

“SciPAC 7”

Part 2

Fascinating, Silek thought. Sensor readings slid across his screen, describing the star that had nearly destroyed the ship. Its behavior was quite unexpected. He wondered what his colleagues on Vulcan would think of this data when he returned home. *If I return home*, he corrected himself.

He might never see his native planet again. He was in the data lab of SciPAC 7, a Federation science vessel, well outside the bounds of populated space. The ship had been thrown to its current location by an unexpected stellar flare and the resulting damage had disabled the warp drive.

There was little hope of rescue. Interference from the star was blocking all communications, so they had no contact with Starfleet. Even if a ship came to the system looking for them, the star's interference with long range sensors would make SciPAC 7 essentially invisible. Potential rescuers would probably conclude that the flare had destroyed the ship.

Silek wondered if Starfleet would declare him dead. His family would accept it as a logical conclusion. Vulcans were renowned for logical thinking.

He brought his attention back to the challenge at hand, modifying his computer models and attempting to find one that matched the star's history. He looked forward to discussing the problem with his wife, Kira. She always claimed a lack of aptitude for theory but had repeatedly demonstrated the contrary. Perhaps she thought that, being human, she was somehow inadequate to the task.

Thinking of Kira was very distracting. He could sense her, through their telepathic link, but at a distance he could only get a vague sense that she was alive and well. He missed her presence even more in the three days they had been married than he had in the three years they had lived on different worlds. He wished they had the luxury of a honeymoon.

Again, Silek tried to focus on his task. He changed some parameters on his model. The computer dutifully presented the resulting simulation, which still didn't match the measurements of recent behavior. He tapped his fingers on the table. Perhaps if he factored in the chaotic effects of the temporal eddies...

Finally, the readings and the simulation aligned. He experienced the thrill of success and ran the model into the future. The elation quickly changed to alarm as he read the star's forecast.

He went quickly to the bridge. Captain Jack Tracer was at the helm. "Something to report, Mr. Silek?"

"Captain, I believe the ship is in danger." Silek tapped some keys on a console and displayed the information from his model on the main viewscreen. "If my calculations are correct, we will soon experience a stellar storm with dangerous levels of radiation."

Tracer skimmed the prediction. "Can we shield against it?"

"No. Prolonged exposure will be lethal to everyone onboard."

The captain's brow furrowed with concern. "Recommendation?"

"We need to put something between us and the star to

block the radiation."

Tracer tapped some keys and displayed various navigation charts on the viewscreen. "Will this work?" He brought up details on a large asteroid.

Silek examined the composition and size data. "Yes, that should suffice."

The captain laid in the course. "What about subspace communication?"

"I believe it will continue to be unavailable until we move to the other side of the star's omega perimeter."

"Which would take us..."

"Approximately six point three years without warp drive. Assuming we maintain a safe distance from the star."

Tracer rapped his fingers on the arm of his chair. "We have enough supplies to last that long. But you, Mr. Silek, will pose a bit of a problem."

The captain had recently learned about a peculiar aspect of Vulcan biology: *pon farr*, the mate-or-die madness that gripped Vulcan males every seven years. And he was aware that Silek expected to have his first *pon farr* in a little less than two.

Ordinarily, the fact that Silek was married would make *pon farr* not an issue. Some time alone with his wife and the madness would pass. But Kira was not a Vulcan and humans were very fragile. There was a risk that he would accidentally injure or even kill her. But he didn't really believe he would. He would rather die than hurt her.

"I believe that Kira and I will be able to manage my... condition," Silek said.

Tracer paused a moment. Then he looked Silek in the

eyes and said quietly, "Just be sure... that she's okay."

Silek inclined his head in acknowledgment of his concern. There was an unspoken agreement between them. Kira and Tracer had been together on this ship for two years before Silek had joined the crew. He knew they had been close. "I will do everything in my power to take care of her."

Tracer nodded. "See that you do."

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Silek found Kira in the heart of the main computer circuitry. She was replacing damaged panels. The ship, with its five-member crew, was almost entirely run by the computer, so it was a high-priority repair.

He sat at the small work table and waited until she completed her task and emerged from the mass of electronics. She had been working on the computer for a long time and looked exhausted. Little wisps of hair had pulled free from where she had tied it back.

He had never seen her look so beautiful.

"*My wife,*" he said in Vulcan, "*the mind is strengthened by sustenance of the body.*" He offered her the sandwich he had brought for her.

She smiled. "Did I forget to eat again?"

He nodded. She sat next to him and took the sandwich gratefully. He could not resist reaching out and brushing the hair from her temple. As soon as their skin touched, their telepathic link snapped back to full strength.

Silek embraced Kira's mind and the comfortable

familiarity it brought. He felt her reciprocate his pleasure at the intimacy. With great effort, he let go of the contact.

Melding with Kira was the greatest pleasure he had ever known. He wanted to be linked with her all the time, but he knew that it was dangerous to do so. Minds melded for too long lost their individual selves, leading to madness.

Kira shared his thoughts. "I wish we never had to let it go," she sighed.

He watched her eat, wondering how much time they would have together. Even in the best possible case, it would not be enough time. Humans had such short life spans.

When she finished eating, he took hold of her hand before she decided to start a new task. She could afford to take a break. He pulled her close and kissed her. Kissing was a human display of affection, but Silek enjoyed adopting some of Kira's culture. Though he tried to hold back, his mind slid into hers again. It was so ... comfortable.

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Silek lay in bed, watching Kira sleep.

He had an odd feeling. It was as if there was something missing that had been there before but he couldn't identify what it was.

Kira's head lay on his chest. The surface of her mind was vibrant with rapidly fleeting images. It was a peculiar feeling to touch the mind of someone who was asleep. He wondered what she was dreaming about.

Her breathing changed and he felt her consciousness stir.

She stretched, sliding her bare skin against his. The sensation took his breath away.

His mind pressed gently against hers through their telepathic link. As she woke up, she yielded to the meld. He happily settled into oneness with her again.

Did you sleep at all? she asked inside his mind.

He started to answer, but hesitated. He had slept, hadn't he?

Kira became alarmed. "Are you alright?"

Silek was confused. "I... I don't remember." Vulcans were not forgetful people. "I don't remember anything that happened after I kissed you in the computer room."

They stared at each other. Perhaps he was sick. But he felt completely normal now.

The comm beeped, and they heard Captain Tracer's voice, "Kira, Silek, report to the bridge. Looks like we have a situation."

Kira broke the telepathic link and rolled out of bed.

Silek fell into a world of darkness. His heart pounded. He struggled to breathe.

It lasted only a moment. Kira was dressing rapidly. She hadn't noticed his distress.

Every fiber of his being longed to touch her again. He had never experienced anything like this before.

He began to feel an emotion he had not felt since childhood: fear.

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The captain rapidly punched buttons on the helm console. "How are we doing?" he asked urgently.

Kira responded, "Radiation levels rising exponentially. We're not going to make it."

Silek was sitting at his station on the bridge. How had he gotten here? He looked at the sensor readings on his screen. His model had been wrong. The star's storm had come earlier than he had predicted.

"Rerouting," snapped Tracer. The ship changed course. They were flying through the asteroid field, an unbelievably dangerous action. But Tracer was trying to reach the large asteroid by any means necessary.

"We'll never make it through there!" Kira shouted.

"Use the phasers!"

Tracer's full attention was on steering the ship. Silek hadn't known he was such a skilled pilot. Kira took control of the phasers, attempting to clear the way by vaporizing some of the asteroids in their path.

Silek quickly manipulated the shields, maximizing their effectiveness against the asteroid impacts assaulting the hull.

Kira glanced at him. "Silek's back with us," she reported.

She was so far away. Too far to touch. So beautiful. So lonely without her. So lonely that it hurt....

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Silek was on a bed in sickbay. Kira stood beside the bed, holding his hand.

"What happened?" he asked.

"We reached the asteroid in time. The ship is safe, for the moment."

He felt very strange. His breathing was quick and shallow. His skin burned like he was on fire. "What's wrong with me?"

Kira laid her free hand against his cheek. Her mind was like soothing water. "You're entering *pon farr*."

That couldn't be right. It was too soon.

She sensed his denial. "Any biological system has normal statistical deviation."

She was acting more like a Vulcan than he had ever seen before. But he could sense, through the link, that it was a surface calm. Inside, she was afraid.

He, on the other hand, was terrified. He had thought it would be a madness he could resist. But this was like losing pieces of his life.

She moved as if to step away from him. He felt her sudden pain through the link.

"Silek, let go!"

He realized he had snatched her wrist and now held it in a vice grip. He made himself let go. With physical contact gone, the burning need for her was almost unbearable.

She placed her arm in an exam bay and the automated doctor treated her injury.

"Are you alright?" he asked with difficulty.

"You broke my wrist," she replied.

Panic swelled in Silek. He had hurt her. He had actually hurt her.

"Sedate me," he ordered.

"That would only make you die slower."

"It's the only way to keep you safe."

"I am not going to lose you."

"Kira.... I can't control it."

"Try harder!" she snapped angrily.

Her words were like a physical blow. He had to control himself. He remembered meditation exercises he had done as a child. He went through them now, and found his breathing became more regular. But he still burned.

Captain Tracer entered sickbay. "What's the plan?" he asked.

Kira stepped away from the exam bay, treatment of her wrist completed. She took a hypospray out of a drawer. "I can't use any drugs that affect his central nervous system. But I can use this to reduce his strength somewhat."

Silek realized what she intended. "Captain, don't let her do this. Sedate me."

The captain looked at Kira curiously. She shook her head. "He'd die within days."

"If I kill you, I'll die anyway. The odds are better --"

"Silek, if you die, I'll die, too. We're bonded, remember? There's no Vulcan healer here to seal the hole that would be left in my mind."

Silek's hopes sank. "You might be able to manage it. You have natural telepathic ability. It's still a better chance --"

Kira gripped his shoulders. "I am not going to sit here and watch you die!"

The scent of her was intoxicating. He could not resist. It took all his force of will to lay his hand on her gently.

He melded with her. It soothed him to the core of his being.

"Stay with me," Kira said. She was leading him out of sickbay towards their cabin.

He needed her but he knew he must resist.

"Stay with me," Kira repeated. He unwillingly slid deeper into her mind.

He struggled for control. He tried the meditation exercises but they slipped away from his memory. Madness beckoned, with whispered promises of manic joy.

Stay with me. Her voice grew smaller in his mind. It would be so much easier to surrender... to be free. *Stay with me.*

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Desire. Burning. Ripping. Devouring.

Agony. Sweet agony.

Silek returned to awareness in a fevered sweat, clawing at consciousness as if waking from a nightmare.

Reality slowly took focus, and he realized the pain he felt was not his.

His eyes opened and he saw Kira. The only reason he knew she was still alive was his telepathic link with her unconscious mind. Every visible part of her was bruised or bleeding. She must have blacked out from the pain.

"Computer! Emergency transport to sickbay!" he shouted.

The transporter took them both to sickbay, placing Kira on a treatment bed. The automated doctor immediately began treating her injuries.

He could not bear the sight of her broken body. He looked at the computer's diagnosis instead. To his relief, it said she would live. Then he saw something completely unexpected in her medical assessment. At first it confused him. It wasn't possible... but then he realized that it was.

Kira was pregnant.

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Silek knelt on the floor in the corner of his cabin, facing the wall.

He had wept for a long time and had found a strange calmness when he ran out of tears.

Vulcans and humans could not have children together naturally. It did not take much deduction to realize that Tracer was the father of Kira's child.

Perhaps it was all for the best. Tracer would take care of Kira. He loved her.

And Silek was sure Kira would want to be free of him. He had failed to control the madness. She could never trust him again. He imagined that the sight of him would be a horrible reminder of the pain she had experienced.

He would never again hold her... never again touch her mind... never again know the comfort of her love. He found he still had tears left after all.

The door slid open and he forced himself into the emotionless shell that Vulcans were famous for. He heard Kira enter the cabin and the door slide shut behind her. There was only one thing left that he could give her.

"There are Healers on Vulcan," he said, "who can sever the marriage bond between us." It was an unusual event to break the telepathic bond, and an unpleasant experience. He did not care for his own pain but he would ask the Healers to do everything in their power to minimize Kira's suffering.

He wasn't sure how he had expected Kira to respond but he was surprised to hear her begin to cry. Perhaps she was upset that she could not be free of him sooner.

"I'm so sorry," Kira sobbed. "I didn't mean to --." She could not continue to speak as the tears choked her. She sank to the ground.

Silek was completely confused. Was she... apologizing? He turned to look at her and felt a fresh wave of guilt. The automated doctor had healed her well, but she still bore bruises from the injuries he had inflicted.

He moved to her side, afraid to touch her, wanting to comfort her but not knowing how.

She looked up at him and swallowed to regain her voice. "I wasn't trying to keep it a secret from you. It just never came up. The impact from the flare must have damaged my birth control implant, but we were so busy and I never thought to check it."

She wasn't saying anything Silek hadn't already surmised. She was looking at him, obviously expecting a response, but he didn't know what to say. "I don't understand," he finally admitted.

"Is there no hope that you can forgive me?"

"Forgive you for what?"

Now it was Kira's turn to be confused. "Aren't you angry

at me for being pregnant? Isn't that why you want to divorce me... why you don't love me anymore?"

It took a moment for Silek to even imagine such a perspective. "I'm not... I thought...." He didn't know where to begin. "Kira, I still love you."

"Then why -- ?"

"I thought it would be what you wanted."

"What I wanted?!"

"I hurt you so badly --"

"But that wasn't your fault."

"Yes, it was. You trusted me to control the madness and I failed."

"No, you didn't."

"I almost killed you!"

"Almost, maybe. But you didn't."

With the amount of guilt that Silek felt, he could not believe that Kira didn't condemn him.

Kira seemed to feel the same way. "You're not angry at me?" she asked.

"For having a relationship with Tracer before we were anything more than friends? Of course not."

They looked at each other for a moment. Silek dared to hope. He reached out to her and she did the same to him. Their skin touched and their minds melded.

Silek felt whole again. Kira still loved him. Kira still wanted him.

They explored each other's thoughts and emotions through the link. Kira didn't understand Silek's guilt about hurting her any more than he understood her guilt about her

previous relationship with Tracer. Finding that they needed no forgiveness from each other, something amazing happened. They forgave themselves.

Silek finally understood why human culture extolled love. It was more powerful than he had ever guessed.

"What about the baby?" Kira asked.

Silek chose his words carefully. "I would be honored to help you raise the child, if you would permit it." Kira smiled. "But it will be no secret who the child's father is."

"I know."

"Are you sure," Silek asked hesitantly, "that you don't want to be with him, instead? The three of you could be a traditional human family."

Kira shook her head. "Tracer and I don't love each other like that."

"But you two were... intimate."

"Just once. After the flare hit the ship, and we both thought we were going to die."

Silek's whole perspective of the situation changed. He had assumed a past relationship that didn't exist.

He brushed his finger lightly down her cheek. "We'll figure it out. One step at a time. And from now on, we'll talk about everything openly. No more misunderstandings."

Kira threw her arms around him. Very carefully, he hugged her back.

"I love you," she said.

Silek smiled. The word meant so much more to him now.

Though there was no need to say what she could feel through their link, he chose to say it anyway. "I love you, too,"

he replied.