

Children of the Desert

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Children of the Desert

by [Beatrice Otter](#)

Summary

There are many hybrid children on the new Vulcan homeworld, including Spock and Nyota's children. Things don't always go smoothly.

Notes

Vulcan words are taken/adapted from the [Vulcan Language Dictionary](#). “mekh” means parent, I adapted it to mean “stepmother.” “Jata” is a girl’s name in Kikuyu, it means “Star”

Betaed by Laura JV

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

“But that’s the way Grandma taught me to sing!”

Sevakis, daughter of Supar, daughter of V’Hal, last (for now) of the House of Tokel, of the House of Surak by marriage, stared down at her house-daughter, Jata Uhura. The child stuck her lower lip out theatrically and folded her arms, though it was not long before she lowered her eyes as was proper for a child. “Your grandmother teaches you Human music, specifically of the Luhya tribe; those songs must be sung in the Luhya manner. However, the song you were singing was a *Vulcan* song, and should be sung in the style that *I* have taught you.”

“Yes, to-mekh.” The words and body language were proper, but the tone was one Sevakis had long since learned to recognize as rebellious. She had also, long since, learned that further argument at this juncture would be futile.

“As you are finished with your academic work, you are free for the afternoon,” Sevakis said. “If you intend to play outside, please remember to drink enough water.” Jata, being three-quarters human, required more water than her cousins and half-siblings; and still being young, she often forgot this fact.

“Yes, to-mekh.” Jata walked sedately to the door, but once outside the house, she took off running to where her half-sibling Skon was playing.

Sevakis watched her go, and silently hoped that her younger house-child Nyongesa would be easier to handle when he reached that age. At the moment, he and T’Pau were old enough not to need to be in arm’s reach, and young enough not to chafe at being kept to the veranda with the family sehlat keeping a watchful eye on them. She checked that the two youngest had enough water and juice available, and that they had drunk sufficient fluids, and that neither required a trip to the toilet. Stifling a sigh, she reminded herself that Sarek and Kamala would be home soon, and then it would be three adults and a sehlat caring for six children, instead of one adult and a sehlat caring for four. Childcare was one of the most necessary and important tasks on Keshta'shivau, and one in which almost all adults shared; Sevakis had taken the appropriate courses and knew herself to be moderately skilled in the endeavor. But if she had felt any great draw to it, she would have chosen it as a career.

If she had chosen it as a career, she would be dead. For she would have been at home in House Tokel's clanstead, caring for the children of her House, when the Devastation came.

She returned to her seat on the couch, across from her old friend Toval, situating herself to see the children through the window. Truly, it was fortunate that they had been on tour together on Earth when Vulcan was destroyed; she could not imagine trying to rebuild her life and her house on this new homeworld without him. At the moment, Toval was occupied with feeding a bottle to his infant son.

“I find it curious,” Toval said without looking up, “that the House of Surak should feel so little concern for the raising of its heirs that it should

leave them in the care of others for months at a time. I understand Sarek's duty as the most experienced member of the diplomatic corps to represent Keshta'shivau at delicate moments, and this must sometimes take him from home. I understand Spock's wish to represent Vulcan in Starfleet, and to maintain whatever he can of the life he would have led had Vulcan not been destroyed. That *both* should be the case at the same time, leaving the children of the house to be raised by one who had never stepped foot into that House's province, nor met a member of that house before the Devastation, is most ... singular."

Sevakis poured tea for both of them as Toval burped the infant. On Vulcan, before the Devastation, they would have had family to help care for the children while they talked. "Sarek has taken his children with him, and will not be gone long, this time. I prefer to remember that by the time these children are grown, and Spock and I bear children for my own House, I will have much more experience and skill as a parent than I do now." Truly, it would have been more logical to raise the first group of children as members of House Tokel, while Spock was serving in Starfleet. But his paramour Nyota wished children of her own, who would of course be children of Spock's house, and the fertility period of Human women was so much shorter than that of Vulcan women that it was necessary for her to bear them now, and raising children for two Houses concurrently in the same household would be impractical.

They could have chosen Tokel first, and given Nyota's children to be raised by Sarek and Kamala, but Spock ... had not wanted his father to have primary guardianship over his children, and after hearing his reasoning, Sevakis had understood. And it was soothing to be a part of a House greater than just herself, even if two sets of mates and a paramour and the associated children were a far smaller household than any Sevakis had ever lived in. It was bigger than most Vulcans had, these days.

Only, it would have been comforting to speak her own language to her children and tend the household in the way her parents had taught her as a child.

She sipped her tea as Toval crooned a lullaby in his warm alto voice, so much quieter than she was used to hearing when singing next to him in a concert hall or temple. As usual, it did not take long to lull the boy to sleep, nor to put him down in the nursery for his nap.

Once that was done, Toval settled back onto his seat with a small sigh, clutching his tea with appreciation. They sat in companionable silence, broken only by the sounds of children playing outside. When they were done, Toval took the tea set to the kitchen to wash it while Sevakis went out to check on the older children and bring Jata a glass of water. (Jata had, as usual, forgotten, but once presented with a glass, drank it thirstily.) I-Chaya the Sehlut watched her as she walked by, and she thanked him for his service—he had gotten Nyongesa to fall asleep nestled between his front paws, and from the way T'Pau's eyelids drooped as she played with I'Chaya's fur, she would not be far behind.

"Have you looked over the preliminary list of songs and performers for the Rain Festival?" Toval asked when Sevakis returned. Before Vulcan's destruction, the question would not have been necessary. But before Vulcan's destruction, neither of them had had children, and (if they had had any) would not have been raising them alone. Rebuilding Vulcan culture was as important as rebuilding the Houses and the population; but it was difficult to balance long-term cultural goals with the immediate needs of children. Also, before Vulcan's destruction there would have been a staff of administrators and craftspeople to specialize in the practical details, and directors to handle the artistic decisions, so that performers such as Sevakis and Toval might have no concerns save the music itself.

They had had the full company and support staff with them on tour, of course; but the other members had scattered throughout the colony and each had at least as many additional responsibilities as Sevakis and Toval.

"Yes," Sevakis said. "I find it curious that the T'Challa Ode was not selected. It is difficult, to be sure, but it is the best and most honored setting of that text." And, as they had only the resources to fully stage *one* of the major feasts per year, it should by all means be done to the best of their abilities.

"I understand that High Priestess T'Lal may not be available at the time of the Rain Festival," Toval said delicately.

Sevakis raised an eyebrow. "Unfortunate." There were only two things that would prevent a priestess from celebrating the Rain Festival, and if T'Lal were dying all of Keshta'shivau would know. Therefore, it must be the other reason. "Lady Mother Sikren is not ready to be elevated?" There were many parts of the Rain Festival that could be celebrated by any, whether lay or cleric; but the presider must be a high priestess. And T'Lal and Sikren were the only surviving members of the priesthood with the voice to sing the T'Challa Ode.

"I understand it will be some years yet before her studies and experience are sufficient," Toval said.

"I see." Sevakis did. Of course the priesthood (what little of it had survived) must judge fitness for advancement based on the performance of duties rather than on musical skills. However, it was very inconvenient from the musician's point of view.

Sevakis was singing vocal exercises, warming up her voice for practice, when the comconsole chimed. As she had programmed it to announce itself only for high-priority messages, she could not ignore it and continue with her work. She left her music room and went to the comconsole, tapping it on. "Sevakis," she said.

It was Sorel, the administrator of the school. "Your house-daughter, Jata, has struck another child. You must come for her."

Sevakis raised an eyebrow. "That is most unlike her. What were the circumstances?"

"Is that relevant?" Sorel said. "She has reverted to her Human heritage. They are prone to violence, as you no doubt know."

It was true that Humans were in *general* more violent than Vulcans; however, the fact remained that Jata was not personally prone to it. As the school should know. "I will be there shortly," Sevakis said.

The interview with the administrator was unsatisfactory. Sorel did not care *why* Jata had struck the other child, only that she had done so, and that her training be adapted so that she would not do so again. It was soon apparent that any answers would have to come from Jata. A few minutes' speech with the teacher who had witnessed the altercation proved similarly lacking. Thus it was that when Sevakis escorted Jata

home, she knew very little more than she had when she received the administrator's message.

This was most annoying. Providing behavior modification in ignorance of the offense was ineffective.

She and Jata made the trip home in silence. Emotions whipped around Jata like a sandstorm; Sevakis' mental acuity was only average, but no touch was necessary to be bombarded with anger, shame, and self-righteousness. It was no wonder she had been sent home; she would have been a disruption to all in the building.

At home Sevakis poured Jata a glass of water and fixed her a snack. Proper nutrition and blood sugar levels were important for all children, but if Jata had been fully-Vulcan she would already be learning the biofeedback controls to regulate her energy and attention levels. A review of Human scientific studies and consultation with Sarek had determined that it would be better to wait, and thus outside means were necessary to good regulation. And Sevakis did *not* want to have this conversation with a child whose bad mood was made worse by bodily concerns.

When Jata had finished eating—still in a mulish silence—Sevakis spoke. "Tell me what happened, from the beginning, from your perspective."

"Why?" Jata said, practically spitting the words. "*You don't care.*"

"That is untrue," Sevakis said. "A physical altercation—other than 'roughhousing' with your siblings, which I am told is normal for humans—is atypical behavior for you. Therefore, a precipitating event is likely. Whatever correction or training you receive as a result of today's events will be ineffective if the true causes are hidden from me."

"But I'm *just a human*," she said. "Circumstances are irrelevant."

Jata's vocabulary was not normally skewed to larger words. She understood them; she rarely chose to use them. Therefore, there was a high probability that she was quoting someone. This significantly strengthened the hypothesis that there was a causal event at school that the teachers had handled improperly.

"You have two choices," Sevakis said. "You may tell me verbally what transpired, or you may allow me to read your memories. The second choice will give me far greater accuracy when I return to speak with your teachers about this incident."

"You're going back to talk with them again? Why?"

"Because I believe there is a strong likelihood that they have not taken all the factors into account," Sevakis explained patiently. "Your behavior was inappropriate. But as it was also uncharacteristic of you, I wish to make sure that all factors are taken care of to prevent another incident."

"You mean you think the teachers didn't handle it right," Jata said, narrowing her eyes.

"Yes."

"And when you go talk to them, you'll be better able to argue if you know *exactly* what happened, and so you want to read my mind."

"Yes."

"Okay," Jata said, screwing up her face.

"A change in expression is unnecessary," Sevakis said. "In addition, we will both meditate prior to the meld. This will quiet our thoughts and make the meld more effective, with less chance of inadvertently sharing things we do not wish to share." Jata had calmed, some, but her emotions were far from tranquil and Sevakis expected closer contact with them to be unpleasant. Meditation should lessen their force, even while focusing on the events that triggered them.

Jata hopped down from her chair and went over to the meditation corner, where a circle of mats lay around a firepot. She grabbed the firestarter with satisfaction—she and Skon both considered it a privilege to use, as Sevakis herself had at that age—and lit the firepot. Sevakis took her usual spot, and waited until Jata was beginning her meditations before sinking into her own.

She took great care with her meditations, bringing herself to a place of stillness and balance before beginning anything substantive. Once she felt as centered as she could possibly be, she began in earnest. First, she examined her distaste for touching Jata's mind, acknowledging her own emotions in the matter. She carefully sorted through them—fear of the chaos, pride in her own mastery and dislike of having it upset—and tucked them away where Jata would not find them. Knowing her primary caretaker disliked her in any way would be detrimental to Jata's psychological well-being, and so it must be concealed. Once the emotions were acknowledged and examined, the factual basis for them was also hidden away.

Sevakis turned to her analysis of humans in general and Nyota in particular. Their impulsiveness, their aggression, the way they dripped emotions over everything. The way Nyota's emotions sometimes echoed through Spock to Sevakis when they were all on the same planet. The way the Uhura clan sometimes undermined Sevakis' authority with the children, without even realizing what they were doing. All of this was examined and locked away where it could not touch Jata.

Sevakis then focused on her duty to Jata. Jata, her house-daughter. Jata, whose voice was pleasing and whose vocal skills were advancing adequately. Jata, whose affection for and care of her siblings was highly appropriate. Every positive thought and feeling about Jata that Sevakis could muster was brought to the forefront, explored, and allowed to infuse her thoughts. All children needed affection and validation, and a mostly-human child more so than a Vulcan one. When Sevakis was confident in her control, she let herself rise to full consciousness and opened her eyes.

Jata was staring at her.

"Are you ready?" Sevakis asked.

"Yes, to-mekh," Jata said respectfully.

Sevakis raised her hand to Jata's temple, and began.

Jata had managed to bring the incident to the forefront of her mind, easily accessible; Sevakis sent a thought of praise for her dexterity before immersing herself in the memory.

A boy in her class. Kopol, son of T'Roong. Unpleasant. A stream of whispered insults, growing louder and more confident as the teacher failed to intervene. A pattern of harassment—and today was not the first such day, nor even the worst, but merely the one on which Jata's control broke. The fight, and its aftermath—Jata led away in tears, Kopol remaining with the class and continuing with lessons. Jata's emotions buffeted Sevakis, but her meditations had been sufficient to restrain their intensity.

Sevakis gently broke the meld, satisfied that she was aware of all the circumstances. It had been less unpleasant than she had feared, though more so than she had hoped.

"Did you *see* what Kopol *said*?" Jata burst out.

"We are indoors, Jata, there is no need to shout," Sevakis said. "I did. He was utterly wrong to treat you or anyone else in that fashion, and it was inappropriate of your teacher to allow it. However, that does not change the fact that your response was wrong. Violence never solves anything."

"But he wouldn't *shut up*!" Jata said, crossing her arms. "At least he won't say it anymore!"

"Are you sure?" Sevakis said. "Now that he knows he can get a response out of you—and one which would seem to prove at least *some* of his beliefs right—he may increase his efforts. In any case, there were many things you could have done that would have been more effective and less self-destructive."

Jata frowned. "Like *what*?" she said, clearly disbelieving.

Sevakis raised an eyebrow. "First and most obviously, you could have notified me of the situation. Today was not an isolated incident, merely the predictable result of a long-standing pattern. Once it became obvious your teachers were failing in their duty in this matter, you should have told me about this situation so that I could intervene. As your house-mother, it is *my* duty to ensure that your education is served, and Kopol's behavior clearly undermined that."

"None of my teachers did anything," Jata said, a little uncertainly.

"As I said, this was wrong of them," Sevakis said. "But the fact that they failed in *their* duty does not mean that I shall fail in *mine*. Their behavior is unacceptable, and will cease. So will Kopol's."

"Yay!" Jata said.

"Your behavior, too, will be corrected," Sevakis said. "This correction will take three forms. First, you will research Terran and Vulcan history and political theory for non-violent responses to harassment, and write a paper on it. Second, because you concealed this situation from me until it had reached untenable levels, you will also research the benefits of Vulcan clan and family structure when under attack, the duties of a parent, and the intertwining and balance of individual needs with group needs. I would suggest interviewing your grandfather Sarek for details specific to your clan. Third, you will apologize to your fellow students for disrupting their studies. Fourth, you will add an extra meditation each day for the next month to examine these issues."

"But it was his fault!"

"The provocation was," Sevakis said. "Your reaction, however, was not. Or do you wish to cede him control over *your* thoughts and emotions? I believe he would abuse the privilege."

Jata hunched her shoulders and looked down. Sensing grudging agreement, Sevakis did not expand on the issue.

"You cannot control *his* actions, nor those of your teachers," Sevakis said. "You can, however, control your own. And although it felt, in the moment, that you had no other options, this is not the case. I wish you to be aware of those options in case a similar event occurs in the future. If it does, what will be your first response?"

"To tell you," said Jata slowly.

"Excellent," Sevakis said. "You have begun to learn." She consulted her time sense as she rose—there were 2.14 hours left until the end of school. "You have three options at this time. You may do the schoolwork which you are missing by being at home, you may begin work on one of the papers I have assigned, or you may meditate."

Jata sighed. "Schoolwork," she said heavily, blowing out the light in the firepot.

Sevakis extracted the PADD with the assignments on it and handed it to her house-daughter.

"What are you going to do?" Jata asked as she took it.

"Arrange a meeting with your teacher and the school administrator," Sevakis said.

The meeting was simple to schedule; Jata's teacher Torval was free as soon as classes ended, as was Sorel the administrator. Thus it was that, 2.24 hours later, Sevakis entered the administrator's office and accepted a cup of hirat juice.

"I hope this event will not be repeated," Sorel said. "It was highly disruptive to the entire school."

"I trust that it will not," Sevakis said.

"What measures are you taking to discipline your charge?" Torval asked.

"Several different measures," Sevakis said. "What measures are you taking to prevent Kopol and his friends from creating the circumstances that led to her outburst?"

"To what do you refer?" Sorel asked.

"A group of Jata's classmates—led by Kopol, son of T'Roong—have, over the last months, carried on a coordinated plan of harassment which has created a hostile environment for Jata. Torval has been aware of this but has chosen to ignore it, giving Kopol free reign to bully Jata. Her outburst, inappropriate as it was, was provoked, and any corrective measures will be ineffective as long as the underlying causes are not addressed."

"Why did you not raise this matter before this?" Sorel said.

"Jata did not inform me. Because none of their teachers intervened to protect her from Kopol's inappropriate behavior, she did not believe that I would, either."

"I noticed no such behavior," Torval noted. "Perhaps she is lying to protect herself. I understand the truthfulness of Humans is a chancy thing."

"Apparently, so is that of Vulcans," Sevakis said, raising an eyebrow. "Either that, or your observations of your pupils are substandard. I asked Jata to show me today's incident through a mindmeld, because it is highly uncharacteristic of her and I wished to understand her actions before seeking to modify them. In yesterday's incident, for example, Kopol called Jata a barbarian *shultah*, the daughter of a primate, at standard conversational volume, within three meters of you. If you did not hear, perhaps you should schedule a meeting with an audiologist."

"Both statements being factually accurate, I saw no reason to intervene," Torval said stiffly. "Humans are primates."

Vulcans, however, were not, being more closely related to the sehlat and other animals reminiscent of Terran bears. "And we are ursines. But I doubt that you would care to hear your mother called a bear, complete with animal noises," Sevakis pointed out. "In any case, the question at issue is not the truthfulness of such statements but the effect created by them. Kopol is the ringleader of a group which uses such statements against Jata and the other hybrids to isolate, distract, demean, and provoke them, creating a hostile environment. He routinely tries to interrupt Jata's concentration during critical moments and thus sabotage her education. The malice in his actions far outweighs the technical accuracy of his comments—and many of them are *not* accurate at all, but rather based on highly bigoted assumptions, showing his *own* failures in logic. It is your duty to protect your students from harassment and correct their logic, and you have done neither."

"His words, as I have heard them, are accurate," Torval said. "Humans are intellectually, telepathically, physically, and morally inferior to Vulcans."

"In many cases," Sevakis acknowledged. "Yet the purpose of education is to assist each child in rising to their fullest potential. A hostile environment—such as the one you have allowed to flourish—prevents children from learning and stunts their capacities for life. I can provide you with several studies to this effect—both Vulcan and Human—if you require them."

The tips of Torval's ears twitched, as did his fingers, though he at least had the discipline to keep his face impassive. Truly, it was best that this had come to the forefront while Nyota was far away. She was an admirable linguist, but could only maintain the subtlety required for proper insults (such as the one Sevakis had just given Torval, by implying both incompetence and ignorance) when she was cool and collected. This required delicacy, if it was to succeed. A full-frontal assault would only harden resistance.

"That will not be necessary."

Sevakis inclined her head in acknowledgment, and switched tactics. "As to the accuracy of Kopol's words, while *some* are accurate, many are not. If you believe otherwise, perhaps we should hold a truth-finding about them. Not just for Jata, but for the other hybrid children with whom he has exchanged words. I am sure that their parents would be amenable, and it would be an interesting evaluation of the school's efficacy in its primary goals. No doubt it would be educational for the children, as well; none of them will have had the chance to see such a thing in person."

Truth-finding was a ritual that predated Surak, though he had cleansed it of barbarian elements and elevated it from a minor rite to a great ceremony. Designed to reveal truths hidden by design or by differing points of view, a truth-finding was a lengthy affair. It involved testimony, evidence analysis, ritual acknowledgment of bias, and was overseen by a priestess of Seleya for telepathic monitoring. It would, no doubt, be educational for the children. It would also, no doubt, be embarrassing for the school, from what she had seen in Jata's memories.

"That will not be necessary at this juncture," Sorel said. "I will investigate the matter."

"Please do," Sevakis said. "It would break my duty as Jata's house-mother to allow her to remain in a hostile environment which sabotages her potential, now that I am aware of it. As such, I will be removing her and her siblings from school until such time as a plan is in place to prevent further such problems. At that time, Jata and the others will return, and Jata will apologize to her classmates for the disruption caused by her actions." She tilted her head. "I will also, of course, have to inform the Head of her House what I have done, and why." Sarek might wish to remove his own children, once he knew of the insult to his granddaughter, and she could see Sorel considering this. And as a member of the Council, Sarek's word carried much weight.

After they had had a few seconds to consider that, Sevakis continued. "And I must also speak with the parents of the other hybrids in the school, so that they may make informed decisions about the education of their own offspring." Given the sizable gender imbalance of Vulcan survivors, quite a number of Vulcan men had married alien women. Sevakis did not know the statistics for this school in particular, but hybrid children would be no small percentage of the student body.

"We will present you with a procedure for handling these situations as soon as reasonably possible," Sorel said.

"And what of Jata's apology to Kopol?" Torval said. "Regardless of Kopol's actions, it was highly inappropriate."

"Indeed it was," Sevakis said. "But the reparation of the breach between the two—and between our two Houses—will be handled privately. I would not wish to distract you from your other duties." She refrained from further insult, though she did not wish to; he had damaged her house-daughter and other children in his care, and by his behavior shown that at least *some* Vulcans were little better than the Humans he so despised.

With nothing further to discuss, Sevakis left. She had another meeting to make.

Sevakis walked calmly up to the door of the Federation-issue shelter in which Kopol's family lived. Although all of the original pre-fabricated dwelling units remained in use, few of them remained in use for *housing*, six years after the planet was settled. Some were dormitories for temporary workers and unmarried Vulcans; most families now lived in homes built on Keshta'shivau which were larger and more comfortable, and customized as to clan and house and personal taste. She wondered why Kopol's family had not chosen to build such a house ... or what had prevented them.

Inside, the domicile was as homelike (for a Vulcan) as one could make a plastic and metal can. It was painted a soothing ochre, with intricate tapestries hanging on the wall. They were not replicas of traditional designs; she could tell by the motifs that they had been made here, on Keshta'shivau. She wondered who had done them.

But she was not here for the artwork. When the ceremonies of welcome were completed, she got right to business. It would not do to let T'Roong and her husband have any advantage, real or perceived. "What correction have you implemented for Kopol to curb his harassment of his classmates?"

"Harassment?" T'Roong lifted a delicate eyebrow. "I believe that if any harassment were occurring, Torval would have notified us. Other than Jata's *physical* abuse of Kopol, that is, which we have been fully apprised of."

"Jata's reaction was excessive and inappropriate," Sevakis said. "But Kopol's actions in the weeks preceding were *also* inappropriate. And while Jata reacted *once*, and is being suitably corrected so that it will not recur, Kopol's actions were calculated and of long duration. Jata will, of course, apologize for her action ... but Kopol must also be corrected, and apologize, for the harassment which precipitated it."

"If there were any harassment, the teacher would have noticed," T'Roong said flatly. Her husband sat off to the side, a silent observer; after all, Kopol and his sisters were being raised for T'Roong's House, which made his discipline a matter for her to arrange. If Spock were here—or even Sarek—Sevakis would not be handling this affair.

Perhaps it was for the best that they were *not* here. In this circumstance, given the reason for the trouble, Spock's own Human heritage would be a weakness too easily exploited.

"The teacher believed, erroneously, that it was acceptable to create a hostile environment for the hybrid children, and so harassment was ignored—and even, in some cases, subtly encouraged," Sevakis explained. "That will not be continuing. Kopol seems to have been one of the ringleaders of the bullying, so he may find it ... a difficult adjustment. Particularly if he attempts to persist in his behavior. Requiring him to apologize would underscore the difference in expected behavior, and probably lessen his difficulties in adapting."

T'Roong ignored this. "The hybrid children are disruptive, as your daughter has shown. They cannot keep up academically, telepathically, or logically—it would be better for them to be in separate schools, where they cannot interfere with the work of the Vulcan children."

"Perhaps *all* disruptive children should be put in a separate school," Sevakis said. "By any measure, that would include Kopol, as he was the one who instigated long-term problems, and provoked the major incident. In addition, he might benefit from special attention from a tutor—perhaps then he might catch up to where Jata is, academically. Or perhaps focusing on his own studies instead of blaming other children for his own shortcomings would make up the difference."

"Kopol's performance in school is entirely adequate."

"I understand his telepathic skills are quite impressive," Sevakis said. Which might actually be part of the problem; what little she could sense of his mother's mind was highly unpleasant. The father was better shielded. If Kopol was picking up his attitudes from her, it was no wonder he was unpleasant himself. "Artistically, he has shown many gifts. In other areas, he requires help. Jata was originally supposed to tutor him in science and math, but was reassigned when he refused to learn from her." That had been an interesting thing to learn, and she wondered if he had seen it as an insult, to be tutored by a hybrid. If that was the reason he gave himself to excuse his bad behavior.

"Or perhaps she proved less advanced than she was thought," T'Roong said. "I find it hard to believe that a hybrid could keep up in a Vulcan class, much less excel—their parent stock is less capable, intellectually and physically, and the rampant emotionalism cannot be bred out in a single generation."

That was true in *general*, but generalities could not be allowed to override the abilities of each individual in question. "Jata is many lessons ahead of Kopol, and has successfully tutored other students in need of assistance," Sevakis pointed out. "There are many reasons that such a student match may not work out. But in this case, it was almost certainly the attitudes that led to his later campaign of harassment against her and her fellow hybrids. Which, in turn, implies that the reason for his own actions may be shame or jealousy."

T'Roong opened her mouth to speak, but Sevakis did not give her an opening. "In any case, we have wandered from the point, which is this: his behavior was inappropriate, and it will stop. The school is even now composing a plan to ensure that all harassment ceases. Jata's reaction was inappropriate, as well, and she is being corrected for it. She will apologize to Kopol ... as soon as he apologizes to her for *his* misbehavior."

The rest of the meeting did not go well. As she had expected, she was not able to extract from T'Roong any indication that Kopol would be corrected in any way for his behavior, nor that he would apologize for it to Jata. Still, Sevakis could return home secure in the knowledge that she had done her duty to the best of her abilities.

The next day was taken up with teaching the children, which then required that her work on the Rain Festival be postponed, requiring her to work late into the night. Keeping the children home from school was not a sustainable, long-term solution. Fortunately, Sevakis did not believe that it would need to be.

It had taken a week to arrange a meeting at a time that would allow all the parents of Jata's fellow-hybrid classmates to attend. Even Sarek and his wife Kamala had returned in time. The school had not, thus far, responded with a plan to prevent the harassment.

They were gathered in the House of Surak's gathering space, which Nyota and Kamala called the "Family Room." Sevakis did not understand this, as every room in the house was the family's, but the nomenclature seemed to be sticking. By pre-Devastation standards, it was tiny, as it only held room for two bonded pairs, a paramour, and their offspring, and most Vulcans tended to live communally—all members of a House together, or even (if the Houses were small) more than one House of the same clan together. For Keshta'shivau, however, it was large; these days a House might be nothing more than a single person and their children. There was enough room for everyone, if only barely, and only with the bondmates sitting closer than was strictly proper. The children were outside playing, the older ones taking care of the youngest, while sehlat's stood guard.

When all were settled, Sevakis explained the situation, her actions, and the school's unsatisfactory response.

"I *told* you something was wrong," Jane Baker said, as soon as Sevakis was finished. Jane turned to her husband Storr. "T'Vran has *not* been acting like herself, and she's falling behind in school, and I *told* you something was wrong."

It was only with difficulty that Sevakis kept herself from wincing at the buffeting of Jane's emotions. The woman must be unusually psi-strong, for a Human, to project so; it would have made her a desirable mate, but could her husband not teach her to shield better?

"You did indeed," Storr said quietly. "I apologize for disregarding your concerns. Evidently, my evaluation of the school's faculty and staff was unduly generous. And I assumed T'Vran would inform us if there was a problem."

A survey of the assembled parents revealed that eight hybrid children had either informed their parents that they were being harassed at school, or suffered personal changes and academic issues that were likely caused by a hostile environment. This was not all, or even most, of the children, but it was a significant percentage.

"And we cannot discount that others may have also been targeted, but better at controlling their response," Stonn of the House of Satiil pointed out. "My daughter V'Tel, for example, is a very placid child. I suggest that we all inquire of our children directly."

"It's jealousy, pure and simple," said Altantsetseg. Sevakis had understood that all Humans had a personal name and a family name, but with Altantsetseg that did not seem to be the case. "You'll note that it's the better students who are being harassed." She shook her head. "Never thought I'd be *glad* my son's struggling with his literature and philosophy, but at least in this case it seems to have spared him." She grasped her husband's hand.

"A week's time should have been more than sufficient for a remediation plan to be designed," said T'Pol, of the Clan Mallrik. "That no such plan has been presented suggests that the school is not properly concerned with handling the situation. A truth-finding may indeed be necessary. I will begin drafting the request, and so notify the school."

"I find it likely the administrators believe it to be an isolated incident," Storr said. "If so, they may believe the removal of Jata and her siblings to be all the correction required—and far easier for *them* than examining the prejudices which led to her shameful mistreatment."

"That may be so, but it's no excuse," Altantsetseg pointed out. "They don't want to do their job right, so Sevakis has to do it for them? I don't think so!"

"I agree," Storr said, "but complaints from additional families—proving that it was *not* an isolated incident, but part of a larger pattern they must correct—might provide the impetus they require to solve the problem, without requiring a full formal truth-telling."

"They should not require further impetus," T'Pol said. "And a truth-telling would be educational for the children."

"I'm sorry, I'm not quite sure what we're talking about," said Taraji Owens. She shook her head. "Is it some sort of inquiry?"

"It is indeed," Sarek said. "It is also a sacred rite presided over by the priesthood. All concerned parties must come and speak their truth, and open themselves up to correction and guidance. Legal evidence and data analysis are often included, though they are not required."

"Priests?" Taraji asked. "Like, you mean adept-priests or just garden-variety adepts? I mean, are they monitoring for ... falsehoods?"

Sevakis stopped herself from reacting to the profanation, but not all the Vulcans present had her control.

Taraji's husband, Valek, lowered his eyes in shame. "Wife, no Vulcan would ever lie in a truth-telling," he said quietly. "And were one ever to do so, they would be banished, for it would be a repudiation of everything that is ours."

"The presider of the truth-finding is, indeed, an adept," Sarek said. "But their purpose is to ferret out emotions and other signs of unconscious bias, to tell them where further probing might be ... useful. It is a far more delicate thing than merely detecting lies ... which, of course, no Vulcan would ever do at a truth-finding."

"So unconscious biases get dragged out into the light?" Jane said. "It would be ... educational for the teachers, too, it sounds like. But how long does it take? I'm swamped as it is, and I know I'm not the only one here. If we have to, we have to—and it might even be better, in the long run—but I'd rather not take the time if the school is willing to be reasonable."

"In any case, a truth-telling is a much more effective threat if it's held in reserve," Kamala said. "We should pursue other options, first, with that one hanging over their heads if they don't comply."

Sevakis eyed Sarek; Aside from his explanation to Taraji, he had been uncharacteristically silent, and his shields were, as ever, impenetrable. It was impossible to know what he thought.

"A truth-telling is one of the deepest, most sacred rites of our people," Stonn said stiffly. "They should be honored to participate. It should not be a threat."

Sarek sighed. "While all Vucans *aspire* to the dedication to logic that allows them to receive a truth-telling for their actions with the honor it deserves, in my experience few are capable of such equanimity when faced with the need for it in person. There are ... many truths that such a ritual would bring into the open, and it would undoubtedly be beneficial. But I, too, bear the burden of many responsibilities. And the school should be allowed a short period, now that we can prove the problem to be widespread, to respond to it in their own fashion. If nothing else, by allowing them ample time to address the issue we will have demonstrated our good faith—and their lack of it—when the time for the truth-telling comes."

This was acknowledged to be sound strategy, and the remainder of the meeting was short. Three other families wished to withdraw their children—eight, in all—from school until a solution had been implemented, and an agreement for a teaching rotation was formed. Sevakis was relieved that she would have several days free from teaching to catch up on her work for the Rain Festival.

Sarek lingered after the meeting. Years ago, when she first married Spock, Sevakis would have had to exercise great control at this. Sarek had been a great man and a legend for his political and diplomatic skills since she was a child, and his House was the most prestigious on Vulcan. Sevakis was proficient in her craft, but before the Devastation had not been a particularly notable artist, and she came from a poor and unprepossessing clan. But years of familiarity had given her confidence and a knowledge of his character. In some ways, she knew him better than she knew her husband.

For instance, she could tell despite his diplomat's control that he was uneasy as she waited for him to speak. As the younger and less senior member of the family, it was not her place to speak first.

"Spock was bullied by his classmates as a child," Sarek said at last. He did not look at her, but rather at some memory only he could see.

"I am aware."

"I spoke with his instructors, but accepted their assurances that all that could be done was being done, despite Spock's continuing troubles," Sarek said. "With Spock himself, I focused on developing his control. I took no further actions despite Amanda's continued misgivings, and so the abuse continued. Your actions have been far more effective."

Sevakis considered this, and what Spock had told her (and shown her) of his childhood. "Spock was, at the time, an anomaly, and a highly controversial one. Jata and the rest, on the other hand, are a substantial and established minority. You and Amanda were alone. I have a community to draw on, and as the school has not responded already, it will almost certainly require the concerted efforts of that community to effect the necessary changes."

"I doubt my response would have been different this second time if Solkar were the victim," Sarek admitted. Solkar was five years older than Jata, and frequently travelled with his father throughout the Federation on diplomatic duties. He was in school infrequently enough that even if such abuse were focused upon him, it would not have time to build before he left again.

"He may have been," Sevakis pointed out. "He has no close friends in his age group, and he is one of the oldest of the hybrids. His consistent desires to accompany you in your work may be motivated at least partially by a wish to avoid certain of his classmates."

"I will enquire," Sarek said. "In Spock's case, even if I could not have forced the teachers to protect him, I could have removed him from the abusive environment, as you have in with Jata and the others. It would have been a simple matter to arrange for tutors. It did occur to me. But I believed that such a move would be, in some way, conceding that Spock was not capable of handling school with his peers."

"Some would have taken it that way," Sevakis acknowledged neutrally. That such uninformed and illogical opinions existed did not outweigh the damage it had done to Spock to go back to that school every day, knowing that no one would protect him. Such people would probably have found fault with Spock—and with Sarek—regardless of what actions Sarek had taken.

"I should have done so regardless of their opinion," Sarek said. "Thank you, for the care and protection you have given my grandchildren."

"One does not thank logic," Sevakis said. "Or duty."

He bowed to her. "You are correct," he said. "Nevertheless. I thank you."

She bowed in acknowledgment.

"That *cow!*" Nyota exclaimed. "I'm going to kill her! Saying that about Jata!"

Sevakis was glad that this conversation was happening over subspace with *Enterprise* several sectors away, because she was sure Nyota's emotions would have been quite distressing. "She was a most unpleasant woman," Sevakis said. "However, the situation is now resolved. The school has an anti-harassment plan in place, and Jata has been back in school for three days. So far, it appears to be effective. I have been requiring detailed descriptions from all of the children about their classmates' attitudes and their teachers' actions, and there has been nothing to note. Jata appears to be in far better mood now."

"I am glad," Spock said.

"You're not going to make her apologize?" Nyota asked.

Sevakis shook her head. "Not until and unless Kopol does, which I believe to be a highly unlikely occurrence."

"Good," Nyota said firmly.

"I assume that, with the plan successfully implemented, there will be no truth-telling?" Spock asked. At her nod, he continued. "It seems a shame. The experience would be beneficial for all the children, even leaving aside the probable changes in the school and the effect on the interpersonal dynamics."

"If you wish, I can request one," Sevakis said. "Your absence during the course of the affair would be more than sufficient reasoning—it would, among other things, create an unbiased record easily transmitted to your ship."

Spock hesitated. Nyota watched him, frowning. Sevakis wondered what the other woman thought about it, but not enough to ask. "I think ... not," he said. "At this point, it would be more likely to breed resentment, and if it finds that the situation is handled, it would make it more difficult to address in the future."

"You believe that such things will recur?" Sevakis asked.

"Not the *same* things, perhaps, but others similarly damaging," Spock said. "My experience of bullies is that they tend to persist in their attitudes, and if the teachers were willing to look the other way once, they will likely do so again once they believe the attention to have died down. *That* is when the truth-telling will be most valuable."

"It is possible that they will truly correct their behavior," Sevakis pointed out. "Whether or not they understand that they were in the wrong, they know now that they are being watched, and not only by me, but by many of the other parents as well."

"They'll probably wait for a while and then start letting things slide again," Nyota said sourly. "I know the type. Humans do it too."

Sevakis raised an eyebrow. "A similarity between our species which would be more beneficial if it were *not* shared," she observed. "In any case, I am watching, as is Sarek—" Spock's face tightened, as if he did not believe his father would do so. It was, of course, his experience that Sarek would not; she was uncertain whether he would be relieved to hear that Sarek had changed, or grieved that such change had not come when it might have benefitted him. "—and the other parents. In addition, I believe that Jata now understands she should come to me for help if trouble recurs."

After settling the issue, and some other minor points of practical discussion, Sevakis called the children to talk to their father and Nyota, one at a time. Jata was first, since she was the one currently in greatest need of support and reassurance.

Sevakis left them to it, and went to practice for the Rain Festival. The winter storms were soon approaching. This storm, however, had been weathered.

End Notes

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