

On Wings of Ice

A K/S Story

by Della Van Hise

(writing as Alexis Fegan Black)

The temperature was approximately 23 degrees below zero on the Fahrenheit scale. Our provisions were almost exhausted, and the last working phaser had malfunctioned due to the extreme temperatures. The emergency communicator was still in operational order; though our location on an unnamed world little larger than an asteroid near the edge of the Romulan Neutral Zone made it appear unlikely that any passing ships would detect our distress call.

I had performed the customary checks of our remaining equipment, and found the tricorder to be fully operational; the two heat-activated body blankets were minimally functional, though one showed signs of severe stress and my calculations predicted failure within four point nine hours.

Our shuttlecraft, the Wings II, remained sealed and off limits -- precariously balanced on the edge of an ice cliff less than a hundred meters from our location: an outcropping of rock which afforded only slight protection from the gale force winds and no refuge whatsoever from the cold. Even if we could have taken shelter inside the Wings II, the lethal levels of radiation which had been released shortly after the crash would have proved fatal within hours.

For myself, it might have been preferable to dying from hypothermia.

Fortunately, I did not have that option. The captain was unharmed in the crash, and had immediately sought other options at once -- performing at his usual efficiency even under the most difficult of circumstances. He quickly ascertained that the Wings II had been sabotaged -- undoubtedly by clever remote computer control in the sector of the galaxy where our mission had originally taken us.

Now, the mission itself seems unimportant, and is a matter of public record. Suffice it to say that Starfleet was correct: it was more logical to risk a small shuttle to possible sabotage than to risk an entire starship such as the Enterprise. Starfleet Command had not, of course, intended to risk myself and Captain Kirk; but the captain, being a man of integrity and compassion, refused to order any member of his crew into what Federation analysts had labeled 'a possible suicide mission'. He asked for volunteers.

I was the only one.

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When we initially discovered the sabotage on the shuttlecraft, the captain immediately plotted a course for the nearest Type M planetoid; and though the computers catalogued M-237 as "habitable", I was reluctant to agree. While certain species of bears and flightless birds might indeed consider M-237 to be a paradise, the world held little promise of survival for more humanoid beings.

According to my calculations, we had been there for three point seven days -- days which were, for the most part, little more than extensions of the long night. What few rations we were able to salvage from the Wings II were rapidly dwindling; and though water was plentiful and considered safe for humanoid consumption, its sulfuric flavor made drinking almost impossible, certainly undesirable.

The captain had been somber. Undoubtedly he knew, as I did, that we would surely die that night. Initially, I believe Captain Kirk thought our rescue imminent. But, as I pointed out to him, the culture which was responsible for the sabotage of our shuttlecraft could just as easily have transmitted a message to the Enterprise assuring Commander Scott of our safety. Any race with the advanced technology required to damage the shuttle's engines through remotely transmitted electronic impulses was certainly advanced enough to insure that their efforts did not fail due to petty oversights.

I was again assured by the captain that my logic could be 'most depressing'.

We spoke little the remainder of that day. And when the night came with renewed snowfall and high winds, we lay down together in the darkness to die.

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It was approximately two hours after nightfall that the heat-activated body blanket failed. I was thankful that it was mine rather than the captain's. Yet, despite the fact that I had known it would happen, I was unprepared for death -- my own or, especially, Jim's.

Apparently, the captain was able to perceive my psychological distress even in the total blackness which surrounded us. His psi reports list him as 'below average' on standard ESPer tests, though I have always wondered if perhaps he altered his own scores through some clever method so as to keep his abilities a matter of privacy. A commanding officer who could theoretically read minds could prove intimidating.

In any event, he moved closer to me, speaking for the first time in several hours. "Starfleet's finest," he whispered, his voice rough and hoarse from the cold.

"Sir?" I wondered if perhaps delirium were responsible for his peculiar statement.

"Starfleet's finest," he repeated, almost bitterly. "Spock... if we get out of this mess alive, I swear I'm going to quit the service!"

It was a common threat -- one he had revealed privately to me on several occasions. In the cell on Organia. In the web of Tholian space when his ghostly form had come to me in the night. When we were held prisoner by Captain Merrick.

"I do not believe we will need to concern ourselves with gainful employment, Captain," I managed, barely able to speak myself. Under other circumstances, it is possible I would not have permitted the despair I felt to surface so abruptly. Yet now, with Death nearer to me than life, semantics scarcely seemed important.

He did not reply, though I felt him again move nearer to me, one hand trying to tuck the malfunctioned blanket tighter around my neck.

"Why didn't you tell me the blanket wasn't working?" he asked, his tone neither accusing nor threatening.

He did not expect an answer and, as the cold was rapidly affecting my ability to speak, I offered none.

"Here," he said, holding up the edge of his own blanket and allowing a warmer rush of air to escape and brush my cheeks, "slide under here with me."

I did not move -- not because I did not want to, but because I discovered that my arms and legs were all but numb. I thought, irrationally, of Socrates, of a cold more lethal than poison. My mental faculties were rapidly failing.

The captain apparently understood that, for he slid closer to me and managed to cover us both with the remaining functioning blanket. I felt him trembling; and when his hand brushed my neck in an effort to close the covers around us, his fingers were icy.

I must have flinched, for he withdrew his hand at once. "Sorry," he muttered. "I know how you don't like to be touched."

"Sir?" Then, abruptly, I understood. "I... have no objections to your... touch, Jim," I tried to explain, though the cold caused me to shiver so violently that I suspect my words were blurred. "Your hand was...."

I felt him nod his own understanding. Then, surprisingly, he moved closer still until our bodies were pressed side to side and one arm covered my chest. His hand squeezed my arm in what I took to be a gesture of reassurance.

We did not speak again for quite some time until, finally, I heard Jim sigh in a fashion I had learned to interpret as frustration.

"Dammit, Spock," he whispered, shivering, "I can think of a hundred better ways to die than this!"

I blinked, surprised to discover snowflakes on my eyelids. "Generally, dying of hypothermia is considered to be quite... pleasant." I considered the absurdity of my own comment. "Of course, I presume one would have difficulty confirming such a theory as the hypothesis was obviously postulated by the living."

Surprisingly, I heard Jim laugh very quietly. "Dead men tell no tales, eh, Spock?" But, again, he did not wait for my reply. "Well," he sighed, "sooner or later, someone is going to find us frozen together like two popsicles -- and I think that is going to be one hell of a tale!"

I wasn't certain what he meant and did not pursue it. For myself, I doubted that we would ever be found. M-237 was not exactly on a well-traveled route of commerce.

"Spock?"

"Yes?" I wondered why he waited for my response when he obviously knew I was listening. Or, perhaps, he believed I had terminated in the space between one second and the next.

"Spock," he repeated, his tone infinitely more serious than before, "have you ever... been in love with anyone?"

Certainly, he was delirious now. It tore me to the quick and, feeling illogically protective, I managed to move sufficiently to slide one arm around his back and pull him close to my chest. "I am a Vulcan," I said in surprising contrast to my actions.

He laughed. Giggled, actually. The cold was obviously winning our battle. "I know you're a Vulcan, Spock," he said finally, sounding remarkably lucid for a man who had just inquired as to the emotional status of a professed unemotional being. "But you're half human, too." He paused as if considering that. "And besides," he concluded, "you can't convince me that love has anything to do with race or even species." He tried to shrug, but ended up letting in a colder draft of cold. "Every living thing feels love at one time or another, Spock."

He was perceptive as well as correct. And, curled tight against my side like an animal huddled to its litter mate, he was strangely vulnerable, child-like. His straightforward question awakened my protective nature. I wanted to hold him like that forever -- until we died... and after. It would be a 'hell of a tale' for two dead men to tell.

I saw no harm in giving him the truth. After all, I rationalized, neither of us would live to face the other in the morning. "I have... loved," I replied haltingly. "But I do not believe I have ever been in love."

He was silent for a moment. "When you were a kid," he said, apparently satisfied with my answer, "did you ever wonder what you would do if you knew the world was going to end in an hour?"

It was almost as strange a question as his previous one. "I knew logically that the world would not end in such a short span of time," I returned, attempting to be honest.

Again he laughed. "C'mon," he said, his words beginning to slur. "Every kid thinks about that at some time in his life." He paused, trying to snuggle closer, though our bodies were already tight-pressed together under the thin blanket which was hardly a buffer against the arctic cold. "What would you have done?" he asked again.

Having nothing else to do as we waited for death, I tried to imagine what I might have done. "Given the unlikely circumstances you have defined, Jim," I ventured, shivering so violently that the ground seemed to tremble beneath us, "I probably would have... ended my own life."

His head lifted slightly and, despite the darkness, I felt him looking at me with one of those expressions renowned throughout the galaxy. "Why?" he asked, his voice a desperate whisper.

"What would be the point in waiting?" I countered. "Additionally, given the defined circumstances, I would not wish to experience the death emanations of so many others."

At that, and though I didn't believe it possible, Jim propped himself up on one elbow. "Death emanations?"

"Indeed," I replied, surprisingly comfortable discussing the admittedly morbid subject. Previously, death had seemed a distant unlikelihood -- a private experience reserved for the old and the sick. And, like my human counterparts, I realized I had fallen prey to the warped logic of believing that it couldn't happen to me. I catalogued the thought, then returned to Jim's question. "When a Vulcan leaves the body, his passing is felt by those closest to him. Legend has it that it is the manner in which all living things bid farewell to friends, companions."

He nodded very slightly, then lowered himself back down against my arm. "I want to go first, Spock," he said calmly, quietly.

My heart felt as if it were tearing. I couldn't have replied had I had an answer.

"I... don't think I ever believed I could really lose you," he went on haltingly. "And... I'm not brave enough to... be alone after you're... gone."

Not knowing what else to do, and addled by the intensely bitter cold, I pulled him closer to me, my hand tangling in his hair and forcing his face against my neck. To hear such a confession from such a man was more than I could bear. Tears stung my eyes, started to run

freely down my cheeks, then turned to ice against Jim's hair. My throat ached.

"Perhaps... the Enterprise will yet... come," I suggested lamely. It was surprising to discover how much easier it was to think of rescue when there was suddenly something worth living for.

He shook his head, his face brushing my neck, his breath warming my skin as he spoke. "Don't," he whispered, his hand moving under the blanket until it found mine. Our fingers entwined, though I doubt either of us was capable of feeling more than the pressure. "Don't, Spock," he implored me.

"S-sir?"

He squeezed my hand. "Don't... waste time thinking of... tomorrow," he explained with such tenderness. "We won't be here, remember?"

I didn't want to remember, but logic interceded to remind me that, as always, Jim was correct. I held him, treasuring the time together. "I will try... to let you... go first, Jim," I promised. It seemed to be what he wanted, what he needed. And it was, I knew, the only thing I could give.

Hearing my words, he seemed to relax just a little, his head settling against my shoulder where he remained for a very long time. His breathing shallowed and, panicking, I feared he had accepted my promise and had acted upon it.

Deliriously terrified, I shook him with what little strength remained within me. "Jim!"

He didn't move other than to rub his cheek against my shoulder. "I'm here, Spock," he said.

Feeling vaguely foolish, I forced myself to calm as a peculiar thought manifested. "The world will be ending soon," I realized.

Jim nodded. "One of those sick childhood fantasies coming back to haunt us, eh?" he said, obviously trying to lighten the heavy coldness which lured us both toward the long dark.

I tightened my arms around him, not knowing how to protect him from the truth. "You... asked what I... would do... if I knew... the world was ending," I said, unaware of where my statement was leading.

He nodded again, his breath warm against my neck. "If you could do anything at all, Spock," he whispered, his voice almost gone, "what would you do now?"

The answer was terribly clear. It hurt far more than the cold, far more than the numbness. "I would... wish to... be... in love."

Surprisingly, Jim only snuggled closer, holding me with a desperation born of death's presence. "I'd wish... you could be... in love with me," he said very, very quietly.

My eyes closed, forcing tears beyond the snowflakes. "I... believe... I always... have been, Jim."

He wept then -- silently at first, then with deep soul-wrenching sobs. I do not know why he wept, whether the tears were born of joy or of sorrow or of regret. I know only that he felt no shame in allowing me to see him cry. And though I do not recall clearly, it is my impression that I shared his grief and his happiness, mingling my own saltless tears with Jim's.

The rest is... somewhat unbelievable, even to myself.

We began to move, though I had thought we were both beyond the ability to do so. I became aware of Jim's face so near to mine in the darkness, of his breath causing my cold-numbed lips to tingle. We met in the human fashion, our mouths colliding together in desperation. Jim's hands moved over me, and were suddenly no longer cold. He began touching me... intimately... the manner in which two lovers might touch and hold and caress in preparation for a lifetime of togetherness.

It did not seem to matter that our 'lifetime' would be unforgivably short.

For myself, I had no desire to question, had lost the ability to shield my responses behind a mask of logic. I wanted to die with Jim if I would be unable to live with him. I wanted nothing more than to blend body and spirit in preparation for the long journey ahead.

Somehow, our clothing was discarded, our bodies straining toward one another until we meshed together. Jim found the strength to rise over me, holding himself on trembling arms as he lowered his buttocks onto my erection.

I heard him cry out only once; and though I would have wished it otherwise, my entry into his body was not a gentle one. The cold prevented tenderness, hampered control, and he collapsed heavily across my chest as I filled him completely.

Suddenly, I was no longer cold. It was as if my entire Self was within Jim -- sheltered, safe, protected. Blindly, I began thrusting upward, seeking release from our icy prison, release even from life itself. I realized distantly that dying in such a manner would not be unpleasant. Indeed, I understood that, after several years of courting death (and one another, I presumed), we would at last share that which we had feared during life.

We would love... into death.

I was aware of Jim's breathing -- ragged and shallow against my throat. His erection was pressed between our bodies, hard and thick and, like the rest of him, perfect.

He began to laugh. Not hysterically or bitterly. But with apparently deep human satisfaction and even deeper pleasure. And though I would never have thought it possible, I laughed with him, our voices blending with the winds which howled and begged at the entrance to our tiny shelter.

Our hands clasped together, and Jim lifted them to his face, asking me without words for the meld, asking me to take the final voyage into darkness with him.

I could not refuse.

When our minds came together, the world we had inhabited ended just as Jim had predicted. A distant sun rose yellow and warm on a blue-purple horizon, and the snow melted, transforming itself to sand. The winds no longer whistled in their eerie minor tone; instead, a flock of red birds flew low over us to announce the coming of spring.

We were naked together on an alien beach -- a Terran shoreline captured in some childhood memory of Jim's.

It nurtured us, and the water which rose to lap at our feet was pure and blue and life-giving. We drank together, thirsty.

And our bodies joined in the symbolic feast -- each seeking refuge within the other. I filled Jim again, was filled in return while the sun climbed higher in the sky and heated our long-denied passions.

Then, as if in a dream, we clung to one another with sudden desperation, our bodies pumping simultaneously as a climax rocked the foundations of Time and Space.

In spirit, rising high away from the Earth and toward the sun, we became one entity. Joined for all eternity.

When I was able to open my eyes, I found Jim collapsed over my chest, felt the sticky warmth of his ejaculation pressed between our bodies like some alien flower between the pages of a book.

It was still dark, but through some miracle I could see Jim's face. It was peaceful, and a smile sealed his still-warm lips.

He was gone.

And yet... not.

Within my own spirit, I experienced Jim's life force -- a tangible, living entity separate unto itself, yet inexorably linked with my own.

The fear was gone. From both of us.

I closed my eyes.

And waited.

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"Oh my sweet Jeezuz!"

I heard the words only through a haze, as if they came from a great distance below. But, being with Jim, I was uninterested in the familiar voice.

"Carlsen, over here! Newling, get two life support stretchers beamed down here on the double!"

Someone came nearer to the flesh forms we had so recently left behind, and hands manipulated our bodies apart. Gently. A healer's touch.

McCoy?

I drifted lower, bringing Jim's laughing, free essence with me, encouraging him to look. He seemed disappointed, but followed my instructions nonetheless. And, together, we observed as McCoy freed our bodies from their death-embrace, discreetly covering each of us with a fully functional electronic emergency blanket.

His eyes were wide, unblinking, and he swore frequently, injecting potions and stimulants into lifeless forms. I looked at Jim, saw him smiling.

"You wanna go back?" he wondered with a boyish grin.

I raised an eyebrow, surprised to find that I did exist in some noncorporeal form. "Do you?"

He shrugged again, running one finger down the side of my face and causing me to tremble in response. He cast a glance over his shoulder -- in the direction of a great, blinding-white light. And though it was warm and offered shelter, I understood suddenly that even death was not enough of a challenge for Jim Kirk.

"If I can be with you, Spock," he whispered, kissing me on the lobe of the left ear, "I want to go back." He looked again at McCoy. "We... we can't do this to Bones... just... leave without ever saying goodbye...."

I looked down at our half-frozen forms. "The journey back home will be difficult, Jim," I

warned. "And... it is possible we may not remember any of this."

But he smiled that notorious smile, bribing me with a lingering, full-mouthed kiss. "I'll remember," he promised. "And even if I don't... you can always meld with me and make me remember."

He seemed to think there was nothing I could not do; and his confidence in my abilities made the decision somewhat easier.

We went back into the flesh.

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The voyage back was indeed difficult, and our recovery required an additional six days in McCoy's personal care. Not once did the doctor speak of the compromising position in which he had discovered us, nor did he mention the 'blue-white flash of light which appeared over the bodies' and was reported by the two security men.

He simply labored silently, mending frostbitten flesh and pumping life-giving substances into two unconscious forms.

I heard him speak only once.

"Love's what brought you back, you know," he said, bending over me, unaware that I was capable of hearing him. "Love's what brought you back from the dead, Spock."

Someday, I will tell him that he was correct in that assumption.

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It had been seven days now since the captain and myself were returned to the Enterprise. And then, on our first day after being released from Sickbay, I found myself oddly restless, dissatisfied.

Jim returned to his quarters before I was awakened by McCoy that morning, and despite my admittedly wrongful attempts to contact his mind, I was unable to sense his presence.

Undoubtedly, it was because we are of one mind. And as some philosopher once said, sensing one's own presence is often more difficult than sensing the presence of another.

And yet, I remained confident.

"Spock?"

Startled by the sound of his voice, I turned abruptly. "Captain?"

His look was admonishing to say the least. Until he smiled. "Spock," he repeated, rubbing that curl from his forehead, "I... I think there's something I... something I need to remember." He came closer, so close that I could smell his cologne, feel the tingle of his aura. "Would you... I mean... is there something?"

We stood less than a foot apart, separated only by the amnesia of death. I lifted my hand to his face, saw his eyes widen for just a moment, then witnessed the relief which abducted his features.

And yet, I could not take what was not freely offered. "If you remember, Jim," I warned, "there will be no turning back, no altering what has happened between us."

His eyes turned brighter, then closed. "I know this might not make any sense, but...I... feel like I've been... home, Spock," he whispered then looked at me again as my hand rested on his cheek, ready to claim him back. "I feel like I've been... reborn." He blushed, then shrugged almost apologetically.

I tried to smile, though am not as practiced at the reassuring gesture as Jim. "Let us simply say that you... found a beach to walk on," I offered, remembering his need for that private freedom.

His brows narrowed, and his arms rose around me as he came into my embrace. "We've been... home, haven't we, Spock?" he repeated fervently.

It seemed important to him, this concept of home. "Yes, Jim," I murmured. "We have been home together."

It is apparently how he sees death itself: a freedom, a release, a refuge. But not a place to dwell.

Somehow, I will make a home for him here. Now. Among the living, away from the dead. And if ever we must make that long dark journey again, we will make it together... or not at all.

Perhaps then it will be more of a challenge than living. Though I know it will never be more of a challenge than... loving.

Tonight, we shall turn the temperature down in my quarters and huddle together beneath a thin blanket. Tonight we will remember death as we celebrate life.

We will never be cold again.

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