

Mr. Spock, dressed in traditional Vulcan traveling robes, disembarked the Yridian freighter onto the ship yards at Kali Guari. After he stepped through the airlock, he adjusted the grey hood of his robe so that he could see but not easily be seen.

He surveyed the area. The corridor from the air lock led to a open walkway that ringed the Market Exchange three decks below. Spock walked along slowly. There were many different species present from the Community and the Federation. Some he could identify readily. Some he could not. All avoided his gaze.

No one interfered with his movements. Not even the Mirta soldiers posted about the Market Exchange. It took him little time to locate and access a computer terminal. The security systems of the repair station were not beyond Spock's abilities to circumvent. Quickly he planted a computer virus that could be activated from his communicator.

Spock made his way through the crowd. As he came to the main floor of the Market Exchange, he could feel the various people watching him. In the center of the main shopping area was a fountain of sorts. It was a wide shallow pool with water that gently bubbled up from the center and splashed against partially submerged geometric obstacles. Spock sat on a bench that was facing the fountain. Children ran back and forth around it.

An adolescent Barchin girl was supervising the play of three young Mirta children. The children ran about alternately playing and bickering. The Barchin girl gave up trying to control them and sat heavily on the end of Spock's bench. She glanced around carefully before pulling a computer padd out of her pocket.

Spock pushed the hood of his robe down to look over at the young girl. She felt his gaze and looked up at him. "May I ask what you are reading?"

"It's nothing." The girl said turning the padd off and slipping it back in her pocket. Spock merely raised his eyebrow questioningly. The girl stared at him. Finally she said, "I've never seen anyone like you. What planet are you from?"

"My home planet is Vulcan." Spock said. "In the United Federation of Planets. My name is Spock."

"I am Tassra." The girl said. "My family serves the house of Bre."

"I see." Spock nodded. "It is an important house?"

"Yes Sir." Tassra said wide eyed. She couldn't believe that anyone had not heard of it. She nodded towards the Mirta children as they played when she said. "The father of my children commands this station."

"Tass!" the youngest of the three Mirta children came running to her in tears. She was a pretty child with olive green skin and long honey colored braids. She hid her face in Tassra's lap mumbling how the others had been unfair to her.

"Don't worry about them, Yuru." Tassra cooed stroking the child's hair. "Stay here with me awhile."

Yuru climbed into Tassra's lap and demanded. "Read me a story."

"Not now." Tassra whispered glancing over at Spock then back at the young girl. Yuru glared at him openly. Spock returned her gaze.

"I'm not afraid of him." The young girl declared.

"I am glad to hear it." Spock said.

"Yuru, go play with your brothers." Tassra said and slid the young girl off her lap.

"Do you have restricted information on your padd again?" Yuru demanded of the Barchin teen.

"Yuru Vahn-Bre." Tassra said firmly. "Go play with your brothers now!" The Mirta girl stared defiantly at her guardian, then stamped her foot and ran off to join her brothers at the fountain.

"Restricted information?" Spock asked quietly.

The golden skinned girl looked up at him pleadingly. "Please don't tell anyone."

"You remind me of a human girl I know, Tassra." Spock said. "When she was your age, she would never confide in me until I had promised not to reveal her secrets."

"Did you promise?" Tassra asked hopefully.

"Yes." Spock said. "She was generally concerned that her father would not approve of something she had done. Is that your concern also?"

"You didn't tell her father?"

"Generally, she found a way to tell her father herself." Spock said. "I believe our conversations helped put things into perspective for her."

Tassra reached into her pocket and pulled out the computer padd. She quickly entered the code to by pass the fairy tales and bring up her secret file. Slowly she handed it to Spock. He took the padd and read with interest.

"This is restricted?" Spock asked with eyebrow raised in surprise. "The Nature of Good and Evil by Tam Burween of Betazed?"

"Philosophy is the property of the Drax'l." Tassra said sadly. "But this Betezoid writer puts thoughts into words that make sense to me. But they are not allowed. Not for the Barchins."

"I see." Spock nodded. "In the Federation information is not restricted in this manner. There is equal access to philosophy, science, mathematics. Continuing education is encouraged."

"Really?" she said. "Even servants can learn?"

"Everyone can learn." Spock handed her back her padd. "What you do with your life is only restricted by your own abilities."

"Tam Burween, is he a good philosopher?" Tassra asked. "Do you believe what he says?"

"He is Betazoid." Spock said. "He comes from a culture that values family and honor. Keeping his background in mind, he makes some very valid points."

"But you do not agree with him." Tassra said.

"His basic premiss does not allow for cultural differences." Spock said. "My own experiences have demanded a more tolerant approach."

"Do you mean that right and wrong are not absolute values, but derived from society?" She asked. "Mr. Burween would not agree."

"You have been studying more than Tam Burween." Spock said with surprise. "Let me ask you, is there a difference between good & evil and right & wrong?"

"I think that right and wrong are relative terms determined by society." The girl said slowly "But good and evil are absolutes. Is that right?"

"That is a theory accepted by many cultures." Spock nodded. "You have studied much on your own. I believe you would find Vulcan philosophy interesting. I should like to send you

the writings of Surak. He is most challenging."

"It is not allowed." Tassra lowered her eyes. She glanced at her chronometer that hung on a silver chain around her neck. "Oh my! I'm late again. Thank you, Spock. But I have to go." She jump up and loudly gathered the children to her. They in turn complained boisterously at having their games interrupted.

Spock also checked his chronometer. The Valhalla would not be leaving Starbase Sixty Eight for another few hours. Ms. Vasco's ship was due to arrive early in the day shift. Since the station ran on three full shifts, Spock saw no reason to get lodging. After all he was expending little energy sitting around the station talking to the locals.

He watched with interest at the comings and goings of the crowd. The fountain served as a meeting place for young lovers and old friends. Workers took breaks there. Families used the area. It would seem that all the repair station inhabitants came to the fountain at one time or another. Spock spoke with several adults of the Community but he found the adolescents most curious about him and where he came from.

When Thoren came through the crowd in his usual manner, he saw a strange robed figure sitting on a bench surrounded by a small group of Mirta, Lirta, and Yortem teens. As Thoren drew near, a tall Mirta boy near the age of consent challenged Spock from the back of the crowd.

"If the Federation is such a wonderful place, why are you here?" The boy asked. "Were you exiled?"

"No." Spock said. "Although my father at one time also questioned why I travel. I seek knowledge and this is best done first hand."

"You have not followed your father's teachings?" The boy was shocked. "So why should we listen to you?"

"On my planet, Vulcan, a father's advice is sought and weighed carefully." Spock tried to explain "But his wishes are not binding on his children. When I left my home years ago, I choose a path no one else on my planet had ever chosen. Although others have followed."

"Your family still owns you?" One of the younger girls who sat on the floor at his feet asked. She was a Yortem teen who wore her bright yellow hair in a pony tail at the very top of her head.

"Owns me?" Spock asked. "If you mean am I still considered a member of my family, I am. It is not logical to disown a child."

"You speak of logic often, Sir." Another Yortem girl said. She was slightly older than her sister who had asked the last question and wore her tawny hair in a multitude of braids. "Is it not logical to do the work you are best suited for?"

"Indeed." Spock nodded. "Who is to decide what you are best suited for?"

"Our parents care for us." A Lirta boy said from the crowd. "They would not choose unwisely for us."

"I like working in the Market." Another Lirta boy assured all around him.

"Ah." Spock nodded. "And do your parents make all your decisions? Who your friends are? What you think about?"

"No." The older Yortem girl answered. "We must also learn to think for ourselves. But we are required to make moral choices."

"And if you question the morality of your parents choices? Or even your own?" Spock

asked the girl. But no one answered. The teens exchanged looks varying from shock to guilt.

Finally Thorten stepped forward. "They need only look to the teaching of the Brotherhood as their guide."

Spock looked up at the large imposing figure. His terra cotta colored skin wrinkled around his golden eyes. He stared at Spock intently. Spock met his gaze evenly. He could feel Thoren's mind probing him, but Spock blocked him at every turn. Using years of experience with Vulcan mind exercises, Spock guided Thoren around the outer reaches of his consciousness. As far as Thoren could tell, Spock was a traveler in search of truth and knowledge.

"I am interested, Rati Thoren." Spock noticed the young crowd inching away from them. "What are the teachings of the Brotherhood?"

"Our values are pure and simple." Thoren answered with authority. "Duty to one's family and to the Community is the highest order. All else flows from this. Honesty. Devotion. Hard work. Truth."

"Indeed." Spock raised an eyebrow. "What do you consider truth?"

Thoren ignored Spock's question, choosing to attack instead. "Since you claim to be no more than a traveler, we do not have a reference to your place in society Friend Spock. What is your family's place?"

"And your treatment of me depends on this place in society you refer to?" Spock asked, Thoren did not answer. "My father is Vulcan's ambassador to the United Federation of Planets. My mother is a teacher and scholar."

The teens stopped inching away. The young Yortem girl with the yellow hair dared to ask. "An ambassador may wed a teacher on your planet? How is this possible? Mirta can not join with Lirta."

"We wed who we wish in accordance with our own customs." Spock turned his attention to the girl. "While my father is a Vulcan, my mother is from the planet Earth. A human."

"Are you married to a human?" The girl asked.

"No." Spock said. "My path has not led that way. I have not chosen a mate."

"Without a mate there are no children." The Mirta boy who had questioned him before asserted. "The teachings of the Brotherhood require that we pass our ways on to the children. This keeps the Community strong and pure."

"Interesting." Spock commented.

"I see that my children are strong and will not be led astray." Thoren smiled approvingly at the group.

"I have found their ideas intelligent and compelling." Spock said. "I wish to continue the conversation. Surely you can not disapprove of them teaching me of your ways."

"Just remember, my children," Thoren took the time to look directly at each one. "You know the truth as your parents and the elders have taught you. Do not let the fascination with alien worlds take you from the one true path."

With a flutter of his robe, Thoren turned and strode determinedly on his way. He ignored the rest of the crowd and made his way directly to the Hall of Devotion to confer with the rest of the Rati. No one had to tell him this Vulcan was trouble. He had been against friendly contact with the Federation from the start.

The group of teens relaxed noticeably after he had gone.