

CONFRONTATION

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Author's Note: SPOCK ENSLAVED, a fan-written novel by D.T. Steiner, postulated a Roman world, similar in some ways to the alien culture in "Bread and Circuses", but more advanced and harsh. Kirk, Spock, McCoy and other crewpersons are trapped on the planet and enslaved, while the Enterprise is apparently blown out of space. The new slaves are added to the household of the Prefect, Octavian, a sensualist with a streak of casual sadism. Octavian takes particular interest in Spock, whom he sees as a champion stallion to be broken, owned and used. He puts Spock to enormous pressures in attempts to break the Vulcan to his will, including a brutal, nearly fatal beating and branding. Devastated by his experiences, Spock is nursed by another of the household slaves, an innocent girl named Deeja, whom Spock takes as mate. The remainder of the story revolves around Octavian's continued campaign to gain Spock's compliance, and Spock's efforts to resist. Octavian has Kirk tortured in an effort to control Spock, and the closeness of Spock and Kirk is tested and affirmed. After several months of feigned obedience, the crewmen plan a revolt, and Spock sends Deeja, now pregnant with his child, into hiding for her safety.

"Confrontation" takes up at this point, in an attempt to explore the Spock - McCoy relationship under stress, an opportunity which was not explored in depth in the novel. Admittedly, these scenes would alter some of Ms. Steiner's final chapters, but the substance of the plot would remain essentially the same.

SPOCK ENSLAVED is available for \$4.25, postpaid, from:

Diane T. Steiner

The noon sun beat down on their practice armor as Spock and Kirk worked out under the critical eyes of their trainer, readying for new gladiator matches. Calling a halt to the sparring, the aged trainer gestured for Spock to approach. A messenger, a young man serving as one of Octavian's bath boys, regarded Spock with visible fear.

"T - the Prefect sends for you," the boy said. "He directed me to deliver this -- forgive me -- in a prescribed manner."

Pulling a tiny metal object from his belt, the boy handed it out -- and dropped it deliberately at Spock's feet. Kirk stepped over and retrieved the trinket while the messenger cowered, expecting to be struck, but the boy was instantly forgotten; the trinket was McCoy's finger ring, smeared with blood.

Spock recognized it immediately. He swung to meet Kirk's horrified eyes.

"Where am I to meet Octavian?" Spock said quietly, turning back to the boy.

"Sir, I'm sorry -- I-I'm just a messenger -- I had to do as I was commanded."

"Yes, of course," Spock said, his voice cold. "Where am I to go?"

"You're to come with me, sir," the boys said, turning back to the house. Spock threw off his breast armor, grabbed a towel and his tunic, and followed, with Kirk at his heels. The messenger stopped.

"Forgive me, but only the Vulcan is to come."

At that, one of the ubiquitous guards stepped out of an alcove and barred Kirk's path with a stungun. Kirk tensed for a fight, but Spock's look stopped him. Grimacing, he watched the Vulcan disappear down the passage, then looked down at the sticky ring clenched in his palm. He gripped it tightly again, and went back out into the sun to sit by the fountain and wait.

Spock smelled the blood and sweat as soon as he reached the stairs to the torture rooms. He braced himself for what was to come.

Octavian was stretched comfortably on a pillowed divan that looked absurd amidst that hell-chamber, with its smoking torches and dull - grey metal chains and devices caked with filth. The Atlantean forwent technology here: pain was pain, and the methods of applying it never changed much. In the sunken well in the room's center, a scarlet-spattered sprawl of limbs was drawing short shuddering gasps. Hard - eyed armed attendants stood by, letting the bleeding heap lie there while they waited for their next cue. One of them held a gory, lead - tipped whip.

Octavian, looking pleased with himself, regarded Spock casually for a moment, as three burly guards instantly stationed themselves around the Vulcan.

"The other hand, now, Doctor," the Prefect said. "Unless you change your mind."

One of the attendants stooped and pulled McCoy's head up by the hair. The man's face was grey, and his eyes were glassy with suffering. Sweat, blood and spittle smeared his features and he looked into Octavian's face dazedly.

"Your last chance, Doctor," Octavian said, irritation touching his voice.

The dazed look cleared slightly. McCoy shook his head once, wearily: No.

Octavian waved at the attendants.

"Break it."

One of the soldiers sat on McCoy's lacerated back and another grabbed his right arm, holding it immobile. The third reached over casually, grasped a finger, and bent it back sharply. The bone snapped, and McCoy cried out. The torturer grabbed the next finger and did the same thing. And the next. And the next. Finally, the thumb cracked. The soldier dropped the hand and stood up, followed by the others. McCoy writhed slowly on the floor where they left him, sobbing softly.

Spock had stood silently, watching, too afraid to speak lest Octavian take offense and do something worse to McCoy. Nor did Spock wish to give the Prefect the satisfaction of witnessing his horror. Octavian designed to notice him again, and beckoned casually for him to approach the divan.

"Your friends are stubborn people," the Prefect said conversationally.

Spock said nothing.

The Prefect locked eyes with Spock.

"A hovercraft was stolen last night; then, as suddenly, it was returned. Its guards were drugged -- with a drug your Doctor McCoy ordered only a day ago. What do you know of this?"

Spock considered swiftly but carefully. Tonight would be the night of the revolt; nothing could be allowed to interfere with it. Nothing. The stakes were too high.

"Prefect, I know nothing of it," he said.

"And where is Deeja?"

"I have not seen her today," Spock said simply.

Octavian glared at him.

"There is something going on here that reeks of conspiracy, and I will not have it!" He jabbed a jeweled finger toward McCoy. "He is no longer useful to me as a physician. He can no longer be trusted. If he can drug my guards, he could drug me as well. What should I do with a useless, disloyal slave?"

Nothing must stand in the way -- nothing, Spock reminded himself.

"Prefect, if I thought you would heed me, I would beg for his life, but as you would not heed me, I beg for his death -- quickly, without further suffering."

He guessed that it would be McCoy's own choice, could the Doctor communicate to him.

Octavian was studying the Vulcan. The months of slavery had melted much of the stoicism out of Spock, made him much more Human; yet a quiet coldness was in him now which reminded dangerously of those first few weeks. The steel had bent, but still it was steel.

"There is no need for him to either suffer more or to die," the Atlantean told Spock. "You have only to tell me where Deeja has been sent, and why, and I shall release McCoy to your custody."

Careful now, Spock thought.

"If Deeja is gone," he said, deliberately edging his voice with a touch of desperation, "then it was without my permission or knowledge."

"Surely McCoy would not do all of that by himself?"

"I do not know," Spock growled, "but it would not surprise me."

Octavian watched the steel bend: anger at McCoy, a sense of betrayal in the Vulcan's voice. Acted? Perhaps, but he did not think the Vulcan had that much in him. McCoy, on the other hand, was probably quite capable of lying to the girl and spiriting her away, in the name of 'humanity.'

Octavian rose languorously and walked to the edge of the sunken well, gazing down at the gory, wheezing form.

"What should be done with you, Doctor? You drug my guards and steal my property. Ah well. It should not be difficult to track down a pregnant, inexperienced child. I shall have her back."

He turned to glance back at Spock and caught the momentarily unmasked anguish. Octavian would have preferred to rid himself of McCoy,

but he reminded himself that he must keep and use every lever on Spock that the Vulcan made available to him. And Spock did value the doctor's life. Therefore, it would be wasteful to destroy that life. Still, there were ways to preserve the life while making McCoy regret that he had been spared. . .

" Spock," he called.

The Vulcan's eyes were hooded.

" He is of no use to me. His hands are broken, he cannot serve even in the kitchens. But I will give him to you, because you have behaved well lately, and I enjoy rewarding faithful service. There is but one condition."

Spock lowered his eyes.

" What do you wish?"

The Prefect looked back across the room. Yes, the braziers were burning, all was in readiness.

" You will brand him for me."

Spock stiffened, and undisguisable revulsion swept his face.

Before Spock could answer, Octavian answered, " Otherwise, the experimental labs can have him."

There was no choice, Spock knew, but he could not imagine himself doing such a . . . a thing. He could not! Not to a beast, or to a stranger, and certainly not to McCoy.

Spock did not look at Octavian, but he said, " McCoy is in shock already. The branding now could kill him. I would agree to perform that task when he has recovered from this."

" Now," Octavian said, all pretense of generosity gone out of his voice, " or not at all."

No choice. Spock bent his head in assent.

The attendants came to life again, hauling McCoy onto his back and pinning his limbs. It was pure formality: the Human was near collapse. As Spock stepped into the well, another attendant held out one of the branding irons to him. The OPA insignia glowed white.

" Do it correctly," Octavian warned, " or you'll just have to do it again."

Spock accepted the handle of the instrument. Even through the leather wrappings at that end, it was scorching.

McCoy's eyes were open, but unfocused. As Spock straddled him, coming into McCoy's range of hazy vision, Spock saw him smile up at him wearily, without comprehension. It was a smile of trust, and Spock's guts winced. Some part of him almost wished that this shock would kill, that it would be over.

He pressed the searing brand against the bloodied shoulder -- white sick flesh gone black. The stink rushed at his nose. Quickly, he tore the metal from the bubbling skin and threw it from him. McCoy was very still. Spock hadn't even heard his shriek. The attendants backed away, and Spock slid his arms under the slack frame, ignoring the blood he smeared on his tunic as he lifted McCoy in his arms. He stepped up out of the well, and Octavian clasped his arm as he passed.

" I am proud of you," the Prefect said. " That was worthy of an Atlantean. I'll see that medicines are sent to your quarters."

Spock pushed past him, but Octavian smiled. He'd won a victory with the Vulcan, he thought. The steel could be made to bend far.

A trail of blood spattered the floors at Spock's hurrying feet as he paced the length of the corridors from the dungeons to the luxurious favored-slaves' quarters in the south wing of the Prefect's house. By the time Spock reached the rooms with his burden, a cluster of babbling house-slaves had gathered around him.

"Is he dead?" Ceres asked, pushing next to his elbow.

Spock tore his mind from the numbed, autopilot state in which it was functioning, but he did not slow his pace towards his quarters.

"Jim is at the lower practice arena," he said, ignoring her question. "Get him, quickly."

The crowd parted to let him pass around the arras into his own bedroom, where he lowered McCoy's body onto the fresh sheets. One of the women brought water, steaming, from the bath, and started to strip off the stained loincloth from McCoy's hips. Spock stopped her. He looked around at the crowd of curious faces.

"Please go away," he said, but his voice carried no conviction, and they did not heed.

"Get out!" he roared, then, and his ice-locked desperation edged his voice with violence.

The onlookers fled back into the corridor like snow before a flame-jet. Spock pulled the privacy - arras across the doorway firmly, shutting out sight and most sound from the rest of the world. Then he went to the bedside.

McCoy's skin was the color of bleached linen under the startling scarlet rivulets that were soaking in spreading patches on the bedsheets. He reeked of sweat and urine. His features were a dying man's: jaw loose, eyes glued shut, cheeks sunken. His hair was plastered in strands to his forehead, blue-black collage on an ash-white ground. The blackened OPA at his shoulder was swelling, a stamp of charcoal in a mound of angry, reddened flesh. McCoy's fingers hung in sickening, broken disarrangement.

Spock jerked his mind out of its disabling horror. He reached for McCoy's wrist, seeking a pulse. It was barely perceptible. Spock realized that the doctor's injuries were in themselves not mortal, but their combined impact had plunged McCoy into deep physical shock, which would be very fatal indeed if not counteracted immediately. Spock hardly knew where to start. He searched his memory for the training at Starfleet Academy in first aid for humanoids. Shock: stop any serious bleeding. Keep the patient warm. Loosen any restrictive clothing. Keep the head lowered.

Spock peeled off McCoy's sodden loincloth and tucked a clean towel between his legs, then searched for any particularly dangerous bleeding. The gouges made by the whips were beginning to clot. Spock made a hurried attempt to wash out the deeper slashes, but abandoned that when McCoy began suddenly to shiver. Spock covered the doctor to the chin with every blanket and drapery he could reach. McCoy's shivering was becoming an unrelenting earthquake which dragged the man to teeth-chattering semi-consciousness. His breath shuddered through his teeth.

"Mother of God!" a hoarse voice cried, and Kirk flung himself beside the huddle of blankets. Not looking up from where he'd pressed his brow into the covers, Kirk said, "What did they do to you!?" He drew back the cloths, revealing the wounds, the deep-seared OPA.

" I'll kill him, I'll kill the bastard," Kirk swore in a moan, but he pulled the covers up again as McCoy's trembling worsened. Kirk sat back, watching in anguished silence, helpless even to comfort the man, for he could not embrace that lacerated back, could not squeeze the scorched shoulder, could not press the broken fingers. He settled finally on laying a soothing hand on the sweated forehead, though McCoy would probably not feel it.

" What happened, Spock?" He had to know, and turned enough to see the Vulcan without shifting his touch on McCoy. " What possible reason could Octavian have to do this to Bones?"

Spock, though, did not answer, and after a long minute of no response, Kirk let go of McCoy to look at Spock squarely. What he saw sent gooseflesh across Kirk's already emotion-clammy skin. The Vulcan's face was a mask -- a deliberate mask. He hadn't seen such a blatant defensiveness, a retreat into indifference, on that beloved face since the early days before they had really learned to know and trust each other.

" Spock?"

Silence.

" Mister Spock, report!" Kirk said in his command voice, hoping to penetrate that stone wall.

Spock's lips parted, but no sounds came. He seemed to shake himself internally, though, then spoke in a monotone.

" Octavian blamed McCoy for Deeja's escape. He traced the knock-out drug to Doctor McCoy's order."

Kirk's eyes widened and he glanced around the room to be sure they were alone.

" Is Octavian on to us?" he whispered.

" He is suspicious, but McCoy told him nothing. I believe I managed to convince the Prefect that Deeja's flight was entirely Doctor McCoy's idea, and not part of any larger conspiracy. It was necessary to allay suspicion."

The tight control in Spock's voice wavered, only adding to the tension, to Kirk's conviction that some hidden thing was very wrong here.

" Did they injure you, Spock? Are you hurt?"

" They . . . confined the physical abuse to the doctor's person."

The privacy arras crinkled back as Ceres pushed through, carrying a tray.

" The Prefect gave permission to bring medicines," she said, setting the tray by the bed. She uncovered McCoy, and Kirk helped her position the doctor's trembling form, rolling him onto his stomach.

" He seems to be in shock," Ceres said, then looked up at Kirk. " We must treat that first. Do you think would could get him to drink some wine? It's all we have, but it may help."

Kirk repositioned McCoy, easing an arm under the doctor's head while Ceres tilted a cup to his lips. The wine drooled down his chin.

" Bones," Kirk called, raising McCoy so he could drink more easily. He shook him carefully. " Come on, Bones, try to drink. Wake up. That's right. . . easy. Take it slow."

Barely conscious, McCoy swallowed a few mouthfuls. Kirk let him down, but pulled close to him, putting his own warm arm around a less severely slashed strip of McCoy's cold back. Ceres soaked a cloth in what looked like an iodine solution and dabbed it into the cuts.

McCoy sucked in a breath, suddenly fully awake, and his frame tensed as though electrified.

"I am sorry," the woman said, trying to hurry. "It cleans the wounds. There is no other way."

Kirk clung to McCoy, both restraining and soothing him, and did not release him though tears sprang to both their eyes. When Ceres spread a salve on the stripes to keep them from sticking to coverings, McCoy relaxed slightly and began to catch his breath. Kirk turned him onto his back so the burn could be tended.

"I wonder why the Prefect didn't kill him?" Ceres said as she dabbed salve onto the wound. "It's all over the house that he kidnapped Deeja."

"Why would Octavian bother to brand him when he had both hands broken?" Kirk said bitterly. "None of it makes sense."

He looked over at Spock, then, who had not moved or spoken since Ceres' arrival, but saw that the mask was still firmly in place. There must be some way to coax Spock out from behind it again.

"Spock, we're going to have to try to set his fingers. I want you to do it. Your touch is more sensitive, you'll be able to feel when the bones are lined up better."

The mask trembled slightly, then hardened.

"I must decline, sir."

Before Kirk could react to that, a weak cough and murmur from McCoy intruded, and Kirk turned back to him.

"Easy, Bones. Easy, we're here," Kirk soothed.

The ice-blue eyes wouldn't focus, but McCoy's lips struggled to form words. Kirk leaned close to hear.

"... Spock?" he was whispering.

"Spock's here, we're safe. Bones, what should we do to help you? Can you tell us?"

"... not ... Spock?" McCoy breathed dazedly.

"You want to talk to Spock?" Kirk guessed.

McCoy wasn't making sense, or didn't have the strength to make himself understood, but there was some frantic emotion in him that was centered on Spock. Kirk frowned, surprised that Spock was not there, too, at McCoy's side, and dismayed at the physical and emotional distance Spock was maintaining. He thought he'd known Spock, would have wagered his life on the Vulcan's reactions, but that silent block of marble was a stranger. Stroking McCoy's damp hair reassuringly, Kirk rose and approached Spock.

"He's asking for you," Kirk said.

"He is delirious."

"The man may be dying! What's wrong with you? You've got to talk to him!"

"I cannot."

"I don't understand you. I thought McCoy was your friend."

"He was."

"Was?"

The stiff mask winced, struggling to disguise.

"I betrayed him," Spock said, his voice strained. "Logically, there was no alternative, but it was betrayal nonetheless. He will never trust me again. Nor do I wish to inflict my presence on him."

Kirk gaped at him.

"What betrayal?" he managed, after a moment. "What did you do?"

" Octavian put a price on McCoy's life. I paid it."

" What did you do?!"

Faced with Kirk's vehemence, there was nowhere left to retreat. The shame overwhelmed, and Spock dropped his face into his hands, unable to meet Kirk's eyes.

" I branded him."

Kirk flung back his head, eyes focused far away through the roof, and absorbed it like a blow. Too much. This day, this month, this world, too much to endure. Compassion welled up in him for his two friends, two victims -- the one abused in flesh, the one abused in spirit. He fumbled for Spock's shoulder, closed on the back of Spock's neck, and drew close to that rigid body, laying his forehead on the Vulcan's shoulder.

" It's not your fault," he breathed. " Not your fault. Spock?"

Spock, his face still buried in his hands, gave in to the touch, to the concern, letting Kirk's arm take the weight of his head, of his soul. He was surprised that the surrender to emotion did not drown him, but rather, seemed to actually strengthen him. He had fully expected to be engulfed in a flood of helpless pathos. But the act of confession, the ready and unconditional acceptance in Jim, lifted an inner sense of heaviness that had weighed down his chest with an ache that was physical.

" I could not prepare him for it," Spock said, not breaking the embrace. " He was not lucid enough to understand. When I approached him with the iron, he smiled at me. I believe he thought I'd come to free him. Instead, I scarred his flesh like an animal's, like an article of merchandise. I do not think that he will truly trust me again, though the logic of the choice was inescapable. Without trust, there can be no friendship, however. Even I, with so little experience with the phenomenon, understand that."

Kirk's heart shrank at Spock's anguish, and he searched for the right words of comfort, the logical words that would reach through that despair.

" You forget, sometimes, my Vulcan friend, that we humans are much more than bundles of uninhibited passions. If we had no appreciation for the value of logic, we would still be living in caves. Bones is a very logical man -- and a compassionate man. If you were to tell him why you had to do that, that otherwise it would have been worse for him, he'd put the blame on Octavian, where it belongs, and not on you. In his own way, Bones loves you, whether you accept it or not."

Spock raised his head and looked beyond Kirk to the bed. McCoy lay on his side, eyes closed, lips parted with gasps that showed no signs of easing. He was coming out of shock, which meant he might survive. But it also meant that the full onslaught of pain from his injuries would soon be on him. He should, though, become mentally functional.

Disentangling from Kirk's embrace, Spock crossed to the bed, squatting beside it so that his head was level with McCoy's. Kirk came and squatted next to him, giving him a faint, reassuring smile.

" Doctor McCoy?" Spock called, unable to shake the formal edge out of his voice. He was -- yes -- terrified that McCoy might reject him.

" Doctor McCoy, can you hear me?"

Ceres finished wrapping the grisly burn in a bandage, and pulled the covers over McCoy's shoulder again. Then she rose and stood behind Kirk, taking the captain's hand to accept his thanks.

McCoy squinted his eyes open slightly, gazing uncertainly in the direction of Spock's voice. Spock saw that he was right: the shock was easing, and the pain building. A new tear leaked from the corner of a glassy blue eye, and Spock permitted himself the liberty of reaching over to brush it from the wan cheek. McCoy blinked and peered blearily at Spock.

" . . . God. . . oh, God . . ." he wheezed, his breaths coming hard. " . . . Spock?"

" It is I."

" . . . broke my hands," McCoy cried weakly. " . . . my hands . . ."

Spock swallowed. Jim's presence, supportive though silent, made it possible to say the words.

" You have been flogged, Doctor, and also branded. Do you remember? Octavian forced me to brand you."

" Never tell . . . them . . . never . . ." McCoy insisted, weary anger behind his words.

" Doctor, do you understand me? It was I who held the iron. I am requesting your . . . forgiveness."

McCoy's eyes cleared slightly, and he peered intently at the Vulcan, as though trying to piece together ragged shards of memory. Pain shook him, but he gasped, " . . . you?"

" It was unavoidable. Octavian would have sent you to the experimental laboratories. I did not wish to injure you, but I did do so. Do you understand what I am saying?"

" . . . did I talk?"

" No, you did not, Doctor McCoy, I am genuinely grieved to have brought you such pain and humiliation. I . . . value your friendship. It is necessary that I know your . . . feelings . . . in the matter."

McCoy licked his dry lips as though about to speak, but a spasm of agony convulsed him. Without premeditation, Spock caught him and held him through the attack. When the tremor had passed, the Vulcan withdrew his hands self-consciously. He saw Kirk's concerned frown out of the corner of his eye, but McCoy's voice called his attention again.

" Spock, help me . . ."

" How, Doctor?"

" Set . . . my hands . . . before they swell . . . any more . . ."

Relief poured in and filled Spock with a warmth that he found astonishing. McCoy wanted his aid. The trust persisted.

" It will be painful, Doctor. I could nerve - pinch you."

McCoy seemed to be gathering some of his wits about him, despite the pain. He looked more alert.

" No . . . thanks," he said. " I want . . . to be sure . . . you do it right."

" Indeed. A surgeon must depend on his hands. I shall endeavor to perform the task efficiently to spare you undue suffering. How shall I go about it? Can you instruct me?"

One part of Spock's mind listened attentively to McCoy's instructions, but another part of his mind was turning over and over, with a sense of wonder, the realization of the differences of values that both

separated he and McCoy as unique beings, and yet bound them as friends. He, Spock, had been most personally affected by the degradation of branding, an affliction which had made the near - fatal beating he had endured later seem insignificant in comparison. Spock had never imagined that McCoy would find being branded any less devastating, when in fact, it meant little to the doctor next to the injuries inflicted on his surgeon's hands.

Ceres scavanged for articles to serve as splints and wrappings, and with Kirk holding McCoy's arm immobile, Spock straightened each fractured finger and bound it carefully with a touch so gentle that it brought a wave of tenderness that stung Jim Kirk's eyes with tears of affection. The pain was not over, and the fight for freedom had hardly begun, but this terrible experience had been like a test by fire, which, once survived, welded new strength into the bond the three of them shared. Whatever the evening, the revolt, would bring, if success or death, it could be faced in the assurance that they would be together, if not in physical proximity, in a unity of love and will.

Capitan of mine,
You do me fine,
You make the words rhyme
When you know my thoughts are low
Just a mere touch
He don't ask much
But to be such a man as he,
The water so pure between the canyon and me,
I don't ask much,
The TV and crowd,
Don't ask much,
When he knows the hurting's bad,
You don't ask much.