bones' insignia, he shook the doctor's hand. "Congratulations, Commodore McCoy."

Bones smiled and nodded, "Thank you, Admiral."

As the Clan cheered themselves hoarse for a third time, Morrow gestured to his side, and the three men moved to stand there. He handed each a box, and they nodded seriously. However, both Bones and Kirk each had a knowing smile on their faces as they glanced at the still seated seven boys on-stage.

'Okay, now I've really crapped myself,' Kevin fretted down his link with Joel.

Morrow moved back to the podium, "Now, for these remarkable young men seated behind me. Some of these children you will recognize either from news vids, or from the Clan Short Funeral that took place yesterday. One of them, however, was not quite what he appeared yesterday when you saw him. Please, watch..."

At the back of the stage, the screen that had been used at the Wedding on Tuesday flickered to life. On it was the image of Joel in his Vulcan armour speaking in Vulcan at the Funeral.

"At the time," Morrow said as the image froze, "this child was known only as 'Joel Short', a rescuee that had been adopted by the mother of the Patriarch of the then Sub-Clan Short. However, it turned out that he was more than just an abandoned child. Many of you will remember the Great Transwarp Disaster. There were no survivors, as we sadly know. Well, that information is not entirely accurate. One child survived. A babe in arms. He was unregistered for his very existence was hidden at the time under a now defunct 'Red One' Vulcan code.

"The babe whom we thought had died was the only son of Admiral Spock. Joel Short is that babe. His true name is Sa'ren, child of Spock, child of Sarek. He has upended Sub-Clan Short by his very presence as one of their own. There IS no Sub-Clan Short any longer. This is now a new Vulcan Family - The Family 'Clan Short'. Also Sa'ren is one of the reasons for Admiral Spock retiring - he wants to discharge his duties as 'Father' - something he has sorely missed for nearly thirteen years.

"Sa'ren, please come forwards," Morrow said as he turned to look at the stunned and shocked face Joel was sporting.

Joel stood shakily to his feet and started slowly forwards. Morrow had to repress his chuckles, for the little Vulcan was dragging both Cory and Kevin along with him, so strong was the grip he had on both their hands.

Glancing back to the cameras, Morrow stated as he pointed at each of the boys in turn, "This is Sa'ren Joel Short, brother of Patriarch Cory Patrick Short, and husband to Kevin Charles David Thompson. Ambassador Sarek asked me to make this formal introduction for his grandson - the reason is, surprisingly to some maybe, emotive. House Surak has long held grief in their hearts at the apparent loss of Sa'ren. Now, joy has replaced that grief. Before, they could not speak of it as Sa'ren had been unnamed - Forsaken, as it is known on Vulcan. Now, they want everyone to know."

As Morrow stood to one side so that Joel was centre-stage before the cameras, Cory whispered to his little brother, "Just be yourself, Lil'elf."

Joel blinked at Cory, then looked at Morrow. "You big meanie!" he whined before starting up a classic Timmy-pout. His eyes, however... they were dancing with repressed laughter.

"Not quite what I meant by 'be yourself' when on live TV, Elf," Cory muttered under his breath.

Joel grinned at his brother before turning to face the nearest camera. "Hiya!" he giggled as he released Cory's hand and waved.

Morrow gestured for the other, still seated boys to come over and join them. He then moved back to the podium. "As you can tell, they are all in Starfleet Uniform. Three of them, however, are not a part of the Fleet. I am about to change that."

He turned and moved to Jude first, and fixed something to the shoulder strap. He then moved and did the same to Kevin's, followed by Joel's. "I hereby grant Jude Lee, Kevin Thompson, and Sa'ren Short the commission of Ensign, Cadet Class."

More cheers.

"As for you four," Morrow said sternly to Cory and the rest, "why are you out of uniform?"

JJ looked down quickly and checked his fly.

"We are?" Adam uttered as he glanced at the other three and then himself in utter confusion.

Sean blinked and mumbled, "I was told Starfleet Uniform, not Vulcan!"

Cory just grinned, for he had guessed. "And you three call *me* blond?!"

In unison and three part harmony, the other three retorted loudly, "You're going swimming, Cory!"

Morrow allowed himself a chuckle, seeing as the entire room was laughing as well. He then pulled out a box from the shelf on the podium. "Please remove those old Rank insignias, for they are now in error."

They did so, and the Admiral moved up to Cory first and attached a Captain's insignia. He did the same for Sean. JJ and Adam both received the rank of Commander.

"Congratulations. For your actions last night, and in recognition of all you do for this planet and now even for the entire Federation, you have earned it," Morrow said seriously before saluting them.

After saluting back, all four boys pulled each other into a hug with Jude, Joel and Kevin.

"We have not yet finished," Kirk said crisply. "Attention!"

All seven boys jumped a mile before quickly forming a line. Bones moved to take the podium and opened the box he carried. He took out a small card and read it aloud, "For acts that brought honor to the Uniform and to the Service while others were in mortal peril, I award Captains Cory and Sean Short, Commanders Adam Short and James Jacob Richardson, and Ensigns Jude Lee, Sa'ren Short and Kevin Thompson the Prentares Ribbon of Commendation."

In the stunned silence, Bones turned and fastened the medal and bar to each of the boys' chests, just below the Starfleet badge.

"Congratulations," Bones said formally as he saluted them, while the room exploded in yells of congratulations and cheers.

Cory just managed to salute back, so bad was the shaking in his hand. As Bones moved away, Cory was also about to seek his seat, but then Kirk moved to the podium.

"Captain Cory Short, Ensign Short and Ensign Lee - step forwards," he said crisply.

As they did so, Bones gestured for the others to join him and Spock to one side of the stage.

Kirk faced the packed and now silent auditorium, "For three separate yet complimentary feats of outstanding engineering, the Cochrane Engineering Academy of Starfleet Command awards each of these young men with the Cochrane Medal of Excellence." Turning back to regard the three gob smacked

boys, Kirk continued, "Due to your skill and knowledge, you saved the lives of the officers and crew of the USS Newton, you took the USS Excelsior into mortal danger yet preserved both the Ship and the Crew, and you brought honour to yourselves and the Federation you serve. Accept these medals as a legacy to the effect."

He then copied Bones, and fixed another medal on each of the three boys' chests. "Congratulations."

Cory really felt the need to sit down now, and it was with relief that Kirk motioned for him and Jude to move to one side.

Joel made to follow them, but a subtle signal from Kirk told him to wait.

Kevin was soon at his side, for Spock had led the other small boy over.

Spock regarded his son's rather nervous looking face before leaning down to kiss his child. "Do not be afraid, Sa'ren," he whispered.

As Spock moved to the podium, Kevin took and held fast to Joel's hand, making the little Vulcan smile.

"Captains of Starships have great responsibility, both to the ship, their crew, and to the Federation that Starfleet represents. It makes no difference what rank you are, when you sit in the Command chair, you are the 'Captain' of that ship," Spock began. "Last night, Captain Sulu of the USS Excelsior was incapacitated during the early part of the rescue, as Admiral Morrow has already explained to you. Both Ensign Sa'ren Short and Ensign Kevin Thompson had been given Command Access, Captain's level, to the Ship's computer less than five minutes before the rescue began. Once Captain Sulu had been laid low, they both stepped up to the responsibilities of the Command Chair, and more than fulfilled the obligations of 'captains'. They commanded others with more years and experience than they held, yet did so by the book, and with care and forethought.

"There is an award that reflects such acts. It can only be given to a 'Captain of a Starship' by the definition I have explained - one who commands a Federation Starship. It can only be given if that 'Captain of a Starship' discharges his or her duties above and beyond all reasonable expectations when others are in mortal peril, but not in a combat situation. That award is the highest non-combat award that a 'Captain of a Starship' can receive."

Spock opened the case he held to reveal two silver crosses, decorated with stars, bearing the Seal of the Starfleet at their centers. A blue and white ribbon was attached to each. "That award's name," he said softly, with respect and even reverence heard in his voice, "is the 'Starfleet Star Cross', and it is with honor that these two young officers have gained these medals - and I too am honored to be the one to bestow these upon my two sons."

With that, Spock turned and placed one medal each around Joel and Kevin's necks.

"I present to you: Ensign Sa'ren Joel Short, SSC, and Ensign Kevin Charles David Thompson, SSC."

Joel had never been hugged so hard in all his young life.

Cory had never cried so much while being so very happy in *his* young life.

Kevin had never rolled his eyes so much at the antics both were engaged in before in *his* young life.

There were a lot of firsts happening as the film crew packed away the cameras, and as the Clan mass pounced the seven boys and three men who had been so honoured that evening.

"The Star Cross..." Cory wept into Joel's neck, "...my brother has the Star Cross!"

"You've said that," Joel managed to squeak out, barely able to get enough breath in to keep himself alive, never mind be overly vocal. "Twenty three times already!" he added breathlessly. "Umm... can I breath now, Cor?"

"Sorry," the emotive teen giggled as he loosened up on his hug, yet refused to release his Vulcan brother. "It's just... wow, the Star Cross..."

"I'm gonna have ta tickle ya if you carry on with that!" Joel sniggered as he squirmed about in Cory's lap, trying to get comfortable.

Kevin had to agree, only it was his twin who was making a fuss over him. "Kenny... I know... we're close... and every...thing... but this... is just too... close!" Kevin managed to say from the bear hug Kenny was giving him.

"Don't care! You're MY twin, so I'll squeeze you if I want to!"

"Help!" Kevin giggled as he locked eyes with Jake. "Help, Jake! He's gone nuts!"

"If he lets you go, I'm getting my share of hugs in," Jake told him seriously.

"Xain?" Kevin asked plaintively, turning his eyes on his Vulcan brother.

"I must agree with my t'hy'la, and I bow to his logic. Once both Kenny and Jake have had their share of familial bonding with you, I shall claim my own. Then, I believe, our father will want to do so as well," Xain stated, his face completely void of emotion - but Kevin knew better.

"Mom!" Jude blushed as Teri made a major fuss of him. "Look, Sean is free! You can get him, now!"

"Sean can wait," Teri said softly as she hugged the teen close for the umpteenth time. "You are new to the family, so you have more hugs to catch up on than Sean does. Besides, I think Spock has first go with Sean at present."

"Oh yeah..." Jude giggled as he gave in and enjoyed the attention.

JJ and Adam had been mass pounced by their kids and the Mikyvis, the latter having made themselves adult age so as to be able to pick up and cuddle the two teens.

"I don't know who has it worse," JJ giggled as Levi tossed him into the air again, "Sean with Spock, or us!"

After watching Adam Casey and the others vanish by transporter beam, Joel and Kevin ran off in search of Cory. They had been discussing something for the past hour over the Bond-Link, and now wanted to see if it was possible.

"So, can we?" Joel bubbled as he squirmed in Cory's arms after rapidly explaining their idea. "Can we, can we, can we?"

Cory giggled, "We can ask if he's willing to do a review, Lil'elf."

Kevin's smile grew even broader as he sat on Sean's lap. "You'll like the Ark Compound, Sa'r. And Tyne's great too."

Xain asked, "Shall I ask the other Council members to meet here now, or wait until after you have spoken with Tyne, Cory?"

"Might as well gather them now, it'll save one of the Mikyvis pulling them out of enjoying something... or napping, like Danny was last time," Cory grinned.

Xain nodded and tapped his comm-badge. "Council Medicus, Council Nitor and Council Ingenium - please come to the Dining Room in CIC."

Kyle popped in a second later, his face serious. "What's wrong?" he asked quickly.

"Nothing, lil'bro," Sean smiled. "Joel and Kevin want to go for Socius Review. We're about to ask Tyne, but wanted the rest of you guys here first."

"Oh! Good!" Kyle smiled as Joel jumped down from Cory's lap and pulled him into his arms. Kyle started to purr.

"I like having little brothers," Joel said to no-one in particular as he cuddled one of the only brothers he had that was smaller than himself.

Xain tapped his comm-badge again, "Council Ambassador to Council Scientia - Daniel, are you available for a possible Founder meeting?"

"If it's urgent, yes. KC has fallen off his skate-board again, and we need to get him patched up... again! What's going on?" came a harried reply.

Sniggering, Cory tapped his own badge, "A possible Socius review, bro. If it happens, I'll ask Tyne if you can sit it out."

"Thanks, Cory. Who might be getting the review?"

"Joel and Kevin Thompson," Cory answered.

"Good luck to them both, then."

Joel giggled and moved closer to Cory, before speaking at the badge, "Thanks, Danny. And thanks for your present! I'm gonna learn how to skateboard tomorrow - Kelly said he'd show me!"

"I'm glad you like it, kiddo - just don't do stupid stunts like KC, okay?"

"Okay," Joel giggled.

Cory asked, "What did he do this time?"

"Tried jumping off the roof... go figure!" Danny snorted before the signal closed.

Everyone who had met KC started laughing: a lot.

Antonio and Brant walked into the Dining Room a minute later, and Cory said quickly, "Don't worry. Possible Socius review for Joel and Kevin pending, guys."

They both looked at the Vulcan and his husband and smiled. "Sweet. It'll be my first review!" Brant giggled. He then grabbed Joel and Kevin and gave them a noogie each, "I've got my fingers crossed for you!"

Cory smiled and then called out, "Ark - is Tyne available to talk right now? We have something to ask him."

<He is currently talking with the leader of the Time Lords. The Doctor wished to speak to Tyne, one leader to another, as a diplomatic courtesy. I believe they shall be finished soon.>

"That's good. We'll be down to visit you shortly, then," Cory said with a smile.

<I will look forward to it.>

"Daddy?" Timmy called out as he ran in, William perched on his shoulder.

"Hey, Munchkin! What's up?" Cory giggled as his son swarmed into his arms.

Timmy regarded his father seriously, "William says that him and me haveta come with ya."

"Did he? I think we can manage that," Cory giggled. "Pop can keep you company when I'm in the meeting."

Timmy grinned.

Joel looked puzzled, however. "Cor - if we don't know if we can have the review, why are we going down before hand? What if we can't? Wouldn't it be a waste of time?"

"No," Sean smiled. "The Ark Compound is our home as well as here, Lil'elf. Even if we can't do the review with you right now, then we can still visit our family."

"Oh, okay!" Joel smiled with understanding.

Kyle giggled, "Ready, guys?"

"When you are," Cory smiled as he held Timmy close.

The next second they were 'elsewhere', and Joel looked around curiously. He did giggle when a purple eyed boy practically jumped out of his skin in fright at their sudden appearance.

"Sorry, Javyk!" Kyle giggled, a mischievous smile on his face.

Javyk picked up the tools that he had dropped and grumbled as he went back to work on a strange door frame he had mounted on the wall, "Mikyvis just popping around wherever they want, teleporting into System Control should be banned!"

Joel raised an eyebrow. "This is the Javyk Ark mentioned last night?" he asked Sean.

"Uh huh," Sean sniggered.

"Do you think it's safe to ask him if he liked the tricorder I made?" Joel asked again. "He seems a little... grumpy..."

<He just had to have his hand reattached so he is not really in the best of moods. I suggest you wait until Kendall returns from the Technical Storage unit down the hall before you try, he is not as grumpy when Kendall is around.>

"He had his... hand reattached?" Joel squeaked. "What happened to it? Are you okay, Javyk?" he asked both Ark and the boy working on the door-frame.

"The phase emitter wasn't aligned correctly, so it didn't line my arm and hand up after I stuck my hand through the doorway," replied Javyk as he pulled a small cylinder shaped object out of the frame. "I ended up with no hand and a few fried emitters. I also have to recreate a few of the prototype modules I created to make the constant connection work. It isn't the first time I've lost my hand."

<Had he listened to Kendall and just threw something else through the door then he would not have had to have his hand reattached.>

"No one asked you," Javyk said as he removed another cylinder shaped object from the frame.

Joel looked at the doorway, the wall, then the boy. He reached and tapped the wall. Solid. "You put your hand through? Oh! Gateway technology! Like the Iconians! Cool!"

Javyk eyed Joel, almost glaring at him, "Whatever helps you understand it better I suppose."

Joel shrugged and patted Javyk's shoulder. "Glad you're better, though. I'll talk to you again when Kendall is here," he said before moving back to stand by Sean. "Hope Ark's right - I like him, but he's *very* grumpy right now."

Sean's face turned red as he tried to keep his laughter in.

"Shall we move on?" Kyle managed through his giggles.

They moved off through the doorway towards the Council Chambers, but Sean found himself guiding Joel completely - the little Vulcan was so caught up with all the interesting items around that he'd have wandered off if left to his own devices. In the end, Sean picked the boy up and sat him on his shoulders.

"Long corridor," Joel commented as he looked ahead. "How big is this place?"

<My entire Compound, not including my Memory Bays, is a little over a mile each direction. If you include my core then my compound is also a mile deep.>

"Nice. I like this place," Joel bubbled as he ran his fingers through Sean's hair.

"You're not walking it, Elf," Sean giggled.

"You picked me up, Ted! I would have walked it!"

"And I'd have walked double just running after you each time you saw something new!"

"But I'm interested in Ark! It's nice! It saved me... is there any way I can hug It to say thanks?"

<I would rather you not try, a simple thank you will do just as well. I am sure that Nyo could give you a tour at some point, if you would like, though.>

Joel grinned, "Okay, Ark. Thinking about it, hugging a processor might be dangerous - to either you or me! I'll like a tour, though. Thanks, Ark. Love you!"

Sean smiled and reached up to tickle his brother briefly, "You're a softy, Elf."

"Thank you!" the boy giggled as he fended off Sean's attacking hand.

They continued on until they came to the Council Chamber door. Cory looked up at the Vulcan and said, "You'll have to wait here for a moment, Lil'elf. Since Tyne's talking with the Doctor officially, then I think only Council Members can enter right now."

"Okay," Joel nodded as he was lowered to his feet.

"You too, Timmy... AND you as well, William," Cory giggled as he herded his son and the bird over towards Kevin. "Stay with your Pop and uncles. We won't be long."

"Kay, Daddy," Timmy smiled.

William ignored him, however.

"I mean it, William!" Cory said as he gently snatched the bird from the air as it flapped around Brant's head.

William clucked his beak at Cory a first times in what Cory recognized as eagle-laughter. "And I love you too," he said as he plopped the bird back on Timmy's shoulder.

Cory then looked at the others and nodded, and together they entered the Chamber to find the Doctor talking with Tyne, Nyo, Rusty and the Holo-image of Cyna. Brant moved closer to Cory and whispered, "Are you thinking a certain Time Lord has arranged for most of the Council to be here, or is it just me."

"No comment," Cory grinned as they moved towards the centre of the room.

The Doctor's back was to the approaching group, yet he giggled and said, "You're five seconds late. Was William being a pain?"

"How'd you... never mind," Antonio sighed. "You're worse than Kyle!"

"I'm older. Had more practice," the Time Lord grinned as he turned to look at them. "Give the imp another millennia, and he'll be more my match!"

"Oh, a challenge!" Kyle smiled wickedly.

"No," Cory said firmly.

"What?"

"Just 'no', Kyle," Cory repeated, this time with a grin.

Tyne looked over at the group that had just entered and frowned, "Is there a reason that just about everyone on my Council is here now?"

Cory nodded, "Kevin Thompson and my brother Joel Short have requested a Socius Review. I gathered the others in case it could be done now to save time. Danny sends his apologies, however, as there is a mini-emergency with KC - again. If this is a bad time for a Review, then we're here to visit as family anyway. However," Cory looked meaningfully at the Doctor, "maybe someone was pulling the strings here?"

"Not really," the Doctor replied seriously. "You are aware that my first meeting with anyone from the Clan happens in your future. I am here now as I am meant to be here now to meet with Tyne and the Founder Council. Since my race is about to return Home, it is only good manners to introduce myself to the leaders of the Great Peoples. The Founders are such a one, as are the Vulcans and a few others. That has now been done, yet there *may* be one other reason I'm here. We shall see what Time brings in that regard, however."

"Ah, I see," Cory nodded. He turned back to Tyne, "In that case: Seer, would a Socius review be possible, and if so, would now be a good time?"

"I don't see why not," Tyne said as he walked over to his chair and took a seat. "Now is as good a time as any."

"You're able to see past that block in the future?" Kyle asked curiously. "I thought that that darkness might stop a review."

"No, what I see is darkness coming, I see the end of choice and our options become few," Tyne said slowly. "I can't see what will happen in that gap of darkness but I can see that what comes out of the darkness gives us two options. Now I'm supposed to be optimistic so I'll go with the one that doesn't have everything ending."

"I can't see *anything* from that darkness onwards," Kyle commented as he shot a look at the Doctor.

The Doctor nodded to himself. "I explained it to the Seer just before you came in, Kyle. What is coming blankets that point in Time. To those of Middle Race and higher level, it also shadows everything after. The One who is causing it has power and defence against all High and Middle races, but not against Younger. There is no need against the Younger, for there isn't enough power from all the Young Races in all the Universes combined to hurt Him. So, a Founder cannot see inside the Darkness - the Choice. But they can see beyond. That may be of use to you as you face that Time."

"Oh," Kyle's reply was oddly subdued. He then muttered softly, "Everything ending... not good..."

"However," the Doctor said as he now turned to Tyne, "you will find a normal review of Joel and Kevin to be... difficult."

Tyne frowned, "Difficult for what reasons?"

The Doctor smiled sadly, "This is that *other* reason for me being here - Sa'ren Joel Short is what the Time Lords call 'Ki'Melai' - The Shaper. He is a Flux in Time. He 'shapes' Destiny. He can create or re-create a Destiny, destroy it, or ignore it. He has no control at present of this power, yet it is still under control by the 'Person' who made him Shaper. He clouds the mind for anyone wishing to read the future. I see everything possible as being equally, 100% possible when he is interacting with me. Same for Kyle. You, however, are Young Race. You won't even see that, for your mind will not take it all in. For me, once Joel enters the room, I will see him kill us all, or feed us cookies, or kiss us, or even have a heart attack and die instantly. It is all valid - all equally possible. He is without Destiny, save for one thing - and that is IN the Darkness that lies ahead. That, and only that, can he NOT change. 'To change Destiny for everyone, except for himself' - that is the problem. You will be able to scan his mind, run all your Review tests and mental simulations, but once he enters the room and starts interacting with you, the Future becomes hyper-fluid. You will never be able to read his future. Only the present and the past."

"Then I can not allow for him to be reviewed," replied Tyne. "To not know the future of how this relationship may turn out goes against one of the key elements involved in the Socius review. If I were to review him and then allow for them to become Socius then I am taking the responsibility for that relationship's success on myself. If it were to fail then I lose my ability to be a part of the review process in the future."

Cory looked around at them all, then asked softly, "There is no alternative? Could another take that responsibility in Joel and Kevin's case?"

Tyne stared at Cory for a moment before replying, "Another Council member could take on the responsibility, but they would be held to the same rules I am, meaning that if the Socius relationship fails they

can no longer take part in these reviews. In addition the Council member may be subject to review if I think it needed."

Cory looked around at them all again. He looked back at Tyne and said, "I am willing."

"As am I," Kyle added.

Xain stepped forward. "I have shared Joel's thoughts, and I too am willing."

Cory smiled, "I think only one of us is needed, guys. But thank you." He focused back on Tyne and said seriously, "He's my little brother. I shall take responsibility in his case. If their bonding should fail, then I understand the consequences, and I accept them willingly."

"Very well, Council Crafter, then the record shows that you are directly responsible for the success of their relationship if they pass the review," said Tyne. "Did you want me to perform the review or did you want to direct it? The choice is yours since it is a review under your record."

"I'll take responsibility, but can you run it as normal, Seer?" Cory asked.

Tyne nodded, and gestured for them all to be seated.

"Since my Time is done here, I'll send him in for you as I leave," the Doctor smiled. He held out his hand to Tyne, "I'm glad I made a few new friends. Be well, Seer."

"You too," replied Tyne as he took the offered hand.

The Doctor shook hands with Rusty and Nyo as well, gave Cyna an old fashioned salute from the time of the First Cycle, then walked to the door and left. A moment later, it reopened to admit Kevin and Joel. As it closed again, Timmy could be heard calling, "Good luck, Unca Joel! Unca Kev!"

As they made their way into the Circle, Joel murmured, "Wow... now THIS is a big, round room!"

Sean stood to his feet quickly as the Council doors reopened, and a subdued Kevin came running out and slammed into his chest. He held the trembling boy tightly, and whispered comfort to him while watching the others leave. Still inside, he could see Tyne and Rusty talking with Nyo and Cyna, then the doors closed.

"It went badly?" he asked Cory as his husband walked up to them, carrying a shaking Joel.

Kyle half smiled, "No. They passed. They can get married under Socius. It's just... well..."

"The stuff they saw," Cory sighed. "Tyne was not easy on them. Since he cannot scan Joel's future, and by proxy Kevin's as well, he put them through one hell of a review."

Sean exhaled slowly as he kept a tight grip on Kevin, then he said softly to the now crying child, "It's over, Kev. What you saw may never happen. It's over, now."

"But one thing will," came a hollow sounding voice from Joel, and it sent a chill through Sean. "I'm going to lose Kevvy... I'm going to lose Kevvy..."

Sean shared a look with Cory, and Cory sent to him, *'Joel's realized the obvious problem. He's Vulcan. Kev's human... the aging difference...'*

'Shit!' Sean sent back as Xain came to pick up Kevin to carry him.

Kyle sighed. "Come on. I'll pop us over to the Morph room... I think that'll take their minds off it..."

It worked.

It took less than five minutes for Joel to pull himself out of his dark thoughts, and Kevin as well due to the Bond-link. The purring mass in the nearest pool had drawn his attention completely.

"What're they?" he asked, his face inches from the pool and it's squirming inhabitants. Whatever they were they were all as attracted to this emotive Vulcan as a moth is to a flame.

"They're *fuzzymores!*" Timmy giggled.

<P-H-A-S-E-N-M-O-R-P-H-S. Phasenmorphs. I do wish you would call them by their correct name.>

"Are they dangerous?" Joel asked as Timmy poked his tongue out at the ceiling.

"Technically, yes," Sean laughed, "but that is because they are living weapons. If one chooses you, it links with you. They act as shields and weapons, and do a lot of other stuff as well."

"I have one. This is Red!" Timmy giggled as he rolled up his sleeve to show Red to Joel.

Joel looked at it, then at the pool. "Would one link with me? They all seem very interested in me."

<I am unsure. You are half human, but your nervous system may be too far out of their ability to link with. The only true test would be for you to put your arm into the water and see if one will try it. You will need permission, though.>

"From who?" Joel asked as he removed his jacket to leave just his tee-shirt on.

Nyo walked into the room just at that moment, and over heard them. He walked up to them and laid a hand on Joel's shoulder. "Just checking in on you, Sa'ren. You okay?"

Joel smiled up at him and nodded, "I'm not hurting right now. I've locked what happened away. I... I'll have to deal with it soon, but... not now. Not today."

Nyo nodded and gave Joel's shoulder a squeeze. "If you want to talk, we are here. Anyway, I see the 'morphs are interested in you - if you want one, and if Cory believes you can be trusted with one, you can try."

"Go on, Elf," Cory giggled. "Fingers crossed!"

Joel wasted no time. His left arm was in the water an instant later. "They tickle," he giggled.

But that was all they did. Each one took a turn to rub themselves against the Vulcan's arm and purred, but none tried anything else.

Timmy's brow creased, and he seemed to be talking to someone. "Red says he'll talk to them," he said as he put his left arm in the pool, letting Red get completely covered with the water.

Joel pulled his arm back out and just watched.

After a moment longer, Timmy sighed and removed his arm. "Red says sorry, Unca Joel. They all like you, but you're confusing to them. They MIGHT be able to join wif you, but... they'd have lots and lots of trouble. Might not work right."

"Oh... okay," Joel said with a sad little smile. "They're real nice, but... okay."

"Red did say that if he wasn't my fuzzy, he could do it. It's jus' that red fuzzies ain't born often," Timmy said by way of apology before stripping off and slipping into the pool to play with the other 'morphs.

Joel watched him for a second. "We allowed to play with them?" he asked Nyo.

Nyo grinned and nodded.

Joel wasted no time - his clothes went flying and in he slid.

Soon, everyone was laughing, for Joel was floating on the surface of the pool covered in morphs... and all of them were purring.

Kevin was laughing so hard that he slipped and fell into the pool, splashing Xain and Antonio as he did so. As he came up and spouted a ton of water from his mouth, Xain reached over and pulled him out quickly. "If you wished to have a bath, you could have waited, Kevin," he said, his eyes twinkling.

"Ha ha," Kevin retorted as he shook the water out of his hair. He then paused, "My arm feels dead."

"Ah, Kev?" Brant pointed at Kevin's left arm. "You have a stowaway!"

Kevin raised his arm quickly and gasped. A morph with greeny blue strips was finishing off it's linkup with his arm. "Ummm... Cor???"

Cory covered his eyes with his hand and shook his head. He then looked up at Kevin and grinned, "Kyle-bear - can you take our newest member of the Short family to the training room, please?"

"Well, we weren't gonna let *you* train him, Cor," Kyle giggled as he ran to take Kevin's hand. "If you trained him, then we'd have TWO brothers who couldn't hit the broad side of a barn!"

"One second, Kev," Cory stated as he lunged for, and captured, Kyle. "Just one second."

Splash

"Now he can train you," Cory stated with a satisfied snort as Kyle's head popped to the surface of the pool.

"Kyle?" Joel asked as he helped his little brother to climb out.

"Yeah?"

"How'd you manage to get your foot in your mouth all the way to your nuts, yet still walk?" Joel giggled as he kissed his tiny brother before slipping back into the water.

Kyle blew a raspberry at him, "I'll get you back for that, Elf!"

"As long as you love me," Joel smiled happily, before he removed a morph that had squirmed up and onto his head, and started to stroke it.

Joel looked at Kevin and saw his husband was looking at the creature on his arm with concern. *'What's up, Kevvy? he sent down their link.*

'I'm not sure I wanted one of these things,' Kevin sent back as he linked his eyes with the boy he loved.

Joel shrugged, *'I have armour that protects me. You have a 'morph. We're both safe, now.'*

Kevin smiled. *'Yeah, looking at it that way, you're right. What shall I call him?'*

'Huh?'

'Everyone else calls their morphs names. What shall I call him?'

Joel shrugged again. *'Dunno. What name would suit him?'*

'I'll think about it when training,' Kevin decided as Kyle, now Mikyvis dried, came back and took his hand. They then both followed the laughing Nyo out and into the training room.

Joel waved him off, then splashed Cory.

"What was that for?" his blond brother protested.

"Dunking Kyle!" giggled Joel. Then the Vulcan reached out of the pool and pulled both Sean and Cory into the water.

Being a Vulcan, and being stronger than humans, had perks sometimes.

"See what you got us into?" Sean giggled as he playfully slapped Cory's exposed butt.

"It was *YOUR* idea, Chicken!" Cory giggled back after coming up for air and rubbing his butt.

Joel raised an eyebrow at Sean, "You told Blondie to dunk Kyle?"

Sean grinned as he removed his tee-shirt, and a 'morph that had started to crawl up his arm, and threw the tee-shirt out of the pool. "Yeah," he giggled as he sat down near the edge next to Cory and started to pet the wiggling creature.

Joel poked his tongue out at him, then picked up three more 'morphs and handed them to Cory before squashing himself in between his brothers. Timmy was still busy swimming about on his back with five more 'morphs on his stomach for the ride. "You're mean to poor Lil'bear!"

"No, mean was him talking Josiah into making every wall in our house into one-way glass... you could see in, but we couldn't see out!" Cory replied with a grin.

Joel smiled, but looked confused. "Why'd that be a problem?" he asked innocently, his eyes showing his complete lack of understanding about privacy.

Sean let the morph he was cuddling swim away and pulled Joel up and onto his lap. "People need their own space, Lil'elf. When boyfriends and partners want to be alone to make love and be together in other ways, they all want to be in a place that's private - just for themselves. We get embarrassed when we do personal things and others catch us or are watching."

"Oh... modesty, yeah?" Joel asked sadly.

"Yeah," Cory answered as he kissed the back of Joel's head.

"Oh... sometimes I wish... never mind, doesn't matter," Joel murmured. "I can't undo the past, can I? I'm never going to really understand what was taken from me... am I?"

"Don' worry Unca Joel; it's a big kid thing that's kinda stupid!" Timmy giggled as he started another lap.

Joel started to giggle. "Then I don't wanna ever grow up! Like that story 'bout Peter Pan! Yeah!" he grinned. Then his eyes grew mischievous, "Hey! I must be Peter Pan! I have pointy ears, AND my own fairy!"

"Who's your fairy?" Cory asked with a smile.

"You are, Daddy!" Timmy chortled as he came to a stop with three 'morphs now on his head. Joel was nodding with a wicked smile on his face as he turned to smirk at his big brother. Timmy continued, still giggling, "You've just left your fairy wings somewhere!"

"I'm going to kill Dylan," Cory grouched as he tried not to giggle at the amused look he was getting from both Sean and Joel. "Juan too, I think," he added with an afterthought.

Joel grinned and reached over to snuggle in with Cory briefly. "Just teasing ya, ashayam sa'kai," he whispered, before helping Cory out of his completely soaked shirt.

As Joel reached to dump it out of the pool, he saw the comm-badge attached to it. "Won't that be damaged by getting wet? Did I break it? Sorry..." he started to say, his voice becoming frightened.

"Don't worry, my Aussie cousin knows us... they are completely waterproof," Cory replied quickly.

Joel relaxed visibly, then brought the badge closer to have a look at it. "Just like in The Next Generation," he murmured. He looked up at Cory, "Can I have one?"

Cory smiled, "Of course." He turned his head and looked over to where JJ, Xain and Antonio were giggling together while talking to Ark. "JJ! Can you get a badge for our Elf?"

"Sure thing, bro! Joel, do you want the Clan crest on it, or shall I have one made with your House Crest?" JJ asked as he moved a little closer to the pool - just not too close to the mischievous Vulcan who seemed to like pulling in others he wanted to play with.

"House, please," Joel smiled joyfully.

JJ moved away and started speaking to Ark. A minute or so later, a new comm-badge was in his hand, with the seal of House Surak on the front. He attached it to the front of Joel's shirt that was lying on the floor and winked at the boy.

Joel then snuggled in tight with Cory and asked, "It's really for me... just for me?!"

Cory nodded. Words just didn't seem to be required, for Joel was skin to skin with him. He knew his Vulcan brother would sense the truth and the love.

Joel closed his eyes and just relaxed as both his beloved big brothers snuggled him and kept him safe. He knew they always would - he would always be safe and protected from all the 'monsters' his mind would so easily bring to remembrance to frighten him, so long as he was held here.

Timmy made three more laps, and even a cuddle pit-stop, before Joel spoke again. "Daddy and Mama like each other," he whispered with a happy smile as he watched Timmy see how long he could hold his breath. "I mean really *like* each other!"

Cory grinned, "You might be right, but Mom believes that if you're married once it's for all of your life, so she won't ever get married again."

Joel twisted to look into Cory's eyes. "Why?" he asked, confused to the core. "My Mother is dead - kinda. She wouldn't mind Daddy getting married again. She told me just now as I was thinking about what I felt from Mama and Daddy earlier. Would your... umm... no, not daddy... who's Mama's blood son? You or Sean?"

"I am," Sean giggled. "And it was my Dad. Cory's dad was my dad's best friend."

"Would *your* daddy mind if Mama got married again?" Joel asked, as he turned to look at Sean.

"I dunno, I'm not lucky enough to have him in my head; I barely remember him, because I was so young." Sean said wistfully. "Mom's always told us that marriage is forever, though."

Joel had so many more questions, but he felt Sean and Cory getting upset, and knew that asking more might be the wrong thing at this time. He reached and pulled Sean's hand to his lips and kissed it, "He's

not away from you. Mikey can appear, and that means your daddies are here too. Don't think they'd ever leave you as long as you needed them around. S'why my Mother stayed in my head and didn't go to Daddy's."

Both boys just smiled lovingly at their little brother and simply continued to cuddle him.

After another five minutes had passed, Joel whispered again, "I'm gonna try getting Mama and Daddy together. If I can... it's logical - they like each other, and they are friends..."

Sean met Cory's gaze and both rolled their eyes, but said nothing. Joel didn't notice, for he was still murmuring to himself about what he'd do to get their parents together.

A while later, and Kevin and Kyle came back into the room. The four in the pool climbed out and got dressed, while Kyle giggled and helped dry their clothes first.

"Ready to go?" Kyle asked with a grin.

Cory and Sean both replied in unison, "Oh, yes. Time to get home!" They were both thinking the same thing - hoping that they could distract Joel from his forming plans.

"Umm, no not yet," Joel said shyly. "If it's okay, could I ask Ark to make me a teddy bear?"

Cory blinked, then smiled, "Sure, Elf - but why? You had loads for your birthday."

"Not for me - for Juan. There was this real special one that he was given a long time back, but he was made to destroy it. He misses his Rambo. I was gonna ask Kyle to read me mind and make an image for Ark to copy," Joel explained.

Kyle giggled as he focused on his big brother's memories. "I got the picture, Big Bro, but Josiah will make a real good one if you want him to!"

Joel smiled, "Okay. He's at the party, right?"

"Not right now," Nyo smiled as he pointed at the door where two boys could be seen walking passed. "I think he and Gavin are back here now."

Joel grabbed Kyle's hand and they ran out of the Morph Room like a shot. "Gavin? Josiah?" Joel called excitedly.

Gavin turned with a smile and grabbed his brother for a hug. "I was hoping to see you before you went home. Did you enjoy your big day?"

"More than anything ever!" Joel giggled as he wiggled happily in Gavin's arms. He then blinked over at Josiah, "Can I ask you somethin'?"

Josiah grinned, "You just did, but you can ask me something else as well, if you'd like."

Laughing, Joel quickly explained what it was he wanted, and Kyle showed the image he had taken from the Vulcan's mind.

After looking at it for a long moment, Josiah said, "Won't take long. Wait here, Joel." Then, he turned and headed back towards the Control Room.

"What's he looking for?" Joel asked curiously.

Gavin grinned, "A trash can - he can turn rubbish into whatever he likes."

"Oooh," Joel smiled before wiggling some more in his Rigellian brother's arms.

Less than five minutes later, Josiah returned with a small Teddy Bear in his hands. The Bear had combat fatigues on, and looked exactly like the one Juan once had.

"That's perfect!" Joel exclaimed. "Thanks, Josiah!" he yelled as he ran and hugged the bigger boy tightly.

"You're welcome," Josiah murmured. "And happy birthday, Joel. I hope all your other ones are as wonderful as this one has been."

"Thanks," Joel smiled as he took the little bear into his hands.

Josiah and Gavin waved at both Kyle and Joel briefly before continuing on towards their quarters. Joel smiled at Kyle, "*Now* we can go home!"

Kyle giggled and snapped his fingers, copying Q in showmanship.

"Decided yet?" Joel asked Kevin as all the boys reappeared in CIC.

"Yeah," Kevin giggled as he patted his phasenmorph.

Kyle asked, "Tell us, then!"

"The BFG!" Kevin giggled again.

"Huh?" everyone there grunted at once.

"The Big *Fuzzy* Gun!"

Cory picked up the small boy, "Another dunking coming up!"

"Hey!" Joel protested, stamping his foot. "Put my husband down, Blondie! It's late, and I have plans for him!... uhhh, did *I* say that?"

"Yup, you did!" Cory giggled as he placed the now furiously blushing Kevin back on his feet. "I'll get Kev tomorrow, then. You horn-dogs going to say good night to our parents first?"

"Uh huh!" Joel nodded, also beginning to blush as he realised how easily his mind had turned to what was now ahead of him. There was no small measure of relief there as well, for he didn't feel as afraid any more. He had permission, now.

They all ran out of Main CIC and into the Rec Room, to find the nightly nest in mid construction. Teri, Spock and Allen were doing the rounds and hugging various little kids good-night when Joel and Kevin sped over to them.

Jason was grinning at them from the sofa, where he and Nathan had called dibs. "I'm guessing that you two ain't joining us tonight," he giggled as Joel stopped by him and waited at his father's side.

Joel blushed further and shook his head.

"Have fun, sweeties," Nathan sniggered.

Joel grinned and pulled Kevin closer to himself before tugging on the back of his father's uniform jacket. "Daddy?"

Spock turned and knelt to be on their level. "What can I do for you, Sa'ren?"

"We're gonna go to bed, now..." Joel stammered, smiling shyly at his father. Over Spock's shoulder, Joel saw Teri turn and move over. "Just wanted to say good night to you and Mama first."

Spock nodded his head knowingly, then pulled them both in for a hug. After, he passed them both to Teri, who, in turn, did the same. Then Allen claimed his share.

"Just remember what we told you," Allen whispered. "Don't worry at anything. If you both enjoy it and have fun and love each other, then we'll be happy, too. Okay?"

Kevin nodded his head as he hugged his Pop tightly around the neck.

Joel smiled and looked about the room, trying to be nonchalant but the grins he was getting soon had him giggling cutely.

Kevin finished his hug and turned to his husband. With his voice shaking, he held out his hand and said, "Time for bed, Sa'ren?"

"Y...yeah. Yeah, Kevin..." Joel answered as he took the hand.

Together, they began to walk out of the room, but Joel stopped near to the door. He saw the last few items from his birthday presents there, and saw that the nice back-pack from Mr T. was with them. He quickly packed everything inside it, and added in the new Bear he had had made for Juan. Then, giggling, he slipped it onto Kevin's back.

"Figures," Kevin giggled as he linked his arm with Joel. They both continued out of the room, only to find they were being followed; by Cory and Sean.

Joel stopped walking. "What's wrong, Cor?" he asked as he looked up nervously at his brother.

"Nothing. Just wondering if you want a private apartment for tonight, or your own room at our house."

Both small boys spent a second to discuss it mentally before Kevin responded. "Could we have an apartment, Cor? Might feel more like a honeymoon," he said with a giggle.

"Then it's room number 10, in the north east of the second floor of the Pool building," Sean smiled. "Kyle thought you might like it, so he got it ready for you."

"That would overlook our house," Joel smiled happily.

"Yup," Cory said, his heart nearly bursting with joy. Joel had said that it was 'his' house. A big step for him. "Good night, my little brothers," Cory added as he pulled them both into his arms. "I love you so much."

"We love you too, Cor," they said in unison, before being pulled into Sean's arms. "And you too!" they giggled, still in unison.

Sean looked at Cory as a tear trickled down his face, "How did we ever get by without these two in our family?"

"Badly, I'd imagine," Kevin giggled cheekily before taking Joel's hand. "Go sleep... get some for us too!"

Cory sniggered as they both ran outside. He and Sean walked to the door and watched as they slowed and started walking down the pathway hand in hand. They didn't seem to be heading for the Pool building yet, but rather going on a starlit stroll first.

"Come on, Hon," Sean murmured as he pulled on Cory's hand. "Let's go to bed."

They re-entered the Rec Room and made towards Jason and Nathan, who were now stripping down to get some sleep. Jason grinned over at them as he kicked his shorts and underwear off and into a fast growing mound of clothing. "I hope they'll be okay," he said with a smile as he grabbed his tee-shirt and started to pull it over his head.

Jason never heard the response, for he suddenly vanished in a shower of golden sparkles.

Not long after, Joel was staring up at the moon as he stood before the Pool building door with Kevin's hand in his. Kevin was pressed tight to his side, and their shared body-heat was enough to ward off the slight chill the Vulcan could feel. Kevin, however, felt no such chill - but he was human, after all.

"I'm nervous," Kevin whispered.

Joel nodded, still looking at the moon. "Me too. Very," he whispered back.

"We... we don't *have* to do anything, do we? Remember what Poppa said?" Kevin trembled.

"Yeah. And remember what Sean and Cory said yesterday morning?"

"Ummm... no, not really."

"About just going with the flow and seeing what happens?"

"Oh. Oh yeah, now I remember."

"We should do that, k'hat'n'dlawá," Joel said finally as he turned his eyes from Earth's satellite to look at the love of his life. "Just see what happens."

Kevin didn't answer at first - he just smiled at the ancient Vulcan term of endearment - 'half of my heart and soul'.

"Oh - Sa'ren," he whispered eventually as he moved his lips closer to Joel's and started to kiss him.

A dual transporter beam caught them at that moment, and they vanished - the last thing being seen was Joel's panicked eyes popping open in fear...

Editor's Notes:

Why do I suspect that something is happening? That WAS a cliffhanger. Don't you dare tell us that it wasn't. This was a very good chapter, at least till that last paragraph. GRRRRRRR.

As always, I eagerly await the next chapter.

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher

Clan Short Archivist Review Notes:

I don't know where to start this was a very interesting and intriguing chapter that did not go where I thought. I am definitely looking forward to more of this wonderful story.

The character development continues to make this a very good story and Ilúvantír deserves a pat on the back.

I am going to check my inbox for the next chapter and it better be here soon.

The Story Lover

Author's Notes:

What? A cliffhanger? You don't like it? Shame, really. Don't worry - I'll answer the question and resolve it... soon... maybe...

Iluvantir

AC's note:

Wisely Says Nothing...

Chapter 15**"Two Become One..."**

***Important Note to the Reader /
Disclaimer***

This chapter contains a major love scene between Joel and Kevin. It goes into detail that has not yet been seen in the CSU so far, but does so tastefully and with reason. However, if you do not care to read such things, know the following - there are three individual scenes which combine to form the love scene, and each of them are told in 'First Person'. Each are labelled as 'Kevin's Perspective' or 'Joel's'. So, if you want to skip the love scene entirely, move over to the next third person perspective scene. The scenes in question will be headed with a box just like the disclaimer box above.

Forward

Many thanks go out to Dark Star for the help he gave me when he said he would write in this chapter. Working together, I believe we have managed to show the healing that both Joel and Kevin have performed upon each other.

Thanks, DS! Hugz, Bro!

"What the fuck!" Nathan spluttered as he watched the golden sparkles replace his life-mate. "I... DRACO! Track and Trace! Voice has been..."

"Don't worry, guys," Mikey said quickly as he appeared in the room.

Nathan stared at him, his eyes like daggers. "Explain before I get Draco to tear the world apart looking for my Jace!"

"There's trouble in Utah, and Pablito thinks Jason can help. So, he grabbed him," Mikey said easily.

Cory managed to collect his thoughts after the sudden disappearance of his brother and asked, "What trouble, and wouldn't Jace being clothed have been better?"

"Serious trouble, and Jace has no concern over nudity among family," Mikey shrugged.

The naked Welsh blond boy standing next to Sean and Cory nearly went ballistic. "SERIOUS?!" Nathan yelled, startling the kids who were listening around the group, "And he's there NAKED with no weapons OR armour? Are you out of your celestial mind?!"

"Did you forget to reboot your brain after the last update?" Cory added, also staring at Mikey.

"Chill, bros," Mikey explained, "Pablito may be a ... unique ... angel ... but he wouldn't take one of the family into a situation where they could get hurt. There are some things that you guys can do that we can't do without having a Mandate. Trust me; we won't ever make a mistake that puts you guys in danger."

Nathan was certainly not happy, but he did nod his head.

"Come on. We need to talk," Mikey said as he picked up Nathan and cradled him over one hip. He wrapped his wings around his two brothers to pull them to each side, and guided them out of the nest and into the Dining Room.

Teri and Spock followed them and waited until Mikey had made himself comfortable, Nathan held securely on his lap. The blond pre-teen was beginning to relax more and more as Mikey rubbed circles in Nathan's belly with his hand.

"What has transpired, Michael?" Spock asked seriously as he, too, sat down.

"It seems that Chang had received some mental programming that enabled a certain General Adams to gain control over him. Chang was made to kill his parents; Janet and Joe, and..." Mikey started to say, but Teri interrupted him.

"WHAT THE HELL! HOW can you say that CALMLY?!" she screamed, her face suddenly pale.

"Because they aren't dead any more," Mikey said, still as calm as Cory had ever seen him. "Pablito is there. He DID have Mandate for a High-level Miracle, Mom. I wouldn't have said to 'not worry' if that hadn't been the case."

Teri grumbled her acknowledgement, still obviously not happy. "Go on, Michael."

"Mikey's in trouble, Mikey's in..." Cory began to sing under his breath.

"Corner. Now!" Teri ordered.

Cory complied fast. She *really* was in no mood to laugh.

Mikey again rolled his eyes. "Cory, if you want your bros to stop picking on your blond brain, then you should learn to read Mom's anger signs a little better. Mom. Calm down," he added as he smiled at his mother, "Janet and Joe are fine and General Adams soon won't be. Jason is over there to find out what programming has occurred, and who else may or may not be involved. Then they can deal with it. Until Jason does that, we can only wait. Oh, and don't try calling for Mike Reynolds - he's a little busy right now... with the General..."

"Good!" Cory said as he sat facing the corner.

"No talking," Teri said automatically. Then she seemed to reconsider the situation. "Cory, come here please."

Cory did so quickly, and soon was standing close to her. He looked slightly apprehensive.

"Sorry, Cory. I know you were only trying to lighten the mood, but that was the wrong time and the wrong way to do it," she said to him seriously.

He nodded his head, "Yes, Ma'am. I'm sorry, Mom."

"Accepted. Come here, sweetheart," she replied as she held her arms open.

Cory moved into her cuddle quickly, and was promptly drawn onto her lap.

"You're still lap-sized," Teri smiled.

Cory grinned, "Only just."

Nathan giggled, "At least you're smaller than Sean."

"I am not! I'm taller than he is!" Cory retorted.

"I didn't mean 'up and down', Cor... I meant around the mid... erkkkk!" Nathan couldn't continue, for Sean had pulled him from Mikey's lap and was attacking his ribs fiendishly. "HELP!" Nathan managed between his giggles.

Mikey complied with Nathan's request, going for his armpits as Cory cuddled with Teri.

"I do believe that qualifies as what you call 'divine intervention', Nathan." Spock said with a straight face.

"You traitor... Poppa... Spock!" Nathan squealed through his laughter.

"You going to call me fat again?" Sean giggled, while Mikey started blowing raspberries on Nathan's belly.

"NEVER!" Nathan managed through his now hysterical giggles. Once both the angel and Sean had released him, he ran around to cuddle close to Cory and Teri. "At least not unless I have running room... We blonds have to stick together; right, Cor?" he giggled, looking at the blond, sniggering Patriarch.

"I believe I should quote that author on that message board that Sean hangs out on... 'Wisely says nothing!'," Cory giggled.

Spock raised an eyebrow, then looked over at Mikey. "Is there anything that the Enterprise can do to assist the Special Forces Division?"

"No, Pop," Mikey smiled back. "It's all under..."

A strange alarm started to sound, one that Cory had never heard from the Clan's system before. What raised his concern level even more as he quickly slipped from Teri's lap was Spock going ridged at their side.

"What NOW?" Cory said with asperity.

"That alarm is sounded when a Member of the Bloodline of Surak is transported without proper clearance," Spock said as he rose fast. His communicator went off at the same moment, "Spock here."

"That answers my question, my son. It is Sa'ren that has been taken. Inform the VSO at once, Spock," Sarek's voice said urgently.

Cory hit his comm badge and his sub-vocal at the same time. "Condition RED ... and if someone doesn't shit the location of Joel within the next 60 seconds I'm gonna be PISSED!"

Nathan then reached and grabbed Cory's badge, since he obviously did not have his own. "Command Override, Fire of the Dragon - Draco - this is a code 93-Charlie. Repeat: 93-Charlie," he ordered, as Mikey suddenly vanished in a loud popping sound.

'Acknowledged. Sa'ren Joel Short is under track and trace,' came Draco's response.

This was followed by Seth immediately after, *"HQ Clear. Oceanic, Clear. AI, Clear. Checking with Utah and all Dragon bases in Africa..."*

'Stop Alert,' came Daileass' voice a second later from the speakers, *'I wish people would inform me of these Starfleet protocols! I beamed him and Kevin Thompson to Utah to help.'*

Nathan beat Cory to it, "On whose authority?"

'Commander Adam Casey. Jason said that only a mind-melder could heal the conditioning that some here have. So he ordered me to beam over Joel.'

Cory's face was livid with rage. "YOU DON'T JUST BEAM OUT A CLAN MEMBER WITHOUT NOTIFYING THE COMPUTER OF THE DIVISION THAT THAT PERSON IS IN... ESPECIALLY NOT MY LITTLE ELF! DO YOU FUCKING UNDERSTAND ME?!" Cory paused for breath, then continued in a command voice, "Ark, this is Cory Patrick Short, Founder Council Crafter. Log the following standing orders and log acknowledgements please."

<Logging commenced, Crafter.>

Cory's eyes blazed as he began. "I am Fleet Commander Cory Patrick Short, Patriarch of Family Clan Short of the House of Surak of Vulcan, High Councillor of Vulcan, Founder Council Crafter, Prince of the British Empire and Defender of the Commonwealth Alliance, and brother of Saint Mikey of Urban-dale. Effective IMMEDIATELY: any and all transports of ANY member or ward of Family Clan Short of Vulcan or any organization working with Family Clan Short of Vulcan are required to be logged and acknowledged by the location responsible for the security of said person before any such transport may commence. This is a standing order which is not cancelable by any person or entity under my command either directly or by association. IS THAT CLEAR?"

"I need to take lessons in being a pissed off blond," Nathan said in awe as he looked up into Cory's eyes.

One by one, all the Clan computer systems from around the world, including the AI's, started to send acknowledgement. Finally, Ark said, <And while I do not use transporters, I will continue to send the coded signal that is normally expected by the Clan's systems when I teleport someone, Crafter. It is common courtesy, after all.>

'Agreed,' Draco added. *'Cancelling the Track and Trace, Fire.'*

Nathan handed Cory's badge back, then looked towards the door sharply as four cats came barrelling in. "What the fuck is going on? Where's Joel?!" Mercury spat out quickly.

"Your AI, Daileass, forgot to be polite and beamed him out without telling the Clan's system," Sean grated slowly as he sat back down.

"If he had an ass, I'd claw it!" Aphrodite growled. "Come on," she added as she pulled the two cheetah's after her towards Main CIC. "We need to have a word with that idiot!"

Artemus curtsied to Cory, then stalked out after her two brothers and sister, muttering and hissing to herself.

"I see that my son has found the best group of brothers that there possibly could be," Spock said softly.

Cory looked over at him, and raised his own eyebrow; Spock was slowly crushing a cast iron skillet into what looked like a ball.

"Ark, please suspend official log. Thank you for your help, and could you please ensure all divisions receive a copy of it?" Cory asked, his eyes still reflecting his angered state.

<Certainly, Cory. Good night.>

"When did Justy add Joel's comm to the system? He's only just had it," Sean asked no-one in particular.

"He didn't," Nathan answered, "Joel's wearing his amulet, right? It has a short range signal device inside. That was linked to the computer earlier today."

"How much range? Could Draco track him?" Cory asked curiously.

"To a point. It's about a mile, if that. What Draco would have done just now, though, is trace all transports on Earth. The signal in Joel's amulet is only to link him to any computer he passes that is set to record it. Which means all official transporters would have a log," Nathan answered easily, then his eyes suddenly went wide. "Uhhh, Poppa Spock?"

"Yes?" Spock said as he dropped the now shapeless lump of iron on the floor.

"We have a big problem," Nathan said slowly as his eyes blazed out blue. "Oh, fuck - do we have a problem. Jace just sent to me... ALL the Genesis kids with the genetic upgrades have the programming! The Cats too! There's 6 human G-kids here with it, and the 8 cats! This is... we need Aunt T'Pol here. You and she have to sort them out before some OTHER arse-hole triggers any one of them!"

As Spock tapped his new comma badge and called for T'Pol, as well as to let Sarek know the whereabouts of Joel, Cory turned to Nathan, "How long would melding with 14 kids take for two Vulcans?"

"About 2-5 mins a piece, Cor," Nathan answered with a sigh.

"And how many of the enhanced kids are we talking about in Utah?"

"Over 35, I think..."

Cory locked his eyes with Sean. Sean sighed heavily, "Kevin is going to be plenty pissed off..."

"I'm sending for more VSO Vulcans," Nathan stated quickly. "No way are we leaving it just to Joel."

"I shall also go to Utah with T'Pol once we have completed all the mind-melds required here," Spock said softly.

"What the FUCK is going on?!" Sammy yelled suddenly from the doorway leading to CIC. He was butt naked and trembling in rage and fear, and his eyes were blazing out with blue-power. Behind him, Vishnu was not looking best pleased either, and was examining his privates gingerly. Sammy entered, still raging, "I... I felt Joel's fear like it was my own! Now I can't feel him nearby at all, then there's the alarms going off and then stopping! What the fuck is going on? WHERE'S MY LITTLE JOEL!!!"

Cory turned and opened his arms to Sammy. "He's fine," Cory said as Sammy allowed himself to be hugged. "He was beamed to Utah by Daileass to help with whatever is going on there. Daileass forgot to send the correct signals to our computer, which triggered the 'kidnap' alarms."

Sean looked angry, "It also seems like he scared the shit out of Joel, Cory. If Sammy picked it up, then it's bad."

"He's fine," Nathan supplied quickly. "In fact, he's now being cuddled by Aunt Janet."

"She's on her feet again? That fast?" Teri asked quickly.

"When we heal, we do it right," Mikey supplied as he reappeared. "Joel's okay. Cory, you need to call all the Genesis children in here. Kartik included, Vish. Can you call him for me?"

"Uh, sure, but can you check something first?" Vishnu asked painfully while still holding his privates gingerly.

Mikey grinned, "Let me guess - you and Sammy were busy when Sammy felt Joel vanish?"

"Uh huh, you might say that," Vishnu winced as Mikey carefully pulled his paws away and held his hand near to the cat-boy's tender bits. There was a brief glow, and then a contented sigh from the cougar. Mikey then vanished again.

"Sorry, Vish," Sammy said softly. "Didn't mean to bite..."

"More than I needed to hear," Helen said as she entered the room. "Okay, I've followed most of that while comforting the scared little ones in there. I'll get hot chocolate on the go."

"You're a horn dog, SamSam!" Randy giggled as he and his two brothers walked in. "You woke us up with your temper. It was only 'cos Aunt Helen was tellin' us all that things were good that we didn't start raging too!"

T'Pol entered next, and Spock went up to her to explain what was going on quickly. Vishnu went to the doorway to CIC, and shouted for his brothers and sisters to come over and stop yelling at Daileass over the comm.

As they entered, Cory closed his own comm to the other Genesis kids. "They're on their way. Nath', how bad is it?"

"Jace says very. But it won't be a problem for a Vulcan to remove," the blond boy said thoughtfully while his eyes were still 'far away' as he communicated with Jason. "He also says that all communication to Utah is now disabled until this crisis is over."

"Logical," Sean murmured as he started pointing the first few arriving Genesis kids towards the Dining Room table. "Over here, guys. We'll explain in a moment. Helen is getting drinks for you all... no, you're not in trouble. Wait for everyone, then we'll explain, okay?"

Once all those from the Unit Division were seated, Spock and T'Pol came over and explained what was happening and that a meld would be required to take out the conditioning.

As the two Vulcans were explaining, Cory sat with Sean, Sammy, the Trinity and Nathan. The blond teen sighed, "Can't we have five minutes without a crisis?"

"Don't think so," Nathan muttered. He cocked his head to one side, then sighed again, "Damn it! Okay, I'm going to wake Austin... the AI boys and even Daileass have this shit programmed into them!"

Sean muttered, "Send him over now?"

"No," Spock said briefly. "I will take him with me when T'Pol and I leave for Utah."

Nathan nodded before rising and leaving to room to find Austin somewhere in the nest. Spock and T'Pol started to perform the melds required to remove all the conditioning from those affected.

"I hope Vish will be okay," Sammy fretted anxiously as he watched the human G-kids get their melds first. He then waved Brian over as Kartik came in with him. Kartik joined his brothers and sisters, his face a mask of curiosity, while Brian cuddled against Sammy quickly. "Don't worry, Bry," Sammy murmured, although he felt scared himself. "Uncle Spock'll fix it."

"Fix what?" Brian trembled as his eyes sought and locked with Kartik's.

While Sammy explained, Nathan floated back into the room with Austin floating behind him. "Nath', you do know I like being clothed if leaving the Compound... right?"

"I don't know," Cory smiled wickedly at the now upside down, butt naked android, "I'm sure you'll give them all a good show. And Jace is over there in the same state."

"No. Jace has a tee-shirt. A short one," Sean sniggered. "Austin, you can take a pair of socks."

"You are SOOOO dead when I get back, Pop!" Austin growled.

Nathan sniggered as well as he lowered Austin to his feet, "Now, now! No back-chat to your father, young man!"

"I'm older than you and your horn-dog partner put together, Nath!" Austin replied with a small smile.

"Details, details," Nathan said airily as he tried not to bust out in giggles. He pushed Austin over until he was squashed between Cory and Sean, then promptly claimed Sean's lap. "Mmm... that's better. It's cold standing around in one's skin."

"Hence why I wanted clothes?" Austin retorted, but he did pull Cory's arm around himself and cuddle in closely.

"I wanted to scope out that cute butt of yours," Nathan said with dignity. "Jace ain't here, so I'm window shopping..."

While Austin and Nathan traded casual insults, the six human Unit kids were finally given the all clear by the two Vulcans, and were told to see Helen in the Kitchen for a drink and something to eat. As they stood to leave, Sammy asked loudly, "Uncle Spock? Can you get Vish and KT sorted first... please?"

Spock looked over and saw that Brian was near tears, and Sammy wasn't much better. He glanced at T'Pol, then at the gathered G-Cats. "Of course, Samuel," Spock said softly.

Cory smiled to himself. Both boys had just discovered their own personal 'special person', so the reaction of what could be seen as selfishness was completely understandable. Also, it didn't seem like the other cats were too badly concerned - the two cougars *were* their 'little' brothers, after all.

As soon as both cougars had had their melds, they were grabbed and led into the Kitchen by Brian and Sammy, with the Trinity giggling as they followed them.

"Sweet," Nathan and Austin murmured, before glancing at each other and laughing.

Austin stood up and stretched. "I'm getting dressed. Won't be long 'til Grandpop is ready to go," he said as he poked his tongue out at Nathan. "Get a good look, sunshine. This will soon be covered!" he giggled as he turned and wiggled his butt at Nathan.

"Shame," Nathan said as he gave Austin a fast goose.

"Hey! No touching unless you plan on owning it!" Austin giggled as he moved away.

"Let me discuss the matter with Jace, then *we'll* get back to you... he thinks you're cute too," Nathan giggled, causing Austin to blush - even the android's behind started to glow.

"I should go all paternal on you for that comment, if I thought you were serious," Sean said as he increased his cuddle on the blond on his lap.

Nathan twisted to grin at him, "I don't make a habit of lying, Historian!"

"I'd spank you, but rumor has it that you enjoy it too much," Sean giggled, giving Nath a quick squeeze to show he was joking.

"Damn, now I'm disappointed!" Nathan sniggered. He then glanced back through the doorway into the Rec Room where Austin was attempting to wrestle his clothes out from under I-Metri and Marjur. "Mmmm... he *is* single, right?"

Aphrodite looked over and giggled, "Did your Tristan and Donna getting together with Jory give you and Jace ideas, Nathan?"

Nathan started to blush, and it only got worse as Spock raised an eyebrow at him.

"Someone get me a 'Fire' extinguisher," Cory giggled.

"That was so bad it was painful, Cory," Teri groaned.

Nathan continued to blush... and watch Austin closely.

Helen came in and set a few mugs down for the boys seated watching the two Vulcans and then sat down herself, "This could be a long night."

"Tell us something we don't know," Sean giggled as he kept a firm hold on the boy on his lap.

Nathan giggled, then glanced at the doorway as Brant and Matthew Parnell entered.

Meanwhile:

After receiving the all clear about his grandson from Spock, Sarek sat alone in his quarters and stared out at the sky through the window, lost in his thoughts. Much had happened since the last time he had been alone in this room, and he needed the quiet to come to terms with it all. Through all his long years, he had never had so much trouble controlling his emotions as now: not even when the horrific news of his daughter-in-law's and Grandson's apparent deaths had been given to him.

His grandson just seemed to exude love - the desire *to* love and to *be* loved in return - to such a degree that all of his barriers and controls just vanished. Sarek could no more *not* feel in Joel's presence than he could stop breathing.

It was a simple fact.

He rather 'enjoyed' it, if he was brutally honest with himself.

"Oh, my grandson; you bring out all that is good in me. I thank you," he whispered to the air.

A beeping from the comm-desk in the corner roused him from his thoughts, and he moved over to answer the call.

"*Patriarch Sarek,*" the Vulcan priestess started by way of greeting once the Ambassador had received the signal. "*I now have the information you requested regarding the Fo'wein Sa'ren.*"

"Indeed?" Sarek said, his interest showing. "Please proceed."

"Your call two days past caused no small measure of concern, Sarek. The Armour and the Sword are guarded closely and perpetually, and no-one is allowed into the chamber that they reside in without a House Patriarch being present: apart from the Sur'Kat'Araya; and he can only enter himself, not authorise others. When you alerted us to the possible current placement of the Fo'wein Sa'ren, we asked Patriarch Misak and Patriarch Siprak to accompany us. It was not until an hour ago that they could come to us for the inspection. The Armour is missing, Patriarch; that much I can confirm. How it was taken, and how it got to Earth, is still a mystery. Misak was simply astonished at this discovery; Siprak, however, was... emotive."

"How so?" Sarek asked, his concern hidden.

"He was angry. He muttered to himself and stormed from the room," the priestess said carefully. "His actions were as curious as they were disconcerting. Finding that the Armour was missing seemed to concern him greatly."

"You have no witnesses to the Armour's removal?"

"Yes," the priestess replied slowly. "There is one, but... we cannot add verification to support the claim, no matter the source."

Sarek raised an eyebrow. "Who witnessed it?"

"Surak."

Sarek's eyes widened. "Would it be acceptable for me to speak with him, please?" he asked softly.

The priestess nodded, *"We were expecting your request - as was Surak. The Sur'Kat'Araya stands ready to take your call, Patriarch."*

The view screen shifted view, and Sarek was now looking into the Chamber where the broken Sword of Surak was kept. The place where the Fo'wein Sa'ren had once been stood oddly empty, however. In the centre of the room, a Vulcan was standing. *"Greetings, Cousin Sarek. Does it go well with you?"*

"It goes very well," Sarek responded, almost smiling. "Does it go well with you, too, Soven?"

Soven nodded. *"I am content, yet troubled. Sarek, I have been carrying the Katra of our Ancestor for more than one hundred years, and in all that time I have never felt what I feel now."*

"And that is, Cousin?"

Soven checked around himself, then leaned closer to the screen. *"Fear, Sarek. I am afraid. You know that we, the Priesthood of Kolinahr, keep the Legend of Sa'ren and Guard this place and the Katra. Until the events two days past happened, I had never given them much more than simple curiosity and respect. Could such things happen? I never did believe that. I do now. The Fo'wein Sa'ren is gone, and it has been worn by a child. Your Grandchild. And he has been Named 'Sa'ren' after the Sword. I speak truly when I say that I am afraid. You have been investigating an ancient power that once threatened the Oldest of Races, and now the 'It' of Legend has arrived? Can I be anything else **other** than afraid? For, logically, if 'It' has come, then 'He' is not far behind. All that remains is for Ish-Hassu to arrive, and we shall have certainty!"*

"He already has," Sarek said simply.

Soven blinked once, then his Kolinahr control seemed to return. *"Ish-Hassu - he is here?"*

Sarek nodded.

"Then we have little time. Sarek, our shared Ancestor wishes to talk with you about the events surrounding the taking of the Fo'wein Sa'ren. Please stand by," Soven said quickly.

Sarek watched as Soven's light brown eyes seemed to change shade slightly, becoming ever so slightly blue-tinted.

"Blood of my blood, thank you for taking the time to speak with me," 'Surak' said from the lips of Soven.

Sarek shook his head quickly, "It was not an inconvenience, Honoured One. I have been informed that you witnessed the taking of the Armour you had created. Is that correct?"

"I would not say I witnessed 'the taking', my child. Instead, saying that I 'witnessed it vanishing' would be more in keeping with the events. As is my wont, once every seven days I spend a few hours experiencing the world through the body of the Holder of my Katra. It was at that time that I came here to gaze upon my ancient weapon and upon the armour I had forged for my Heir. Then, as if the air itself had become as liquid, a vortex appeared and swallowed the armour. It was much as those reports I have heard at times of 'wormholes'. The experience was... interesting. I left this room and intended to inform my Holder once he had regained control, but the effect of that event drained me. I fell inwards and did not emerge again until four hours ago. After finding out that you had contacted the Temple shortly after the time of the Armour's disappearance, I purposed to talk with you."

Sarek was still thinking of what to say after that revelation when Surak spoke again, *"Your Forsaken grandson has been found and Named?"*

Sarek looked up and nodded slowly.

"Do you have an image of him so that I can see my Heir?"

Sarek didn't answer; instead, he pressed a few buttons on the control panel before him and a picture of Joel in the Armour appeared on split-screen. Then, another appeared that was just Joel in his jeans and tee-shirt from earlier that day.

"It is him. I was there, Sarek. I was there at your grandson's Naming. Sa'ren after Sa'ren. My Heir. My Scion. The 'One Who Knows' was correct," Surak trailed off as he stared at the two pictures.

"Who is this 'One who Knows', Honoured One?" Sarek asked curiously.

"Me, Grandpa Sarek," the Doctor said from behind the Vulcan Patriarch.

Sarek turned quickly, and 'Surak' on screen looked directly at the little ginger Time Lord. *"You! Who are you, child?"* Surak asked quickly.

The Doctor smiled, and raised his hand to draw a symbol in the air. It hung there, created of light, and revolved slowly.

The Seal of the Time Lords. The Seal of Rassilon.

"The Time comes," the small boy said softly - ominously, "and the Sunlight will tremble."

CIC - Dining Room:

"And you have a problem with me and Jace stealing your android son?" Nathan sniggered as the door to Brant's apartment closed behind the Vampire and Matthew Parnell. "I'm betting two hours tops, and they'll be a couple!"

"1.7365 hours tops," Cory replied in his best Vulcan demeanour. "Plus or minus .045 percent."

"Less than 10.4537 minutes until they both engage in intimacy," T'Pol stated firmly as she released Bast from their meld. She saw Cory's curious expression and tapped her nose, "Female Vulcans have a higher sense of smell than our male counterparts, and I could smell that young Matthew is awash with desire. He is conflicted and scared about what is happening, but I could sense Brant's concern and compassion for him as well. I believe Brant will assist him."

Nathan giggled, "Well... glad I didn't put money down on THAT bet! Good for Matt! He's been so alone for so long."

"Juan's gonna be pissed he missed out on this one!" Cory giggled under his breath.

"We have finished," Spock murmured softly. "If Austin is ready, we shall depart for Utah. Nathan; is Daileass allowing transporters to beam in, or do we need to use a shuttle to get there?"

Before Nathan could answer, Cory offered, "Ark can get them there. Ark won't have any problems with a dampening field."

Spock asked, "Ark is the ancient AI I have read about on the Clan's systems?"

Cory nodded as Austin came back into the room. "Enjoyed the show, Nath'?" the Android giggled.

Nathan grinned and nodded, "When can I see it in reverse?"

"I believe that would require the approval of your mate, which is quite possibly only going to occur if Hades has a temperature decrease to 10 degrees," Austin dead-panned.

Both of Spock's eyebrows raised quickly, and Nathan cocked his head to the side. His eyes went far away for a moment, then he grinned at Austin. "We'll see..."

Cory glanced at Sean, then over at Austin to await the boy's retort. This was an entertaining evening, all things considered.

"You *think* you'll see..." Austin replied back.

Nathan tilted his head further, then nodded to himself. "Ah... now I understand. I should have said 'you'll see', Austin." Then he shook his head a bit, "I'm not used to these intuition things..." He then slid off Sean's lap and padded across bare foot to Austin, who was looking a little uncomfortable. He smiled

up at the slightly taller boy gently, then levitated up to be on eye level. He said softly, "Don't worry at it. I feel you, and I have *a* feeling that things will change for you in a good way soon. Maybe with me and Jace, but likely not as you said. I was kinda teasing you, but I'm also telling you the truth: Jace and I *do* think you're cute. But I've got this - feeling - that things are going to be okay for you. Don't worry at it." Nathan then slipped his arms around Austin's neck and kissed his cheek softly, "You'll be okay, brother."

"Thanks." Austin replied as he gave Nath a hug. "You know something though? It's really not polite to be poking your brothers with deadly weapons!" he added with a giggle.

"I believe that you should take that as a compliment, Austin," Spock said seriously as Nathan blushed.

"Down boy!" the blond giggled down at what was trying to seek some attention as he floated out of the hug with Austin. He then grinned back at Austin and said, "Told you that you were cute! My soldier agrees... and I believe he's not the only one with this problem!" he added as he glanced down Austin's body to the tent that had formed.

Cory was trying not to fall out of his chair laughing.

Spock raised his eyebrows and added his opinion with a ghost of a smile, "I believe that part of the teenage male anatomy does not respond to voice commands, Nathan. In my experience, at your age level the penis generally thinks more than the actual brain."

Nathan considered that while Austin started adjusting his clothing, while fighting with his blush. "Yeah... you're right... there's another way to sort this out! Be back in a bit, guys... I won't ask you to join me, Austin - even though you *obviously* need to do the same!" Nathan giggled as he floated out of the room towards the nearest bathroom.

"JJ keeps the lotion under the sink!" Cory yelled to the departing 12 year old.

"Don't need it! I'm not cut like some of you poor peeps!" came the giggled retort.

"I can fix those for you, Uncles!" Levi giggled helpfully from the Rec Room.

Cory and Sean tilted their heads in thought...

Meanwhile:

"It is Time. Time for answers. Time for it to be revealed. Time for you to know," the Doctor said seriously as he looked at Surak on the monitor.

Surak, inside Soven's body, raised an eyebrow. "*What is it that you shall reveal?*" he asked slowly.

"Not all, but you need to know how important the Armour and the Sword truly are," the Time Lord answered. "The metal found in orbit of Vulcan by your race was not some random meteor or comet that was caught by your planet's gravity well. It was placed there for you to find, and for your mutual ances-

stor S'harien to use," the boy explained to them both. "The metal contained a variety of minerals from both my world and one other, plus something else that not even I know about."

"What other world?" Sarek asked, although he was sure he could guess.

"Sa'kai-T'Khasi. Earth," the Lord of Time answered.

Surak raised both eyebrows, *"And who left it there?"*

"I did, right before my race left this Universe. I did so on orders," the Doctor said.

"Whose?" both Vulcans asked at once.

"Vae'Runam - The Guardian of Forever. He who set the Legend into motion. He who first spoke the prophecy."

"Then... then the Legend is more than a mere Legend?" Surak asked. *"I dreamt the words, and saw images that scared me. I told my apprentice soon after my now famous duel, then seconds later, a group of children from the then primitive world of Terra arrived in the Cave of Naming, being led by a Vulcan and his child."*

"Yes. It is more than a 'mere Legend'. It is what must be. There is a cancer eating at the Heart of the Universes, and it is located in Alpha Prime - this Universe. He must be removed, and It must do it, or He will Destroy everything. All shall fail and fall, and so, the Sword and the Armour have been made," the Doctor said slowly.

"We have read reports from multiple ancient races, Doctor," Sarek said seriously, fear beginning to show in his eyes - fear for Joel. "After decoding and translating them, we found that all these ancient fears about a Pillar of Light that could rend planets were all linked. Even on Vulcan, at least five hundred thousand years ago, there are writings that say the same. It is a common theme throughout this section of space. How can a Sword and a suit of Armour help my grandson against that?"

"I do not know, only that the Sword was made for him," the Doctor said gently. "S'harien was given the pattern for the swords, and given the words to inscribe upon the First of them; the one made from the metal he found. That Sword is an echo of Joel, the real 'Sa'ren'. It had shed no blood until the War of the Raptor, and neither has Joel til now. It saved Vulcan, and so shall Joel. He must. Only he can. How? I don't know."

Surak looked from the view-screen at Sarek's troubled face, then over at the Doctor, *"What metals from Earth were used?"*

"Titanium, and Vitaferum."

"What is Vitaferum?" Surak asked curiously.

The Doctor smiled, "At the time that it was placed in orbit of Vulcan, it didn't exist. The peoples of Earth created it not too long after, but the Guardian could and did get some. He made the mix that was then used with the strongest metals of Vulcan to make the Sa'ren Sword. There was enough metal left

for at least two more swords, but S'harien knew, without knowing why or how he knew, that he should place that remaining special metal aside. It was for use in the Armour that you were to make. And you used it."

"What does Vitaferum do? How is it special?" Surak pressed, his eyes - Soven's eyes - showing an interest that was rarely seen from Surak.

"It was made to augment a human and make them age slower and heal faster. In the Armour and the Sword, the reason for it's placement is obscure. However, there must *be* a reason, or the Guardian would never have set it within the metal I was ordered to leave in orbit."

Surak's face became thoughtful. While he contemplated something in the room that only he could see, Sarek moved to sit down heavily. "The Guardian said that the Legend has been in existence since He came into being. Why is it only now that we are told the true import of these facts?"

"Because Time dictates," the Doctor answered him as he crawled up and onto Sarek's lap. "All things have their Time, Grandpa Sarek. All things."

"What of the part of the Legend, regarding my Heir being able to change what Was to Be Anew?" Surak asked suddenly.

"I think that refers to The Shaper. The Master of Destiny, and the One without Destiny - almost. He has only one task; to face and defeat The Destroyer. Vae'Za."

"Vae... Vae'Za?! You called the Guardian Vae'Runam! That... that means..." Sarek said, horror showing clearly on his face as his control fled away.

"Yes," the Doctor sighed sadly. "Vae'Za is a Guardian too. He was the Guardian of Dimension. Now, he is just the Destroyer. He is one of the Fallen, in a way - and within the Circle of Creation, more powerful than any of the Fallen."

"Sa'ren..." Sarek whispered in fear. "My grandson... nooo...."

Surak also looked concerned, but did not know how to comfort his descendant. After a few moments watching as Sarek regained control over his emotions, Surak asked the Doctor, *"There is but one more thing I have long wondered at. Why did I feel led to add those words to the inside of the breastplate of the Armour?"*

The Doctor turned his face and smiled, "Your Heir will have to work that out for himself, Surak. It will become an advantage, and all due to the nature of the special component that was given to the metal your people found."

Surak stared for a moment, then nodded. *"Very well. I must give control back to Soven, now. Live long and prosper."*

"Peace be on you, Surak," the Doctor smiled.

"Is Nathan asleep?" Cory whispered as Sean rejoined him in the Dining Room. Both boys had gotten ready for bed, but since neither could sleep while their 'Lil'elf' was still in Utah, Cory had retreated to the Kitchen to get two mugs of chocolate ready while Sean double checked all the other kids. All were asleep after the excitement.

"Yeah," Sean answered. "I don't know how he can do it when it's his husband over there. I'm on pins and Joel's only my little brother!"

"Training," Cory shrugged. "I bet they've had to be apart for far more dangerous missions than this."

"S'pos so," Sean muttered as he sat down next to his blond bonded. "Sammy and the others have gone over as well. They weren't looking pleased." He glanced at the wall clock, "It's nearly half past eleven already?"

Cory nodded as he opened the blanket he had wrapped around him so that Sean could cuddle up to him on the two chairs that had been pushed together. "Dad's been gone for an hour, now. Poor Joel and Kevin... this isn't something I wanted for them on this night of all nights."

Sean cuddled in tightly, "I wish I could have five minutes with that ass-hole General."

"Yup," Cory sighed, holding back on the anger that just wanted to let rip again.

There was a slight shimmering behind them, and they turned quickly to see those that had gone to help in Utah appear in a shower of sparkles, along with Joel, Kevin and Mikey. Joel's eyes lit up happily at seeing his two big brothers, but his yawn interrupted what would have been a joyful greeting.

Both teens wasted no time in throwing off the blanket and heading for Joel and Kevin, who were both scooped up into their arms for a tight cuddle.

Spock stated softly, "Austin. Bed. Now."

"Yes, Grandpop," the tired Android murmured as T'Pol guided him out and through to the nest.

"Michael, I need to meditate to be ready for the morning. Will you assist my sons to their apartment for me, please?" Spock asked of the Saint at his side.

"Sure, Pop," Mikey smiled as the Vulcan hugged him.

"Then I shall take my leave for the rest of the night. Sleep well, my sons," he said as he reached and pulled Cory and Sean, plus their armfuls, in for a hug and a kiss.

"Night, Dad," Cory murmured, while Sean simply smiled happily.

"Night, Daddy," came the muted whisper from Joel.

Spock left, and Mikey firmly made Cory and Sean sit with the two small boys pulled up on their laps. "I'm getting something for you both to drink," he said seriously as he went out into the Kitchen.

Joel simply yawned again, then tucked his face into the crook of Cory's neck and grumbled to himself tiredly. "Fuckin' prick of a... spoilt our... gonna kill the fucker... not fair..."

"You can say that again," Kevin muttered back as he copied his little husband and tucked his face into Sean's neck. "And that Daileass... I'm going to zap him, I swear... Scaring us like that..."

"I already chewed about 20 million transistors out of his virtual ass for doing that," Cory stated simply.

"So did Allie - at least that's what Daileass said when Adz also shouted at him," Joel muttered with a grin. Then, with a mischievousness borne out of extreme exhaustion, he blew a raspberry into Cory's bare shoulder - then giggled.

"I guess we better tell Timmy to get Allie's stomach checked," Sean quipped; trying to lighten the mood.

Cory grinned at him, then tickled Joel's ribs lightly, "You going to stop blowing into my skin, bro?" he whispered with a smile.

"Nope," Joel giggled softly, then went for Cory's bare chest.

Cory couldn't hold in his giggles this time, and started wiggling on his seat.

"That looks fun," Kevin murmured. "You ticklish too, Sean?" he asked, his tired eyes beginning to light up with amusement.

"Yes he is," Mikey's voice came from the Kitchen. "Under the armpits, behind his knees, and the soles of his feet. I recommend fingers only, however - I've a stinky brother!"

"Hey!" Sean retorted indignantly, then he too started to laugh as Kevin's quick fingers took advantage of the distraction and went under his arms. "Traitor!" Sean yelled at Mikey.

"I'm your big brother! I've GOT to help others tease you - didn't you know that?"

Sean couldn't reply for he had slipped from the chair and onto the floor with Kevin now perched happily on his chest. "I'm the King of the Sean!" the brown haired boy giggled as he lifted his arms in a victory salute.

Sean took advantage of Kevin's position and went for the smaller boy's own armpits, while Cory also slipped from his chair to join his husband. Joel landed lightly on top of him, then assaulted his big brother's belly, blowing raspberries for all he was worth.

Cory was giving as good as he got, however, by tickling Joel's extremely sensitive ribs and stomach.

"I leave you alone for two minutes, and there's a tickle war? And I wasn't invited?" Mikey laughed as he set the two mugs and plate of cookies down on the table. "Who wants help? Kevin or Joel?"

"*TRAITOR!*" Cory and Sean giggled in unison.

Joel pointed at Kevin. "I've got this weak Blondie! Help my human husband," the little cherub giggled as he bounced lightly on Cory's stomach, fending off Cory's attacking fingers. "I'll soon have the Patriarch suitably corralled!"

As Mikey set to work on Sean's feet, Joel had an idea. "Mikey? Flap your wings!" he giggled to the Angel's back.

Mikey did so as Joel swivelled around to grab both his blond brother's ankles. He lifted easily and Mikey's wings started brushing over the soles of Cory's bare feet.

Both Cory and Sean had stopped trying to tickle back at this point, for they were laughing to hard to do anything.

Joel let his brother's feet down a moment or so later, and Mikey and Kevin also took pity on Sean at the same time. Joel flopped back with a happy sigh to be held against Cory's chest by his brother's strong arms. "I love you, Blondie," the Vulcan whispered as he felt his brother give the back of his head a kiss as they lay there.

Mikey smiled as he helped Kevin get the still giggling Sean up off the floor, "Elfin; drink your chocolate, kiddo. You deserve it after what you did."

Joel nodded with a small smile as he got up. He helped Cory to stand, then stopped dead, staring at his brother - or more specifically, below his brother's waist. "Levi's been giving more prezzies, huh?" he giggled.

"Huh?" Kevin enquired as he was pulled onto Sean's lap.

Joel stood to one side and gently patted what he had noticed, making Cory giggle. "Levi gave Cor the same gift he gave you, Kevvy!"

Kevin grinned, then slipped from Sean's lap to look. "Sean too," he smiled, then climbed back up.

"So what happened, Joel?" Sean asked as Kevin reached for his own mug of cocoa. "Why do you two look dead on your feet?"

Joel sighed as Cory sat down, then he too sought the comfort of a 'big brother cuddle'. "I had to de-program Adz, Logan, Juan, Jory, Will and Chang. Chang was the hardest as the alternate personality had been made active... I had to..." he trailed off, as if searching for the words.

"He had to kill it," Kevin said quietly. "I felt what happened."

"Did I? Was it alive? I don't think it was... I'm not sure... I've never killed before. I never want to kill - I hope it wasn't alive," Joel whispered as he began to shake on Cory's lap. "I don't know..."

"It's not a human if there is no soul attached," Cory said softly. "Did it have a soul?"

"I don't think so. It didn't feel the same when I was melding with Chang and got rid of it, but now I'm thinking about it - I'm not sure. I don't want to be like *him*, Cory! I don't wanna be a murderer! Maybe

it wasn't alive, but then it could've become alive if he'd have lived... it had lived... I don't know," Joel wept in frustration and fear. "I don't wanna be a murderer..."

Cory increased his grip on his little brother and kissed the back of his head again. *'Kyle? Can you come in here please? Or Ty? Elf needs you,'* he sent quickly.

'Comin',' Kyle's thought bounced back quickly.

'I think it can wait a few minutes if you're doing that,' Sean sent with a giggle.

'Ha ha ha,' Kyle retorted as he strolled in from the Rec Room, Tyler at his side. They both stopped by Sean and poked their tongues out at him. *'Perv!'* Kyle added with a giggle as he slapped the back of Sean's head.

Joel blinked through his tears at his two little brothers. "What did Sean do this time?" he asked, forcing a smile.

"He's perving on us," Tyler explained with a giggle.

"Oh," Joel responded, looking lost. "How?"

Kyle smiled softly, "It's only a joke, bro." He glanced at Cory, then back at Joel's tear streaked face, "Wanna talk about it, Lil'elf?"

Joel glanced back at Cory quickly, and saw his brother nod. The Vulcan sighed again, and explained what the problem was. Again, as he finished, his tears were back.

"Don't cry, Joel," Kyle whispered as he crawled up onto Cory's lap to cuddle with his Vulcan brother. "You didn't do anything wrong."

"But I could have killed. I... I can't kill; I just can't! And I might have," Joel whispered back.

Kyle kissed Joel's face as Tyler moved over to Cory's other side. "Got enough room on there for me too, Bro?" the blond eight year old asked.

Cory giggled, "Yeah. Get up here, Ty."

Tyler wasted no time. Soon, Joel was sandwiched between the two Mikyvis, and all three were being cuddled by a giggling Cory.

"Bro," Tyler said as he pressed himself in close to Joel, "you know we can't see your future too good, right?"

"Yeah," Joel nodded slowly.

"We can see your past, though. And we can go check for you if you want us to," Tyler explained.

"Would you?" Joel asked desperately. "Oh, please! Please go check. I..."

"Shhh," Kyle silenced his brother softly. "Just relax, Elf. Give us a moment, okay?"

Joel nodded, and as both his little brothers' eyes went far away, he whispered back to Cory, "But what if I *did* kill?"

"You don't do wrong, Lil'elf... if it was to be, then it was done," came Cory's reply.

Joel didn't look convinced, but decided to wait for his two special brothers to find out first.

He didn't have much longer to wait: "It's okay. It wasn't alive," Tyler said softly as his eyes gained focus again.

"It never was. Chang is the only one alive, as you told him in the meld, Bro. That thing was just that, a 'thing'," Kyle added seriously. "If it had lived, it would have been a monster. You didn't kill, and you're NOT a murderer. Even if it HAD been alive, you'd not have been a murderer. Murderers kill for no reason, or 'cause they like making others hurt. In this case, if it had been alive, you'd have killed it in a clean fight. It wouldn't have been wrong."

"But anyway, that don't matter. It wasn't, so you didn't, and that's it. Okay?" Tyler finished with a small giggle. He rubbed his cheek against Joel's in the way Joel always seemed to like doing to him and Kyle, and whispered, "I'm proud to call you my big brother. So can you stop kicking yourself over doing a good thing, please?"

Joel's arm snaked around Tyler's small frame, and his other around Kyle's even smaller one, and pulled them in tight, "Thank you... I love you guys... sorry."

"Don't be sorry - just be our Elf!" they both chorused together.

"And MY Sa'ren," Kevin added, grinning over from his comfortable Sean-seat.

"And his Sa'ren," Sean giggled, tickling Kevin's ribs and making the boy laugh.

"Smart asses," Tyler giggled as he slipped to the floor. "We're goin' back to bed. If you need anything, though, Elf - just call. Okay?"

"Okay," Joel smiled as he gave Kyle a kiss, then he pulled Tyler back up and kissed him as well. Then he plopped both giggling Mikyvis on their feet. "Seeya tomorrow."

"Night!" they both chorused as they walked back out and into the Nest.

Cory edged his chair closer to the table, and pulled his own mug and Joel's closer to them. "Drink up, Lil'elf; or Mikey's gonna be upset that you don't like his hot chocolate!"

"Uh huh," Mikey giggled as he floated cross-legged on the other side of Sean and Kevin. "That's special 'Mike Short Cocoa', that is - I only make it on special occasions!"

"Hey!" Sean protested quickly, "We haven't had that for AGES, Mike!"

"So?" Mikey giggled at the indignant looks from the two boys. "Oh, very well... here you go, my jealous little brothers!" he giggled as he produced another two mugs. "I did make four, but I was wondering when you'd ask!"

Cory reached for it eagerly. "Mmmm...." came his satisfied almost-purr.

Joel took a sip. "Cinnamon?" he asked softly.

"Yup! My own recipe..." Mikey smiled.

Sean had a contented look on his face as he sipped his own 'Mikey-Cocoa'. "When we had nightmares, Mike would always make us his special cocoa," he explained as he reminisced.

Cory's eyes were peaceful as he enjoyed his drink, "It still relaxes me..."

Joel had to admit, this was the best cocoa he'd had in the three days he'd been here. "It's very yummy," he murmured as he smiled at his Saintly brother. "Thanks, Mikey."

Mikey just grinned and nodded, then he watched tenderly as his four brothers enjoyed their drinks - and the cookies that had been placed on the table before them.

"Kevvy?" Joel looked over at his husband questioningly once he'd finished his mug. "Can we meld?"

Kevin smiled back, "Sure. Anything important?"

"Yeah," Joel murmured hesitantly. "You don't know everything about me. I don't know everything about you. I'd like to share everything with you. I've not gone back in any of the melds til I helped Adz and his bros - They know everything about me, but you don't. I don't want it to stay that way, Kev. I want to be open with you about what made me as I am."

Kevin's face became serious, "I want that too, Sa'r. Yeah, you can meld with me. You never have to ask that."

Sean edged his chair over towards Cory's until his legs were touching his blond husband's, thus allowing the two boys on their laps to reach each other.

Joel smiled his thanks, then reached to place his gentle fingertips on his own husband's face. "My mind to your mind, your thoughts to my thoughts. Our minds are merging... our hearts are one..." he whispered...

"Where are we this time, Sa'r?" Kevin asked as he looked around at the bridge both boys were standing on.

"This is the link between our memories, Kev," Joel explained as he took the other boy's hand. "That's yours behind you. The other's mine. Wh...which first?"

"Yours," Kevin whispered. "Let's get the worst over with."

"I felt your own past when we melded earlier, but only generally. You've got a bad history too, Kev. We're just different - but that don't make mine worse."

Kevin shrugged, "From what little I know, I wouldn't have survived what you did, Sa'r. I'm not as brave as you."

"Yes you are," Joel said shyly.

"No," Kevin said seriously. "I'm stronger, but not braver. You're the brave one, and we share what the other doesn't have. I'll watch your past only because you are with me and make me brave."

Joel embraced Kevin quickly. "Okay then," he whispered. "Let's go."

They turned and walked into the light that was Joel's memories, and seemed to vanish away...

Back on the 'bridge', and what seemed like a lifetime later, Kevin crumpled into a sobbing heap. Joel was cuddled up around him, and also crying.

"Why?" Kevin sobbed piteously. "Why'd they do that? Why'd that world be that way?"

"Don't know," Joel cried as he tried to comfort his husband, but reliving those memories a step at a time had torn his heart up too. When he had melded with Adam Casey and the others, his past had been an instant dump into their memories, and the same for theirs into his. What he had done with Kevin, however, was fundamentally different: they had walked behind his younger self and experienced everything. For Kevin, the shock and the horror was near unspeakable. For Joel, the pain-remembered was overwhelming even to his new Vulcan training.

But he did feel better for sharing it.

It took a long time, though, for both boys to stop crying. Finally, Kevin looked up and placed the palms of his hands onto Joel's chest, "Now I know where each of these marks comes from."

Joel thought his clothes away, and knelt there naked. "Yeah. Each has a story, and none nice," he choked out through his tear-tightened throat as Kevin traced each with a shaking finger.

"I'm sorry I can't take them away," Kevin said, as tears began to trickle down his face once more.

"You have," Joel said, his own eyes leaking in union with Kevin's own. "Your love... it's made them disappear. I don't see them any more. Not really."

Kevin's eyes met Joel's, and he saw truth in the Vulcan's piercing blue gaze. He didn't know what to say, but his heart swelled with love in that second to the point that he nearly fainted. His voice shaking, he asked, "Do you want to walk down my memories? Will you make me brave enough to see *them* again, like you always make me brave?"

Joel stood and thought some clothes back on. "I'm always here, Kev. I'm never going to leave you. I swear it."

Kevin smiled and stood up as well. They both turned and, hand in hand, made their way into the light that was Kevin's memories...

Again, after a 'lifetime' had passed, they both reappeared. "What a fucking BITCH!" Joel screamed in impotent rage.

Kevin was also angry, but trying to ride herd on a pissed off Vulcan was an experience he'd never had before. He didn't have time for his own anger, only Joel's.

"She tried to KILL YOU! Not once, but five times?!" Joel screamed as he created a pile of china dishes just so he could smash them to pieces. "FUCKING BITCH!"

"Uh, Sa'r?" Kevin tried to break through his lover's anger, while ducking a mis-aimed dish. "You knew that, didn't you?"

"Yeah, but poison? FUCKING POISON?? She'd have LET YOU DIE IN AGONY!!!! I wanna go back in time... come on, we're gonna see Levi, and we're gonna go back there, and I'm gonna rip out her guts and feed them to her, the...."

At this point, Kevin had to fall into Vulcan-language mode to keep up with the rant that Joel went off on.

"... yem-tor Gloria'am yukalam-tor I-Cheya lu tersau!" Joel finished, then he saw Kevin's now amused face. "What?" he demanded, not very graciously.

"I don't think she'd live much past the bit involving the piano leg going where the sun don't shine, so I'm sure as rain is wet that I-Cheya'd never get the pleasure of his ovary soup, Sa'r!" Kevin giggled.

"Good point... reverse that bit," Joel said, before giggling himself, "I don't think Levi'd take us back, will he?"

"No. I don't think so," Kevin grinned back at him, "but I do feel better knowing that you care enough to do all THAT to her... I don't think your dad will approve, though. That goes a tiny bit beyond logical punishment for the crime."

"The piano leg was a bit too much?"

"Ah, no, Sa'ren. I think after you went past the bit where you'd rip her toes off and beat her unconscious with them... that was the point it went 'too far'. Everything else was so far *south* of 'too far' that I got lost at the Florida Keys!"

Joel giggled again, then embraced Kevin. His face became slightly more serious as he whispered, "How can any mother do that - any of that - to her son?"

Kevin shrugged seriously, "How can anyone do ANY of the stuff we've both been through to ANY-one, Sa'r? I don't know the answer to that - none of us do. Some people are just evil. Maybe not totally, but there are some that are that mostly. We can't understand it, but we can heal now. We have a family, now. We're loved, and we're looked after. And we can help others to escape it as well."

After nodding seriously, Joel whispered, "You're right... you're right." He then kissed Kevin seriously. "Time to go back, now," he giggled.

"Oh? Are our brothers getting tired of holding us?"

"No. We've only been about three minutes, but Sean just said something to Cory, and because he can't move me or he'd break the meld, he's very uncomfortable, now."

"How come?"

"Cos I'm squishing the stiffie that Sean's comment just gave him, and he cannot move it without moving me and my hand from your face!"

"So, Boner boy - do I have to beat you for trying it on with my husband?!" Kevin giggled as Joel's hand came away from his face.

Cory blushed, then giggled as Joel lifted himself up a bit to gently adjust what he was sitting on so that both boys could be comfortable.

After sitting back and pressing his back against Cory's chest, Joel giggled, "It's like a hot-water bottle!"

Cory blushed even more, then.

Kevin and Sean were giggling too much to comment, however.

Joel sighed happily, then yawned. "Time for bed," he whispered before slipping from Cory's lap and starting for the door to the Nest. He paused by it when he realised that the others weren't following. As he turned back to face them, they saw his face was not as happy as it had just been.

It was regretful.

"So you're not going to your apartment?" Cory asked, although he could guess the response.

"Why? I'm too tired to make love," Joel said, his voice now soft and worn out.

Kevin sighed as well, "Yeah. No point, now..."

"You're still going there, boys," Mikey said seriously as he stood up and picked Kevin from Sean's lap. "At least you get some alone time," he added as he walked over to Joel and picked him up as well.

Mikey looked at his two teen brothers and jerked his head towards the Nest, "You two - sleep. I'll look after these imps now: me and their guardians."

Cory raised an eyebrow, then saw movement by the door towards Main CIC. I-Cheya and Blackie were sitting there, watching them all closely. "Okay, Mike," Cory said with a smile. "Good night... Hey, Prince! What are you doing up?"

Prince Harry, who had just appeared behind I-Cheya and Blackie, smiled. "I will be going to bed shortly, brothers. I have just been getting information from the Yoshuhlnak. Since Brant is off duty tonight, and since Seth is now in bed, Antony is coming over to stand watch in Main CIC. It is closer to the scene for what is being planned tomorrow."

Cory smiled, "Thanks, Prince. Well, good night. And sleep well, Joel!"

"We will," came the tired response as Cory turned to go towards the Nest with Sean.

Mikey turned back from watching his brothers leave and addressed Harry. "What are *you* doing here?" he whispered.

Harry looked at the puzzled expressions on both Kevin's and Joel's faces, then back up at Mikey seriously. He then smiled, but didn't reply.

Mikey opened his mouth, but after hearing something that only he could hear, held his peace. "Well, good night," he said, his voice unsure. He then walked out of the Dining Room with his precious armful, and was followed by the two Spirit Guardians.

Prince Harry watched silently as the Saint and the two boys left, then walked to the table and sat down. With a flicker from his now brilliant white, glowing eyes, the lights in the Dining Room and Kitchen winked out.

Then 'Harry' just sat there, invisible to all - his eyes still glowing...

... and a mysterious smile on his face.

Joel yawned his way into the apartment with Kevin at his side, while Mikey guided them both. They sat heavily on the edge of the bed, and frankly looked beat. Mikey gazed down at them both tenderly, then held out his hand. "Here. Eat this, it'll help," he said softly as a glowing object appeared in his angelic hand.

"What is it?" Kevin asked tiredly as he peered at it.

"Fruit. Special fruit," Mikey said with a soft smile.

Joel tried to raise an eyebrow but failed. "Why?"

"To wake you up. This will do that and more, little brothers."

"We just want to sleep, Mikey," Kevin said around a huge yawn. "I feel like the crap's been kicked outta me by one of Uncle Chip's horses!"

"I know," Mikey said as he knelt in front of them after placing the 'fruit' in Joel's listless hand, "but you both were not meant to be this tired right now. Tonight is special, and you both need it."

Joel started to blush, "You mean...?"

"Yes. There are some things that are just meant to be," Mikey smiled softly.

"But I'm the Shaper, and..." Joel started, but Mikey placed a finger on his Vulcan brother's lips.

"I know you are, but there is One who can undo even *your* power, Elfin."

Joel lifted the 'fruit' up and sniffed it. "Where's this from?" he asked, his curiosity waking up.

"A very special Tree," the Saint answered with a grin.

Kevin cocked his head to the side, then his eyes opened wide. "But... that means..."

"No, you won't become immortal. The Tree no longer works that way in this plane. But you will feel renewed and refreshed. Yes, you'll sleep tonight, but you won't need much. There are things you must do, or you won't get much chance otherwise."

Joel continued to blush, but took a large bite anyhow.

"Oh... wow, Kev... it's..." Joel started, but trailed off as he offered the 'fruit' to Kevin.

The brown haired boy also took a bite.

Within moments the two boys had woken up, and a lot more. They were practically bouncing beans on the edge of the bed as they giggled at the Saint who was still kneeling before them.

"I think that worked," Mikey grinned. He blinked once and the Radio started playing one of the oldies channels. "I'll leave you two love-birds, now. See you tomorrow, okay?"

He had no answer, for Joel was trying to reach Kevin's tonsils. Kevin was returning the favour.

Mikey knew when he had become superfluous, and so left the room, closing the door behind him.

Joel pushed Kevin back until he was lying on top of his husband, still in the middle of the kiss, when the presenter of the Radio station introduced the next song:

'And now, by request of Mike Short, Orlando: 'Shooting for the Moon' by Amy Holland. For all those sweethearts still awake at the midnight hour...'

"Mikey gets around," Kevin giggled as the two boys broke their kiss.

Joel giggled and held on tightly to his little husband as they listened to the song.

Funny how sometimes life
Just changes overnight
Magically everything you do
Turns out so right

Just like that
You pull rabbits out of your hat

You've got the charm
That even wizards can't explain
How to make rainbows from
A single drop of rain

Who can say?
It's a trick you learned how to play:

When you're shooting for the moon
and finally make it,
Guess a lucky star is shining on you
The candle on the cake is yours
So take it,
Make another wish it's sure to come true
Isn't that the way you do it?
Tell me I can do it, too.

Who could believe one day
You'd learn to walk on air
Everyone said, "No way,
You haven't got a prayer."

Click your heels
That's how up and happy it feels

When you're shooting for the moon
and finally make it,
Guess a lucky star is shining on you
The candle on the cake is yours
So take it,
Make another wish it's sure to come true
Isn't that the way you do it?
Tell me I can do it, too.

There's a candle on the cake
It's yours, so take it,
Make another wish it's sure to come true

You say there's really nothing to it
Maybe I can do it, too...

(Shooting for the Moon © Amy Holland)

"I love you, k'hat'n'dlawá," Kevin whispered.

Joel nuzzled his face against Kevin's. "I love you too - so much that it hurts, Kev."

The radio started up with more old love songs while Joel rolled off Kevin and stood to his feet, his nerves suddenly back again. "My tummy's feeling all funny," he murmured as he gazed down at Kevin.

"I got butterflies too," Kevin stated shyly as he stood and after a second's pause, walked around the bed to the bedside cabinet. He opened the draw to find those items Cory had told him would be there. "Awww, man," he blushed as he brought out a few tubes of lubricant and a handful of little packages. "Chocolate?"

Joel sniggered, but then a strange look came over his face. "Do we really need to use them?"

"Well," Kevin thought, "I've heard we have to be safe and stuff, Sa'r."

"But we're virgins," Joel stated deadpan, although his cheeks were bright green with his blush. "We got nothing bad to give the other!"

Kevin's face brightened for a moment, then it fell again, "But we have to be clean."

"Oh," Joel nodded. "Yeah... damn, I... never mind." He then looked at the bathroom quickly. "Wait... Levi said something is in there that we might need!"

"What?" Kevin looked puzzled.

"I dunno... you know Levi... he was blushing like crazy when he said it," Joel smiled as he turned to head for the en-suite.

A small hand on his shoulder stopped him. As he turned back to Kevin, he found his lips taken yet again and he lost himself in the love he had and felt for and from his other half. As he came up for air, he started giggling, "You coulda just asked and I'd have gotten naked, Kevvy!"

"Was more fun this way," the adorable brown eyed boy smiled as he dropped Joel's clothes to the floor.

His eyes burning, Joel pulled Kevin back in for more kisses, and soon he had his husband in the same undressed state.

"There," Kevin murmured breathlessly, "now we have something nicer to look at while we find this thing that Leev left for us."

Joel giggled and scooted into the en-suite, Kevin keeping pace right behind him to continue to enjoy the sight of the Vulcan's wiggling butt.

As he rooted about in the cupboard, Joel felt some weird feelings race down the Bond-link, and so he looked over his shoulder and caught the fixed stare from Kevin. He glanced at his own butt, then back at Kevin, then down at what the sight of his bare butt was doing *to* Kevin's fair sized 'soldier', then he wiggled it suggestively. "Soon, T'hy'la," Joel giggled as Kevin blushed at being caught. Joel giggled some more before turning back to continue his search, "Look all you want. It *is* yours, after all."

"Mmm," was all Kevin felt safe enough to vocalise.

Joel continued to giggle, and continued to wiggle his butt. Then: "Ah! I think this is what Leev was on about..." the little Vulcan said with a sunny smile as he stood up with an enema kit in his hands.

Kevin pulled a face, yet grinned at his husband, "Well... ah, yeah, that would work... but, you go first!"

Joel shrugged. "Okay, but I'll need help," he said as he read the instructions.

Soon, Kevin was sitting on his laughing Vulcan sweetheart's back as Joel tried to crawl away from the sensation, and was valiantly trying to finish the process. "Stop wriggling, you great alien baby!" Kevin laughed, lightly slapping Joel's left butt-cheek.

Joel couldn't respond, he was laughing too much.

Kevin should have kept his mouth shut, for after Joel had finished with the toilet: "Well, ain't it your turn?" Joel asked as he advanced on Kevin who was backing out of the en-suite, his face creased in laughter lines.

"Y...you'll have to c...catch me first!" he giggled before turning and pelting out of the apartment door.

After thanking I-Cheya for catching Kevin for him, Joel walked back into the apartment with his husband slung over his shoulder. And it was in this inescapable position that Joel did to the now hysterically laughing Kevin what Kevin had just done to him.

"Payback's a bitch, hon!" Joel sniggered.

Once both boys had finished the tickle war that had been the end result of all this, they opted for a bath. Joel watched with fascination as Kevin set to the serious business of drawing a bubble bath. "That smells nice. What are they for?"

"What's what for?"

"The bubbles."

"I dunno... but they're nice, and fun."

"Oh... Okay!"

Joel slipped in first, "Warm."

Kevin did the same, only a lot slower.

"What's wrong?" Joel asked him curiously.

"Hot hot hot! Gotta get used to it bit at a time," Kevin explained with a wry smile.

Comprehension dawning on his face, Joel nodded, "Ah. I don't feel it the same."

"I noticed," came the sarcastic response as Kevin finally got himself seated. He cuddled up with the small Vulcan, "Mmm... now this is nice: lots better than a shower. Shall I wash your back?"

Kevin's Perspective:

I walked out of the bathroom with Sa'ren and then we found ourselves just standing there; not sure what to do, I guess.

I realized that both of us were shyly 'not looking' at each other - beyond stolen glances - and I could tell his face was just as green as mine was red; thinking of what was supposed to come next.

"Weird huh?" he asked softly.

"What?" I asked just as softly as I looked over at him, but he just motioned behind him - back towards the bathroom.

"Yeah, it was, kinda," I replied as I thought about what we had just done before our bath.

"Made noises, didn't it?" he said, giggling slightly.

I couldn't help but smile and reply, "Yeah, it did!"

"This is stupid," he said next, and I didn't have to ask to know what he meant.

We'd done some stuff, and knew what was coming, but for some reason it seemed different.

This wasn't just jacking off this time. This was something else: something special and I knew we could both sense it.

"We shouldn't be freaked like this," I said finally.

"Yeah, but I am," my Sa'ren whispered, and there was nervousness in his voice as he looked at me. In his eyes too.

I moved closer to him and gently brought my hand up to his cheek. I ran my fingers softly along his olive-shaded skin as I said, "Me too."

That got me one of his beautiful smiles as he said, "Come on! We're being stupid, Kevvy! Let's just go do it!" And with that he grabbed me and pulled me over to the bed. Down on it we fell, with his arms

wrapped around me tightly, and he started to kiss me; my lips, cheeks and down to my neck before returning back to my lips.

I could feel the 'heat' climb inside of me as I began to kiss him back. Soon, though, we found ourselves simply looking into each others' eyes; lost in the feelings flowing through us and between us.

"Are you as scared as me, Kevvy?" he asked quietly.

He was so cute when he was nervous - my heart melted each time I saw that look on his face.

However, his question was valid. I didn't answer for a moment, but then admitted in a whisper, "Yeah, Sa'r. I am."

He looked away from me and I could feel him trembling slightly as I rubbed his back.

"We don't have to do this," I said finally. I realised that now *might* not be the right time after all.

"It's our wedding night, Kevvy," he said softly without looking at me.

I reached out and brought his chin up gently, then I said just as softly, "Sa'r, I'll be here whenever you're ready. It doesn't need to be now. I can wait."

"I... I have to get past it, Kev. I... I *want* to get past it," he whispered.

"I'm scared, too, Joel. For different reasons, but I'm scared, too," I replied simply.

He looked long at me and I found myself lost in those deep blue eyes of his: so lost and yet so happy.

"This is stupid," he said again.

"Yeah," I replied.

"We've already done stuff," he continued, as if trying to convince me - or maybe himself? Probably.

"Yeah," I replied again, a grin starting on my face.

"So why is this so hard?" he asked.

"Because it's different this time, Sa'r. It's... well, different," I said, thinking about it carefully.

"Yeah," was his turn to say.

"Oh, let's just listen to what Poppa said," he finally added after a lengthy pause.

"You mean...?" I started to ask but he finished for me instead.

"Just have fun!" he grinned, and I felt him leech some of my strength in order to say it.

"Yeah, let's not worry about anything. And Sa'r?" I asked.

"Yeah Kevvy?"

"Let's not worry about nothing. You know, doing anything 'specific' like," I said.

"Okay; just whatever is fun," he smiled as his hand slowly moved down my chest: touching my skin, rubbing gently - feeling me.

"Mmmm," I mumbled, as my hand copied his movements.

As much as we had cuddled and touched recently, for some reason this was like the first time to me. Every inch of my Sa'r's body was new, special and wonderful. I discovered it again, as if it was the first time I'd ever seen or felt it.

His delicate neck and the soft skin there, leading down onto his beautiful chest with those pale reminders of his scars and the two little nipples now standing as erect as his dick. My fingers brushed over the little nubs repeatedly; it made me giggle at his reactions.

His thrusting out of said chest into my fingers, coupled with his soft moans, told me that he was enjoying the touch as much as I was - for he was doing the same to my chest.

One, then the other, and we mirrored what each of us was doing to each other; and he was bringing feelings that I can't begin to describe to my body. And I to his as well, if his reactions were anything to go by.

I let my fingers finally, after what seemed forever, drift downward onto his delicate tummy - trailing back and forth then around his sweet outie belly-button. This elicited giggles and squirms from my Sa'r as he begged me to stop.

"No," I whispered, as my fingers circled and then pressed in on his adorable little outie, earning a gasp and squeal from him as I tried to make him look as if he had an innie belly-button. I giggled all the more as I removed my finger only to see it pop back out again. So I repeated the process, with him laughing at me.

Even though he was laughing, his own fingers soon moved down from my nipples - which *completely* fascinated him - and soon I understood what he meant when he had asked me to stop as I too began to squirm and squeal; begging *him* to stop, this time.

"No," he managed to laugh out, before he brought his lips to mine. Through our giggles, our lips touched and caressed one another and our tongues shyly extending to find one another within our mouths.

Kissing through giggles is fun, and feels weird too. But it is a nice weird - especially with the moans mixed in with them.

When we eventually stopped, we found that our hands had ceased to move and were simply resting on each other's bellies. Both of us looked at where they were, inches away from other 'things' which were bouncing in time to our heartbeats.

Without a word, our gaze returned to one another and stayed there; each looking into the other's eyes as we became lost in the feelings coming from each other.

It was with a gasp that I felt his hand move further down. My eyes quickly darted to follow that movement as it covered the small distance from my belly to 'something else', something that I felt desperately needed what was coming - his touch.

As that touch found it's mark, I couldn't help but gasp again at the lance of fire that shot from my dick and into every other part of my body.

My gaze went back to his eyes to see laughter lurking deep within the ocean of blue there. He said "Wanking is fun... yes?"

"Oh yeah!" I replied, letting my own hand start that short yet momentous journey his had just completed.

His hand was still holding me, although not moving; I wished it were!

I was on fire, and it all centred at that one point that strained to feel more from him - but he wasn't moving his hand at all. He was just holding me.

My hand found his dick, finally, and I gently held it, thus earning just as eager a reply from him as I had given him moments before.

"Oh Kevvy, I burn," he murmured, his eyes fluttering closed as I felt a wave of heat radiate down our shared bond-link.

"Yessss," I replied as his hand squeezed gently.

I knew exactly what he was feeling, because I felt it myself. And that didn't even take into account our bond-link which fed my *own* fires in ways I could neither anticipate nor describe.

As his hand slowly started to move back and forth, I thought I would die - the feelings were so good.

When I started doing the same to him, the feelings I thought were so good became beyond measure - as if the very act of loving him made me feel all the better, too.

As I let my hand mimic what he was doing to me, I realized that it did. Him feeling good was more important to me than my feeling good.

I knew then if he did nothing at all, I would still want to make him feel as good as I could - and that it would light me on fire just as well.

The movements began to increase and the feelings went with them, getting better and better every second.

I looked down again to watch as my hand moved on him, and I knew he was looking down at what he was doing to me too. I marvelled again at how alike we were - everything about us was the same size, which meant that we were both fairly well 'equipped' for our apparent ages, let's say!

We watched and we explored, and we started to do things with our hands that we had never done before - either me starting and him copying, or the other way 'round.

Then, I finally knew what I really wanted to do. I gently removed my hand from him, which caused him to look at me sharply.

"Shhh. close your eyes, T'hy'la," I said nervously.

"What?" he asked, but I brought my fingers up and touched them to his lips.

I repeated "Shhh," before planting a gentle kiss lightly against his cute green lips, just loving the taste of them.

Oh - he tasted so sweet, so good to me. I loved him so much, and I only hoped he'd like what I was about to do.

"Close your eyes, Sa'ren," I said again as I allowed my mouth to move down to his neck and gently nibble at the skin there. I used my tongue to caress that area which I soon found to be *very* sensitive for my Sa'ren.

"Oh!" he moaned, wriggling about as he lay there.

"Like?" I asked softly, before letting my tongue go back to softly flicking along his neck.

"Yeah!" he cried as I moved slowly down. I started going back and forth, down then up; each time getting a little bit further down until I eventually reached his nipples.

As my tongue flicked out and brushed over first one then the other, he arched his back and grabbed on to my head. He started to cry out in pleasure while trying to bring me back to them.

The only thing is that I wasn't co-operating. I kept teasing each of them by gently lapping at first one then the other before moving to other areas on his chest. Then I'd return to his nipples.

When I thought he was going to go into seizure from all his wriggling, I suddenly swooped in, took one into my mouth and started sucking hard. I also flicked my tongue upon it, causing him to squeal in either complete pleasure or extreme agony.

"Ooooooh! K...Kevvy!!" was all that came from him. I moved to the other and started all over again.

I never knew they could feel *THAT* good. Although I had been exposed to stuff before - innocent of the mind I was not - in this case I just figured I'd try some of that out, and it seemed to be working.

Finally, though, I knew that if I stayed there any longer he'd get the 'feeling' before I could even go anywhere else. So I moved on down a bit to his cute little belly button and began to lick and suck there instead, which caused him to go from moans of extreme pleasure to squeals of extreme giggling.

I made it a game: nibbling and licking his outie, and when he was almost ready to piss himself I'd stop. I'd then lick around it. When he had relaxed enough, thinking it was all over, I'd quickly go back to nibbling on it - and the giggles would begin all over again.

It seemed to be working and we were having fun. Me, lots of it and, I think, my Sa'r as well.

Finally, all good things must end... so better could come! I moved off the button and just sat there looking at my final destination: what I'd been working on getting to this whole time.

Pulsing, vibrating, throbbing. It stood there pointing upwards and I could almost hear it begging. It's need communicated itself to me as soon as I grasped it in my hand.

It jumped wildly at my touch, and so did Sa'ren. He added a loud moan at the feel of my fingers as I began caressing him; touching his oh so soft skin that covered the most sensitive area; an area he had only recently allowed *anyone* to touch.

"Kev..." I heard him whisper as he began to tense up.

I knew he was scared... and to tell the truth, I was, too - but I wanted this and as I looked at what was held gently in my hand, I said, "I've... I've never done this before, Sa'r. You know I've been told about it and even seen it - but never done it." I then looked up into his uncertain eyes and told him, "But I want to, and I want to do it for you. Please?"

I could see that old fear back in his eyes. But also his love and trust for and in me, and what I could swear was his want - no, his *need* - for freedom from that fear. And so, I just waited and watched while pushing all my love into him, down our link, until finally he nodded his head slowly. The tenseness in his body was flowing out as well, and peace filled his eyes instead of that fear.

"I love you, Sa'ren," I said, before moving my attention back to what I was holding.

I didn't know what to expect; whether it would taste good or nasty. But at this point, I just didn't care: I only wanted my Sa'r to feel good and I was determined to do everything in my power to accomplish that. And so I moved my head closer, rolled his skin down, and let my tongue flick out once, quickly. Testing the waters, I suppose.

Sa'r was in the middle of saying "I love you, too" when I did this, and the 'too' got turned into a loud drawn out cry instead.

That first tentative flick became many more when I found that I liked this.

If you asked me now what it tasted like, then I'd have to say strawberries - but then, we'd only *just* had a bubble-bath. What went through my mind at that moment, however, was something else.

It tasted of my Sa'r; uniquely my little Vulcan. It tasted of only him.

I let off the most sensitive part and moved down to explore the rest of his 'friend' while listening to his mewls of enjoyment. Occasionally I'd move my hand, which was still holding him lightly, a few times - this was funny as it caused him to thrust up in his need for more: but I wasn't going to give him any more... not just yet!

I continued to explore, half giggling to myself at the reactions this was causing, for I was slowly driving him mad. At least, that's what he was telling me!

Finally, I went back up to that part that he had been begging me to attend to. I let my lips surround the end and nibbled on his foreskin, which caused more cries from him. I was giggling like crazy, but really I loved making him feel this good. I gently pushed it back, before taking all of him into my mouth.

The scream that tore from his throat as I gave his 'friend' all of my attention rivaled anything I'd ever heard, and his thrashing almost threw me from him. He was gasping over and over again, "Kev... Oh, Kev..."

I moved rapidly, doing everything I could think of to make this special - everything that I had ever seen or been told about that I thought would make this the best thing ever for my Sa'r. I could feel him tensing; getting ready; getting closer to that special feeling. I couldn't have that, so I started teasing him.

I'd wait for him to get 'almost' there, then stop and move elsewhere.

He called me names, but I only giggled at him.

Eventually, though, I decided that he'd had enough of me teasing. I went back to work, full tilt. Through my empathy, I felt him climbing that 'mountain', and he was really heading for the top with speed.

I could literally *feel* him getting there, the bond-link relaying his scrambled thoughts and feelings, exactly, to me. I increased my efforts even more as he let out a grunt followed by a long cry. His hips thrust up into my mouth and he froze that way.

His back was arched and he was incapable of movement, other than the spasms ripping through his frail body. Wave after wave of feelings slammed into him, through him, while nothing but guttural cries escaping his lips. These became mixed with whimpers, as finally, his body lost its rigidity and began to fall back onto the bed - only, to my surprise, to arch upwards again as another cry burst forth from him. *'Maybe I should have stopped sucking?'* I thought with a giggle. No words came back from him, except the sense that he'd have hit me if I *had* stopped!

This one did not last as long as the first, though. Slowly he fell back onto the bed while his hands feebly tried to push me away from what I still didn't want to let go of.

"Kev," he moaned as he tried and failed to push me away. I continued to tease him with my tongue now and again, getting small cries out of him due to his sensitivity, now.

I finally released him when a near tearful "S...stop..." came from him. I looked down at his 'friend' and giggled... he was still at attention - but he did look a little tender and sore, now.

I just couldn't resist letting my tongue give it one last long swipe.

My beautiful Sa'ren pulled away, begging, "No more!"

I moved up his body and brought my lips to his. I kissed him gently, then more passionately, before just lying there to let him come 'back' to this world once again.

Mikyvis might think they have the corner on world hopping, but I had to smile as I thought that. I had just taken my Sa'r to a far **far** more distant one than even they could get to - and I now had only to await his return to ours.

'I might not be one of them, but I could still get the job done,' I thought to myself as I watched my T'hy'la breathing rapidly. It was as if he'd just been running a marathon, what with the sweat glistening on his small, cute body.

'He's so beautiful. So lovely. So mine,' I thought as his eyes slowly fluttered open. They looked lost and dreamy all in one, as they tried to focus. He finally settled them on my face and there was such a look of wonder within them that I thought I'd cry.

"Always," he whispered gently, reminding me of our bond and that he'd 'heard' what I'd been thinking. "I'll always be yours..."

"Did you like?" I asked softly, a tender smile spreading over my face.

He brought his hand up to my face and tenderly ran it back and forth while looking into my eyes. His own overflowed with the emotions of the last few minutes, and I soon realized he had matching tears of joy to those running from mine.

To see the love, the tenderness, the adoration on his face - and knowing it was all for me - was almost too much for me at that moment.

"Yes. That love is for you, my Kevin... my T'hy'la... K'hat'n'dlawa," he softly told me, before planting gentle kisses upon my face first, then my lips.

As he pulled back, he said, "I have nothing to compare it to, but... it... it was the best, Kevvy. I don't think it could have been better, not even if you'd been doing it for a million years..."

I giggled, "Well, after a million years I hope it's just as good, Sa'r!"

"As long as it's with you" he replied softly, as he closed his eyes briefly. "Only with you..."

"Always," I told him, my voice filling with love and tenderness for him as he increased the hug I had him in.

"Now it's my turn," he suddenly giggled a few minutes later, his eyes flashing open and filled with... well, mischief!

"You don't..." I started, but it was his turn to bring his fingers to *my* lips.

He smiled, "Shhh! I want to. I want to do it for you and make you feel as good... as loved..."

I nodded with a grin, only to have his hot lips began kissing my face, lips, nose, ears - just about everywhere on my face, really. Well, this heated me up again quickly.

How I didn't get the 'feeling' right then from just making *him* feel good, I don't know - but I hadn't. Now, though, I knew it was just a matter of time.

I think he sensed how wild I was getting, for he moved quickly down to my neck. As he did so, I got to fully understand what he had just learned a short time ago - as his gentle kissing and nibbling started, they sent thrills through my entire body.

Knowing that I was already half way there, he didn't spend as long as I had on that area before moving on - but then again, I didn't want him to, either!

For both of us, there was only one place we both wanted him to be when I reached there - and that was much further down my body than my neck! Not that my neck didn't love his attention, mind you.

My nipples loved it even more, however, as his tongue found them. In the way that I'd explored him earlier, he did the same to me over and over again - touching, heating, and in his own way even burning me as he sent me even higher towards the 'feeling'.

He even had to bat my hand away from 'something' more than once, as the feelings he was giving me were just so intense I didn't think I could bear it.

I hadn't realized that nipples could feel so *good* on a boy, even though he certainly had seemed to like what I had been doing before.

Shortly, though, it was my turn to cry out and wriggle like one of the rugrats being tickled, for he had moved down and got me howling from his attacks on my belly button.

Believe me, a tongue on that tickles like heck, but there was something else too. Something mixed in that sent shivers up my back and into my own 'friend'.

Maybe it was knowing how close his tongue was to *it*... I don't know, but mixed in with the giggles, there was this fire - a burning fire growing ever hotter.

When his tongue finally moved south, I felt my whole body lock up, and my breath stopped, for I knew where it would go next.

"Hmmm... someone waiting for something?" he teased before tracing a line further down slowly.

"Yesss..." I moaned out - then "Noooooooo..." as he moved around and past where I'd wanted, no needed, him to go.

"Good things come to those who wait," he teased in a sing-song voice.

"But I don't wanna!" I whined as he giggled. He then continued to explore, just not where I wanted him to explore!

I finally remembered to breathe, and I began gasping for the air I'd been denying myself for the last twenty seconds.

"OH GOD!" I cried as his tongue and mouth worked on me just below where I wanted it.

The action down there did have an effect on what was just above, and it made it almost hurt!

He murmured, "See what you did to me?"

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry! Please, Sar! I'm gonna die!" I cried out, but he just giggled and grabbed my hand which had been trying to sneak over to my dick.

"Naughty, naughty," he said, before going back to what he had been doing.

I was discovering things about places on my body that I really had no idea about - and this was just the beginning!

I didn't know if I could survive much more, considering that I felt like I was going to die with all the feelings overwhelming me already! He found that funny, for some reason.

"God Sa'r! My dick is on fire!" I finally cried out as it became near painful in a way.

At that, he moved his head up and looked lovingly at me for a moment before saying, "Well then, I guess I better put it out!"

As I stared at him in confusion, he got a big grin on his face and then grabbing hold of me. Then, in the same movement, sank his mouth down fully upon me.

I screamed out with the sensations engulfing me, and all I could think was that it was not putting *anything* out at all! He was making the fire into a raging inferno - I couldn't think, not even if my life had depended on it...

He came up off me and looked down at it. He mumbled "Not working?" before looking at me with a shy grin on his face.

"No! No, it's working just fine!" I cried out as I gasped for breath.

He replied "Oh, good!" then proceeded to flick his tongue out like I had done to him, sending me moaning at the feeling it brought me.

What was worse was that he kept teasing me. Just like I could with him, he could sense what I was feeling through his Vulcan touch-empathy, and was bringing me almost to the point of no return before going off and doing something else! I'd gasped, moaned, and thrashed about in an agony called pleasure - then start yelling at him in frustration when he went off elsewhere! And I couldn't do anything to stop it, for he had my hands in a vice grip!

I became aware of a loud noise coming from somewhere... then it came to me that it was me that was screaming out. Each time he brought me so close to the 'feeling', I'd start...

As this went on and on, I was still making the oddest noises - punctuated by small cries. He just never let the fire burn out, but he wouldn't make the 'feeling' come, either!

On one of his ventures away to tease me, I managed to lift my head to look at him, and saw the love in his eyes - and the mischief.

"You like?" he giggled, but before I could even think of an answer he went back down suddenly. I cried out louder than before as he began assaulting me full bore.

Everything before had been so new to me, but this... it was *really* nothing like *anything* I had ever felt before. Pleasure that was almost painful as I felt the 'feeling' build up and burn once again... only this time there was no teasing, no playing. He brought me straight to it with everything he could do...

"SAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!!!!!" was all I managed to scream out as the 'feeling' hit me, flooded through me... then I sank into a blessed darkness.

When next I knew anything, it was that light touches were being placed on my face, cheeks, nose, lips and forehead... and a gentle nibbling was going on with my ears.

I slowly opened my eyes, to find my little Vulcan looking down at me between the gentle kisses he was giving me.

Everything was fuzzy and warm; my body was weak from the feelings he had given me.

"You better, now?" he asked softly before kissing me again.

"Oh, you have no idea," I said, blushing slightly.

"I think I do, cause you made me feel the same way, just now, Kev," he giggled shyly, and I could see the hint of blush in his face.

I brought my arms up and around him pulling him to me. I hugged him tightly and whispered, "Oh God, Sa'r. I love you so much!"

"Shal ashau tu," he replied as we kissed and kissed some more. Our hands were roaming, exploring, touching, feeling... just loving, really.

This wasn't like before, because the lust, the fire, had been lessened. The love - real love - seemed to burn even brighter, now. Each touch we gave was something to tell how much we each loved each other.

His ears got many gentle caresses as I traced from the pointed tips then down to his neck, before going back up again.

His fingers played over my too-thin shoulder blades and on down my back, then up again.

His sides were gently stroked as I felt ribs that, like mine, were far too prominent - but they were a part of my Sa'ren. I loved them anyway.

Then I let my fingers trace over his beautiful face: those wonderful eyebrows. I moved my finger over them and down to his cute nose before running along his lips, all this mixed in with soft, sweet kisses.

I'd never understood that before. How someone could call a kiss sweet, or say their boyfriend or girlfriend tasted sweet, or good - but I did now.

I didn't know why or what it was, but there was a taste and smell that was all 'Sa'ren'; and I loved it.

It filled me up like no food or drink ever had - and I'd only been enjoying food since Sa'r had arrived and been feeding me. Unlike food, though, his kisses were something I could never get enough of.

"You're getting as bad as the rest of them," he muttered as he smiled at me.

"What?" I asked, feeling a little confused.

"Everything's about food with you lot, ain't it!"

I giggled, but finally said, "Well, when you taste sweeter than any candy and better than any steak - yeah! It is!"

"You're silly... I like silly..." he said with his own giggle before going back to my lips.

I don't know how long we stayed like that - just touching, feeling one another and being close like that - but it was a while. Nothing else seemed as or more important than that, and so that is what we did.

We may even have dozed off a bit but if we did, our love never stopped, and neither did our thoughts.

Then, after a while longer, we heard something...

Normal Perspective:

"Did you hear something, Sa'r?" Kevin asked as he raised his head to look at the door nervously.

"Not sure. I think you deafened me when you popped, Kevvy," Joel giggled back before starting to nibble on one of Kevin's ears lazily.

You not alone who lose hearing!

Joel's eye widened, and he blushed furiously - as did Kevin. "Blackie! Stop listening at the door!" Joel yelled back quickly.

We no at door. We in Rec Room! You LOUD!

Kevin's mouth dropped open. "Please don't tell me everyone heard us," he whispered nervously to Joel.

Black Feet! No Tease! Told you before! I-Cheya's response came suddenly as they heard the Sehlat huffing outside the door.

It opened and two furry faces poked their way around the edge. *Sorry Blackie sent*, as his tongue hung out of the corner of his muzzle in his wolfish laughter. *I no resist*

Me control him. Keep on with fun. You happy, we happy huffed I-Cheya as he nosed the curious pup back outside and, somehow, closed the door.

Joel traded a look with Kevin, then muttered, "I bet Cor and Sean never had this problem *their* first time!"

"You'd lose!" Mikey's voice giggled out of nowhere.

"Mikey too?" Kevin said as his face reached a shade of red that Joel thought impossible for humans.

Mikey appeared at the foot of the bed. "I'm not listening in, as such. I'm just aware of what you're saying when it's not... uh, love related," he explained softly as he smiled at them both.

Kevin and Joel traded another look, then: "Explain. Make us feel just a BIT better, and tell us what happened with Cory and Sean that could *possibly* be worse than having two half Spirit peeping toms, and a Saint hovering around!" Joel ordered playfully as he fought with his blush.

"Let's just say I had to stop Mom at their bedroom door... she thought one of them had cut off a leg or something!" Mikey giggled. "Then, helpful brother that I was, I went into the room and told them in full detail what happened... then mimicked every noise they made at a more normal level."

Joel cocked his head to the side, "How old were you?"

"I was fifteen. They were both eleven," the angel giggled wickedly.

"How'd you know it was their first time?" Kevin asked curiously, his blush gone due to the interesting distraction.

Mikey snorted, "'Cos I'd overheard Cory asking my lil'bro what he wanted for his birthday, and Sean said he wanted to go all the way..."

"Ooooh! Nice present!" Kevin giggled. "That makes you and Sean alike, Sa'r!"

"Uh huh, bestest birthday present so far!" Joel giggled at Kevin before he looked at Mikey, "Thanks. We feel better knowing that this stuff's normal."

"Well, at least you don't have Mom listening to you, Joel," Mikey giggled.

Joel nodded at him seriously. "Yes I do, Mikey! My Mother is in here, remember?" he said, tapping the side of his head.

"Oh... umm... I forgot," the Saint said before falling onto his back on the bed, laughing.

Joel's face became a picture of passion then as he pushed Mikey off the bed with his feet. "Time for you to go, Mikey... unless you want to *watch* a little brother do stuff - instead of just spying and listening outside of their door!" he giggled.

"Ewww!" Mikey giggled in full playful 'kid-mode' as he stood to his feet. "And I wasn't spying outside the door!" he shot back quickly, although the blush that appeared on his cheeks told a different story.

'Swearing by Pablito is tolerated, Michael - you lying is not. Do you want to be polishing the Golden Gates for a celestial month?' came a disembodied voice.

"Sorry, sir," Mikey said quickly, before whispering to a surprised Joel, "St Peter."

Joel sniggered. "Busted!" he and Kevin chorused cheekily.

Mikey winked at them before placing a kiss on their foreheads. "Just keep on being amazing little brothers, guys. God Bless," he whispered before vanishing away again.

"Is your Mom really listening?" Kevin asked with concern once the Saint had left them.

Joel shook his head. "She's kinda aware what we're doing, but she said before that when I do special stuff with you she'd close herself away somewhere in my head and not really 'know' what's going on."

"Oh, well... okay," Kevin giggled, before looking down at both their 'Little Friends'... and a smile played across his face...

Kevin's Perspective:

We were *both* hard, although how *I* was after what Sa'r had just done I don't know. While Mikey had been talking to us, I'd come to a decision, and I bravely trembled, "Sa'r?"

"Hmmm?" he mumbled back as he began to nibble at my neck again.

"Sa'r... I..." I stopped. He moved his head up to look at me with that searching look of his.

"What is it, Kevvy?" he asked.

Suddenly it wasn't as easy as I had thought it would be.

I looked away for a moment before looking back into those gorgeous eyes of his.

"Sa'r... I...I want to make love. I mean, I want you to... to go all the way with me," I said, begging him with my eyes. "You make love to me... please?"

I watched as a haunted look came to his deep blue eyes. "Kev..." he said, trailing off. I knew why. He was afraid about more than doing something that he had so long believed was wrong. He was also afraid as he'd been rescued only seconds away from being raped. Which was why I was asking him to make love to me, rather than the other way around.

"Please, Sa'r. We need this. To make it our own - especially you," I whispered gently.

He hung his head for a moment, and then looked up at me with that fear back there, but also with hope deep in his eyes. "Do you think we can?" he asked softly. "That I can?"

"Yes. I do," I replied with conviction and hope... and love.

He looked down for a moment more before he responded. "I guess *he* think so too," before giving me a shy smile. I followed his gaze and saw what he was talking about.

"Apparently" I said, smiling back as I playfully batted at his not-so-little friend.

"Promise me if it hurts, you'll stop me?" he asked seriously.

"I promise, but you know it might hurt," I replied, kissing him softly.

"I don't wanna hurt you, Kevvy," he insisted.

"I know, and you won't," I told him, trying to calm him for he was completely unwilling to bring me to harm.

"Promise me," he insisted again.

"If it gets too bad, then I'll tell you, Sa'r. I promise," I finally told him.

He nodded seriously, then got a shy smile on his face. "Close your eyes."

"What...?" I started to ask, but he put his fingers to my lips.

With a giggle, he said, "Shhh!"

As I closed my eyes and flopped onto my back, I felt him move around. I took a peek and saw him grab a tube - I knew what that was! Then I closed my eyes quickly as he started to kiss me again.

It was almost like before; only slower and more gentle, if that were possible. He went down, and further down, until he found my very appreciative little Kev waiting for him - somehow as awake as he had been before.

It was weird because this time everything built much slower. I guess it was because of what we'd already done, maybe, but either way it was so much more beautiful than before. I didn't think that it could have been better, but Sa'r seemed to make the impossible, possible.

After a while, he moved away from little Kevin and went further down - further than he'd been last time.

As he got slowly closer, I wondered if it would be yucky - but I heard a soft giggle in my mind, then one word: *'Yummy!'*

Any smart reply I had been forming was kinda blanked out by the sensation he suddenly brought me. It was...unbelievable!

I never knew that *that* part of my body could feel anything like *that*! Wow!

An errant thought flashed through my mind - how it managed to be understandable is a mystery, though. I remember thinking that my Sa'r was going places no-one had gone before, but it wasn't the sensations that made the thought vanish - it was Sa'r giggling down our bond-link.

"What?" I asked out loud.

'Long story,' was all the reply I got, along with a few more giggles.

Then I felt something else and realized that it was his finger.

What began to fill my senses created feelings deep within me that I'd never known could exist.

"Oh... Sa'r," I said finally.

"You like?" he asked as he looked at me, a half smile on his face.

"Yeah," I moaned.

"Incoming," Sa'r giggled as he wiggled another finger at me.

"Oh... God!" was all I could say in response.

Finally, I could bear it no longer. "Now Sa'r! Please, now!" I begged.

"Sure, Kev?" he asked one last time as he moved himself up to get in line with me.

"More than anything in all the world, T'hy'la!" I told him as I looked into those blue pools of light and emotion coming from his eyes.

I watched as he slowly brought himself closer, then he took up the tube and squeezed it onto the end of his very much awake friend.

Then, smiling at me, he moved it forward till it touched me. "I love you, Kevin Thompson. Forever and ever," he whispered as he slowly brought himself closer still to connect with me.

I can't describe the feeling of it. It was so different; so strange; yet it was also so wonderful - beautiful - and most of all, so very loving.

The 'feeling' that was building was different than before. I think I've said that already, but it just was. So much slower and gentler; more loving, if that was even possible. Most especially, it was something that was bringing us even closer at a primal level.

Suddenly, though, he hit something within me and I gasped.

He giggled. "Ah! That must be..."

I didn't let him finish. I pulled him down and kissed him, mumbling, "Less talk!"

"Mmmph," was all the reply I got - verbally at least.

Then, I felt what I could swear were barriers lowering - I'd not even known that any were there! Well, something had *been* there, but they suddenly fell and... and... everything I was feeling physically flowed down the bond-link into my Sa'ren. And everything he was feeling physically was flowing back into me.

It was... I don't know! 'Awesome' didn't even begin to describe what it felt like, but as Sa'r continued to make love to me, we became even more than one.

We became whole. Each felt what the other felt. I was Sa'ren. He was me. We were One. Body, Soul, Spirit. It... I don't know. I don't think I ever will.

There was no hurry, no screaming headlong rush towards the 'feeling', this time. Just a slow gentle climb to some place far, far away - feeling each and every sensation we had between us as our own - and marveling at not only those but how we each felt them and then how we felt each others.

It was something not even my soul-link with Kenny could ever be... Sa'r and I were one. Forever one.

As this new fire slowly built up, it consumed us both and soon overflowed, drowning us in feeling. Joined together through the Bond-Link the way we now were, the special place and feeling was reached simultaneously for the both of us - and together we crashing down the other side and into oblivion for a peaceful, joyful while...

Normal Perspective - CIC, Dining Room:

Brant and 'Harry' were talking, and again as before, this 'person' was perceived exactly as Prince Harry by the powerful Vampire. There seemed nothing there that could give away the fact that 'Harry' was not really Harry at all. After a few more moments of soft whispers, Brant slipped off of 'Harry's lap, and trotted off into his Apartment, carrying a mug of cocoa.

Harry nodded to himself as the boy slipped into his apartment, then turned and stood up.

He seemed to become as liquid in the air, and instead of the masquerade of 'Prince Harry', a being made of solid light stood there - a light that did not waver, nor shimmer, nor project, for the room around was as dark as before this being took on this form. It moved silently and unseen through the Dining Room

and into the midst of the children sleeping in the nest. Cory, who was still awake and staring at the ceiling, was completely unaware; as were the Mikyvis and two Time Lords.

Then it stood there. Waiting for the Music to start. Waiting for the Time...

Pool Building - Apartments:

In the hallway outside of Joel and Kevin's room, I-Cheya, Black Feet and Mikey were seated down near the stairs keeping guard - and playing Uno.

Mikey shook his head slowly as he watched Black Feet nose about the cards he had behind the book shielding them from the other two. He then watched as I-Cheya did the same with his own cards, using one massive claw from his left paw and his right paw acting as a shield.

"If I didn't see this, I'd never believe it," Mikey muttered.

Uno! Blackie sent as he nosed a card around the edge of the book before him.

Mikey sighed, "How can I be losing this game to a pair of animals!"

Black Feet laughed in his wolfish manner. Then the pup's eyes widened as something came to the hearing of all three of them. It was not sound as we know sound, yet it was - on another level.

It was music. Two different melodies that were slowly combining in perfect harmony and heard only by those connected to the plane that these three were a part of.

Boy's soul sings I-Cheya sent softly.

Black Feet nodded, *Kevin-Boy's soul sings also*

"Wow," Mikey murmured in wonder. "I never get used to hearing this..." he said after a moment as tears started falling from his eyes.

The two Spirit-Guardians looked at him and blinked.

"I... I always hear it when my... my family are at a moment of peace. To hear my Vulcan brother's soul sing this way... it's an answer to prayer, guys," Mikey sobbed softly.

The Sehlat cub and Wolf pup thumped their tails happily, then all three just listened as the two distinct yet joined melodies continued...

Joel's Perspective:

Wow!

Just... wow!

Daddy never told me about THAT! What WAS that? How did... I mean... what the...

My thoughts were scattered as I was slumped on my Kevvy's belly and chest, half asleep due to the power of what had just happened. I could sense that Kevvy was as gone from reality as I was. Whatever had happened with out bond-link had been... wonderful... surprising. I don't know, but I hope it'll happen again!

My head was resting on my Kevvy's upper chest, and every so often I felt him kissing the top of my head while his hands held me tight and rubbed my back. He was trembling, as was I - Wow! "I love you, Kevvy," I whispered as I lifted my head to stare down into those deep brown eyes of his.

He smiled cutely at me. He didn't have to say anything. I knew without a word being said how much he loved me. So I kissed him.

As we broke our kiss, I remained there on top of him and lost in those twin pools of chocolate - thinking. Remembering. It had been so hard to keep any coherent thought in my head when I had been making love to him, but now - now I could analyze those few things that had made me curious. No, not the sex bit; the real thing that had made me curious was that my Kevvy had felt something I'd not expected him to feel when I was loving him.

Protected.

He'd felt safe and protected by me.

So I was thinking back about what I had been feeling.

It was harder than it sounded, really, as both our emotions - our feelings - everything - had merged. I wasn't sure what was mine and what was his, but... I believe that while he had felt that protection, I had been feeling that I was guarding him. Surrounding him. Taking care of him.

I liked that. I really did. I *loved* that he had felt safe, but I liked being the one *making* him feel safe.

It seemed to answer a question inside of me.

But...

"Kev?"

"Yeah, Sa'r?" he whispered as he lazily blinked at me, that cute smile still playing over his lips and his hands still circling my back and even, now, my shoulders.

I paused and began to feel nervous about what I was about to ask, and he sensed it.

"What's wrong?" he said, speaking a little louder this time and his voice had a note of worry in it.

I kissed him quickly before hiding my face in the crook of his neck, "Just... Kev, you... I felt what you were feeling when... when I was making love to you. You were feeling safe - protected. I want to feel that too..."

Kevin hugged me as tight as he could, then, and whispered back, "Are you sure? I know that that old bastard tried to use you, Sa'r. I don't want to make you freak out..."

"My old master never did manage it, Kev. I... I think I'll be okay... It's you. I love you. Please?" I stutted, feeling braver as I tapped into his strength.

After pressing another kiss to my hair, he whispered, "For you, anything... roll off me, Sa'r. I can't do nuffin' like this!"

I giggled, as did he, for I was still sprawled on top of him. I pushed myself over and to his side, rolling onto my back as I did so.

"Close your eyes," he whispered as his cool hand traced its way from my neck down to my chest, "and relax..."

I did... and soon he started to do to me what I had done to him to get him ready. I laughed a lot, especially with the comments he was sending down the link to me. It felt real weird, but real *good* too.

"Ready?" I heard him ask, so I opened my eyes to see him kneeling between my legs.

I nodded and he smiled at me. His face was so wonderful and tender, and I just knew he'd keep me as safe as I would keep him.

I cannot begin to describe how it felt. If what he did to get me ready had felt good, this was way WAY better... and... I felt it. The barrier that had come down when I had made love to him was still down.

Our souls seemed to merge...

... and he made me feel *safe*...

Normal Perspective:

The three Spirit beings outside in the hall could still hear that 'music', only this time it seemed to get louder and louder.

"Synergy," Mikey whispered to himself as he could swear that the music was being made visible before his eyes. "How many will hear this, I wonder?"

//Those who need to, Saint of Heaven//

In the Rec Room, Cory was still awake. He was so worried for Joel that sleep seemed to just stay out of reach.

Sean moved slightly at his side and wiggled around until he was no longer being spooned by Cory. *'Need to talk?'* he sent down their shared link.

Cory shook his head, *'No. Not really. I hope they're alright.'*

Sean was about to reassure his blond soul-mate when they felt themselves grow almost light inside. "Wha...?" was all Sean could say before gentle sleep took him.

Cory's own eyes opened wide at the weird sensation, but then he, too, dropped off like a rock.

The Mikyvis in the room were as asleep as any of them could get, but they woke with a start as that weird 'feeling' rolled through. Then, they too fell asleep. True sleep.

The Music was no longer just Joel's and Kevin's. As Mikey had said, peace causes a person's soul to sing.

Now, the entire room of kids were sleeping in that peace, and their souls started to sing as well...

... and the Music grew stronger...

This was what the invisible being seemed to be waiting for. Keeping even the High Races in true sleep, and controlling the Mikyvis from an automatic reproductive cycle that this form of 'sleep' would have produced, the being raised it's arms. The Music flowed around the room, building upon itself with the Harmony of all the children's souls added to it. It flowed around and through the being of Light... and then shot up and out, faster than light. Faster than Time. Faster than Thought.

As Fast as Spirit...

Behind the Barrier:

Vae'Za stopped his search for he found the crack that the Enterprise had once come through and then left through. He moved to wiggle as much of himself into it to begin draining the power he needed from the great shell that surrounded the star.

He never made it, for a blast of 'Music' burst through that crack and flung him away.

As he steadied himself from his chaotic spin, he found that he had lost all bearing on where inside his prison barrier he was. The crack was now nowhere to be seen.

His screams of rage would have echoed back at him, had sound been able to travel in space.

Sybok, somewhere deep inside his own usurped body, smiled.

\\Vae'Runam! You have enabled him to delay me! I will find the way out, Brother... and I will avenge myself on the one who just postponed my escape!\\

He moved back to the inside edge of the shell.

Let the Shaper beware the Destroyer!\\

//**He comes, and It comes, and the Sunlight shall tremble...**//

Rec Room:

After nodding to itself, the being of light looked around the room before reaching out with it's power. It brought down the last part of the Time Lock that had so long shut Alpha-Prime away from external interference. Then, the being pointed at the truly sleeping Levi and another small body appeared curled up with the first-born of the Mikyvis. Then, the being pointed in the direction of Teri's house... and in one of the many empty, spare guest rooms, a bed filled with the shape of an adult male - also fast asleep.

Chuckling to itself, the being vanished.

Joel's Perspective:

Our love sustained us throughout the night, and our minds and souls were merged throughout it all.

I lost count of the number of times we loved one another, the number of breaks we took or the times we drifted off only to wake one another by loving them again. Sometimes we woke up together and fed the 'fires' back to that burning intensity.

It was nothing like I had feared it was going to be and certainly nothing like my Kevvy had thought either. It sealed our love as it was meant to do.

Sometime - joined together in body, mind and soul, we drifted off to sleep for the last time that night.

It was our Poppa's advice that we keep in our minds: "Have fun". We did - and we would always remember to do so...

Normal Perspective:

Joel awoke with a start, but kept his eyes closed. He was cold. Chilled to the bone. And hurting.

He reached with his arm to feel for Kevin, but there was no-one with him on the bed... the small single, smelly bed.

He breathed in slowly, and muffled a cry of pain, for his ribs ached and he could barely catch his breath.

His stomach felt heavy, and his butt - it felt like it was on fire, and he could feel a wetness there. He reached, still with his eyes closed, and felt his tight, scar-traced skin protest at the movement in that bitterly cold room. He felt around his anus, and brought his hand to his face.

Only then did he open his eyes in that night darkened room.

It was his cell-bedroom. Back in that Hell Universe... and his hand was covered in dark blood and shit and semen.

He started to cry, for he realised then that he had been raped. He had been raped by his master, and not killed as he had feared. But, he must have blanked out and...

"No, it...it can't h...have been a d...d...dream," he whispered sickly as he tried to sit up, but he couldn't. He looked at his chest and saw the bruises covering his body. The bruises and scars... and he 'remembered' then the blow his master had given his chest as he had been stripped naked. His ribs were broken. At least three, maybe more.

That was why he couldn't breathe right!

"Nooooo," he wailed softly, not daring to wake his master. "K...K...Kevvy... Cory... Sean... nooooo... D...D...Daddy and Mama... I w...want my M...Mama... nooooo..." he sobbed, all the harder for his stutter had also returned. It proved that it had been a dream. He even tried to think of more than one thing at a time, but couldn't. He turned his face into the filthy, thin sheet on the bed and sobbed as hard as he dared.

It had all been a dream. A wonderful, happy dream; a dream where his heroes had existed, and a group of boys that were his brothers... but not for real. Not real. Not here. Never here. He was alone, as ever. His mind, although quick and sharp for a human, was slow and sluggish compared to his wonderful dream.

How could he live like this now? How could he go on when that wonderful home he had had was just make-believe?

It was a long time before he felt able to move.

Grunting in agony, he managed to get up from the bed and began to tip-toe from the room towards the bathroom. Once there, he looked at himself in the mirror - the tattoo was there, and his hair was a mess. Tears once again sprang from his eyes as he saw his ears were not pointed, but perfectly human.

After washing his hand and his body free of the muck and filth he had covered himself in during his rape, he silently moved out of the bathroom and onto the landing. He stood there, as still as stone; trying to decide what to do. He could hear the deep breathing of his master in the main bedroom...

Then it came to him. He turned and quietly walked downstairs, his mind finally made up. As he reached the hallway, he made to turn towards the kitchen...

...to where the sharpest knives were kept.

He wouldn't live like this any more.

It was time to die...

Darryl's Notes:

Okay, now, that was just not nice. I think that Ilu has been taking lessons from The Evil Author, again. I believe the student is coming very close to outstripping the master, here. We are going to need another chapter very soon, yes, VERY SOON!

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher

Author's Notes:

What, me evil? Naaaa...

Hope you all enjoyed this chapter. Somehow, I think Kevin and Joel did.

Ilu

Chapter 16

"Old Enemy, New Friends"

As he took that first step that would lead him to his death, he heard something - Something terrifying.

A Voice...

*I told you that you would never become **His** Shaper...*

Joel froze.

That voice sounded so familiar. From when he had been sucked into that hole in his mind in that wonderful dream of his brothers...

Yes. All a dream. Just die and be gone from it all.

Joel turned around quickly and nearly lost control of his bladder. His master was by the front door, watching him. The man's old, wrinkle lined face glared at him.

But - wasn't he just in bed sleeping? Hadn't Joel heard his snores?

There was something wrong, however. Something not... natural.

Mr Williams' eyes were glowing red. A deep, malevolent red.

"Well, boy? Are you going to do me the favour of killing yourself or not?" his master grated at him. "I really don't want the job of cleaning my clothes after getting your blood on them."

Joel backed away from the 58 year old man and into the front living room. In doing so, he stumbled on an object on the floor and tripped over backwards.

As he lifted himself up with his hands to find out what had tripped him, he saw his master start into the room through the darkened door frame. However, his eyes were drawn to the shape by his feet. He screamed in pain and loss, for it was Cory's body, minus the head. His brother's head was lying a foot away, and the expression on Cory's face was of shock and pain.

"So much for him, huh?" his master chuckled as he advanced slowly. "Want to make things easier, Shaper? Go. Get the knife. It'll be quicker and far more painless than what I would do to you. And an act of charity from me is only offered the once, fleshling."

"C...CORY!!!" Joel sobbed out loudly as he started to scramble backwards. He had still not gotten up from the floor.

"Careful!" his master yelled harshly as Joel bumped into a mound behind him. A mound that felt cold, clammy and wet. "You'll mess up my art, you bastard!"

Joel turned to see more horror. It was a pile of his brothers, along with his mother and father. They were in various stages of dismemberment. "How? H...How can it b...be a dream if th...th...they are he-re?" he asked quickly, turning his fear filled eyes back on the 'thing' before him.

"Well, well. So I could not turn off that Vulcan mind of yours after all," the 'man' said. His voice had ceased to sound like Joel's old master's, and became - if anything - urbane. "I have not had much experience with Vulcans in the past two thousand years. Surak did a number on you all, did he not? Most uninteresting. Except you. You - are - interesting."

"Where am I? Who are you?" Joel asked quickly as he scrambled up to his feet, his stuttering vanishing. "My brothers will come for me!"

"You are here; I am who I have always been; and no, they will not."

Joel just stared. "What are you?" he trembled. "Wait... this is the hole in my *mind*, isn't it! You are the other ME! The me that has all the bad things inside of it!"

"Am I? I am disappointed to be considered a mortal bag of meat, fleshling. You are an abomination. A hybrid, and..."

"What's wrong with being half human!" Joel shouted back, feeling slightly more confident at knowing he was fighting himself.

"I did not mean that. Don't interrupt me again," the thing grated threateningly, and Joel yelled as coils of darkness seemed to strike at him and pierce his flesh. Seconds later, the pain stopped, and Joel quickly checked his body. No damage. The thing continued, "Yes, your heritage is both human and Vulcan, but that was not what I was referring to. You are a hybrid as you are animal and spirit together. You disgust me."

Fear back in his eyes, Joel blinked at the 'man'. "Wha...? Flesh and... what *are* you?"

"A Prince. The First. The Highest. Your doom," the thing answered. "I have been here since you were a babe. I caused the accident that nearly killed you. And it was I that changed the destination of that wormhole your power allowed to open," it continued maliciously.

Joel shook his head, "No. I don't believe you. This is my mind. You are me. You are the worst of me. You can't keep me here! I've learnt things from Daddy, and..."

"And what? Try. I have forever."

Joel backed away further until he was pressed against the wall. It was then that he noticed all the bodies around the room had vanished. He tried to connect his Bond-Link with Kevin - but there was nothing. "Kevvy," he wept in fear and frustration as he kept on trying and trying to reach out with his link. "Cor! Sean! MIKEY! Anybo..."

"I wish my brothers would just learn to call me first," Mikey grouched as he appeared next to Joel and wrapped him in his arms. The Saint then looked up at the 'man'... He pulled Joel behind him and suddenly threw out his wings - with a blaze of light, the whole room they were in, the building and even the countryside vanished. "YOU!"

There, in the darkness of the 'wound' in Joel's mind, Mikey was standing with Joel behind him - and facing off against a person of stunning beauty. Yet, the beauty was of a dark light.

"Where is your Mandate!" Mikey ordered as armour seemed to snap in from all directions. Even his wings became armoured. Joel backed up slightly as this happened, and gasped at how his angel-brother now looked.

"I am here. I am bound to remain and bound to possess. What other Mandate do I need? I am not made manifest in the Realms of Mortals, am I, little saint?" the being said, as a malicious smile played over his face.

"Mikey?" Joel trembled.

"Joel... stay back, Joel. It's you he's after," Mikey said as he drew the sword that had appeared at his side. He did not take his eyes from the being before him.

The being remained as calm and urbane as ever, yet still, the threat in the area grew.

"What gives you the right to be here?" Mikey demanded again.

The being's eyes narrowed, "Who are you to put limits on me? I go where I wish. I will not allow this 'Shaper' to remain. I *will* not."

"You have no say in that," Mikey retorted, backing Joel away slowly as he kept himself between the being and his little brother.

The being chuckled, "Trying to save him? He will die. And to spite you, I will make it as painful as I can..."

Joel couldn't stand it any longer.

"God... I want my Kevvy... please... I just want my Kevvy and my family! Please! Why can't I just have my family?!"

A shimmer and a deep, bell-like tone came an instant later, and Kevin was there. "Sa'r! Where'd you go to, and where... wha... oh. FUCK! What's goin..."

"The Strength, too? My day is getting better. Both the Shaper and his Strength in one fell swoop. Little saint, you are about to be reduced back to white for *this* failure!" the being said with obvious glee as it began laughing.

"Is he, you *prick*?" came another voice as Pablito appeared, in similar get up to Mikey. "Tell you what: first you kiss my ass, then we'll talk about being demoted, fuckhead!"

Mikey didn't know whether to laugh or cry. "Pab... you *don't* speak that way to one of the Princes! Not even *him*!"

"Fuck that! NO-one hurts one of my brothers! Not even this asshole!"

"I like you," the being said, a considering tone in it's voice a finger pressed over one lip. "You will be an interesting investigation, once I have done what I have come to do."

"Investigate this!" Pablito spat back, his free hand cupping his groin.

The being smiled slightly. "Standards have dropped in the last Cycle, I see. Anyway. Two Wingéd Ones, and then the grand finalé."

"Me too, Eldest," Davey said as he shimmered in.

Then, another voice - "And a few others as well!"

Joel felt a warmth creep over him, and he and Kevin turned to see loads of adults and kids appear behind them. All in various uniforms, and all armed. Joel's fast mind counted - 114 people. He knew who they were...

The Martyrs from the Montana Massacre!

"If you go for one of us," Mark Little said seriously, "you're going to have to go for ALL of us." His voice was like an echoing whisper that was clearly audible, yet also so faint that it seemed unreal.

"You do know whom you are about to fight, do you not?" the being smiled evilly. "You come out from under *His* protection when you face me post-life. The Wingéd Ones know that."

"Then we shall really die," said Dennis North as he and the other 113 spirits fanned out to either side of the three angels, keeping Joel and Kevin behind them. They all raised their various weapons ready to do battle: each knowing that their eternal soul was on the line, here - but not *one* was willing to back down and let their brother die alone. "We would rather die forever than to just *let* you take our brothers. They have helped our family - and we stick *by* our family. *THEY* are our family."

"More for me, then," the being said as a sword of dark-lightning appeared in his hands.

"I guess the Klingons are right! Today IS a good day to die, asshole - for YOU!" Pablito yelled as he rushed forwards.

"NO!" Mikey yelled, dread in his voice.

There was a flash of blinding 'dark light', followed by a heart-rending scream. Pablito was cast back to lie prone at Mikey's feet, breathing out his sobs hard. His wings had been ripped from him, and he looked much like the little child he had once been - fragile. The armour he had been wearing was slowly burning away, and it seemed to sear into his 'being', causing him to writhe at Mikey's feet.

"I think I will do the same to you two as well," the being breathed as he flashed out his blade yet again..

Mikey and Davey collapsed screaming, their wings vanishing instantly, and their own armour melting into them.

"You will all die. I will win, here. I will take you all. I will take the Strength. I will take the Shaper. I will 'investigate' that one," he continued, pointing at the whimpering Pablito.

Joel, who was trying to help Mikey, stopped dead and stared. "Five 'I Will's?" he trembled. Then his eyes widened, "I know who you are!"

"Good. I was wondering how long it would take you," the being said. "Ready to die?"

"I will not die," Joel said as he straightened up. "Get out."

The being seemed to grow still. "No."

Joel seemed to stop as well. Then he smiled; and began to sing, but not to the being before him. The little boy lifted his eyes upwards, and:

"Moving through the shadows of uncertainty,
Clinging to the words You said.

Through my loneliness and fear, I long to feel You near,
But I hear another voice inside my head: '*Crawl*'

But then the darkness is broken into
By inescapable light from You:
I'm never standing alone

You are my rock, my fortress, my shield
You are my rock, let Your strength be revealed
My rock, my comfort, my peace
My salvation, my refuge, my God
You are my Rock..."

(© Petra - You are My Rock)

As Joel's voice rippled out in song, the being seemed to shrink - and a glow surrounded the three felled angels. A pure golden glow, starting first with Mikey, then moving on to Davey and Pablito; healing and restoring.

Kevin spoke then, his face set with determination, "Get out. You are not welcomed here, spirit. In the Name of the Great Spirit, I command you to go."

"In the Name of Our Father," Mikey grated as he levered himself up from the floor, his golden wings back in full and his armour returned, "we abjure thee."

"In the Name..." The spirits of the 114 Montana Martyrs also started their own commands - each according to what they knew or had believed in life.

Whatever they said, it all came down to the one simple thing - and it was said the best by the smallest and youngest of them all...

"In the Name of Love, get out!" Mark Little ordered, his voice steady and his eyes determined as he raised up a sword made of pure flame.

The being shrank down and slowly backed away as he yelled back, "I shall not leave! I cannot! You will NOT cast me out!"

"Eldest One, thou hast no place here. Be thou removed," came a new voice. Archangel Michael was suddenly there in full armour and shining brilliantly.

The dark being hissed, "Begone, Tyka. You have no authority over me!"

"Fairest One, thou hast no place here. Be thou removed," added Archangel Gabriel as he, too, appeared fully armed.

"No, Lazo! I will not... I will stay... I..." the being shouted at them, but another voice overrode his.

"Fallen One," Joel said firmly, as he came forward. He was shining as the dawn, for his mind had formed the Fo'wein Sa'ren around his mental body and the Vulcan Armour glimmered out with its own internal light. "Fallen One. In the Name of Jesus, I rebuke you, I bind you, and I cast you out! I do not belong to you, Lucifer. Get out!"

More than anything else, the power that suddenly radiated from the Fo'wein Sa'ren at Joel's words seemed oddly painful to the being. Even though this was not, as Joel believed, the real armour, its effect was real. Whatever it was, the being was thrown back by it - weakened due to all the commands given - but he didn't get very far, for a ripple in the 'air' stopped him. A ripple that grew bigger and bigger...

The being spun around only to have his neck caught in the vice-like grip of a blinding white hand: a hand from the Figure of Light that had been in the Compound earlier that night.

//The first time that thou didst say 'I Will' five times, thou didst Fall. Thou hast made a grave error, Prince Zeri, for thou art in *my* Realm now. Will ye or no, thou wilt not lay harm 'gainst mine own; 'gainst *my* Sa'ren!//

It was the *Guardian of Forever*...

//Inside the Circle, I and my Brother hast Power even o'er a Prince of Heaven, Prince Zeri. Knowest thou this very well, for thou didst trembled when we two were formed. The Father hath ordered that we only fight thee and thy ilk when thou doest break thy Mandate - and *never* will Mandate be given thee to possess The Sa'ren. It hath been a long chase, but now thou hast revealed thyself. By the Commands given - and by the Love shown - the Door hath been opened so that I might deal with thee once again. I do advise thee to learn thy lesson well, this time...//

And with that, the Guardian lifted his free hand, formed a fist, and brought it down with stunning force into the being's, Zeri's, face; blasted him away only for him to be drawn back by the Guardian's power to be slammed by Forever's OTHER fist.

Pablito, now once again back to his normal angelic self, just gaped. "Daaaamn!" he muttered as Zeri was sent flying away a second time.

Zeri was getting enraged. As he was drawn back yet again, his sword came up. He ran through the Guardian with it, but a downward swung back-hand from the Shining Being hammered him into the ground.

//Thy memory must be failing thee, Zeri. Thy powers mean naught 'gainst me// the Guardian intoned as he pulled the sword from his chest and crushed it into nothingness.

It did not stop an enraged Zeri from starting what could only be described as a bout of bare-fist boxing with the equally enraged Guardian of Forever.

Mark Little was as enraptured by this fight as the rest of the group watching, but after a moment or two more, he noticed that Michael and Gabriel were not getting involved. "Um, sirs? Why ain't you two helping the Guardian?"

Gabriel turned his sad eyes on the little dead boy and said simply, "Zeri is our brother."

"So?" one of the adults asked, not seeming to understanding at all. "He's a prick, isn't he? When someone's a prick like *him*, you should sort him out... brother or no! Thump him!"

"I'll explain after," Mikey whispered to them all as he drew tiny Mark close to his side.

Joel was still in the image of his armour, and watching with wonder as the Guardian fought. Something started, then, at the corner of his mind - a feeling he both recognised as his own, yet also he knew it to be from without himself. A voice, a whisper, and it was like the Guardian's own, it seemed. Like yet not alike.

/In Justice, Draw Me... Call Me, and I hear. Summon Me, and I come. Living I be, and a Sword Forever... Call my Name. Call... My... Name.../

Joel took a step into the ring that had formed by the rest of the 120 persons there watching. The Armour he wore seemed to shine and throb with power in concert with the light that was internal to the Guardian.

Mikey nearly thought his heart would stop as Joel stepped towards this 'natural disaster' of a fight - then he remembered that he was dead and he didn't have a literal heart any more. Funny how it still felt the same, he mused.

As Joel's Armour glimmered out brightly, seeming to keep rhythm to an unknown heartbeat, Joel brought his hands together as if to hold something. "Shal vutau ish-Sa'ren!" he cried out.

Before him the air seemed to swirl and ripple, and become as liquid - as if something was being brought from one place into another - and a Broken Sword started to push through the effect. Each piece of the Sword seemed to float in its correct place so that the blade seemed whole, yet it was clearly shattered.

Sa'ren had heard Sa'ren's call: and the *Sword* answered the *Blade's* command.

Now, with the 'Sa'ren' in his hands, Joel advanced further into the ring - and as he did so, the Broken Sword, the Armour he wore and the Guardian himself became so brilliant that everyone's eyes closed.

Zeri screamed as the Guardian lifted him by his neck and impaled him upon the 'Sa'ren' being held firm by the young Vulcan.

//Thou didst drive my Brother insane and do count him as doing your work. Thou hast stolen my Twin from me. Yet, e'en though he is warped, know that even he would still take thee down shouldst he even find thee. I, though? Come, Prince. Let us now away from the boy - His Shaper and My Sa'ren - and away from the Sword he doth hold. This *small* discussion we do now enjoy shall grow all the larger...//

And with those words, both the Guardian and Zeri were gone.

/Farewell, Sa'ren/ came a muted whisper from the Shattered Sword as it, too, vanished in the same way that it had arrived - the air turned liquid and warped around it, and seemed to suck it away.

"FUCK! No fair, Guardian! I wanted to watch you whup his ass more!" Pablito complained loudly.

"Me too," Mikey echoed, along with most of the other kids there.

Kevin, however, was looking at Joel with awe as the Vulcan's armour seemed to melt away into Joel himself. "Sa'r?"

Joel turned his troubled eyes toward Kevin, "Yeah?"

"You were FANTASTIC!!" Kevin bubbled as he hurled himself into the little Vulcan's arms.

Joel giggled a bit, but the look in his eyes remained as he locked his gaze with his big brother Mikey.

Mikey smiled, "I think you'll find out in time, Joel. But yes; that was the real sword."

"What about the Armour?" Joel whispered. "I've had it appear on me in Mind-Melds before, but... wasn't it just a mental image?"

Little Mark giggled and shook his head. "Nope, it was real too!" he giggled out, "and Kevin's right - you were FANTASTIC!"

"But... it was all you guys. I'd be dead if... if..." Joel started, but Kevin silenced him with his lips as he sought for and found a wonderful kiss.

"But you had to make the choice to speak yourself, bro," Dennis smiled as he picked up Mark Little. "You had to listen to the Voice you heard speaking to you. You did that."

Joel did not answer, but rather started to think seriously about what he had been feeling - all the while still kissing Kevin. Which was another reason why he did not answer. Kisses were far, FAR better than talk...

Eventually: "Was that really the..." Kevin started to ask as the kiss came to an end, but stopped as he saw both Michael and Gabriel nod.

"He is our brother, and as such, we cannot fight him - at least not within the mind of another. Our power coming against his would have killed Sa'ren," Gabriel said seriously. "We need to go. Mikey, you know what to do."

"Yes, sir," Mikey nodded seriously as they vanished.

"Sa'r?" Kevin said then as he turned to look at his husband's face. He increased the hug he was giving as he giggled, "Next time we make love, don't hit my head so hard against the headboard, please? This is one weird ass dream!"

"Hey! I didn't! There was a pillow there!" Joel protested as everyone else started laughing.

"I was joking, T'hy'la," Kevin giggled. "But your protest has only confirmed..."

"Oh, hush you!" Joel grinned. Then he went after Kevin's tonsils yet again.

After coming up for air, Kevin grinned at the long-suffering Mikey, "Could you wake us up now, please? I want to...ummm... to do unmentionable things to your brother!"

"Ho! Is that the time? Boy, it's been great! Come on, guys!!" Mark Little chortled as he started to fade away quickly, and with their own laughter ringing behind them, the other martyrs of the Montana Attack waved and vanished. However, both Joel and Kevin could feel they had left some small part of themselves behind.

Love. The Love that proved itself the day they gave their lives to save those they did not know was now left to help heal the hearts of two boys that they knew to be needed for the Universe.

Simple Love.

Mikey sighed, however, as they all abandoned him and his fellow two angels to deal with two horny kids. He then rolled his eyes at Kevin. "You two are worse than Cory and Sean! Go on. Go with Pablito. He'll take you both some place nice while Davey and me fix this hole in Joel's mind," he giggled.

"But it's our wedding night! Of COURSE we're gonna SEEM worse," Kevin reasoned logically. "Doesn't mean we ARE worse. We've got a lot of catching up to do to beat your brothers!"

"Not a lot, it seems," Davey stated deadpan as he studied a fingernail with fake seriousness.

"Not one word, Pab," Mikey said, wagging a finger under Pablito's nose as the impish Angel opened his mouth to add his own thoughts on the matter at hand. "Just keep it to yourself."

"No! I'll just give them some pointers when I take them to... uh, where did you say to take them again?" Pablito giggled, scratching his head.

"Oh, for the love of... The Realms, Pab. The Dream Realms. To the Queen," Mikey sighed with a fond smile.

Pablito snapped his fingers, "Oh, riiiiight! Uh, why's Brakkii the Queen again?"

"Vincent," Davey grinned. "Just blame Vincent. Brakkii does every time it's mentioned, so we might as well too!"

"Pablito! The Forgetful Angel!" Kevin sing-songed while Joel giggled.

"Ha ha ha," Pablito scowled. "Just for that, I won't tell you about a super fun thing you two can do."

"You'll forget about saying that in a few minutes, so that's no threat," Davey mumbled.

Mikey decided to remain silent.

Pablito stuck his tongue out at them both, then vanished away with Joel and Kevin.

"Any bets?" Davey giggled.

Mikey still remained silent, then grinned and began to heal Joel's mind...

Brakkii met them in a large valley under a reddish coloured sky. Joel was looking around at the soft yet sparse grass-like cover the valley floor had. "This is Vulcan! This is the agricultural area!"

"No," Brakkii laughed. "This is the Dream Realm, but your brother Mikey told me you'd both like it to look this way, so I set aside an area for you. I tried to get all my people out, but I think the trees are not going to listen. However, they just like watching and protecting, so they won't tease you."

Kevin blushed as he looked at the Vulcan-seeming trees with their red leaves. "Well, uh.... thanks. I'd have rather you not tell us that..."

Joel giggled and pulled his husband after him towards an area of the valley where the grass seemed the longest and deepest, "Pab, thanks for bringing us here, and Brakkii, right?"

"Right," Brakkii smiled.

"Thanks for making it look like this. Now go away! I wanna talk to Kev about those 'unmentionable things' he was going on about!"

After cracking open one eye, Joel lifted his head from Kevin's chest and looked around the softly lit apartment. Dawn's early light was just beginning to creep over the horizon, and the room was cool and airy with the window open. As he felt the light, tickling touch of the morning breeze on his bare back, Joel grinned and yawned. He then looked at the clock and murmured to himself, "How long have we slept?"

"Just two hours, and yeah, it's six o'clock," Mikey said from the foot of the bed. "That fruit should still be working for you."

Joel turned to look down at him, "Then it wasn't a weird dream?"

"No. It really wasn't," Mikey stated seriously. "But it's over now. Your mind is completely your own again - other than having your Mom in there too. She's fun. She helped fix up your mind - and she called me cute," he trailed off, his face showing that he wasn't quite sure how he should take that compliment.

"You trying it on with Joel's mother?!" Kevin giggled, his eyes still closed. "You after your brother's MOM!! EWWWWWWW! You..."

"Don't say it, Kev," Mikey warned, before cracking up laughing.

Joel smiled at his angel-brother, then turned to attend to the business of kissing Kevin. "Too early for breakfast?" he queried as he finished kissing his husband into insensibility.

"Just a little. But you could go and cuddle with your brothers until it is ready," Mikey offered with a smile.

"Warm. Comfy. Don't wanna move," Kevin muttered as he wrapped his arms around Joel and pulled him back down to cover him like a blanket again. Through it all, he hadn't opened his eyes once.

Joel pouted slightly, "But I'm getting hungry, Kev. I want... Mmm... Mikey?"

"Yeah?"

"Is it too early for American Sausage?"

"I... pardon? Oh! Seeya!" Mikey giggled as he shimmered out.

Kevin opened one eye, "American what?"

After a giggle and some slight movement, Kevin's eyes opened wide in understanding. "OOooooohh... yeeaaahh! American *sausage!*"

It wasn't more than fifteen minutes when two naked cherubs ran across the grass from the apartments to CIC in the sun's early light, followed close by a wolf pup and a Sehlat cub. They all slipped quietly through the doors and padded quickly down to the Rec Room. After surveying the mass of bodies, Joel saw a path towards the centre of the Nest.

"Right... now, how do we get in with them without them waking?" Joel whispered as I-Cheya and Blackie moved off to slip into the fur-ball shaped part of the nest that held the cats and other creatures.

Kevin shrugged, "Umm... I've been expecting Levi or one of the others to wave or say something... ain't they all just... too quiet?"

Joel also shrugged. He picked Kevin up and carried him easily as he made his careful way over the bodies in the nest. "Pull up the quilt, Kev and I'll slip you in," he whispered as he reached Cory and Sean.

Kevin did so, and was soon joined by Joel. After much squirrelling about, they found themselves between both older teens. Kevin was now being spooned by Cory, leaving Sean to do the same for Joel. This way, they were able to also hug each other close and tight against each other's chests.

"Made it!" Joel giggled, then he kissed his little husband. "Get a bit more sleep?"

"I'd rather get a bit more, but sleep's also good," Kevin giggled wickedly, making Joel blush.

They didn't sleep again, but lazily studied each other's faces as they waited for their brothers and sisters to wake up.

It wasn't long, however, until that came to pass, for a commotion started from just outside CIC, and slowly grew louder as it came inside the building. Everyone in the nest seemed to wake at once - except for eight kids that shouldn't really have been 'asleep' at all.

"Who the hell is he, Jim?" they heard Bones say loudly.

"Don't know," Kirk answered as the Rec Room door opened to admit him, Bones, Spock, Teri and a complete stranger who seemed to be looking for someone. "If you take one more step, I will fire... again!" Kirk ordered as he levelled a phaser at the strange man, seemingly for the third or fourth time judging by his irritation.

"I will bring no harm to your children, but I must seek my son," the stranger said with heat. "Why are my powers not... What is going on here? Where am I?"

The man never got to say much more as a blast of electrical power ripped from Cory's hand, flew over the prone bodies of his family and slammed into the stranger's chest.

"I SAID I WON'T HARM ANYONE! STOP SHOOTING AT ME!" the man yelled, his eyes frantically searching the faces of the kids before him.

"What the...?" Cory muttered. He patted his morph lightly, as if it had a fault that could be repaired that way.

The noise level in the room raised exponentially as everyone started to panic and move away from the strange adult. Everyone except for Joel, Kevin, Sean and Cory. They stood to their feet to look at the man better.

"YOU!" Joel spat with venom as he moved to stand between his brothers and the man.

"Get out of the way, Elf!" Cory and Sean said in tandem as they raised their hands at the stranger. Kevin was also doing the same with his own phasenmorphed arm.

"What are you doing here, Q?" Joel demanded, completely ignoring his brothers and Kevin.

"Who the Hell is 'Q', and how do you know him?" Sean asked as he stared lasers at the man. Then his eyes widened, "Wait - Q? You've mentioned someone called Q, haven't you?"

"Yeah, I ha..." Joel started, but he was cut off.

"Yes, yes. Very clever of the Shaper. Now shut up so I can... THERE YOU ARE!" Q cried with joy as he rushed towards a pile of kids who were miraculously still asleep.

It dawned on everyone at once that this truly was a miracle - the Mikyvis and the two Time Lords were dead to the world.

"My boy!" Q cried out with relief as he stared at his son - a small boy with bright white-blond hair who was cuddled with Levi.

Spock, completely unruffled at this turn of events - even when standing in his Vulcan sleepwear - said, "Excuse me. I believe you need to stop bringing concern to my family, or you and I will be having words."

"What would you do, sir, if your son was missing and you did not know where he was, mmm? I do know, in fact. You would tear the world apart looking for him. Am I not entitled to the same right? And as you have plainly seen, what the hell can you do to me if I DID want to hurt any of these children?" Q retorted as he picked up his son and turned to face the other adults. "Now. Where am I... wait a minute..." he trailed off as he turned to look at the still scowling Joel. "Shaper?"

"What. Are. You. Doing. HERE!" Joel said slowly, with great emphasis, and finishing off with a shout loud enough to wake the dead.

Well, not quite the dead, but he did wake up the five Mikyvis and two Time Lords... and Q's son.

"Wha... was that real sleep daddy?" Bryce asked as he sat up and rubbed his eyes.

Dylan yawned, then stared at Q. "UNCLE Q!!!" he yelled with joy.

"Quint!" Levi also yelled, then he giggled, "Did you forget to tell your daddy you was having a sleepover? I think that was sleep anyway, it sure feels like Daddy said it's supposed to feel."

"Hey, Uncle Q!" Kyle and Tyler waved as they stood up. Then they noticed the strained looks they and their sons were getting from everyone else, bar Joel.

"What... the... fuck!" Cory stated, obviously far from pleased. "Explain now, or else...."

"Doctor!" Q said, overriding the irate Cory as his eyes fell on the little Time Lord. "Is this Alpha-Prime, and when did you lower the Lock?"

The Doctor winced as he saw Cory's face go from enraged to... well, there *was* a word in Gallifreyan, but it wouldn't translate. "Q. Whatever you do, don't piss off Cory. You're doing it right now."

"I've pissed off gods in my time, Doctor. What the hell is going on? I was doing a spot of Picard baiting, then the next I knew I was dreaming... DREAMING! I've not slept since... since... EVER!" Q waved his free arm around as he little son slipped from his arms and walked towards Joel and the other three.

"Sorry 'bout my Dad. He's... well... Dad!" he shrugged as he gave them a smile. His yellow eyes were open and honest, and his face was trusting. "You'll like him if you give him a chance - just don't try betting him or daring him. He'd win; normally."

"Q, be still and let me sort this out," Q said as he stared at the Doctor. "I'm waiting, Doctor. What the hell have you done!"

"Nothing! I was asleep too!" the Doctor protested.

Kirk came forwards, "Look here. You're scaring the children, and I won't allow this to continue..."

"Get your fucking ass in the other room... NOW!" Teri yelled out. She had been fighting with her temper, but when she had finally taken in the scared looks on most of the faces - as well as the completely pissed off enraged expressions on Joel's, Sean's and Cory's faces - she snapped.

Q spun around and was about to retort when Joel came to stand before him. "Go in there, NOW!" he ordered, and everyone felt a thrill run up their spines.

For a second it looked like Q was going to ignore Joel, but then he turned and grabbed his son into his arms and marched off into the Dining Room. The Doctor, Jay and the Mikyvis all ran after him, as did the adults.

Sean looked around and caught JJ's eyes. "Keep everyone calm, bro. We'll be right back," he said, as he followed Cory, Joel and Kevin out as well. They were followed by six cat-guards, three Sehlats and a wolf pup.

Joel slid onto Cory's lap as his blond brother sat down, while everyone else picked a chair and slid into it. Kevin decided that Teri needed his naked presence and so he chose her as his cushion.

Q, seeming more calm now that he was seated with his son held possessively in his arms, looked around curiously. "Is it normal for teenagers to parade around in their skin before their parents in Alpha-Prime? Things have changed in the last fifty thousand years," he asked no-one in particular. "Kids, yeah it's normal. Teens, though?"

Teri nodded. "It is normal with this group. Now, would one of you overpowered cookie grabbers please explain what is going on here?"

"Cookies?" Joel perked up.

Q snapped his fingers... but nothing happened. "What the hell! Doctor? What is going on!" he demanded seriously.

//I can answer that, Prince of the Q//

Q spun about and saw the Guardian appear in his Light-Figure form through a warp of liquid air. "Vae'Runam? Was it *you* that lowered the Lock?"

//Correct// the Guardian said as he turned his featureless face towards Teri. **//Greetings, Lady Teri Short of Earth. Am I invited to your table?//**

"Why not, everyone else but the Archangels has decided to join us, it seems," Teri replied.

Joel and Kevin started, and looked at each other seriously as the Guardian sat down. **//Prince Tyka and Prince Lazo send their regards, but celestial affairs have their attention at this moment. The Fallen, Zeri, is now being hounded by them//**

"What did you do to him, sir?" Joel trembled as he shook with remembered fear on Cory's lap.

//It is not for innocent ears, my Sa'ren. I would tell any but two, at this table. You and Levi are not to know the worst - he is to remain innocent, and you beautiful. Neither of you can do your tasks if you are exposed to certain knowledge//

"See, Sa'r; HE agrees with me that you are beautiful!" Kevin said with a slight giggle, but his eyes were also wild.

"Okay, what the fuck is going on?" Cory demanded fiercely, as he tightened his hold on Joel, who had begun to tremble more. "What has happened?"

//The Wound in your brother's mind was more than a simple Vulcan ailment, Lord Cory. He was a target from conception, and found when in transit to Earth as a babe. He that is called 'Eldest and Fallen' found him, set off the experiment to destroy him, then possessed him. It was due to my Sa'ren's ability as His Shaper that saved him. Then, for nearly thirteen of your years, the 'Fallen' was locked within a small area of Sa'ren's mind due to the change in form he underwent. Last night, when my Sa'ren was at peace - with love filling his senses as he slept in the arms of his Strength and Lover, the Wound opened again. Zeri, the 'Fallen', struck - and nearly overcame the Blade of Surak. It was Love and the Commands that allowed me to... deal... with Zeri//

"Galli, please translate that," Cory asked, not really sure how to take the proclamation.

The Doctor, his face pale, cleared his throat. "Joel was possessed by Lucifer, Cory... Zeri is his true name. Tyka is the one you call Michael and Lazo is Gabriel. It, ah... well, it seems like the Guardian had a bit of a fight. The only time I ever saw something of the like was when Vae'Za, the Guardian's brother, was fought by Michael and Gabriel, 7 Billion years ago! They were equally matched to a single Guardian, them and the rest of the Eternals - so Zeri alone would have been seriously OVERmatched by Forever! I would give anything to have watched that, Vae'Runam!"

//It was - fun// the Guardian said dryly. Then he looked at Cory's troubled face, and the nervous face of Joel, **//Do not fear. He will not be returning for some time. He will not dare break Mandate again so soon//**

"Soon by whose standards?" Kyle asked nervously.

"Don't worry, Kyle," Q said airily, "the Fallen don't mess with High Races. We're not 'fun', or something," he finished, making quote marks with his fingers.

Kyle narrowed his eyes, "I'm worried about my family who ain't High Race, *uncle!*"

Q raised an eyebrow, then said, "Ah. You're still that close to them. Well... just keep a look out. Not that you can see, sense nor do anything if he or the other Fallen come around. They may be here right now, for all I know. However, if they break Mandate, the Guardian comes in like... well, like the wrath of a great wrathful thing... that was a poor choice of words, but without my POWERS, Guardian, my ability to wow with my silver tongue is fast VANISHING due to IRRITATION! Can you PLEASE tell me what is going on?"

//The Fallen do not come nigh to me often. They are terrified of me. However, your powers are now returned. This was set up for a reason, for you are all family. You included, Q and Q. It is time for the Continuum to enter Events. They and you are needed. As for my Sa'ren, he is now

healed. Lord Spock, your son's mind is whole for Mikey of Urbandale has worked a Healing. I have lowered the Lock of Time, forever, and the three High Races can now do what needs be done. Now I must away. My Voice, you will need to remain close to my Sa'ren from tomorrow onwards. You are my Voice. My Sa'ren is my Hand. You are to work together in the Time to Come//

And with that, the Being of Light melted out through the air and was gone.

"When did the Guardian start channelling Mikey?" Teri muttered into Kevin's hair with a long-suffering sigh.

Q ignored her, as he instead snapped his fingers, and plates appeared on the table before Joel. Plates containing:

"COOKIES! YUMMY!" the little Vulcan crowed out as he bounced on Cory's lap while reaching for the nearest pile.

Bones stood up and moved towards the kitchen, muttering something about 'whiskey', while Kirk traded a long look with Spock. "I think it was easier on our five year missions," he muttered, half to himself.

Joel, while munching on one cookie and feeding Cory another, looked over at Q, "You're nicer than on the shows. Are you really always pranking Picard?"

"It's my favourite way to pass the time," Q answered glibly.

"Ain't that the truth," Quint breathed.

"Hush, Q," Q said with a small smile.

Cory swallowed fast on the mouthful of cookie before laughing, "Isn't this going to get confusing? Q and Q?"

"Levi named me Quint," Quint giggled. "He got the inflection of my name 'Q' right. It's 'Quint' in a way, anyway. At least to us Q it is!"

"Just how long have you known 'Quint', Levi?" Teri asked curiously.

"If you add it all up, I think we're up to about seven years now!" Levi giggled.

Q shook his head, "Only one of which I knew about, really. Oh, I knew he had a friend he visited, and had even met this 'friend' a few times, but... somehow, young Levi kept himself from being really 'seen' by me."

"So you're not just five days old, Leev?" Joel asked curiously.

"On this plane I am. Mikyvis age is funny," Levi replied thoughtfully.

"Same for me. I'm seven billion... or so... kinda," the Doctor giggled.

"Oh," Joel murmured, his cute face scrunched up in thought. Then he wiggled his bare butt on Cory's bare lap. "Owwwieee! Keeeevvvvv! You made my butt sore!"

"Why do you think I'm sitting on Aunt Teri? She's not thin and boney like Cor, is she?" Kevin retorted with a giggle as he wiggled a bit himself.

Cory, while trying not to burst out laughing, whispered to his elven brother, "You should talk to Sean after. The both of you - unless you've figured out which will be, ah... well..."

"We're both bottoms," Joel supplied helpfully, in a normal tone of voice as he helped himself to more cookies. He was completely oblivious to the fact that Kirk was nearly off his chair laughing, and his father had both eyebrows vanished into his fringe. "So we'll both talk to Sean. That okay, Ted?"

"Ummm.... yeah...." Sean replied, trying his hardest to avoid eye contact with any adult.

Mont and Bast grinned at each other, then at both boys they guarded. "We like Joel. He's fun," they chorused.

"I agree," Nathan said from the doorway where he, JJ, Adam and half the Clan were also watching the fun. "Jace and I are both the opposite. We keep having fights, Joel. What are you and Kevvy gonna do?"

Kevin, his face aflame by now, muttered, "Draw straws..."

Teri re-entered the Rec Room with Quint and the Mikyvis at her side, "Everything's okay now, and you have a new brother I think. This is Quint, for those who didn't catch what Levi said."

"Hi!" Quint grinned at the assembled horde of naked kids. "Is this the dress code?" he asked Teri as his own clothes vanished with a muted flash.

"It seems to be, and you'll fit right in!" Teri responded with a chuckle.

"It saves on laundry for our 'rents," Tyler said sagely as they all watched Timmy run up to the newest member of the Clan.

"Hi, Uncle Quint! You wanna shower with us? We gotta get ready for breakfast!" the little Fireball asked excitedly.

Quint checked with Levi, who nodded, then he shrugged, "Okay, I'll go with you, but I don't need showers like you solids."

"You'll LIKE our showers!" Ricky giggled as he took the hand that Timmy had not claimed. "C'mon Pauly... New Uncle!!!"

Pauly, however, was looking in confusion at Quint. He was also poking at Quint's belly and arms, "Whatya mean? You's solid, you are!"

Suddenly Timmy and Ricky had no hands to hold. Between them hovered an amorphous blob of energy that glowed with an inner light. "This is the real me," said the energy, in Quint's voice.

"KEWL!!!!!!" the three boys exclaimed. "Uncle Levis does that too, an' he's really fun in the showers!" Timmy added.

"Ah, but can Levis do this?" said the Energy-Quint, giggled as Spock was standing there. Then Kirk. Then Timmy. Then Teri. Then an older, bald headed guy in a futuristic Starfleet Uniform like the one Quint's dad had been wearing. Then a Horta...

"I like you; you are funny!" Timmy giggled as his partner and brother nodded in agreement. "You're gonna be a kewl uncle!"

"Good," said the Horta-Quint. "If you wanna, Halloween will be well cool! I can make you into whatever you want for the night, too!"

Pauly's mouth dropped open. "You can makes me a werewolfie?!"

There was a brief flash of light, and a Pauly-looking little werewolf was standing where Pauly used to be. "Yep!" Horta-Quint giggled.

"AWESOME!!!!" Pauly exclaimed loud enough to make the adults hold their ears.

Cory looked around the doorway at Pauly, then he looked at Kyle, "Illusion?"

"Nope, you now have a for-real werewolf as a son," Kyle giggled.

"Oh great... PLEASE tell me you can turn him back, Quint!" Cory responded seriously.

"Yeah. That's no biggie," Quint said as he returned to his normal form.

"Okay. Pauly, don't bite anyone, okay?"

"Okay, Daddy!" the little wolf-kid said as he started to chase his tail around and around in circles. "I won't!"

Wacko, however, was hissing and spitting at Pauly. Pauly looked at him, "It's me! Silly!"

Wacko cocked his head to the side, then pounced Pauly. They both started to roll around wrestling on the ground.

Teri rolled her eyes before looking at the rest of the gang watching. "Half an hour until breakfast. You know the drill, people. Showers and dress. Get your skinny butts in gear!"

"Yes Mom!" the assembled crowd giggled.

"Did she just say that we were to be wearing dresses?" Quint asked Cory.

"Naw; we're supposed to be dressed to eat." Cory replied. He then got a huge grin on his face. "Hey Ky; wanna have some fun with Mom? Between you and Quint we can pull it off...."

Kyle was already one step ahead of Cory, and had been talking silently to Quint who was grinning madly. Then the grin spread to the rest of the assembled kids.

Teri looked at her son, then around at the others. There was a flash of light that surrounded the entire group and when it vanished, they were all in pink frilly dresses. Even the werewolf-Pauly.

"We're ready!" they all chorused.

Teri shook her head in wonder. "You forgot shoes!" she chuckled as she turned to head to the kitchen. "I can't wait to see Spock's face after THIS one!" she added.

Spock, seated with his son at the Dining Room table and talking with Q, heard her as she passed through towards the Kitchen. He decided to investigate.

"Hi, Uncle Spock!" "Hi Grandpa!" "Hi Dad!"

Spock went back to sit down with Joel, Kevin and Q.

"What has my son done this time?" Q asked seriously.

Joel looked up at his dad and giggled at the sight of both eyebrows hidden in his hairline.

"He dressed the Clan," Spock answered simply, looking at the doorway as Cory and Sean walked in, still in their dresses.

Q laughed so hard that he fell into his energy form.

"This is really uncomfortable," Sean muttered to Cory as he wriggled within the get-up he had on.

Cory nodded in agreement, "Thank God I was born a boy!"

"I could change that!" Q managed through his laughter. "Then you'd fill out that dress properly, at your age anyway!"

Cory and Sean quickly stripped naked, their faces panicked. After checking that they were all 'still there', they turned and ran back for the other room to let the rest know of Q's threat.

Once the Clan had all spread out to get showered, and after Quint had turned Pauly back into a real little boy again, Tyler and Kyle grabbed Jay and the Doctor and popped away to the nearest empty bathroom. "Come on, I'm hungry," Tyler giggled.

Jay grinned as he looked at the huge tub next to the shower area. "Bath might be nice," he murmured.

"If our brothers can fill it quickly enough, sure," the Doctor smiled. "Otherwise we'll be late for food!"

Kyle gestured and the tub was full with hot, bubbly water.

"Sweet," Jay said as he slipped himself into it quickly, followed by Tyler. The Doctor grinned at Kyle, who just nodded at him.

The Doctor's face became slightly concerned, but he let it slide as he helped Kyle into the water and got in himself.

Jay was already busy washing Tyler's back and hair, while the blond boy just murmured happily at the attention. "Wish we could do stuff like you Mikyvis," Jay said softly as he splashed water up Tyler's back to clear away some of the suds. "We have some powers like you, but mostly it's all time stuff."

"That's okay; you can do stuff we can't do, so we're even," Ty replied just as softly. "Oh, down a bit! I gotta itch!"

Jay started to scratch Tyler's lower back, then stopped, "Wait a minute! You can't get itches, can you?"

Kyle half giggled, "No, but back scratches still feels nice."

"Oh - in that case," Jay giggled as he gently lifted Tyler so that the boy was half out of the water and placed him so that he was dangling over the edge of the bath. Tyler's arms were just relaxed as they dangled outside of the water while Jay knelt behind him and scratched his back thoroughly.

"That looks like it's fun," Kyle murmured with a sidelong look at the Doctor.

The Doctor grinned and quickly manoeuvred Kyle into place next to Tyler. Then the two Back-Scratching Time Lords really set to work on their Mikyvis brethren.

"You know something, Kyle?" the Doctor said with a small smile.

"No, what?" Kyle purred back.

"You're lucky."

"Oh? Why?"

"Because Tyler's bum is *real* cute!" both Jay and the Doctor giggled.

The bum in question flushed red as the blond Tyler blushed heavily.

"Thank you," Kyle giggled as he joined his hand with Tyler lovingly.

"Yeah. Thanks, I guess," Tyler managed around his massive blush.

After about five minutes of purring, the Mikyvis traded places with their Time Lord partners.

"Grade A back scratching, Ty," Jay said as he dangled over the edge of the bath.

"What's this?" Kyle asked as he pointed to a strange mark on the small of the Doctor's back.

The Doctor lifted his head and looked over his shoulder at his brown haired brother. "That's the sign of Infinity," he said with a smile. "The Lemniscate. It's how my people knew I was the one who'd first change to a higher state of being - obviously Middle Race. Only I went a *little* further!"

"Cute," Kyle smiled before going back to scratching.

"Don't ogle his bum, hon!" Tyler giggled as he gave Kyle a light shove.

"Like you're not ogling Jay's!" Kyle retorted.

Jay sniggered, "Stop poking me, Tyler!"

"I'm not asking," the Doctor said, his eyes still blissfully closed. "I'm just not asking."

About fifteen minutes later and the four boys were back in the Rec Room getting into their clothes. Most of the others were already in the Dining Room, but there were a few who had taken slightly longer in their respective showers as well.

"I'll get you a place, Galli!" Jay hooted as he and Tyler ran into the Dining Room arm in arm.

"Kay," the Doctor called back. As he pulled his tee-shirt on, he felt Kyle tap him on his arm. "What's up?"

"Why's he like that?" Kyle asked seriously, nodding his head towards the Dining Room.

The Doctor had a feeling as to whom Kyle was referring to and knew this was what was troubling his brother. "Q?" he asked for confirmation.

"Yeah," Kyle nodded, his eyes still serious.

"Q's always been like that. It's his nature," the Doctor said lightly. "He does what he does for a reason, mostly, and things seem to happen right anyway."

"But he treated Cory like shit!" Kyle exclaimed. "I thought he was nice, but he seems to look down on us 'solids'."

"No, he doesn't look down on the Younger Races. In fact, he cares for them after a fashion - at least compared to the majority of his Race. He's just not one to let authority figures go without being poked and prodded. It was meant to happen, Kyle," the Doctor answered.

"It's not right, Galli," Kyle said as he crossed his arms.

"For Q, yes it is."

"Explain," Kyle demanded. "Explain why bad manners is okay!"

The Doctor sighed, "The Q believe that others need to expand their minds before they reach their true worth. Q himself is not quite that bad, but his methods run along those lines. So, he tries to rub people the wrong way to see who they truly are by their reactions."

Kyle didn't like such a disarming answer. "Why didn't you warn us about him? He just appears in the Compound and scares the shit outta our brothers. A little warning might have been nice!"

"I didn't know he'd arrive then. The Guardian brought him. The Guardian is an Unknown Element in the Time Streams. I couldn't have known - the Time Lock was still active when I went to bed, then I was as asleep as you, Kyle," the Doctor exclaimed, waving his arms around.

"You should have still told us about Q!"

"It wasn't the right Time, Kyle! Things happen a certain way and I know not to mess with them! Then the Guardian upset my timetable in my mind, so I was in the same boat as you!"

"Screw that! Why would that have made a difference to tell us about him before?!"

"It just would," the Doctor said with resignation. "Look, Kyle - you need to calm down and think things through a bit. I know these Time things better, and unless Joel or the Guardian messes around with them, it mostly happens as I see it happening."

"Don't tell me to calm down, and don't you walk away from me!" Kyle shouted as the Doctor moved off through the now empty Rec Room towards the Dining Room door. "Cory deserved better. We all did, and..."

"Kyle..."

"Shut up and let me finish!"

After having had to run back to the apartment to dress, both Kevin and Joel skipped back into the Dining Room for breakfast. Everyone else was slowly getting themselves seated after having had their showers and gotten dressed. As he placed a pillow down for himself and Kevin to sit on, and also ignoring the sniggers from various other boys there, Joel's attention was pulled to the door to the Rec Room as it burst open.

"You KNEW what he's like, and STILL didn't think about WARNING us all first. You let him do that to Cor, and I'm just meant to listen to you when you say it's 'meant to be'?" Kyle was yelling at the Doctor.

"Kyle, I've already said it - some things have to happen a certain way, and..."

"I don't give a FUCK! HOW DARE HE TREAT CORY THAT WAY!!!" Kyle raged back, cutting the Doctor off mid-speech.

The Doctor's eye flashed dangerously, "Don't you dare take that tone with me, Kyle Richardson!"

Kyle reached and pushed the Doctor angrily, "Shut the fuck up, *Gallifrey*! I won't let Cor be hurt again, and..."

Now it was the Doctor who raised his voice, "If I thought Q would have hurt Cor, I'd have done something; BUT THIS WAS MEANT TO HAPPEN THIS WAY!!! Q is like that 'cos he just IS!"

Kyle pushed him again, harder this time, "I DON'T CARE! If he tries treating Cor like that again, I'll fight him. I killed Axon. I'll kill him too!"

The Doctor pushed Kyle back fiercely. "DON'T YOU EVER SAY THAT! High Races killing High Races?! You don't even KNOW what you're talking about, you stupid little twerp!"

Oh, that got Kyle's fists flying when he said that.

Joel just stood there trembling as two of his brothers rolled around on the floor attempting to punch each other's lights out.

"Kyle Calvin Richardson and Gallifrey Short, freeze RIGHT NOW!" Teri ordered, her tone stating that they had better listen.

Neither did. Both the ten year old and the eight year old continued to pull hair, scream and punch each other - both completely oblivious to the havoc they were causing.

Q strolled over smiled at Teri, then snapped his fingers. Both boys were now a foot apart, and two feet from the floor - yet still trying to kick and hit each other. The obscenities were turning the air rather more blue than was normal even for the Clan. Q, ignoring the screams of abuse being traded, turned to Teri, "If you're wondering - yes, I can match powers to your Mikyvis and even Gallifrey. I'm not as good with Time, but the physical? I'm the Lord of."

"Thank you," Teri grated, however her eyes were fixed on the two still yelling and red faced boys. "Both of you, stop this NOW, or else I'll make sure that it's stopped for you," Teri announced over their obscenities.

Kyle, to his credit, did stop swearing. He was still trying to transport himself closer to the still raging Time Lord, though, but Q was easily keeping him under control.

The Doctor, however, was a real mess. His eyes were streaming tears, and the haunted look in them was pitiable: and due to his feelings, he still had not heard Teri and so was still shouting... but by now he wasn't making much sense.

Quint, who was seated with the wide eyed Levi, turned to his friend. "Do they do this often?" he whispered loudly.

Levi mutely shook his head as the Doctor's rant turned into just plain sobs of barely repressed rage and grief.

Teri came to stand directly before Kyle, who was raised up to eye level by a helpful gesture by Q. "Explain," she ordered seriously.

Kyle bit his lip hard so that he wouldn't shout it out, then managed to say softly, "He just let Q get away with treating Cory like shit, and with scaring our brothers. He never told us what Q was like."

The Doctor tried to respond, but Q laid a finger over the ten year old's lips. "Hush. You wait your turn," Q said softly, yet just as seriously as Teri had.

Kyle threw a dirty look at Q and the Doctor, then stared straight ahead as if blanking them both out - Teri too. He did continue, however, and his voice was slowly getting harder and harder, "The *Doctor* just let an unknown stroll in and freak everyone out. He never warned us. He never told us! Q could have been dangerous, and we never really knew! The *Doctor* brought us to meet Q, but then Q seemed nice. He's not. Joel's mind shows he's not, but I listened to the *Doctor*... I won't make that mistake again." Each time Kyle said the Doctor's name, it was with as much insult and venom as he could muster. He then turned to look the ginger Time Lord in the eyes and spat out, "You are not my brother! Brothers would have said. Would have explained!"

The Doctor's eyes, already wet from the tears that had recently stopped, started running again, yet his face mottled in something that was a mix of anger, pain and self-loathing, "Fine! You can fuck off, then! I've been alone for longer than your world has had LIFE! Why'd I ever bother with such a fucked up people? I hate you! I... ha...hate you..." he finished as his voice broke completely.

Teri felt that they needed some space - like right now! "Neither one of you meant that, and you BOTH know it. You both call me Mom, and as your mother I am NOT going to allow this behaviour to continue. Corners, NOW, until such time as you can be civil to each other and are able to apologize to EVERYONE here for your actions."

Kyle, still blanking everyone, barely nodded his head. He was lowered to the ground and taken by Teri to one corner of the room.

"LET ME GO, Q!" the Doctor screamed as he fought with the 'hold' Q had on him.

"No," Q said slowly.

Teri walked back and looked the Doctor in the eyes, "Corner."

"You've got to be kidding!" the Doctor sobbed out, still struggling as he hovered two feet off the ground. "No! He said... he... I did nothing... I... he... NO! He's not my brother any more! He said it..." the little Time Lord rushed out, barely making himself understood through his heartbreaking sobs, "I've lost... lost another brother... so you ain't my mother no more... I o...opened my h...heart and... and... NO! I WON'T!"

"WHAT WAS THAT YOUNG MAN?" Teri replied, steel in her voice.

"You heard," he muttered morosely. "What's the point in continuing this farce. I'm the eldest of all - I'm not staying here - I'm leaving..." he muttered as he dashed his tears from his eyes. Useless move as more replaced them fast. The air around him started to Fold, but then... nothing. "Wh...what? What the..."

//Listen to your mother// came the gentle voice of Forever from everywhere.

"What?! After... after what..." the Doctor sobbed out, but then the Guardian's voice came again.

//Listen to your mother, Lord of Time. You are no longer the Lonely God, nor the Wanderer Without a Home. You *are* home, now. You are no longer lonely//

"B...but..."

//Listen to your mother. You accepted, she accepted; and so I bound you together. You have a mother again. You are a child again as I intended. You will heal in time. You have lost nothing now, and have gained more than you had ever lost before. Listen to your mother//

Still sobbing, the now frail seeming little boy was lowered by Q to the floor where he trembled before Teri. As she reached out to lead him towards the opposite corner from Kyle, he impulsively embraced her and sobbed into her chest for a long moment. Then, and only then, did the oldest living person in the Universes - apart from the Guardian - allow a relative 'child' of a human to discipline him.

The Doctor was stood in a corner for the first time in over 7 billion years in that Timeline.

"Mama?" Joel trembled as Teri came back from where she had stood the Doctor.

She smiled down at him, and gently ruffled his hair, "Don't worry, Joel. Fights happen with a bunch of kids and teens all in each other's pockets all the time. It'll work out."

"Oh... you sure?"

"I'm sure. Sit down, sweetie, and enjoy your breakfast," she said with a tender smile.

Joel did so, and his face scrunched up again as he tried to make himself comfortable.

"You DID ask, Sa'r," Kevin giggled wickedly from his side.

"Ask what?" Kenny giggled mischievously from Kevin's other side.

"When we were getting showered and ready for breakfast I wanted Kev to..." Joel began, but Cory reached over and silenced him with his hand.

"We get it, Lil'elf," the blond patriarch giggled.

Grandma Anne then bustled into the room carrying a large plate of fruit-salad. "Where are they? Ah! Here you go, boys..." she said as she placed the plate before Kevin. Then she looked at the faces Joel was pulling, and pushed the plate over to him instead. "I think this is more for you, Joel," she said with a smile.

"Oh! I like fruit. So does Kevvy!" Joel smiled happily, "But why more for me? Can't Kev have some too?"

Grandma Anne bent down and whispered for a moment into Joel's ear, while others at the table simply giggled.

"Oh! But we're BOTH that way, Grandma!" Joel giggled as she finished explaining.

"Oh! Okay, you share this, and I'll get you some more," she said happily as she turned and bustled back out.

"We share anyway!" Joel called out helpfully, but then shrugged and popped a piece of banana into Kevin's mouth. "I like her. She's strange, but I like her."

"You know," Jude giggled as he helped himself to some toast, "this reminds me of those old stories of people being abducted by aliens."

Spock raised an eyebrow and asked, "What stories are they, my son?"

Jude smiled as everyone started to listen carefully while eating, "In my world, some people claimed that little green or gray men from other worlds came to Earth, took them into their starships, and examined them. The biggest story was about anal probes and stuff. They say it was happening all over the world. I never believed it - I just thought it was gay people who were still 'not out' who were trying to say something about what they really 'wanted'."

Kenny started laughing like mad as Jude finished explaining.

"What do you find so amusing, Ken?" Xain queried as he started to take a drink from his Vulcan tea.

"Hehehe... Jake gets probed by an alien... hehehe... almost every night!" Kenny giggled.

Vulcan tea was sprayed over the nearly half of the table, and Jake sat on Xain's other side completely speechless. Then he started pounding on Xain's back to stop the 12 year old 'alien' from choking to death.

"How did what Grandma Anne do or say remind you of that, Jude?" Joel giggled as he watched the colour return to Xain's face.

"Well... not Grandma - you! It was the role reversal of a human 'probing' an alien!" Jude laughed.

Kevin just sat there, trying to look angelic with a 'Who, me?' expression on his face. "Don't bother, Kev," Sean giggled. "We can all see the horns!"

"Hey!" Joel protested as everyone started laughing at both him and Kevin, "I probed back just as much!"

"TMI, cuz!" Justy laughed even louder. "Waaaaay TMI!"

"Kenneth," Xain said, his voice as emotionless as ever it could have been. "Please remain here once you have finished breaking your fast. Jake and I wish to dunk you."

"And you expect me to stay after saying that?!" Kenny giggled his retort.

"Yes!" came the response from both boys.

As Kevin popped a cherry into his mouth, Joel said to him, "We never tried Cory's favourite number, Kev. Wanna try it after?"

Kevin started choking.

Joel hammered on his back quickly, then caught the cherry in one smooth motion as Kevin spat it out. The little Vulcan then giggled and popped it into his own mouth to eat.

"Hey! Cor, tell him! He just stole my cherry!" Kevin protested, then blushed deeply once he realised what he had said.

Cory nearly choked on his own food as Sean giggled, "Wasn't that the whole point of your wedding night, Kev?"

Teri rolled her eyes at the banter, before returning to her own tea.

Ten minutes later, and there seemed no let up to the amount of food being consumed. It was then that Teri felt was time to talk to her two sons. She got up and went over to Kyle first, and as she came to a stop behind him, she could hear his quiet sobs. She laid a hand on his shoulder and turned him around, and in the same movement she sank to her knees to be on eye level with the small boy.

"Can you tell me what happened?" she asked softly.

Brushing his tears away, Kyle nodded and started spilling everything out in a rush, "Yeah, ah... I didn't like how Q spoke to Cor or how he treated and ignored Cor, so I asked the *Doctor* about it, 'cos Q never seemed like a mean person when I met him Wednesday but the *Doctor* just said it was Q's way. Then I got a bit angry 'cos he didn't seem to care that Cor had been hurt and made angry and stuff, so I started arguing, then he started acting like he was all grown-up and stuff and... and..." Kyle trailed off softly as he hung his head.

Teri brushed the hair out of Kyle's eyes then asked something that only one parent can ever ask another. "How would you have treated people if it was you looking for Levi and you couldn't find him?"

Kyle looked at her for a moment, his tears still trickling down his smooth, pale cheeks. He opened his mouth a few times as if to answer, but stopped each time. Eventually, he sighed and hung his head again. "Kinda like Uncle Q did, I s'pos," he admitted grudgingly, and the honorific being reapplied to Q told Teri that *that* part of Kyle's problem was dealt with. Then he looked up again, "But why didn't the Doctor tell us about this happening? He says he knows things before they happen, and if he'd told us then Cor wouldn't have gotten mad or nothing! That was wrong! And he acted all... all... like an adult! He's a kid like us, now! And... and..."

Teri held a finger to Kyle's lips. "Shhhhhh.... You've explained Time Paradoxes to me a few times, enough that I understand what kind of trouble they cause. If you really think about it, I bet that you're

going to be able to tell me the same thing I figured out myself. Think it out, and no cheating by running time scenarios through your head."

Kyle lowered his eyes again as he whispered, "I can't anyway. The Darkness is too much for me to do that right now, but... but you're right. If we'd known we might have changed stuff and... but why'd Do... why'd Galli not tell me like I'd have told him something? Why'd he act like he's all adult and stuff?"

Teri smiled, "When Galli tells anyone something to do with Time, how does he do it?"

Kyle sniffed back a few soft sobs, then whispered, "Like he always does..."

"Like he always does," Teri repeated with a smile. "And I gather that he's your brother again - now that you're calling him 'Galli'?"

Kyle started crying. "Sorry, Mom! I'm sorry... I've never, ever, EVER said a brother wasn't a brother before... I'm really REALLY sorry!" he finished with a heartbroken wail.

She reached out and enveloped the crying child in her arms and then sat back on the floor, pulling him onto her lap. She soothed his tears and held him close until they had run their course.

Meanwhile, Tyler and Jay were seated together on the same chair and eating - while watching both their partners out of the corner of their eyes. They were also talking about what had caused so spectacular a breakdown, and whether or not they should fight, too - just to not seem like they weren't supporting their respective husbands. However, for all the others too far away to hear, they just seemed like a nine year old and his eight year old brother bonding and feeding each other.

"I could use the bacon plate, and bonk you over the head with it," Jay supplied as he helped himself to the last 6 pieces on said plate.

Tyler shook his head fast, "Nuh huh! God, you'll have Tommy AND Helen AND Mom after you then!"

"Good point. What about the chair we're on?" Jay asked as he fed one of the rinds of bacon to Tyler.

Tyler chewed and considered it. "That might work. Especially if I'm using the armchair from the Rec to beat you to death with. A chair each sounds fair. Can I have another?"

"Sure," Jay said seriously as he popped another rasher into Tyler's open mouth. "Can you pass the salt, please?"

As Tyler did so, Dean shook his head in wonder. "That must be the most friendly, brotherly and loving way I've ever heard of a declaration of incoming violence be discussed before!" he stated to Justy, who giggled into his 4th bowl of Wheaties.

Once Kyle had ceased crying, Teri stood up and led him over to an empty chair by Sean. "Start your breakfast. I'm going to talk with your brother," she whispered to him.

Kyle nodded mutely as he and his chair was pulled over against Sean's side.

The Doctor was still as stone when Teri got to him, but she could hear his own soft sniffs and sobs once she had gotten close enough. Getting back down onto her knees, she turned him around and asked, "Could you explain what happened, son?"

The Doctor launched into his own fast paced rendition of the events leading up to the fight, only from his own perspective. He ended in tears with, "... and I only got real mad when *he* said he'd kill Q! I've seen too many of us die, Mrs..." At a look from Teri, the Doctor stopped what he was about to say and changed it fast. "...Mum. I've seen too m...many, and he d...didn't know what he was t...talking 'bout - then he t...tells me he's not my brother and it's o.o...only 'cos he's my brother that I h...have a mum and another d...dad and lots of other b...brothers and... I..."

Teri wiped a few tears from Galli's face, then asked softly, "How much time has anyone had to sit down and learn about the history of all of the High Races?"

"None," Galli whispered back, then added quickly, "but I told Kyle about it. About what I... 'bout what I did..." He trailed off with a sick whisper. "I'm a murderer. I killed them. All of them... I killed them to stop just one race. *One* people. I... They call me the 'One who never carries a weapon', yet I've more blood on my hands than anyone else. I'm a murderer... I *am* the Destroyer of Worlds..."

"Is this a common issue among the High Races? Thinking they are murderers because they did what was necessary to protect life in general?" Teri asked, her tone showing that she was asking a serious question. "Your Father has a saying which fits this quite well... 'The needs of the Many outweigh the needs of the Few, or the One.' You have done things in the past that allowed the Universe to continue, obviously they worked or we would not be here. Stop beating yourself up over something that had to be done."

Galli dissolved into tears and fell into Teri's arms, sobbing his heart out. She made out a few phrases only from his tear filled ramblings. Such as "I'm sorry for saying you're not my Mummy" and "I really do love Kyle".

At the table, Kyle had not yet started eating - he just didn't feel like it, not without making up to his brother first. He was sitting morosely, and pushing a fried egg around his plate when a hand came to rest on his shoulder. He looked up and found Teri smiling at him.

"Come over here, Kyle," she said softly as she led him up and over to where Galli was standing.

The little Time Lord was scuffing his foot against the floor and looked very shame faced - Kyle thought that he looked as bad as he himself felt. What was worse was the black eye that Galli was now sporting. Unlike himself, Galli wasn't immune to physical trauma yet.

"I'm sorry," Galli whispered as he stared at the floor between them both, once Kyle had gotten to within two feet of him. "I'm sorry I said I hated you. I don't. I... I really don't, Kyle. I shouldn't have acted so bossy, either... I'm just.... I'm sorry..." he trailed off. A second later he lifted his eyes to look into Kyle's. "Can you be my brother again?" he asked, his voice catching with incipient tears.

"I was a stupid brat. Do you really still want me as a brother?" Kyle replied softly.

"Always," Galli whispered as he dropped his eyes again. "And I was the brat. You're too nice to be one..."

Kyle shook his head. "I shoulda known better, but I didn't listen to ya. I was thinkin' of myself instead of listenin' to what you was sayin'."

"Guys, if this continues, you'll be fighting about who was the bigger brat. Just kiss, hug and make up, then you can be the two wonderful little boys we all know and love again," Teri chuckled.

Galli half smiled and tentatively moved a step closer to Kyle and began to open his arms for a hug.

"NO TONGUES!" came the yelled giggles from both Jay and Tyler.

"Just for that, we might!" Kyle yelled back before joining the hug. "I love you, Galli. I'm sorry."

"I love you, and I'm sorry too," Galli whispered, a ghost of a smile on his face.

Kyle pulled back enough to check Galli's black eye. Then he kissed it, and when he pulled back, the swelling had gone and it was normal again. "Want to share breakfast? Our other halves have already fed each other."

"Yeah!" Galli giggled.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" Teri said softly, looked briefly at the others.

Galli straightened slightly, and while still in the hug with Kyle looked around at the other kids. "We're sorry for acting like that. We were wrong."

"We kinda pulled a Cory and Sean and argued when we wasn't 'posed to. I'm sorry guys," Kyle added seriously.

Joel smiled softly, then looked over at Cory, "You've fought with Sean before?"

"Ummm, yeah - we have," Sean said seriously.

"The first time was the funniest," Mikey giggled from a foot off the table where he had only just appeared, "Sean knocked out one of Cory's teeth because he thought Cory was ignoring him, so Cory used a dinner plate to give Sean a concussion!"

"Mikey!" Cory and Sean protested.

"How old were they?" Kevin giggled.

"Six and seven," Mikey sniggered.

Cory rolled his eyes, "You going to tell everyone *all* of our secrets?"

"He already did, Blondie! Mama? Did you *really* think they were being murdered the first time Cory had anal sex with Sean?" Joel asked curiously.

As both Cory and Sean disappeared under the table, the only indication of their presence the bright red glows from their blushes, Teri stuttered her response while trying not to laugh. "If you had heard them, you would have too, Joel."

"You mean they were worse than JJ and Adam are?" Dan asked seriously, causing JJ and Adam to join Cory and Sean.

"Ah," Joel nodded to himself. "Boy, you must be loud!" he added, glancing under the table to look at his bright red brothers.

So you! Ears still ringing! Black Feet sent - and everyone heard him and burst out laughing.

"Blackie!" Kevin yelled as he too crept under the table to join the other four.

"I'm Vulcan. I can yell loud," Joel shrugged as his cheeks started to glow green. "And Kevvy made me feel very, *very* good when he..."

"SA'R!!!!" Kevin added as he pulled his slightly blushing Vulcan husband under the table to join the others. "Jeez!"

Tommy giggled as he lifted the tablecloth and looked underneath, "Ya know, Ma; all the blushin' bros under th' table is makin for a good food warmer!"

"Bite Me, Tommy!!" five voices answered at once from under the table.

"Cuddle me, Tommy!!" Joel's voice followed.

"ELF CUDDLIN'!!!!!!" Tommy yelled as he stood up then literally dived under the table.

A second later, Tommy started laughing hysterically as five pairs of hands started tickling him. After a moment or two more of this, a loud cry was heard from Joel, "Hey! Leave off 'im! I want my cuddles!"

"Sorry, Joel!" "Sorry, Sa'r!"

"Thank you! Now. Cuddles, comedian!"

As Joel and Kevin left the Dining Room patting their full stomachs, Galli ran up to them arm in arm with Kyle, "Joel? Got a minute?"

"No, I got a stiffy that needs dealing with - but I think I can spare a second or so," the Vulcan giggled wickedly as Kevin whistled innocently.

Galli blinked then both he and Kyle burst out laughing. Through his chuckles, the little Time Lord handed Joel a small seeming bag, "Here, sex-crazed alien! This is for you."

After taking the bag from Galli, Joel raised an eyebrow curiously, "Thanks. Why, though?"

"I didn't give you a gift yesterday. I was still trying to get it made. That's it, big bro," the little Doctor grinned at his brother. "It's a 'Bag of Dimension'. Or, for you, your 'Cookie-Carrier'."

Joel opened the largest seeming flap and looked at it, "Mmm, I can fit a few in here. Thanks, Galli!"

"A few?" came a voice from one of the other pockets.

Joel dropped the bag. "What the hell?" he cried as the bag cried out.

"Damnit, I wish they wouldn't do that all the time, Galli!" Jay said as his head pushed its way out of the pocket - which had enlarged as he did so.

"They wouldn't if you didn't go inside them to explore, you goof!" Kyle sniggered as he helped the Doctor pull Jay from the bag. Galli was pulling on Jay's arms while Kyle held the small bag steady on the floor.

"AUNTIE HEEEEELLLLLLEEEEEENNNNNNNNNN!!!!!" was all they heard from Joel as soon as the bag was 'Jay-Free', for the little Vulcan had snatched it up and was pelting from the room at warp factor 10. "I NEEDS COOOOKKKIIIIIEEEEESSSS!!!!!"

"Thanks a bunch," Kevin grouched. "That's all I need. A sex crazed, Pon Farr approaching Vulcan with a SUGAR RUSH!"

"You're welcome," Galli bowed, then he giggled, "but don't worry. Joel shares, don't he? You'll be on the same rush, Kev!"

"Oh," Kevin sighed. "Be still my beating heart. There goes my waist-line..."

"Ah, don't worry, Kev!" Jay grinned from his seat on the floor. "Joel'll burn off your extra calories quickly enough. Sex is good exercise. Just think of the cookie intake as an excuse!"

Kevin's face brightened considerably as he too ran off after Joel - obviously to 'help' with the filling of the near bottomless bag...

Cory was standing behind the sofa and rubbing and massaging Sean's shoulders when Spock walked up to him with Teri and Dan. "My sons. I would like to talk with you both, if you are not too busy," he said casually with a soft smile to them both.

"Sure Dad," they both answered, although Sean still had his eyes closed with contentment.

Cory smiled at his new father yet continued to attend to his beloved's shoulders. "What's up?" he added amiably.

"Yesterday," Spock said as he took a seat with Teri, "your mother and I had a long talk regarding the state of the Clan. Most if not all of you require what humans refer to as a holiday. Especially you two. So, you are both having one. No arguments, no objections and no choice in the matter. As second in

House Surak, I take your responsibilities from you as of now and hold them in trust until your mother concludes that you are both ready for them to be returned. You are simply Cory and Sean Short; two young men on a break. I would advise you to start packing, for your mother is going to take you away from the Compound for a while."

Sean's eyes were wide open by the time Spock had finished speaking, and Cory was still as stone, behind him. "Well, ummm..." he murmured before clearing his throat. "Uh, Dad - can we at least pick where we want to go?"

"Do you think that is needful, my grandson?" Sarek asked, as he walked over to join them. "Do you not remember what was said on Monday when Levi allowed the Guardian of Forever to speak through him?"

"Which time?" Cory asked, as he tried to get his mind around his new 'orders'.

Sarek nearly smiled, "When you both were talking to my wife and I in private."

Cory scrunched his brow in thought, and Sean started to giggle, "Oh, give it up, Cor. You'll burn out your last brain cell! I remember, Grandfather!"

"Bite me - you would, cheater!" Cory giggled as he proceeded to tickle Sean.

"The Guardian said you will return to the beginning after four days. The beginning for you can only be..."

"Des Moines!" Cory giggled as Sean started to fight back.

"I shall ask Justin to take control of the Clan while Jason is away in Utah, Father," Spock said as he began to rise up from his seat, but he stopped speaking when he saw the subtle shake of his father's head.

Sarek did not elaborate, however. He just looked pointedly at Cory.

At first, the blond teen was confused, then he smiled as he remembered. "Lil'Elf!" he giggled.

"Yes, Blondie?" Joel crowed out as he bounced through the door in time to hear his brother. "What's up?"

"Besides you?" Sean giggled softly.

Joel looked down at himself, blushed and readjusted his pants. "Oops! Sorry, Grandpa!" he rushed out nervously.

"I too went through puberty, Sa'ren," Sarek stated calmly. "Your current predicament is not unknown to me, nor unusual in any case."

Joel grinned, then looked curiously at his two giggling brothers. "Well? You called? What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Cory grinned. "How'd you like to be in charge of the Clan for a few days while Sean and I go on holiday?"

Joel's face fell. "You... you're going 'way?" he murmured, a slight hint of terror beginning to creep into his voice. "What did I do wrong? Was I bad? It's 'cos I had sex with Kevvy, isn't it! I knew it was wrong!" he started blubbing.

He was suddenly surrounded by his brothers, his father and mother, and even Sarek. Cory was the only one to speak from the mass hug, however. "No, you didn't do anything wrong, and no, we're not 'going away'. Just on a holiday. Dad and Mom say Sean and I need a break, so we're going to Des Moines for a few days," Cory explained gently, as he wiped the few tears from Joel's eyes. "Dad?" he asked as he looked up into Spock's eyes, "is it just me and Sean, or can others come with us?"

"Others may go, just as long as all who are going are on 'holiday,' too," Spock answered easily.

"Want to come, Joel?" Sean asked with a smile.

Joel blinked at him and Cory, then up at his father. Then back at his brothers. "Umm... first, why'd you want me in charge of the Clan, Cor?" he asked rather than answer Sean.

"Because you'll be great at it, and you'll learn a lot doing it," Cory said seriously. "And because I trust you. Your cousin Justy will be here as well, and he'll show you what to do, and Jace as well when he gets back from Utah."

Joel considered this for a moment, then looked into Sean's eyes, "You're coming back, right?"

"Of course!" Sean said quickly. "We'd never leave any of you, Joel. We're brothers forever and ever!"

"Then I'll stay and look after the Clan. If I go, you'll both have work keeping me safe. I keep needing you when you're near. If I'm not there, you can really relax. Daddy can look after me, and Kevvy and Poppa and the others. You need a break from me," Joel said seriously.

"I'll *never* need a break from *you*, Lil'Elf!" Cory murmured as he rubbed his nose against Joel's. "If you want to come, you can. You don't have to stay and look after anything - you can have a holiday with us, too. You are *not* work, Elf."

Joel sighed happily and threw his arms around Cory's neck. "Thank you. But I'll stay. I can always visit if I need a Cory or Sean hug. You're not exactly out of Enterprise transporter range, are you?" he added with a giggle.

Cory shook his head with a smile, "Even if we were, you have a bunch of brothers who can get you to us even quicker than a transporter!"

Joel grinned. Then he asked, "Who're you gonna take with you?"

"You ain't going nowhere without me and Ty, Cory!" Kyle said loudly as he and Tyler popped into the mass hug. "Just you try it!"

"That's your safety sorted," Joel giggled. "Plus your two puss-tats!"

"Oh yeah! Can't forget them!" Sean giggled.

"And my son and his better half have already said they are going with you. JJ was *quite* insistent about it, to be honest," Dan grinned from his seat on the sofa as he watched the mass hug break up.

Teri grinned, "Eight boys, one Teri. I think I'll need help."

Spock tapped her on her shoulder and gestured toward the Kitchens, and they both left, leaving most of the others to watch curiously as they made their way out. Sarek, as ever, showed no reaction. Joel shrugged, then smiled. "Maybe they're gonna..." he mused to himself before shrugging again happily and snuggling closer to Cory.

Cory glanced over at Dan before pressing his face back into Joel's curly hair and asking, "Was everyone but me, Sean and Elf in on this 'holiday', Uncle Dan?"

"Yes," Dan said simply before chuckling.

"You know, one of these days we're gonna get even with you for this..." Sean said with an evil gleam in his eyes.

"Excuse me?" Dan laughed. "I am of the opinion that I'm getting even with *you*, Sean Patrick Short. My life was quiet, calm and peaceful before JJ got infected with your 'add every kid you come across' disease!"

"Sorry Dan, JJ already had it before he met us... that's how you got Kyle!" Sean giggled. "I think JJ gave it to US!!"

Dan responded with dignity, "Sharon and I had already decided to adopt Kyle, so no - JJ caught it from you. That's my story, and I'm sticking to it!"

"Can Kev and I adopt kids too, Blondie?" Joel asked hesitantly as Sean tried to find an answer.

"You better believe it, Lil'Elf!" Cory responded as he pulled Joel into a snuggle. "It's a family tradition... so whenever you both agree that you're ready, go for it."

As Cory finished, Sean spoke up. "Dan, Kyle just told me it took JJ a whole month of bugging you and Aunt Sharon before you finally caved in. Busted!!!"

"I can't hear you, I can't hear you," Dan called out as he left the room quickly, his fingers in his ears.

"... and he questions OUR maturity sometimes???" Sean commented as he tried not to collapse in giggles.

Sarek, as ever, remained impassive. However, when he scooped Joel up into his arms, his little grandson could feel the well-hidden laughter buried within the old Vulcan. "They're funny, aren't they Grandpa?" he giggled as he kissed Sarek's cheek.

"Yes," Sarek said simply. "Yes they are. Have you and Kevin found someone you both wish to adopt, or was that question 'in general' only?"

"In general," Joel answered. "Just checking."

"Where is your miniature hubby anyway?" Cory giggled.

"Oh, around," Joel smirked.

"It's unusual not seeing him right next to you; you two are closer than Sean and me," Cory mused.

Joel kissed Sarek again, then slipped down to the ground. He pulled a smallish bag from where it was tied at his belt and opened the largest pocket. "Cookie?" he asked Cory as he offered the bag to him.

Cory smiled, "Sure." He put his hand into the bag - then found that it seemed a LOT bigger inside. "What the...? The Doc?" he asked as he groped about inside.

"Uh huh," Joel giggled.

"Ah! I think I found... ummm, why have you got furry cookies?" Cory asked, his face scrunching.

"Gotcha!" came a semi-muffled cry from inside the bag, and three things happened at once: Joel pulled the top open wider; Cory yelped; and then he was pulled into the bag as far as his waist.

Joel then lowered the bag to the floor, which made it look, of course, like Cory's upper half had fallen through the floor.

Sean obviously couldn't let the chance go for a quick rump-fondle, even though he was crying with mirth at the sight.

Then Cory disappeared entirely into the bag. "Kev! You little..." his muffled giggles were heard.

"Argh! Help, Sa'r! There's no-where to run in here!"

Joel was too busy laughing. As were Sean, Tyler and Kyle. Sarek just raised an eyebrow.

Joel, his cookie bag now Cory and Kev free, was at one of the terminals in Main CIC going through the Clan files. Sean was at his side with an arm around his little brother's waist and answering the questions the little Vulcan was throwing out. He could not, however, keep up with the speed at which Joel was reading the script that seemed to flash upwards at an unbelievable rate.

Suddenly Joel hammered his little hand on the button and yelled out, "CORYYYYYYY! Get in here!!!"

A bare second later Cory ran in, Kevin hot on his heels. "What?! What's happened?!" he asked in a rush, thinking there was some big emergency happening.

"Where were you born?" Joel bubbled out as he fixed his blond brother with his eyes.

Cory, his brain trying to switch gears from 'emergency' to 'elvish-hyperness adaptability', just blinked at his grinning little brother. "In a hospital," he stated with his own grin.

"Haha," Sean rolled his eyes. "I think in Des Moines, Joel. We've never really asked, though. We're American, though."

"Well, technically yes," Joel giggled. "But Cory's only American as his mother was. His dad was Scottish, right?"

"Yes," Cory agreed, not knowing where this was going.

"Well, so are you! You were born in a hotel in Glasgow, Cor! Your mam and dad went on a holiday a month before she was due on you, and you were born prematurely! You're Scottish by birth!" Joel exclaimed happily, pointing at the British Birth Certificate showing on the screen.

"Okaaaay," the stunned Patriarch replied, still trying to get his mind to shift gears. "I... well, I... never knew... why didn't Mom ever say?" he muttered curiously as he slipped in to sit on Joel's other side.

Kevin giggled, "Maybe because you never asked?"

From another console, Justy rolled his eyes and muttered just loud enough for them all to hear him clearly, "Blonds!"

"Bite me!" Cory retorted, not taking his eyes off the certificate. "Wow!! So I'm not just British because of what Grandma Lizzie did!"

"Nope!" Joel chortled as he reached and pulled Kevin onto his lap.

"What about Sean?" Justy asked as he walked over. "No, let me guess. He was born in a barn? He always leaves the doors open, so that would fit."

"No, Justin. He was found under a cabbage leaf," Teri said with aplomb as she walked in with Spock. "Mikey was found under a rose bush, but Sean took after his father."

"Hey! Why'd Mike get the rose bush and I get stuck with a lousy cabbage!" Sean protested.

Joel turned his head to regard Sean, a weird expression on his face. "Sean. Ummm... you DO know she's teasing, right? Well... better explain. You see, your mam and dad got a certain 'urge', and..."

"EWWWWWWWWWWWW!!!!!!!" Sean and Cory both exclaimed.

"Don't *you* say 'ewwww', bros!" Joel protested. "In my first meld with Daddy I opened the wrong door and saw ALL the times he and Mother 'did it'.... I'm a First Night baby... Pon Farr First Night baby, in fact... I got to see it ALL... now THAT is 'ewwww'... sheesh!"

"I'm sure that Kyle would be willing to help me share that experience with you Sean, that is if you really want to know..." Teri added with a grin.

The sight of Sean running from the room screaming in terror would forever be etched in Cory's mind as the funniest sight ever...

As Cory left Main CIC to look for his traumatised husband, Spock entered with Jude and moved to where Joel and Kevin were still exploring the Clan's database. "Sa'ren; due to your love of Starfleet and your aptitude for Federation technology, Admiral Morrow and I wish to put both you and Jude through the entrance exams for Starfleet Academy. In Jude's case he shows great proficiency in starship engineering and auxiliary systems. Are you both willing and free to attempt these tests?"

Hugging Kevin so hard that the poor boy squeaked, Joel excitedly replied, "Yeah! Cooooool! Yes please, Daddy!"

Spock nodded, then gestured for Jude to take a seat by a free console. He then turned to look at little Kevin. "Do you wish to attempt the tests as well?" he asked the boy.

Kevin shook his head. "I like being in the Clan's Diplomatic Corp, Uncle Spock. I like starships and such, but I don't know how good I'd be in Starfleet - not yet, anyway," he finished quietly.

"That's crap, Kevvy," Joel stated hotly. "Stop thinking like that. Cory and the others said the same to you ages ago, didn't they? And I've seen your mind! You went from not being able to read to reading things like Tolkien and Shakespeare in less than two months! You've GOT a brain, so stop thinking you're dumb!"

Kevin stared at his husband seriously, "I know I'm not dumb, but Kenny..."

"Is Kenny. He's a math head! He's into different things than you! He can't draw for shit, Kev! You're into different things, but you're EACH just as clever as the other!"

"Sa'ren is correct, Kevin," Spock said softly, "You are no less than your brother, and you have an air of command as you showed two days ago. These tests do not simply check for technical knowledge - if that was the entrance requirement, what need would there be for the academy? They test you on many levels to find where your potential and abilities lie. If you have natural skills that Starfleet looks for in its officers, you will pass. If not, it will show where your skills and abilities would be better suited. There are more opportunities within the Fleet than officers on starships, my child. We are always in need of proficient diplomats as well."

Kevin had bowed his head by this time, and Joel could sense him thinking long and hard about what both he and his father had just told him. After a moment or two more, Kevin looked up, "You really think I'd stand a chance at getting into Starfleet Academy?"

"Prentares Commendation and the Star Cross," Jude said simply. "I think they both say enough about your chances, Kevin."

Kevin's face started to split into a slow, wide smile. "Yeah - How many cadets would have them before their first day!"

"Not many," Spock said dryly as he gently separated Kevin and Joel and placed them at their own consoles. "Do you require anything before we begin? The test can run over an hour in the majority of cases."

"No thanks, Pop," Jude shook his head as he made himself comfortable.

"A warm Vulcan to cuddle?" Kevin grinned mischievously.

Spock raised an eyebrow but let that slide without comment.

Joel, giggling, also shook his head, "Nope - I'm good, Daddy!"

"I know you are," Kevin stage whispered with a wicked grin, "but you'll make Jude feel inadequate if you brag like that!"

Joel kept his furiously blushing face turned to the monitor as he tried to tune out Jude's snickers of amusement.

Spock just shook his head as he turned to activate one of the central consoles. "The test will begin in thirty seconds. Answer honestly, and to the best of your ability. You may be as detailed as you care to be regarding the questions - but know that the more you put down will allow for a clearer picture of your potential."

He moved to the doorway and watched as the three boys' screens flickered to life. He allowed a slow smile to grow on his face as he watched Joel's profile - his son had his tongue caught at the side of his mouth as he began to concentrate - and Spock remembered that he too used to do that. It had taken almost as long for his father to break him of that habit as it had been to teach him modesty.

Outside, by JJ and Adam's house:

"Is she serious?" the bush Cory was standing by trembled.

"Goof," Cory giggled lovingly. "No, of course not. Come on, Sean - we need to pack!"

Sean climbed out from under the bush and brushed himself down. "Elf is so going to get a tickling after," he giggled as Cory grabbed his hand and started tugging him towards their home.

Adam poked his head out of the upstairs window. "Don't bother, guys. Levi just did it all for us! I think they really want us out of here!" he giggled.

Cory and Sean smiled up at him, then made to start back to CIC instead. As they did so, the door of the building opened and Nathan came charging out. He saw them walking towards him, smiled and floated over quickly. "Hey, guys. Got a minute?"

"Matters if our Mikyvis brothers will let us!" Cory giggled.

"Sure, Nath'," Sean added amiably as he pulled the smaller blond boy to his side once he'd reached them. "What's up?"

"Just wanted to give you a brief run-down on what we're planning later today, and..." Nathan started, but his communicator interrupted him.

"VHC 'Dzharel' to Fire of the Dragon," came a Vulcan voice from near Nathan's neck. *"I am Call of the Dzharel."*

Nathan pressed his comm and answered, "Go ahead, Call of the Dzharel. How can the Dragon be of assistance?"

"Greetings, Fire. It is we who are assisting you. We were en-route to meet with the incoming ambassadors from Cardassia when VSO Command requested we transport three new members of your Division to Terra."

"Thank you, Call. When should I expect them?"

"In thirty seconds. The 'Dzharel' is de-cloaking now. Stand by," came the answer as the air darkened above the Compound, and a loud shimmer filled the air.

Once the Interceptor Starship was fully visible, it lowered itself to about fifty feet and three bodies jumped out of an open airlock. There seemed to be webbing stretching between their legs and from their arms down their sides, which allowed them to glide to the ground. Once they had landed, the large ship moved back up and, with another thrum, became invisible again.

"Thank you, Call. Live long and prosper," Nathan said by way of farewell into his comm.

"Peace and long life, Fire."

Cory and Sean were busy scanning the three newcomers closely. A very young Vulcan boy, a slightly older Andorian boy, and a full grown adult male. The youngest was dressed in a blue jumpsuit, they saw, as he stripped off the para-suit, but the other two were dressed in solid black.

'Ummm... black??' Cory sent to Nathan.

Nathan looked curiously up at Cory, *"Uh... yeah - there a problem? Zema just passed his Trial three weeks ago. Sken is a transfer from Le-metya Division. What's wrong?"*

Cory tilted his head. *'Age??'*

"Zema, you mean?"

"Duh! No, the man... of course, Zema! He's, what... nine? Ten?"

Nathan looked at Cory and Sean seriously, and received an equally serious look back from both. *"Vicky is eight. She was seven when she took the Trial of Fire. It was unusual for one so young, but it does happen. Rhys is also Black, but masquerades as Blue most of the time. He's six, but since he is an android he's also much older; it counted for the Vulcans. Eight years old is the lowest age in general that they will allow for the Trial."*

Cory's non-verbal response was enough to let Nathan know that it did not make him happy. With what he was seeing Kyle and Tyler going through, his opinion of putting that much responsibility on the shoulders of one that young was not in any way pleasant, never mind the pain of 'passing' the Trials.

Nathan sighed sadly before turning to the three newcomers. "Welcome to Earth, Brothers of Oath. May we Defend Vulcan and Her Allies until our last heart-beat."

"May we live as the line, and die to defend it," all three responded together.

Cory and Sean began to look less and less pleased.

"I feel your disquiet, sir," the young Vulcan boy piped in a high treble voice as he looked up into Cory's cloudy face. "We understand our responsibilities, and we accept them willingly. Do not let our ages make you think less of the VSO." He then smiled softly, caught himself, then shrugged and carried on smiling. His deep blue eyes sparkled up at Cory from under a very heavy forehead.

"It's just... well ... I think that kinda stuff is ruining two of my little brother's lives," Cory half-muttered in explanation.

The Vulcan adult, Sken, spoke then, "Do not feel that we give too much responsibilities to the youngest of our Order, Patriarch of Family Clan Short. Only a rare few are ever given as much as those who lead the Dragon. It has not been seen for nearly sixty of your years; a twelve year old child as Lead One. They are allowed to be children - but you must realize that the VSO are mostly Vulcan. We are not human, and from the age of seven we start to train to hide, then control, our emotions. We are from that age no longer children as you generally know them to be. We are Vulcan. It is our curse, and our gift. We must forsake our hearts to preserve our race. VSO responsibility is therefore no more arduous to our children than emotive control."

"What about non-Vulcans?" Sean pressed, looking at the Andorian boy.

Nathan answered, "Me and my family were the first non-Vulcans to ever join the Order, Sean. It's an exception, not a rule. However, we test all those who want to join as Black. Only those who can handle it go to Vulcan to complete their training. Zem was one, right bruv?"

Zemal smiled and nodded, "Yes, Nathan. Patriarch and Historian. I am the son of an Imperial Guard of Andoria. I was to follow in my father's footsteps. Instead, these humans saved my life when I and my parents were on vacation on Earth. I was befriended by Voice and Fire, then asked my father if I could join them. He agreed. They agreed. I passed through Fire. I am here."

"They are sworn to Red One," Nathan murmured to them. "They know of the Fire."

Zemal's defences dropped suddenly, and tears sprang to his eyes. "Good. It is hard, Nath'. I hated both you and Jace when it was over, knowing that you knew I'd get that hurt... but I understand now. I forgive you," he wept. Sken laid a strong hand on the shaking Andorian's shoulder and squeezed.

The little Vulcan boy piped up, "I know of the Fire. I only wanted to help, not lead. I was sworn to Red One, and I was told. Never will I pass through the Fire. I do not wish it."

"Good," Cory replied. "While I understand the logic, it still does not lessen my emotional response. Call it a side-effect of being Human I guess. Welcome to Headquarters, everyone."

"Thank you. Is it true that the son of Spock has been found and is not dead as was understood?" the small boy asked, his deep blue eyes searching Cory's face. His soft smile was still there, and he had an expression on his face that tugged at the corners of Cory's mind.

"Yes, one of my newest little brothers is definitely Spock's son," Cory replied. "So am I, now."

The boy nodded, then seemed to look off towards the horizon - his face unreadable.

Sken asked, "May I journey to Wales and the Dragon's Nest, Fire? I have felt the absence of my Bond-Mate keenly, and the 'time' does come with unseemingly haste."

Sean raised an eyebrow. "Sa'ren Joel is also fast approaching that 'time', Sken. We understand."

Nathan nodded, "Sure, Sken. What is your code name?"

"I am called 'Deathdealer'. Assassination is my skill," Sken answered.

Nathan nodded. "Permission granted. Take three days to acclimatize yourself, then report to Koth. He is the Master of Assassins."

"Understood. Solkar, do you wish to accompany me?" Sken asked the small Vulcan boy.

Solkar looked up at him, then over at Nathan. "I... I do not know. I am to report to Blue Leader, but I also know that I am granted a week due to my age to get used to a new home. Since the Dragon Division is now a part of Family Clan Short, I... I am torn... I would like to stay here. It is warmer here than Wales, I believe. If I am allowed, Patriarch?" the small child asked Cory hesitantly, his eyes filling with tears and emotions that Cory had no idea where they were coming from.

However, the expression on the boy's face was so familiar to the blond teen that his heart started to break. Where had he felt this before?

Cory looked over at Nathan, "I think that Headquarters could use a Blue adept as we get things sorted out around here, Nath'."

Nathan nodded, "I think that is a good idea. Besides, Rhys is Blue Leader, and he is here at the moment. Swimming, the last I saw of him. I will take you to him in a moment, Solkar."

"Thank you," Solkar mumbled, looking down at his feet.

"I will return with Sken," Zemal said softly. "This place is like hell on a hot day to me!" He looked over at Cory and giggled, "Oh, Patriarch? I'm twelve, by the way. I saw you looking at me funny and I guessed you're not happy with young ones being VSO - I'm actually a little older than Jason. Just small."

"Good things come in small packages?" Nathan grinned.

"I'll leave that to those with partners," Zemal shot back with a wink.

Nathan giggled, then moved to embrace the Andorian. "Sorry you went through that, bro."

"I know. I'm okay - or will be. I'll talk to you later, brother," Zemal said quietly before moving to stand by Sken. He tapped his comm at his neck, "Draco - two for transport to the Nest."

Once they had vanished, Nathan turned to see Sean cuddling a sobbing Solkar. "What's the matter, cariad?" Nathan asked quickly as he came up behind the small boy.

"I... I miss mother..." came the soft reply that was choked with tears.

"THIS is the reason I'm pissy right now, Nath!" Cory sent to Nathan, no small amount of anger in his mental voice. *"He's too young!"*

Nathan looked slightly lost, *"We've got a number of young Blue Level Vulcans in the Nest, Cory! They are NEVER sent if they would break down like this!"*

"Where is your Mommy?" Sean asked softly, trying hard to block the fury he was getting from Cory.

"In the Hall of Memory," Solkar answered with a small wail of grief.

Nathan's hand flew to his mouth, "God..."

Cory glared at Nathan as he quickly sandwiched the young boy between himself and Sean in a loving protective cuddle. "It is proper to release your emotional turmoil at this time," Cory stated softly while ensuring that the authority of his position in Vulcan society was conveyed.

Nathan felt at a loss. He moved apart slightly and tapped his comm. "Draco - I need to know who the FUCK authorised this poor boy to be apart from his family! And I want to know NOW!"

'Grandfather Sarek authorised his transfer last night. He, Sken and Zemal were transported directly upon receipt of those orders,' the Vulcan AI answered immediately.

"He's still in mourning, for Fuck's sake! What the hell was Grandpa thinking! He needs his family!" Nathan all but raged.

'He IS with his family, Fire. He is a ward of the Family of Sarek of the House of Surak. He was orphaned two years ago and he requested training in the VSO then. It helped with his grief. However, he has come to Earth to be with those he knows as he was getting emotive back on Vulcan.'

"Full report on this to Cory's sub-vocal - NOW, Draco!"

'Acknowledged.'

As Cory listened to Draco's report, his eyes seemed to lose the anger they held. Instead, he embraced both Sean and the trembling child tighter. "You're home with us, now. We're your family, okay?" he whispered into the child's pitch black hair.

"Thank you," Solkar trembled.

After a few more moments of cuddling, Solkar shifted slightly in their arms. Cory moved back a touch to allow the boy to turn around. Since Sean was now seated, the boy made himself comfortable on the auburn teen's lap.

Cory ran a finger over Solkar's heavy forehead, then looked questioningly back at Nathan. The other blond shrugged.

Solkar smiled. "I am a quarter Romulan," he explained.

"Is that why you smile so much?" Sean whispered softly.

"No. I smile and laugh because I am not yet seven - Vulcan years, anyway. I am seven as measured with Earth time. I have not yet started my emotional training," Solkar said as he pulled Sean's arms around himself tighter in a move that reminded Sean of something. He couldn't place what it was, though.

"Do you have any family left, other than Grandfather Sarek?" Cory asked softly as he knelt there.

'You thinking what I'm thinking?' Sean sent to Cory, and received a subtle nod in return.

Solkar looked a little nervous at that question. "My mother has died. My father... I do not know the current location of my father," the boy hedged, looking scared at the obvious lie he just made.

"We'll take care of you until you can locate your father, Solkar," Cory whispered, his eyes showing that he knew something was being hidden that was not meant to be revealed yet.

Solkar smiled his gratitude.

"Solkar? Ah, my child - you have arrived... and met some new brothers, I see," Amanda said as she walked up to them all. "I do enjoy taking a morning walk, and I am glad I did this morning."

"Fa'komi!" Solkar cried out happily, leaping from Sean's lap and into her arms in one fluid motion.

Sean raised an eyebrow at Cory, *'Fa'komi?!'*

'As our bratty little brother would say, we need to wait for the right 'time'... something in Solkar's answer tells me that Grandpa has something up his sleeve,' Cory replied.

As she held the small child in her arms, Amanda smiled down at the other three, "Where is Rhys? I will introduce our newest Blue Adapt to his command leader, then I shall keep him with me for a few days. He needs stability for a while."

"In the pool, last I checked, Grandma," Nathan grinned. "And thanks. I was about to get all pissy with Grandpa for what just happened - and I think Cory was about to chew me a new butt-hole!"

Before Amanda could even laugh, a small, silvery giggle was heard from Solkar. A giggle that was so familiar to the three boys now standing with Amanda that it made them look at each other closely.

"Come on, fa'sa'fu; let's go see Rhys," Amanda chuckled to the small bundle of joy now giggling in her arms and repeating 'butt-hole' over and over.

"Ummmmm....." Cory muttered, afraid to express the thoughts going through his head at that moment.

"What I'm thinking..." Nathan and Sean said in unison, then they all giggled nervously at each other.

"Well, I need to call Russ and Sara," Cory said as he shook off the weird feeling. "Gotta ask if they'll come on over to keep control of our monsters while we're away."

Sean giggled, "Be ready for a long talk then, babe! Sara loves talking!"

Cory shrugged and grinned.

Meanwhile:

It was quiet in the Dining Room when Spock closed the door behind him. At first it seemed unusual considering the Clan's penchant for the culinary art of 'Food Sampling'. Extensive Food Sampling, if Cory's statements were anything to go by, Spock thought to himself as he started towards the doors to the Rec Room. He felt a whisper of a presence in his mind and turned to see Teri at the door to the Kitchen. She was wiping her soapy hands on a towel and smiling at him.

"Finding it unnaturally quiet, Spock?" she asked with a low chuckle.

"Indeed," Spock nodded as he turned to head towards her. "I was under the impression that the Clan randomly spent time in this room between meals - what was the term? Ah - snacking to build up energy for the hard work of eating a full meal. That was Cory's phrase."

Teri laughed. "They do snack a lot, but between meals, snacks are to be eaten in other parts of the Compound. This room is where they are to be dressed for meals and eat with manners. Outside of the doors of this room, they can eat like pigs if they so choose. Most have learned that taking an uncontrolled advantage of the free snacks will lead to bellyaches. After finding that we don't treat those minor self-inflicted problems with the same concern as with genuine problems, they keep their feasting within reasonable limits."

"Logical," Spock said softly as he sat down. "And thus this room becomes a haven for those adults who wish to talk while still within reach of the children should they require us?"

"Yes. We all take advantage of it. On occasion they will use this room for communal homework or Clan business, due to its size, but mostly in the mornings, it stands empty of the kids."

Spock nodded his understanding.

"How do you think our two boys will do with the tests?" Teri asked curiously as she sat down next to the Vulcan man.

"I expect both Kevin and Jude to be challenged in their own way with the test, yet I do not think Sa'ren will be stretched by them," Spock answered easily.

"Kevin is taking it too? Good. It's about time that boy did something to show himself he's more than capable of greatness," Teri said with approval. "He's a little sweetie, but he still has a lower sense of self-worth than his brother has."

"He and Sa'ren are alike there, Teri. However, they are lacking in just those areas where the other is strong - so they are both far greater together than they are apart. In fact, they exceed the sum of their individual personalities when they combine."

"I've noticed," Teri said softly as she looked towards the door to Main CIC.

They both continued to talk softly for another ten minutes, but the CIC door opening to let in Joel brought their attention from their enjoyable discussion quickly.

"Something wrong, sweetheart?" Teri asked with concern as she did not expect that Joel had finished already.

However, he had.

"Nope, Mama! I'm good. Dad? Are there any more tests? That was fun!" Joel smiled as he ran over to plop himself on Teri's lap. "Number 5 was real clever in how it asked the question, but once I saw the trick, the answer was simple. Number 34 was tricky, but as it's just an opinion not based on facts and technology, I soon got that done. The rest were easy-peasy!"

Spock smiled at him, "I expected you would find it easy, my Child. There are no more tests, however - not for entrance to the Academy. I will forward your answers to the Admiral with those of Jude and Kevin once they have finished, and then we shall see what the results are."

Joel gave his father a sunny smile, then pulled his mother's arms tighter around himself to enjoy as much of her hugs as he could, before she left for the weekend break.

Teri smiled and kissed the top of the little boy's head before continuing her talk with Spock. Joel listened with interest, and with a knowing smile on his lips.

Five minutes later, the door opened again to admit Jude. "I've finished, Pop," he said with a smile.

"There were a few I couldn't answer - command choices and stuff. I don't think I'd be good at commanding anyway. The engineering ones were a breeze, though. And the tactical questions were enjoyable."

Spock raised an eyebrow with quiet surprise, "Well done, my son. Please, join us while we wait for Kevin."

Jude nodded amiably before taking a chair close by and opening his arms to Joel.

Not willing to pass up an offered lap and cuddles, Joel slipped down from his mother's lap and pounced onto Jude's, then the two boys started quietly going over the questions together while the two adults continued their own chat.

Kevin did not appear until almost a full fifty minutes had passed since the tests had began, and his face was concerned as he entered the room.

"What's wrong, Kevvy?" Joel asked quickly as he ran over to embrace him.

"Well," Kevin hedged slightly, but then he sighed. "I don't think I did to good, Sa'r. I love reading, but there were words there I'd not read before. Had to sound them out to recognize them, and some I just didn't get. Not sure if my answers are going to make a lot of sense with those questions."

"Don't worry, Kev," said Teri gently as she came over to them both. "As long as you did the best you could, then that is all anyone here could expect. We're going to be proud of you no matter what the results are. Anyway, I'm certain you did exceptionally well."

Kevin smiled slightly, then shrugged, "If I failed, I can always try again. That right, Uncle Spock?"

Spock nodded. "There are many outstanding officers in the Fleet who failed the entrance exam on more than one occasion. The desire to succeed drove them to keep trying, and that drive is again something we value in the Fleet."

Joel grinned, "And if you do need to do it again, I'll help you before to get ready. Remember, this was a surprise for us all."

"Yeah, but you're an egg-head! I bet you've passed no problems!" Kevin giggled.

Joel blinked, then cocked his head to one side. "Egg-head? My head's not made of eggs, Kev," he said seriously.

Cory put the phone back on the hook and smiled over at Sean, who was seated in the Quiet Area of the Rec Room. "They'll be here in an hour with DeeJ and the others. Timmy and Pauly will be pleased," he said as he sat down and cuddled up close to Sean. They glanced around lazily at their brothers and even a few of their new Dragon sisters who were chilling out around the Rec - and listened to the squeals of childlike laughter coming from the outside where Timmy and Belar were 'holding court' over the combined might of the Tribe and Rugrats.

"Oh no... here comes Mom... hide me!" Sean giggled suddenly as Teri walked in carrying a rather put out looking Joel. Kevin, however, was laughing madly at their side with Spock and Jude looking on with amusement.

"I KNEW I was missin' something.... I'm overdue for Elf Cuddles!!!!" Cory exclaimed as he slapped his forehead.

Sean's eyes narrowed, however, when he caught the expression on his Vulcan brother's face. "What's wrong, Joel?"

Joel looked at him seriously, "Kevin said something illogical, and he says it's not illogical but he won't explain it, and I'm confused and they're laughing at me and no-one'll tell me anything! My head is NOT made of eggs, Kev!"

Jude couldn't contain himself and so fell over laughing and clutching at his ribcage.

"Mama!" Joel wailed. "Why are they picking on me?!" he asked as a tear threatened to fall.

"Chill, guys," Cory said seriously. "Come over here and tell me exactly what he said, lil' bro."

Teri put Joel down and he ran over to cuddle in on his brother's lap. "We were doing the Starfleet entrance exams and I finished and went to tell Daddy and then Jude finished right after me, so we talked, then Kevvy came in a little later. He said I was an 'egg-head' but I don't know why and he won't tell me; he just laughs and laughs and Jude laughs too and Daddy is trying not to laugh and so is Mama and... my head isn't made of eggs... is it?"

Cory kissed Joel's forehead. "Nope... 'egg-head' just means you're really smart. It's something old people came up with. I think we need to look up the meaning on the 'net to really understand it."

"I think a certain Patriarch is skating close to the line with that remark," Teri mock glared as Joel's face filled with comprehension. "I understand it, so does that mean I'm old?... I'd think before you answer that one, Cory."

Cory tilted his head in concentration, then with a huge grin he answered, "Yes, Ma'am."

"Joel, please move over onto Sean's lap," Teri said as she threw a glance at Spock. Spock nodded and glanced back as Joel curiously did so.

Cory *did* try to get up and run - we have to admit that - but against the speed of a full grown Vulcan, he stood no chance. He was soon on his back on the floor with his arms being gently held over his head and his belly being assaulted by a vengeful Teri.

"So calling Mama old is not a wise thing to say?" Joel asked Sean curiously as Cory's cries for mercy went unheeded.

"Nope, it's not," Sean nodded as he grinned down at his red faced husband.

Kevin moved over to sit with them and watch, while Jude continued to laugh holding his ribs. "Sorry, Sa'r. I wanted to 'splain, but it was so funny and I couldn't stop laughing!"

"S'okay, Kev," Joel grinned as Cory's cries reached an octave only a Vulcan could hear.

"Do you agree to respect me and not call nor infer I'm old, young man?" Teri chuckled as she let up on the torture.

Cory nodded his head, the twinkle in his eyes giving away the fact he had no intentions of complying with the demand for very long.

"I do not believe him, Teri. I believe we should continue with this course of action a while longer," Spock said, his face completely void of expression and emotion.

Teri looked up and raised an eyebrow while Cory began to look nervous at this sudden shift in the normal 'play-war' he usually had going with his Mom. "For how much longer, Spock?"

"Another half an hour should suffice," Spock said after a moment's thought. "... or so."

"MOM!!! DAAAAAD!!!" Cory exclaimed, hoping Teri wouldn't take Spock's advice seriously.

Teri tapped her finger to her chin in an over-exaggeration of thought. "It does have merit, but my arms will get tired to do so that long."

"Sa'ren could help," Spock offered.

"DAAAAAAAD! Nooooooooooooo....!"

"Ummm, no Daddy, I likes my Cory. I don't wanna do that to 'im," Joel shook his head.

"Then we shall have to resume this at a later date," Spock decided finally.

Teri nodded, "Agreed."

"There is a God!" Cory breathed before giggling as his mother poked her tongue out at him.

Joel's stomach rumbled loudly at that point. So loud, in fact, that Joel stared down at it in shock. "How can you be empty? I ate half a pig for breakfast!"

"I told you to eat a whole one!" Cory giggled as he was finally released by Spock.

"Stay here, Sa'ren. I will return momentarily," Spock said with a small smile at his son as he got up from his knees and left towards the Kitchen.

Cory quickly piled back in next to Sean and pulled Kevin onto his lap, while Teri sat down on the opposite sofa.

There was another very loud rumble from Joel's midsection.

"It's not going to escape and eat everyone is it, Joel?" Jude sniggered as he managed to get himself into a seated position and crossed his legs on the floor.

Joel was still staring at his belly, "I hope not. Belly, behave! You can't need more!"

"Uh, Joel?" Kevin murmured. "It's not going to answer you..."

growl

"On second thought, never mind," Kevin decided as he too stared at Joel's belly.

"What do you want?" Joel asked his stomach, playing it up for all he was worth.

*growl**bubble*

"Oh! But I don't think I should have any more of that with Mama here, Belly. Kev might be embarrassed!"

*growl**GROWL*

"I said no, Belly!"

"What can't it have, Elf?" Sean asked curiously, completely sucked in with the play going on on his lap.

"American Sausage," Joel answered automatically, still looking down at his stomach - sorry, his 'Belly'.

Kevin blushed five shades of red, then giggled.

"Hmmm -- my favourite dessert!" Cory quipped, causing Sean to match Kevin's shade of skin tone.

Teri stood up and rolled her eyes, "I believe I shall help Spock do whatever it is he has gone to do."

Jude also stood up and giggled, "And I believe I will find Billy Joe for a... um, 'snack'!"

Joel watched them both leave, then:

ggggrrrrroooowwwwwlllll

"Ah... okay, I'm really getting hungry now," Joel said as his face took on a pained expression. "This is not right, is it?"

"You're not turning Mikyvis, are you?" Sean asked semi-seriously. "They make Cory and I put together look like picky eaters."

"Nope, I'm not going to be a Mikyvis," Joel replied absently, then he shivered. "I'm just hungry. Veeerrry hungry," he added as he quickly shoved Sean's thumb into his mouth and began to suck, a grin on his face.

"No wonder Kev is always grinning!" Sean said as he smiled at Joel. "The rest of my body is getting jealous of my thumb!"

Joel was about to pull Sean's thumb back out and say something when Cory stepped in, seeing where Joel's thoughts immediately went to. "He's kidding, Elf. If 'other' parts of his body are jealous, I'll deal with them. You just enjoy his thumb..."

Joel nodded with relief - and continued to suck. *'Kinda helps me keep from feeling hungry,'* he sent to Kevin.

Kevin grinned, *'Sean's right, though. You always make me grin - and not just because you like my 'sausage'.'*

A blast of love hammered down the link into Kevin, making the little boy's eyes roll slightly.

Cory snapped his fingers, "Remember what Uncle Bones said? Joel, you're going to get mood swings, a huge appetite and his sex drive increase... Kev will deal with the last 'problem' - won't you, Kev?"

Kevin blushed and grinned foolishly, "Uh huh. It's a tough job, but I'll willingly do it!"

Spock walked back in then, with Teri right behind him. He was carrying a steaming bowl of something, while the mug Teri had gave off a rather heavy scent. Cory wrinkled his nose at the smell coming from the mug that Teri placed on the coffee table. Kevin and Sean, however, felt their mouths begin to water at the smell. "Ewww, what's that?" Cory asked, looking at Spock.

Spock smiled, "Bar-kas theris."

"Spice Tea? That's Vulcan Spice Tea?! I thought it was meant to be a delicacy! It smells god-awful!"

After allowing a slight chuckle to come out, Spock answered, "I have found that Humans fall into two groups. They either love it or hate it. You obviously will hate it. I believe Kevin and Sean will love it."

"What's that?" Sean asked, tearing his eyes from the mug on the table and to the bowl Spock was holding. It was filled with an opaque, thick colourless liquid.

"Plomeek soup," Spock said as he sat down next to Cory and gestured for Joel to join him.

The little boy shimmied over the others to sit on his father's lap, and the bowl was placed before him and held steady by Spock's strong hand.

Cory leaned forwards slightly, "Doesn't smell of anything."

"It would be bland and tasteless to you," Spock said seriously. "Vulcan sense of smell and taste is far greater than that of humans. The flavour of plomeek soup is so subtle that only a few humans can truly taste the smallest aspect of it. To us, however..."

"YUM!" Joel exclaimed after his first spoonful had vanished. "Wow! I kinda remember your memories and how you like this, Daddy, but... YUM!"

Cory wrinkled his nose again as the spicy smell from the tea wafted closer. "Sean! Do you HAVE to steal our brother's drink? Especially when you're sitting right next to me?!"

"Yes," Sean said dreamily as he sipped the tea, then offered it to Kevin. This made it so much worse for Cory, for Kevin was ON his lap.

"Wow..." Kevin grinned after taking a small sip. "Try this, Sa'r!"

Joel reached with his free hand and took the mug.

"Mmmm.... YUMMY!"

"MOM!" Cory whined. "Tell them! That stuff is... is..."

"Try some, Cory! It tastes way better than it smells!" Joel said happily as he offered his drink to his brother, delight in his eyes at being able to share something.

Cory's face became a comic mix of distaste for the offered drink and love for his little brother. He reached and took the mug, "Okay, but I can't promise I'll like it... oh, it's rank!" he groused as he raised the mug to his lips.

They all watched as he took a sip...

... then his face became confused as all hell.

"How can something that smells like a pair of Sean's week old socks taste so *good*?!" he asked no-one in particular. Then, "Get lost, Sean, this is mine!" he said as Sean tried to go for the mug himself.

Joel giggled and continued to spoon the filling soup into his mouth as he watched his husband and two brothers fight over the mug - with Cory holding his nose the entire time.

"It must be a blond reaction," Spock mused seriously. "That is the first time I have seen a human both hate and love spice tea."

JJ looked up from the game of chess he was losing to Xain, "Did you just make a blond joke?"

"Yes. Was it delivered correctly?"

"Oh, you bet!" JJ giggled. "Oh, you do realise that no-one has the balls to throw you in the pool for doing so, don't you?"

"Yes," Spock said, a twinkle in his eyes as he glanced around the room at the other blonds who were throwing looks at each other. It was obvious they were trying to work out if retaliation was even possible here. "Yes, I do."

"Daddy, is there any more soup?" Joel asked softly as he watched his Kevin succeed in drinking the last drop of the tea, much to Cory's and Sean's disappointment.

Spock smiled as he hugged his son's back tighter against his chest. "Yes there is. Doctor McCoy and I made a large quantity last night before the events started in Utah."

"Why? You think some of my brothers will wanna have some?" Joel asked curiously. "I don't think they'll like it much."

"For you, my Child. You need the protein and energy that Vulcan foods can supply. There are certain nutrients and proteins that are found only in fruits, vegetables and the animals of Vulcan that we need. We can utilize non-Vulcan foods and drinks to emulate those missing key pieces of our diet, but it uses more energy to do so than to simply eat Vulcan food. In your case, you need to gain more fats, energy and protein and not use up more to gain less from Human foods," Spock explained gently.

"So I get weaker if I eat human food?" Joel asked, looking disappointed.

Spock shook his head, "No, but where Cory would gain 100% from an item, you would gain less than 73.43% from the same item. I do not want to take the joy of eating human foods from you, Sa'ren. I only wish you to have Vulcan foods as a supplement. The Enterprise carries a large stock of ingredients, and the Compound here has some of them. Xain's home has far more, for until you arrived he was the sole Vulcan in permanent residence in the Clan. Now, the Clan's stores have been bolstered."

"What about Vulcan meats?" Joel asked.

Spock smiled, "Orlando has many animal sanctuaries, and some are exclusively for Off-World creatures. We have contacted them and arranged for fresh meat to be delivered here as and when required. There are few Vulcans living in Florida, but there has been that arrangement for those of them that had children with them on Earth. The same is now applied to you. Xain can explain more, should you wish. He has lived here longer. If you will move back onto your brother's lap, I will go and get some more soup for you - unless you wish to have the next course I have prepared instead?"

"Oh! New food! Yes please!" Joel beamed happily. "My belly is still a little grumbly! Can you get some more tea as well, please? My brothers drank it all!"

"I shall," Spock smiled softly as he watched Timmy and Ross enter - obviously looking for the nearest plate of cookies. "I shall also bring them a mug each as well. That way, they do not have a need to fight and cause a scene by acting in a manner more reminiscent of a pack of starved mor'grilam."

Joel laughed as he bounced over onto Cory's lap, sharing it with Kevin as his father stood and left the room along with Teri.

"We ain't *THAT* bad!" Cory giggled as he accepted another cuddle partner onto his lap.

"DAADDDYYYYYYYYYY?????"

"No, Timmy," Cory giggled as the little Fireball came zooming over.

Timmy's face scrunched up, "How'd you know what I wus gunna ask?"

"I know you, Timmy," Cory giggled some more.

"But I wanna mogwai!"

"Kyle, tell your sons NO!" Cory said as his mind processed the question. "Timmy, you know what could happen... and we can't count on everybody knowing not to feed them at the wrong time and not to get them wet. You might know better, but a new kid wouldn't, and then there'd be a real mess."

Timmy cocked his head to one side and stared at his dad, "You're silly, Daddy. Not 'for real' mogwai - one of the Vulcan ones Gramps was talkin' ta Unca Joel 'bout!"

Levi walked over then and asked, "Has Dilly been playing pranks again, Uncle Cory?"

Timmy shook his head as he looked up at Levi, "No, Uncle Leevee. Daddy's just bein' silly!"

Due to the steam now pouring from Cory's ears as his brain attempted - badly, but attempted - to switch gears for a second time in less than the standard half hour his brain normally required, Joel explained instead. "Mor'gril, or Mor'grilam if there's more than one, are a type of wolverine-like animal on Vulcan, Timmy. They can sense those with strong mental powers and are able to communicate with their packs over great distances. They're also scavengers and carrion eaters; always fighting over the food they find."

"Oh, so they're like Freddie?" Timmy asked. "Him an' his pack like helpin' keep bad animals away from here... He's a nice wolfie."

Levi's eyes went distant for a moment, as if listening to a whisper only he could hear. Only thing was, Joel could hear it too.

"Freddie?" Cory managed. "You didn't tell me you made friends with a wolf called Freddie, Timmy."

Timmy shrugged, "If I told you about ALL my friends, it'll take all day, Daddy. I gotta play *sometime*!"

Cory shook his head, and then noticed the strange look on Levi's face. He then heard Joel murmur, "Ooooh, you sure, Guardian?"

Cory looked at Sean, who shrugged.

A second later and it seemed that Joel had his answer, for he again murmured in unison with Levi, "We'll take care of them."

There was another pause. "Oh, my cousins? Sure, I'll call them over," Joel said with yet more understanding. Then he shouted across the room, "Jamie!!! Jacob!!! Beau!!! The Guardian has something to ask ya!!!"

"You..." Beau started.

"...called us...." Jacob chimed in.

"...Lil'elf?" Jamie finished as he, his twin and Beau skidded to a stop before the sofa. Justy and Dean were only a step or two behind them.

Joel smiled at them and said, "The Guardian says there's a pair of twins on Vulcan who've been cast out by their family 'cos they're different and they have no-one to care for them any more. He says they'll die if they don't have new parents - parents who'd understand them. He says only you three can understand them as you have a mind like they do."

(Jamie) "We..."

(Jacob) "are..."

(Beau) "too..."

(Jamie) "young..."

(Jacob) "to..."

(Beau) "be..."

(Jamie) "daddies..."

(Jacob) "emotionally."

"Will you three PLEASE stop that? You're making me dizzy!" Justy giggled as he held the sides of his head.

Joel shook his head, "You are not too young for these two. They need you, guys."

Beau stepped forwards a bit, and said softly, "But... what if we mess up? Can't we just be their brothers and someone better be their dads?"

Levi's eyes started to glow white, as did Joel's. Together they spoke, but their voice was really just one person's:

"...//The twain of which I speak are the First in a long Time to arise on Vulcan. The last to arise were the Vulcans themselves. Now, they do share a world with a new proto-sentient race. These two are the first - but they are not humanoid. They will be as brothers to you, but they are not like any that you have encountered before. This is guided evolution, and you three have been chosen to help them form. Do you accept?//..."

All three boys glanced at Justy, and with grins on their faces answered in perfect unison. "You ain't done anything bad yet, Guardian, so we guess that we must be able to do it. We'll do our best to do what you think we can do for them. We'll accept your offer."

Justy looked over at Dean, "You know what? I'm not sure that was any better!"

Dean giggled, "You love it and you know it, Jus! There's nothing that your bros could do to make you angry."

Joel spoke again, "...//**Three things I must tell you - First: Male and female they are, yet their minds are as one. Second: Sentient they are, but they shall not be at the same level as a human. They shall have, when matured, the level of a three or four year old child. It shall be many hundreds of generations before they shall ascend to the level of their elder cousins, the Vulcans. Third: They have already imprinted on a Vulcan, and so can understand in Vulcan. They will imprint on you, and therefore will be able to understand as Human. Now, prepare yourselves. The Clan now gains two new siblings, and the Clan takes on a responsibility rarely deeded - to guide and form a new race in its infancy...//...**"

Cory rolled his eyes. "I swear, that's the LAST time I skip practice to go to the mall...."

"I told you," Sean muttered with a grin, "but would you listen? Nooooo.... I said we'd be in trouble for skipping practice. I said we'd regret it, but would you listen?!"

Cory was about to respond when his eyes went wide. "Sean, you know what? I didn't remember everything about what we did that day until just now! I can remember the whole day now!"

There were smiles on everyone's faces as they heard Cory say that, and Joel turned in his lap quickly to kiss him.

Then things got a bit more serious...

Joel stood up from Cory's lap and moved forwards to stand with an open space before him. Out of the corner of his eye he saw his parents watching, more food and drink on trays in their hands. However, it was the whisper in his mind he now focused on. A whisper from his Sword - his Broken Sword... */As you called me, so call them. As you summoned me, so summon them/*

Joel knelt down and held out his arms with his palms facing down. "Shal vutau H'rak heh Keshta," he said firmly, and the air before him, and right under his palms, started to become as liquid.

Levi's eyes widened, and Kyle, who had come up behind his son, whispered, "Your Friend doing that?"

Levi mutely shook his head. Together, he and Kyle looked over at Quint who was standing by the Doctor. Both the little Time Lord and the Q-boy shook their heads as well.

"I call. You here. I summon. You come. I am the Sa'ren, the Hand of Forever, the Blade of Surak. H'rak and Keshta, it is time to come home," Joel whispered, yet his voice carried to every ear there.

"Uhhhhh...." could be heard from multiple kids as they all looked between themselves.

There was a movement in the air-liquid before Joel, then two forms suddenly and shockingly resolved themselves into two wolfish seeming puppies that stood about a foot and a half off the ground. Puppies with deep red/brown eyes, dark red fur, curled sabre-like teeth and claws, and long whip-like tails.

"Hello," Joel said as he looked into their eyes and saw a quick intelligence there. "I'm Sa'ren."

They licked his face, and then turned on instinct towards Jamie, Jacob and Beau.

The air seemed to ripple as if a breeze had blown a light mist in front of them all, then:

'Dads. Dads. Dads. Dads. Dads...' both young creatures started sending as they bounded over and piled the three ten year olds to the ground and started to fuss and lick them with a vengeance.

"Pouncing Paybacks...." Sean giggled.

The two pups looked over at Sean. *'Beta Master? Yes, Beta-Master. Alpha-Master's Mate. Bounce both? Yes. Little Brown One bounce? No. Move him? Yes. Little Brown One mate of Sa'ren. Sa'ren must move. Little Brown One Strength? Yes. Then Sa'ren no must move. Strength is Strong. Bounce Strength too? Yes. Now? Now.'*

Sean glanced at Cory, resignation in his eyes as he realized just how much of a perfect match the two newest additions were to the Triple Terrors. "Oh crap..."

Sean, Cory and Kevin found themselves swamped by the two young pups, and two tongues seemed to be everywhere at once.

Kyle giggled and turned to Joel, "That's not speech their sending, is it?"

"Nope," Joel shook his head. "Guardian said they can't use words as we use them. They have thought patterns of very young kids, and it's just by the imprint they took from the Double Js and Beau, and from the Vulcan they came across back Home that they can think our way as well. We're adding 'words' to what their thoughts are when they send them out. They broadcast generally and pick up generally too. They can't be lied to. What we're thinking at them, they 'hear' as we 'hear' them. Psionic."

"What are they? Originally, I mean," Dean asked.

"Mor'gril, originally. A type of Vulcan wolverine," Joel supplied. "These two never were really just mor'gril, though. They're more."

"Kinda like my favourite little brothers," Justy commented as he held his arms open for a triple cuddle.

"They..." Beau started.

"...are going..." Jacob continued.

"... to fit in great!" Jamie finished with a wide smile that the other two shared.

"Yes they are!" Dean giggled as he circled around to sandwich the three new daddies between himself and Justy. "No fair hogging the best triple cuddle in the Universe, Jus!"

'Bonding without us. Not acceptable. Must bounce Dads and Dads pack? Yes. Now? Now... wait. Lick Strength again. Done. Now.'

Dean went arse over tip as the two pups barrelled into him and started nosing under his tee-shirt to wash his chest.

Teri looked over at Spock. "I swear, there are times that I think those three boys are sharing a single brain. Now there are two more?"

Spock turned to regard Teri seriously. "The twins do share a mind. They are two yet one. Beau joined with them, and now two in one is three. Yet one. They do share a mind - and yes, now there are two more. We need more le-matya meat. They will require feeding as well, I believe."

Le-matya? Boy's Father has dead le-matya? I-Cheya sent to Spock as he ambled up behind him.

Spock looked down with surprise. "This is the first time you have spoken to me. Sa'ren has told me of this. Why has it taken you this long to speak with me?"

Boy needed Father. Boy is First. Always. Is le-matya dead? Or I kill?

"It is dead. I have saved half the carcass for you, your mother and Marjur. It is outside the building waiting for you," Spock offered helpfully.

I take pups and feed. I take Three Mind Boys and teach them Parent of Mor'gril

"That is acceptable," Spock agreed with approval. He turned and addressed the laughing group with the two mor'gril. "Nephews. Please go with I-Cheya so that he may show H'rak and Keshta the feeding practices for Vulcan animals in the Clan."

"Which is which?" Kevin asked suddenly.

One of the two mor'gril came over and rolled onto its back. He was obviously a boy. *'H'rak. Good H'rak. Pet H'rak?'*

Obviously, Keshta came over to join her brother for the petting that Kevin started to give. Joel giggled, "H'rak is from Wuh'rak, meaning 'First'. Keshta is from Pukeshta, meaning 'Born'. They, together, are the 'First Born' of their new race."

After a few seconds more of belly tickles, however, both pups heard a quiet huffing from the Sehlat cub. Then both mor'gril rolled back to their feet and walked over to sniff the far larger Vulcan bear.

Three Mind Boys. Come. Your children need feed. You learn. Come I-Cheya all but commanded.

"Don't argue with the Sehlat, guys. He doesn't need a pool to soak you!" Teri said with a smile.

"Okay Aunt Teri!" the three boys chorused as one.

As they trooped out after the ambling Sehlat and two hyper pups, Teri heard I-Cheya send out generally, yet to no-one in particular, *I-Cheya Legend grows. Soon all fear Wonderful I-Cheya. All bow at I-Cheya's Paws! Mwhahahahaha...*

"I was not aware Sehlat had egos," Spock commented as he moved over to where Joel had sat back down to eagerly await his next Vulcan meal.

Teri chuckled, "Obviously that one does." Then she saw Marjur amble past, and he looked over and nodded at Spock's back. "Make that they all do, Spock!"

As Spock sat down and placed the covered tray on the table before him, most of the guys who had assembled to meet and greet the newcomers moved off again. Kyle and Levi, however, went over to the Doctor and Quint. "Where's your dad, Quint?" Kyle asked seriously.

"Visiting an old 'friend'," Quint grinned evilly.

Kyle thought for a second, then grinned. "Wow, couldn't happen to a nicer guy!"

"Velnis has decided to visit Xanus on the Moonbase Archive today as well - what a co-incidence! Must be Semion's shouting..." Galli giggled. "Poor, poor Semion!"

"I almost feel sorry for him... almost," Kyle said with a grin.

"Why don't you like him, Daddy?" Levi asked in wonder.

Kyle answered Levi seriously. "Him and I don't see eye-to-eye on just about everything. I believe Granma Lizzy would call him a 'Pompous Arse' on his nicer days."

Quint giggled, then he grew a little more serious. "Why do you want to see Dad?"

"Joel. What just happened? We all felt it. That's nothing like anything I've felt since I became this way. Do you guys know?" Kyle asked, suddenly just as serious.

Quint shook his head, "Don't know. But something was going on, that's for sure."

Galli sighed, "He is the Hand of Forever. You heard him. I don't know when that happened, but... I think it has something to do with the armour. I don't know everything about it, but Joel wore it once, and it may be having an effect already."

"Is he changing?" Levi asked with concern.

"No... I think... He shall always be himself. That is what is worrying. He is the Shaper already, but does something lie with him ALSO being 'the Sa'ren Blade of Surak' that only the Guardian knows about?" the Doctor asked rhetorically.

Meanwhile, Joel was digging into his new plate of food, and Cory was sniffing the air with his mouth watering. "What is that?" he asked Spock.

"Le-metya," the Vulcan answered.

Cory poked his finger into the green sauce that was all over the meat on Joel's plate and tasted it before Spock could stop him. "Wow! Nice!"

Spock tapped his communicator, "Doctor McCoy to the Rec Room. Bring Di-Valnozin with you, please."

"What damn fool has been eating raw Vulcan meat?!" came the sudden, irritated answer. *"On my way... if it's that Cory, I'll turn his hair green by the time I'm done..."* Then the signal cut off.

Cory went pale, and Sean asked quickly with concern, "What's wrong, Dad? Is Cory going to be okay?"

Spock patted Cory's arm gently, "He will be fine. Once the good Doctor has finished with him, that is. Vulcan meat is usually served simply warmed to children. It is therefore running in blood, as this is here."

Cory looked at the 'sauce'. "That's blood? It tastes so... so... nice!"

Spock nodded, "Once you have the Di-Valnozin you can have your own plate."

"What's that for, Uncle?" Kevin asked curiously.

"Vulcan blood is green. So is the blood of all creatures on Vulcan. It is copper based, not iron as is yours. You are able to process a certain amount of copper, but not in the amount that Cory just had. It is not lethal, but it will make you very ill. Di-Valnozin is a counter for a human ingesting the blood of a Vulcan creature," Spock explained.

"Do I have to have the shot every time I want to share my little brother's food, Dad?" Cory asked sadly.

Spock nodded his head, "Yes, although one application would last a week."

Joel kept on eating, and his face was now more green than usual due to the 'sauce'.

"Carnivore!" Sean giggled at him as he rubbed Cory's back soothingly.

"Don't care! Nice! Get the shot, then you can share!" Joel giggled between bites of the green tinged meat.

McCoy entered then, and bustled over. "I knew it. Boy, if I had not just had the best cup of coffee I've tasted in the last five years, you'd be in for a full physical! Arm, now!" he ordered as he got to them.

Cory meekly held out his right arm, and McCoy pressed the hypospray into it. "Anyone else?" he asked, looking around.

Kevin and Sean offered their arms.

"You three need to read up on the Starfleet Medical texts that's required reading in the first semester at the academy! Never eat alien food without knowing what it'll do to you first!" McCoy said seriously to them before wandering off towards the Kitchen, obviously after another cup of that wonderful coffee he'd just been drinking.

Quint giggled over at them from where he, Galli and the two Mikyvis were laughing at Cory. Quint then snapped his fingers. "There. You can eat what you like from Vulcan. No more of those 'shot' things needed," he giggled before rolling his eyes at them.

"Who is gonna tell Uncle Bones that he don't get the fun of shooting us?" Sean giggled.

"No-one," Cory said simply. "He enjoys it, so why spoil it for him? Joel - come on, bro! We're hungry too!"

"Go kill your own le-metya! This is mine! Allllll mine!" Joel giggled playfully, but he did wriggle across slightly so that all four boys could start eating.

Joel and Kevin were in deep discussion using their bond-link. Occasionally, they would glance over at Sean and Cory. Each time they did so, the two older teens would trade nervous glances.

"Hon, I hate to say this..." Sean said softly, "but they seem to be taking lessons from you, and that could be really scary."

"I was just thinking the same about you," Cory replied with a small giggle. "Wonder what they're up to?"

Neither teen had long to wait. They watched as Kevin got up and whispered something to Artemus, then they saw him run off to move a large armchair into the quietest corner of the Rec Room. Joel, however, moved straight for them, and while Artemus gathered up her sister and four brother cats there to give them orders, little Joel simply stopped in front of them both and reached to take their hands. Without saying a word, yet with his cute little face green with an obvious deep blush, Joel started to tug gently to get them to stand and follow him towards the armchair that Kevin was nervously standing by.

"Here we go," Cory whispered to Sean as they allowed themselves to be guided by their brother.

Once at the chair, Joel arranged them both, then he and Kevin claimed a lap to sit on. The six G-Cats were now spread out in such a way as to stop anyone getting closer than ten feet to the armchair.

"What's on your minds?" Sean whispered into Kevin's hair as the small boy cuddled in against his chest.

Joel blushed deeper, then poked Kevin in the stomach gently, "Your idea, Kevvy. 'm too 'barrassed to say..."

Kevin, his face also flaming, giggled and shifted about enough to be able to look Cory in the eyes. "Umm... earlier you said we should speak to Sean about... stuff... since both Sa'r and I like, you know... being bottoms and stuff..." he managed to murmur, his face getting redder and redder. He then poked Joel and sent him a pleading look.

Joel sighed and whispered, "Yeah, what Kev said. But that means we've gotta both be tops too, so we was thinking... could you *both* speak to us about... stuff? Please?"

Sean managed to stifle his giggles as Cory's blush immediately matched Kevin's. "Sure thing, bros," Sean replied. "We gotta help you be safe."

"Thanks," Kevin whispered.

Joel was smiling through his own blush as he turned around on Cory's lap to be able to see him properly. "I could feel your red cheeks on the back of my head," he giggled cutely. "You don't have to be shy, Cor - we're not gonna say things to embarrass you to our brothers... we're embarrassed enough just asking!"

"Sean's just better at talking 'bout personal stuff than me," Cory said as he gave Joel a squeeze. "Just thinking about talking about it makes me blush!"

"... and get a stiffy," Joel commented with a giggle as he wiggled his bottom on Cory's lap. "Same here, Blondie," he admitted, looking down at his tented pair of shorts.

Kevin traded a look with Sean, and they both rolled their eyes.

Joel noticed. "Hey! You're as bad as me, Kev! And..." he reached over and pushed Kevin enough to confirm something to himself, "... and so're you, Sean! Stop rolling your eyes!"

Cory managed a giggle, then, "So, what's your first question, guys?"

Later, in the Rec Room:

"Joel?" Galli asked as he walked up to where Joel and Kevin were cuddling on Spock's lap. Teri was on the other side of the sofa with Sean on her lap. Cory was currently out of the room talking with Brant and Matthew Parnell.

"Joel, we're going to need you for something in a moment," the little Time Lord said as he was quickly pulled up onto Spock's lap as well.

"What?" Joel asked as he continued to trace patterns on Kevin's alabaster cheek.

"You're needed in Utah. It's one of those Time things," Galli smiled as Spock gave him a kiss on the forehead.

Joel smiled, "Okay."

"Dad?" Galli looked up at Spock, "have you got the link going with Mum yet?"

"Yes," Spock answered.

"What link?" Sean asked curiously.

"I explained to your mother that, due to the issues both of us face in raising you all as our children-in-common, a mild Mind-Link would be a logical step to take. She agreed. It will be of help while you are away on your break, and especially later when Sa'ren enters Pon Farr," Spock explained easily as Joel and Galli slipped down from his lap.

Sean wrinkled his brow as he considered the implications. "I guess that kinda makes sense...."

Joel, however, had an 'I told you so' expression on his face. He smiled at his dad and Kevin and said, "Good idea. Kevvy, wanna come with Galli too?"

Kevin shook his head, "Hugs. Hugs good. Vulcans give great hugs... besides, I wanna ask your daddy something, and I want it to be a secret... something only a Vulcan can tell me."

"Owww... I don't like secrets!" Joel pouted playfully.

"You'll like THIS one," Kevin said as he smiled wickedly at his little husband.

"Ah," Spock noted absently. "It must be regarding Vulcan erogenous zones. Go with your brother, Sa'ren. Kevin and I will discuss this in depth."

A blushing Joel quickly decided that following the Doctor at that point might save him from more embarrassment.

"This is Commander Adam Casey. We are currently setting up for a full scale Military invasion of a hostile base holding many Genesis Children. The Special Forces division is asking for any help that can be given. Please contact Daileass with what you can do. Thank you."

"Joel's gone for twenty minutes, and this happens?" Sean muttered as he and Teri jumped to their feet to run out of the room.

"I will go and investigate as well," Spock said seriously as he placed Kevin on his feet.

Seconds after they left, I-Cheya came bouncing in and pulled at a startled Kevin. "HUFF HUFFFF! Huf-huf huff huff!"

Brant, Matthew Parnell and a group of others ran in just seconds later. "Same for us," JJ and Adam giggled.

"Ain't you going on holiday with Cor and Sean?" Kevin asked quickly as he fended off the still huffing, hyper Sehlat.

"Blackie said we'd have 'Time'," Adam grinned.

Kevin blinked at him, then tapped his communicator, "I'll call Sa'r." I-Cheya started huffing louder as well as pawing at Kevin's head. "I-Cheya, down! Get down!" he said with a giggle as the signal was received. Then, "Sa'r? We have a few here who are coming too... can you tell Adam please? DOWN, I-CHEYA! Jeez!"

Over the comm they heard Adam Casey acknowledge Kevin's request, then Joel's voice came, "Kevvy! We're gonna go train in the Tardis! It's all specially set up so it'll take no time! Call Daileass quick!"

Sean and Cory came running back in. "Is it just training you're going for?" Cory asked quickly as Kevin was making a nose count of the kids with I-Cheya.

"Yeah," Kevin answered with distraction. "We'll be back soon. Something to do with the Tardis, Sa'r was saying."

Cory sighed with relief. "Okay. Have fun. I don't want you or Joel in any invasions," he ordered as he turned to leave.

Kevin looked at his patriarch's departing form... and winced.

Utah - Camp Bam Bam:

Kevin appeared beside Joel and Levi, and I-Cheya materialized a moment later with Brant, Matthew, JJ and Adam on his back. Blackie was bouncing around the big Sehlat, yapping happily.

"Cool! Time for some fun," Joel bubbled as he pulled Kevin into a hug.

'Huff huffff hufhufhuffff!'

"Huh?" Joel blinked at I-Cheya.

Blackie started yapping louder before licking at Joel's sneakers.

"What do they say?" Matthew asked.

Joel giggled, "I-Cheya wants to learn karate, and Blackie wants to be a ninja."

Matthew started laughing, along with Brant and Adam. JJ, however, patted I-Cheya fondly, "I think you'll be great."

Joel sniggered before running up to Adam Casey with Kevin, "Adz? Is it okay for Kev to train too?" he asked, his face alight with joy.

Adam smiled down tenderly at the two happy boys. Inside, he was thinking that they'd likely never see battle, but better safe than sorry. "Sure. In you go... the bear too?!" he added as I-Cheya and Black Feet ambled past, carrying Brant and the others.

"Uh huh. He says he wants to learn karate..." Joel giggled, his eyes twinkling before he, too, ran inside with Kevin.

"Wow," Brant said in awe as he saw the giant mech, then he noticed Juan at its feet, kissing it. "What happened to him?! He in make up?"

"No, he died. Koth, Korris and Chang too. Then Kahless came and brought them back. Koth and Kor are the last two blood Sons of Kahless! It's so cool!" Joel bubbled as he led I-Cheya by one sabre-tooth

over to stand with the hundreds and hundreds of others who were pouring into the Tardis. "This place is neat!"

Once everyone had assembled inside, Galli explained to them how time would not affect them, and that no matter how long they stayed inside, it would only seem like minutes to them. They would remember every relative moment, and they would learn and gain muscle memory, but not mass. Then Adam addressed them all and told them the first week would be for orientation, then the training would begin.

As Joel ran off to look for a place for himself and Kevin, he wondered just what type of training this would be...

Editor's Notes:

Well, I am very glad we got that little dramatic pause taken care of. I, too, am interested in knowing just what kind of training is going to be involved. There were lots of things that happened in this chapter. I can hardly wait for the next one.

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher

Clan Short Archivist's Notes:

I have to agree with The Radio Rancher there was a WHOLE LOT of things happening in this chapter.

I thought it was a wonderful thing portraying the Mikyvis as still being human emotionally while they aren't human physiologically. Joel seems to be healing with the love and care of his Family and of course Kevin. The future seems like it is going to be very interesting for all concerned.

The Story Lover

CSU Founder's Notes:

First off, just a warning ... ***DO NOT MESS WITH TERI... EVER!!!!!!*** Anyone that can put 'High Races' in the corner is ***NOT*** to be messed with! Besides that important point, I'm really happy with the way Ilu is carrying the storyline and showing the interactions of the CSU characters. Great job, the only problem I have is that the next chapter ain't done yet! (grin)

AC

Chapter 17

"Gifts"

Rewind - Earlier that morning:

"Was the journey to Earth pleasant, Solkar?" Amanda asked as she walked towards the Indoor Pool building carrying the small, seven year old Vulcan.

The still giggling child smiled up at her. "Yes. Zemal played with me, and showed me how to use the Imaging Room on the Interceptor. We saw where Qonos is and where Romulas is, and Telar as well. I found it very enjoyable," he added seriously, nodding his head earnestly.

Amanda smiled, and held back a chuckle, "That is good."

She nodded politely at Kirk and McCoy as they were leaving the building, and then smiled more as Kirk held the door open for her. "Thank you, Jim," she murmured.

"Who's the newcomer?" Kirk asked with an easy smile.

Solkar smiled at him, "Greetings. I am Solkar, Blue Adept of the VSO... if Blue Leader accepts me, I mean."

"I'm sure he will. Rhys is a good boy," McCoy smiled as he reached and ruffled Solkar's hair, making the child giggle again. As Amanda entered the building, McCoy whispered to Kirk as the door closed, "I love them that age. None of that damned emotionless, unfeeling..."

"I get it, Bones," Kirk laughed as they started off towards CIC.

Inside, Amanda stopped by the door to the swimming pool. "The air's a little thick in there for me for the time of day, Solkar. I will be going back to see Sarek now. However, I want you to have some fun, and make some new friends."

"I will," Solkar nodded seriously as she set him to his feet. "Will I see you later?"

"I will come to collect you in two hours, and we can share a meal with your Fa'sami," Amanda smiled down at the happy little boy.

"Thank you. I will see you then, Fa'komi," the child answered before giving the old lady the Vulcan Salute and entering the doors.

Inside the pool-room, Solkar's entrance was noticed first by a certain red-haired Fireball.

"New Guy!!" Timmy announced loudly as he sprinted from the side of the pool, gaining the proper momentum for a classic 'welcome' pounce.

Solkar was thankful that he had Vulcan reflexes, for he managed to snag the flying boy from the air and still keep his footing while holding a now hugging and wriggling six year old. Fairly impressive as he was only slightly bigger than Timmy to begin with. "Is this the standard form of greeting for the Clan and the Division?" Solkar asked as he hugged Timmy back properly once the red-head had been placed back to his feet.

"If me or the Tribe see ya first, it is!" Timmy giggled as he spun and grabbed one of Solkar's hands. "I'm Timmy my Daddy is Cory and my Poppa is Sean. C'mon you gotta tell me your name and then we gotta n'terduce you to everyone, then you gotta get nekkid so you can swim with us. Then we're gonna make you part of the Tribe before Daddy finds something for you to do; then you'll meet Allie an' all the ot'er animal friends we got."

The Vulcan boy was almost dazed at the speed of Timmy's verbal diarrhoea, but his fast mind did manage to keep up. "I have met your fathers, and they have told me and my Commander that I may stay here in Orlando for a while. My name is Solkar, Ward of Family Sarek and of House Surak - I am a Blue Adept in the VSO. I am pleased to meet you, Timmy. May I enquire; where is Lieutenant Rhys Parnell? I must report to my Blue Leader before I can... 'get nekkid'? Do you humans not use swim-wear?" Solkar asked as he cast an appraising look over the boy before him. Then he looked around at the mass of the Tribe and Rugrats playing in the pool. "Mmm, I believe I am mistaken."

"Unca Rice is playin' wit' Allie!" Pauly giggled as he joined his brother in 'welcoming' their guest, as Wacko stretched up to add a welcoming lick to the side of Solkar's face. "An' we don't wear no swimmin' shorts!"

Paul Mills, son of Paster Mills, chuckled as he caught up with his same-named shadow. "Welcome to Orlando, Solkar. RHYS is trying to learn 'Gator surfing, follow us and we'll try to get his attention between falls!"

"Thank you," Solkar smiled softly as Pauly and Timmy took a hand each and started moving him towards the pool.

As they went, Pauly looked up. "You has a middle name?" he asked hopefully.

Solkar shook his head at the five year old, "No. It is highly uncommon for a Vulcan to have one. In fact, Sa'ren Son of Spock is the first to do so in recorded history."

Pauly looked slightly crestfallen. "Oh, 'kay," he murmured.

Timmy looked at his little brother funny for a second, but then they got to the pool's edge. Out in the water, the kids were playing and in the middle was a brown haired six year old wobbling about on the back of an alligator.

"Are not alligators dangerous?" Solkar asked curiously.

"Allie's our friend!" Timmy replied. "Yist, how long until Rhys falls again?"

Yist giggled. "I'm not looking, Timmy... it's more fun watching it happen in real time!"

Splash

"It looks like you did not have long to wait, Timmy," Solkar giggled as Rhys' head popped to the surface of the pool.

Rhys turned their way, waved, then swam over quickly. "Yes, I fell. No, I don't care, and yes, it was deliberate!" he giggled as Paul Mills pulled him from the water. After hugging Paul quickly in thanks, Rhys looked over Solkar quickly. "I am Guard of the Dragon, Blue Leader. Name, rank and bio, please," he ordered formally.

"Solkar. Lieutenant. Astrophysics and tactical assessment speciality. Blue Rank Adept, Second Level Red," Solkar answered just as formally.

"Red One sworn? We do not have as many as you, Solkar. And I'm impressed with your focus - you have done well for one so young," Rhys smiled.

Solkar smiled, "Thank you."

"You are welcomed to the Dragon Division, Solkar. First orders - relax. You have seven days until I can call on you," Rhys giggled, his six year old self coming back to the surface. "I'm pretty sure you're still young enough to become Tribe and Rugrat... that'll likely be happening shortly."

"Tribe? Rugrat?" Solkar asked as Belar and Ross came over to stand with Timmy and Ricky.

Yist and Paul giggled as they watched the four young leaders get 'formal' by shaking off excess water. "It's the Junior Division of Family Clan Short," Paul explained as he lifted Pauly up onto his shoulders.

"Yes, we try to comfort and encourage the younger persons who are rescued," Yist added, goosing Rhys for not explaining.

"I see. I would be honoured to join - if you would have me," Solkar said brightly.

"You asked for it," Rhys giggled as Ross ran off to the side of the room to grab something.

Solkar had only a second to look quizzically at his section leader before Timmy, Ricky and Belar came at him and started to tug him out of his uniform. A second later, he had his eyes covered with a blindfold.

"Should I be nervous?" he asked softly as he was pushed about so as to remove the lower half of his uniform and boots.

"It's recommended, but not required," Paul replied with a giggle.

Solkar shrugged as he found himself hoisted into the air by a large amount of wet hands. Obviously more of the kids had joined in from those in the pool.

"Do you swear to help others in twubble?" Belar asked seriously.

"I do," Solkar answered with a smile.

"Will you be brave even if you feel like running away?" Ross asked, while holding one of Solkar's legs firmly and securely.

"I will."

"THREE!" Timmy shouted.

"TWO!" Ricky added.

"ONE!" everyone completed as Solkar was thrown up and over and into the pool.

He started to panic. He was Vulcan. He was not even seven Vulcan years old. His world had little water.

He couldn't swim.

He focused deeply on what little he had been taught and fought down his rising fear so that he would float... hopefully.

There was little need for that, for less than three seconds after hitting the water, a pair of arms brought him up to the surface and held him there.

He pulled the blindfold from his eyes and looked into the face of his rescuer.

"Hi! I'm Jimmy," the rescuer giggled.

"You look familiar," Solkar said softly. "Are you related to someone I know?"

"Dunno who you know. I might be," Jimmy giggled. "I'm Captain Kirk's son, so you might have seen or met him."

"Ah. You have his eyes..."

"I'd better run quickly before he wants them back then!" Jimmy laughed as he brought Solkar to the shallow end of the pool, where everyone else was piling in to welcome the newest member of the Rugrats.

Solkar giggled. "So... was that the entrance to both groups? Or just one?" he asked as Timmy and Belar swam up to him.

"Uh huh.. until shower time!" Timmy giggled.

"What happens then?" Solkar whispered to Jimmy as everyone started to swim about.

"You'll see," Jimmy giggled. Then he looked at Solkar closely. "You remind me of someone too," he said seriously.

Solkar half grinned, "I am a member of House Surak. It is a common trait. We can look alike."

"Blue eyes ain't THAT common in Vulcans," Jimmy said seriously, but he let the matter drop.

Timmy, meanwhile, went up to Paul and asked, "Can I speak to my brother?"

Paul smiled and lifted Pauly off his shoulders and put him down in the water next to Timmy. "Sure. Have fun!"

As he swam away, Timmy pulled his little brother to the edge of the pool, "Wazza matter?"

"Whadd'ya mean?" Pauly replied, looking a little lost.

"Back there. You asked Solkar 'bout a middle name, an' then you looked upset. Wazza matter?"

Pauly's eyes fell again, then he sighed. "'m lonely," he whispered.

"Whadd'ya mean?" Timmy asked as he pulled his little brother into a hug.

"You has Ricky. Bel has Ross. Daddy has Poppa. Unca Kyle has Unca Ty," Pauly recited slowly, his voice getting thicker and thicker with tears as he went. "Th...then I gets a tee-shirt sayin' I b...belongs to someone called Joseph... but where is he?" he finished as he cried into Timmy's shoulder.

"I dunno," Timmy said softly. "Nobody bad pranks my brothers an' ev'one knows it, so he's gotta be comin'."

/Look to the Shaper/

Pauly's head jerked up, "Wha??"

Timmy looked around, "Was that you, Guardian?"

/From him, yet not him. From Earth, yet not of Earth. I am that which is Broken. Look to your uncle. Look to the one who shall wield me. Look to the Shaper/

"You sound like that Yarn Guy Uncle Kyle talks about!" Timmy commented.

/Older than he. You know my Name already. You know me, for you know the Shaper. He is me and I him. Living I be, and a Sword forever/

"Swords can't talk, silly!" Timmy stated.

*/Your Uncle can, and he is the Blade of Surak. I am from your world, and that which **came** from your world is alive. It is the same as that which resides in the one you call Kitisci Lhaamin. The Metal that infuses him, infuses me. It is alive. That which the Guardian gave added thought. I am the Sa'ren, the Broken S'harien Sword - And I live, as does the Armour worn by your Uncle. Joseph shall come. The Shaper, the True Sa'ren, shall find him. Look to your Uncle/*

I think that he's for real, I felt Vitaferum in Joel's armor. Red stated to Timmy.

Timmy tilted his head. **You know that stuff better than me Red!** He then gave Pauly another squeeze. "Red says that he's for real; I guess you just gotta wait for Uncle Joel."

"Kay. I'll ask him later," Pauly said, feeling a little better. "Thank you, Mr Sword!"

/You are welcome/

"Why haven't we heard you before?" Timmy asked curiously.

/You have. You have heard the Armour and I all your lives. Only now, with the Shaper, the True Sa'ren, here, do you understand our voice/

"You sure you're not related to that Yarn Guy dude?" Timmy giggled.

/I am sure. I like you and I shall see you soon. Farewell, Timothy and Pauly Short/

"Bye bye, Sword-guy!" Timmy replied, causing boys to start giggling over the rhyme.

Inside the Tardis:

As everyone found places to call their home for the next few 'years', Chang came up to Joel and Kevin. "Brother, I have a request," he said as he laid a gentle hand on the little Vulcan's shoulder.

Joel looked up with a smile, "Sure thing. What's wrong?"

"The PACK may be conditioned just as I was. I do not know the other Vulcans here, but I do know you - and I trust you. Could you do for them what you did for me?" Chang asked.

Joel grinned and nodded, "Yeah! I wanna meet them properly anyway! They look cuddly!"

"Please do not be offended however, if they are not very 'cuddly' right now. They have recently lost their two eldest siblings," Chang said while looking over his shoulder at the Wolves all milling about behind him. Korris was in the middle of the group and speaking to them softly.

Joel's face became sad, "Okay. Kevvy, you wanna come over, too?"

Kevin shook his head, "Nah, I'll get our room set up. Call if you need me, though."

"I will. Okay, Chang. Let's help your puppies," Joel smiled wanly as he and Chang started over towards the Wolves.

Chang stopped and looked at Joel. "It would be advisable not to call them 'puppies'," Chang said with one of the few grins he gave out, then continued walking over to where they were all standing.

"I'll remember... til later," Joel whispered, trying for some levity. He could already sense the grief in the air the closer he got to the eight Wolves. A tear was already trickling down his pale cheeks.

The pack quieted down as the two approached. Chang quickly picked up the disapproving looks the older ones gave when they saw Joel crying; however, he also saw the looks of compassion on the younger ones.

Chang knew that the PACK respected strength, he just needed to make them realize that simply shedding tears does not make you weak.

As the PACK parted, and Chang and Joel walked into the middle, Bardolf spoke up. "Filtiarn... Do you have any orders for us yet?" the twelve year old wolf boy asked while looking around at everyone who was setting up in a small town type area.

"Yes I do - however, I will allow Joel to explain what he needs each and every one of you to do." Chang paused as he looked at each of them individually, "You will obey his orders as if they came from me. Is that understood?"

Chang got eight hesitant nods, then all eyes were on Joel.

Joel looked at them with compassion in his eyes as he spoke quietly, "You are all the product of a certain now-dead bastard, General Adams, as you know. However, what you probably don't know is that every one of those kids that he had enhanced or created were implanted with mental conditioning. Should a certain code phrase be spoken, or even sent telepathically, you would cease to be you. Another, pre-created, 'you' would come out and take over. You would be dead. Gone. And the new 'you' would be a living monster. Only a Vulcan can remove such deep programming. I have been taught how by my father, Admiral Spock of Starfleet, and, if you are willing, I would like to perform the mind melds now. In the Tardis, there should be no chance of the code being triggered, so you can wait a while - if you don't trust me enough right now, that is."

The wolves first looked surprised, and then, almost as one, they turned to look at Chang. When he simply nodded back, they all looked shocked. The eight of them started to have a silent conversation between themselves, which Chang decided not to listen in on.

Finally, though, Bardolf spoke for them all. "Sir, we are unsure how we feel about someone screwing with our heads. What effects will this have on us?" he asked, looking at both Chang then Joel. Chang simply deferred to the smaller boy.

"I will know you. Completely. You will know me, completely. I will purge the programming. You will remain. Unchanged, except for the complete knowledge of my life. Your Filtiarn has already been in this type of meld with me. The only difference between what you will see and what he did is that last night... Me and my husband... it was our wedding night, you see, and... well... I hope grade A porn isn't going to be too offensive to you," Joel finished with a shy giggle, his face now bright green.

Before any of the wolves could respond, Chang spoke, "Let me assure you that there is nothing harmful about what is about to happen. As Joel just said, I have gone through this very same thing right before we rescued you. Also know that I trust Joel with my life, and as such know he would not harm any of you."

Okhnhaka, the youngest male wolf at age nine, let his tongue hang out a bit as he grinned, "Well, if you say it ain't gonna be bad, then that's enough for me." He grinned even more, to the point he almost started to pant, "However, could you ask him to shower first, he smells of cat!" That got the lot of them laughing, and even Chang smiled and chuckled.

Joel giggled a bit as well, "Well, yeah. Four of the G-Cats are my guards. I should also smell of Sehlat."

"What's a Sehlat?" Accalia, the youngest She-Wolf, asked.

"HUFF! Huffhuffhhuuuufffff! Huff huff huff!" I-Cheya 'said' as he suddenly sniffed at Accalia's tail. "HUFF!"

"HOLY SHIT!" she screamed as she jumped back, looking at the giant bear like Sehlat. "WHAT THE FUCK IS THAT THING?!?" she asked.

At about the same time one of the others asked, "Does it eat us, or do we eat it. Damn, he looks tasty too!"

I eat all two legs. Unless friends. If friends, I wash

"It SPEAKS too??" Accalia said as she backed away behind Okhnhaka. "You go first. Boys first!"

"Who changed the rules when I wasn't looking?!" Okhnhaka protested. Then he yelped as I-Cheya scooped him up with one immensely strong paw... and started washing him, after somehow removing his armour.

"He's... not 100% Sehlat," Joel giggled. "But he's right - he is on the top of the food chain on Vulcan."

I-Cheya sent as he was washing a wriggling Okhnhaka, *Hush. Me clean Puppy-boy. He smell of blood and battle. Stinky. Stay still, Puppy-boy*

In between giggles of laughter, Okhnhaka could be heard swearing... "Don't....*giggle*... call me a ...*Giggle* PUPPY!"

Joel smiled as this continued, but he looked around at the now amused faces of the other seven wolves, "There is something else you should know - just so that it don't shock you. My past, before I was found, is not good. I was tortured and a slave all my life. I already expect to find some bad stuff in your heads too, but I didn't want you to be caught unaware by mine. So, if you wanna - who wants to go first? Then, you can have a bath. I-Cheya is good with baths. He can take away some of your hurt at losing your loved ones," he added softly.

The wolf boys were suddenly serious again, all except Okhnhaka who was still being 'showered'. Finally though, Bardolf stepped towards Joel. "Since I am now the eldest male, I will go first."

"Logical," Joel said seriously as he went towards the large wolf. He climbed into the surprised boy's arms and placed his left arm around the back of Bardolf's neck. He rested his fingertips of his right hand on those points needed on the wolf-boy's face, "Remain calm. My mind to your mind..."

Chang shot a look at Korris, and both sighed. They knew what *else* Joel would find in the minds of all eight of the PACK: the Hell that had been unleashed that previous night... and the reasons why Joel had seen both of them cut up like pieces of meat.

Less than three minutes later, a sob escaped Joel's mouth as the meld ended. He tucked his head down so that it was more or less under Bardolf's long muzzle-chin, and bawled like a baby.

Bardolf, for his part, no longer had the look in his eyes when he had first beheld the crying Vulcan child come up to them. He now knew just how strong Joel had been in his short life; and while that strength was now gone, his bravery was still there. He comforted Joel as best he was able, as the boy sobbed himself out into his chest. He settled down onto the ground and held Joel tightly to himself as he started to nuzzle the Vulcan's face. All the while, he was whimpering to Joel; explaining in a low tone. Comforting.

After a long while, Joel's tears stopped and he looked up into the wolf-boy's brown eyes. His own were filled with horror, but Bardolf's radiated calm, and affection for the frail little alien on his lap. "You're so brave. Your big brother and sister would be so proud of you, Bardy..." Joel whispered for Bardolf alone. Then, he kissed the wolf-boy's nose, tickled him behind both ears for a bit before scrambling up and running right at Chang.

As soon as Chang's arms closed around him, and Korris had come behind him to sandwich him between the two of them, Joel started crying again. This time, due to whatever Bardolf had said to him, the tears were not as bad. "You... you are the best, the bravest..." he managed between sobs. "I love you... you two. But... if you e...ever do that again, I n...neck pinch you out forever!"

After cuddling with both the larger boys for a while longer, Joel went up to the eldest she-wolf. "Ayame, are you ready?"

Mutely, Ayame nodded.

It really didn't take too long to do the same for her and the other six as he had done for Bardolf. At the end, all of them had looks of respect and wonder on their faces... and each took I-Cheya up on the offer of a bath. Okhnhaka, in fact, had a second. And a third.

"I think they'll be a while," Joel said from Korris' shoulders as the Klingon and Chang made their way back to Kevin and Joel's room.

Korris chuckled, "Yeah, seems like it."

When they arrived, Joel gave them one last hug and a kiss each, before going into his apartment style room. Inside, Hermes and Mercury were being washed by Aphrodite and Artemus. All four looked up at him as he came closer and wrinkled their noses.

"You smell of dog! Get in the bath with Kevvy, THEN you can join us for a cat bath... you stink!" Mercury giggled.

Joel just laughed, threw off his clothes, and ran into the en-suite to join his husband.

"Adam?" Jason said as he came up to the Unit Commander a few days into the Basic Training. The VSO teams had separated slightly from the Unit ones due to the fundamental differences between them in regards to Training, and Jason had had to smile at the fact that over one hundred of the rescued kids from Camp Bam Bam had elected to become VSO. After having scanned them, Jason agreed. He thought he'd even manage to get over 70 of them as Black, so determined were they - but that would have to wait until they left. Only by the Trail of Fire on Vulcan could any VSO member ascend to the Black.

"Yes, Jace?" Adam asked as he turned to look down at the shorter boy.

"What are you doing?"

"Putting this group through SHIT," Adam replied, looking lost. "Didn't you do something the same on Vulcan? You were only there for, what - three months?"

"Two of training," Jason answered, "one of recovery. Yes, you told me, and yes, for humans this will work. Why's Joel going through this, though?"

Adam turned to look at Kevin and Joel. It had been three days of hard work, long hours, sweat, tears and little sleep. Kevin was looking much as expected. Joel... not so. In fact, in the middle of the assault course Chang was forcing the ten boy team to go through, Joel caught Adam's eyes and waved brightly. "Uh... well, he needs to be worn down, then made to learn to think while worn out. What training did you do if not this?" he asked, looking back down at the amused Jason.

"Vulcan training," Jason grinned, "and some of this is involved, but not to this extent. They have a more... advanced way, let us say. They did adapt it for me and my family, of course, as we'd not manage full Vulcan style. It has the same result, though. Adam, seriously, you're wasting your time here with Joel. Let me do the basic with him with my VSO lot. You're going to wear out faster than he will."

Adam blinked. "I don't think he'd keep up with me, Jace," he replied seriously. "And he said he wanted to do it my way when I asked."

Jason shrugged, "Okay. Don't blame me when he's still going and you're asleep." Then, giggling, the brown haired Patriarch wandered off towards the VSO area.

"I don't think so," Adam said with determination. Then he looked back at the fresh faced Joel, and his brow furrowed. "I think I'll do this personally. Hey, Chang? Pull Joel out of the course, bro. I'll take over!"

"Jason!" Adam called out a few days later as he walked up to the Commander of the Dragon Division, a cheerful Joel skipping along beside him in the early morning air. "Jason, we need to talk!"

"It didn't work, I take it?" Jason replied as he got up from doing his push-ups.

"In a word, NO!" Adam retorted with disgust. "He gets tired, alright, but he never gets to the point I want him to get to! He was even SLEEPING WHILE ON A MIDNIGHT-FUCKING-HIKE! He had his god-damned eyes OPEN, but was fucking SNORING! What the HELL!"

Joel smiled sweetly up at Adam before running over to Riti for a cuddle.

"I want answers... and you can stop smiling, Jace," Adam huffed with injured pride. "I've never had my training so... so..."

"Ignored?" Jason supplied helpfully, but the look he received made him wipe his face clear of smiles fast. "Okay, bro. I can see your a little bit upset. Come over here and I'll explain."

Adam sat down at one of the meal tables that was just outside the Division's canteen area, and waited while Jason went to fetch two mugs of coffee.

"Here, drink this," Jason offered as he placed one of the mugs down next to his friend. "Okay. Vulcans have a weird mind, bro. They think on multiple levels all at once. You and me - all N-Gens - we do as well, but in a different way. We make an image of ourselves and set it in a room to go over a problem without our direct attention. Then, once the image has done what we want, it comes back out and then we know the result. Right?"

"Yeah, you said this, and it does work... kinda," Adam admitted with a small smile.

"You need to practice it more, is all," Jason answered, patting Adam's forearm lightly before sipping at his coffee. "Well, Vulcans use all of their attention on multiple things at once. I don't mean splitting it 33%, 33%, 33% over three things, but 100% on three things. Or four... or more. Depends on the mind. Joel, if he's *anything* like his dad, is likely more. Which has an interesting side effect. They can keep their concentration even when tired."

"You mean I can't make him think when exhausted?" Adam asked.

"No. He'll keep on going til he drops dead, bro. His brain doesn't work like a human's. Also, you've been feeding him, right?"

"Field rations, same as the rest," Adam answered. "More for him and Kevin since they have to have those energy drinks. I can't have them getting ill."

"A Vulcan can go without food for weeks. Without water for three days before they even begin to feel thirsty. They can go without sleep for nearly four days. Joel won't be as able to do any of that yet, of course, but by just feeding him the field rations, his body will adapt to use it as efficiently as possible. He will be a jumping bean from daybreak to sundown. Sure, he'll get tired. I've seen him flop into bed and be asleep a second later. But his mind will never switch off the way you're hoping. If forced, he'd push himself beyond most - maybe even you. It's nothing to do with your genetic enhancements or their lack in his case. He's just - Alien."

"So what training can I give him?" Adam asked as he turned to watch Joel roll around on the grass with Victoria, Riti and their child Asher.

"Whatever you like, just don't expect him to 'pass' your SHIT week. It won't work. Like I said, I can put him through the VSO version of it, and the result will be the same. Then I can send him back to you... although he did tell me yesterday he wants to learn everything his mother did. She was VSO too," Jason said uneasily.

"What's wrong?" Adam asked as he caught the tone in Jason's voice.

Jason sighed, "I think he wants to be Black VSO. Poppa will never allow it."

"About that," Adam said, "I've thought about what you told me and Logan after we swore the promise. Do you really think the Chipmunks can pass it?"

"They have a 95.34 percent chance of doing so, yes," Jason answered softly.

Adam nodded to himself, "Then I'll leave it up to them if they want it. As for Joel - how long to run him through your Basic Training?"

Jason smiled, "With what you've done already, only 24 hours. Just tell Kevin that he cannot have his favourite 'po-go' stick to play with tonight. Joel's going to be too busy."

"Hey!" Joel retorted from where he was still playing with Victoria and the others. "It was my turn to play with his!"

"Tough!" Jason and Adam retorted before breaking down in laughter.

A few days later:

Basic training for everyone was now over, and what had come to be called 'Classes' had started - the kids were picking which of a number of different courses interested them. Some went on to do more than expected, but everyone seemed to be looking forward to learning some form of Martial Arts.

Even I-Cheya.

Joel and Kevin were no exception, but on their way to Chang's first lesson, Galli came up to them.

"Hey, good morning, guys," he giggled brightly.

Joel simply pulled him into a hug while Kevin giggled back, "Mornin'!"

"Oh, been picking up Joel's accent, Kev?" the little Doctor grinned as he teased.

"Too right, gov'ner!" Kevin giggled again.

"Heaven help us," Joel sighed as he released Galli from the hug. "You coming to learn with us, Galli?"

"Nope. Nothing new there for me, and I don't need to practice or learn this stuff anyway. I need to talk to you. The both of you. There's something we need to do, and something Kevin needs to get."

"No kisses!" Joel giggled, wagging his finger under Galli's nose. "Only I gets to kiss 'im - do you hear me, Mr Horny Time Lord?"

"I wasn't going to! Jeez!" Galli giggled as he poked his tongue out at his Vulcan brother. "No matter HOW cute I think he is!"

Kevin bulshed.

Galli slung his arms over both boys' shoulders and walked between them towards a door that had appeared, "Come on, kiddos. Oh, can you call your two rampaging Spirit Guards, Jo'?"

Joel giggled and nodded as his eyes went slightly unfocused. As they got to the door, I-Cheya ran up with Blackie balanced on his back, and all three boys fell over laughing and clutching at their ribs.

What? I-Cheya sent in a classic 'Timmy-pout'.

The large Sehlat cub was dressed in a kun-fu gi...

"Now I've seen everything! I can die happy!" the little Time Lord chortled as he rolled about on the ground.

Chang-Boy gave me. I like! Stop laughing!... Does butt look big? the large bear asked as he turned around and wagged his tail; which was sticking out of the pants of the gi.

"Uh huh, no more eating bad people for a few days," Kevin giggled as he managed to stand up.

Once Joel had finally stopped laughing, the Doctor picked him up and stood him to his feet. Then Galli called out, "LEVI! Can you join us?"

"Yup!" the tiny boy giggled as he popped in onto Joel's shoulders. He was in his three year old size and was now holding onto Joel by having the palms of his hands against the Vulcan's forehead. "What's up?"

"A Friend wants to see us," the Doctor smiled as the door they were standing before opened. "Come on."

They stepped through and into another place altogether. The wind blowing was cool, dry and, in a way, dead. Kevin shivered, even under the weak light of a pale sun in the heavens. The city that stretched out as far as the eye could see in all directions was crumbling into ruin, but there was a light coming from behind them.

"Where is this place, Galli?" Kevin trembled.

//Welcome to Forever//

Kevin spun around and his jaw dropped open. "Wha...?!"

"That's the Guardian," Joel said. He then did a double take and pointed, "Look! Look there! That's where Mikey cuddled me when he rescued me! There's even a bit of scrambled eggs that I'd dropped when eating!"

True enough, there was a disturbance in the dust by a still solid wall that looked like a larger person had sat there, with a far smaller one in front of him. Kevin giggled, "Your naked bum left an imprint, Sa'r!"

"Oh, hush!" Joel giggled as he blushed.

//Nothing changes here unless I wish it//

Joel smiled as Levi jumped down from his shoulders and as I-Cheya huffed as he nuzzled Joel's neck. "Why are we here, Guardian?" the little Vulcan giggled as he tickled I-Cheya under the chin, causing the Sehlat to wag his tail.

//Knowledge and gifts//

Kevin looked confused, "Huh?"

**///Call Me, and I hear. Summon Me, and I come.
Living I be, and a Shield Forever... Call My Na-
me...///**

"What was that?" Kevin asked, his face growing more and more confused.

Joel looked thoughtfully around himself, then a light seemed to appear in his eyes. "It sounded like the Guardian and like the Sword of Sa'ren, but different. Is it...?"

//Summon the Armour, Sa'ren of Vulcan//

Joel was about to ask how, but then he thought about the Sa'ren Sword. He said firmly, "Shal vutau Fo-wein Sa'ren."

Between them and the Guardian, the air turned liquid and a humanoid shape appeared. It resolved quickly into Joel's Armour, and it somehow seemed to keep its shape as if being worn. He was about to walk to it when the Armour spun around and opened up. It flew at the surprised and shocked Vulcan and seemed to snap and click into place over him - and as always, it fitted exactly.

///Greetings, Blade of Surak///

"Uhhhh... thanks?" Joel trembled, his voice echoing out from the helm he had. The nose guard came down to his top lip, and the cheek guards both came in close to it. To Kevin, it seemed like the space was in an intricate Y shape. "I... Guardian, how come that the Armour and the Sword speak?"

//First, Summon the Sword// the Guardian answered as it pulsed with It's inner light before them.
//Also, you have no need to say 'I summon' nor 'I call', Sa'ren. Just call the Name//

"Uh, but what if I'm telling someone *my* name? Won't the Sword just appear?" the little Vulcan asked curiously.

//No. You need to focus on what you want to do or to have happen. It requires directness of thought. The Armour and the Sword will know when you are calling for them or not//

Joel shrugged within his Armour. "Sa'ren!" he called out, and in front of him, through that same liquid effect, the Sword of Surak appeared - and just hovered there. It was still shattered, yet the pieces floated in place.

/Greetings, Blade of Surak/

Kevin moved a bit closer to look and saw the gaps between the segments. "Wow!"

Joel closed his right hand around the hilt, and the Sword stopped floating. Considering It's size and composition, it was shocking that Joel's arm barely registered the weight.

It was not lost on Joel himself. He asked, "Why's it not heavy?"

//It carries the weight of Itself for you. If you notice, so too does your Armour//

Galli was impressed. "What *was* the mineral you added to that mix all those millennia ago, Old Friend?"

//Myself//

Levi giggled and reached to tickle the side of Joel's armoured chest. "Does this tickle, Friend?"

//No, Levi. I cannot feel in the way you suggest. What I gave to the making of the Sword and the Armour added sentience - and power. What came from Earth added life. Vitaferum is contained within both, and it is a living metal. The Sword and the Armour are alive and both are dependant yet independent of me. And the same applies for their relationship to Sa'ren himself//

"Why, though? What's the reason for them?" Kevin, Galli and Joel asked together. Levi just looked politely puzzled.

//For Destiny//

"As your answers usually go, that was fairly clear and concise," the Doctor said dryly.

"Really? It made sod all sense to me, Galli!" Joel giggled.

//Thank you//

"It wasn't a compliment, Guardian!" Joel giggled more. Then, "So, you wanted me to know that the Armour will come to me like the Sword does?"

//Partly. You need to remove the Armour's Chest-piece//

Joel shrugged and, with Levi's and Kevin's help, he removed the sectioned one-piece chest armour. Joel placed his helm down as well, the crown around the top glinting in the weak light of Forever World's sun. "What am I... oh, I see something... symbols... like on the Sword," Joel murmured as he looked at the inside of the chest-piece. "How can I understand it? I couldn't on the Sword..."

//You were looking at a replica of the Sa'ren, Sa'ren. You have worn the Armour for over four hours already; at the funeral. You have already gained much imparted knowledge from it without even knowing//

"What's it say, Sa'r?" Kevin asked, as he traced his fingers over the engraved Vulcan symbols.

"'For Hope, Keep Me; By Faith, Wear Me; With Knowledge, Use Me; In Love, Sacrifice Me'," Joel recited, "and there's more underneath. 'Time, Space and Matter mean naught to It which commands us. Sword and Shield - Alive in the Hand of Forever.'"

The little Vulcan looked up at the Guardian, "What's that mean?"

//It is for you to discover, my Sa'ren. You and you alone will unlock the potential within both of them, and from within yourself. You are Shaper of the One; the Hand of the Guardian; the Beloved of Earth; the Lover of the Strength. You shall find the answers... in Time. My Voice, Levi, shall be there with you when you do... Now, it is time for others to receive their gifts//

The Doctor giggled and sat down, "This'll be fun!"

//My Voice. My Avatar. My Levi. Step through me, and receive one of your Birthrights!// Forever Commanded.

"Ummmm.... okay, I guess. What is gonna happen?" Levi asked, an edge of worry in his voice.

//Step through me// was the only response the small child received.

Joel whispered to Levi, "Trust acts on Love, Lil'Mouse. If you love him, trust him. I do."

"Okay, Uncle Joel," Levi responded as he headed towards the Guardian. He paused for a moment before the squashed seeming circle that was filled with Mist and Images from... everywhen and everywhere... then stepped through.

As he came back around from the other side, they saw that his clothes had vanished. "Ummmm... why's he naked?" Joel asked.

"He was practising his illusion. He's been naked all morning," the Doctor giggled. "Don't blush, Leev! It's not like I'd NOT have noticed, is it?"

Levi giggled, then looked down at what was now about his neck. A beautiful pendant hung by an intricate, deep golden chain. On one side of the pendant was the symbol of the Mikyvis, backed by the Clan Short Crest. On the other, an intricate design, with a deep purple gem at the centre.

//You are Bound to Forever, my Voice, by a Link that can never be removed//

"I shouldn't take the necklace off?" Levi asked as he held the pendant between his fingers.

//You are unable to remove it. Only your death would loosen the bond. You are sealed to me now. What the pendant will impart is for you to discover//

Levi looked up and giggled, "That's gonna be a long time - I'm not planning on dying!"

"You can't tell him anything about it now, Guardian?" Galli asked as he grinned at the small boy.

//One thing. Say 'Shield' and concentrate on the pendant, Voice...//

Levi shrugged and said, "Shield."

The air turned liquid around the pendant, which Levi quickly let go of. The effect spread out to cover the small Mikyvis completely. When it vanished, Levi was in a type of armoured suit that had echoes of the one Joel was wearing - even to the point of having a circlet around the helm. The colours were that of the Mikyvis High Council, and the design at the centre had the same intricate design from the back of the pendant superimposed over a whole looking Sa'ren Sword.

//The day will come when this will save the life of your beloved father; when those who are Banned Return... In that day, you must Shield the Prince of the Children of Forever - your father, Kyle//

"Cool! I'm just like Uncle Joel now!" Levi bubbled. Then it sunk in about Kyle. "What's gonna happen to Daddy?! Who are the Banned?! I... I *WON'T* let *ANYTHING* happen to my Daddy!!!" he said, his voice growing angry.

//Beware, and keep watch. Time will tell the rest. Now, Strength of my Sa'ren. Step through me//

Kevin gulped and did as instructed, with only the slightest of hesitation. From behind the Guardian, they heard an echoing giggle, "Wow! Wooooow!" Kevin walked back around the Guardian - and was in a suit of armour identical in all but one way to Joel's - the Sa'ren symbol on Kevin's chest was broken, whereas the one of the Fo-wein Sa'ren was whole. Kevin's right hand flew then to his left arm, to where his phasenmorph was. "Won't this squash BFG?" he asked nervously.

//As with the Fo-wein Sa'ren, the armour is shaped to allow freedom for a phasenmorph. Also, the Vitaferum in the armour will act as a reserve for your 'BFG's' power supply//

"Oh. Okay, as long as he's not gonna be hurt," Kevin said, and they could just see his lips form a smile inside the helm.

Joel, however, was looking at his own left forearm. "There's a difference in the shape here, alright - but why? I can't bond with a phasenmorph - can I?"

//Wait and see, my Sa'ren//

Levi was patting his armour randomly. "How do I tell it to go away?" he asked, looking up at Joel.

Joel shrugged. "I dunno. Maybe tell it to return, or something?" he answered, before trying it himself. He looked at the Sword, and concentrated on both it and the Armour he was wearing, "Return."

The Sword seemed to melt into the air, and the Armour came away in it's entirety from his body and also vanished.

/Farewell/

///Farewell///

Levi giggled and also said, "Return."

This, of course, left him naked again.

Kevin tried saying the same, but nothing happened. "No fair," he pouted.

//You need to wear it for a longer period of time so that it can bond with you, Strength//

"Oooh. Okay," the little brown haired boy grinned as he unfastened and took off the helm he was wearing.

Levi was looking at Joel, and studying the Vulcan's tee-shirt and shorts. "Clothes," Levi giggled, and duplicate items seemed to melt out from the pendant around his neck. They were almost identical to Joel's, but the cut of the clothing seemed, if anything, Vulcan. The little Mikyvis even had Vulcan style sandals on.

Joel grinned at him, and received a look of unadulterated adoration and hero worship in return.

Kevin noticed and smiled. He sent down his link to Joel, *'I think he has a crush on you.'*

'Gee, you think? What should I do, Kevvy?'

'Nothing,' Kevin replied as he came up behind Levi and cuddled him against his chest. *'You love Cory and Sean. If he loves you like that, then it's a good thing. He'll find his own special person in time. Til then, if he's idolizing you, then he has a great hero to look up to - but my opinion is biased.'*

//Guardian Spirit Black Feet of Earth. Step through me//

The boys turned to see the little wolf pup bounce around in a circle a few times before running full tilt at the Guardian. Once he came back around from behind the doughnut shape of Forever, they all saw he was covered in silvery armour - and seemed full grown.

BarkHowl**Pant**

Me Big! Me Strong! Me filled with A-W-E-S-O-M-E!

//Your size can be altered, but only in times of need. You will normally remain at your current size for your age when in the armour. When in need, however, you can become as your Father, Cynoswr - a Power to be reckoned with. Guardian Spirit I-Cheya of Vulcan. Step through me//

Soon... soon all see! Great I-Cheya the Magnificent! huffed the Sehlat cub as he charged at the portal before them.

From behind, once he had disappeared through the mists, came a deep throated, bellowing and resonating roar. Kevin nearly wet himself, so loud was it.

Sedately, slowly and with great poise, the now massive form of I-Cheya came back from around the Guardian. Like Blackie, he was covered in silvery armour, and full grown.

He had been big as a cub. Now, he was just humongous! None of the boys had seen a Sehlat like this before; apart from T'Kahr, I-Cheya's father. He made his mother, I-Metri, look small. He was wild and huge... and, amazingly, smiling in his Sehlat way at them all.

ROAAAAR* *Huffhuff* *ROOOOAAAAR!!!!

I LIKE! Me look WELL COOL!

Kevin yelped then as Blackie nosed his way under the still armoured boy. So big was he now that Kevin could easily ride him. "Wicked!" Kevin giggled as his armour seemed to click and bond slightly with Blackie's. "This is better than a car!"

I-Cheya huffed and shrunk down to his normal cub size, the armour shrinking with him. Joel ran up to him and kissed his face where the armour wasn't covering it. "I love you, 'Cheya! Oh wow! Your fur! It's silver now!"

HUFF

The Doctor whistled, "He's taken after his father, alright!"

Kevin climbed off Blackie's back and watched as the wolf became a pup again. He picked up the still armoured ball of energy and giggled. "How do they take the armour off?"

//They do not. It will melt into them and appear when needed by them// the Guardian answered.

"Cool," the Doctor said as he watched both creatures' armour melt away. It did seem like it 'melted' into their bodies. "Most amazing."

//Hand of Forever - My Sa'ren. As you were when you came into this world, so too must you be to step through me. You are as my Voice, Levi; and you must become *as* my Voice. Remove your garments, and come to me//

"Okay," Joel bubbled.

Kevin ran over quickly and plopped Blackie onto I-Cheya's back before 'helping' Joel out of his clothes.

"I wasn't exactly like *that* when I went through," blushed Levi as he tried to not look at what Kevin had caused to happen to Joel.

Both Joel and Kevin, however, saw that every time Levi pulled his eyes away they seemed to drift back to look at Joel's 'grown problem'. "It's okay, Leev," Joel said as he came over to kneel down before the embarrassed Mikyvis. He opened his arms and Levi melted into them. "I don't mind you looking. It's normal."

"But you're Uncle Kevin's. I shouldn't," Levi whispered softly.

"Joel looks at Sammy, Sean and Cory sometimes, Leev," Kevin said softly. "I look at Uncle Chip funny at times. And at Gabe too... he's cute. It's normal."

Levi whimpered, "'Kay. As long as I'm not being bad."

//You cannot 'be bad'. It is impossible if you do not will it to be//

Joel lifted Levi's face and kissed his cute little nose before getting up and walking through the Guardian, leaving Levi to be cuddled by Kevin. When he came back around from the other side, he too had a pendant around his neck. It was identical to Levi's in every way - including the symbol of the Mikyvis.

"Hey, we're twins!" the still slightly blushing Levi giggled from Kevin's arms.

Joel grinned before looking back down at the pendant. "Why the Mikyvis Crest?"

//Only time will tell if you fulfil the Hope. Your pendant will act in another way for you than for my Voice's. It will reveal what it can do in the fullness of time. It too can never be removed. Strength of my Sa'ren. Remove your armour and your garments and step through me once more//

Joel giggled and ran over to his husband, and, together with Levi, quickly stripped him. Blushing, Kevin stepped once more through the Guardian. When he came back around, he also had one of the pendants on. "Triplets?" he giggled at Levi.

"Uh huh!" the giggling cherub nodded back.

//The same now applies to you, Strength. You shall learn to use your pendant in Time, and it can not be removed before your death. Now, you must all return to the Tardis. Be thou blessed, my Children//

Then, suddenly and without further warning, they all vanished.

Alone again on his World, the Guardian pulsed to Itself.

//... only Time will now Tell...//

It had been four months since everyone had entered the Tardis, and training was going well. Joel thought that he'd never have as much fun learning stuff this way again.

It was night, however, and as per Adam Casey's rules, everyone should have been in bed sleeping.

Not Joel, though. He couldn't sleep. Something, somewhere, was wrong. The pendant around his neck felt hot as if it was telling him of a problem. And so he was wandering the Camp looking for the source of that 'feeling'. He made his way through each and every barracks, through the mess halls and training halls. He even ran into Adam, and it was only because Adam now knew that Vulcans could get by on less sleep than a rock, did he allow Joel to continue his search.

In the end, the only place left unchecked was the Hangar. Joel silently slipped through the normal doorway and started checking the area. Before he was half way through the huge building, he heard crying. Soft sobs, and they were coming from the direction of the Doctor's Mech.

Joel padded over and peeked around the massive foot to see Juan sitting there like a lost little lamb.

Juan started and jumped to his feet, "Who's there? Nothing happening here. Go to bed, you're not allowed to be.... be... Joel?"

Joel came out of the shadowed area by the Mech's foot and walked towards the larger boy, who was clutching his Rambo bear tight to his chest. "Yeah, it's me, Juan. Wazzah matter?"

Juan burst back into his tears again. He had no need to hide and pretend around Joel. Joel already knew everything about him from having had two melds with him. So, he cried. Joel came up to him and hugged him as he slipped to the floor again.

"What's the matter?" Joel asked for a second time as he curled up on the larger boy's lap, with his chest against Juan's and Rambo squashed between them.

Juan's lip trembled for a moment before the Klingon-like boy blurted out, "Koth!"

Joel kissed his cheek. "You had an argument?"

"No..."

"Then, what?"

"I wanna... wanna... wanna be close to him. To show him I love him... to be loved... to be..."

"Intimate?"

"Yeah," Juan blushed even while crying. "I can't, though... you know why. I just..."

"It's been half a day since I helped you, Juan. You can't expect to be healed after so short a time," Joel whispered, "Koth's had nearly two years with good people to help him recover. You've always kept it to yourself til our first meld. It'll take time, but you'll heal, big bro!"

"It's been four MONTHS, Jo'! That should make things a LITTLE better... shouldn't it?" Juan pleaded.

Joel shook his head seriously. "No, it's been a few seconds. Remember what the Doctor said - in here, we have all the time of Forever, but really - emotionally - only a few minutes will pass for us. We can't heal in that time, Juan. I can't change the bad things in me either. We need to be out there - in the real world - to heal."

Juan buried his face in Joel's neck and cried more, before whimpering, "But I love him so much, and I wanna show him..."

"Why don't we go see him right now?"

"NO! I can't let him think I'm this weak! I can't... can't... cry like... like this in..."

Joel interrupted him. "Do you think he don't already know, Juan? He's linked to you - you're both N-Gen, ain't you?"

Juan just cried in frustration and shame.

"Yes, we are," Koth said from the other side of the Mech's foot. He came around and cuddled up close against the unsurprised Joel and the shocked Juan. "You cry if you need to, Qu'raki. I'll never think you're weak. I know you. I love you. I'm okay to wait too. Don't worry about my love, Juan."

Juan whimpered, "B..but I wanna show you I l...love you and I can't a...and it's b...breaking my heart up, Teddy Bear..."

Joel thought about their situation hard while Koth whispered comfort to Juan. Then he had an idea. "Juan... what do you fear?" he asked, knowing the answer.

"Being raped again... s'why I don't let Koth n...near my butt with his... ummm..." Juan trembled.

Joel nodded and kissed him softly. "But could *you* make love *to* Koth instead?"

Koth blushed as Juan's tears seemed to stop. "Well... I, uh... maybe... I dunno, Joel."

Joel felt Koth's growing nervousness and so sent out his thoughts briefly down his bond link, waking Kevin. Then he slowly got up and took both Klingons' hands and tugged them to their feet. "Follow me," he smiled.

Juan and Koth exchanged a look and shrugged, then let the frail little Vulcan lead them out of the hangar bay.

They worked out where they were being led to quite soon. Their own personal apartment. Inside, looking very grouchy, was Kevin; and seated on the bed looking even more grouchy was Korris. Standing by the fridge drinking a Jolt Cola was Juan's brother, Adam.

"Can I go back to bed now, Sa'ren?" Kevin asked, his voice very put out.

"If you wanna. Or you can stay and help me help these two," Joel giggled.

Kevin blew his husband a raspberry, "No, s'okay. I trust you, and you know..."

"Yeah. Was only kidding, Kev. Seeya in a bit... for a bit!"

Kevin blushed and legged it from the room before the others could break ribs laughing at him.

"What's going on, imp?" Korris nearly snarled at the grinning Vulcan. He didn't like being pulled from Chang... quite literally, it turned out, for he had been making sweet passionate love to his beloved when Kevin had barged into their room.

Joel pushed Juan and Koth over to the bed gently as he said, "These two wanna go all the way, but Juan is scared, and I think Koth is a bit as well. They need their big brothers. You and Adam. Will you help?"

Korris' grouchiness disappeared when he saw the cute yet nervous expression flood over his little brother's face. Adam nearly choked on his cola as he spun from the fridge to look at an embarrassed yet *very* nervous Juan.

Korris smiled, "Since it's *that*, then yes. I'll help. What do you need us to do?"

Joel blushed a bit before explaining, "Juan really can't be 'bottom', for obvious reasons." Adam nodded with understanding, and Korris looked with compassion at the blushing boy. "But he thinks he might be able to be 'top'. Koth has had more time to deal with *his* issues, but he's still a little nervous. Will you both stay here and just... approve?"

Adam blushed a little and asked, "While they're... making love?"

"Yeah," Joel blushed too. "You know, sit on either side of them and... I dunno, hold their hand or touch their shoulders or something? They're N-Gen, so they'll feel your support more that way... unless it's too embarrassing for any of you... it's just a thought. When Kev and I first wanked each other, we were so scared. But Cory and Sean were holding us tight when we were doing it, and they made our fear go 'way. Could you do that for them?" he asked, as he squeezed both Koth's and Juan's hands gently.

Juan sniffed, trying to hold back his tears, but it was hopeless. He wailed, "Pleeeeeasssse, Adam. I really love him, but I'm sooooo scared! I'm just so scared, and I don't wanna be scared no more... please? Please?"

"You know little guy," Adam said as he came over and sat down next to his little brother, "I was really scared the first time myself."

"You were?" Juan asked softly.

"Yeah, see I know a little bit of what your going through, and maybe it would help if I explained it a bit for everyone else. See when I got out of the Lab, I had all the mental knowledge of what to do with sex, but it was all clinical, text book shit. It wasn't anything with feeling or anything like that. No one really knows this, but Logan's and my first time actually having sex was only about a month ago."

Adam let that sink in, and Juan just didn't know what to say, he had thought that Adam and Logan would have been 'fucking like bunnies' since they first met. "See Juan, I didn't know what to do, and I was scared I would do it wrong. Logan was almost the same way. The first time is always scary."

"But... but it's not my first..." Juan tried say, but started to cry again.

"YES IT IS!" Adam said emphatically. "The other times were not by your choice, THIS WILL BE your first time. And this time... you have us to be with you. If you want, I will hold your hand the entire time."

Juan looked up into Adam's eyes and saw nothing but his older brother's love there. Juan nodded and bit his lip, not trusting himself to talk.

Korris, meanwhile, was talking with Koth.

"Not very Klingon, am I?" Koth sobbed softly into his big brother's shoulders.

"Yes you are," Korris said firmly while he rubbed his brother's back. "You're like Mother was. She had a heart that was bigger than Homeworld. It isn't cowardly to feel afraid, Koth-boy. It is if you *run* from your fears and don't do what's right. You love Juan, and he loves you. If you want to make love, then that is the right thing. You must face your fears and do it anyway. But you don't have to fight alone. I'm here. I swore to you when we were really little that every battle you are in, then I'm in. You need me. I'm here."

"Thank you... how did you get over it with Chang?" Koth whispered back.

"I haven't, yet. I can make love to him, but that's because Chang has already talked things over a lot with Janet. I still haven't let anyone in to help me, just like Juan hasn't. I can't let him make love to me, yet... but I am able to make love to him. Once we're out of this Timeless place, I'll start healing more again."

Koth cuddled in tight. "I love you, Kor. You're the best brother anyone could ever have. Thank you."

Joel smiled at them and turned to the door to leave, but he felt two hands take his. He looked and found both Juan and Koth holding them. "Please stay," Juan whispered.

"You'll help like they will, bro," Koth added, also in a whisper.

Joel bit his lip as he fought his own tears at the trust he saw in both their eyes. "Okay. I'll help. I'll pull some of the fear outta you both... but I won't touch the other feelings. Those good ones you'll need."

Juan smiled his thanks nervously, then turned towards the bathroom. "You had your first time in a shower, right, Joel?"

Joel giggled, "Yeah... you've a good memory for Mind Melds."

Adam grinned, "So do I. Your first cum was rather cute and loud, you know!"

Korris snorted his laughter as Joel's face went so green a blade of grass would have been ashamed!

"Anyway!" Joel stuttered, changing the subject slightly, "you wanna do this in there?"

"No. We just wanna be comforted by having you guys shower us," Koth whispered shyly.

Adam started to remove his clothes and grinned at Korris, "Sounds like a good way to start."

"Agreed," Korris grinned as well.

It was about 45 minutes later when Korris, Joel and Adam stepped out of Juan and Koth's apartment. Joel and Adam were slipping back into their clothes, but Korris had been pulled from his 'bed' in his skin. "Are you sure they won't need us now, Joel?" Korris asked as he tried and failed to hide his erection.

Joel giggled as he adjusted himself, "No. I felt their fears fall away ten minutes ago. They didn't even notice us leave! Now, I'm going to wake up Kevvy again... he needs to help me with... something! Watching those two got me all worked up!"

Korris glanced down at Joel's tented pants, and grinned. "Same here... Chang is *still* awake... I'm going to have to talk very fast to get him to calm down!"

Adam didn't say a word as both boys wandered off in the direction of their respective apartments. Instead, he turned and headed for his own... the lump in his combat pants leading the way, and he was whistling tunelessly. Once he opened the door and looked at the bed where Logan was sleeping, he grinned.

"I'm gonna get me some tonight..." he sang softly as he slipped his clothes back off, then crept into the bed. "Oh, Loooogaaaaan... sweetie, I want to, uhhh... 'talk' to you..."

Outside, on the roof of the apartment complex, Jay and the Doctor were sharing a large cookie and sipping some hot chocolate. They giggled when Logan's surprised exclamation reached their ears.

'2 Years' Later:

"Why though, Jace?" Joel asked plaintively. "Don't you think I'll make it through the Trial?"

Jason pulled the boy closer and hugged him, "Joel. You know what the Trial involves. You're not allowed to take it if you know what it involves. I'm sorry. And I'm sure you've been told by your mother that Heirs of Houses never become Black VSO."

Joel wept softly, "But my Mother says... says I've already lived a real Trial of Fire, Jace... I never told anyone I was gay. No-one ever suspected. If they had, if I'd slipped up, I'd have been killed!"

Jason thought about that for a long moment. Then, "I can't promise, bro, but I'll talk to Sellik about it, and once we leave here, I'll contact VSO Command. It's up to them, not me - and up to our grandfather. You'll likely get a visit from a Kolinahr Master to make the final decision."

"Okay, Jace," Joel whispered back as he wiped his eyes. Then he smiled softly up into his brother's face, "Adam said I'm a Captain in the Unit, now."

"That's a Captain twice over, bro!" Jason grinned as he gave Joel an extra special squeeze.

"Yeah. I think it's honorary, more than anything. I'll never lead anyone into battle, but I still earned it. My master always called me worthless, but I earned becoming an army captain!" Joel grinned back, pride lighting up his face.

From around the corner where he and Chang had been listening, Adam Casey had to wipe tears from his eyes and choke back a sob of joy at the sight of his little Vulcan brother gaining some self-worth.

Chang smiled and simply hugged Adam tightly. "He is right. He will never see battle if we can help it - but that does not mean he could not. You have done well, brother!"

"So have you, Chang," Adam said as he turned in the hug to give his Asian brother a kiss on the cheek. "So have all of us!"

The last six months of training involved both the UNIT members and the VSO Operatives going through 'wargames'. The Doctor had arranged for photonic enemies to be created by the Tardis for both groups to be set against. Other times, however, both Jason and Adam Casey would set their respective groups on missions against each other - to further hone their skills.

It was during all this that a new 'war' started.

Practical Jokes.

It started small, at first. Then it got wilder and wilder. It was, really, a tribute to how close everyone had become. There was a real bond between everyone inside the Tardis by this point, and a real union between the Dragon and the UNIT.

Which is why the following was allowed to even happen...

When set against photonic troops, the 'bullets' would sting like hell when they hit a real person, but other than that do zero damage. The stinging was irritating, however.

Juan found out how 'irritating' it could be when Jason got revenge for a custard shower when he and Nathan had been mid-loving.

"Quick! Quick! Jason, fire at them... I have no line of sight!" Juan yelled out as 'bullets' and 'grenades' went off all around him in his little sheltered spot in the middle of the battlefield.

Jason, who was meant to be Juan's second for this 'test', just laughed. "Payback's are a bitch, little brother!"

"You fucking prick, I'm gonna kick your ass later, fuckhead!"

"Now, now... take it like a man, little boy!" Jason giggled as he pressed a button on his tricorder like device. He had reprogrammed the photonic troops to all focus on Juan.

Watching as the small ten year old tried to outrun fifty six 'troopers' all aiming for his arse (another refinement by Jason) was so funny that some of those watching actually wet themselves laughing.

Juan was at the same time pissed off to the extreme and also highly embarrassed. Especially when he tripped and got caught in a snare with his butt up in the air. A handy target for the 'troops' to aim at.

Jason started running at that point, for Adam and the Doctor finally managed to stop laughing enough to stop the 'exercise' and rescue the now hysterical and enraged Juan.

A few weeks later, and after having gotten their heads together on revenge, Juan started a prank that more than made up for his 'injured pride'.

At this point, I must add, the whole 'Prank War' had settled down into two factions. UNIT verses VSO. There were various kids - like Joel and Kevin - on either side that didn't get involved, but mainly, everyone was lending a hand with the 'fun'.

What Juan did, with Mont and Bast's help, was to persuade the Tardis to convert everyone in the VSO into their opposite sex... and he timed it so well that the vast majority of them were mid-love-making when it happened. He had even involved Jay and the Doctor - or should I say Mont and Bast had, since they had found out the Doctor had helped prank Juan to begin with.

Joel watched all this happening with mild curiosity and more than a small amount of shock.

From the time of that huge prank until they all left the Tardis, no more pranks happened, and the UNIT side thought they had won.

Adam Casey and Juan were insufferable with their gloating.

Koth and Korris, who had seemed to stay more or less neutral, were really acting as double agents. It was they that fed Jason and the Doctor the idea for revenge.

And it was little Joel to whom they all turned to implement it... for everyone - and I do mean 'everyone' - inside the Tardis thought of Joel as their cuddly little mascot.

Everyone in the VSO were sworn by oath to defend him anyway, as he was heir to a major Vulcan House. By the end of three years, they had also grown to respect him. He could fight and think strategy as well as the best of them. He was also practically 'Black' VSO - but that would have to be truly seen once they left the Tardis.

The UNIT guys ALSO thought of him as their own personal good luck charm. He was a Captain of the UNIT, within the Intel groups, and was as proficient as any of the best of them at almost every aspect of being a soldier. Juan had trained him on firearms, and he was very nearly as good as Juan. Jory found an apt pupil in explosives, while Will found Joel a joy to teach when on any aircraft. Adam had drilled the boy on tactics and command, while Chang and Amur Khan had refined the Vulcan's hand to hand fighting skills. Everyone in the UNIT knew that Joel was worthy of the rank he had been given.

His only weakness - known by BOTH teams - was that he could not defend himself. He would leap into the fight to help anyone else, but if he was alone against an enemy, he was defenceless. They knew this would take 'real time' to heal in him. He wasn't the only one with issues that had come to light, and the Doctor had clearly told them all less than a year into the training that those issues would need time outside of the Tardis to work through. So, the UNIT never held it against the frail seeming Vulcan for not being able to fight for himself. Nor did they hold it against Joel that he never killed. Not even the photonic enemies that the Tardis had created. Joel had simply incapacitated them. They hadn't even been injured. Not one drop of blood - real or photonic - had ever been shed by Joel.

And it was that one fact that earned Joel everyone's *highest* respect - even Juan's.

His skill. In a one on one fight, or in a fire fight or sword fight... he had never injured anyone, but he had rarely lost either. In fact, the only person Joel had never beaten in a fight was Chang... but it had been a very close call nonetheless. That, however is another story.

Regardless, everyone inside the Tardis had sworn - either alone and to themselves, or in small groups - to never let anything bad happen to their 'Little Elven Mascot' if they could help it.

...and ultimately, it was this respect and this trust that Jason wanted to take advantage of for his pay-back against the UNIT Leadership...

After some fast talking, and some encouragement from Kevin and Adam Short, Joel had decided to go ahead and do as Jason had suggested.

The day before they all were to leave the Tardis, Joel started to work on his own unique and hand made tricorder... to get the programming 'just so': to give a false reading of female anatomy and even a pregnancy...

Not one of the UNIT guys would expect their 'Little Elven Mascot' to lie to them... now would they?

Orlando - Short Compound:

After the thrumming had stopped, the Tardis' door opened to allow those who had gone to Utah to leave. The Doctor and Levi walked away slightly to talk, while the Cats, Matthew, Brant, Dean and Justy sat down to relax in the sun. Joel bounced outside to find himself in the grounds outside of Main CIC, and turned to see Cory and Sean waiting for him. "It was great!" he bubbled at them. "We was gone for AGES, but it only felt like a few minutes! We learnt loads and loads and loads and..."

"We get it," Cory giggled as he picked up the hyper Vulcan and hugged him briefly. "We're just glad you're back in time to say goodbye to us. We're going to Des Moines soon," he continued as JJ and Adam pounced Sean.

"What was that for?!" Sean protested from under the other two giggling boys.

"Just because," JJ said simply before jumping up and running off into CIC.

HUFF!

"OOOFFFF!... I-CHEYA!" Sean's muffled yell was just about heard from under the Sehlat that had just decided to, not pounce him, but lie on him gently.

Joel turned from the show to grin up at Cory. "Shall I rescue your hubby?"

"Naaah!" Cory giggled, "Let him suffer!"

"No sex for you tonight, *sweetheart*!" came Sean's muffled retort.

Joel winked at Cory, "That's okay. He still has his... you right handed or left, Cor?"

"Both," Cory chuckled.

"Interesting. You can do yourself and Sean at the same time... I'll have to try tha... no, no I won't," Joel said sadly as his face fell.

Cory hugged him close, "You'll be able to do it yourself one day, Lil'Elf. Don't beat yourself up over it - healing takes time."

"Cory! Sean! Time to go!" Teri called from just inside the building.

Joel stretched up and wrapped his arms around Cory's neck. After being lifted up to be held chest to chest with his brother, Joel kissed Cory on the lips. It was a serious kiss, but still a 'brother' one. "I'm gonna miss you bad, bro," Joel whispered with a few tears trickling down his face.

"You can come over to visit whenever you want," Cory whispered back.

Sean, meanwhile, had managed to fight his way out from under the large bear and came up to wrap himself around behind Joel. "Can I have one of them special kisses too, Lil'Elf?" he whispered into the little Vulcan's hair.

Joel nodded and was quickly swivelled around by Cory so that Sean was now holding him. After supplying just as loving a kiss to his other beloved brother, Joel murmured, "Go quickly, or I won't let you at all..."

As he placed Joel back onto his feet, Sean whispered, "By your command, Captain Short."

Wiping his eyes off on the back of his hand, Joel watched as Teri came outside with Adam, JJ, the two Mikyvis and the two Lions. "Bye," he called out tearfully. "Love you!!!"

"We love you, too!" Cory yelled, and he was echoed by the others.

Then, they vanished away by Mikyvis power.

Joel sighed, then turned to find Kevin waiting for him. "Hugs?" the little brown haired boy asked softly.

"Yes please," came Joel's muted response.

To the boys' surprise, in mid-hug they found another pair of arms encircling both of them. "I'll miss them too, guys," Justy said softly. "You need *anything*, even just a cuddle, you've got my full attention. Any time, anywhere."

"Thanks, Justy," both small boys whispered.

"You really are an angel, Cuz," Joel added with a smile up at him.

"I can't let you be the only one!" Justy replied with a smile.

Kevin reached up and laid his hand on Justy's forehead.

"Whatcha doin', Kev?" Joel asked curiously.

"He admitted it!" Kevin exclaimed in shock. "He... he must be ill... MEDIC!!!" he yelled with a giggle.

Justy giggled harder. "That is just between you two, me, and Liam. Better add the Wonder Twins too, noting hides from them long. I'll only admit it to the guys I really care about."

"We won't tell Dean that you care more 'bout us, then," Kevin whispered. "Even though he's right behind you looking like he's ready to give you a..."

"ARRRGH!"

"Wedgie!" Kevin completed with a wicked grin.

Dean brushed off his hands, nodded at the two boys, glared down at Justy, then walked inside with dignity - which only lasted as far as the doors before he broke into giggles.

Justy snickered as he quickly restored breathing room to his most prized treasures. "After Dean got 'hurt', we really bonded when we were sitting down trying to figure out what would happen between us with him being a Vifer now. We went from boyfriends to being kinda like one person, so I didn't even think about listing him. It's all kewl though; he owed me that wedgie from me sneaking up and giving him one while he was reading a report last night."

Joel sniggered, "And have you decided to go for being a Vifer now? Dean's gonna be that Time thingiebob, so you'll be affected by it too, won't you?"

"We're waiting to see just how that works out," Justy replied seriously. "I'm pretty sure by the way Galili acts that we'll find out pretty soon."

Joel was about to reply when Mikey appeared. "Ah, there you are with my fellow saint - I mean my fellow 'I'm No Angel!!' Justy who isn't a saint..." the mischievous Clan Guardian giggled.

"You out restocking your dirty magazine collection, Mikey?" Justy replied in return with an innocent expression glued on his face.

"Excuse me?!" Mikey protested, although his cheeks did colour up slightly. "Absolutely no need to. I have to watch the Clan get ready for nests almost every night. Enough eye candy there, thank you," he added with aplomb.

"And he spies on people having their first times, too," Kevin added mischievously. "Did you get any tips from us, Mikey?" he asked sweetly.

"I was not spying!" Mikey protested again, this time over Justy's howls of mirth. "I was... was... forget it. Yes, I picked up a few tips. No, I have no-one to use them on. Happy?"

"No," Joel stated sadly, his face falling, "You're lonely, aren't you? Did you ever... you know... have someone special - before... you know...?"

Mikey shook his head. "No, not really... well, yes - kinda. I dated a little bit, but never got serious as I was trying to be a Dad as well as a big brother to my brothers. That is until I found... there was one girl that seemed to be what I was looking for, but I died before it could get to more than dating and... messing around."

Joel felt a warm rush of - something - fly up his spine, and he smiled, "Don't worry, Mikey. We're all your family - and I'm sure you'll find someone special soon." Then he grinned at the Saint. "Messing around, huh?" he asked with a cute giggle. Then he winked at the now blushing angel.

"Can angels date?" Kevin asked no-one in particular.

"Justy did," Mikey said, sidestepping the question as he tried to regain control of his face.

Justy raised a hand and, through his uncontrollable howls of laughter, put on a fake female voice, "Wow, Mike! That was just... HEAVENLY!!" Then he literally started rolling around on the ground.

After booting Justy in his butt a few times - which only made Justy laugh all the harder - Mikey turned back to the giggling duo. "Joel. You need to get back into your armour and get ready for another mission."

Joel became dead serious. "Um, okay. Fo-wein Sa'ren!" he called out, and one ripple in the air later, both Joel and his Sehlat were fully armoured.

Joel giggled at the shocked looks he was getting from everyone who had not been present when the Guardian had given his gifts. He and the others had never told anyone about it, as it seemed just too personal.

"What the hell?!" Justy exclaimed, and Brant and Matthew jumped to their feet to stare at Joel in shock.

"I'll tell ya all later," Joel giggled. Then he looked at Mikey, who wasn't in the least surprised. Obviously, the Saint was in the know. "What's happening?" he asked.

"Lunch time for the bear and for Brant in Des Moines," Mikey said seriously.

Brant tore his eyes away from Joel and looked at the Saint. "It's that serious that you're sending the two most deadly hunters in the Clan with Joel?"

"Yes," Mikey said, as he gestured and both Joel and Brant found themselves on I-Cheya's back. "Ready?"

"Kinda," they both echoed before vanishing.

Kevin tugged on Mikey's wing. "Is it going to be okay?" he asked quickly as the angel turned and picked him up.

"Yep, it'll be fine. You'd better get ready too, but for something else. Seeya later, Kev," Mikey smiled before kissing the boy and putting him back down. Then he vanished.

Justy rubbed his eyes, then looked down at Kevin, "If my Cuz don't tell me, I'll tickle YOU til you do! Until then, I'll leave that all slide... okay?"

Kevin nodded seriously, while touching the new pendant he wore around his neck. "Okay, Justy."

The others all looked at each other and nodded their agreement to Justy's statement. They really wanted to know, but, after the time in the Tardis, most knew by now that things happened when they were meant to. Not before.

Instead, the two cheetahs started bitching.

"You know I really hate it that he goes anywhere without us like this. How can we protect him if he runs off places all the time. Adam will have our hides and then get nasty with us after skinning us, if Joel

gets hurt and we'll never be allowed to look after people again and..." Mercury started to whine, but his sister Artemus closed his mouth gently.

She said, "He's with Brant and his bear. He'll be okay."

"But..."

Artemus glared at Mercury for a second, and the cheetah silenced. "Better. Look, things are different, here. They know not to go do stuff that'll put Joel in danger unless *we're* with him. We just have to learn to trust them. 'Kay?"

"Kay," he mumbled softly.

Kevin bent over to pick up Blackie, then said as he stood upright, "I'm in constant contact with Sa'r, guys. I'll tell ya if something goes wrong. And Leev is here, so we have fast access."

"What am I, chopped liver?" the Doctor giggled, play-pouting at Kevin.

"Yeah, raw and icky!" Ricky giggled from his nearby perch, giggling to show that he was joking.

The Doctor glanced over towards the sound of laughter and started laughing himself. "How the hell did you two get up there, little ones?" he called up to the small blond child who was seated with Timmy on top of the Tardis.

Timmy sniggered and pointed at Ricky, "Sitting Eagle."

"Soaring Eagle," Ricky said straight after him, pointing at his boyfriend.

"Do we needs to spell it out for ya, Unca Galli?" Timmy continued, breaking out into full giggles.

"Oh, comedians. I have a reward for cheeky little monkeys who try teasing me," the Doctor giggled as the others with him broke out in laughter.

Timmy pulled a face, "Yeah? What?"

"And will you catch us?" Ricky echoed cheekily.

"Yes," the Doctor replied as he Folded from the ground and appeared behind them, grabbing them lightly around the shoulders, "I will catch you. Just 'cos your daddies are off on a holiday don't mean you get to tease your uncles without getting paybacks..."

All three vanished before reappearing on the ground by Kevin and the others, soaking wet.

"Where to, this time?" Aphrodite asked curiously.

Timmy lifted up the baby seal he was cuddling. "Northern Canada," he giggled. "This little baby lost his mama, so we're gonna look after him."

"I think Cory's gonna need a bigger house..." Kevin muttered.

"Gonna find Unca Josiah," Timmy continued as he stood up. "We needs his help to make a place for Flipper."

Matthew pulled up his VSO tricorder and started tapping in a few commands. "He's not up here, little dude. You'll have to wait."

"I can help," Quint said helpfully as he walked over with Bryce and Dylan. "What do you need?"

"A bigger house," Kevin said seriously under his breath.

Hermes nodded, "And a large place for animals..."

Quint looked around. "I could do that, but... Mmm... need to check on some things. Leev? I'll be back later. Timmy, you let him swim in the Rest Stop for now. I'll have a room done for him in your house in an hour, then I'll see about a bigger house..."

With a flash of light, the Q-boy vanished.

"Did he think I was serious?" Kevin asked Levi.

Levi nodded. "Uncle Cory's getting a bigger house."

"Oh... boy, I hope I won't get in trouble for this!"

"Nope," Levi shook his head. "You won't. Nor will Quint. Cory'll just think it was Dilly playing pranks again."

"Hey!" Dylan protested. "It's not *always* me, Leev!"

"True, you and Bryce take turns..." Levi giggled.

"No-one's ever caught me doing things bad, Levi!" Bryce said, looking scandalized.

"But that don't mean you *don't* do things wrong, does it?" Mercury giggled.

"I'm gonna find Xan," Bryce poked his tongue out at them all before popping away.

Dylan giggled. "And I'll find Thomas. I wanna try some stuff!"

Levi rolled his eyes as his other brother vanished, then he looked at the Doctor who was laughing softly.

"Fun family you got. Well, time for us to go," the little Time Lord said as Timmy and Ricky ran off, carrying Flipper the Seal and with Justy following behind them to 'try' and keep things sane.

"Where?" Kevin asked.

The Doctor smirked, "Somewhere warm. Time for a little holiday of our own."

"Who's going?" Levi asked.

"You, me, the cats, Kev, Matthew and Blackie. We'll meet Joel, Brant, I-Cheya and a few others there," the Doctor said as they all Folded away.

About fifteen minutes later, those that had vanished with the Doctor returned. Justy had returned from Cory's back yard, where Timmy and Ricky were playing with Flipper, and waved at them. "Where's my Elvish cousin, Kev?" he asked with a grin.

"With his new brother," Kevin giggled. "He's doing a 'Cory' and adopting him for Teri, just to save her the effort!"

"Yep; he's a Short boy!" Justy giggled. "Why do you have those leis on?"

"Because the folks in Hawaii gave them to us," Matthew answered. "We'll have to explain later though; we've a mission to prep for. Kev? You'll need your armour."

Kevin nodded at Matthew absently as he started taking off the leis from around his neck. "I'm thirsty," he said to himself. "Anyone else want a drink?"

Justy looked seriously at Kevin, "What's this about you and armour?"

"I've got a set like Sa'r's," Kevin said as he tried to side step the question.

"Kevin," Justy's tone was insistent, and he crossed his arms - just to show he was serious.

Kevin sighed. "Sa'r and I are going with Adam to rescue some kids," he said reluctantly.

Justy's eyes went wide and his face paled. "You mean that base that is heavily fortified and has more guns than Doom - the base that Nathan and Vicky have been using CIC as a base to plan for?!"

"Uh... yeah, that'll be the one," Kevin muttered, scuffing his foot against the ground. "We're gonna go along and help... and stuff..."

"Does Uncle Spock know about this?!" Justy asked, his voice raising. "Does Aunt TERI?! Or your Pop??"

"... ummm.... can I take the Fifth?" Kevin trembled.

Spock walked outside quickly, Justy's tone alerting him that there might be an issue. "Am I to infer there is a situation that I must be made aware of?" Spock asked.

Justy was now caught between ratting out a brother, protecting a found 'treasure' of his Vulcan House, stopping two little brothers from getting in WAY over their heads, and obeying a senior member of his family. "Ummm..."

Matthew traded a look with Galli, jerked his head towards CIC, and said aloud, "Time to get ready for the day, Time Lord! Let's go!"

"Wait there until I have resolved this issue, Matthew," Spock said calmly, however Matthew could see his A'nirih was not as calm as his Vulcan facade made out.

"We weren't fast enough, Matt," Galli grimaced.

"Justin. I would like an answer, please. Or Kevin instead, since your face is approximately the same hue as my nephew's. What is going on that would require my knowledge, Teri Short's *and* Allen Thompson's?" Spock asked as he employed his Kohlinar skills to hold the gaze of both boys at once.

"You tell him, Justy..." Kevin squeaked nervously, hoping beyond hope that the Doctor was about to step in and help.

Galli caught the glance thrown his way, and furiously shook his head, "I've stood in enough corners for this lifetime. I'm not getting involved!"

"You took me to get the armour, *Galli!*" Kevin squeaked again.

"I am waiting," Spock said, now bringing Galli into his 'field' of vision.

"Oh, thanks a bunch!" Galli cried.

Justy sighed, "Kev and Joel are going to go with Adam Casey to save those kids at the base we've been talking to Nath' and Vicky and the others about, and the Doctor made Kevin armour like Joel's and... and, well... I'm sorry, Kev..."

Spock just stood there for a long moment.

He then turned and re-entered the building.

"Five... four... three..." Galli started counting.

Justy looked at him, "What's going to..."

CRASH

"Ah," Justy finished as the unmistakable sound of a door being ripped to pieces with a coffee table reached his ears. "I think you'd better run, Kev... son or no son, he's **PISSED!**"

Kevin gulped, but didn't run. He sighed and hung his head before heading into CIC and making for the kitchen. The others followed behind him, glancing at each other as well as keeping their eyes and ears open for an enraged Vulcan Admiral.

All except Blackie, who remained outside. He panted at them in wolfish laughter, then vanished.

After allowing Helen to fuss over them for a moment or two, they all settled down at the counters in the Kitchen and started snacking. Even the cheetahs had a small nibble, although they rarely ate before evening meals.

Mostly, they were silent, apart from the odd question from Justy regarding their time away in Hawaii. Kevin, however, didn't say a word. He never liked getting told off nor shouted at, and he was half afraid that Spock would return and do just that.

"I think I should go to him first. Don't you, Justy?" Kevin asked out of the blue twenty minutes later, while Hermes was telling them all about his attempts at surfing.

Justy looked over before reaching out to lay a gentle hand on Kevin's shoulder. "No. Let him come to you, Kev."

"But what if I..."

Kevin's voice cut off sharply as his eyes went unfocused. Then they widened with wonder, "Oh... oh, my... I need Poppa! Where's my Poppa?" he yelled joyfully as he went from sitting still to flat out running. He vanished into the Rec Room faster than Justy could follow.

"What happened?" Matthew asked curiously as he and the others ran in after him.

They found Kevin jumping up and down before Allen, his twin, and his two brothers, gabbling a mile a minute. Then Spock entered and approached, now looking slightly calmer.

"... and Joel says he's sweet and cute and really needs someone to love and look after him and..." Kevin was saying, but Allen covered the excited boy's mouth, gently, with a hand.

"I get that you're excited, Little One, but what is this about?" he asked.

"Joel's found someone he thinks we should *adopt*, Poppa!" Kevin said, rolling his eyes. Why can't adults just *listen* when there's something exciting being explained?

Spock had been about to inform Allen on the situation that Joel and Kevin were about to get themselves into when he heard this, and so he stopped short and just listened.

"Adopt? Are you sure you want to do that, Kev?" Allen asked cautiously. "It's a lot of responsibility."

"Yes, Poppa - we are sure! Cory and Sean have. Kyle and Ty have even had kids for real, and they're younger than us! We both talked 'bout this last night in between making... making... uh, you know," Kevin finished with a blush.

"Making a lot of 'noise', Kev?" Kenny giggled and winked at his beloved twin. Kevin blushed more, but did grin back happily as he nodded.

Allen looked up at Spock, who nodded slightly. "They have the maturity together that they lack apart. They will be adequate parents for any youngling," Spock said with assurance. High praise... from a Vulcan.

"Then I'll give my blessing, too, Little One. When do you get to see him?" Allen asked as Kevin blushed even more at what Spock had just said.

"Right now," Pablito's voice said from no-where as Kevin vanished.

Galli snorted, "One down, seven more to go."

Allen's eye widened as Spock asked, "Seven *more*?"

"You'll see. And yes - they both need to go on their 'field-trip', Dad. It's one of 'those' things," Galli said seriously.

"What's this?" Allen asked as he looked between them.

Justy and the others decided to vacate the area post-haste as Spock started to explain, taking Kenny, Jake and Xain with them.

Editor's Notes:

Well, you can't really call this a cliffhanger. Or I can't, anyway. It doesn't seem as if anyone is in eminent, life threatening danger.

It must be one of those dramatic pauses. Yeah, that's it. I am rather hoping that there will be a new chapter dropped in our laps, soon. I can hope, can't I?

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher

Clan Short Archivist's Review Notes:

Cliffhanger or not a Cliffhanger, is that really the question? Again this is a wonderful melding of several different authors and their characters. We have learned more about several of the characters and their lives. Yet at the same time this chapter leaves far more questions unanswered than answered. Hopefully the next chapter will answer those questions without leaving even more unanswered. Will that happen? We can only hope.

TSL

Chapter 18

"The Shiny Warrior!"

London, UK - No 10 Downing Street

3.30pm - GMT (10.30am EST):

The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Tony Blair, was sitting in his office reading the report that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir Anthony Pearce, had just given to him. The General sat across the table from the PM and waited until the last page had been read.

"As you can see, sir, the VSO are closing the noose around the FCC. Also, the group known as 'The UNIT' are pulling the Genesis Project to pieces. Should we lend our aid?" Sir Anthony asked softly.

"No, not yet," Tony answered as he re-read the last page. "We are now in a state of war, as per Her Majesty's declaration on Wednesday; but until you get your marching orders, we'll just keep ourselves at the ready." He looked up and narrowed his eyes at the General, "In regards to that, do you foresee any difficulties? How are our forces?"

"The English regiments have all been thoroughly debriefed, sir; but as yet we have not started the new training with the Irish, Welsh and Scottish regiments. I can say, however, than the new Naval Impulse Destroyer, Victory, has been fully staffed and are debriefed. The other Impulse Destroyers are slated for their training soon," Anthony Pearce replied with a soft smile.

"Good. And the RAF?"

"Same as the Army, sir," Anthony replied. "English Stations, Wings and Squadrons are prepared. We have yet to start on the others."

"And the rest of the Empire..."

"... will follow along as ordered from the Imperial Ministry of Defence, yes sir," Anthony completed, nodding his head. "What of the information we received yesterday?"

"I do not think he will cause a problem, General," Tony answered, waving his hand dismissively. "Names mean very little to me. However, we must keep Joseph happy, so we'll put his plan into motion. If he thinks those three will do as he foresees, then tell the operator to initiate it."

The General stood up, "And what of our mutual problem?"

"She will have to be dealt with, and soon. Otherwise, we'll be pushed into a corner before our full forces can be brought to bear," Tony said, his brow furrowing. "I'll contact our support, and get them moving now."

The General nodded his head and left the room, leaving Tony to sigh as he reread the briefs he had been given.

Orlando, Clan Short Compound:

"DAD! DAAAAAD!" Joel yelled from the kitchen as he and Kevin reappeared, along with a small five year old, brown haired boy who was cuddled on Joel's hip. "Dad? Where are you?"

"I am in the Rec Room, my son," Spock called back.

Kevin giggled and kissed the little boy's cheek, "You'll like your new grandpas, Rafey."

"Kewl! Captain Spock's my Granpa!" the boy crowed as Joel carried him through into a fairly full room.

Applause met their ears from the kids assembled as Spock and Allen came toward them. When the two adults reached the two smaller boys and their even smaller new son, they knelt down.

"Dad; Pop: this is Raphael Leroy Short-Thompson. Rafey? This is your Granpa, *Admiral* Spock, and your *other* granpa, Allen. You wanna go have some cuddles with them?" Joel asked.

Rafe looked into his dad's eyes, "Yeah, if you says dey not gonna hurt me, den yeah!"

"They'll never hurt you," Kevin whispered as he rubbed the smaller child's back.

Rafe hopped down from Joel's arms and scooted over into Spock's embrace as fast as he short little legs could carry him. "Wow! Wowwowwow! GRANPA!!!"

Of course, Timmy wasn't going to let a new potential member of the Tribe go more than ten seconds without a greeting...

"NEW GUY!!!!" he and Ricky yelled, as they pounced onto Spock and Allen as the two men were cuddling the small child.

Belar and Ross were seconds behind them as well... the 'Rugrats' had to be represented officially, after all.

Then both men found themselves piled under by giggling teens and kids - any excuse to pounce Spock without making it seem like a prank, you see. In fact, the blonds in the group used it as paybacks for the blond-joke Spock had cracked earlier that morning. The fact that Joel and Kevin were also pulled into the pile was a side effect, though.

"Hey you little bunch of rats, let the old guys breathe!" Aaron said with a laugh as he walked in, to see what the noise was all about.

"Watch who you're calling rat, Air-head!" Gabe giggled from inside the mound of kids covering Spock, Allen, Joel, Kevin and Rafe.

"If the name fits...." Aaron giggled, as he wisely decided it would be best to leave the room.

"GETS HIM!" Belar yelled as he wormed his way out of the mound and started running after Aaron.

Aaron tried to run, but *somehow* he found his way blocked by about a third of the kids from the pile. "No fair!" he laughed as they closed in on him and pounced from all sides.

Levi just sat by Joel and Kevin and shook his head.

"Dylan again?" Kevin asked as he laughed at the predicament Aaron found himself... under.

"No," Levi sighed as he rolled his eyes. "Bryce."

"Snitch!" Bryce yelled from 'somewhere' in the Aaron 'burial-mound'.

"Brat!" Levi yelled back, his smile giving away his feelings about his little brother.

"Imp!" both the other Mikyvis chorused.

"Dey always like dis, Daddy? Poppa?" Rafe asked from Spock's lap.

"Yes," both boys responded with a grin.

Joel grinned at his boy's giggles, then asked his father, "Daddy, can you and Poppa Allen look after Rafey while me and Kev go help Adz and the others?" His question gave away the fact that Kevin had told him Spock had already found out about the upcoming battle.

"Of course. I shall introduce him to your grandparents while you are away. Please take care of yourselves, my children. I shall be - put out - if anything were to happen to either of you," Spock replied, his eyes tightening noticeably.

"We will," they both answered together as their Cat guards came up to them.

Allen looked closely at Kevin, "We will have a long talk afterwards, Little One. I don't like you keeping *these* types of secrets from me - but I'll let you off this once. As long as you're careful."

Kevin hung his head slightly, "Sorry, Poppa. I didn't think you'd let me go if I'd have told you. I promise I'll be careful."

"Where's your bear and wolf?" Hermes asked Joel, as Allen pulled Kevin in for a quick hug.

"They'll meet us there," Joel responded with a smile. "They say they have things to do."

Hermes shrugged, "Okay. Matthew has already gone over to our Base to wait for us, and he said Brant will meet us there. Come on, Elf!"

Joel stood up, and helped Kevin to his feet. "You gonna try ordering your armour this time, Kev?" Joel giggled.

"Might as well. I wore it enough in the Tardis," Kevin replied hopefully.

Allen watched in stunned awe as Kevin called out "Shield!" and a suit of armour like Joel's morphed in from liquid air to snap into place around him.

"Hey! It worked!" Kevin giggled.

"I need one of those for when Zac opens his big mouth around the twins!" Mark chuckled as he watched the boys getting ready from a safe distance.

Kevin grinned over at him, "Go talk to the Guardian, then!"

/Blade of Surak, call me. I wish to meet someone in person/ came a voice that was clearly heard by everyone in the room.

Timmy and Pauly's heads poked up quickly from the pile of kids covering Aaron. They recognised the 'voice'.

Joel smiled and said, "Sure thing! Sa'ren!"

From out of a ripple in the air, a huge Sword pushed its way into being. Spock's eyebrows vanished into his fringe. "Is that what I think it is?" he asked, as he looked at the floating, Shattered Sword.

Joel nodded as he watched Timmy and Pauly make their way nervously toward the floating Sword that hung in the air before him.

/Do not fear me, Timothy Short. Nor you, Paul Short. As I told you, I like you/

"You're kewl!" Timmy giggled.

The Sa'ren pulsed with light briefly, and Joel recognised it as the Sword's version of a 'smile'.

/Take me in your left hand, Timothy. Ricky Michaels - please come here, too/

"How'd I get into this?" Ricky giggled as he joined Timmy and Pauly.

/The Balance is uneven. You are both one and the same, yet not at the same time. I will remedy that/ the Sword answered the small boy. Timmy had already placed his hand on the hilt, and found that the weight was almost non-existent. */Place your left hand just under your partner's, Ricky - but make sure you are not touching/*

"Okay... you belong to Unca Joel, so I trust ya," Ricky replied as he followed directions.

/Sa'ren - Time, Space and Matter mean naught to It which commands us. You must command/

"Command to do what?" Joel asked, his face puzzled.

/The Balance is uneven/

Joel's brow crinkled slightly, but he shrugged. Logic would dictate that he simply command it to be fixed, so - "Make them even, Sword of Surak!"

Joel's armour glowed brightly, as did the Shattered Sword. As did Timmy and Ricky... and, brightest of all, Timmy's Phasenmorph...

/Kitisci Lhaamin, be thou twinned!/?

Ricky gasped, "My arm! My arm feels funny!"

Hello, Ricky

"Wha...? Timmy? What was...?" Ricky spluttered as the light quickly vanished. He looked at his arm and gasped again. On his arm was a red striped phasenmorph, identical to Red who was on Timmy's arm.

"KEWL!!!" Timmy cried out happily. "You've got a FUZZYMORE!!!"

Do you like me, Ricky? Ricky heard in his mind again.

Mutely, Ricky nodded his head.

/He is Rahm'Fo-dan - your Thunder Shield, and brother to Kitisci Lhaamin. Now, Balance is restored/?

"Oh crap... TWO overpowered midgets???" Aaron chuckled, as he struggled out from under the pile to see what was happening.

"Bite us, Uncle Air-head!" they both giggled back at him.

Pauly giggled as he reached out and rubbed the spine of both Timmy's and Ricky's 'morph, causing both boys' eyes to roll in their heads. "Funny!"

The Sword pulsed at the small child, */Take me into both of your hands, and I shall answer a question for you - but only in part. What you do with the answer is up to you.../?*

As Timmy and Ricky handed the Sword to their little brother, Gabe asked Joel, "Did that Sword just create a living being?"

Joel shook his head, "No. The armour told me that the Sa'ren took a cell from Timmy's 'morph and formed a twin from it - basically, an advanced type of 'test-tube-baby-morph'. Life can only come from Above."

"Oh. Cool!... why is Pauly glowing?" Gabe spluttered.

Paul Mills rushed over, but didn't actually touch his little shadow. "What's happening, Joel?" he fretted nervously.

Pauly was, however, completely unconcerned. In fact, he was giggling about his ears tickling and about the rest of his body as well.

Joel started to laugh, "Ummm.... I hope Cor and Ted don't freak out!"

"What is going...?" Aaron started, but stopped dead as the glow vanished from around Pauly. "Oh! My! GOD!"

/This is the only answer I can give for whom you will find as your own 'special person', Child of Family 'Clan Short' of Vulcan/ said the Sword as it floated out of Pauly's now olive coloured hands and vanished away into its ripple effect.

"Why's ev'ryone lookin' at me?" Pauly asked as he glanced at the stunned faces everyone there had pulled.

"Umm... you're a... you are... ummm..." Paul spluttered, but Joel finished.

"You're half human," the Son of Spock giggled as he listened to what his Armour was telling him.

"I taught I wuz ALL human," Pauly replied as he scratched the side of his head. In doing so, he touched his right ear. "HUH?! Pointed???" he exclaimed.

Joel continued to giggle, "Umm, you *were* ALL human. Now you're half Vulcan! Like ME!"

"And what's more... you're a platinum BLOND Vulcan!!!" Travis howled in glee as he fell to the floor laughing.

Spock stood up and came toward his grandson, and Pauly looked up into his grandpa's face. Pauly's blue eyes had changed shade slightly and now looked much like Joel's, but his hair was as bright as before. "Are dey prarkin' me, Gramps?" he asked softly.

Spock shook his head. "No, child. Do you trust me?"

Pauly nodded his head, a smile coming to his face as big Paul joined him and put his hands on Pauly's shoulders.

Spock nodded, then tapped his communicator. "T'Pol. Could you join me in the Rec Room, please?"

"Certainly, Spock. I am on the Enterprise. I will be there in three minutes."

"Not really," Levi giggled as Quint snapped his fingers, and T'Pol was suddenly there.

"Or not," she said, her voice impassive. "What do you need, son?" she asked. Then she saw Pauly. "Never mind - I have worked it out. Instead, how is it that this child has become one of our blood?"

"The Sa'ren," Spock said, his eyes relaying more than his words did.

"Change that which is to be Anew...'," she quoted. "I see. We can use the Dining Room table. That is approximately the right height."

"Agreed." Spock nodded before looking down into Pauly's questioning gaze. "Your father, Cory, is not able to Name you, for he is not Vulcan and therefore has no chance of being able to See. Now that you are Vulcan, you *must* be Named, or you will remain 'Forsaken' by our culture. As the next *Vulcan* male in the line, I am now tasked with Naming you - just as you saw me Name your uncle, Sa'ren."

"But I has a name already, Gramps," Pauly smiled up at the man.

"Yes, but now, you'll have another one - maybe like mine!" Joel giggled as he moved over to hug the boy, with Paul.

Pauly smiled, "Otay! Dat sounds KEWL!"

Spock looked at his son, "As his uncle, can you assist Timmy, Calen and Cabe in getting him ready?"

"Sure, Daddy," Joel bubbled.

T'Pol sat down on the nearest sofa to mentally prepare, while Spock went into the Dining Room.

Kevin looked around at the other kids, "Let's all go into the Dining Room, too - they need to get things ready here. I'll come with you and tell you about what'll happen."

They all nodded and left, following Kevin into the Dining Room. Rafe didn't know what he was meant to be doing, however, so he clung onto Joel tightly.

Joel smiled down at him before gesturing Calen and CD over to join them. Ricky gave Timmy and Pauly a quick peck on the cheek before scampering out to join the others. Paul Mills did not leave, however. "He's like my little brother. I'm staying, too," he said stubbornly.

"That is good," T'Pol said, nodding at them all. "Sa'ren, please continue while I meditate."

Joel turned to Timmy, Calen and CD, "You saw how I was 'dressed' when I was Named, yes?"

"Dressed?" CD giggled. "Uh, yeah... hehehe..."

Pauly giggled as well. "I gotta get nekid!" he crowed with even more giggles.

Joel nodded, then said, "In a moment, I'll get you the Naming Robes for after. Once Daddy has Named you, your big brothers haveta dress you in it."

"And I do like you did? Just let 'em?" Pauly rushed out with excitement.

"Yup. Just relax. It's really fun," Joel smiled as he gave Rafe at his side another squeeze.

"Kay!"

While Timmy and the others were getting Pauly 'dressed for the occasion', Joel went into Main CIC and to the replicator. A minute later and he went back into the Rec Room to find T'Pol by the door leading to the Dining Room with Pauly being carried in her arms. "We are ready, Sa'ren. You and Pauly's brothers need to stand behind your father."

Joel nodded, handed the robe he had replicated to Timmy, and then led them and his small son in to stand behind Spock.

Aaron turned the lights down so that the room was as dark as the Cavern of Naming on Vulcan, then took his place in the crowd watching.

In the darkness of the room they all watched as T'Pol made her way in and toward Spock, who was standing at the far end of the large dining table.

"Spock, behold your Grandson," she stated clearly, as she carefully handed the small boy into Spock's arms.

Spock looked into the smiling face of the blond haired Vulcan child he now held, then lowered him to lie on the table before him.

Then, just as with his own son, Spock placed his fingertips at Pauly's temple and turned his gaze inwards to See.

Everyone watched and waited for a long moment before Spock breathed out slowly. "I Name you Senva, Child of Cory, Child of Spock," he said, before leaning down to kiss Senva's forehead.

Timmy giggled and moved forward with Calen and CD. Easily and quickly, they had their little Vulcan brother dressed in the black Naming Robes that Joel had replicated. Then they hugged him until he squeaked.

"Why does that name sound familiar?" Aaron asked, as he scratched his head. "Something I heard in Mr. T's lessons a few weeks ago..."

Joel looked at 'Senva' in wonder, "Senva was an ancient Vulcan healer, over 50 or so thousand years ago. He could see what a person's problems were with just a glance, and his love for others, and pain at their pain made him famous!"

"Do you like your name, Pauly?" Timmy asked, as he hugged his little brother even tighter.

Pauly giggled, "Yeah, it means I could be just like Daddy!"

Tommy giggled, "Pauly, your Daddy counna put a band-aid on the broad siduva barn! You better be tryin ta be better'n him!"

"Is that after when he eventually manages to HIT it with his morph?" Aaron giggled.

Pauly poked his little green tongue out at them both. "Don't pick on my DADDY!" he protested, before giggling.

"We have to go, Joel," Aphrodite whispered as she quickly went to Joel's side. "We're gonna be late for the meeting."

"Okay," he answered, before kneeling down to pull Pauly, Timmy and Ricky into a hug. "I'll talk to you after I get back, okay?"

"Okay," they chorused happily.

"Will you help Daddy look after Rafey? And can you wait til I'm back before making him Rugrat and Tribe? I'd like to see him go through the Swearing In."

"Sure!" Timmy giggled, as Pauly quickly pulled the surprised Rafe into a hug with the rest of them.

"You be a good boy and make friends, okay?" Joel smiled at his new son.

"I will, Daddy Joel," he nodded earnestly.

Joel stepped back and crooked his finger at Pauly, who slipped to his side. "Pauly - Rafey has a problem with animals. Um, could you talk to him a bit? Help him with his fear?"

"Sure, Unca Joel! We'll start wit aninimal cookies!" Pauly replied with a grin.

Joel smiled, "Okay. You know best. Kyle told me in my head that he and you'd know better than anyone here."

"Uh huh. Me an Ky had a bad daddy. Did Raffy have a bad daddy, too?" Pauly asked seriously.

"Uh huh. He had a bad mammy, too. He's okay with Blackie and 'Cheya, but they're goin' with me to a rescue. We'll be back later to help," Joel answered as he ran his fingers over Pauly's pointy ears softly.

"K... me an Slider an Allie will help him," Pauly said with a determined look.

Joel kissed Pauly quickly. "Thanks. Seeya later," he whispered.

He stepped back and linked hands with Kevin. The other cats came up and gathered around them. Kevin asked, "Shall I call for beam out?"

Joel smiled, "Yeah, unless you wanna walk to *Camp Bam Bam...*"

As soon as he said the words 'Camp Bam Bam', his armour glowed and the air turned to liquid around him, and around the others with him.

Then, they vanished.

Spock's eyes widened, and silence hung in the air for a long moment. Then he turned to Levi, "Was that you?"

Levi shook his head slowly.

Spock was about to ask something else when his comm went off. *"Poppa Spock?"* It was Jason.

"Yes, son?" Spock answered after tapping the badge.

"We have Raphael's former parents in custody on the Yoshuhlnak. Do you want to beam up to run the judgement, or shall we leave it for Tel?"

"I believe I can trust Telez to do the right thing. I have to help my newest grandson, and I would prefer to stay here and begin doing so," Spock answered.

"Understood. Voice out."

Spock looked again at where his son had just been, then he turned to look at the others in the room. "I believe we will find out what has just happened later, children. Go back to your play."

"Yes, Gramps!" "Yes, Dad!" "Okay, Uncle Spock!"

Spock then looked down at Ricky, Timmy, Pauly and Rafe. "Senva - will you and your brothers join me and Raphael for lunch with my parents?"

Pauly blinked at first, then giggled. "My new name! I's gonna take a bit ta get used to it! Sure, Gramps!"

"T'Pol?" Spock asked, looking over at his mother-in-law.

She nodded. "I shall call for Trip to join us there."

Meanwhile:

"You wanna go find Timmy and the others?" Jimmy asked Solkar as they eventually climbed out of the pool. Jimmy had been teaching Solkar to swim, so when everyone else had vacated the pool on a search for food, they had remained. Solkar had gotten fairly good at swimming already. 'Must be a Vulcan thing,' Jimmy thought to himself as he watched the water run off his new friend's naked form. 'He's cute.'

Solkar noticed Jimmy's eyes roaming over his body and blushed. He hid it as best he could and answered, "No. I would like to go and see my grandparents for food. Fa'Komi said I could eat with them. Do you want to join us?"

Jimmy grinned and nodded, then took Solkar's hand to head for the showers.

Solkar watched for a moment as Jimmy adjusted the spray. "Why do we need to shower? Are we not wet enough?"

Jimmy giggled, "But we're all stinky, Sol. We need to wash off the pool water, or it's gonna smell weird all day!"

Solkar sniffed at himself, and his forehead creased. "I am unable to smell anything amiss."

"That's 'cos we've been in the water for hours. We're used to it, but to others, we smell funny," Jimmy explained.

"Okay, I shall do as you suggest." The seven year old Vulcan smiled as he went to join Jimmy under the shower.

Jimmy grinned at him, then handed him the shower-gel. "Can you wash my back, please?"

Solkar nodded and began to spread the soap over his friend's back and neck.

Soon, both of them were giggling and covered in suds and their hair seemed white with shampoo as well.

"Sword fight?" Jimmy asked with a giggle.

Solkar raised an eyebrow, then sneezed as a bit of soap went up his nose. "What do you mean?" he asked, after Jimmy had finished laughing at him.

Jimmy looked down and patted gently at what Solkar was 'pointing' up at him. "Sword fight," he giggled as he used his own 'sword' to bat against Solkar's.

Solkar giggled and nodded, understanding the jest and the reference.

It was in the middle of their 'duel' that Amanda walked in and found them. "Shall I come back later?" she asked with amusement in her voice.

Jimmy, blushing, stammered, "We were only playing, Granma 'Manda. We weren't playing those *other* games."

"...yet," Amanda completed for him, with a wink. Then she chuckled, "Get dried up. Your lunch is ready."

Solkar wasn't blushing at all. Jimmy had been right; they were only sword-fighting, after all. "We will, Fa'Komi. Can Jimmy join us?"

"Certainly. I've just been told we have a few more eating with us, and your father will be there as well, Jimmy," she added, looking down at Kirk Junior.

"Kewl!" Jimmy bubbled. "We'll be there soon!"

Amanda nodded before leaving them to finish off their shower.

"What did my grandmother mean by 'yet', Jimmy?" Solkar asked curiously.

Jimmy blinked, then grinned. "I'll tell you later. And show you, too, if you want."

"Can you not tell me now?" Solkar asked, as he followed Jimmy to the towels.

"Well, it involves our dickies, and playing, and feeling REAL good!" Jimmy giggled.

"Sex?" Solkar asked mid wipe with his towel, staring at Jimmy.

"Well, yeah. Kinda. You've never touched your dickie and made it feel good?" he asked curiously.

"I am not even seven, by Vulcan standards," Solkar answered, as he went back to drying himself down. "I am at least four years away from the start of puberty, and longer until Pon Farr. I have never felt the need to do so."

"Boy, you've been missing out!" Jimmy giggled. "If you wanna, I can show you later."

Solkar looked at him blankly for a moment, then blushed slightly, "You like me, do you not?"

"Well, yeah! You're my friend... aren't you?" Kirk Junior asked, his voice becoming uncertain.

"Of course. I meant, you like me as more than just friends. Am I correct?"

"Uh... well, yeah. A bit. You're nice and cute and I... I dunno, but my tummy feels funny when I look at you, and even funner when I touch you or you me, an'..."

"I understand. I like you, too. I get, as you say here, flutterbyes in my stomach..." Solkar said as he blushed harder, but he was interrupted by Jimmy laughing.

"*Flutterbyes?!'*" Jimmy howled as he fell to his butt laughing.

"Is that not the saying?" Solkar queried.

"Kinda," chortled Jimmy. "They're called 'butterflies', Sol!"

"Ah. Thank you. We do not have such insects on Vulcan," the young Vulcan smiled before he too giggled.

"Come on! I'm hungry!" Jimmy giggled, as he pulled himself back to his feet and ran for his clothes, with Solkar hot on his heels.

It wasn't long before both boys were running though the side door to Teri's house, and heading toward the kitchen and dining room. As they skidded, laughing and giggling, into the Dining Room, they saw that everyone was already at the table waiting for them.

"Solkar! Solkar! Lookie! I'm a VULCAN, TOO!" Pauly crowed out as he leapt down from his chair and ran over to greet the slightly older boy.

Solkar and Jimmy's jaws dropped open, and they stared at the platinum blond Vulcan boy in front of them. Solkar managed to find his voice first, "How is this possible?"

"Make up?" Jimmy asked, as he reached to tug lightly on Pauly's ear. Pauly giggled. "Nope, it's not make up!" Jimmy gasped.

"Sit down, children, and I shall explain as best that I am able," Spock said lightly. "And Solkar, I am very pleased to finally meet you," he added, looking at the part Romulan child who was still gaping at Pauly.

Solkar stiffened slightly as his blue eyes darted over to meet Spock's. "Thank you, Admiral Spock," he murmured.

Spock's brow furrowed slightly at Solkar's discomfort, and Sarek and Amanda did not miss it either. "What is the matter?" Spock asked, looking closer and closer at the small boy.

"I am fine, sir," Solkar said, averting his eyes and yet trembling slightly. "I just did not expect to meet you here."

Amanda came around the table and knelt down before him. "That is not what is troubling you, is it?" she asked, gently.

Jimmy was concerned as he traded looks between them all. Sarek looked as confused as ever a Vulcan could look, while Spock's face was filled with curiosity.

"I am fine, Fa'komi," Solkar repeated himself, his eyes now calm as he fixed them on her.

Amanda's eyes narrowed slightly. She knew he was lying, but she was willing to wait for him to feel like opening up more. "Okay. Take your seat, Solkar," she said softly.

Once they had all retaken their places and began to eat, Jimmy asked Amanda and Sarek, "Why does Sol call you grandma and grandpa?"

Sarek swallowed his mouthful and answered, "When he was born, I was told that his father could not be there to Name him. Since Solkar's mother was of my House, and since she had no other direct family alive, I took the responsibility to Name him. When his mother came to us two years ago and told us that she was dying, she asked that we take Solkar as our Ward. We did so, and he has called us his grandparents ever since."

"It is a common practice within Houses, James," Spock offered. "We Vulcans care for all of our children in any way possible. Saavik was a fine member of our House, and a credit to me as my pupil. I will continue to miss her."

"So do I," Solkar murmured sadly.

Jimmy reached and squeezed Solkar's hand quickly, then looked over at Pauly and changed the subject, "Come on, then! Tell us how Pauly got to be a Vulcan!"

Camp Bam Bam:

The briefing had gone as planned, and everyone was now in their respective modes of transport and being transported to the battle location by Daileass. Kevin was giggling to himself as Joel bitched and moaned over the comm with Juan. He stopped giggling, however, when he saw the hurt look appear on Joel's face; even though he'd hidden it in his voice, Kevin knew that Joel thought his Juan had brushed him off.

'You okay?' Kevin asked down their bond-link.

Joel mutely shook his head. Then he blurted, *'You said it would be okay! You and Jace and the rest! Now he hates me... he hates me...'*

Brant was watching both boys carefully. He felt them talking, but due to the nature of their link, he was unable to tell what they were saying. "You okay, Joel? You're face is telling me you're having a problem."

Joel sniffed and wiped at his eyes. Even though they were still dry, they were burning as they threatened tears. "Juan hates me, 'cos I pranked him and the others..."

Brant repressed a giggle, but only just. "No, he doesn't. He was only playing with you, Lil'elf."

Joel shook his head, "No. He hates me."

A few seats down, one of the Unit boys - a fourteen year old with dark brown hair and an open expression of friendship that he shared with the world - grinned and reached to tap Joel on the shoulder. The young Vulcan looked over at him, "Yeah, Cliff?"

"Dude, what makes you think he hates you so much?" Cliff asked.

"'Cos he'd never turn down me tellin' 'im stories," Joel muttered as he stared morosely at the floor. "I shouldn't have listened ta Jace and them."

"Jace planned that?" Cliff asked, curiously.

"Yeah. Well, kinda. He wanted ta get back at them for making him and the others in the Dragon girls, so..."

Cliff chuckled. "I think it was a good prank, then. Adam and Juan went overboard with that one. You came up with the idea?"

"Sorta. I heard Koth ask if it was possible to make them think it, so I worked on it to make it work," Joel responded.

"Don't worry," Cliff smiled. "I'll make sure they know it was Jace and not you, Elf. And no, Juan don't hate you. Remember, it was Jory that told you not to read the story - right?"

"Right," Joel replied, his face brightening a lot. "Right! Juan still loves me, then!"

Kevin started giggling again.

It wasn't long before Kevin's giggles stopped, for they were soon on the ground and setting up the Intel forward base - while dodging incoming fire. Kevin was glad for his morph and armour at that point, considering how many bullets were flying about.

He and Joel were at the nearest comm station and both were relaying orders back and forth from the VSO and Unit groups inside the buildings and out in the courtyards.

"TOSS ME!!!! BUT NOT A WORD TO THE ELF!" came Juan's voice, in a fake Gimli accent.

Joel looked up at the screen, which was receiving a feed from one of the Genesis Bases' cameras that they had tapped into, and started laughing when he saw Amur pick up and toss the small boy like a frisbee. At the same time he received another message on his padd's screen. *'Dragon in position. Fire Eagle and the Cute trio have found Fire. Friendlies accounted for. We are unleashing Hell!'*

As he tapped in a response, he called over the comm to Adam Casey, "Oh, look! A flying Dwarf! Got all teams in place, Boss. The Dragon are all inside. Chipmunks and Horny One have linked up with Fire."

Before Adam could respond, there was a thunderous detonation from inside the base. Joel looked up at another monitor only to see Jory tossing teddy shaped explosives at various soon-to-be-dead Genesis soldiers. After laughing himself silly, he went outside of cover to watch as the main gates were blown off their hinges. Kevin tried to pull him back, but while doing so, bullets started pinging off of their armour - and off the shield that Kevin's BFG had encased them both in.

"If you go down to Arizona today, you'll sure have a big surprise. If you go down to that G-Base today, you better go in full armour and a tank... cos today's the day when Jory's Teddies are having... a blast..." Joel started singing gleefully.

"That didn't rhyme, Elf," Kevin shot back, as he managed to pull Joel out of the field of fire.

"I know. Kinda hard to do when you're racing for cover, Not-Elf," Joel giggled.

'Huff!'

"I-Cheya! You made it!" Joel shouted as both his Sehlat and his wolf pup appeared through a liquid effect in the air. "You getting the Guardian to give you lifts?"

I-Cheya shook his head before stomping all four feet at once and encasing himself in his armour. 'Huff!'

"What's wrong with him?" Kevin asked as he peeked around at the chaos of the war-zone.

"Dunno," Joel shrugged. "What's up, boy?"

'Huff huff huffff!'

"You sure?" Joel asked seriously.

'Huff!'

"Fuck! Come on. We're needed, Not-Elf," he yelled as he jumped onto I-Cheya's back, then catching Blackie as the young wolf pounced into his arms, also fully armoured.

"Boss told us to stay here!" Kevin protested.

"I'll say 'sorry' later. Come on!"

'Huff!'

Bark

Kevin sighed and climbed up in front of Joel.

"Hi ho Sehlat! AWAY!" Joel yelled.

Artemus and Aphrodite were gob-smacked, but raced to follow them. All the while cursing at them, of course.

Matthew and Brant simply looked at each other. Matthew pressed a button on his belt and vanished from sight, while Brant started running after the cats as well. Beside him, a shadow was keeping pace.

"Oh, God... If I die, I'm going to be soooo pissed off at you!" Kevin grouched as he was held tight by Joel. Blackie, now squashed behind him, wriggled in amusement.

"You've got the same armour as me. And a morph!" Joel reassured him.

"I might throw up at seeing this too close!" Kevin whined back.

"Meh, bad guys. S'long as I don't kill them, I don't care. Wow! I-Cheya, you can run fast!" Joel spluttered as I-Cheya picked up speed and ran for the main gates.

They rounded the entrance, and witnessed hell everywhere. Joel didn't have time to worry, however, for Kevin sent down their link, *'What's going on?'*

'I-Cheya said that some kids are in trouble. The building Sammy went to crack open has more than he can handle. There's something going on there that we need to sort out!'

They hammered through the now opened doorway into a large greeting room. A few bodies littered the floor, all dressed in Genesis uniforms. "Sammy don't mess about, does he?" the 'shadow' that was Matthew giggled.

Brant grinned and shook his head. "Sammy's THAT way," he pointed off to their left down a hallway.

"How do you know that?" Kevin asked as he slipped from I-Cheya's back, followed by Joel and Blackie.

Brant tapped his nose, "I can smell him."

From a door at the end of the hallway, a group of figures came on silent feet toward them. Artemus raised her automatic rifle and took aim, while Joel unsheathed his Vulcan sword, the trillpa'morov, and moved to stand with his bodyguard. His eyes widened when the approaching figures came into the light of the greeting room, and Artemus whistled.

There were three G-Cats, two tigers and a lion, a rather large gorilla, two badgers and a wolverine. The three cats looked to be about the same age as Aphrodite, twelve; the two badgers seemed shorter but older, about fourteen. The wolverine seemed to be about the same age, but the gorilla was a true silver-back and fully matured. It was not the gorilla who seemed to be in the lead, however, but the wolverine instead - and he looked pissed off. "Who the fuck are you?" he grated, his own rifle pointed at Joel's chest and his free paw/hand clenching and unclenching.

"We're Clan Short - we're here to help you," Joel said, as he brought his sword down slightly. "Is my brother Sammy back that way?"

The gorilla snorted, "He's being petted by the babies. They find him... cuddly."

Joel grinned, "That's my SamSam!"

"No time for this shit. If you're here to help, then we have to save the others," the wolverine grated.

"Calm yourself, Logan," the gorilla said softly. "We can't rescue the little ones if we don't think things through."

"Shut up, Graeme," Logan the wolverine snapped. "I'll tear those fuckers apart to get to them - what other plan is needed?"

Joel sighed. "How many guards are between us and these kids?"

"More than we had guarding us. The main barracks for this building is between us and them," one of the badgers supplied, pointing at the door opposite. "The one you call Sammy said he phasered the door to stop them joining in, but he didn't know the Reject Room was through there. We've got to get through a sealed door AND about thirty guards to get to them."

"Thirty?" Matthew said as he made himself visible, shocking the gorilla slightly. "Damn, we should have invited the 'family' over for dinner, Brant."

"You've got a point. Anyway, I'll deal with the door," Brant said, as he gave Matthew's hand a squeeze. "It'll be easy with my Dark Gift... the hard bit will be deciding to destroy just the door, or the whole wall as well," he added with a grin.

Logan stared at him, then shrugged, "Get your ass moving then, pale one."

Brant looked at the door and concentrated as Logan moved to stand in front of it. Joel was right at his side.

The door imploded and fell down to the ground, now the size of a golf ball. The two guards on the other side had only a second to react before Logan had ripped their hearts from their chests. Joel grimaced, "I bet that hurt."

"Who gives a fuck?" Logan said, as he threw the hearts to one side and stepped over the fallen bodies that were still twitching. The corridor he and Joel entered was short and free of more soldiers, so Kevin and the others started to move toward the now door-less doorway. They stopped dead, however, when the door on the far end of the corridor burst open and guards poured through, firing a solid stream of bullets right at Joel and Logan.

Joel didn't even blink, knowing that his armour - and the shield from Kevin's morph - would deflect the bullets. Logan, however, did not know how well protected Joel was. As a G-Hybrid, he had been trained that a human life was more important than his own. Since Joel was in his full armour, he had no telltale signs of his Vulcan heritage to confuse the irritable wolverine.

Logan stepped in front of Joel, and took the full salvo of fire. He hit the ground hard.

From behind Joel, Kevin's voice rang out, "Pricks! Don't you shoot at MY Sa'ren!" Then a blast of electrical power rippled passed Joel and over Logan to slam into the approaching guards - throwing them back into the room they had come from. Joel took this as an opportunity to pull the unmoving Logan back out of the corridor and to one side of the greeting hall. Matthew and the gorilla took up station on either side of the doorway to keep the enemy pinned down.

"Shit, he's hit bad," Aphrodite muttered as she started emergency treatment. "Arty? Call Skipper fast!"

"They are massing again!" Matthew called over as Artemus did as her sister had requested.

I will block path! the now adult sized I-Cheya sent forcefully as he lumbered over and squeezed his huge arse through the door and into the corridor. Then, he roared. *Like bowling... perfect score... try again, pricks?*

"Language!" Joel said absently as he helped Aphrodite with Logan. He was holding pressure down on one of the deepest wounds, and he could feel through his armoured hands that Logan's life was slipping away. "No, don't go," Joel whispered as a tear trickled from his eye and rolled down his cheek. "Please, you can't go. Not now, not yet," he whispered even more softly, and the tear fell from his cheek and through the open part of his helm.

It landed on Logan's chest, and for a moment, Joel's Armour glimmered - just enough so that Kevin, Brant and the others there noticed. From the air vent in the ceiling, the slightest of gasps could be heard.

Logan began to breathe a tiny bit easier; and, seeing this, Joel looked up at the air vent.

Someone or something was there.

His attention was diverted when Bobby and Skipper came running in through the blasted open main doors. They had no reason to ask why they had been called, for the blood covered and barely breathing wolverine kid was plain to see. "Okay, out of our way, guys," Bobby said with authority as he and Skipper got to business.

Joel stood up and looked at Aphrodite. She was covered in Logan's blood. Then he looked down at himself. Not one drop was on him, not even the palms of his gauntlets that had been keeping pressure on some of Logan's wounds. Deciding to investigate that later, Joel shook his head and looked at the Gorilla and the others who had come with Logan. "Stay here and guard the entrance. When Bobby and Skipper are done, help them to the triage."

Graeme the gorilla nodded. "You sure you won't need us?"

"We have protections you do not have," Joel said softly. "I won't see any more of you guys hurt."

"But... we're designed for this!" one of the tigers protested.

Joel shook his head, "No. You're alive and sentient. You are designed to *live*. Same as us. We have tech and other stuff that protects us better. You don't, right now. So you stay and look after Logan. I'll save the kids in the Reject Room."

As the tiger nodded uncertainly, Joel headed for the doorway that was blocked by I-Cheya. "Cheya, you need to go on a diet... you've got a fat butt!" he giggled as he petted I-Cheya's rump, causing the bear to wag his tail.

Not fat! Big boned! Cheek!

"Just shrink your ass already!" Brant giggled. "I'm thirsty and want a drink, and you're blocking the way to the bar!"

Kevin took position next to Joel, "We ready?"

Everyone nodded, so Joel patted I-Cheya smartly on the rump, "Forward, boy!"

Huff!

Like a tank, I-Cheya charged forward. The yells of shock from the end of the hallway was suddenly cut off by the sound of the reinforced door being closed.

"Need me to use my Gift again?" Brant called from behind I-Cheya.

I-Cheya huffed with amusement - and sped up.

The sound of a solid, three inch thick steal reinforced door being torn like paper was something Joel had never experienced; but he found it most interesting.

So, too, did the soldiers on the other side who were too close and got torn in half by I-Cheya's claws at the same time. At least, they were *briefly* interested...

Then, the group was in the middle of the main guard room, and soldiers were surrounding them. What happened next, to be completely blunt, was that Joel's task force became a natural disaster that had found a place to happen.

With the most vicious display of organised unfriendliness one could imagine, I-Cheya, Blackie, Brant, Matthew and the two She-Cats tore into the forces on one side - leaving Joel and Kevin fighting back to back on the other. Brant spared a few seconds to watch with awe as Kevin and Joel almost danced with spellbinding grace - moving as one, with one purpose and one heart. Their armour, and Kevin's morph, meant that the ballistic firearms of the guards were rendered completely useless, so they had both drawn their blades and were disarming those that came into melee distance to them. Joel's trillpa'morov flashed faster than could be followed, rendering guns and rifles useless and in pieces as well as cutting armour and clothing from his enemies - yet not one drop of blood was spilt by the young Vulcan. Kevin's own Vulcan short swords, gained inside the Tardis, danced no less gracefully - but he did draw some blood.

What Brant found most impressive, after caving in both sides of a soldier's head that had come within 'hand-clapping' distance, was that neither of the tiny boys took a life. Around their moving and dancing forms, bodies began to pile up - all alive, yet unconscious.

Around the others, however, was a fair to middling amount of blood and gore. I-Cheya's claws cut swathes out of the massed soldiers, while Blackie's sharp teeth were ripping hamstrings and then throats. Brant was simply braining the enemies - so much so that a new fashion of brains seeping from ears became in vogue. The two She-Cats were using four paws, teeth and claws to pull the enemies apart.

What shocked Brant, though, was the viciousness of Matthew. His boyfriend was in his element - and Brant finally understood the reason for his nickname 'Vampire'. That, and his speed, which was... pre-ternatural. He was moving too fast for a human; FAR too fast. Yet not fast enough to be obvious to any but a Vampire... Brant began to worry, while kicking a soldier so hard in the nuts that he had to pull his foot from the now dead man's chest.

"You're making a mess," Kevin said to them, as they finished off the last of the soldiers, while banging some poor sod's head against a wall repeatedly - just to be sure he wouldn't get up for a while, of course.

"Yeah," Joel muttered, chewing on a maple and pecan cookie, "does it really take that long to deal with them by ripping them to tiny pieces? We were finished AGES ago!"

"Only by six seconds," Matthew said, not even panting from his exertions.

"Five point three one nine six, to be precise," Joel supplied as he carefully wiped the crumbs off of his gauntlets.

Matthew poked his tongue out at the Vulcan, then levelled his wrist mounted phaser at the mound of 'sleeping' guards near Kevin and Joel.

"NO!" Joel ordered, stepping quickly between them and Matthew.

Matthew looked surprised, "They are enemies of children, Joel. They deserve death."

"We don't know whether they wanted to be here, or were made to be, Matthew. They will stand formal trial under Vulcan justice," Joel insisted.

"This is Vulcan justice - VSO justice," Matthew said, slightly lowering his phaser.

"I am in charge of the Clan at this time, and you have been transferred from your superiors to the Clan's Night Watch. You will, while working directly for the Clan, obey Clan procedures," Joel said seriously. "They are to be mind-scanned, then face Standard Vulcan Justice."

"As you wish, Patriarch," Matthew said, nodding his head.

Joel's eyes widened, but Kevin giggled. "You said you were in charge of Clan Short, Sa'r," Kevin grinned. "That makes you the stand-in patriarch for now."

"Oh, boo to you all. Come on!" Joel said, as he rolled his eyes and made for the only other exit from the room.

Through it, two Genesis soldiers came, and both had their guns trained on Joel. "Die, fucker!" one yelled, while the other dropped to one knee to take aim at the small Vulcan.

Joel's lips curled in a snarl, for he could hear, from beyond the door they were blocking, the whimpering of small children. Then a hiss sounded and all other noises cut off. Joel, however, was already moving... without moving.

The others saw Joel vanish into a liquid effect from where he had been standing, only to reappear behind the two soldiers. The one kneeling was the first to hit the deck face first as he was felled by a nerve pinch. The other was sent flying toward Brant by a nice little roundhouse that Joel performed. "Chuck Norris Attack!" Joel giggled evilly.

Brant's face grew a feral smile. He murmured "Lunch time!" as the man came screaming into his 'loving' arms.

Me claim left-overs! I-Cheya sent, while watching Brant start 'eating'.

While the two hunters were busy with the soon dead soldier, Matthew looked at Joel seriously. "What happened there?" he asked.

"What happened where?" Joel asked, feeling totally confused as he was melding with the unconscious soldier at his feet.

"You. Transporting without a transporter. What gives?" Artemus asked.

"Dunno," Joel muttered, as he finished his meld. He picked up and tossed the unconscious man into the corner. "I just... did it. Not sure how."

Kevin shrugged, then asked, "What did you learn from him?"

"The door beyond this hallway leads to the 'Rejects' room. The kids we're after are in there, and I know at least one's alive - I heard a cry - but there may be more. However, the door can't be opened from this side."

Kevin nodded, then pulled a large, long gun from a holster on his back, "Looks like I'll get to play with Juan's 'boomstick' that he gave me, then."

Matthew giggled, "His what?!"

"Juan gave me this. He said I'd know when to use it. Some type of grenade launcher - or something."

Joel grinned, then looked at the two feasting hunters. "Come on, starvers. Time to rescue someone! And leave that one," he said, pointing at the second, still sleeping soldier. "He was just doing his job. He hates this place, and wanted out, but was afraid for his own kids."

BURP

"Come on, Fatty-Sehlat," Joel giggled.

Told you! Me no fat!! Me big boned!!!

"Yeah, yeah... come on!"

Joel was the first to head down the hallway. He rounded the corner and saw ahead a large reinforced steel door. "Mmm... Dunno if your boomstick will work, Kevvy. Brant might have to do this one."

Kevin smiled and pushed in front of Joel. He levelled the 'gun' at the door, and fired.

After picking both himself and his Vulcan husband up from the floor, and after patting the sides of his head to stop the ringing in his ears, Kevin asked with a shout, "Did it work?"

"Only if you meant to do that to the fucking ceiling, yes!" Matthew shouted back from around the corner.

"Speak up! For God's sake, stop whispering!" Aphrodite yelled back.

"What the fuck did you say? And Kev, if you do that again, you'll be the first brother I'll eat!" Brant shouted from a side door, where the blast had thrown the Vampire.

Joel was about to reply when his vision blurred slightly. His eyes swam a bit, then he was looking around at the hallway and door. It looked just as it had seconds ago, only now it was as if he could see through everything.

"Uh, Joel?" Brant said softly, as he looked at Joel's now brightly glowing blue eyes, peeking at him from within the helm the Vulcan wore. The crown on the helm was also glowing and mist-like wisps of blue coloured power seemed to pour out of the corners of Joel's eyes.

Joel ignored him, for he was looking into the room beyond, and what he saw made his blood run cold. "We have to get in there," he yelled as he started running at the door in anger. He leapt into a flying kick straight for the door, "... right *NOW!*"

Leonidas cried silently as he was pushed further into his cage, and held onto Verne with his hands and feet tightly. Verne was sobbing and crying loudly in pain, and agony filled whimpers were coming from a curled-up ball on the floor outside of the cage. Dr Philps kicked at the ball a few more times, then levelled his gun at Leonidas, "Time for you, now. Worthless trash you may be, but I won't have the invaders rescue you. No, not rubbish like you."

Leonidas closed his eyes tightly. He didn't want to see his death come.

"Huw, you'd better take a look at this," Dr Robins called from the security monitor. "We have company. Looks like you sent those two men to their deaths."

"I don't care," Dr Philps spat as he moved over to look. He glanced at the screen, then the room shuddered as an almighty bang went off. "Christ alive, they're going to bring the place down. I'll turn on the field. That'll fry them," he spat angrily as the monitor showed the small figures in the hallway outside stagger back to their feet.

He moved to the door and started tapping on a control panel there, while Dr Robins went over to a second cage and looked inside. "Sorry, you two," he mocked as he levelled his own gun at a brother who was cuddling his sister. "Now, say cheese?" he grinned as his finger tightened on the trigger.

"....*NOW!*" came a yell from his right. He turned his head to see a foot inches away from his face. Then he was thrashing about on the floor after Joel's boot had slammed into his forehead and felled him.

"FUCKING BASTARD! Where the fuck did you come from?!" he cried out as pain lanced through his head.

Joel, again on his feet, shrugged. "Through the door. Shut up, arsehole!" he yelled.

"I don't know how you did that," Dr Philps spat from the doorway as he fired off his gun, "but you'll wish you hadn't."

The bullets did nothing against Joel's Armour, of course, but Dr Philps didn't have time to ponder that. The reason? He was as flat as a pancake a split second later...

Right before Joel's foot touched the door, he vanished through it. It was as if he had dived into water. Brant spluttered in shock, but I-Cheya roared and continued to do so as he started his own charge at the door.

He pounced, and all four of his paws connected with the door at the same time.

The door came down into the room beyond, and at least a foot of the wall on either side did, as well.

Hence the reason for Dr Philp's new 'pancake-look', for he had been just on the other side of said door.

I-Cheya huffed shortly, then returned to his natural size. *Prick!*

"Told you before! Language," Joel giggled, as he kicked out quickly and sent Dr Robins into a forced 'sleep'.

Kevin, Brant and Matthew piled into the room, and the two She-Cats were seconds behind them. It was the two girls that were the first to reach the kids locked in the cages, for maternal instinct kicked in right away. The brother and sister were freed first and held in tight hugs by the girls as they both cried. Joel and Kevin quickly freed Leonidas and Verne from their cage and held them close as they cried, while Brant and Matthew checked the weakly twitching ball on the floor.

"He's dying," Matthew said sorrowfully.

Joel handed Verne to him as he came over to look, and Verne started sobbing, "My brodder, my brodder! Nooooo, Jules!!!"

"I won't have it," Joel spat as he knelt down to take the small ball of fur into his arms. Blood was pouring from the tiny child's side, and the boy's eyes - for he was obviously a boy - were growing dim. "I won't let you die," Joel said softly, and a tremor ran up everyone's spine.

The Armour of Sa'ren shimmered.

In Joel's arms, Jules gasped and squeaked, and as before, Joel heard a gasp from the air-vent. Then the pattering of small paws. Then silence.

Jules was now hugging Joel as tightly as his little arms could manage.

Sighing with relief, Brant sat down quickly. "There's more about you than meets the eye, Joel. I hope I get to be let in on the secret, soon!"

"Jules! Jules!" squealed the ball of energy that was squirming around in Matthew's arms. Matthew released him quickly, and watched as the small kid slammed into the cuddle Joel had going with Jules.

Matthew looked closely, now that they seemed to have the time, at all the rescued children.

They were all crosses with various animals. Jules and Verne had long thin bodies, comparatively short arms and legs, and long thick tails. Their faces were faintly cat like, up to and including their small pointed ears that sat high up on their heads. "Ferrets?" he breathed softly.

Jules looked over at him, "Uh huh! Uh huh! We ferrets, we is! We good at finding stuffs and stuff!"

"Specially SHINYS!" Verne added seriously, before going back to pecking kisses all over Joel's helm and the parts of his face reachable.

Matthew giggled, then looked at the boy Kevin was cuddling. Larger than the two ferrets, yet much smaller than Kevin, he was holding onto his rescuer with both hands and feet. His face was simian, and his ears protruded from the sides of his head. He was covered in thick, black hair. He was a chimp. Mostly, at any rate it seemed.

The boy waved his fingers at Matthew, and Matthew blinked. He started to sign back at the boy, but the boy flicked a finger or two to stop him. "You're mute, not deaf, huh?" Matthew asked aloud.

The chimp-boy nodded.

"Leonidas, right?"

The boy nodded again, then signed quickly.

"Okay. Lee it is," Matthew smiled. He then looked at the two kids the She-Cats were cuddling. "Well, fuck me... badgers!"

Both the girl and the boy were white as snow, yet obviously crossed with badgers. They were larger than Lee the Chimp, and very heavy set. Their legs and arms looked short, but very powerful, and their fingers and toes had short but wicked looking claws coming off of them. They looked over at Matthew and he saw that their eyes were pale pink. "Do you have dark glasses in here, guys?" he asked the two albino badger-kids gently.

The boy nodded and pointed in the general direction of one of the cabinets. Then he spoke, and his voice was surprisingly high and light for the way he looked. "I'm Brian. This is Suzanne. Are you gonna hurt us?" he whimpered.

"No, my tastes run more toward assholes that hurt kids," Brant stated as he finally took the time to wipe off his chin.

Sue looked over at him as best she was able, and giggled, "I like him. He's funny."

Sitting on the floor, Joel was too busy giggling as his face was kiss-pecked all over. "Hey guys! I need to breathe!" he giggled, only to have them both giggle back at him.

Eventually, he sat up to look at them closely. "Why's your backs all... oh, God... you've been beaten!" he cried softly. "No! This is not right!"

Jules' eyes filled with tears as he nodded. Then they widened as Joel's Armour glowed again.

Both ferrets glowed as bright an instant later, and then the light vanished.

"We's better!" Verne cried out as he started checking his brother's back. "Me back's not hurtin'!"

"Nor mine!" Jules joined him, so that both boys were tumbling over and over in Joel's lap as they tried to examine each other closely.

"Stay still, Verne!"

"No, you stay stills, Jules!"

"No you!"

"Yous!!"

CLICKCLICK

Both boys stopped squirming around and looked over at Kevin. Now on the brown haired boy's shoulders, Lee held out a small clicker and clicked it again. Then he signed at them.

"Sorry, Lee!" they both chorused contritely.

"Things are going to be fun in the Compound," Brant said under his breath as he smiled at the kids. He came back from the cabinet that Brian had pointed at and handed the two badgers, each, a pair of dark glasses. "We need to get you guys some clothes."

"We no wears clotheses," Verne said softly.

Jules shook his head as well, and stood up. He stretched and moved around in a circle for a moment or two. Then he sat back down on Joel's lap. "Clothes stop us from moving right."

Brant nodded. "What about you three?" he asked Lee and the two badgers.

"We wear overall jumpsuits when we have to," Brian said. "At least those who are normal do," he added softly. "Most times, we all just stay as we are. We don't need clothes either."

Lee signed at Matthew, who spoke for him, "Same for Lee. When the badgers need to fight, though, there's special armour for them. The chimps here don't fight as much, so they just wear normalish clothes when working. The Ferrets can't at all, really. They're too stretchy or something."

"Hats!" Verne called out.

"Pardon?" Joel giggled.

"We like hats! Hats don't stops us from moving and stuffs," Verne explained with a wide grin.

Kevin moved over to Aphrodite and Artemus, with Lee still on his shoulders and patting gently on his head in contentment. Kevin looked down at the two badger siblings and said, "You're both normal. Okay? Don't say stuff like that."

Sue blinked up at him, then smiled. "Okay."

Joel called over to Kevin with a giggle, "You thinking what I think your thinking?"

"Yes," Kevin answered, "but let's get them all home first."

"Now then," Joel said, as he removed his helm and gauntlets, placing them down on the nearest table. "Time to see what's in this person's mind."

Joel moved to Dr Robins' body and proceeded to meld with him. Then he pulled back in disgust, and looked at Matthew. "He's... he's raped and abused every child that he's ever worked on – except the Hybrids. Those he just hurt, a lot. He's killed more than I dare count... he... he..."

Matthew held up a hand and moved over. He slapped the unconscious doctor's face repeatedly, until Dr Robins woke up. "For your crimes against children, I sentence you to death," Matthew grated, before slowly crushing the now weakly struggling doctor's wind pipe.

Brant began to worry again, for the strength to crush an adult man's windpipe was not common in a twelve year old boy.

Joel, meanwhile, was already moving for a side door from the room. He entered and found what he had seen in Dr Robins' mind: another doctor, tied to a chair and gagged with tears rolling down his face.

"Grandpa!" Verne squeaked happily as he peered around the doorway with Jules. "Grandpa Rosenthal!"

"Ah, my little one," Dr Rosenthal croaked, as Joel gently removed his gag. "I was praying that the Lord, blessed be His Name, would save you - and He has! Thank you, son," he added, looking into Joel's piercing blue eyes. Dr Rosenthal blinked when he took in Joel's Vulcan features, which were at odds with the happy smile Joel was giving him.

"Shalom, Rabbi," Joel said in greeting, his sunny smile growing all the bigger. "I recognise your name, from the records I read earlier today."

"Why were you reading about me?" Dr Rosenthal asked in surprise.

"Mission research," Joel grinned. "You were, well, still are, the foremost expert on animal and human DNA. Even though a lot of the religious people frowned on what you were doing, they had to admit that."

"Then you should know that I'm not a Rabbi any longer," Rosenthal said sadly. "I was stripped of that when I refused to listen to my fellow countrymen."

"The gifts and the callings of God are without repentance'," Joel quoted.

Rosenthal laughed briefly, as he was being untied by five excited kids, for the badgers and Lee had joined the two ferrets with Joel. "That's not from the Torah, son."

"No, but He's the same God. I follow Him through Jesus, and you through Moses. But He's the same, and He don't change. You were registered as dead. How are you here?" Joel asked, as he helped the old man to his feet.

"General Adams," Rosenthal spat out. "He came to me nine years ago, saying my work could benefit the whole world. Once I got here, I found out what he had planned, and turned to leave. He threatened

my family; the chimps and gorilla children I had created. He also threatened my son and daughter-in-law, *and* little Jacob - my grandson. I've not seen them in nine years. Jacob would be 13 now... Adams arranged for my 'death' so that they wouldn't come looking for me... I want vengeance, son. As much as I'm a man of peace, I want to end that devil-spawn, once and for all."

Joel shrugged, "You'd have to go to hell to do that, Rabbi. Clan Short has already received confirmation of his... demise. A team of our own found him and, let's just say, made him pay. Little ears," he smiled, nodding at the five little kids around Rosenthal's feet.

Rosenthal breathed in deeply, then sighed. "At least I won't face my God with blood on me. I am content; thank you. What is your name, anyway?"

"Sa'ren. Sa'ren Joel Short, Child of Spock, Child of Sarek of Vulcan," Joel grinned, holding out his hand to shake.

Rosenthal blinked again, then shook Joel's extended hand. "You're unlike any Vulcan I've met, Sa'ren of Vulcan. Your father is a good man, I've read about him. He would be proud of you... if that were possible."

"It is," Joel said, as he and the five kids led the doctor out of the small room and back to the Reject Main Room, "and he is. Here, let me introduce..."

"Artemus? Aphrodite?! I thought you two were dead?!" Rosenthal shouted as he, surprisingly for his age, bounded over to the two now weeping girls and hugged them. "How are my little princesses?" he asked as tears flowed down his cheeks to join with theirs.

"We missed you," Aphrodite cried into his chest.

Rosenthal gently stroked her head while wrapping his other arm around Artemus. "All your brothers okay?"

Artemus nodded, then did a double take and shook her head. "No. I mean, most of us are... but Kuan Ti... he died last week..." she trailed off brokenly.

"Amur Khan is still not the same," Aphrodite said brokenly as she still wept into the doctor's chest.

Rosenthal closed his eyes tight, as images of a small tiger boy and his twin swam before his eyes.... 'Dada? 'Nudder story, Dada!'

"Blessed be your life, Kuan Ti, and blessed be us all for having known you," Rosenthal wept softly.

Joel and Kevin hugged while the doctor wept with his two 'princesses'. Joel closed his own eyes and pulled up a memory from earlier that 'day'; from within the Tardis...

Flashback:

"Amur?" Joel asked, as he walked past Amur Khan's apartment. It was 'night', and only a 'month' into their time in the Tardis. "What's wrong?" he asked, as he moved in through the open door to where Amur was on his bed weeping.

At first, Amur had tried to force his tears down, but this strange little Vulcan's presence just kept his pain and hurt on the surface. Without knowing why, he pulled Joel into his arms.

Joel, never one to pass up a hug, and never one to just let another be upset without trying to help, cuddled in quickly.

As he did so, images of another tiger, like Amur, came into his mind, due to his empathic Vulcan abilities working in concert with his melding ones. "Ah," Joel sighed, as he worked out the only logical conclusion left open to him. "Your brother? The one from the funeral?"

"My twin. My Kuan..." Amur wept, for he had seen the same images Joel had. "He came to us, before I even met you. To tell us he was always with us... with me... but it's not the same... it's just not."

"No," Joel whispered into Amur's furry chest. "It wouldn't be." Joel closed his eyes and focused his empathy more tightly. There was a knot of pain lodged in Khan's heart, and the large powerful tiger just couldn't move past it, nor around it. "I... I could help you, if you wanted," he whispered.

Amur started to shake his head. "I don't want you to take anything away, Joel. I... I need to remember him... He's a part of me, forever... I need my p...pain," he wept.

"I'd never do that," Joel said softly. "It's just that you're all tangled up in here," he added, tapping Khan's chest, "and I wanna help untangle it. The pain will stay, but... but it won't make you hurt *this* way... you'll have the pain leading you to where you should go... to your good memories of Kuan."

"Are you sure?" Khan asked brokenly.

"He is," another voice said, as a pair of strong arms came around Khan from behind him. Furry, tigerish arms. "He is sure, brother mine," Kuan Ti whispered into his brother's ear.

"Kuan!" Amur cried as he twisted about, bringing little Joel with him so as to squish the tiny boy between his and his brother's massive furry bodies. Not that Joel minded.

Joel just stayed still and cuddled into Amur's chest as Kuan Ti whispered comfortingly to his twin. Then he felt a wet tongue bathe the side of his face. Kuan Ti whispered to him, "Do it, Sa'ren of Vulcan. Help my brother heal."

Joel wiggled his fingers until they were buried into Khan's fur so that he could touch the skin beneath. "Amur. All men hide a secret pain. Share your pain with me, and gain strength from the Sharing..." he whispered, drawing Khan's heart and his own together.

Within seconds, Amur was bawling like a baby. So was Joel. And so was Kuan Ti. They wept this way for nearly an hour, 'til finally the last 'knot' inside of Amur heart unfurled and the agony of his brother's

passing lifted. It was replaced by something no less sorrowful, but far more productive: a bittersweet joy and hope, and a gentle, quiet sense of longing and grief.

"Keep your heart open, my brother," Kuan Ti whispered to his brother as Amur smiled, yet wept, as they kept their eyes locked. "You will be surprised at who will find you; and how large a place will be taken inside of your life, considering how small a person it will be..."

Amur blinked, but Kuan cat-kissed his face. "Sleep, brother. I shall hold you until the morning. We both will," Kuan whispered, and Amur felt his eyes growing heavy.

As he slept, he felt Joel's surprisingly strong arms around his chest, and his brother's even stronger ones around his shoulders... and a face swam before his eyes. A face and a small figure that was just outside of his ability to recognise.

Present:

Kevin sighed as he watched the girls crying with Rosenthal, "Matthew, do you have water? I'm covered in blood."

"Sure, Kev," Matthew said softly. He made to take a flask from his hip, but then noticed another door from the room leading to a kitchen area. "Oh, that'll work out better. Come on, guys. We're all messed up."

"I'm not," Joel said, in a considering tone. "That's strange."

I-Cheya huffed to himself, but quickly became quiet as the boys' eyes turned his way. He sat down on the fallen door to try and look innocent, but the blood and gore already seeping out from underneath it spurted out with a wet fart sound. I-Cheya looked down with surprise, and quickly stood back to his feet. Then he started bouncing on the door lightly, huffing to himself in amusement.

"Sehlats," Joel sighed, rolling his eyes.

Kevin giggled at I-Cheya bouncing happily for a second or so more, before turning to look over Joel's body. "You're right, Sa'r. You were standing with me, and I got sprayed with blood and worse... how is it that you ain't covered, too?"

"Dunno... I dodged?" Joel shrugged helplessly.

"Unless you move as fast as me, that's doubtful," Brant giggled. He moved to the door that I-Cheya was now attempting an 'almost' tap-dance on, and dipped his fingers into the blood on the floor. "Hold out your arm, bro," Brant said as he came over and allowed a spot to drip down onto Joel's extended right arm.

The blood fell until it was almost in contact with the Armour, then it vanished.

"Weird," Joel murmured. Then he sighed with impatience, "I hate not knowing everything about my own fucking life!"

Kevin giggled, "Come on, I'm a mess and I want you to wash me."

Joel's face perked up. "Sounds like fun!"

"No time for *that* type of fun," Matthew giggled, casting a look at Brant. "Pity," he added.

Brant blushed and giggled, "Carry on, and I'll tell them your nickname!"

"I shall wait with my daughters," Rosenthal said as he looked over at them. The two girls were calmer, now, and cleaning themselves up the 'cat' way.

As the others went into the kitchen area, with the small badgers, ferrets and the chimp trotting along behind them, Matthew instead looked at the doctor. "Sir. Your name is Rosenthal? Doctor David Rosenthal?"

"Yes," Rosenthal answered.

"Your grandson - he's not Jacob Rosenthal, is he? Likes football - or soccer - and painting landscapes?" Matthew asked.

Rosenthal's eyes widened. "My grandson loved painting! And he lived for football! You know him?!"

"He's a lieutenant in the VSO Dragon Division. Him and his life partner, Mahmud. He's here, in this base with my Commander!" Matthew said with a smile.

Rosenthal nearly passed out in shock.

Joel and party entered the area that Sammy and his task force had raided, to find a mass of purring fur covering all those who had gone in to rescue them. "Sammy?" Joel called out with a giggle.

"Under here... somewhere," came the answering giggle from the mass of purring fur.

The purring stopped quickly and eyes seemed to appear from the mass. They were mostly kitten-kids. LOADS of them. Artemus and Aphrodite started purring in a very maternal fashion almost immediately.

"Wow, now that's a lot of pussy!" Matthew giggled.

Brant slapped him. "Bad pun!"

Sammy managed to get to his feet. "We've got things covered here, Elf. You okay?" he asked, as he looked at the furry kids crowded around Joel and Kevin.

"Yeah. We're goo..."

Joel was interrupted by two fast balls of fur that had left the main mass and came right for him and the two ferrets he had on his shoulders.

"JULES! VERNE!" they cried as they used their short yet sharp claws to climb up Joel. Joel was very thankful his Armour was protecting him. "We thought we'd never see you again!" they cried as they hugged themselves around the two ferrets.

Joel fell to his butt quickly so that the four kids could cuddle properly on his lap. He looked around at the rest of the kids in the room and found that not all of them were cat-kids. Some were badgers, some ferrets, a fair few were chimps and gorillas, with a few wolverine looking kids for good measure. Over in the corner there were two raccoons as well. At the far end of the room, there was a gathering of larger chimps and gorillas, and Joel surmised they were adults. "God damn!" Joel murmured. Then he tried to get a good look at the two new kids in his arms. A lion cub and a tiger cub. "Hello, cuties. What're your names?"

"He's Aslan," the tiger answered, pointing at the lion.

"And he's Shere Khan!" Aslan echoed a second later.

"We're bestest friends! And so's Jules and Verne!" they chorused. "And that's Simba!" they added, pointing at a lion-boy who was running for Matthew as fast as his little paws could take him.

"Uh huh! Uh huh! They help us find Shiny's, they do's!" Verne added with a grin.

Half the room giggled out, "Shiny lovers!" while the other half echoed in response, "Shiny haters!"

"Shall we have another vacation, Fangie," Joel giggled as he cuddled the four furry kids tightly. "Hawaii again?"

"Have they recovered from the last trip?" Brant giggled as he and Matthew took turns scratching the ears of the young lion-boy now in Matthew's arms.

I-Cheya then entered the room, and all the kids became deathly silent. The large Sehlat cub looked around at all the children, then sat down. His back legs splayed out with his forepaws on the ground before him - for all the world like a large stuffed teddy-bear. *Can I have hugs?* he sent with a few 'huffs'.

Joel laughed himself senseless as his Sehlat was mobbed by the children, all vastly impressed with their large new furry teddy bear that hugged them back...

The fighting was now over, and Logan Casey was conferring with Jason in soft tones. All the rescued Genesis children and various groups of Animal/Human hybrids were gathered in the large courtyard and being fed and tended to by the Unit and VSO troops, and the Vulcans were performing mind-melds on all of the rescued and released Genesis children.

Joel and his troop came out of the building they had run into over an hour before, and approached Logan. "What's the problem?" Joel asked seriously as he shifted Lee into a more comfortable position on his hip.

"Nothing we can do anything about," Logan said softly. "I've gotten word that Adam is okay - seems like Levi and his friend got there to help him, so..."

"Adz was hurt?" Joel asked quickly.

"Yeah, but like I said - he's okay, now," Logan answered gently as he pulled Joel over for a quick hug. "The problem is that three of the kids we came here to save got badly hurt, and we think they're dying. They tried helping and got shot; and I think you know one of them."

Joel's eyes hardened. "That wolverine is dying? Logan? Where is he? Where are they?" he asked quickly as he handed Lee over to Kevin.

Jason looked at the determined stare Joel was giving him and shrugged. Maybe the 'Shaper' could do what their medics could not. "This way," he said as he took Joel's hand.

They ran over to the field medic tent that had been hastily set up in the grounds and quickly entered. Three bodies were being worked on by calm seeming Vulcans, but Jason could tell from the readings that all three were slipping away. Two were fully human, the last was the wolverine, Logan. Joel moved over to the nearest one and laid his hands on the boy's body. Joel's Armour glowed briefly as he prayed, and then he moved to the next. Jason just stood and stared in awe as the readings stabilized for the three boys. "I don't believe it," he croaked.

The first to open his eyes was Logan and he looked at Joel closely. "I was dying. But you called my name and I came back... how?" he asked, his voice gruff and strong sounding.

Joel smiled at him before kissing his nose. "Dunno," was the only answer the strange little Vulcan gave. He then smiled at the other two, now recovered, boys before skipping back out of the tent.

He found his T'hy'la helping to feed the gathered kids, and being helped by Lee the chimp. The two ferrets Joel had saved were speaking to an older and larger teenage ferret, who was wearing a Stetson hat. The older ferret placed a baseball hat on each of the smaller ferrets' heads and whispered something to them. As Joel came closer, the older ferret's eyes widened and he bowed deeply. "Shiny Warrior!" he squeaked.

Joel's eyebrow raised within the helm he wore as he looked the kid over. "Pardon?" he asked, a smile in his voice. Then he glanced down at his Armour which was glowing in the sun. As he looked back up, about twenty more ferret kids had gathered and were all looking at him in wonder, pawing at his shiny Armour. "Ah... okay, I'm the Shiny Warrior, then. What's your name?" he asked the one in the Stetson.

"Dave," said Dave, as he grinned widely.

"He's the High Priest of the Shiny!" Jules squeaked before rushing off to find some food... or shinsys. Both were good.

Dave nodded earnestly before saying, "We must talk later, Shiny Warrior. But I must care for my flock, right now."

"Okay," Joel said, still trying not to laugh as he watched the ferrets practically disappear into the mass of kids around them. He giggled and turned to find Kevin wagging his finger under Aslan and Shere Khan's noses.

"No playing with your food, okay? Eat it all up," Kevin said seriously.

"Okay, Papa!" they both squeaked before diving back into the raw meat they were eating with Simba, their friend.

Kevin looked up at Joel quickly and his heart was in his eyes.

Joel simply smiled and nodded. *'I am thinking the same,'* was all he sent down his link.

"GRANDFATHER?!" came a yell of shock from a black robed boy, and Joel turned to watch as a VSO lieutenant ran for Dr Rosenthal. "YOU'RE ALIVE?! OH MY LORD! YOU'RE ALIVE!!!" he wept loudly, as he flung himself into Rosenthal's arms.

The Hebrew doctor's day was now complete - his Hybrid children were now saved, and his grandson was finally reunited with him. Soon, he would meet his son and daughter-in-law again...

All was now right with the world...

Orlando - Clan Compound:

"... and that was how we rescued them!" Kevin finished explaining from Allen's lap, while Shere Khan and Aslan chased Jules and Verne around the Rec Room. Sue and Brian were busy with some paints and large sheets of paper, learning how to make finger paintings with Timmy, Ricky, Pauly, and Rafe. Lee was hanging from the light-fitting upside down and swinging back and forth contentedly, while Joel was still wondering how the boy even got up there. Brant and Matthew were trying to get their small lion cub into a tee-shirt and adapted pair of shorts, but they were fighting a losing battle. The small giggling boy was having the time of his life, fending off his new daddies' attempts at dressing him.

Spock, calmly watching the chaos, nodded, "I am glad that you succeeded, my son. However, am I to infer that all these children are now yours and Sa'ren's?"

"Not me! I wan' the dead one and the funny dark one to be my daddies!" Simba giggled, a tee-shirt partly pulled over his head.

"Got you, you little terror," Brant giggled.

"Like fathers, like son..." Seth quipped from his seat, safely across the room.

Matthew was looking slightly unsure, however. "Brant, can we have a talk?"

"Sure. Simba, go play with Shere and Aslan, okay? We'll be back soon," Brant said softly, and the little boy nodded at him before leaping up, throwing off the tee-shirt, and sped off after the other two boys.

Matthew and Brant stood and started out of the Rec Room.

Joel smiled after them, "It'll be okay. Yeah, Simba's theirs. The rest, Kev and I wanna adopt!"

Spock nodded. "I shall go with Seth and enter them into the records."

Allen was still looking dazed at the news his little Kevin had relayed to him. "Eight kids. Eight! In one day... Kyle and Tyler, eat your hearts out..." he muttered before sliding Kevin off his lap. "I need a drink. I'm going to spend time with Bones - he's usually got the good stuff with him."

Kevin giggled at his Pop's retreating back, then he looked at Spock. "I'll come with you. I know their birthdays and stuff."

Joel grinned as his husband left the room with Spock, then he looked up at Lee. "How did you get up there, young man?" he giggled.

Lee signed down at him, then covered his mouth in silent laughter.

"Oh... BRYCE! DYLAN! Get your otherworldly butts in here!" Joel called, while trying not to laugh.

"Yes Uncle Joel?" both boys chorused as they appeared, purple-ringed golden halos above their heads.

"Get him down, please," Joel asked with a soft smile.

"Do you wanna?" Dylan asked Lee, who nodded his head with a smile.

Joel tapped his foot at Dylan, however. "Light fittings are no place for children to swing from, Dylan."

"We made sure he wouldn't get hurt, Uncle Joel," Bryce said reasonably.

"But other little kids wouldn't know that. They could find other ways of getting to dangerous places, thinking they'd not get hurt. Don't do that again, okay?" Joel said seriously as Lee appeared next to Brian and Sue to help them paint with Timmy and the others.

"Okay, Uncle Joel," They chorused again; both obviously affected by having been chewed out by Joel.

Joel pulled them over and hugged them, "I'm not mad. It *was* funny, but please remember - you can't be everywhere at once, and if a kid did get hurt copying a funny trick you played, you'd feel real bad, wouldn't you? I don't want you to ever feel like your powers have somehow hurt someone else, okay? I love you both too much."

"Okay," Dylan said softly. Then, "Do we gotta stand in a corner now?"

Joel giggled and kissed him, "No. I'm not Mama. And don't think you can't play your tricks like you normally do. Most of the stuff I've seen you do, little kids couldn't copy. Don't change that, okay?"

"Okay," Dylan replied as a set of rainbow fairy wings appeared on Joel's back.

Brian snorted in laughter as Amanda came into the room with Solkar and Jimmy - and both seven-year-olds promptly fell about laughing.

"What?" Joel asked them, then he noticed something flapping behind him. "Oh, haha!" he giggled as he started tickling the grinning Bryce.

"Hey! It was him!" Bryce squealed in protest.

"So? You're just as evil! You can get HIM back after, if you like!" Joel retorted.

Bryce blew a raspberry at Joel as he vanished, and Dylan quickly followed his brother. Joel's new wings vanished as well, leaving him to grin up at his grandmother. Amanda looked down at him and said, "Sa'ren, I'd like you to meet Solkar. He's a ward of our family, and therefore my grandson as well."

Joel smiled at the nervous face now regarding him carefully. "Hi, Solkar. I won't bite," he said softly.

Solkar blinked, then smiled back softly.

Joel's smile slowly fell away, however, as he stared at Solkar. There was something about the way this seven year old Vulcan looked. Something familiar.

Spock re-entered the room and came over to Joel. "Kevin is entering the details about your new children with Seth. I have added my authority already... Sa'ren? What is the matter?" he trailed off as Joel was staring first at Solkar, then at him.

Joel slowly stood to his feet and went over to the nearest mirror. Then he looked back at Solkar, who was now trembling. "Saavik was your mother. Right?" Joel asked softly.

"That is correct," Spock said when Solkar didn't answer.

Joel did not take his eyes from Solkar. "When is your birthday?"

Solkar squeaked, "Earth time, 15th of October, 1997."

Joel's mind did some fast computing, factoring in a half Romulan half Vulcan's gestation period... then his jaw dropped open as he turned his eyes to his father. He tapped his comm-badge, "Sa'ren to Sarek. Fa'sami, can you come to the Rec Room, please?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Sa'ren, no..." Solkar cried softly as Jimmy hugged him tightly.

"What's wrong, Sol?" Jimmy asked quickly. Then he looked at Joel, "What's the matter?"

"I am nearly there already, grandson. Is there something amiss?" Sarek answered.

"Uh... no, not really. Just hurry up, Fa'sami!" Joel answered, his voice just as soft and hoarse as before - thick with emotions.

Spock's mind was no less fast than Joel's, and with the looks Joel was sending him, he had also worked out what Joel had just discovered. He fell to his knees as he turned to behold Solkar.

Solkar's emotion filled eyes were now fixed with Spock's, and Amanda was trembling as she, too, started to guess.

Sarek entered the room to a tension he had rarely felt.

"1996, in this Universe," Joel started, "on a world called Genesis, Captain Spock's body was regenerated as a child, then he aged with the planet... you went through Pon Farr, didn't you, Daddy?"

Spock nodded, while Sarek said, "His mind was not in his body, so he cannot remember. However, such is what Saavik told... told..." then he too fell silent as he looked between the kneeling and now crying Spock and the sobbing Solkar and the wondering and smiling Joel.

Solkar whimpered. "I... Ko'mi told me not to tell you. She told me that until I knew your heart could handle it, I was to remain quiet. She kept it hidden, even from Fa'komi and Fa'sami. When I heard that my... my brother, Sa'ren, had been found and that you had Named him... I asked if I could come to Earth... Sa'mi! Will you accept me, Sa'mi?" he finished with a broken hearted sob.

Spock just reached out and pulled Solkar, and Jimmy as well, over and into his arms. "Even though I have no knowledge of your conception, I would never abandon a child of mine," he wept. "I claim you as my son, Solkar, Child of Spock, Child of Sarek of the House of Surak of Vulcan. I claim you as my son!"

Joel wasted no time in slamming into his father's arms as well... and into a hug with Jimmy... and with his revealed half-brother, Solkar...

Meanwhile, in Main CIC:

"Chimp-Human cross, Genesis Project. So, Lee is mute?" Seth asked as he entered Spock's authority into the Clan database.

Kevin nodded, "Yeah. Poor kid watched as his parents were murdered to teach others a lesson. Those fuckers thought it would toughen him up. All it did was stop him talking."

"Poor thing," Seth whispered. "You two will help him - I know that much."

"We'll try... no, he's nine, not eight, Seth," Kevin said as he was reading what Seth was typing. "His birthday is April 14th, 1995."

"Got it," Seth continued to tap into the keyboard. "When did you learn sign language, Kev?"

Kevin giggled, "About an hour ago. Joel melded with Lee and then sent the language to me over our link."

"Love Vulcans... must be so sweet to learn languages like that," Seth giggled as well. "Okay, who's next?"

"We'll sort out the G-Cat kittens. Shere Khan the tiger, and Aslan the lion. Shere Khan was 'born' on September 8th, 1999, and Aslan on September 10th same year," Kevin grinned.

"Who picked the names?" Seth laughed as he entered the information.

"Got no idea, but they fit - kinda," Kevin chuckled. "Then there's Verne and Jules - Ferret-Human crosses. They're twins, and were born on July 28th, 1999."

"Same age as your crazy cats?" Seth giggled.

"Why'd you think they're best friends with our two kittens?" Kevin asked rhetorically.

"RWWWWWWOOOAAAWWWRRRRRR!" came a 'fearsome' squeak from behind Kevin, and he and Seth found themselves pounced by three kitten-boys and two ferrets. "We AWESOME pouncers!" Aslan and Simba chorused, while Shere Khan mock bit Seth's arm, growling his squeaky little growl. "Rwwwwoaaawrrrrrr!"

"JUSTY!!!!!!!!!" Seth laughed as he 'fought' off the attack. "You're DEAD!!!"

"What did *I* do this time?" came an innocent sounding yell from just the other side of the doors that the kids had pounced in from.

"I'd recognize that pounce technique anywhere!" Seth yelled back. "Ark, I believe Justy needs to visit the North Atlantic... AGAIN!"

<Sorry, but the Council Seer will need to approve such a prank. Please hold.... Yes, he has just done so.>

"Tyne! You trai...." Justy's voice cut out as he vanished.

"What you done wif our teacher?" Verne asked curiously as he blinked up at Seth from the side of the wheelchair. He and Jules were trying to work out if the shiny bolts could be loosened or not.

"He's taking a swimming break." Seth responded with a chuckle.

Justy reappeared in the room, then, and was dripping wet. "I'm going to get Tyne for this," he mock glared as he picked a small icicle out of his hair.

"Got it!" Jules squealed as he showed Verne the bolt he had managed to remove. "Quick - turn da udder way, den we'd have ALL deese Shinys!"

Just then Dylan popped in. "I TOLD ya you needed a black wheelchair Uncle Seth!" he giggled as Seth found himself being transported to the chair used by everyone else while on watch. "I'll be right back; I'm gonna get you a non-shiny one!" Dylan giggled.

Jules and Verne couldn't believe their luck. "Wow. WOW! Stop wif da bolts, Jules! Quick, quick! Help me wif da chair!" Verne hooted.

The two ferrets and their 'Shiny Loving' minions, the three kittens, quickly gathered behind the wheelchair and scooted it out of the room. They banged into the wall and door frame as they left, for they were so small that they couldn't see where they were going, properly.

Justy was laughing so hard he had forgotten that he was soaked to the skin, and Seth was almost as bad as him. Kevin, however, was nearly hyperventilating.

Dylan reappeared just then, accompanied by an all-flat-black wheelchair that made Seth's former transportation look like a rickshaw. The first thing that set it apart was the wheelie bars sticking out the rear; between them and the hazard warnings on the power unit it was apparent that this was one high-powered unit.

"The ferrets are welcome to that last piece of junk," Seth gasped as he was helped over onto the new chair. "This is a Rolls Royce of wheelchairs!"

"Can I have a towel, please?" Justy begged of whomever was listening, for the cold, icy water he had just been dunked in was getting to his bones, now.

<With compliments from the Seer,> Ark said as a warm towel appeared over Justy's head and landed on him.

"Thanks, I think," Justy giggled as he stripped down to dry off. He then watched as Seth put the new chair through its paces. "Sweet ride, Seth."

Dylan beamed happily, then vanished again to continue causing mischief somewhere.

Kevin giggled, "Aunt Helen is going to go nuts about these marks you're leaving on the floor, Seth!"

"Bite me! This is too much fun!" Seth giggled.

"Can we get back to my kid's details, now?" Kevin asked with more giggles.

Seth poked his tongue out, but did return to the console. "Okay, spoilsport. Who's next? What about that third kitten?"

"That's Simba. I think he's going to be Brant's and Matthew's, once they've talked," Kevin explained. "He's just gone six last week. October 19th 1998."

"Okay, I'll put him here and put Brant and Matt as a possible for adoption for now," Seth grinned.

Kevin nodded, "Okay, final two are Brian and Sue - Suzanne... with a 'z', yeah... Badger-Human hybrids."

"Age?" Seth asked.

"Seven," Kevin answered.

Justy whistled, "They're big for seven. Mind you, Lee's small for nine, so like that matters."

"Birthdays?" Seth asked Kevin.

"January 10th, 1997 - twins of course. Also put down in medical that they are both albinos. We'll have to get someone to check them out," Kevin added.

Seth nodded. "Doctor McCoy would be the best to speak to. And get with Conner as well; Bones will want to see all three, I think."

"Good idea," Kevin smiled while Justy nodded.

Before Justy could add his thought in on the matter at hand, he was mobbed by Beau, Jamie and Jacob. In unison they chorused, "You've GOTTA get into the other room, bro! We've a cousin we didn't know we had!!!!"

"You mean there is something that you three *don't* know about?" Justy giggled as he allowed himself to be dragged away.

"Come ON! Joel wants to show you his BROTHER!" Jamie exclaimed, for Justy just wasn't moving fast enough. Kevin and Seth exchanged a look, and Seth put his new chair through it's paces as he sped out with Kevin on his lap.

"Cheaters!" Justy yelled as he took off after the chair.

Inside the Rec Room, more of the adults had gathered, and Kirk and Bones were sitting with Joel on Bones' lap and Solkar on Kirk's. Joel waved at Justy as soon as he saw him, and launched into his explanation of events at breakneck speed.

Spock, meanwhile, was still trying to bring his emotions back under control from the shock, with the help of Sarek and Amanda.

A minute later, Joel finished with, "... and so I've got a KEWL little brother and... and..."

"I see Timmy is not the only one who speaks like this," Solkar said in awe as he watched Joel's flapping mouth.

"At least I'm used to it; try getting it in stereo!" Justy giggled as he scooped Solkar up off of Kirk's lap. "Hi! I'm Justy, your Sa'mekh's nephew!"

Solkar grinned, "I know. I knew I was Spock's son. And do you not mean in triplicate from Jamie, Jacob AND Beau?"

Justy grinned. "Beau is nice; he lets Jamie and Jacob do the confusing. They only do triple when they know it'll give a grown-up a headache."

"After that comment..." Beau started.

Jamie continued, "...we're gonna get..."

"...you more, too!" Jacob finished.

"So there!" they all added together.

"Won't work, bros... you taught me; remember?" Justy laughed.

"Not..."

"...every..."

"...thing!"

'Enough to handle you three little angels!' Justy sent with a grin.

"That sounded like a challenge, guys" Joel giggled to the three grinning ten year olds, then his eyes opened wider and his hand flew to the pendant around his neck. "Ummm....?"

"I heard them too," Kevin whispered.

Levi just tilted his head. "I didn't, but then I don't read people's minds unless I need to. I don't think my pendant works like that..."

Joel was blinking as he studied the small pendant carefully. "I was just looking at Just, and I could hear 'im... will it happen alla time?"

Levi just shrugged, "I don't know. Maybe you'll have to control it, or focus it, or something."

Joel ran his fingers over the pendant once more, then pushed it from his mind for the moment, "I'll try later."

Jamie and Jacob were studying their Vulcan cousin's face carefully, and their eyes were growing more and more curious. "Your mind's getting darker," they said together.

"Huh?" Justy asked.

"We can't read him much, now. We had trouble before, but now it's like you're fading, Joel!" Beau explained.

"...//**Time Comes. This is as it should be**//..." Levi said as the Guardian used him to speak.

Before Joel could ask any questions, Bones, on whom he was still sitting, said, "Come in, Admiral."

They all turned to see Admiral Morrow at the door leading to the Dining Room. "Afternoon. I see we have yet another son of Spock?"

Bones snorted and joked, "Tell us about it. *Jim* is the one who sleeps with anything in a skirt, yet it's Spock who has all these unknown kids flying about the Universe!"

"Hey!" Kirk protested as most of the kids there started giggling.

"You have kids that can fly, Poppa Spock?" Levi asked innocently.

Spock opened his eyes from his joint meditation with his father and smiled slightly, "If they are on-board the Enterprise, yes."

"How can we help you, Admiral?" Kirk asked before Bones could throw another barb his way.

Morrow just looked around the room until he found Jude and Billy Joe with his eyes. "Well, it is about the three test scores I had land on my desk from the head of the Academy. It seems that a certain Jude Lee, Kevin Thompson, and Sa'ren Short have more talent than has been seen by the examiners in many a long... decade..."

"M...mine too?!" Kevin squeaked. "But I... I thought I'd... I..."

"Yours too," Morrow smiled down at him as he walked further into the room. "If you three are up for it, I have another exam I would like you to do... Now, if possible. It is tailored to each of you individually."

"More tests?" Joel grinned happily. Solkar was just as interested. Jimmy, Justy and a number of the others looked at the two Vulcans as if they had grown another head.

"FORWARDS, SHINY-MOBILE!" came five squeaks that very second, as Seth's old wheelchair zoomed into the room with the two ferrets and three kittens squashed onto the seat. Dylan was laughing and running along behind them. The wheelchair had been pimped out to the max with pearlescent paint and various shiny items glued in place. On the front and back there were car number plates with "SHINY 1" emblazoned on them.

Seth shook his head. "Now why didn't Dylan pimp it out like that for me?" he asked with a laugh as the 'Shiny-Mobile' did a few turns around the room.

"You didn't ask?" Joel giggled.

Levi giggled, then vanished for a few seconds. When he returned, a light bar, which Jude recognized as similar to the police lights on the cars from his old world, and a polished brass squeeze horn from an old Model T were sitting at his feet. "You need shiny things to tell us you're coming!" Levi giggled.

Jules, the 'driver', squealed the chair to a halt by Levi so that he and Dylan could attach the new 'Shiny-s'.

"We're gonna clean up da place of ALLL Shinys!!" Simba explained with great seriousness to Harley, who was listening with the same amount of seriousness. "Den, we HOARDS them and DEFENDS them from Shiny-Haters!"

"Can I joins wif you?" Harley asked softly, his eyes lighting up as the police lights started flashing.

"Sures!!" Shere Khan giggled as Simba and Aslan hopped down to help Harley up. The now six kids did not notice that the chair was subtly growing in size to accommodate them all, but Joel did. He glanced at Bryce, who was 'innocently' sitting with Zandor, and saw him wink back.

Levi giggled, "All done!"

"Kewl!" Verne crowed as he started using the horn.

Harley stood up, being balanced by the three kittens, and yelled, "FOR DER SHIIINN-NIIIIIEEESSSSS!!!!"

And they were off with a few tyre marks remaining in the carpet.

Morrow was still standing there, as if nothing had happened. "I take it those boys were some of those rescued from today's intervention?" he asked politely, looking down at the giggling Joel.

The boy nodded, "Yessir, they are. Four of them are Kev's and my kids. The other Lion cub we think will be Brant's and Matthew's. Oh, and the Chimp, two Badgers and the human kid behind you are also ours."

Morrow turned to see two sunglasses adorned multicoloured badgers smiling up at him. One had a small human boy on his back, while the female had Lee the Chimp on hers. "Pleasure to meet you," he said with a welcoming smile.

Sue nodded her head, then curtsied. "Charmed," she giggled, before dropping to all fours and running from the room, closely followed by Brian. Lee and Rafe simply hung on to enjoy the rides.

"Why were they multicoloured?" Morrow asked curiously.

"Paints," Kevin giggled as he pointed at a pair of equally colourful boys; Timmy and Ricky. "Pauly's around somewhere, and I'm sure he's no longer a normal Vulcan colour either!"

"Wait a moment... Vulcan?" Morrow asked.

"It is a long story, Admiral," Kirk responded with a smile, "we'll explain while these three boys work on their exam."

"I shall look forward to it," Morrow grinned.

Timmy skipped up to Joel and whispered in his ear, "The Tribe and Rugrats will get everything ready for the new guys while you do your tests. Then we can do the Swearing In!"

Joel hugged the Fireball happily. "Kewl!"

"Admiral?" Solkar asked from Justy's arms, where he was making himself most comfortable. "May I have one of the tests to do as well, please?" he asked hopefully.

Morrow smiled, "I am sure we can find one that is geared for you, Solkar. I will pull the records from the VSO and set you a Starfleet one to match and challenge your talents - as far as is possible for Vulcans, that it."

"Thank you," he beamed.

Justy placed the boy back down on Kirk's lap and ruffled his hair, "I need to find Dean - he'd love to meet you, too!"

"I will be here, Justy," Solkar beamed again. "Admiral Morrow won't be able to get my test ready for at least an hour, knowing VSO procedures in releasing classified data."

Morrow chuckled, "I will try to be quicker, but you are right. Now, if my three victims will follow me, I shall get them started!"

Joel and Jude were already racing for CIC as he said this. Kevin grinned and followed the Admiral more slowly, for he still wasn't sure he fully believed he had made any good impression. His thoughts were dwelling on all the words he couldn't quite make out, and on the fact that it *must* be just kindness that was making the Admiral do this for him.

"Come on, Kevin," Morrow said, as he turned and easily read Kevin's pensive face. "Your test score was surprising - not because you did it, but because it was from an eleven year old. I have never seen such insight from one as young as you, in the fields of diplomacy."

"Really?" Kevin whispered softly.

"Really. Now, hurry along, Cadet!" Morrow added with a semi-serious bark to his voice.

Kevin immediately jumped to it and ran into the Main CIC to join the other two, as fast as he could.

After shutting the door between Main CIC and the Dining Room behind him, Admiral Morrow moved to sit at the main table with the other adults. Jason Evans was also there, having just arrived back from the rescue. "I take it things went well?" he asked the Dragon Commander.

"They did. Very. We didn't lose anyone," Jason replied with a smile. "I'm here as the VSO guard for Joel for the afternoon. Nath' and Koth are still with Logan and the others."

"That's great news," Morrow smiled.

Spock and Kirk turned their full attention on the Admiral, then. Bones was simply sipping yet another coffee, but his eyes were probing Morrow no less than Kirk's and Spock's.

"Okay, Admiral; what on Earth has brought you all the way from San Francisco? Three entrance exams by a group of kids and teens have never made you do that before," Kirk asked, cutting right to business.

Morrow nodded, "Correct, and normally they wouldn't have done so, now. However, those three boys are anything but normal."

"Would you care to explain that one?" Dan asked curiously.

"Both Joel and Jude not only aced the entrance papers, but spent some time answering some theoretical questions on Sub-Space mechanics - just to relieve the boredom of the easy tests, I'd imagine. Kevin came up with a brilliant diplomatic ploy that our experts are even now trying to adapt to use with those damned Sheliak - and their first opinions are that we may manage to get a treaty out of them with it. THAT is why I'm here in person. I will NOT allow these three boys to have their talents put to waste, if I can help it, and I also wanted confirmation."

"Oh," Dan murmured.

Allen simply looked stunned, proud and terrified all at the same time. "My little Kevin did that?"

"Your little Kevin did," Morrow answered seriously.

John grinned and patted Allen on the back before turning to Morrow, "I'm sure they'd have not gone to waste, Admiral. Cory has an eye for talent."

"So do I, and a little known law of the Federation states that you can hold position in any number of the fleets within the Membership of the UFP at the same time - he is STILL Starfleet himself. And so will these three be, if they really want it," Morrow grinned back.

"Does Cory know that?" Dan asked curiously.

"Like I said, it is little known - outside of the highest levels of power. Whilst we allow it, we don't encourage it. A person isn't their best if they spread themselves too thinly. Cory, however, would be bored with just Starfleet, or just the Vulcan High Command. He and Sean have more talent than should rightfully be allowed. Any number of the children here do. I'm 'window-shopping', if you wish to call it that. And I'm already geared to place a sizeable bid in for Joel, Jude and Kevin." Morrow turned to Spock and Allen, "How much for them?"

Allen laughed, "You can borrow, but never keep!"

"The price is astronomical," Spock said at the same time.

"You'd have better luck talking me into having a sex change," Dan replied seriously.

Morrow fixed him with a look, "The way I feel about those boys? Pick your dresses!" Then he laughed. "Seriously, they have talent, ability and knowledge to spare. If they want in with the Fleet, then whate-

ver else they get under Cory with VHC, the Fleet is open to them. Oh, and as for Joel, he's got command potential, Spock. I'd wager he'd rival Jim, here, for ability. And Scotty now has TWO boys with engineering excellence. Jude and Cory. Scotty has the report on Jude already, and he's drooling at the mouth."

"I am seeing a trip to the Academy within a day or so. Right, Harrison?" Kirk asked with a knowing smile.

"Correct. If they do as well with these tests as I expect, I'm arranging for a full simulator run this coming Monday."

Spock glanced at Kirk and smiled, "I hope Sa'ren acquits himself with more morals than a certain other Cadet I used to know."

"Hey, now! I did nothing, no one saw me, and you can't prove a thing!" Kirk laughed jovially.

"Kobayashi Maru?" Morrow guessed. "I heard the rumours. It was..."

"Imaginative," Bones completed with a sly grin.

"Very," Spock confirmed. He looked at Morrow, "Will you run them through that?"

"Yes."

"Then expect to have the second 'win' in the unbeatable scenario, Admiral. And this time, without 'imaginative' exploits," Spock said seriously, and when he saw the look Morrow gave him, he added, "I have seen into my son's mind. He will, to use a colloquial phrase, 'trash' the test. Both he and Jude, with what I've seen already."

"Jude has been hanging around with Cory; do I need to say more?" Dan added.

Morrow was practically bouncing in his seat, "I cannot wait for them to take it, then. Spock, with what they put down on the test papers, I bet they could design a new starship, never mind 'trash' our current tests!"

"Too late...." Dan muttered.

'They already have.'

"Hello, Draco," Morrow smiled, "What did you mean by that?"

'Both Joel and Jude have already designed a starship. They have called it "Enterprise E" and it contains technology that I have never seen before. Very interesting.'

Morrow looked stunned.

Spock raised a hand quickly, "Such technology would be dangerous for Starfleet at this present time, however. We will need to integrate what they have designed slowly so as not to destroy ourselves by a large influx of information and power."

"Agreed," Morrow nodded, "but it isn't half tempting!"

"No D'Kyr tours for you, Admiral." Dan chuckled. "All the finest talent in the Clan are working on the plans for that ship."

"Joel and Jude are not," Spock clarified. "Cory is fully aware of what they have created and is himself scared of the Clan having that power too quickly."

"Are you aware of what they have designed?" John asked Spock.

"Yes. I can give you the names of some of them, for you will not be able to reproduce the items from just the names." Then, Spock started to list off, "Quantum Torpedoes; Tri-Cobalt Weapons; Corbomite Shielding - based off of a ploy used by Jim in one of our earlier missions; Multi-phasic Shields; and Ablative Armour Plating generators."

"They're all weapons and defensive tools, right?" John confirmed.

"Correct. Restricted, of course," Kirk said. "Not even I know what they really are or do. The other stuff they came out with, however, is going to be more fun."

"Sa'ren has already sent off all the information he knows about 'holodecks' to the Oceanic Division, as it seems to play into their interests," Spock explained, "while Jude has supplied us with blueprints of new scanning and deflector systems."

Morrow just sat with his mouth open. "I'm so looking forwards to seeing what can be released, you know."

"I've finished, Uncle Harrison!"

Morrow turned in his chair to see Joel close the door behind him and walk over carrying a data-padd. "Here! That was fun! Any more?" he asked innocently.

Morrow's face went pale. "M...more? Fun?! Joel! That was an exam from the end of the second year of the Academy! Quantum Physics!! You've been," he checked his watch, "eleven minutes!"

"And thirty two point three nine six seconds. Like I said, fun," Joel smiled easily without a trace of conceit. "Do you have any more?"

"Okay - he's a Vulcan, alright," McCoy breathed out as Kirk looked shocked. What was most surprising was that Spock himself looked impressed. "Your son is just like his parents, Spock."

"I do not think that I ever managed to complete such a test in so small a time," Spock stated as he beckoned Joel over to give him a cuddle.

"No, but your wife was quite able. With her gifts AND yours combined into one small, yet admittedly cute, form, no wonder Joel's fast!" Kirk laughed.

Joel beamed happily at the praise while watching Morrow read the answers on the padd.

Xain and Telez walked in at that moment. Joel waved, "You're back from Utah quick!"

"I had no need to remain longer, but every reason to return, cousin," Telez smiled.

Joel cocked his head to one side, "What? What did you call me?"

Behind Telez, Trip Tucker and T'Pol entered, and Trip placed a hand on Telez' shoulder. "We have some news for you, little one," Trip said to Joel.

Joel simply raised his eyebrow.

Xain cleared his throat and said, "Telez and I found out on Tuesday that we are both related. My human great grandmother's sister was his paternal great-grandmother. She married Carl Fisher, whose grandson was Doctor Graham Fisher: Telez' father."

Joel nodded slowly.

Telez beamed. "My great-grandfather, Carl, had an older sister."

"My mother," Trip grinned. "She married Charles Tucker Jr... your great grandfather!"

Joel was up and in Telez' arms within a heartbeat. "MORE FAMILY!" he yelled with tears of joy running from his face.

"Should I tell him now, Aunt T'Pol?" Xain asked with a hint of a smile.

"There's more?!" Joel gasped. Then, "Wait! Aunt??"

T'Pol nodded, "My sister married Out-Of-House. She married Siprak, Patriarch of House Suvak. It was a good match, or so it seemed until the bond began to sever between Suvak and Surak."

Joel's eyes opened wider as he called up the information from the Clan's computer that he had memorized. "Xain's my cousin too?! And so's Telez'?? We're cousins to each other, the three of us?!"

"Yes," Trip beamed.

"I have Family again," Telez said as tears fell from his smiling face, for family meant everything to Andorians. "I really have a family again!"

"Daddy?" Joel asked as he climbed onto his father's lap. "Mother wants me to ask you something."

Spock smiled slightly, "What is the question, Sa'ren?"

Joel smiled as he wiggled around to make himself comfortable. After pulling his father's arms tightly about himself he said, "She's asking to be transferred to your mind, Daddy. She says that I am better now, so she wants to spend some time with you before she is taken to the Hall of Memories."

Spock nodded and then kissed Joel's head. "Turn around, and I will meld with you."

Joel did so, and Spock laid his fingers upon his son's face. After a few minutes, he removed them and noticed his son crying. "What is the matter?" Spock asked with concern.

"Cory's really feeling that bad?" Joel asked softly as he wiped at his tears.

Spock nodded. "You were playing with Mikey when I talked to Teri about this. Yes. If he does not rest, then he will become very ill - possibly die. He is not as strong as an average 14 year old due to the stress of the past year and 3 months, and any more stress right now will have an adverse affect on him. Teri knows what to look for, and once Cory is strengthened, he can come back."

Joel sniffed and nodded, "Okay. Thank you for getting him his holiday, Sa'mekh."

"It was my pleasure to assist him, Sa'ren. I love all my children. I love you," Spock replied, deep affection heard in his voice.

Teri's House:

Queen Elizabeth approached Jason's grandmother, Meredith, who was seated in the living room. "My dear, Philip and I will be leaving here tomorrow. Is there anything you want me to take to Wales when I leave? I shall stop off at the Dragon's Nest, first."

"No, Ma'am, I'm fine," Meredith smiled up at her Monarch. "The PM is missing his weekly meetings?" she asked with a chuckle.

The Queen made a face, "I detest that man, but I cannot show partiality. There is something odd about how he feels when I am around him. Makes me wish to reach for a gun."

"I know how you feel, Ma'am. Make him wait a little longer, then. Have *some* fun with your position!"

Elizabeth chuckled and sat down. "How many times will I need to ask you to call me 'Lizzie', Mere?" she asked, knowing what the answer would be.

"As ever, your Majesty... One more time!"

Later:

Jude had finished his own test papers about a half hour after Joel had, and Kevin less than ten minutes after him. Morrow had been just as impressed with each of the boys' tests as he had been with Joel's. So much so, in fact, that he was requesting more, far more difficult, tests to be arranged at the Academy and sent over. Meanwhile, Joel and Kevin went to the Pool to meet up with the Tribe and Rugrats.

"Okay! All in Uniforms!" Timmy giggled once those from both Kid-Groups present had assembled.

Clothes went flying.

Click-click-click

Joel looked down at Lee and watched as the boy signed to him.

"No, they always swim this way," Joel giggled. "So do I."

Lee signed again.

"Cool! How, though? I thought chimps couldn't?"

More signing.

"Cool! That'll work nicely," Joel sniggered as Belar pounced Lee and blindfolded him. Blindfolds were also now applied to the other seven of Joel's kids, and each were being carried near to the water.

Timmy then asked them the same questions that had been asked of Solkar earlier that day. After getting his answers, and a thumbs up from Lee, Timmy then counted to three.

On the count of three, all eight were tossed into the pool, to be picked up by the eight or so swimmers in there.

Joel felt his free hand taken and he looked down to see Solkar beaming up at him. He quickly pulled his little brother close and just stood there as his kids swam and played, just enjoying his closeness to Kevin and Solkar.

Jason entered and asked, "Is it safe now?"

"No, but you're brave enough," Kevin giggled before running and diving into the water to try chasing the two Ferret boys. Jules and Verne swam like fishes... and were checking everyone's 'family jewels' - which seemed logical to them, for 'jewels' are normally shiny and if they were... well... the boys were just glad that their 'jewels' were unanimously declared "Dull"!

Jason giggled and pulled off his uniform, "I think I'll swim with you all, too."

Before he could place his uniform in a safe place, his comm went off. Joel moved over to listen while Solkar ran and bombed into the shallow end of the water.

It was Cory:

"Attention all members of Family Clan Short. As of three-forty-seven PM Central United States time, the city of Des Moines, Iowa officially has a Clan Compound in the suburb of Urbandale. I hereby designate Julio Carlos Hernandez as Director of Clan Short - Des Moines with Johnny Hernandez as Head of Communications. All Divisions are hereby ordered to provide support as necessary to bring this Division to full operational status in the most expedient manner. Division heads, acknowledge."

"Commander Casey responding for Clan Short Special Forces Division." Joel heard Adam respond, within a few seconds. *"I have just alerted a full strike team to help them with anything they need. Is there anything else you can think of they would need, or should I just get in contact with them?"*

"Divisional Staff Security is the priority," came Cory's reply.

"Understood, Patriarch, have them prepare for Lieutenant Sean Patrick and a full equipped assault team to act as division security until such time as they do not need them any more. Strike Team Tango will arrive within thirty minutes." Adam responded after a short delay.

"Acknowledged and approved, Adam," Cory replied.

Next came Danny, *"Charleston AI Division acknowledged."*

"Acknowledged, Danny. Nothing outstanding that concerns AI at the moment," Cory responded.

"Acknowledged, Cory," Sammy replied, and Joel giggled as he could swear that he could hear purrs behind SamSam's voice.

"North America acknowledged."

"North-East; we got ya, Patriarch."

"Okay, Peter, tell your brothers to take a break, already!" Joel heard Cory reply with a giggle.

Jason then tapped his comm and giggled, "Voice of the Dragon to Patriarch Cory: it took you this long? We've been watching Julio and company for weeks already... Get with the plot, blond-top!"

"You are so dead, Jace!" Cory giggled back quickly.

"Yeah, well: I'm down here in sunny Orlando. You're stuck up there for the next few days... I will be well hidden before you get back!" Jason retorted, but he had forgotten something.

Joel.

Jason found himself picked up by two slim arms around his waist. He yelled in shock as he was carried full tilt toward the pool and tossed in, with giggles from Joel all the way. As he left Joel's grasp, Jason found that his comm-badge flew from his hand and sped back to Joel's.

Joel spoke into the badge, "Blondie? Don't worry, Blondie! I got your back! Tell Julio I'll be over in the week, sometime, with some cookies as a present! I've gotta run, got more Starfleet tests to do! Love you!"

Joel then laid the badge down before pouncing into the water and started to dunk Jason, yelling happily, "Only I gets to pick on Blondie, Jace!"

Solkar giggled before getting out and turning the comm off and tossing it onto Jason's pile of clothes. Then, because family stuck together, he jumped onto Joel and Jace and started to help his half-brother teach the giggling VSO Patriarch a good lesson.

Joel had only just swam off to find and dunk Kevin when Galli and Jay appeared at the edge of the pool and called to him. He swam over and looked up at the two small boys, "Yeah?"

"We need to talk, brother," Galli said seriously.

Joel's face grew serious as well and he hoisted himself out of the pool and followed the Doctor and his partner to the shower room.

"What's the matter, bro?" Joel asked nervously.

The Doctor sighed. "Big brother, I have a mission that is still left before me. I need to find my entire race, to rebuild the Time Lords. I... I have to leave, now," he said softly.

Joel's eyes grew watery. "For how long?" he whimpered.

"For me, a long time. For you, it depends on when Time wants me to return here."

Joel sniffed. "I *will* see you again... right?" he asked brokenly.

"Certainly," Jay answered, "but the next time we know about is when you first meet us, from our perspective. We won't be your brothers at that point, for it's before we entered this Universe and this place in the timeline. Other than that..." Jay trailed off.

Galli cuddled into Joel's chest quickly, "I don't know anything, right now - about what will happen between us, I mean, Joel. You have a destiny I cannot fully see, nor even understand. All I know is that it is something important, yet hard. I know bits and pieces, but all I can do is hope I'll see you again - you're my brother forever, now. But there may be a chance that this is the last time I'll hug you as my brother."

"There's no chance, then?" Joel wept.

"There's always a chance. Joel, how far would you go, and how much would you pay, and how much would you endure, to save the ones you love," the Doctor asked Joel, seriously. "What would you sacrifice?"

Joel stopped crying and thought long and hard. "Everything," the little Vulcan whispered, eventually. "Everything."

The Doctor nodded, "Then maybe we *will* see each other again. A wise Man once said, those who seek to save their lives will lose them, but..."

"Those who lose their lives for my sake, will save them," Joel completed. "My destiny; When does it come, and what shall I do when it does?"

"Soon; and you'll know what to do, Child of Red Sands," the Doctor answered, as he turned to enter the Tardis. "You shall know. Remember - No Greater Love, Sa'ren of Vulcan. No Greater Love."

Jay quickly came over and hugged Joel as well. Then both boys vanished from Joel's sight, and a deep toned thrumming started up and quickly faded away.

Gallifrey, the Time Lord, was gone.

Joel sniffed and turned to find Kevin watching him. "I don't know what that all means, but I'm scared, Kevvy," he said, tears heard in his voice.

"I am too, but we're bravest together, Sa'ren. We'll face anything when we're together," Kevin soothed as he moved to comfort Joel in his arms.

Less than half an hour had passed when Morrow entered and called for Jude, Kevin and Joel to come to him. He smiled as they quickly dried themselves down and donned sweatpants and a tee-shirt. "Going commando?" the Admiral chuckled.

"Yeah!" Jude grinned back. "No point in putting on too much if we're going back swimming, later. Would only mean more time stripping and less time swimming!"

"Very logical, and a good sign of forethought," Morrow said seriously, but the look in his eyes showed the three boys that he was yanking their chains. "Come on. I've got something special lined up for you."

Jude, Joel and Kevin had finished the latest test, and were now outside CIC and found that the rest of the kids had started a spirited game of soccer. Jules and Verne were having a lot of fun as well, even if the ball was far bigger in comparison to them than to the rest of the youngsters playing. Jude pulled Kevin under one arm and Joel under the other as he said, "I think we all did very well, don't you?"

Kevin nodded with confidence. Morrow's reaction to the first test before their swimming break had bolstered his self-image, and Joel had added to it with a good long kissing session - just to be sure. "Yeah - we're super amazing!" he giggled wickedly.

"That's my Kevvy," Joel sniggered as Lee caught sight of them first and ran over.

As with the other G-kids, Lee seemed to find it easier to run on all fours. His arms being slightly longer than his legs was the main cause, and the fluidity of his movements as he used his flexible fingers and

'toes' to grip and pull himself forward amazed both his parents. He stopped before them and smiled widely before sitting back and signing up at them with his 'toes', which made Jude giggle.

"No, we thought we'd go talk to Russ and Sara," Kevin said after Lee had finished. "Want to come meet them?"

Lee's eyes grew curious and he waved his 'toes' a few times at Kevin.

"They share being parents to all of Cory and Sean's kids, just like Cory and Sean share being parents to Russ and Sarah's. Russ brought everyone over a few hours ago, and they've been settling themselves in Joel's house."

"*Our* house," Joel corrected as he reached behind Jude to tickle Kevin's ribs.

Jude picked Joel up before Kevin could do more than laugh and hugged him tight. "You are going to make me cry, little brother," he whispered.

"Why?" Joel asked quietly as he enjoyed the tight snuggle.

"Cory and Sean opened their home to you, but this is the first time I've heard you say it's *your* home."

Joel smiled, softly.

Kevin's eyes were also a little moist as he looked up at the older boy who was cuddling his husband. He wrapped a hand around Joel's bare left foot and rubbed his thumb firmly along Joel's sole, "Jude's right. You said it last night, too, but I was too... horny... to notice. It's nice you have something of your own, that you accept as being your own, T'hy'la."

Joel's eyes fluttered. While his feet were ticklish, the manner in which Kevin was rubbing with his thumb was anything *but* ticklish.

Jude noticed the lump forming in Joel's sweatpants and giggled. "I think you should go meet Sarah and Russ after you've dealt with this weapon of mass destruction, Joel!"

"Huh? Oh! Hush, you!" Joel blushed slightly, but the Cheshire cat grin showed Jude that Joel wasn't all that embarrassed. A massive change from yesterday.

Lee tugged on his poppa's hand, and Kevin looked down to watch him sign a question.

"Yes. He has a stiffy. If you rub his feet a certain way it'll cause it."

Lee silently giggled and covered his mouth with both hands while his feet flicked out more.

"Yes, we're gay. Well, he's bi, but yeah - we like to make love to each other," Kevin explained as he giggled and picked up his eldest son. Lee kissed his cheek before gripping on with all four limbs. "You're coming with us, then," Kevin giggled.

Lee nodded.

"I'm going to the 7th hole rest stop. I need to relax," Jude smiled before kissing Joel briefly and placing him down next to Kevin.

Joel waved goodbye before calling for his other seven kids.

Once they had assembled, he asked them, "Do you want to come meet Uncle Russ and Auntie Sara with us?"

"Who?" came the seven responses that sent Joel to his knees laughing.

Lee blew noisily through his lips, making them flap which produced a rather amusing yet odd sound. He lifted his left leg and, with his left hand, signed a brief explanation to his brothers and sister.

"Haha, smartass," Sue giggled. "Just 'cos you asked before we got here!"

Lee simply grinned.

Joel picked up the two ferrets and placed one on each shoulder, then he pulled the two badgers over and held one under each arm. The two kittens and Rafe joined hands and simply looked up at their daddies. Joel giggled at Rafe, "Joining in the dress code?"

Rafe looked down at his nude form, then grinned back up, "Uh huh! If they don't wear stuffs then why me?"

Joel grinned again as Kevin asked, "Did you put sun cream on?"

"Uh huh!" Rafe nodded before giggling. "Shere and As helped!"

"His dickie is funny. It flaps all over der place!" Aslan explained.

"Oh, that type of help," Kevin chuckled as he looked between his three five year olds before him. Then he glanced at Joel, "All cats are like that?"

"Retractable? Yeah. Most animals on earth are to one degree or another. Humanoids are generally 'collapsible!'" Joel giggled as Jules bent himself double to take a good look at his own 'bits and pieces'.

"Oh yeahs! Mine looks differents too!" he giggled.

"Ain't you played wif it enough to knows?" Verne sniggered as he rested his chin on Joel's head to watch his twin.

"Yeah, buts not when I can sees a humans one toos!"

"You stupid!"

"Am not! You stupid, stupid!"

"Hey!" Joel grinned as he reached up and tickled them both. "Don't call each other that. No-one is stupid, okay?"

"Otay, Daddy!" they chorused, adding a small light punch to each other's nearest arm as they said so.

"And no hitting!" Kevin added, trying to hold back his own laughter.

Shere Khan grinned, "Dey always likes dat. Dey nutzors!"

"Am not!" both ferrets shot back, but their giggles spoiled the 'hurt' expressions they were shooting for.

It wasn't far to walk from the playing fields to Cory's house. Less than a hundred yards all told, so there was no particular rush. Timmy, Ricky and Pauly soon joined them, once they had seen where they were headed. Before they had gotten to the front door, DJ, Tanner, Toby, Beau, Jamie, Jacob, Brandon, Austin, CD and Calen joined them. Joel giggled. "Everyone ready to pounce for snacks?" he asked them, remembering the delicious home made cookies that Sara had baked for him for his birthday yesterday.

"Ho, yeah!" DJ and Tanner chorused.

"Huuuuungreeeeey!" Toby added.

Jamie, Jacob and Beau sniggered.

"Foods! Foods!" Shere crowed out.

"Shinys too?" Verne asked.

Kevin grinned as he opened the door, "We'll see."

"Charge!" Tanner commanded and all the kids surged into the house and made a bee-line for the living room.

Russ was lying down on the sofa, reading a book, while Sara was busy sorting through some paperwork, when the Horde descended.

Sara started laughing, for Russ soon had all eight of Joel and Kevin's kids on him, all clamouring for food in the most pathetic manner. Even Lee was in on the act, for he was on the back of the sofa and repeated tapping Russ's forehead gently and pointing to his mouth, then using his right foot to rub his stomach. She didn't laugh for long, though, for she had DJ and Tanner on her lap seconds later, "Ooffff, you two are getting big!" she chuckled.

"What do you mean?!" Tanner whined with a grin on his face. "We're wasting away, here!"

"Yeah!" added all of Cory and Sean's kids. Even Austin, who was really the biggest kid of the lot!

"Foods... or Shinys... or Shiny foods!!" Verne exclaimed loudly at the top of his lungs.

"I think they are hungry," Kevin informed Sara deadpan.

"Nooooo. Really?" Russ chuckled as he launched a counter-tickle-attack on Aslan and Rafe.

"It's a good thing that I had been preparing food, then," Sara said. "The stew shouldn't be long, guys. Go get cleaned up, and then we can eat."

"Do you has meat for us?" Shere asked after bounding down and running over to stand with his chin on her knee. "For me and Assy and Jules and Verne?"

"Of course I do, cutie," Sara smiled as she reached to tickle Shere Khan's nose, making him sneeze.

Sue and Brian came over and took off their sunglasses. Their weak, watery pink eyes blinked as they tried to focus on Sara. "Do you have our foods too?" Sue asked softly; shyly.

Tanner and DJ slipped from her lap so she could sit up and pull the two badgers onto it instead, "Grubs, some meats, roots and fruit - yes I do."

Brian rubbed at his belly happily as he licked his lips. "Yum! We like some human foods too, though. Can we have some wholegrain bread, toasted?"

"Sure, honey. Why, though?" Sarah asked with interest.

"Rafey told us he likes cheese on toast. That's a little rich for us, but grubs on toast might be nice. Could you toast them for us?" he asked, blinking his soulful eyes at her.

Sara was glad that being in the Clan had allowed her to see and hear it all, so her stomach didn't turn at the idea. "Sure. I will see if we can make it your favourite dish."

"Yum!" Sue said before she and Brian pecked kisses onto Sarah's cheeks.

Soon, everyone was around the kitchen table eating. Tanner was pulling faces at the two badgers. The cats and ferrets eating raw meat didn't seem to bother him, but Sue and Brian sucking earthworms up like spaghetti was just a little more than Tanner felt he could handle.

"Want some?" Sue asked politely when she saw him staring at her and her brother. She picked up a worm and held it out. It was dead, of course, and slightly toasted on top. "It's yummy!"

"Now you've done it," Joel giggled. "You'll hurt her feelings if you refuse."

"Dude, it won't be the first 'worm' that you've ever ate!" DJ giggled.

Tanner's face couldn't decide on blushing or turning green as he gingerly took the worm from Sue - who was now watching him like a hawk.

Russ, feeling slightly evil, asked DJ, "Tanner has eaten a worm? DJ, if I was you, I wouldn't be bragging about only having a 'worm' in my pants."

"Hey, it's in the Book of World Records as the world's biggest worm... they want to classify it as a python, actually!" DJ replied, not letting Russ phase him.

Tanner giggled at the banter, then looked at the worm in his hand carefully. "Mom? Would this be safe to eat?" he asked bravely.

Sara smiled and nodded.

Tanner closed his eyes tight, and popped the worm into his mouth. He chewed quickly and swallowed.

DJ clapped, looking impressed at his boyfriend.

Tanner's tongue smacked at his lips and upper palette in his mouth experimentally, his face deep in thought. "Not bad," he said with surprise as he looked at Sue and grinned. "Thank you!"

"Want some more?" she asked, hopefully.

Tanner got up and scooted around the table and climbed in between the two badgers - who promptly started to share out their meal evenly with their new friend.

DJ pulled a face. "Brush your teeth before you think of kissing me - okay?" he giggled.

"They don't taste much different than my favourite King Cobra; and you let me kiss you after kissing it!" Tanner shot back between worms.

DJ's face went red faster than a traffic light, and everyone started laughing at him. He joined in a few seconds later, "Okay. Okay, I yield! Jeez!"

Pauly, Joel and Kevin were giggling between themselves as they tucked into the same bowl of stew. Theirs was different to that being consumed by everyone else - it was green, for it consisted of Vulcan meats; mostly le-metra. Pauly was having a blast, for he was cuddled onto Joel's lap, and was feeding his two uncles, one chunk of meat or veg at a time, then feeding himself. All three would need a shower by the end of this meal.

Once everyone had finished, they all started clearing the table. Lee was on top of the fridge directing the 'traffic', much like the Magician's Apprentice, and Kevin was standing on a stool to wash up.

Jules and Verne started bouncing up and down around Joel, "Can we looks for Shinys now?"

"Yes, but don't take them," Joel said fondly. "They belong to my brothers and nephews, okay?"

"We won't! We not allowed to take a Shiny-Lover's Shinys!" Verne informed him seriously.

Joel looked at his son oddly for a moment, then glanced at Timmy, who held up his right hand and quoted, "I pledge allegiance to the Shiny of the Shiny Nation, and to the Gleam for which it stands; one Nation under Shiny - sparkling, with incandescence and radiance for all!"

By the time he had finished, all the other Tribe members were quoting with him, and Russ had to leave the kitchen rapidly before his sides split open.

Kevin was laughing so hard he nearly fell into the sink, and Joel grinned. "Do you have a national anthem, too, Jules? Verne?"

"Uh huh!" they both replied, then started to sing:

"God save our Gracious Shiny!
Long live our Noble Shiny"
God save the Shiny"
Send it victorious;
Happy and Glorious;
Long to Shine over us;
God save the Shiny!"

"Who came up with this?" Tanner asked as he held onto the kitchen table in order to remain standing as he howled in laughter.

"Dave! Dave!" Jules giggled.

Joel made a mental note to go and see that strange little ferret very soon. In fact, once he had gotten cleaned up and had settled his children down a bit, he was going to go and find him straight away. He might need more information about the strange society of the ferret Hybrids.

"You wanna have a shower with us, Uncle Joel? Uncle Kev?" Timmy asked as he held one of Pauly's hands tightly. "Senva here is ALLLLL messy. So're you!"

Kevin finished the last dish and hopped down to join them, saying, "Yeah, we'll get cleaned up too. Pauly made sure that was needed, didn't you?"

Pauly giggled cutely and nodded.

Before they left, Joel pulled his two ferret boys into his arms, "You two as well. I want to show you something, then you can do exploring, okay?"

"Okay, daddy," they answered.

Once upstairs, Joel and the others stopped by Cory and Sean's bedroom door. "This is Uncle Cory and Uncle Sean's bedroom. No-one is allowed to go in here at all, unless Uncle Cory and Uncle Sean say you can - okay?" Joel told the two ferrets seriously. "You can explore everywhere else, but not in here."

They both nodded seriously. "When will they be back?" Jules asked.

"Monday," Timmy smiled. "They'll show you. Daddy and Poppa like showing off their bedroom, but they told us to never go in there unless they told us we could."

Verne nodded. "Okays. We understands, we do. Can we go 'sploring now?"

Kevin smiled, "Sure."

As they ran off one way, Timmy and Ricky grabbed Joel and pulled him into their bedroom, with Kevin carrying Pauly behind them. It was shower time.

An hour later, Joel and Kevin led their horde into the Rec Room to find Allen waiting for them.

"There you are. I'm about to go home, Little Ones, and I was wondering if you wanted to come stay the night with us," Allen asked, looking more at Kevin than any of the others.

Kevin smiled softly, "You've been missing me, Poppa?"

Allen grinned sheepishly before getting to his knees to hug his smallest son. "You saw right through me. Yes, I've been missing you, Kevin. You've been here since Tuesday, and Juana and I have missed you being there."

"I'll stay here with the kids, Kev. You have some family time, and..." Joel started.

Allen pulled him over quickly to stop him. "No, Little Heart. You, as well. And the kids - I want to get to know all my new grandchildren."

"Is there room?" Kevin asked with confusion.

"There is, now," Allen grinned. "You'll see when we get there."

Kevin grinned at Joel, and said, "This should be fun!"

Joel nodded, and absently handed his dimension-bag to Verne, who was jabbering about wanting some place to hide a Shiny. He then said, "I want to pop over to see Adz in Utah, so you guys go ahead, and I'll be there soon."

Kevin nodded as he climbed into Allen's arms. "Take care. Verne? Give it back!"

Verne pulled a face, then handed Joel's dimension bag back to his dad. "Only wanted to makes sures it was hidden rights!"

Joel giggled and was about to call for transport to Utah when Levi popped in next to him. "Uncle Cory's at it again, Uncle Joel," Levi said seriously.

"Oh? He's working *again*?" Joel asked with exasperation.

"Yeah. Shall I take you there?"

"Please. I need to kick his butt again!" Joel giggled as he vanished.

Des Moines:

After having sorted out Cory, and having met Julio and Jesse, Joel went to mingle for a half hour or so with the Des Moines guys, as they had a 70s party. Jules was riding on his shoulder, for he had been the 'shiny' that Verne had hidden in the dimension bag.

"Can I dance and stuffs, Daddy?" Jules asked, still holding on tightly to his golden cup that Kyle had given him.

"Put that in my bag, then yes," Joel smiled. As Jules slipped to the floor and reached up to Joel's waist, Joel had another idea. He unclasped his bag and slung it around Jules' shoulders like a back-pack. "There. You have somewhere to put your shinys, if you find any. Remember, if it belongs to someone, you have to ask first, right?"

"Right!" the tiny child crowed before dropping onto all fours and scampering off into the crowd.

Joel moved through the mass of teens and kids easily, stopping every so often to shake hands and hug with someone who had met him earlier that day. He answered more than a few questions about how Rafe now was, and about the tiny half-ferret asking all and sundry for 'Shinys'.

Jules, on the other hand, had amassed a small fortune in Shinys - a fortune for a ferret, but it was mostly worthless stuff, really. Then he spied the Shiniest Shiny of them all.

The Disco Ball on the ceiling.

He tugged on the nearest boy's arm, a boy of about eight or so, and squeaked, "Can I have that one?!"

The boy grinned down at the tiny ferret kid and then picked him up. "Sure, but first - what's your name?"

"Jules. What's yours?"

"Robin. Can you keep a secret?" Robin giggled.

"Sure! I'll keep it REAL secret. What am I keeping secret?" Jules asked curiously.

Robin turned to look up at the disco ball and gestured with his hand. There was a faint click and then the ball floated across the ceiling and then down into a corner. Robin ran over with Jules on his shoulder.

"You has magic!" Jules whispered into Robin's ear in awe.

"Yeah!" Robin giggled. "There. Yours, I believe. How are you going to sneak it out of here?" he asked wickedly.

"I have some magic too!" Jules crowed. "My daddy's magic bag! Watch!" he added as he jumped down to the floor next to the ball and pulled his 'backpack' off. He opened one of the flaps and pulled and pulled to make the opening big enough.

Robin whistled and then helped him make the hole as big as possible. "I think I see the bottom... just," he giggled. He then helped Jules place the large 'Shiny' inside.

Just in time too, for Joel started to call for his son.

"I gotta goes!" Jules grinned as he placed the deceptively small bag back on his shoulders. "Thank you, Robin! You're a REAL Shiny-Lover!"

Robin grinned, "Visit again, and we'll go to the Science Center and we can get even more shinys. You'll have to bring your bag, though."

"I will! I will! I'll bring my brodda, Verne too!" Jules crowed out, as he scampered off, waving at his new friend.

Robin giggled, then felt a tap on his back. He turned and found Kyle smiling at him. "Yes?" he asked. Then, "Oh my God - you're KYLE!"

Kyle nodded, "That's me! Come to Cory's house tomorrow night, about four o'clock, in time for food. Okay?" Kyle giggled.

Robin's eyes went wide. "THE Cory? His house? Why?"

"'Cos you're a telekinetic, and I want to train you right," Kyle said seriously before popping away instantly.

Robin's jaw dropped open, then he bounced a few times. He was going to learn how to use his 'magic'!

Jules, meanwhile, reached Joel and scooted up his dad's body to sit on his shoulder again. "Where now, Daddy?" he squeaked happily.

"Utah. I want to talk to that weird Dave of yours. He said something earlier and I want to see how serious all this 'Shiny Warrior' stuff really is," Joel explained.

"Oh, he's serious," Jules giggled. "Seriously BONKERS, but serious!"

"Uh...huh," Joel grunted uneasily before tapping his comm. "Captain Sa'ren Short to Commander Adam Casey. Come in, Commander," he asked.

"*Why so formal, Elf?*" Adam responded a few seconds later.

"Weeeellll," Joel hedged. "I kinda didn't know if you'd all, like... forgiven me or not," he added, softly.

He heard Adam chuckling and due to his greater hearing he made out Adam breathing out, "*Like it makes a difference **now**...*" Then, louder, "*You're safe, Joel. Koth fessed up and said he, Korris and Jason got together to do it, and they worked on you to make it happen. What's up, Little Dude?*"

Joel smiled, "Was wondering if I could come over for a short while. I need to talk to one of the rescued kids from earlier. Dave, a ferret, and..."

"That insane little fucker? What the hell for?! And if you can, can you get me my pen back?"

"Jules told me he was nuts," Joel giggled.

"No - Bonkers! Not nuts, stark raving loopy-loo!" Jules said seriously as he twirled his finger at the side of his head. "We only listen to him 'cos he does make sense... only *if* you can make sense of 'im, though."

"Jules is another ferret? Do I really want ANOTHER one here?" Adam chuckled. *"Just kidding, Jules. Sure, Elf. Come on over. There's some food here as the guys are having some fun and games. Oh, and go easy on Khan - he had a small fight and is feeling fragile."*

Joel rolled his eyes, then called, "Daileass? Transport for two, if you please!"

'Right you are, Cap'n,' Daileass giggled as Joel and Jules vanished instantly.

Utah - Camp Bam Bam:

After hugging Adam briefly, Joel was pointed to the area which the ferrets had claimed as their own; the second underground base across the Canyon.

"They're all there," Adam said. "Daileass said they're holding some type of service or something. Jules, as cute as you are, you're all nuts," he added with a soft smile.

"We like Shiny's," was all Jules said, as he slipped from Joel's shoulder to walk hand in hand with his daddy.

As Joel started off toward the second underground base, I-Cheya ran up to his side with Verne on his back.

"You've been hiding here?" Joel giggled.

No. Just came. Time for Fun. Boy will know when

"If you say so," Joel giggled as he scooped Verne up and placed him on his shoulder.

A few minutes later, they got to the base and made their way down to the level the ferrets were on. As they drew near to the door that a kindly female gorilla had pointed out to them, Joel heard:

"Oh Great Shiny! Thank you for bringing us the Shiny Warrior and leading us to the Promised Land..."

Joel looked down at Jules, who was giggling softly at his side. "Is he doing what I think he's doing?" he asked softly.

"Yes," Jules giggled as he made sure his hat was on properly.

Verne tapped Joel's head before slipping to the ground, "Come on. We'll shows ya what to dos, Daddy!"

Joel allowed the two boys to lead him by the hand, into a large room, and I-Cheya plodded slowly along behind them. He looked around at the den like beds and small mounds of shiny items littering the room, as well as at the collection of ferret kids. Some were between three and six years of age and were as small as, if not smaller than, Jules: two feet tall or less. The others were between twelve and fifteen, but they were no taller than three and a half to four feet.

Right at the end of the room, by the largest pile of 'Shinys' was the three and a half foot ferret, Dave, naked, as were the others, the only noticeable difference was his had a large Stetson hat on his head which was covered in all manner of shiny items and badges. Also, around his neck, was a cardinal's stole - again, covered in Shinys.

"Is that him?" a small girl ferret squeaked as she tugged on the hand of a larger twelve year old boy, while pointing at Joel.

The boy nodded, "The Shiny Warrior!"

"He's not shiny! He's Dull!" she squeaked again.

"Do not speak so of the Shiny Warrior!" Dave called out, as he turned to see who had committed such blasphemy. He then saw Joel walking toward him with Jules and Verne beside him. "Shiny One! Thank you for gracing us with your presence!" he said as he bowed to Joel.

The others in the room who had been there when Joel had been at the 'end of battle feast' all bowed as well. The others still looked unconvinced, though.

A fourteen year old girl came forwards, "Dave - he's NOT shiny! I'm sorry, but he just isn't!"

"He saved me! I was dying, and he saved me, and he does so Shine when he wants to!" Jules said, with heat, jumping up and down in temper at her.

"Quiet!" Dave called, raising his hands for silence.

As the oldest ferret, he was the de-facto leader of the espionage Ferret Teams - as well as their self appointed spiritual leader. They all became as silent as the grave and just watched.

"Shiny Warrior. Many of my brothers and sisters did not get to see you earlier. Would you please show them your Shinyess?" Dave asked, humbly, bowing to Joel again.

Joel thought fast on his feet. What was different about him now to when he had been at the battle? *'Oh, my Armour!'* he giggled to himself. Well, if these kids wanted a show, then a show he would give them. He looked around at the seventy four ferrets in the room, then told Jules and Verne to scoot over and join Dave. He then grinned and backed into a clear area.

'Sa'ren - My Sword - can you hear me? If so, answer silently in my mind,' Joel sent out.

/I hear thee, Blade of Surak. What do you will of me?/

'Can you and the Fo-wein Sa'ren read my mind?'

/We have no need. We are One with you and know what you know. What is it you wish?/

Joel sent out a brief image.

///You are clearly as insane as the ferrets,/// the Armour's voice came suddenly, *///But I like insane///*

/Agreed. We have waited a long time to be with you, but we never expected you to be this entertaining. Of course, we are able to do it, and I-Cheya will know what to do, as well/

Huff! I-Cheya added joyfully.

Joel grinned, then he looked right at the gathered 76 ferrets and started to speak:

"I am Joel, Prince of Britain and Defender of the Secrets of Mount Seleya. This," the little Vulcan pointed at his Vulcan Bear, "is I-Cheya, my fearless friend. Fabulous secrets powers were revealed to me the day I held aloft my magic sword..."

As he spoke he reached behind him and the Sa'ren appeared against his back. He lifted his hand upwards, raising the point of the Shattered Sword to the heavens, "...and said, By the Power of T'Khasi!"

Lightning and power exploded from the Sa'ren and engulfed the small boy. All the ferrets gasped, and Dave could be clearly heard muttering, "The Sword of Many Shiny!" - obviously referring to the shattered nature of the blade.

There was another flash of blinding light, and Joel's clothes vanished to be replaced by the Armour of Sa'ren. He brought the Sword down and held it before him with one gauntlet shod hand on the hilt and the other on the blade. His voice became amplified by his Armour as he shouted, "I have the SHINY!"

He then pointed the Sword at I-Cheya, and more power shot out. I-Cheya grew exponentially to his adult size and was quickly encased in his own glowing armour, and started roaring loudly. His silver fur shot the light back out like the sun.

"I-Cheya became the Mighty Shiny-Sehlat, and I became - Sa'ren, the Most Shiniest Elf in the Universe!" Joel said loudly.

All the ferrets were now lying prostrate, except for Jules and Verne who were staring open mouthed at Joel. "Daddy?! Woah, Daddy - you da SHINYESTEST SHINY EVERS!"

Joel had had no idea what he had just started, or confirmed, I should say, but it wasn't long after that that he, Jules and Verne rode out of the second base to head back for the older one. In his hand, Joel held a book that Dave had thrust at him, and rather than reading it there and then, he decided to put it in his dimension bag.

The ferrets, meanwhile, were now hyped up beyond all measure: and Dave's new religion had just been grounded as 'fact' forever for them...

Once Joel got back to where the party was going on, he saw Khan and Logan the wolverine hobble out of the medical wing and sit themselves in a quiet area. He walked over, still in his Armour, and asked, "What the hell have you two been doing?"

"Getting to know each other," Khan grunted sourly.

Logan nodded and also grunted, "As well as the tables, chairs, canyon walls, bushes..."

"Tents, dirt, rocks..." Khan added even more sourly. "And cacti," he added, rubbing his sore butt.

"He fights well," Logan grudgingly admitted.

Joel rolled his eyes as Jules tutted at Logan. Joel grinned, "Why did you fight?"

"Cos that's what we do," Logan grunted.

Khan rolled his own eyes, then winced, due to his black eye. "He didn't want to accept my authority over the Hybrid Forces, so I had a 'discussion' with him, about it."

Joel sighed before moving over and opening Khan's ever-present robe. Khan raised an eyebrow at the boy, but soon started purring once Joel had settled himself to hug Khan, chest to chest. Joel reached up and started scratching Khan's ears, then under his chin, then he lent back and rubbed Khan's chest.

"Cats," Logan muttered, as he watched.

Joel muttered, "You'll be better, soon."

His Armour glimmered, and Khan gasped. All of his injuries had vanished. Normally, such wounds would have taken a couple of days to go away.

Joel smiled and got off of Khan's lap, before closing Khan's robes. He then went and sat on the already naked wolverine's lap, and started to give Logan's shoulders a good massage and rub. If Logan could have purred, he would have. "Get better," Joel said again. And again, the Armour glimmered for a second, and healed Logan as well.

Joel finally stood up and then added, "You know something, Khan?"

"What?" Khan asked.

"Next time you need something from Logan, just ask me," Joel giggled.

"Why?"

"Cos he owes me a life debt!" Joel smiled.

Khan looked at Joel for a moment. Then he looked at the wolverine at his side, who grinned toothily at him, "He's right, I do."

Khan then looked back at the innocently grinning Joel, "You mean you could have just ORDERED him to follow me?!"

"Uh huh, but I didn't know you were gonna go tell him you were his boss, right away, and I wasn't here... any ways, the look on your face is more fun!" Joel hooted before scampering away giggling, with his twin ferrets and I-Cheya running fast behind him.

Khan looked at Logan again. The wolverine was still grinning at him.

"That's it: I'm going for a walk," Khan said in complete disgust as he got up and wandered away, swearing under his breath.

Logan grinned more, stood up, and ran to catch up with Joel.

"Is Khan mad?" Joel asked Logan with a giggle as he watched his two boys tear into some raw chicken.

Logan grinned and nodded. "I think that pussy is always mad. Fights like a devil, though," he grunted with amusement. "Hey, Angel. Tell me how you did that."

"Did what?" Joel asked as he pulled a few cookies from his bag and munched on them. His Armour glimmered slightly as Logan tapped it.

"Healed me and Mad-Cat. And how did you save me earlier today?" Logan asked curiously.

Joel shrugged, "Don't really know. It's only happened today. I just say something and it happens. I think it's the Armour. Speaking of which; Return!" he said loudly, and the Armour detached and vanished into liquid air, followed seconds later by the Sword that was against Joel's back.

Logan whistled. "You're very strange, Angel. I'm glad I know you."

"I'm glad, too," Joel giggled as he raised himself up enough to kiss Logan's black nose.

Logan sneezed, then grinned.

Joel, I-Cheya and the two boys arrived in the Thompson Residence just as the others were sitting down to dinner. Allen smiled, "Good. Juana didn't want it to go to waste."

"Sit down, and I'll get yours for you," Juana smiled as she bustled out of the Dining Room and into the kitchen.

I-Cheya followed Juana out to see about some cold-cuts that could well be on the go, while Jules looked up at Joel and asked, "Can I have the Magic Bag, Daddy? I wanna show Verne alla nice Shinys I got from the dance!"

Joel giggled and handed the bag to his son before settling down next to Kevin and Kenny to eat. Kevin grinned at him, "Verne said where he'd stuffed his brother once Levi vanished you, then I-Cheya vanished, taking Verne with him. I figured they went to join you."

"So I gathered, or you'd have called or something," Joel grinned. "Well? What was Poppa Allen on about, about there being room for our kids here too?" he asked, as he watched Reuben and Ricardo eating with Lee and Shere Khan. More showers were going to be needed, he thought to himself. Then he noticed the badgers weren't eating dead food this time. They had some cold cuts of meat, and some roots, but two tubs in front of them with lids and a lot of wriggling 'things' inside.

"I'll show you after dinner, Little Heart," Allen smiled as Billy passed him some bread.

"Okay, Poppa!" Joel smiled happily as Juana placed his dinner down in front of him. He then began the serious business of feeding Kevin and himself.

"Lookie, lookie, Poppa!" Shere Khan giggled as he grabbed a worm from Brian's plate and put it on Aslan's tuft of hair.

Aslan nearly freaked. "My mane! Leave my mane alone! Yous jus' jealous 'cuz yous don't have a mane!" he yelled, as he flicked the worm off and then set about puffing his tuft to stand up again. "Yearch! Nasty worm in my mane!"

"Shere, what have I told you?" Kevin reproved.

Shere Khan grinned, "Not to play with my food?"

"Yep," Kevin said, while Allen, Billy and Juana tried not to laugh.

"But Poppa!" Shere Khan grinned more, "It wasn't *my* foods!"

"But it was my mane!" Aslan grouched, now happy that his 'mane' was back to his tastes again.

"He's got you on that one," Joel snorted after managing to swallow his mouthful.

"Yeah," Kevin agreed as he pondered the dilemma.

Brian was already up and chasing the worm across the table. "Don't play with other people's food, either, Shere! Get back here, worm! I wanna eat ya!"

"There's just so many things I could say," Jake said softly, "but there are too many innocent ears listening."

Lee nearly choked on the apple he was eating as he fell into silent laughter, and Mercury and Hermes were almost as bad.

Joel giggled, then looked at the wickedly grinning Tiger cub. "Shere. You don't play with food at all. Yours or anyone's. Okay? Food shouldn't be messed about with... unless you have a food fight, and that's not for a dinner table."

"Food fight?" Aslan's ears perked up. "Can we get that dead cow to fight those evil little green round things?"

"The beef fighting the peas?" Kenny asked. "Now that is a fight I'd like to see! Where's Juan? I want to place bets on the beef!"

Allen cast a withering eye at his son, "I've noticed you not eating them, Cute Stuff. No dessert until they are gone - you know the rules."

"Yous should become a Tiger," Shere Khan told Kenny, sagely. "*We* don't gets to eat those yucks!"

By now, Lee was nearly having a fit under the table. Joel bent over to look at him, then decided to go help his eldest son. "You okay, sweet-pea?" he asked softly as he helped Lee back onto his chair.

Lee nodded his head, still laughing silently. He flicked his toes a few times, then started rocking back and forth again.

"Okay, but try to calm down. You'll get a stomach ache, otherwise," Joel smiled before kissing his son's forehead and going back to sit down.

Lee nodded again and tried to calm down.

"He's silly," Sue sniffed before hovering up three wriggling grubs and shoving a small piece of root into her mouth. "A silly monkey," she added slyly.

A banana bounced off her head a second later and she looked at her glaring chimp brother, who gave her a hand sign that needed no translation.

"Lee!" Shere Khan looked horrified.

Lee flicked his fingers a bit.

"I knows what it means! But you **THREW FOODS!**"

Joel couldn't hold it in. He fell off his chair laughing, while Kevin looked at Allen, appealing for help.

"You wanted them, you deal with them," Allen said with aplomb, taking another bite of his food as the banana went sailing back to bounce off of Lee's head.

Mercury smiled at his twin, and Aphrodite just shrugged and giggled at Artemus.

Kevin stood up. "Stop it!" he ordered firmly, as Lee picked up three oranges with his two feet and a free hand to hurl back, while rubbing his sore head with his other. "No more. Sue, say sorry for calling your brother a monkey, and both you and Lee say sorry for throwing fruit."

Sue pouted, but did mutter "Sorry!" ungraciously. Lee signed his own apology, but did keep an orange in one foot to throw once Kevin had stopped watching him.

Xain, of course, did notice, and quickly relieved the chimp of his weaponized fruit. Joel was still rolling on the floor laughing, and being no help whatsoever to Kevin, who booted him in the butt a few times. "Thanks for your assistance, T'hy'la!" he grouched.

"You're... welcome..." came the answering giggle from the floor.

Kevin started to giggle as well; it was just too funny watching his beloved laugh gleefully on the floor.

"And dey thinks we're strange?" Verne asked his brother.

Jules nodded. "There is strange, and then ders Shiny-hating strange. They are just strange. That's good."

"Oh. Okay," Verne nodded, before ripping into his raw beef again.

Leaving Kevin to supervise their kids eating warm custard - and loving every mouthful, I must add - Joel and Allen climbed the stairs to the second floor of the house.

"Up here, Little Heart," Allen chuckled as Joel saw a new set of stairs going up again.

"Wow!" Joel gasped as he climbed from the second floor to a new third. "This the attic?"

"It was," Allen chuckled, "until Quint came for a visit. He said I'd need a place for my grandchildren to play and sleep. He converted this whole space to a playroom, with the room at the back as a den, or bedroom. There's an en-suite up here as well."

Joel took in the room with all the cool climbing frames and balls of yarn and other toys. "This is wicked!" he giggled. "They'll love it, Poppa!"

"I hope so," Allen smiled as he hoisted Joel up and into his arms, "I really hope so."

They explored for a good five minutes until being pounced by Kevin and the children, along with Reuben and Ricardo. "Can we stay with them tonight?" Reuben asked Allen, hopefully, "Mama said to ask you!"

Joel shared a look with Allen, and the man nodded, "Sure - if you promise to go to sleep when we tell you, you may."

"We promise!" all the children echoed, and Lee added a thumbs up to relay his feelings.

"Play for a while, then we'll be up to tuck you in," Kevin said gently, as he and Joel joined hands to go back down to the second floor.

"I'll stay for a while - just to make sure they don't hurt themselves, of course," Allen said reasonably, but Kevin knew better and snorted.

"Poppa is a big kid," he whispered to Joel once they got to Kevin and Kenny's bedroom.

Kenny was already there waiting for them, and giggled, "I'll tell him you said that, bro!"

"Rat!" Kevin retorted playfully.

That started a tickle war which lasted for about half an hour, and it even dragged in Jake. Xain played referee.

Eventually, tired and rather sweaty, the four 'fighters' all flopped to the floor in exhaustion and started to recuperate. Xain cast a mischievous eye over them before ceasing to 'play innocent' and launching his own attack. Of course, the four now puffing like bellows on the floor could do little to resist.

"You dirty rat, T'hy'la!" Jake exclaimed as he tried to escape by crawling out of the room.

Joel was seriously considering a nerve pinch on his cousin, but since Xain just couldn't let his boyfriend escape, Joel had no need to. Xain was already on his boyfriend and tickling his ribs like crazy.

Kenny puffed, "Quick! Bathroom!" He started to creep slowly in that direction, keeping a close eye on Xain and Jake in the doorway.

Kevin threw caution to the winds and simply ran for it, with Joel being dragged across the floor by one arm. Joel found this hysterical.

They made it, and Kenny quickly locked the door to keep both his older brothers out. "I was going to go to the Teeters, but I'm all smelly and sticky now," he giggled, casting a glare at the innocently smiling Kevin and still laughing Joel - who was still on his back on the floor.

"Can we come?" Joel managed to ask as he held his ribs.

Kenny nodded as Kevin asked, "Any particular reason?"

"Rory asked me to give a new dog toy to Possum," Kenny smiled. "He didn't get a chance to, himself."

"Oh, I wondered why he wasn't here," Kevin giggled. "He got scared of the pussy-cats?"

Kenny laughed, but stopped when he saw Joel's face. "You miss him, don't you," Joel said shrewdly. "Rory, I mean."

Kenny nodded slowly with a smile on his face, but it was a wistful one.

"Sorry," Joel murmured sadly.

Kenny cocked his head to the side, "Why are you sorry?"

"Cos Kevin has me, here, but you don't have your Rory," Joel whispered as tears came to his eyes. "It don't seem fair."

Kenny moved to sit besides Joel, and he placed an arm around the frail Vulcan, "Don't think that way, bro. I'm happy for Kev and you. I *want* you two to be together - as much as possible. Rory's on Vulcan for a good reason. I knew when he arrived Monday, that he'd have to leave today. He can't be away from his treatments for long, or he'd go back and be as bad as he was before. I'd rather miss him for a small while, now, so that we can have all our lives together, later."

Joel sniffed. "First Vincent and Leyman and Jordy... today, Galli and Jay left, then Rory... *And* Cory and Sean and the others are away for a few days... why is everyone leaving me?" he finished with a heartbreaking catch in his voice.

Kevin sighed. "That's what you've been hiding in there all afternoon," he said, as he sat down on Joel's lap, chest to chest. Then he kissed Joel. Seriously.

After Joel's head came back down from cloud nine and he could think clearly, he locked his blue eyes with Kevin's brown.

"No-one is leaving you, T'hy'la," Kevin said, as Kenny rubbed Joel's back gently. "Sure, they've got to go away for a while, but we're family. We'll always be 'together' in the ways that count. In here," he said, tapping his chest. "And in here," he added, tapping Joel's.

Kenny spoke softly, "We all walk our own paths, Joel. Sometimes we have a lot of company, other times, only one or two are with us. But if we're family, then no matter how far, or how many universes are between us, we're always together. Always brothers."

Joel sniffed again before tucking his face into Kevin's neck. He sighed deeply, then said, "Okay, I guess. I just miss them."

"We know. And we do too," Kenny said. Then, "Come on, sticky one. We're all smelling bad, and if we don't show quick, Possum will give us a bath instead... then we'll stink of dog as well as sweat!"

Joel giggled, then, with mischief, quickly stripped Kevin while he was still on his lap.

Then together, they attacked Kenny to do the same.

Both twins giggled as they surveyed the clothes now scattered about the room, then they turned their own eyes on Joel, who was backing away with a cheeky grin on his face. "Get him!" Kenny yelled, as he led the charge at the now giggling, still dressed Vulcan.

Kenny knocked on the door, and barking started almost immediately. From inside the house, Joel could hear a man say, "I wonder who that could be at this time in the evening?"

A moment later, and Rory's dad, Marcus Teeter, was at the door, "Oh, hello Kenny, Kevin. Who's your friend? A brother of Xain?"

"No, Xain's cousin, and my husband," Kevin said with a cute blush.

"Husband?" Mr Teeter asked with surprise. "What's been happening in the last few days? This is fast, isn't it?" he added, scratching his head.

Kenny giggled, "We can explain, but can we come in and tell you all together? It's a lot to say, and saying it twice will take all night!"

Mr Teeter did a double take, then grinned and nodded. "Of course, boys. In you come. Boy, you do look familiar, kiddo," he added looking square at Joel. "Have you been on TV?"

Joel nodded as he passed through the doorway hand in hand with Kevin, "Yessir, I have."

"Who is it, honey?" came a woman's voice from the living room.

"Kevin, Kenny and... what's your name, son?" Mr Teeter asked, looking at Joel.

"Sa'ren Joel Short, son of Spock, son of..." Joel started, but a squeal of shock from the living room made him jump.

Mr Teeter simply stared. "My God... that's where I know your face! Welcome to my home, Sa'ren!"

"Is it really...?" came a voice at the living room doorway, and Joel turned to see a sixteen year old girl looking at him speculatively. Then her face fell. "You look real young for thirteen," she said with disappointment.

"Don't get any ideas, Corina," Kevin said seriously, as he increased his grip on Joel's hand possessively. "He's mine, and we're married. Go find another boy!"

"Wha... what? What's that mean?" Joel asked, his eyes darting between the glaring Kevin and the still speculative Corina.

Kenny giggled, "She's boy crazy, and a famous Prince twice over is something she'd not let go by, without at least *trying*."

"He's a prince? Oh, I don't mind them young," Corina decided, her eyes twinkling as she cast a look at the thunderous, murderous look that was on Kevin's face. "But you're gay, so I have no chance."

"Actually, I'm Bi," Joel said, on automatic, his slave training kicking in to correct an error before he would get hurt for not doing so.

"Reeeaally? Well, well... Mmmm...." Corina murmured, now even more interested.

"You can fu... you can forget it!" Kevin said, catching himself just in time from swearing in front of Mr Teeter.

Corina giggled, then flounced upstairs, wiggling her hips for Joel's benefit.

Joel shook his head quickly to clear it. "Was she serious?" he asked Kenny.

Mr Teeter answered instead, "Yes."

"Oh..." was all Joel could say as he watched Kevin, who was keeping his eyes fixed on the stairs to keep a watch for the predator's return.

Mrs Doris Teeter came to the living room door, then and looked at them. "Why are you here so late? Is there something wrong? Is your dad ill, Ken?" she asked, her voice sounding odd to Joel.

Kenny shook his head, "No. We came to give Possum a gift from Rory. We weren't going to stay long, if it would keep you up."

Mrs Teeter nodded at him, "He's in the kitchen eating." Then she looked at the tiny, thin Vulcan next to Kevin. "You look even more starved than Kevin does," she muttered. "You're staying. You need food!"

Then she was off.

"I think the new tablets are helping," Kenny said.

"Oh, they are," Mr Teeter added. "She's a lot calmer. I'm going to make sure my daughter doesn't cause mayhem for you, Sa'ren, Kevin. You boys go into the living room and I'll be back, soon."

As Mr Teeter went upstairs, Kevin led Joel into the room and sat him down furthest from the door. Then he sat himself between Joel and the door - Corina defence was on defcon 1.

"I'm going to give this to Possum," Kenny said as he hefted the small bag he was holding. "No killing Rory's sister if Rory isn't here to watch, Kev," he added with a giggle.

"If she lays one paw on my husband, I'll..." Kevin started, but cut off as he saw Mrs Teeter come back in, passing Kenny in the kitchen doorway.

Mrs Teeter put a plate down on the coffee table before Joel, and also handed him a large glass of 'milk'. "Can't give you too much or you'll be ill before bed, but eat up," she said, before sitting down opposite them and happily watching Joel closely.

"Um, thanks," Joel said joyfully as he saw that the plate contained cookies and brownies. He reached and took one of the brownies first, and popped it into his mouth.

Kenny had stopped at the doorway to watch this, and he was giggling silently. So was Kevin, who knew what was coming.

Both ended up shocked, and Mrs Teeter was more than a little thrilled.

"Wow! This is yum!" Joel exclaimed, as the brownie vanished fast. "How'd you know to make it taste like Vulcan food, Mrs Teeter?"

Mrs Teeter blushed slightly at the praise. "Call me Mom. You're Kevin's boyfriend, and he's brother to Kenny, who's my son's boyfriend. That makes you my son, too. I don't know, honey, but I'm happy you like them!"

Kenny looked disappointed, and Kevin looked surprised. "Do they really, Sa'r?"

"Yeah! Here," Joel replied, popping one into Kevin's mouth quickly.

Kevin chewed slowly, his face far away. "Mmm, you're right! I've never tried them before. They do taste kinda Vulcany..."

Kenny, now playing with Possum in the doorway, muttered to himself, "I'm never eating Vulcan food. No way... isn't that right, boy? Yes."

Possum just panted and licked his face.

Joel and the twins were finally back in the Thompson Residence, and were relaxing in the main family room with everyone else. All the small kids were on the floor, and so were Joel and Kevin, and everyone was watching a movie. Long before the end, Joel giggled to Kevin, "I think we need to put the babies to bed."

Kevin nodded, and Allen grinned, "Need help?"

"Please," Kevin smiled as he picked up a sleeping Ricardo in his arms.

With everyone helping, all the kids were soon tucked up together in the new den on the top floor. Joel and Kevin were the last to go back down stairs to the second floor landing, only to find Jake, Xain, Kenny and Allen waiting for them. Kenny smiled at them and spoke first. "You guys want the bedroom for yourselves tonight?" he asked.

Kevin asked curiously, "What do you mean?"

"Do I have to draw a picture for you?" Kenny giggled, which made Kevin blush.

"It's your bedroom too, Ken," Joel said softly. "We'd not want to do that with you there, and we really don't want to kick you out."

"You're not," Kenny said reasonably. Then he blushed a bit himself, "When Rory was here, Kev was with you in the Compound - I got to spend 'time' with Rory in our room, Kev, so why can't you and Joel have the same?"

"Where'd you sleep, though?" Joel asked curiously.

Jake smiled, "Since Xain and I are not on a honeymoon period right now, Kenny will stay with us."

Xain nodded.

Kevin giggled, "We had three years in the Tardis... more, really. I think we've had our share of sex to last us at least *one* night!"

Xain raised a finger to make a point, "But that only seemed like ten minutes emotionally, if what you told me earlier is accurate. Therefore, your hearts are still longing for each other, as if you had not been there - correct?"

Joel nodded shyly, and after a second so did Kevin.

"Then take the room," Allen smiled as he ruffled their hair. "And we'll see you in the morning."

Kevin didn't need telling twice. He grabbed Joel's hand and dragged him across the landing and into his room. Then the door closed fast.

Kenny giggled before skipping off with Jake and Xain to their room. Allen could only shake his head in wonder. Then he watched as Artemus and Aphrodite came to stand guard, while the twin cheetah's curled up with I-Cheya and Blackie a few feet from the bedroom door. "Best guards in the world," Allen smiled as he nodded at the two girls.

They grinned back at him.

Saturday Morning:

It was very early and the sky outside of the bedroom window was only just beginning to turn light. Joel woke up feeling happy and refreshed. He stretched himself out before twisting around to kiss Kevin tenderly. Kevin remained fast asleep, but did sigh happily as his subconscious registered the tender act of love from his Vulcan husband.

Joel smiled as he pushed a few stray hairs from Kevin's forehead away. He felt his bladder telling him that it was awake, too, so he got up quietly and quickly attended to business. Then he paused as he re-entered the bedroom. Kevin was still out for the count, but Joel had never felt so awake. He padded over to the door leading to the rest of the house, and made to open it.

As he touched the doorknob, he heard a rumbling of small feet charging down the stairs from his children's bedroom above, and then Verne's squeaky voice asking if they could wake up 'Daddy and Pop-pa!'.

"No," Joel made out Mercury's soft voice whispering back. "They need sleep, Verne."

Joel grinned and opened the door, stepping out between his two cheetah guards. He looked down at his two ferret sons and both of his cat-kids as well, "I'm awake. What about getting a drink and playing outside for a while?"

They obviously thought that was a great idea, for Jules started to bounce around, asking Hermes, "Can we go outside and swim, then?"

Hermes and Mercury shared a glance and nodded, while Joel said, "Of course."

He watched as the two ferret boys and their feline companions raced for the stairs to the ground floor, then he giggled as Mercury and Hermes sped off to follow. He, however, decided to make his way more calmly. The cheetahs could manage for a few moments, he thought as he reached where I-Cheya, Blackie and the two She-Cats were sleeping together. He reached down and tickled each behind their ears gently, doing his best to not wake them up.

He didn't, but I-Cheya's back leg did twitch slightly. Joel giggled and continued down the stairs. As he reached the bottom, he heard Aslan ask if there were colours and paper that he could draw with, and Verne adding that paints would be fun.

Joel knew there wasn't anything here that could be used that way, other than Kevin's supply, and Kevin had very good quality items that wouldn't survive four energetic five year olds playing with. He moved to the Thompson's Clan computer and started to run a fast search. He brought up the internet and found that there was a general store not twenty minutes walk away from the Thompson house. He glanced outside and saw that it was going to be a beautiful, if cold for a Vulcan, day. He raced back upstairs and slipped into his tee-shirt, but then had to rummage through Kevin's wardrobe for more clothes. He was soon dressed in a warm hoodie, with thick jeans on, and a pair of Kevin's boots that all felt warm on him. Knowing that he'd need money to get what he was planning on buying, he grabbed his Family Crest neck chain and slipped it back on. Inside, as Jason had explained to him, was a chip that could be read by bar-code scanners on Earth, and therefore he had the wealth of House Surak to call upon. He did leave behind - for some reason he didn't notice - the St Christopher medallion Sammy had given him for his birthday, however. The Seal of his House he then tucked inside of his tee-shirt and hoodie to lie with the smaller pendant the Guardian had gifted him with.

He quickly made his way back out and downstairs, again after scratching I-Cheya's ears, and unlocked and vanished out of the front door.

I-Cheya's eyelids twitched slightly, but other than that, he did not stir.

Ralph Gibson climbed out of his dad's car and closed it with a wide yawn. He shot his dad a telling look, but quickly looked down as his father turned toward him. "Come on, Ralph," his father sighed. "No more of those looks, please. You know why you're here."

"That's more words than you've spoken in the last two days," Ralph said truculently.

Mr Thomas Gibson simply crossed his arms, "And you expected normalcy, after getting sent to Juvy? You count yourself lucky it's just a month's grounding and helping me on weekends in the store!"

"Wasn't Juvy enough?" Ralph shot back irritably. "Can't I get more sleep? You kept me up late cleaning the car and garage!"

"Don't talk back to me, young man," Mr Gibson said sternly. "You know very well how to act, and you let me down badly. Your mother would turn in her grave if she knew what had happened!"

Ralph winced at his mother being mentioned, "I said I was sorry - can't you just accept that? But please don't use Mom against me, Dad... it hurts."

Mr Gibson sighed, "I know. But I am right. Come on, let's get inside and get a coffee going before we start the day. We'll talk more later, okay? And I mean really talk - like we used to."

"Kay," Ralph muttered, subtly wiping a tear from his eye as he followed his father into the rear delivery bay and through the back door into the General Store.

It was about thirty minutes later, as Ralph and his father were near the front of the store, that Ralph saw a small figure outside of the front door peering in at them. He felt a tap on his arm and his father asked him, "You want to find out what he wants, son?"

"Uh, sure," Ralph nodded and he walked over and unlocked the front entrance. "Yes? Are you okay?" he asked, looking down at the small, hoodie wearing boy, before him.

A cute little face looked back up at him from under the hood, and Joel giggled, "Yeah, I can wait another fifteen minutes for you to be open!"

Ralph smiled slightly, but his eyes were curious. Then he noticed that Joel was shivering. He looked back over his shoulder and called for his dad to come join him.

Mr Gibson took one look at the shivering child outside and immediately said, "Okay, son - in you come. I don't mind having an unofficial shopper here, if you're cold."

"Don't know why you'd be cold, though," Ralph added with a smile. "Where are you from?" he asked as Joel smiled his thanks and stepped into the store.

Joel giggled and lowered his hood, "Vulcan; originally, anyway!"

Mr Gibson did a double take. "Don't I know you from..."

"TV!!" Ralph exclaimed. "You're the one who had the Star Cross, ain't you? You're Admiral Spock's son!"

"Sa'ren Joel Short," Joel giggled. "Thank you, Ralph."

Now it was Ralph's turn for a double take. "How'd you know my name?"

"Clan Short files," Joel said semi-seriously. He reached and took Ralph's hand gently, "What do you think about your actions on Wednesday, Ralph?"

Ralph's face fell, and Mr Gibson's face tightened slightly. Before Ralph could say anything, however, Joel embraced him tightly, "Good. I felt it, Ralph. I felt your remorse. Your name will be removed from the Clan's watch list, now. And you're welcome to come visit us, any time."

Ralph was speechless. Mr Gibson nearly was as well. Instead of commenting on what had just happened, he asked Joel, "Why are you here so early, Ensign? Kids are normally still in bed at this time of the day."

Joel released Ralph and giggled, "I want to get some toys and gifts for my kids. It's a nice morning, and I had loads of sleep... well, not loads, but I feel wide awake... so I thought I'd come shopping."

"Kids?" Ralph asked with surprise. "You're only about ten... ain't you?"

"Thirteen, and I've adopted - me and my husband, anyway," Joel said with a smile.

Ralph looked strangely at him, then smiled himself, "Vulcans are strange."

"Yup!" Joel laughed. "Stranger than most! Anyway, could I look around and then buy when you're open?" he asked Mr Gibson.

Mr Gibson shook his head. "No, instead you and Ralph can go shop now. Help him out, son - help him get what he needs. I'll be at the till."

"Okay, Dad," Ralph said with a smile, which grew wider as Joel quickly took his hand and started bouncing at his side. "First time shopping?" Ralph asked him with a chuckle as they made their way to where the toys were.

"No, but it is the first time I've gone anywhere by myself! This is really cool!"

After having paid for his three bags worth of goods, Joel stepped out of the main doors of the store just as they were officially opening for business. He had found a large selection of hats and tee-shirts that he was intending to make into mini-robos for his children, as well as many toys and goodies for them. He waved goodbye to Ralph and his father, then turned and started off in the direction of the Thompson house.

Life was good, he thought to himself. For the first time IN his life, he really felt like everything was finally going his way.

What he did not know, though, was that Powers, the likes of which he had only brushed up against once before, were now watching him with baleful eyes...

End of Sa'ren: Part 1 - Tears that Heal

And so the story continues...

Love shall be tested; bonds shaken; and new life shall spring forth!

Pain comes, and innocence shall be lost: Vengeance shall cry from the Heart of the Nexus.

Enemies shall appear and seek to rule the Federation: A Crown shall Ascend in power and fight for the Freedom of the Earth.

...And from a Cycle that knew naught but war shall Arise a Power that has not walked under Sun and Moon in living memory:

Revealed shall be The Secrets of Silver Ghost Valley!

All this shall take place in:

Sa'ren

Part 2 - Ascension

Editor's Notes:

Once again, there is a lot to take in from this chapter.

That last bit was a bit of a sticky wicket. Or should I say wicked?

Things seem a bit grim for Joel, don't they? This could certainly qualify as a cliffhanger.

If you were paying attention, there were at least two clues, earlier in the chapter. I won't elaborate on them here, as that would be cheating. I promise you that there were two separate clues, in two different places. Of course, even if you figure out what the clues are, I'm afraid it won't help this situation very much, if at all.

Let's all hope that Joel is paying attention to what is going on, and will take the proper precautions.

I suppose that there will be a bit of an intermission before we get to see Part Two.

Let's all keep Joel in our hearts and minds.

Your Friend,

Darryl

This chapter has been approved by Fibita for posting.

Peace and Good Thoughts

FIBITA