

KiScon

The
Official
Zine



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Editors' Notes

T'Uhura

I already owe so much to KiScon that I didn't think I could be more grateful. From being almost too shy to register for the 2022 con to the honor of being 1lostone's drug dealer (Advil) in Seattle in 2024, I somehow became part of this community that lives up to the ideals of K/S: above all, friendship and the transformative power of love.

Working with Alice West and 1lostone has been a delightful collaboration and a nerd's editorial paradise (*kai'idth* or *kaiidth*?—read on to find out—must we follow Merriam-Webster hyphenation dictates?—guess what, no—shared respect for the semi-colon!). Thank you both!

When I started to read K/S fanfiction, I wasn't prepared for the astounding dynamic between writers and readers, artists and beholders. And so, I would like to especially thank the generosity of the authors who permitted—indeed, welcomed—me to consult on their projects. It has been a pleasure and a privilege.



Alice West

One great thing about KiScon (among the many, many things) is that there is always a zine, whether the con is in person or online. As someone who first discovered fanzines in their



paper form (carefully typed, collated, bound, and sent through snail mail), I'm happy that we carry on the tradition of collecting a variety of stories, poems, and occasional essays together in one place. (And art, too!) Thank you to all the authors, who submitted their creations and then worked with the questions, deletions, corrections, and suggestions from not one but *two* editors ("first pair of eyes" and "second pair of eyes"). We three editors hope each of you is happy with the result.

1lostone and T'Uhura, you are the best! (And while the rules say that sentences never begin with a numeral, I'm doing it anyway.) T'Uhura, your jumping in this year made our work both easier and more enjoyable. You are a skilled editor whose experience and perspective complemented Lost's and mine. Lost, I think we worked together even better this year. I'm so grateful for how available you made yourself to us, your sharp eye during revisions, and your (magical) ability to put the entire zine together, and so beautifully.

Happy reading, everyone!

1lostone

Happy KiScon, all! I am so excited to be part of the triumvirate to bring you this zine. It has been amazing working with Alice West again and bringing T'Uhura into the fold. We have found that we mesh really well, which, if you've ever had to work on a group project together, you know is not always the case. We've conquered time zones, AI data mining, and the various weird technological issues that pop up when three people are working on a major work at the same time. We've discovered a love of shared tropes, the Oxford comma, and (haha, see what I did there?? YEAH!) channeled our latent artistic talent into a—if I do say so myself—truly majestic artistic endeavor. (See Bonus Art!)

I love this community so very much. I am so happy that I have met friends—old and new—and keep finding new ways of falling in love with Kirk and Spock all over again.

Thank you to everyone for your continued support of the KiScon zine. If I could leave you with one last thought: we have a few contributors who have never contributed to the zine before, so if you see them around fandom, be sure to give them some love!



Table of Contents

We Know Not What He'll Do LSpingles	5
Personal Logs Bersakhi23	22
Waterfall (Reimagined) Shelley Butler	32
In Translation Nostra Battista	33
Alternative Modes of Communication Alice West	34
Acts of Omission Cordelia Naismith	44
Curiouser and Curiouser Lichqueenlibrarian	53
My Soul Sails on Solar Winds Thia Wen	54
r/It Takes a Village Foundbyjohndoe	55
Luck and Miracles: A Love Story ArvizuM	71
Celestial Bodies and Universal Constants Lor Vee	78
Sanity and Sangfroid Mazarine A.S.C.	79
Gift Giving Nev	82
Sisyphus and the Dream of Happiness Zjofierose	89
Silver Lining Eldar_of_Zemlya	95
Mine ForFucksSakeJim	96
Connection Shelley Butler	120
Touch, unrequited 1lostone	121
Contributor Roundup	127
Bonus Art!	130



We Know Not What He' ll Do

LSpingles

Spock felt the solidity of the bridge deck beneath him. He felt his ribcage expand with the breath he inhaled. Sargon had touched his mind to alert him of the imminent transfer of his *katra* back to his body from Nurse Chapel's, but after floating so long disembodied, he needed time to regain his mental and physical controls. Feelings of anguish and guilt ripped into his unshielded mind as Kirk's fingers pressed his throat in search of a pulse. He wanted to assure his captain that he was unharmed, but he did not yet have sufficient command of his vocal cords. The emotional bombardment ceased abruptly, leaving a bereft feeling in its wake. During the reprieve, he became aware of Sargon speaking to Kirk.

"I could not allow the sacrifice of one so close to you."

Spock pushed himself unsteadily to a standing position.

"There was enough poison in that hypo to kill ten Vulcans!" Doctor McCoy exploded.

"No, Doctor. I allowed you to believe that to be true so that Henoah would read your thoughts and believe it also," Sargon replied.

"It seems, Doctor, the injection was only enough to cause unconsciousness," Spock explained, pleased he was able to articulate smoothly.

"But Henoah believed and fled the body," confirmed Sargon. "He is destroyed."

Kirk turned to look at Spock. "Where was your consciousness kept?" By now, Spock was able to stand crisply at attention, at least giving the appearance of a full recovery.

"The place Henoah would least suspect, captain." Spock glanced in the direction of Nurse Chapel, automatically sharing the rationale he had been provided. "Thalassa believed Henoah would not suspect the nurse because he had been working closely with her."

"Mister Spock's consciousness was placed in me. We shared consciousness together," chimed Nurse Chapel happily.

Spock kept his eyes rooted to the floor as she spoke. While his mind had been housed with hers, he had done his best to limit any transference and not "share" minds. It was clear from her lack of unease and pleased tone of voice she was not aware that despite his effort he had seen certain fantasies involving him. She had assisted in his recovery, and he did not wish to embarrass her, but neither did he want to encourage her delusions. Would it be a kindness to inform Nurse Chapel that



he did not desire her as a mate? He had thought he had been sufficiently clear after Psi 2000, but the fantasies suggested she still imagined a relationship between them. Leila Kalomi had accused him of being cruel when he bluntly told her the truth at the Academy. *Now is not the time to decide*, he chastised himself.

After taking another moment to center himself, he became aware of his surroundings again. Sargon had been speaking. “. . . allow Thalassa and me to share your bodies again. A last moment together.” Spock bit down on his inside cheek to prevent himself from objecting, as Kirk and Dr. Mulhall had clearly already given their consent and were moving to the upper deck. He focused on reminding himself that Sargon and Thalassa had already demonstrated their integrity and would soon be gone, but he could not watch the interaction. Listening to their words, promising togetherness forever, reminded him again of the price he had almost paid for his silence. He and Kirk were not *telsu*.

Since his obligation to T’Pring had ended 8.2 months ago, he had allowed himself to contemplate a future where Kirk would be his bondmate. The occasional rush of Kirk’s thoughts during their incidental physical contacts had provided fuel for his fantasies—fantasies in which he had the right to sink into the depth of Kirk’s mind and body.

Spock had been pleased 2.1 months ago by his ability to track Kirk to Triskelion. Probing his own mind then, he had discovered a nascent link. The link, formed without conscious intent, suggested that their minds were highly compatible and that a full bond could be formed. Kirk had reminded him last week that he still owed him an explanation for how he had found the abducted team, but out of fear Spock had delayed speaking. Although he believed there was only a 1.7 percent chance Kirk would request that the link be dissolved, Spock had not wanted to risk it. Having the link had saved Kirk’s life and might do so again in the future.

However, from the moment of the transference of his consciousness into Henoah’s sphere, Spock had realized that his silence might have cost him an eternity together with Kirk. As his mind briefly touched Henoah’s during the transfer, Spock had become aware of Henoah’s intent: to keep his own body and to destroy Sargon by killing Kirk’s body. With no bond, if Kirk died, they would be lost from each other forever. Spock could think of no worse fate than for his *katra* to be enshrined for eternity in the Hall of Ancient Thought without the possibility of reuniting with Kirk.

Spock’s racing thoughts quieted as he sensed Kirk’s presence again by his side.

“Sargon and Thalassa seemed content,” Kirk said quietly. Spock raised his head, his eyes captured by the magnetic pull of Kirk’s. Although a small smile lit Kirk’s face, his manner seemed slightly downbeat. Spock wondered the reason.

“Captain,” Spock started, but did not continue, realizing he wanted to ask, “Are you well?” Such a personal question, if he dared it, should be asked in private, not on the bridge. It was all he could do



to prevent himself from reaching out to touch Kirk's thoughts and probing to determine the answer for himself.

"We need to speak. Debrief." Kirk continued in the same muted tone.

"I would benefit from a brief period of meditation." Spock knew he needed time alone. Today's events had given him the impetus to speak to Kirk about bonding, but he needed time to assimilate his thoughts. The refusal had left him discombobulated. His thought patterns were disjointed and disturbing. Moreover, the fantasies he had glimpsed in Nurse Chapel's mind had reminded him again of the disturbing ideas that he knew circulated on the *Enterprise* regarding his possibly predatory sexual behavior. It would be foolish to believe Kirk unaware of the rumors. Further, his actions on Vulcan while in the *plak tow* would only have added credence to any such ideas in the captain's mind. Spock had a vague recollection of obtaining sexual release grinding against Kirk on the sands of Vulcan while in mortal combat. The fact that he had taken pleasure while engaged in such violence was most disturbing. Prior to his *pon farr*, he would have denied the possibility, but the evidence in his underwear when he returned to the ship was conclusive.

Spock blinked, realizing Kirk was speaking. "—relieved as of now. I'll have Chekov take over the science station. If we meet at 1900 hours would that give you sufficient time?"

"Affirmative, Captain."

Spock turned to leave but found Dr. McCoy blocking the way. "I'd like to check you over, Spock. You were knocked unconscious."

"I assure you, Doctor, I am not in need of medical attention."

Kirk quickly put a hand on Dr. McCoy's shoulder. "Bones, I promise I'll order Spock to sickbay after our meeting is finished. Will that suffice?"

Spock refrained from debating the matter with Kirk as the doctor grinned. He simply nodded his head in resignation and left the bridge. He would visit sickbay later.

— * * * —

Spock stepped into his quarters and paused as the doors slid shut behind him. *Henoch has been here. Henoch has used my biometric signature to access not only the science labs to perform the job of constructing the android robots, but to also access my private quarters.* He had not anticipated this when he agreed to the exchange. He had assumed Henoch's behavior would mirror his own. If he had been assigned the task of robot construction, he would have forgone sleep until it was complete. After touching Henoch's mind, he had focused on little other than the danger to Kirk. However, as he now delved deeper into his memory, he recognized a ravenous desire in



Henoch to explore his senses—taste, touch, sight, hearing, smell. He was certain Henoch did not have the skill to play his lyre, but it had been removed from its stand and left carelessly on the floor. His chess set had been pushed aside and in its place was a tray containing an unfinished assortment of foods, as though Henoch had randomly made selections and taken a bite of each. Spock had to control his gag reflex at the sight of a partially eaten chicken leg. Henoch had not respected his request to follow his dietary restrictions. Disquieted, Spock tentatively moved forward into his sleeping quarters. The placement of his Vulcan antiques on the wall was off, as though items had been removed and put back or simply touched before moving on to another, more interesting artifact. More alarming was the sight of an opened bottle of wine on the shelf behind his rumpled bed, and not one, but two wine glasses beside the bottle.

Spock recollected the cryptic exchange he'd had with Sargon after he detailed the plan to destroy Henoch. "I regret that I did not anticipate Henoch's actions. I regret what transpired," Sargon had said.

At the time, Spock assumed Sargon had been apologizing for Henoch's attempt on Kirk's life. "It is illogical to hold you responsible for the actions of another," he had naturally replied.

"Remember that sentiment. Henoch's actions are not your own," Sargon had responded.

Heart racing in his side, Spock stepped forward with a sense of dread. One of the wine glasses was stained with pink lipstick. Spock realized he had ceased to breathe and forced himself to inhale. He recognized his own scent mingled with that of another. With a jerky movement, he snatched the pillow from his bed and noted several blonde hairs. He made himself analyze the evidence.

The musky nature of his own scent suggested Henoch had been sexually aroused and may have engaged in sexual intercourse. Based on the floral scent on the pillow and the color of the lipstick, Spock assumed that Henoch had been with a female. He was aware Henoch had an interest in women. The first words he had heard Henoch speak while trapped in the sphere came back to him.

"Hello. Oh, you are a lovely female. A pleasant sight to wake up to after half a million years." Henoch had been speaking to Nurse Chapel.

The memory triggered an undeniable truth. Henoch had bedded Nurse Chapel. The perfume scent was the same one he had breathed in on the bridge when she stood near him. It suddenly occurred to him that the scenes he had seen in her mind were her actual memories, not sexual fantasies, as he had assumed.

He dropped the pillow on the bed and backed up until he hit the wall, then staggered into his sitting area and collapsed into his desk chair. He rested his elbows on his desk, his fingers automatically clasped together to prevent his hands from shaking. His head bowed forward to rest atop his



clenched hands, and his eyes closed. He inhaled deeply through his nose, paused, and exhaled with a small whoosh, losing count of his breaths, until he was calm enough to think clearly again.

My body was used against my wishes. I have been violated. There was no one to blame but himself, as he had agreed to the transfer. At the time the choice to offer up his body had seemed logical. McCoy's outburst about the transfer "being indecent" had seemed like one of the doctor's usual emotional exaggerations. However, McCoy had been correct. In his enthusiasm for the opportunity for scientific advancement, Spock had not considered the consequences of giving up control of his body to another. He had blithely assumed Henoeh would treat his body with respect and act as he himself would. Much as Spock wanted to cleanse himself and his room, he knew that was inappropriate. His quarters were now a possible crime scene. He had seen only glimpses of Nurse Chapel's memories. *Did Henoeh use my Vulcan abilities to coerce her? Does she remember what occurred?* He was not certain that everything that had flashed before his eyes earlier had been consensual. *Am I guilty of assault? Are there potentially more victims?*

As painful as the conversation would be, Spock believed his best course of action would be to speak to Nurse Chapel.

— * * * —

Spock pressed the buzzer to Nurse Chapel's quarters. He had allowed himself an hour of meditation to try to accept Henoeh's violation of his body, and to rebuild his shields for what he anticipated would be an emotionally charged conversation. His approach would depend on whether Nurse Chapel appeared to be aware of what had occurred. It remained unclear in his own mind whether he preferred her to remember or not.

A mind-wipe by Henoeh would increase the probability that the encounter was nonconsensual. If she did not appear to remember, he would thank her for her assistance in holding his *katra* and leave to inform Kirk. He anticipated that Kirk would consult with Dr. McCoy to determine who best, and how, to inform Nurse Chapel of the sexual assault.

If she did remember the encounter, Spock knew that his presence would have the potential to cause her stress, particularly if not all of Henoeh's actions had been consensual. But recalling how composed Nurse Chapel had been in his presence on the bridge, he concluded that she could likely deal with an initial inquiry without risk of harm. He admitted that his own preference for a private conversation might be biasing his analysis. Spock entered after her shout of "come in."

"Mister Spock."

As he stepped into her room, Spock observed that Nurse Chapel averted her eyes in a most uncharacteristic manner. After uttering his name, she remained unusually quiet, tightening the



knotted belt to her full-length white bath robe and clutching the collar under her chin. Her hair was damp. Evidently, she had showered after her shift. Unpleasant as it was to acknowledge, Spock concluded that his presence was making her uncomfortable. *I should have considered that she would feel more vulnerable alone in her quarters as compared to the crowded bridge. Her behavior suggests that she remembers at least some of what transpired between us.*

Spock took a step back, clasping his hands behind his back to appear less threatening. He started speaking without making eye contact to give her a moment to adjust to his presence. “I apologize for arriving unannounced.” He caught and held her gaze as he continued. “I believe you have guessed why I have come.” The flush of red that spread over her cheeks was confirmation even before her quick nod.

“I am aware my being here is making you uncomfortable. I have no desire to hurt you any further than I may have already. My preference would be to speak with you privately about what transpired in my quarters; however, I understand if you do not wish to converse with me at all, or would like others present. Do you wish to call security?”

“Heavens, no!” The wave of a hand that accompanied Nurse Chapel’s exclamation allowed Spock to observe some bruising before she clutched at the collar of her robe again. “I don’t want security present. The last thing I want is an audience. I’m embarrassed enough already. I was hoping you would never know. I was worried you might have picked up something from my mind. But you left the bridge without giving me any particular notice, and when you didn’t turn up immediately on my doorstep, I thought I was in the clear.”

Spock cleared his throat. “I attempted to focus elsewhere to protect your privacy, but I did see some glimpses in your mind. I initially dismissed what I saw as normal Human sexual fantasy.”

“There’s no need for you to be backed up against the wall like that. I’m not afraid of you. I know you’re not Henoah.” With a small smile, Nurse Chapel pointed to her seating area. “Let’s sit down. We might as well be as comfortable as we can be.” After they both were seated, she asked, “What made you realize it wasn’t just my wild imagination?”

Spock flattened his hands on the tabletop to prevent the urge to fidget. “There was physical evidence in my quarters.” He did not want to catalogue it all. “When I identified the scent of your perfume on my pillow, I knew what I had seen was real, not fantasy.”

“I’m sorry. I can’t imagine what it was like for you to find out like that. I never imagined he wouldn’t clean up, but then again, I guess he didn’t plan to give your quarters back to you.” Nurse Chapel touched his wrist briefly. His shields held. “I want you to know it was not my intent when I agreed to join Henoah for a drink in your quarters.”



“What was your intent?” The question had left his mouth without conscious volition.

“Simply that. A drink and perhaps a little kissing and touching. It’s been a while since anyone showed any real interest in me and I knew I had caught Henocho’s eye. It was flattering. Of course, after a millennium in a bottle, he might have been attracted to anyone. He touched me on more than one occasion while we made the metabolic reduction injection and it was pleasant. I suppose it was a blessing and a curse that he was in your body. It made him much more attractive to me, but it made me forget I wasn’t really dealing with you. When I went to leave, he wasn’t pleased.”

Spock watched as Nurse Chapel licked her lips then chewed on the lower one. After a release of breath, she continued. “Henocho pulled me firmly around the waist with one arm so that I was pressed against him. ‘You forget, I can read the surface thoughts of your mind. I know you find this body attractive. And I know it’s not me you want.’ He laughed. ‘I can give you what you want using the power of his Vulcan mind,’ he said. Henocho placed his other hand on my face, like I’ve seen you do when you meld with someone, and then he was in my mind. He was like a thief, opening and closing drawers, to find the secret jewels.” Nurse Chapel glanced away before continuing. “Anyway, he picked out some of my sexual fantasies involving you. It was impossible to resist.” After a pause, she whispered. “I didn’t seem to have any control over my actions or thoughts.”

Spock shuddered internally. He could conceive of no worse crime than to take control over another’s mind without their consent. “I regret what was done to your mind and body,” he offered.

“You don’t need to apologize. I know it was Henocho.”

Since Nurse Chapel had not addressed specifics, Spock considered how to broach some of what he had seen. It was his duty to determine her welfare. “Christine, I am aware that Human sexual practices are diverse and that some enjoy practices involving bondage and discipline, dominance and submission. Understand I am not forming a moral judgment on your sexual practices—”

“I know you’re not asking, but for me, until the other night, all of that was only fantasy,” Nurse Chapel interjected. With a nervous laugh she continued, “Some women have their rape fantasies, I have my BDSM fantasies. I don’t think Henocho understood. I think he truly believed that what he saw in my mind was exactly what I wanted. Perhaps he didn’t understand that Humans fantasize about things they don’t want in reality, or he didn’t have your experience with melding to know the difference.”

“Do you require medical treatment?”

“I’ve been able to take care of most of the damage myself. A benefit of having access to the right equipment.”

“Most of it, implies not all. Would you accept my assistance?”



Nurse Chapel was quiet for a moment, before replying firmly, “Yes. I’d rather not go to Leonard.” She rose stiffly and went into the bathroom. She continued to speak, attempting but not quite succeeding in maintaining a clinical manner. “There are some welts remaining from the caning that I was trying to deal with before you arrived. Henocho also bit me in some spots too hard for me to reach. If you could disinfect those.” She emerged with antiseptic, a dermal regenerator, and some towels. “If you could give me a moment, I’ll slip out of my robe and lie on my bed.”

Spock turned away to give her privacy. After Nurse Chapel had settled herself with towels arranged so that Spock could work on her back, he brought the chair over to sit by her bedside. It was difficult for him to comprehend why Nurse Chapel’s sexual fantasies involved him performing violent acts and inflicting pain. For him, losing control when sexually aroused and hurting another was his worst nightmare. In his own sexual fantasies, which were often set on the *Enterprise*, he was allowed to freely express his love for his captain. A favorite had Kirk naked in the command chair, legs lewdly spread, beckoning him to perform fellatio. Naturally, he could not resist kneeling before him and bringing him to completion. Violence was limited to one of them pinning the other to the mat during wrestling sessions in the gym, and matters logically progressing from that point. Occasionally, he imagined such a scenario happening on shore leave. Kirk tackling him on a beach, reversing the wrestling hold, and making love as the surf rolled around them. He liked to visualize the sunlight turning Kirk’s hair golden, to feel the texture of the sand as their bodies pressed together, to imagine the taste of Kirk’s skin mirroring that of the ocean.

Spock dabbed the antiseptic over the areas of broken skin Nurse Chapel had left exposed. As he completed the treatment on her back and adjusted the towels to so that he could work further down, he could not help but notice where a too rough hand had left a print on her right buttock and the fingerprints on her hips.

“I admit I do not understand why you would want me to do such things to you. I know you are not alone in these thoughts. The song that Lieutenant Uhura sang in the recreation room for Charlie Evans suggested that I might use Vulcan mind control to take another against their will. A sexual encounter with me was portrayed as dangerous. I have also overheard conversations that suggest my losing control and becoming sexually aggressive is a genuine concern for some, and desired by others.”

Spock’s shields, which had proved adequate earlier, were woefully inadequate now. Nurse Chapel was loudly broadcasting shame and remorse as he brushed his fingers over the yellow and blue mottled skin on her hips. He was inclined to pull away, but he could also tell that his touch was providing comfort and he wanted to assist her to the extent possible. He slowly decreased his movements so that he could end the contact less abruptly, and switched to using the dermal regenerator, which did not require touch.



“I can only speak for me. I do have other fantasies. Ones where you are gentle and kind. So please don’t think I only think of you this way. Henocho picked. Maybe this fantasy excited him. It wasn’t only pain and punishment. There was definitely pleasure, too. In it, you were in a jealous rage because I had dared to look at another. You determined spanking would be an appropriate punishment. Since I wasn’t sufficiently contrite, the cane was used. During sex, you needed to mark what was yours, hence the bite marks. I’m not really sure why I like imagining you losing control. I’m sorry, if it is offensive.”

Spock remained quiet as she spoke, focusing on the task at hand. Nurse Chapel glanced over her shoulder as he held the dermal regenerator over her hips to remove the blemishes. “Strange, but I don’t remember any pain when those bruises happened. I remember Henocho moving me about. I felt like a doll. No control over my limbs. He was the puppet master. Perhaps it was the excitement of knowing that after all the punishment, it was time for my reward. I don’t think Henocho appreciated your Vulcan strength compared to a Human. When he penetrated me, though, it was wonderful. That was always the pinnacle of my fantasy.”

“Do you believe Henocho may have had sexual liaisons with any others? I am concerned there may be other victims that he brought to my quarters or assaulted elsewhere.”

“I don’t think of myself as a victim. Really, I just got what I asked for in my fantasies.”

Spock put down the dermal regenerator. When Nurse Chapel turned to look at him over her shoulder, he continued. “Negative. I don’t believe you actually wanted this.” He motioned at her bruised body with his hand. After Nurse Chapel faced forward again, he cleared his throat. “It is possible for me to remove some or all of the memory of what happened. Is that something you desire?”

“No. It might be hard for you to understand, but I want to remember.”

“Given your medical role, I am certain you are aware of the various services that are available for those who have experienced assault or sexual trauma. Please consider availing yourself of those services.”

“I will if I think need to. At present, I’m doing fine, but I also recognize there might be a delayed reaction. That goes for you, too, Commander.”

Spock moved to a new topic, not wishing to address his own mental state. “Do you believe there may be others?” Spock deliberately did not use the word “victim” this time, although he could not help but think of Nurse Chapel that way. He knew that the moment Henocho melded with her she had lost the power of free will.



“I don’t think Henoch had the time. For most of it he was working on design specifications to give to Scotty, or meeting with Doctor Mulhall, who held Thalassa’s mind. After our liaison, Henoch said he was going to shower before meeting me in the lab. He arrived about ten minutes later.”

“I have a debrief meeting with the captain in seventeen minutes. I need to report that Henoch had sexual intercourse with you in my quarters. Although I am hopeful that there are no others, I believe forensic evidence should be obtained from my quarters. The DNA evidence will reveal your presence, so security will need to be informed. Based on the fact that Henoch used a meld to prevent your departure, I believe it would be most appropriate to indicate that the encounter was non-consensual.”

“Well, I don’t! I have no intention of charging you with assault.” Nurse Chapel sounded outraged at the notion.

“Are you certain you are not letting your”—Spock paused, as he considered his word choice—“personal feelings toward me cloud your judgment?”

“I never said no and I’m not sure I ever wanted to. Please report that our sexual encounter was consensual.”

“As you wish.” In his mind, it was not consensual, but he was prepared to concede to her viewpoint. He had no wish to insist that Nurse Chapel view herself as a victim, although he knew she was one.

— * * * —

As much as Spock desired a chance to meditate before his visit with the captain, time was short. Nor did he wish to return to his quarters and be surrounded by the evidence of what Henoch had perpetrated there. He hoped Nurse Chapel’s assessment was correct regarding Henoch’s lack of opportunity for other sexual encounters, but he could not be certain.

Spock decided to go to Kirk’s quarters directly. Kirk had selected the meeting time for his benefit. It was not Kirk’s fault that his allotted time for meditation had been truncated due to his discovery. Unfortunately, he had now had little time to process the feelings he had experienced while in the sphere, separated from Kirk. *Kaiidth. An unfiltered discussion might be best. Reticence has not served me well.*

When Kirk’s door opened, it revealed the unexpected scene of the captain removing his bedding.

“Spock! You’re early.” Kirk exclaimed. “I thought it would be Yeoman Barrows. She kept me late on the bridge with some unexpected paperwork. I thought she might have found something else.”

Kirk seemed uncharacteristically flustered by his early arrival. Normally, it would have garnered him a smile.



"I am somewhat familiar with your schedule, captain. Changing your sheets mid-week after your shift is outside the norm." He refrained from noting specifically that this activity typically occurred at 0600 hours on day 7 in the calendar. Spock suppressed a shudder of unease. Kirk's quarters lacked their usual ambience. *The captain's scent is absent*, Spock realized with a jolt. *It is masked by air freshener.*

"This was not my finest moment." Kirk balled up the sheets and shoved them into the recycler.

Spock's eyebrow started to climb when he spotted a nearly empty bottle of Saurian brandy on the ledge above the bed. The scene was eerily familiar. He closed his eyes, wondering how he could bear it if Kirk was one of Henocho's victims. Had Henocho learned of his own desires in the transfer process and been drawn here?

"Alcohol," Kirk answered his unvoiced question, flipping a thumb back at the bed. "I needed a shot of courage. McCoy, mother hen that he is, barged in before I had a chance to pour a second drink. The bottle tipped over when I left it sitting on the bed to go to the bridge. Hence, my liberal use of the shipboard air freshener and why I am stripping the bed at this hour."

Relief flooded Spock's system. However, the fact that the captain had come to his quarters to drink during his shift was disconcerting. *If I had not been trapped in the sphere, I would have been able to assist and a drink would not have been necessary.*

Spock recognized that the emotional high and low he had just experienced were indicative that his controls were not optimum. A delay might be advisable. He could meditate in the observation lounge. "Captain, would you prefer it if I returned in thirty minutes or an hour so that you can finish what you are doing?"

"No. It's fine. I'll make the bed up later. The mattress needs time to air out." Kirk motioned Spock over to his seating area.

Spock put aside any further thought of delay, and seated himself. Anxious to unburden himself, as soon as Kirk was seated, he began. "Captain, I would like to report—"

Kirk held up a hand. "Not yet, Spock." He placed his hand upon Spock's, which were resting on the desk. "I need to get something off my chest. What I want to say is that I wish I'd never agreed to the exchange." Spock's shields were insufficient to block the blast of guilt and remorse he was receiving from Kirk. He extricated his hands and pulled them safely into his lap.

Spock swallowed heavily. Evidently, someone had reported an assault by Henocho, causing the unexpected extra paperwork that had delayed Kirk at the end of his shift. Kirk must now be inappropriately blaming himself for Henocho's actions. "Captain, I agreed to the transfer of my own free will. You are not responsible for the actions of Henocho. May I know who Henocho assaulted, or



do they wish to remain anonymous?” Spock knew his voice betrayed his compromised emotional state, but it could not be helped. He had illogically grasped at Nurse Chapel’s assertion that there had not been time for other victims. The elation he had experienced earlier at the knowledge that Henocho had not been with Kirk was now replaced with shame. He had momentarily forgotten there could be other victims.

“What?” Kirk’s forehead creased as his brows drew downward.

“Nurse Chapel advised me to say that her sexual encounter with Henocho was consensual. However, I presume others have come forward. Do these victims intend to charge me with sexual assault?”

The perplexed look on Kirk’s face deepened. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. No one has charged you with assault!” Kirk leaned forward rubbing his temples with thumb and fingers. “Spock, perhaps I should have let you go first, after all. Please, report.”

“While Henocho was in possession of my body, he engaged in sexual intercourse with Nurse Chapel in my quarters. She advised me to say that the sexual encounter was consensual.”

Spock observed a muscle twitch beneath Kirk’s eye, and that his jaw was clenched. “She advised you,” he said slowly, enunciating each word. “So very precise. I bet those were her exact words.”

Spock remained silent. There was no point acknowledging what the captain had deduced.

Kirk stood and paced the length of his quarters. He returned to his desk, grasping the back of his chair. “Do *you* believe she consented?”

Spock tilted his head up to hold Kirk’s gaze. He could not lie to a direct question. “I believe that Henocho used Vulcan techniques to control her mind. He sought out certain fantasies. I do not believe she was capable of providing informed consent.”

“Oh, no.” Kirk sighed and released a breath with a whoosh. “Clearly, you’ve spoken with her. How is she doing mentally and physically?”

Spock considered how to answer without betraying Nurse Chapel’s confidence. He knew that was not the intent of the captain’s question. “She suffered minor physical abrasions which have been treated. Mentally, Nurse Chapel is a strong woman. I believe she has accepted what has occurred with more equanimity than I.” With that admission, Spock looked down at his tightly clasped hands. It had been more than he intended to reveal. He did not wish to add to Kirk’s burden.

When he was able, Spock raised his head to find Kirk studying him. “Not that it helps, but I think I can understand some of what you must be trying to deal with. Being both the perpetrator and the victim of a crime,” he said compassionately.



Spock swallowed deeply. Kirk had a way of seeing through him. Of knowing his mind, even without a meld. He did feel like a victim, even though it was his body that had been used to violate the mind and body of another.

“It’s difficult to look in the mirror when your body has been used to do something vile, something you never could imagine you were capable of. The counselling I did with Bones helped after my attempted rape of Yeoman Rand. If I know you, you’ll try and meditate your way through this, and apply some Vulcan philosophy. *Kaiidth*, I’ve heard you say many times. Promise me, if it isn’t working, you’ll talk to Bones or me. We can get you to Vulcan, if that is needed.”

Kirk waited silently until he received Spock’s nod of agreement, then moved into his sleeping area. When Spock dared to glance up, Kirk was pouring what remained of his Saurian brandy into a glass. He reseated himself. “I thought I needed a drink earlier. My regret list relating to this mission keeps getting longer. There’s nothing much I can say other than I’m very sorry.”

“You need not apologize. You are not responsible. If I may, I am curious as to why you were drinking in your quarters earlier today.”

Kirk ignored Spock’s last comment. “I’m the captain. Everything that happens on my ship is *my* responsibility.”

“Jim, you are forgetting your own words to us when we made the decision. You explicitly said, ‘I could order this. But I’m not.’ You advised, ‘You may dissent without prejudice.’ My job as science officer was to make you aware of the risks, but I allowed myself to be blinded by the possibility of scientific discovery. I also dismissed Doctor McCoy’s objections without the consideration they deserved. To be clear, I understood that there was a risk and I agreed to the exchange, as did Doctor Mulhall and yourself.”

“Touching someone else’s mind for the first time. It was an amazing experience. I think I was so enamored by the touch of Sargon’s mind, his goodness, that I never considered the intent of the others.”

It was difficult for Spock to compartmentalize the thrill of excitement that Kirk’s words created. He had observed Kirk’s reaction to merging with Sargon and had recognized that he did not fear Sargon’s mind, but to know that Kirk actively welcomed the experience, and joyfully, was inspiring to Spock.

Spock nodded. “Given that Henoah was the enemy when they transferred into the spheres, I suspect that Sargon had never touched his mind. And from my discussions with Nurse Chapel, it seems they were limited to reading surface thoughts. Henoah had to meld with her, using my



abilities, to know what was deeper in her mind. Sargon told me that he had a special telepathic link to Thalassa. It sounded similar to a Vulcan marriage bond.”

“I should have asked Sargon how he could vouch for the behavior of the others before encouraging everyone to agree to the exchange. I didn’t do my job.”

“I am equally to blame in that regard,” Spock asserted with a touch of annoyance at the captain’s stubborn insistence that he alone was to blame. Wanting to change the topic, he pressed Kirk to respond to his previous query. “Jim, you never answered my question. Why were you drinking in your quarters?”

Kirk took a deep swallow of his brandy, finishing the glass in one go. He stared into the empty glass as he rolled it in his hands. “I thought your essence was dead. Your sphere was a smoking wreck, destroyed. And I had just given the order to kill your body, too. I wanted to hide in my quarters and curl up in despair. It seemed as if I had just ordered the destruction of half my soul. I thought the alcohol would help give me the strength to see it through on the bridge. I owed it to you, to at least be there, when your body was poisoned for our safety.”

Half of my soul! Kirk’s words flooded Spock with hope. Yet he first had to address the misplaced guilt Kirk was expressing. “Captain, may I remind you, it is my duty to give my life for the benefit of the *Enterprise*. I would not want you to feel guilt over such an outcome, as it would be my privilege to lay down my life for your command.”

“I don’t think you understand all of what I was feeling guilty about.”

Spock quirked his lips. It was time to reveal some of what he had acknowledged to himself while trapped in that sphere. Kirk’s easy acceptance of the touch of Sargon’s mind combined with his recent words gave him courage. “Jim, I believe I understand more than you suspect. As you know, I am a touch telepath and at times have glimpsed your mind when my shields were compromised.” Kirk’s eyes sparkled as Spock observed him, considering what he may have unknowingly revealed.

“Recall, I was trapped in my sphere having touched the mind of Henoah. I knew his plan to kill your body in order to destroy Sargon, and was powerless to stop him. If he had succeeded, I would not have wanted my body back, as all meaning to my life would have ended.” Kirk opened his mouth as if to debate the worth of Spock’s life in his absence, but Spock did not want to hear it. He knew the emptiness of his life before Kirk had entered his orbit.

He moved on quickly. “When I first entered your quarters, I feared Henoah had been drawn here from the *desires* he found in my own mind, learned through the transference.” Spock glanced at Kirk’s unmade bed and turned back, holding his captain’s gaze until a faint pink blush rose on his



cheeks. When Spock felt a mirror response, he determined not to suppress it, and was rewarded by the site of Kirk wetting his lips. “I, also, think of you as the other half of my being.”

Kirk rose as a grin slowly spread across his face. Spock stood to join him, stepping close. Spock welcomed the press of Kirk’s hand on his lower rib cage over his rapidly beating heart. “My biggest regret when I thought you’d died was that I had never confessed my feelings for you because I lacked the courage. I love you, Spock. When your *pon farr* struck, I had to choose between my career and your life. I had been certain nothing was more important than my command, until I was forced to choose, and when I had to choose it was easy. I’m grateful to T’Pring for the challenge because it set *you* free to choose. I hope your choice is me.”

“I cannot forgive T’Pring. The devastation of seeing your limp body dangling from the *ahn’wun*, held in my hands, is a memory I can never forget. However, I would like to make new memories.” Spock leaned forward and tasted Kirk for the first time. The faint taste of alcohol did not diminish the experience. A brush of lips along the hairline gave him the salty ocean flavor he had imagined. “I cherish thee,” he murmured, before slipping his arm around Kirk to pull his body closer. Kirk hummed appreciatively before breaking away. “It would be nice to explore each other horizontally.”

“Indeed.” The light shining from Kirk’s hazel eyes was setting Spock aflame. “Jim, I should warn you. I believe we already have the beginning of a link formed merely through our frequent touch. The fact that it has formed without the benefit of a deep meld suggests that our minds are highly compatible.”

“So that’s how you were able to find us on Triskelion.” Spock tipped his head in acknowledgement of Kirk’s deduction.

“If we should meld when in coitus—” Spock pressed his hardening member against Kirk’s thigh.

“A fantasy of mine,” Kirk interjected as he pressed his thigh even more firmly back against Spock.

“—a bond may form.” Spock finished. “Our minds will be joined together, forever. Do you understand?”

Spock thought Kirk’s smile had never looked quite so radiant. His eyes seemed to sparkle in delight as he spoke. “While antiquated, two words from the traditional Earth marriage ceremony work well here.” After a deliberate pause, he declared, “I do.”

Kirk’s hand gently nudged his shoulder and Spock let himself be maneuvered into the sleeping quarters and over to the bed. “Sorry, I forgot my mattress is still wet,” Kirk laughed. He quickly made a suggestion. “I think we should move our activities next door to be more comfortable.” The mention of his own quarters jolted Spock back to reality. He stiffened, ashamed that in his own happiness and desire for Kirk, he had allowed himself to respond to one of his own fantasies, temporarily



forgetting what had happened in his quarters. Kirk, also realizing, stepped back, contrite. “I can’t believe I put that out of my mind. We must address what Henocho did. Recommendations?” Spock’s surge of arousal quickly dissipated as he made his suggestions. “I believe Security Chief Giotto should be informed that Henocho may have sexually assaulted crewmembers. Public footage and log-in scanners should be used to track his whereabouts and determine who may have been alone in his presence. At a minimum, my room should be searched for DNA evidence to determine if anyone else was lured there. It will be apparent that Nurse Chapel was in my bed. I can draft a statement of my interview with her.”

“Keep that as brief as possible and copy Giotto, myself, and Nurse Chapel. Giotto may want to verify the statement with her in person to determine that she has not been coerced by a senior officer to not press charges. I suggest you use her words.”

“Agreed.”

“I’ll speak to Giotto. He’ll be discreet. He can clean your quarters and tidy up when he’s done so you won’t have to deal with that when you return. Why don’t you get to sickbay before Bones calls here looking for you? If you’re agreeable, I’ll arrange for dinner in my quarters and we can celebrate our new beginning.”

“I would welcome that opportunity.” Spock did not attempt to suppress the pleasure he felt at Kirk’s words and saw his own happiness reflected back in his captain’s eyes. However, he was uncomfortable with his earlier actions. To be physically intimate with the captain would seem disrespectful to Nurse Chapel and any other potential victims of Henocho. “Jim, as much as I desire you, I would prefer to defer any consummation of our relationship until the investigation is settled.”

Kirk nodded in understanding. “That’s a good idea. You haven’t had much time to process what happened. Anyway, we have a lot to talk about. As I wine and dine you, we can share some of the fantasies Henocho might have discovered had he read our minds.” Kirk’s eyes twinkled as he continued. “And it’s too late for you to deny having any fantasies—you already confessed that you thought Henocho came to my quarters because of them.”

Spock tilted his head in acknowledgement. “Agreed. However, at least for tonight, refrain from telling me of any *pon farr*-inspired fantasies. I do not like to think of myself as a wild beast, inflicting pain rather than pleasure. It is too close to my own nightmares. It seems to be a prevalent theme among crewmembers to imagine me violent and out of control.” With that comment, Spock stepped forward and left for sickbay, the words of the song “On the Starship *Enterprise*” haunting his journey.



‘On the Starship *Enterprise*’ from the episode “Charlie X”

Oh, on the starship *Enterprise*,
There’s someone who’s in Satan’s guise,
Whose devil ears and devil eyes,
Could rip your heart from you.

At first, his look could hypnotize,
And then his touch would barbarize,
His alien love could victimize,
And rip your heart from you.

And that’s why female astronauts,
Oh, very female astronauts,
Wait terrified and overwrought,
To find what he will do.

Oh, girls in space, be wary, be wary, be wary,
Girls in space, be wary.
We know not what he’ll do.

Vulcan Language translations from the Vulcan Language Dictionary (VLD).

<i>Ahn’wun</i>	Rope-like Vulcan weapon.
<i>Kaiidth</i>	Philosophy. What is, is.
<i>Katra</i>	Soul. The living essence of a Vulcan. A combination of soul and memory.
<i>Plak tow</i>	Blood fever. The final part of pon farr whereby the victim is rendered incapacitated and the only thought is to mate.
<i>Pon farr</i>	The time of mating. Occurs generally once every seven years.
<i>Telsu</i>	Bonded. One who is bonded.



Personal Logs

Bersakhi23

USS *Enterprise* Stardate 8131.82 to 8147.95

Personal Log, Engineer's Mate Anthony Johnson

Stardate: 8131.82

I still can't believe what happened yesterday on the ship. Our training cruise nose-dived fast, and all we could do was hold on and do our jobs and try not to die.

I was down in engineering in the dilithium reactor room pretty much overcome from the beating of whatever was hitting us. After I recovered from being knocked around, I saw Chief Engineer Scott and, for some reason, Doctor McCoy both on the floor. They must have been incapacitated. That's when I noticed someone else was there in a red command uniform, and it took me a few seconds to recognize that it was Captain Spock. I couldn't believe my eyes! He was inside the dilithium reactor chamber wearing just a pair of gloves and no other protection! How he got in there at all was a mystery. Not long after that, Mr. Scott and the doctor came to. They started yelling at Captain Spock to get out of the chamber, but either he didn't hear or he didn't want to. Captain Spock had his face right in the blast of radiation escaping the main reactor, like he was trying to see right inside it. He reached down and must have done something to realign the rods because after he put the cap back on top, the warp engines suddenly came back online! I heard the power surge the second before we went to warp. Spock must have fixed it somehow.

I kept watching him, wondering why he wasn't leaving, but I could see he was too weak to stand and he fell. It was obvious he was dying from the radiation. I heard the doctor call up to the bridge, and it seemed like less than a minute later when I saw Admiral Kirk flying down the ladder and running to the chamber. He tried to reach Captain Spock inside, but the doctor and Mr. Scott stopped him. Now that I think of it, another engineer's mate helped too. It took the three of them to stop the admiral from trying to break through them. I heard Scott tell him that Captain Spock was already dead, and I believed that too, until I saw him slowly get to his feet. Then he fixed his uniform, like he was just getting ready to head off to work. Admiral Kirk pushed against the chamber door to go to him, but it was locked, of course, sealed shut against the radiation. I heard him call Spock's name. Just as the captain was trying to make it to the door, he bumped into it, so he must have been blind. He must have asked the admiral something, because I heard him say yes, and then they had



some more words, but I couldn't hear them clearly. I suspect they were private, anyway. Probably saying goodbye to each other. Admiral Kirk slid down the wall of the chamber partition along with Captain Spock on the other side, and they sat there for a long time, so he didn't die alone, even if they weren't touching. It was obvious it hurt, to lose a comrade like that. It was a damn shame.

I wasn't at the funeral because I was in sickbay recovering from some minor radiation poisoning, but I heard it was a poignant military sendoff on the torpedo deck with Scott on bagpipes, and that there were a lot of people in tears, including the Vulcan lieutenant.

We're heading to a starbase for repairs, and probably some crew replacements. I plan to stay in engineering, if Mister Scott will have me. I think if we can just get back to our jobs, we'll recover. It's a privilege to serve on this ship, that's for sure.

Computer, end recording.

Personal Log, Admiral James Kirk

Stardate: 8134.21

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Personal Log, Lieutenant Saavik

Stardate 8139.42

This evening, I was present at Captain Spock's funeral with other officers and crew. Admiral Kirk made a speech which he delivered with great poise, until the very end, when I heard his voice break. I am ashamed to admit I was unable to prevent a tear from forming. Captain Spock had been my mentor, and his loss is regretful. His sacrifice was not in vain, Admiral Kirk had said, and on this I would agree. There is a Vulcan adage that I heard my teacher use before, that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. It is not logical, but it is something he clearly believed and it explains his actions. It remains to be seen if Admiral Kirk will see it that way. Perhaps he will, in time. Captain Spock performed with honor.

His absence will affect my further instruction, and so I will need to contact the pertinent authorities to continue it. However, I believe whoever will replace Captain Spock will lack the unique characteristics that made him such a valuable teacher. I will . . . miss him.

Computer, end recording.



Personal Log, Admiral James Kirk

Stardate: 8140.49

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Personal Log, Commander Nyota Uhura

Stardate: 8140.55

I can't believe Spock's gone. No one can. It feels like we're all moving through molasses. The crew is beaten up. Especially the admiral. Poor Jim. He could barely hold it together at the funeral.

Everything is still so fresh in my mind. Makes it hard to sleep. I'll never forget how fast Jim jumped out of his chair and flew down to engineering as soon as he heard Doctor McCoy's words on the comm. I was at my station, of course, when we thought we were facing our deaths. It was chaos on the bridge, and no one even noticed Spock leave. We were all focused on the countdown. David Marcus, Jim's son—yes, that one threw us all for a bit of a loop—told us there was no way to stop the Genesis device from detonating. Things looked grim. Then someone said the mains were back online, and the admiral was lightning fast and ordered Sulu to get us out of there at top speed.

That's when the call came from engineering—it was Leonard, not Scotty, which seemed odd. Then I saw the admiral look over at the empty science station and his whole body froze for a second as he processed what was going on. Spock was down there, and he had somehow fixed things. He'd performed a miracle of some kind to save us. I keep replaying the sound of Len's voice cutting through everything in a moment of relief. I keep hearing something in the tone that was meant just for Jim. It was obvious. Whatever was happening, Spock was involved and not going to make it. Or he was already gone. I couldn't process either; I just sat in my seat, stunned, and felt such sadness and pain for Jim who was losing his best friend.

Spock was my comrade and friend. He and I shared so many special moments together. Music, teasing each other in playful ways. It was easy to respect him, for me anyway. Spock had such knowledge, conviction, dignity. So much kindness and wry humor and compassion . . .

(background sound, unidentified)

Computer . . . never mind. Continue.



I know Christine loved him, even though he'd shunned her years ago. But it didn't surprise me, that it was never going to work, because I think I knew why. Spock and Jim were close. Over the years I watched their special interactions from my position on the bridge, watched their friendship grow before my eyes. There'd be this special . . . energy. There were rumors that there was something more between them. I never engaged in them. It was their business, and if I'm honest, probably the best thing that could have happened to the two of them. They were made for each other, that much was clear. I hope they found some happiness together, at least, before . . .

Jim's hurting more than anyone, of course. Scotty told me about what happened down in engineering, how the two of them were separated during their last moments together. I can't even imagine. It's heartbreaking. We all loved Spock. He was not an easy person to get to know, but if you were lucky enough to *really* know him, you'd know he was an old softie. But Jim loved him the most, of that I'm sure.

I passed Jim in the corridor earlier, and he was like a zombie. Maybe if he can spend some time with David, get to know him a little . . . I suspect finally meeting his son under the worst of circumstances shook him up, too.

I just hope he can get past it, eventually. I hope he gets help. I think that's why Doctor McCoy told us to make these personal logs, so we can all work through the trauma. I have no idea what's next for us as we limp our way to a starbase. It feels like we are a vessel of ghosts and broken souls.

Upumzike kwa amani, rafiki yangu.

(Swahili dialect identified. Translation: May you rest in peace, my friend.)

Computer, end recording.

Personal Log, Admiral James Kirk

Stardate 8143.10

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Personal Log, Chief Engineer Montgomery Scott

Stardate: 8144.57



It was Doctor McCoy's recommendation that we take some time to sort out what we all just went through by recordin' it in our personal logs. I dinnae make it a habit of doin' this, but maybe 'tis time.

I was down in engineering with ma team, tryin' to get ma poor bairns back online. When his voice broke through from the bridge, I could tell things were nae goin' well. It had a kind of panic I've rarely heard. Lord knows if I could've, I would've tried harder. I always tried harder, for the admiral. I was tellin' him the bad news that the mains were offline, and he hollered somethin' about not havin' enough time. Three minutes? I used to exaggerate my estimates on purpose, it was a kinda runnin' joke between us. But this time . . . nae. That was somethin' I couldna do. This was gonna be the end.

Later, Nyota told me about how Jim shouted his excitement when he thought I'd fixed it. But it wasna me. It was Spock. I'd almost passed out in the chaos after we were hit, warnin' Jim about the radiation. I was groggy for a bit, then someone in a red uniform passed me, and for a moment I thought it was the admiral. For some reason Leonard was on th' floor like me, and that's when I noticed it was Mister Spock standin' there. Captain Spock. Wha'ever. By the time I came to my senses, Spock was already inside the chamber. I started yellin' at him to get out o' there, and that's when McCoy came to. The both of us . . . shoutin' at him. Shoutin' at Spock. His face was bein' blasted with radiation, and he only had gloves on, the poor devil. There's no way he's survivin' that, and I knew it. But then the mains came back online, and we were good to go, tearin' outta there away from what they told me was some kinda doomsday weapon. Aye, we made it away in time. But at what price? Spock was down, dyin' on the floor. It was a doleful sight, that. Then I heard McCoy call up to the bridge, tell the cap'n, tell Jim, to come.

Heaven almighty, Jim was just there, I dunno how he made it that fast. He had a horrible look on his face that I know I'll nae forget. He tried to get past Leonard and me, to get to Spock, but we held fast. I had to tell him the truth, even though Spock wasna already dead, literally at least. But he might as well've bin. There was no chance o' survivin' that much radiation. Then Len told him what we already knew; it was too late.

It broke my heart watchin' the two of them have their last conversation. Len and me and a handful o' others were there, tryin' not to eavesdrop, but there was no time for privacy. When I watched them slide down together to the floor, nae be able to touch, and then Jim put his hand up to meet Spock's through the partition, I just could nae stop my tears. It was such a damn sad sight. Poor Jim just sat on the floor there wi' a blank look on his face, leanin' against the door wi' Spock on th' other side, dyin'. I heard Len order for the medics and a decontamination team to take Spock's body. Len tried to help Jim up, but he just pushed him away. I dinnae know how long poor Jim sat there like that. He must hae bin numb with pain. I dinnae ken what happened next, because Len and I and the rest o' us were taken away to sickbay for radiation treatment.



I brought me pipes for the sendoff on the torpedo deck, got me kilt. I wanted to show me respect for Spock. He saved us all, doin' wha' he did. We'd known each other a long time, and I saw how important he was to everyone, especially Jim. I dinnae know how he'll cope with him gone. I just dinnae know.

After the funeral, Len told me about what Jim confessed, that he cheated on the Kobayashi Maru test at the academy. That was just like the cap'n. And the sacrifice that Spock made was just like Spock, too. I tried to get Leonard to join me in a dram or two today to talk some more, but he still seems to be under the weather. Maybe when we get to the starbase things will start to feel normal again. I think I'll see if Nyota is up for a drink or two, or just some comp'ny. I expect she'll be needin' some support too, poor lass. She and Spock knew each other a long time, same as me. They had a special thing, but not th' same as . . . well. It's gonna take some of us longer than others, I s'pose.

Computer, end recording.

Personal Log, Admiral James Kirk

Stardate: 8145.95

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Personal Log, Chief Medical Officer Leonard McCoy

Stardate 8146.18

It's been . . . a day.

I just released Jim from sickbay, even though he wasn't sick. But he needed help. I could tell he wasn't listenin' to my advice. What advice can one give when . . .

He needs time. We all do. It's a helluva thing we just went through. It's taken me this long to follow my own advice and do a personal log. Lots to mull over, muddle through.

I'm still worried about Jim. When we were on the bridge together, watchin' that new planet form, I asked him how he felt, and he said he felt young. I wasn't quite sure what that meant. I suppose he wasn't about to reveal his deep despair in public like that. He sounded hopeful. And he smiled. Not that brilliant smile he usually has, just a sort of rueful one. His face just looked lighter. Not like that moment in engineering.

Dammit.



Guess it's time to go over that.

I'd just barely recovered from that pointy-eared traitor's nerve pinch when I saw Jim shimmy down the ladder. Yes, traitor. Damn fool betrayed us all with his heroism. Especially Jim. How could he do that to him? But he had to, of course. Spock knew there was no other option.

Scotty and I had to grab hold of our captain . . . I mean admiral. Dammit. He'll always be captain to us. Anyway, Jim rushed forward, and we had to stop him, and for a moment I had a flashback to that other time, when he held me back from someone about to die on an old New York City street, also for the greater good. Irony, how things in the universe seem to cycle with inevitable patterns. If only there was someone I could ask who knew about such things. Damn. That's terrible. Maybe this is how I'm gonna cope, with bad attempts at humor.

For whatever number of years I have left in this lifetime, I'll never forget the look on Jim's face when we held him back from the sealed chamber. Shock, horror, helplessness, seein' Spock dying behind that partition. The moment Scotty told him Spock was . . . what he meant was just as good as . . . And then I had to tell Jim the truth, that it was too late, and there it was, that iota of hope transformin' into heartbreakin' despair, and I felt my heart break, too. We let him go finally, and Jim went to him. We couldn't tear ourselves away from their final moment together. Jim was callin' his name in vain as we all watched Spock pull himself up and perform a final dignified move to fix his damn uniform jacket. I think that's when my tears started. Seein' him do that for Jim . . . *dammit*.

Computer, pause recording.

(paused)

Computer, resume.

I'm gonna pass on the autopsy. No need to put it in my log since the images will keep hauntin' me in dreams for . . . probably ever. I'll skip to the ceremony.

Saavik shed an actual tear, which shocked me. Not even Jim did that, but he was close. He was tryin' hard to be strong, to be our heroic leader. His speech started smoothly enough, but then it was like he had to tear the final word out of his mouth. I couldn't help wonder if Spock would've been insulted by what Jim used to describe him, "human," and that's when I looked over at Saavik. She was just starin' ahead, tryin' to be Vulcanly professional, but like I said, it looked like she wasn't doin' a good job of bein' unemotional. The rest of the bridge crew were there, along with a bunch of others, just young kids. And of course, Carol and David, both lookin' miserable. Poor Jim, havin' to manage the triple shock of runnin' into his ex, meetin' his adult son, all on the same day as losin' his closest friend in the universe.



Scotty played the bagpipes, bless him. I couldn't even follow that damned black torpedo tube when it passed by. Who knew it would fit a body that perfectly? It seemed kind of . . . obscene, really. But what option did we have? I wonder whose decision that was. Sure wasn't mine. I wasn't even sure it was real until I heard the hatch close. Then it was over.

I need a rest. Hell, I need a drink. Maybe Jim will join me for one. More than one. Somethin' tells me he won't be ready for a while, if ever. I know what Spock meant to him.

I'll check on Jim again soon. Maybe tomorrow I'll drop by his quarters, reminisce, if he's up to it. Would that make it better? I dunno.

If only I could shake these damned headaches . . . Must be the stress. Or residual radiation effects.

Gettin' back to a starbase for repairs can't come soon enough. We all need repair, I suppose.

Computer, end recording.

Personal Log, Admiral James Kirk

Stardate: 8146.90

Deleted

....

Personal Log, Admir—Captain James Kirk

Stardate 8147.95

Spock is gone. Spock is . . . gone. Spock . . . is . . .

(paused)

I can't, I *won't*, use that word. The real one that lists his official status.

Maybe Bones is right. I have to say the words to believe it. Come to terms with it. Is he doing the same? He hasn't been himself lately, so I can only hope he takes his own medicine. He was there, after all, when . . .

But I resent that advice, to record this personal log, which will be my sixth attempt.

Obviously, I don't want to hear myself say it, or see the words on the screen. That just makes it more real. It can't be real. I don't want it to be.



It is . . . unavoidable. I almost said logical . . .

I have to face it. Move on.

Is that the intention? It's just that I can't bring myself to really talk about it. I can't think about it. But I can't *stop* thinking about it.

(pause)

I keep seeing him in my mind. Not just those last moments . . . *god*, it hurts, to see the suffering of my dear friend . . . but so many other times, from before. All those years when . . . when we were faced with danger, even death, and overcame it because we were always so in tune. We had a sort of shorthand that I relied on a lot for getting ourselves out of trouble. Or just . . . normal everyday moments. On the bridge. In the mess or the gym. At meetings. During chess. In my cabin after hours to decompress, sometimes just sitting quietly together and not even talking. Those things don't stop in my dreams, or when I'm awake.

How can this be? How could this possibly have happened?

How can I . . . how can I . . . anything? Carry on, be the leader, give orders, go on day to day, without the best part of me by my side? My . . . my heart. Oh god it hurts. How much he must have suffered. I wanted to hold him so much. We couldn't even say goodbye properly. I can't . . .

(pause)

I've had losses before that really hurt. Gary, Edith, Miramanee. But David was right—I never really have faced death.

Not like this.

Not like this.

Not this time. I always told others, even believed it myself, that there's always a way. To escape, to win, to survive. As I face this new reality, I realize I no longer have that luxury. This time I ran out of all the bluffs, the deal makings, the silent prayers, the last-second assists. Even plain luck. It seems to have all run out, as I always feared it would, some day.

My bag of tricks is empty.

I am empty.

(pause)

Today I took McCoy's advice to let out some of my pain in the gym. So, I ran a few laps on the machine, but I found myself replaying everything that went wrong from the moment we boarded the



science station. Then I went to the punching bag and started off with just a few jabs. Most of them were directed at general frustrations about not being able to deal, then more forceful ones against Khan and the Genesis device's failsafe not stopping the countdown, and guilt over David and what Carol had to do all those years without me to back her, and then I really started pounding on the bag, at that empty chair on the bridge and at that damned partition separating us, and damned if I didn't end up crushing the bag to me and calling out your name, Spock. I wanted so desperately for it to be you. To hold you close and feel your life force one last time. When I pulled away finally, I saw a poor ensign at the doorway. I felt more embarrassed for her than for me. What a sight that must have been, her commanding officer losing it . . . I split some skin, too. Damn. I should probably have Bones take a look.

My hands and joints ache. But not nearly as much as my heart and soul.

Dammit all to hell.

(sound of object breaking)

...

I don't think this is helping.

Computer, delete entry.



Waterfall (Reimagined)

Shelley Butler

Many years ago, I did a piece with a similar pose, but without any waterfall. I think at the time, I felt too unsure about drawing water pouring down over their bodies. But whenever I would come across it, the lack of water bothered me.

So now finally, I did something about it.

This is WATERFALL reimagined.



In Translation

Nostra Battista

There are times when the ways of my mother's people are inexplicable.

The Standard word 'carnal'
is a derivative of the Latin *caro* (meanings: the body, meat, beloved).
Since the 15th century
'carna' has meant flesh, as in fleshly desires, and could easily be incorporated
into a metaphor that describes the press of our sweat-slick skin together.

Vulcans are to refrain from eating meat.
Surak's logic showed us that living creatures need not kill to live,
that when our passion overcame our reason, we suffered needlessly.

Yet Vulcans hunger still.

In Vulkhansu
the root word for 'hunger' (*avon*) and 'burn' (*yon*) is the same: craving.
And *yokul* means 'to eat.'
All Vulcan words pertaining to eating are linguistically related
to fire.

There is no logic in my hunger for you
I will never be satisfied by our feasts
No fever alone drives me to your side
I will burn with you, yet we will never be consumed

There are also times when the Vulcan Way is inexplicable.



Alternative Modes of Communication

Alice West

“Computer.”

“Working.”

“Computer, locate Mister Spock.”

“Mister Spock is in his quarters.”

“Is he still awake?”

“Affirmative. Air displacement and temperature indicate wakefulness and limited movement.”

“I see. I wonder if he can’t sleep, either.”

...

“Computer, record the following voice message to be sent to Mister Spock on my command.”

“Ready.”

...

“Ready.”

“No. Too immediate. Let’s try this. Computer, abort and delete voice message. Record the following on this microtape. Lock tape, to be opened only by Mister Spock and myself.”

“Ready.”

— * * * —

Spock, I could ask you to report to me for this conversation, but I’m betting that speaking via microtape will give both of us more time to consider our responses without feeling pressured by the presence of the other. Yes, we could use the ship’s computer to simply send audio messages. But I like the thought of delivering our taped voices to each other in person.

If you prefer to talk to me face to face instead, I would welcome that, of course. Because I want to venture into the personal realm, I have the sense that you’d be more comfortable dictating your thoughts rather than speaking them to me directly. Or, I don’t know. Maybe I’m talking about myself.



I'm going to stop here. I'll give this disk to you tomorrow in the mess hall or on the bridge. Which by now you already know, since you're listening to this.

— * * * —

Captain, a conversation with you is always agreeable. Your idea to conduct it with no visual component offers intriguing possibilities. The delay between our transfers of the tape would create further nuance.

You say that the subject is of a personal nature. Would you care to elucidate?

— * * * —

I'm glad you're amenable to an alternate form of communication. To me, the pause would be like waiting for a letter from home because of the delay of subspace. I also think you and I might express ourselves differently using this method than we would in person. And something else. On Earth we've known for a long time that the language we're first exposed to affects and even shapes the brain and therefore our perspective, how we experience our world. For a short time, we believed that growing up bilingual or multilingual was damaging to a child, as though there were room for only one language, and learning two or more would mean learning each imperfectly. Ultimately, we understood that the plasticity of a growing brain allows for uncomplicated, almost unlimited learning and therefore widens our ability and our perspective.

I've been reading more about Earth's linguistic history. Words that exist in one language may not exist in another, particularly if a culture has no need for the concept. A very old and much-used example, back when Earth was divided by region and country, would be the Inuit dialects whose vocabularies included various words for different forms of snow and ice, whereas cultures living in tropical or desert climates had no need for even one. Unlike English, for example, the Inuit dialects had separate word roots for "falling snow," "fallen snow," and "snow on the ground." Other linguistic differences might be gender categorizations or perceptions of time. My point is that you and I are distinct not only because we're separate people with unique experiences but because our languages have shaped how we understand our own awareness and observations. I'm curious about how using spoken language only, without gestures or facial expressions or other physical cues, might bring out our linguistic differences more strongly. If we notice at all.

You asked about the topic. Since we're trying this new (for us) style of communication, I think there's some irony in telling you that the subject I want to talk to you about is communication itself. Our communication, specifically.

Spock, twice now I've found myself interacting with people from your personal life I was previously unaware of, namely T'Pol and your parents. I know that Vulcans place great importance on their



privacy, and, as you so often say, you are a Vulcan. I value our work together and our chess games, through which you have become my steadfast first officer and my close friend. I wonder if there's another way we can learn about each other, particularly the important people and events in our lives, past and present.

— * * * —

Jim, are you disappointed in me?

I acknowledge that both of those situations put you at a disadvantage. In the first case, I believe I was not wholly responsible. Had I not entered my Time, you never would have learned of pon farr or T'Pring. Once I understood what was occurring, I could no more inform you than I could control the urge to vomit when I attempted to eat or quell the need to lash out in anger when anyone attempted to speak to me. If you remember, I told you that Vulcans do not speak of pon farr even among ourselves. You were exceedingly understanding that day you came to my quarters. I never thanked you for all that you did after our interaction. Furthermore, I have never been able to confront the events that unfolded on Vulcan, much less assess them with you.

As for my parents, I can only say that I expected you to have read the roster of the complement on the shuttle that delivered them. My personnel file clearly states that, in the case of my death, my parents are to be notified. Their full names are specified. I acknowledge that I was surprised by your ignorance of the identity of the ambassador and his wife, given that you are usually thorough in your preparation for our missions. Jim, it was never my intention to embarrass you in front of them.

— * * * —

No, I'm not disappointed in you, Spock. I would say *frustrated*. And a little discouraged. I don't know that either of those situations would have turned out differently if I had grasped the circumstances better beforehand. I do understand why you never told me about *pon farr*. But the fact that you had a fiancée? Spock, you never thought that might be important for me to know, if not as your commanding officer, then as your friend?

I can already hear you correcting me about "fiancée," but I don't know what else to call T'Pring. Your intended? Maybe someday you'll tell me the Vulcan word.

I admit that during our voyage to Babel I was foolish not to realize right away that the Vulcan and Human couple standing in front of me were your parents. To be honest, because I expected to meet only Vulcans, I didn't see your mother's Human characteristics right away. Her dress was properly elaborate, with its distinctive high collar, and her styled hair hid her ears. She conducted herself like a Vulcan of her status as she stood beside Sarek. Despite her affable demeanor, it wasn't until you identified them that it all fell into place.





You were not foolish, Jim. You are one of the most intelligent beings I know. You have an uncanny ability to imagine, even anticipate, situations never before encountered. You once called it luck; I call it inspiration. It is a quality I lack, as I learned during my attempt at leadership aboard the Galileo.

I do not know what more I can tell you about my life previous to our acquaintance. I learned early that divulging personal information is not required or even appropriate until it becomes necessary. It is unlikely that my effort to “fill in” the areas of my life about which you know nothing would serve any useful purpose. Nor am I convinced that such a report is what I would desire from you. They would be facts, with no connection to the friendship that you and I share. I doubt that is what you are seeking.



Spock. I want to know more about you. Don't you realize that? I want to know anything about you, everything about you. Partly because of the two occasions I pointed out, but not entirely. You and I are an extraordinary team, able to communicate without words and easily coordinate our actions. That ability to tune into each other extends into our personal relationship. You've become unusually important to me. Recently, however, I've begun to feel that we've arrived at a plateau in our friendship. I'd like it to deepen.

But if you find telling stories about your life irrelevant, let me suggest another possibility.

A list of lists. In other words, we could each make a list of categories from our lives that cover a particular subject that holds significance for us. Each category would be the heading for a list of explanations—instances or people or thoughts—that fall under that topic. If either of us wants to ask about one of those lists, we can see how that conversation develops. An example of a list might be: “Admirals I have no respect for.” That's not the most revealing list because it only includes names. A better one might be: “Why I lost respect for certain Starfleet admirals.”

I suggest, if you're amenable, that we each come up with as many categories of lists as quickly as we can. Whatever pops into our minds. Don't judge, don't censor. Then we can choose which we want to reveal to each other. What do you say?



The activity you are suggesting is a kind of game, not unlike chess, is it not? I accept, Jim.

Allow me to offer my own example, to be certain that I understand. A possible entry for my list of lists could be: “Reasons I left a place or posting.”



What is the deadline for this exercise?

— * * * —

There is no deadline, Spock. In that way, too, it's like a chess match. The difference is that we're not trying to outsmart each other or win. There is no winning. We're trying to be more open with each other, more generous in sharing what's important to us.

And yes, your example of a category is perfect. If you'd decided on: "Reasons I went to a place or took a posting," those reasons would be easier to guess and less interesting.

I'll begin my list after I give you this microtape at the end of our bridge shift.

— * * * —

I have finished my list of lists, Jim. Initially, the exercise was quite difficult. My mind balked at both the personal nature of the exercise and the unconventional train of thought it required. However, in the end I found it rewarding.

I wonder what your current experience has been, as I presume you have taken part in this pastime before. Are you producing the same categories, or does it make a difference that I am the one with whom you are engaging? Does the fact that we are, in addition, limiting this interaction to message tapes have a different effect than if we were making written lists or speaking about our lists in person? Could we have played this particular kind of game entirely in person? Fascinating.

— * * * —

I've never made a list of lists before. Maybe I heard about it somewhere, but I thought I came up with the idea on my own. In any case, I agree that each time would be different because the categories would be influenced by the person you're interacting with.

I'm glad I've piqued your interest, Spock. It can be fun to try out different means of communication.

— * * * —

I am not indulging your desire for "fun," Jim. However, there is an element of enjoyment involved.

What was the first category you thought of?

I will offer you mine. You will likely be surprised, as I was. Yet I could not dismiss it, because you had asked me not to censor myself.

"Humans I have . . . cared for and never told." Coupled with the reasons why.



————— * * * —————

Funny. Mine is: “People I’ve said ‘I love you’ to and meant it.”

My list is short. What about yours? You told me once that you had never told your mother you loved her. I imagine that she said it to you more than once when you were growing up. It was obvious to me on our way to Babel that she loved you very much. Are there others you haven’t said it to?

I mean, maybe, because you didn’t want them to know.

Is Leila Kalomi on the list? Just curious.

————— * * * —————

There are others. To be precise, there is one.

I did reveal to Leila Kalomi on Omicron Ceti III that I loved her. Yet, I am certain now that I was not telling the truth. Perhaps I did experience some elements of that emotion in the moment. I felt a great surge of exhilaration, and she was the person with whom I could express it.

After you rescued me from the spores’ thrall, it was important to say goodbye to Leila privately. I didn’t blame her for what had occurred. She, too, had been under the influence of the spores, after all. Also, we had shared an experience together which left me with some affection for her. However, what I felt for her, in reality, was never love. I know that now.

...

Are you inclined to reveal the second topic on your list of lists?

————— * * * —————

Thank you, Spock, for telling me a little about your encounter with Leila on that planet. I didn’t want to ask. I thought I should be less affected by the sight of the two of you together. I mean, you’ve certainly seen me with more than my fair share of beautiful women. I suppose I had never considered you as someone who *wanted* to be in any kind of relationship. *That* kind of relationship. I was afraid . . . I was afraid I would lose you to her. As my first officer, I mean. As my friend, as well.

You invited me to join you down on the planet, but I couldn’t even think about it, her taking the place of first in your life.

“Ideas I had to beat the Kobayashi Maru test.” That’s what I have second on my list. I came up with a few possibilities. I’ll tell you sometime, if you like.



— * * * —

Jim, it is highly improbable that we will find ourselves in a situation similar to that on Omicron Ceti III again, therefore the likelihood of my becoming derelict in my duties is almost nil. I would calculate the odds at 0.574 percent. Therefore, you have no need to give it more consideration. As to our own relationship, I would like you to know that I am no longer ashamed to call you my friend. Indeed, I am honored that you consider me your close friend. As I do you.

The second item on my list also concerns Starfleet: “Experiences of true discovery while exploring space that have created awe in me.”

I will add that the word for friendship, in the Human sense, does not exist in the Vulcan language.

I say “Vulcan,” not “my language,” to remind you that I myself grew up bilingual. Vulcans, too, have for centuries understood the advantages that the plasticity of a child’s evolving mind creates.

— * * * —

I apologize, Spock. I played back our tape. You’re understandably offended by my earlier insinuation that Earth was or is the foremost authority on sociolinguistics. I meant only to give an example. My ethnocentricity is showing.

The fourth topic in my list—I’m skipping number three for now—is: “Vulcan words I know.” I’ve learned a few phrases, too. Mostly from T’Pau, but not from you. I wonder why that is. I assume you’ve never spoken Vulcan around me because there’s no one else on the ship to speak it with. That must be lonely.

— * * * —

Jim, you of all people should know by now that Vulcans do not feel offence. I did, however, experience mild irritation.

I will follow your precedent to reveal my fourth list as well. This category is not one I am eager to discuss, but it was one of the first to occur to me: “Instances in which I was unable to maintain my psychic shields.”

Besides the incident with Leila, you have been present for a number of them. I include the unendurable pain caused by the parasitic invaders on Deneva, my mind meld with Nomad and even with the Horta, and the effects of the virus on Psi 2000.

I do not include my pon farr, nor do I consider mind linking with psychologically disturbed beings such as Dr. Van Gelder to be violations of my psychic integrity.

Then there are the instances you are unaware of.



— * * * —

Can we talk about them? I can't imagine the mental suffering that kind of breach must cause. I really mean that, Spock. If you can share some of what you experienced with me, or even show me through a mind meld, I want to understand. I want to know more about your Vulcan side. You understand so much about us Humans. About me, at least. But I don't know other Vulcans. I've seen you try to hide that side of yourself so that we don't judge you as "too alien." I hate it when someone reacts to you like that.

...

But you *were* able to withstand the Klingons' mind sifter on Organia, and you were the only one of the men unaffected by the three women Mudd brought aboard the *Enterprise*. How do you classify the ways that your internal shields have been broken down? Where is the line crossed? At viruses, drugs, parasites, failed mind melds, aliens taking over your body, invasive machines? Does a virus count, but your own physiology going haywire doesn't? Is it only when you're unable to keep an outside entity from influencing your mind?

— * * * —

Your questions are quite perceptive, Jim. In order to explain, I would need to speak with you, face to face. I would not be surprised if you convinced me to consider a different perspective on the matter.

Jim, addressing the computer in my quarters is becoming more of a hindrance than a help. Now that we have opened new pathways in our discourse, I find there is much more I wish to say to you, to ask you, to discuss.

— * * * —

Yes, for me, too. Although I do enjoy handing off our tape to each other on the bridge as though we're doing something clandestine. As though we're old-style double agents or illicit lovers.

I'm sorry, Spock, that just came out. I know there are limits to what I can share with you, or even say to you, but I don't always know what they are. I keep wanting to push against the boundaries you put up. You've always been astonishingly agreeable in allowing me to.

— * * * —

Our current conversation is no more clandestine than speaking during a chess match in your quarters. What we wish to say in both cases is private. However, I do share your gratification when we exchange a tape in front of the bridge crew, knowing that they assume we're providing data one or the other of us requires. The secretive nature of our recordings does transform the character of our interactions. It invites more . . . intimacy.



— * * * —

Intimacy? That's not a word I associate with you, Spock. I don't think I've ever heard you use it before. Are you sure it's what you mean?

— * * * —

Please, Jim, there is no need to insult me. I always mean what I say, whether aloud, in writing, or otherwise.

— * * * —

Vulcans never lie, is that it, Spock? With that in mind, I'll share the third item on my list. "Times I ran after my brother and he turned me away."

I think I've given you the impression that Sam and I were devoted to each other. After his death, when we found his body, you tried to acknowledge my loss. I cut you off, needing to focus instead on finding the cause. I want you to know that I was aware of the kindness you extended to me, and I know you would have continued to if I had asked.

We weren't close, Sam and I, when I was little. I worshipped him. He could do no wrong. I was always following in his footsteps, trying to catch up with him. Maybe my drive has more to do with trying to show him I could compete than with any ambition to command. But he didn't want me around. He had his own friends, his own goals.

What started as roughhousing turned into Sam beating me up. Especially when we lived on Tarsus IV. I guess he took out his rage and helplessness on me. Finally, he went away to school, and then I did, and after that we were rarely in the same room together. I toughened up, and he became less ruthless. By the time of his death, we had reached a truce.

On Deneva, I stifled any loss I felt, knowing I could unpack it later, after the crisis was over. Because my brother and his wife were already dead, there was nothing I could do for them. That's how we roll in Starfleet. My duty, as captain, was to my nephew, whose life was in danger, and to any other inhabitants on Deneva who might still be alive.

Did my feelings about the deaths influence the desperation I felt when you were attacked? It's likely. I had just lost the last of my family of origin. I couldn't face the possibility of losing my dearest friend, one of my chosen family. You *are* like a brother to me, Spock.

The truth is that I haven't grieved the loss of my brother's life at all. I'm too afraid for yours.

— * * * —

"Computer."



“Working.”

“Computer, unlock this message tape.”

“Voice command of James T. Kirk, captain of the USS *Enterprise*, verified. Completed.”

“For what reason, Jim?”

“I want to delete it. It served its purpose.”

“You will not delete it. I wish to keep it.”

“Spock, are you getting sentimental on me?”

“Never. I simply require proof of the commencement of our new status. Computer, relock microtape. Only the captain and I may open it.”

“Completed.”

“Have I told you how much I love you?”

“Hardly. I expect you will take the rest of our lives together to tell me, my *t’hy’la*.”

“Your what?”

“The Vulcan word for friend. And brother. And lover.”

“And lover. My love.”

“My only love.”

“My true love.”

...

“What was the next category on your list, Spock?”

“Rumors I heard about Jim before I met him, and why they are untrue.”

“I don’t believe you.”

...

“All right, all right, I believe you.”

...

“Stop smiling like that.”

“I’m happy, Jim.”



Acts of Omission

Cordelia Naismith

Spock of Vulcan, first officer of the USS *Enterprise* and man of logic and reason, scanned the landscape of Beta Niobe IV. The name of the planet was irrelevant to him. As was the panorama surrounding him. He was oblivious to the world encircling him. The deep emerald of the trees and the cobalt of the sky brushed past his consciousness. Insects droned unheeded amid the redolent scent of earth and water.

Smell, sight, sound. All senses were focused on the only thing of relevance: the Terran sitting along a riverbank ten meters away.

James Kirk sat on the mossy riverbank flicking stones across the quiet stream. Stone after stone skipped along the surface of the still water. The pure white linen shirt and pale jeans contrasted vividly against the greens and browns of the slope, accenting the firm body that leaned aside to find another pebble.

Spock watched intently as the Human stood, casually brushing his jeans free of moss and twigs. Spock neither blinked nor breathed as he watched Kirk bound, with unselfconscious grace, up the bank.

Although he would have sworn that not a leaf had rustled, that was obviously untrue as hazel eyes swung toward his hiding place. Their eyes met and held.

The light ones flared in pleasure. "Spock! You changed your mind!" He tossed a final stone toward the river.

Spock's feet moved forward, dragged like iron filings to a lodestone.

"I'm glad you decided to come," Kirk said, releasing a smile that threatened to melt Spock's feet to the ground. "Is there a problem? The ship?" he asked anxiously.

"No. No, Captain. There is no difficulty with the ship."

Spock felt the warmth of the Human's smile, a smile that lit his personal world brighter than any sun. He wondered if this smile was a natural thing or if Kirk had developed it as an added weapon in his personal arsenal. Spock stood silent, striving to process his inner tumult at the only sight that gave this moment any meaning.



Kirk smiled, eyes alive with inner vitality. “I know this is atypical for you, changing your mind and abandoning the lab for rocks and trees, but I promise you won’t be sorry. I’ll make it worth your sacrifice.”

Spock already knew this to be true.

“Come on. I was just going to cool off in a great swimming hole I found.” Kirk began down a dirt path, leaning over to pick up a discarded towel and sandals.

Spock followed. He would have followed this man anywhere.

They walked side by side through an area of shrubbery. Kirk stopped occasionally to pick some wild blackberries lining the path. In his quest for the biggest and blackest berries, Kirk was soon hot, scratched, and blue lipped.

Spock watched the quest, grateful for the silence. He rejected all offerings to share the blue bounty with a shake of his head.

“Spock, is something wrong?” Kirk finally asked in a soft tone. He leaned forward, gazing intently into Spock’s face. “I appreciate your coming, but if you really prefer to finish your experiments, I understand.”

Spock had no illusions about this Human’s ability to interpret his expression. He turned away and concentrated on being as unreadable as possible.

“No, Jim. I am merely concerned that I initiate proper actions.” Spock was relieved to be able to give a completely honest response.

Kirk laughed, pushing a wisp of hair off his cheek and leaving a blue smear in its place. “That’s easy, Spock. You’re here to enjoy yourself. It’s shore leave!”

They began to walk again. Spock saw Kirk’s gaze flicker toward him with the knowing expression of a man well aware that he would eventually get the answers he sought.

Before the inevitable game of conversational parry and thrust could begin, they came upon the swimming hole. Water poured forth with tremendous power through a narrow gap in a massive rock formation. Spock tensed with dread at the force of the sound. The water churned as it cascaded into a pool of cold, clear water. The surrounding pines created a verdant ring in the afternoon sun.

Kirk began discarding clothes. With easy grace and a dazzling smile, he pulled the shirt over his head and tossed it into the bushes. In two hops his pants were off and discarded on the damp rocks. He stood a moment, a pale form against the dark outcropping. Then a shallow dive sent his body as



a pale arrow across the water. Within seconds, gold-streaked hair broke the surface, and Kirk flipped his head back, sending water flying into the air.

“Come on in, Spock.” The voice wafted across the pond as he stroked confidently toward shore. Nearing the shallows, Kirk stood and began clambering up the slick, mossy rocks. “I don’t think it’s too cold for you.”

Any further suggestions were cut off as Kirk’s foot slipped. He pitched forward. His head struck a boulder a moment before his body hit the water.

With a few powerful strides, Spock pulled through thigh-deep water before Kirk’s body could sink below the surface. He grasped the limp body under the shoulders and swiftly moved back toward the shore. There he sank down, trembling, oblivious to the chill of the water or the sharpness of the stones under his knees. Only the man he held in his arms had any reality.

Then he checked the Human’s pulse and breathing. The golden head drooped backwards onto Spock’s sodden arm. The face was pale and seemingly lifeless. A thread of blood traced along his temple. Spock gently wiped it away. Kirk’s red blood tinted his fingers. In reality, Kirk’s blood was ultimately his own. Spock touched the still water, washing the blood from his hand.

Fearful, he checked the vitals again. Blood still flowed weakly along Kirk’s pale cheek. His heart still beat. Overcome, Spock clutched the limp body to his chest and pressed trembling lips to the damp hair.

Relief swept through him. A relief so great that he would not have been able to stand if he had wished to. To feel the cool flesh, see the fine face; all the things he had deemed lost. It set off emotions so profound that he felt he would implode containing them.

Two months. Sixty days. 1,440 hours. 87,658 minutes. 5,256,000 seconds.

Mere calculations, simply numbers. Nothing that reflected the depth of the emptiness that this time had encompassed. Two months that had become an endless well of pain.

He looked down into the treasured face he had believed he would never see again. The face of the man he had thought lost for all time. He caressed Kirk’s cool cheek as he regained his inner balance. All this pain, all this loneliness. All for one mistake. One omitted shore leave. One time he had not been present to watch and protect the being he should have placed above all others.

But two months ago, an experiment in the lab had claimed his attention, and James Kirk had come to this pool alone.

And drowned.



In his mind's eye, Spock replayed the terrible sight that had greeted him at this pond two months before.

Immersed in his experiment, a sudden dread had clutched his heart. A soul-numbing dread that something was terribly wrong. He had gone to the transporter room with a speed that had raised concerned questions from the few crewmembers he encountered; questions that he had neither time nor inclination to answer.

After he had transported to the surface, his sense of dread had pulled him to this site. He had stared in horror at the sight of the nude body of James Kirk, pale and still, on the rocky bottom. Spock had tried resuscitation in a frenzy of hope that the Human was merely stunned. Later, McCoy's agonized acknowledgment of Kirk's death had sealed Spock's failure.

Now he was here again.

He had arrived in time. Checking again that Kirk was secure, he pressed his lips to the cool forehead. He gently placed the limp body on the dark rocks. As he stood, water slid from his pants and slogged in his boots. It went unnoticed. Nothing mattered except Kirk's life. He stood in the shallows of the pond, chilled to the bone, the sound of the rushing water continuing around him. His body ignored it all. Only his mind was warm. The love he felt for this man flooded through him with enough heat to dry the clothes on his back.

His infallible time sense reasserted itself. In a short while, he would see himself walk down this very path. His past self would look down upon Jim's body. But this time, Jim would be revived. Spock's eyes closed in gratitude that his past self would now be spared that soul-killing sight.

Unwilling to leave, he hesitated, scrutinizing the body as it lay draped across the rocks. Jim was one of nature's better creations. He gave a moment's thought to providing a modest cover. With the part of his mind that still functioned with some level of rationality, he rejected it, a final calculation of the probability that Kirk could possibly slip back under the cold surface. No, he was safe, and the time approached that Spock must be clear of this place.

Spock backed away, then slowly climbed the rocks and, with one last look down at the living body below, walked into the woods. Once there, he picked up his pace. The Guardian awaited and, on the other side of it, the *Enterprise* and James Kirk. That thought sent him speeding through the undergrowth, heedless of twigs that struck his face and grabbed at his clothes.

Jim was alive. Jim was waiting. On that joyous note, he leapt into the void.





A cold wind blew chilled sand past his face. The heat of anticipation warmed him as he stood on the barren world of the Guardian.

“The traveler has returned,” the Guardian intoned to no one except Spock. He paid it no attention but pulled out his communicator.

“Spock here.”

“Kirk here, Mister Spock. We just read your signal. Are you ready to come home?”

He closed his eyes in relief and joy as the sound of Jim’s living voice washed over him. Home! Indeed, wherever Jim Kirk was, was home in the truest sense of the word. He inhaled sharply, hoping to steady his voice, but he took in a shock of chilly air instead. In a moment, he recovered both breath and composure.

“Affirmative, Captain. I am ready.”

He hoped that he was.



He materialized on the same transporter pad in the room he had left just hours ago. Kyle was at his usual place behind the console. All was the same.

Nothing was the same.

“Everything all right, Mister Spock?” the technician inquired with his usual politeness.

“Yes, Mister Kyle. Quite satisfactory.”

He was unable to continue and was grateful for the absence of others. He fled the room for the safety of his quarters. There were advantages to being Vulcan. No one he passed in the halls expected small talk.

The doors obediently swished open onto the dark warmth of his quarters that again held more than just his possessions. Without raising the lights, he went straight to the shrine, which always helped to order his thoughts. Weeks before, hunched in front of its flickering glow, the image of the Guardian had entered his fevered mind. The shrine had revealed the answer to his hours of empty mourning.

Still, the journey had been a difficult one. Pressing his steepled fingers to his forehead, Spock released his anguish and doubts to the flames. But there were no regrets over his actions.



Unlawful use of the Time Portal had been only one step in his road of deception. From the moment he had realized that he could undo the past, there was no act that he would not commit to return the man who was lost. He could feel no guilt even for the lies he had told to Sarek to gain authorization to the Guardian. No guilt for the subterfuge to Starfleet for his deceptive use of the ship. No guilt for the deception of the crew which had brought him to the needed place.

No, Kirk's life justified any action. The violation of his word as officer, as Vulcan, and as a rational being paled before the terrible violation of spirit that Jim's loss had exposed. That awful moment when he had realized that James Kirk was his soul.

The worst part had been seeing Jim again at the pond. Watching in fear that he might act too soon or too late. That his web of lies had been for naught. That he had bartered his integrity for a handful of air.

Contemplation of the past was broken by the buzz of the door comm. It was Kirk. He could feel it through the durasteel. The shrine had answered him again. Spock had no fear. Nothing could happen now. Nothing could be worse than that which had been.

Calm and at peace, he answered. "Come."

Kirk entered and glanced about with those sharp, bright eyes that rarely needed light to see what Spock most wanted to hide. This seemed to be one of those times, for he walked across the office area and into the meditation area. Spock could not rise as he watched Kirk come toward him. The hazel eyes were alive with an energy so vital that Spock was amazed it did not burn through the decking.

"Did everything go as planned, Spock?" Kirk leaned against the doorjamb, not entering. The flicker from the fire pot turned the Human gold and crimson.

"Everything went as planned, Captain," he answered with a truth that was not a truth. He drank in the sight he had traded his integrity to see again. Fearful that his tumult would be visible in his eyes, Spock dropped his gaze, hoping to break the current building up between them.

"Damn! I knew I shouldn't have let you go alone."

Spock's eyes flew open in momentary panic.

"If anyone forced you into something against your ethics, Spock, I swear I'll nail someone's hide for it."

"Jim, I did nothing against my will." One truth, at least. "Why do you ask this?" He was curious and fearful. Jim had an amazing ability to sense subterfuge of any kind, especially when Spock tried it.



Kirk pushed off from the door and went to sit on the shrine's edge. He jumped back up as if realizing what he sat on.

"You may sit anywhere in here you choose, Jim." Indeed, it was almost a religious experience having the two objects of his worship so conveniently side by side. Stone and flesh, logic and emotion.

Kirk seemed to relax as he always did when Spock used his first name. It was a personal act between them and one that Spock viewed as one of his pleasures and privileges. However, Kirk moved to a low side table and eased down, leaning forward with an expression of concern that Spock was unable to meet. He looked down.

"I worried about you down there." The soft voice was so close. "I'm not comfortable conducting a mission when I'm not quite sure of its parameters. Especially when I'm not there to be sure nothing goes wrong."

"I am gratified for your concern, but it was not necessary."

"You're sure?" Kirk gave a low chuckle, and Spock knew that he must have raised his brow especially high at the query. For some reason, Jim seemed to find it amusing. Spock raised his brows as often as possible. "Sorry. It's just that I see people take advantage of you and it bothers me."

Spock basked in the light of the shrine and the warmth of Kirk's gaze. One touched his body, the other his soul.

The irony of the situation was not lost on him. That Kirk should fear dishonesty and exploitation from others when Spock had perpetrated these acts on a scale spanning planets and time.

Now Jim was alive. Sitting calmly, close enough that Spock could reach out and touch him. Close enough to breach the gap that still divided them.

Spock remembered his agony in the hours after Kirk's death, his regrets for all those words and deeds omitted. For all the things that would have brought him closer to Jim, that would have let the human know how much he was loved and needed.

If he would pay the debt to all those deceived, he would start now. He would speak those words to Jim. He would close the gulf between them.

"Jim, there is something I wish to tell you."

"Anything, Spock. You know that."

The intercom sounded. Once. Twice. The third time, Spock rose. Kirk followed him into the office as Spock flipped a switch on his computer.



"Spock here."

"Hey, Spock. You comin' down here, or do I have to chase you all over this damn ship?"

Kirk chuckled at McCoy's usual lack of tact. The sound sent vibrations down Spock's spine.

"I am coming, Doctor. I was speaking to the captain."

"Leave me out of this, Spock," Kirk said with a smile.

"I waited until the mission was over and you'd had some time alone, Spock, like you asked. Now get your Vulcan ass down here."

Kirk walked past Spock to the door. "I'll see you later, Mister Spock." He stopped. "Unless you need to talk now."

He shook his head. The moment had passed. Now he felt brief panic. A fear that when Kirk disappeared from sight he would once again disappear from his life. Kirk left for the lift. Spock stood frozen with his finger on the com button.

"So, *are you coming?*" McCoy's querulous voice issued from the comm.

"On my way," he said as he hurried to the door.

Down the corridor, Kirk stood awaiting the lift. As it arrived, he turned, saw Spock, and smiled, waving him forward while holding the door.

"If you don't mind, I'll get out first and leave you and McCoy uninterrupted."

Spock nodded, relieved at this proof that his fears were foolish. The past had been altered. It was not a dream. Kirk's death had been the dream. The nightmare. The black hole in his heart that had sucked all meaning and warmth into a void .

"Spock." He returned to the present to find Kirk's concerned face watching him. "You sure you're okay?"

"Yes, Captain. I am quite well."

Kirk tilted his head as if appraising the truth of that statement. The doors opened onto the bridge, but Kirk made no move to leave.

"Sickbay," Kirk ordered, as they began a return to lower decks.

"Captain, it is really not necessary to accompany me."



“Indulge me, Spock.” Kirk leaned casually against the paneling, his expression muted in the attitude that told Spock that Kirk was on the scent. Experience had taught him that the more subdued Kirk became, the more focused he was.

They were going to sickbay, and Jim Kirk had questions. Spock would not bother opposing either.

He relaxed as the lift continued its journey.

His own journey was over, and he was content.

Whatever happened next was irrelevant. If Jim was amazed by what Spock would soon confess, or if he was appalled by admitted sentiment, or if he was angry at Spock’s actions . . . Irrelevant.

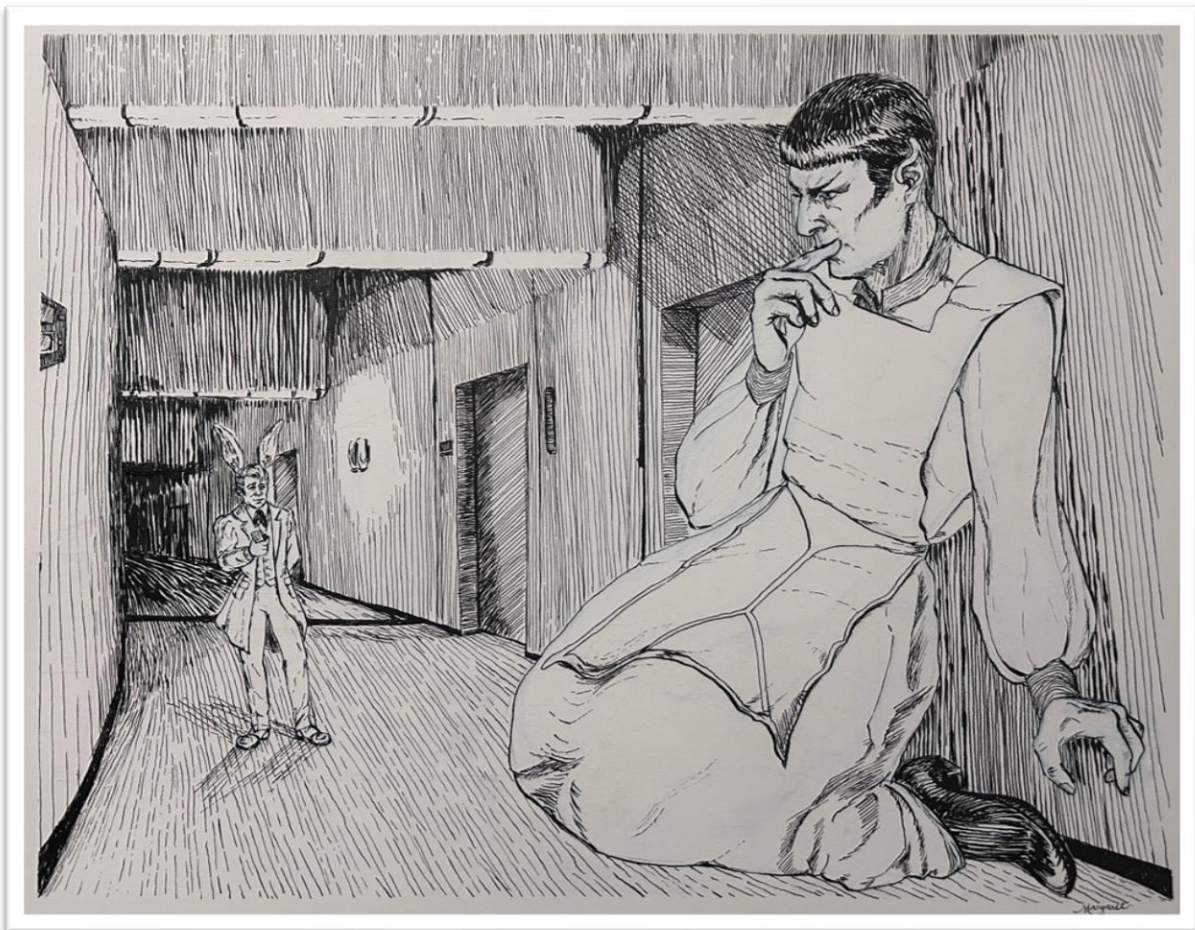
James Kirk was alive.

And now, Spock’s life began again.



Curiouser and Curiouser Lichqueenlibrarian

I was inspired by Alice in Wonderland, and wanted to put Spock in a post-*Search for Spock* dream, with Jim as the White Rabbit.



My Soul Sails on Solar Winds

Thia Wen

Do not seek me there
on that distant world
where my bones wither
in that lonely sepulcher

Look to the void between stars
to the nebulae that glimmer in the light
to the galaxies spinning
across the cosmos

It is there that you will find me
my soul sailing on solar winds
consciousness adrift
among the stardust

I will await you there
when your brief mortal life is done
The universe will be laid out before us
the unfathomable unknown beckoning us forth
an eternity to explore



r/It Takes a Village Foundbyjohndoe

For reader ease, here's a character username key (all unlisted urls are just randos):

Kirk: Tiberius32233
Spock: STGS
Uhura: SwahiliStargirl
Sulu: SuluHowDoYou
Chapel: baddiewithaBSN
Chekov: made_in_St_Petersburg
M'Benga: RurusDad

And naturally Bones does not fuck with Reddit at all and therefore does not have an account.

— * * * —

r/Parenting

ISO: NYC After School STEM Program

👍 1.2k · Posted by **u/Tiberius32233** · 3 months ago

Hi fellow New York based parents - I am seeking after school program recommendations! My son (12) is very into science at the moment, and I want to get him started in a local program so he can meet other kids with similar interests. We are based in Upper Manhattan. Thanks in advance!

EDIT: We have already tried Boy Troops. My son did not enjoy it. Furthermore, I am seeking a program centered around hands-on scientific learning.

💬 22 Comments



u/becarefulwithfire · 👍 182 📉 12

Boy Troops is always good for a young man!

u/tirredmomny · 👍 96 📉 1

I saw in one of your previous posts that you're Jewish — the Midtown Jewish Center offers youth STEM programs.





↳ **u/Tiberius32233** ·  53  0

Just checked out their website! Unfortunately the days the program runs would conflict with the days he's with his mother in NJ. Thank you for the recommendation!

↳ **u/tirredmomny** ·  67  11



His mother couldn't bring him to the city for the program?

↳ **u/Tiberius32233** ·  90  1

Her schedule wouldn't allow it, but I wouldn't ask her to in the first place. It's her time with him, I don't want to encroach.

↳ **u/SwahiliStargirl** ·  211  17

What fields of science interest your son? I run a language arts and sciences kids program in West Harlem, if that's something that'd interest him.

↳ **u/Tiberius32233** ·  97  0

He's currently into chemistry and earth sciences, but this program sounds awesome. Are Yiddish and Hebrew a part of your curriculum? We've got Bar Mitzvah on the brain right now.

↳ **u/SwahiliStargirl** ·  288  21

Hebrew, yes. Yiddish, not yet. We have a dedicated course for those studying for B'nai Mitzvah!

↳ **u/Tiberius32233** ·  11

Just DMed you!

↳ **u/baddiewithaBSN** ·  74  8

West Side General Hospital offers some youth PreMed programs :^)

↳ **u/STGS** ·  256  5

Hello User Tiberius32233. My daughter is also looking for an after school STEM program. Please update if you find a suitable one.

↳ **u/Tiberius32233** ·  119  11

Fingers crossed for both of us!

r/NYNHM

Gem & Mineral Hall Remodel

 843 · Posted by **u/STGS** · 2 months ago



A query: Have other parents found themselves deeply aggrieved by the recent remodeling of the Museum's Hall of Gems & Minerals? I had found the previous design of the hall to have a calming effect on my daughter, especially during moments of overstimulation. She particularly enjoyed the black velvet conversation pit and its minimal lighting, as well as the tactile opportunities with the petrified tree stumps.

The new Hall is very brightly lit, which has a blinding effect as the new overhead LEDs reflect off the polished schist floor. Additionally, the floor causes voices to echo and reverberate, where the old velvet would dampen noise. Overall, I have found the effect of the remodeling disruptive and a negative change to the previous design from the 1970s.

7 Comments

u/SuluHowDoYou ·  303  99

Love to see someone else with a strong opinion on the matter! I was very pleased with the museum's new wing and its butterfly room, but when your four-year-old is having an outburst, a giant echoing chamber designed to look like an ant farm is NOT the place you want to be.

↳ **u/STGS** ·  154  122

Your husband has every right to feel bereaved, User SuluHowDoYou. This "remodel" is a clear downgrade.

↳ **u/ihatetrint** ·  41  432



Idk, i like the new design but to each their own.

↳ **u/flitflyflow** ·  241  122

I'm an autistic adult and I feel this! I was so angry they changed it, I actually shocked myself out of a meltdown by how mad I was they took the conversation pit away!

↳ **u/STGS** ·  123  1

My daughter is autistic, as am I. Thank you for affirming our experiences, User flitflyflow.

↳ **u/Tiberius32233** ·  198  89

My son was just ranting to me about this! His school takes them to the museum once a year and the gems and minerals used to be one of his favorite rooms (he's very into geology), but he says there's no touch exhibits anymore! I'm this close to breaking into the NYNHM's storage and stealing those petrified stumps for him, haha!

↳ **u/STGS** ·  82  21

I empathize with your instinct to bring back a bygone joy for your child, User Tiberius32233, though I cannot co-sign any illegal actions taken to do so.



r/Geology

Identification on this sample?

↑ 527 · Posted by [u/made_in_St_Petersburg](#) · 2 months ago

[IMAGE ID: A rounded, dark grey/almost black rock sample with white lines running through it. There is green algae staining the side of the sample. END IMAGE ID]

Hello, I found this sample by the side of the boardwalk in Coney Island. I am particularly interested in the white lines that run through it. This sample is approximately one kilo. Apologies if my question is not clear- English is not my first language. Thank you!

💬 3 Comments

[u/Tiberius32233](#) · ↑ 145 ↓ 10

Showed this to my son who loves rock formations! Here is his answer: The rock was formed from glacier sediment and gravel, and was probably submerged in water for a long time (he says he knows this because the rock is so smooth). The white lines are quartz veins, crystallized from minerals in the water it was formed in. Hope this is helpful!

↳ [u/made_in_St_Petersburg](#) · ↑ 92 ↓ 1

Wow- thank you and your son! He is so knowledgeable, I am very, very impressed.

↳ [u/Tiberius32233](#) · ↑ 228 ↓ 12

He says no problem! And yes, I agree-he's great!

r/GirlTroops

Autistic-Friendly NYC Troops

↑ 674 · Posted by [u/STGS](#) · 2 months ago

After discussion with her peers at school, my 12-year-old daughter has requested to join the Girl Troops. I want to fulfill her wish, but due to past negative experiences in youth group environments, I am wary of simply signing her up for the closest troop.

For further context, my daughter is on the autism spectrum, and in moments of distress can struggle to relate to her peers, regulate big emotions, and communicate effectively with figures of authority. Research has led me to understand that there is a history of Girl Troops formed as affinity spaces for children with similar backgrounds or special needs.



Is anyone in the NYC area aware of a troop that is equipped to support and/or work with my daughter's needs? Naturally, I would be as involved as possible to ensure her comfort, but I would like to create several other social safety nets so my daughter can thrive in the Girl Troops.

 **12 Comments**

↳ **u/vvverve** ·  4  480

I don't think the Girl Troops is the best place for your daughter if she can't effectively regulate her emotions. Maybe try a playgroup for autistic kids?

↳ **u/STGS** ·  161  13

My daughter is able to regulate her emotions with the proper support, hence why I am looking for a troop equipped to do so. Additionally, she is very intelligent and enjoys physically and mentally stimulating activities for youth her own age and above. I doubt she would enjoy a "playgroup," as that implies a developmentally younger demographic.

↳ **u/RurusDad** ·  207  1

Troop 1701 was able to accommodate my daughter's special medical needs while she was undergoing chemotherapy. The girls were able to pick which badges they wanted to earn as well, so everyone got to do something they liked—all-in-all a very good group!

↳ **u/STGS** ·  122  33

Were the Troop leaders supportive of your involvement with the children? I have read accounts from some fathers that they were not as included in parental discussions as mothers or female caretakers.

↳ **u/RurusDad** ·  887  13

I never felt excluded or like I wasn't welcome, if that's what you mean. Miss Chin-Riley always kept me involved, and I even led the lesson for the girls to get their First Aid certification badges. Dads are very appreciated!

↳ **u/STGS** ·  104  7

Thank you, User RurusDad, this is good to hear.

r/PolyglotNYC

Job Opportunity: Yiddish Educator

 421 · Posted by **u/SwahiliStargirl** · 2 months ago



Hello, I run a youth language arts and sciences afterschool program in West Harlem and am looking to onboard a Yiddish educator (ideally a fluent semi-native speaker) for a twice-a-week, 8-hour total commitment.

You would be working closely with me and our Creole educator to create a lesson plan centered around the genesis of diaspora languages. We are a not-for-profit, so the pay is quite low, but your involvement means that any children in your life who'd like to attend the program may do so for free!

Please comment or DM me if you are interested in further information. Thanks!

 **9 Comments**

u/STGS ·  204  13

Hello User SwahiliStargirl, I believe I meet your preferred requirements for a Yiddish educator. I have DMed you.

r/GirlTroops

UPDATE: Autistic-Friendly NYC Troops

 697 · Posted by **u/STGS** · *2 months ago*

UPDATE: For other parents looking for a troop that can accommodate their child's unique needs, Manhattan Troop 1701 has exceeded all of my expectations. Troop Leader Chin-Riley is a dedicated leader and skilled organizer. She cares deeply about every child's experience in her troop, and the community within the troop and their parents reflects this.

Many thanks to User RurusDad for his fruitful recommendation.

 **1 Comment**

↳ **u/RurusDad** ·  65  9

Happy to help!

r/Parenting

ISO: NYC After School STEM Program



 1.3k · Posted by **u/Tiberius32233** · *2 months ago*

[...]



u/STGS ·  456  25

Hello User Tiberius32233. My daughter is also looking for an after school STEM program. Please update if you find a suitable one.

↳ **u/Tiberius32233** ·  444  24

Fingers crossed for both of us!

↳ **u/STGS** ·  314  19

If you are still in search of a STEM program for your child, I may have a (albeit, unorthodox) solution for you.

↳ **u/Tiberius32233** ·  184  4

I'm all ears!

↳ **u/STGS** ·  202  2

Direct Message me.

r/Restaurants

Best Korean Barbeque Spot for Toddler [4F] Birthday Party

 532 · Posted by **u/SuluHowDoYou** · 2 months ago

What it says in the title. My daughter loves korean barbeque, but not every place is good for kids. I'm not worried about anyone burning themselves (she's exceptionally spatially aware for her age) but a friendly staff and perhaps singing?

 2 Comments

u/baddiewithaBSN ·  72  8

Seems like it would be easier to order in or make it for her at home.

↳ **u/SuluHowDoYou** ·  156  2

No <3 She loves the flame.

r/GirlTroops

Boys in GT?

 589 · Posted by **u/Tiberius32233** · 2 months ago



Hi all, I've been looking for an after school program for my son (12) and recently I've been recommended to a local Girl Troop that meets all my preferred criteria on paper. However, I'm worried how he will fit in socially in the troop.



I know that technically the Girl Troops have been co-ed for several years, but I'm not sure if the troop-by-troop culture is actually that integrated. Has anyone had experience with a boy in a troop? How did it go for him and the other troop members?

 **5 Comments**

u/zhengenvisa ·  673  8

I was a boy in GT for about a month ... then I was a girl in GT, lol! But for that month I felt pretty accepted, though I think we were all a little too young to get those social pressures that cause gender divides, and your son is at an age where he's probably more aware of all that.



I think the most helpful factor in my joining the troop was my best friend who introduced me to the other girls and made sure I was included. Does your son know anyone in the troop?

↳ **u/Tiberius32233** ·  92  0

He does not, but the person who recommended the troop to me has a child enrolled. Do you think a playdate or prior meeting could help my kid mesh better with the troop at large?

↳ **u/zhengenvisa** ·  141  44

Having someone you know when joining a new group is always good. Best case scenario this other kid helps him like my friend did for me, worst case they don't get along one on one and that can tell you a lot about if the troop is right for your kid.

↳ **u/Tiberius32233** ·  113  3

Great points all around. Thank you so much.

r/MaritimeMuseumNYC

Best hours for sound-sensitive children?

 468 · Posted by **u/Tiberius32233** · 2 months ago

Hey friends, I'm planning a playdate for my son and a (hopefully!) new friend at the Maritime Museum this Saturday, and want to accommodate this friend's occasional sensitivity to sounds and large crowds.





Her father has assured me that he is well equipped to take care of any big emotions brought on by these sensitivities, but I don't want to set this girl up for failure. Does anyone know the peak and slow hours of the Museum off the top of their head / if sensory-friendly days exist for it? Thank you all so much!

 **3 Comments**

u/flitflyflow ·  94  25

This doesn't address the crowds issue, but lots of sensory-sensitive people use noise-cancelling headphones for places like museums.


↳ **u/Tiberius32233** ·  87  2

Her dad told me she has a pair of those!

↳ **u/made_in_St_Petersburg** ·  133  3

If the children will be interested in this kind of thing, I have found that the Grayback submarine the Museum has does not get as much foot traffic as the main levels of the Museum, likely because it is submerged in water outside.

There is some interesting information to be learned in the submarine about U.S. Cold War policy, as well as the general fascinations that come with touring inside of a decommissioned vessel.

↳ **u/Tiberius32233** ·  106  9

This sounds fabulous! I'll check to make sure she and her father are okay with being below deck, but this is a great suggestion!

↳ **u/made_in_St_Petersburg** ·  75  4

Please tell your son thanks again for the rock identification.

r/LaborNYC

Support nurses united nyc!!!! May 6th - 12th @ West Side General

 2.3k · Posted by **u/baddiewithaBSN** · 2 months ago

Hello friends of r/LaborNYC — if you're tuned into the healthcare world (or saw my crosspost on r/Nursing), you've probably heard about the contract dispute going on between the NY Nurses United union and West Side General Hospital.

The hospital has totally walked away from the bargaining table as of last Friday, and the NYNU has been picketing outside the hospital since then.



We are asking YOU, the people of New York, to help us hold the picket line and force Mount Sinai back to the bargaining table! Show up for us during National Nurses Week and tell the profit-obsessed suits at the hospital that nurses are essential and New York is a UNION TOWN!

Here is a link to NYNU's website with our demands and more information about the Nurses Week picket. Solidarity forever!

67 Comments

↳ **u/SwahiliStargirl** ·  324  25

I work as an on-call translator at the Union Square General Hospital and I will absolutely be spreading the word about West's picket!

↳ **u/baddiewithaBSN** ·  174  6

OMG hey UnSq! We'd love to have you on the line <3

u/made_in_St_Petersburg ·  287  12

Thank you for linking to your website — I read through your demands and they seem very reasonable. A patient cap would benefit both your overworked staff and allow for better quality of care. победа медсестрам!

u/Tiberius32233 ·  1001  0

West's nurses stayed by my son's side for hours when he was a victim of a stabbing and I was out of state. I owe my son's life and my happiness to the fantastic emergency nursing staff at West and will be coming down to 59th Street to show my support.

↳ **u/STGS** ·  312  7

User Tiberius32233, I am deeply moved by your story. My daughter was admitted to West Side General Hospital for malnutrition and refeeding syndrome after escaping a dangerous fostering situation. The nurses of the hospital were kind and empathetic to her, and greatly encouraged her ability to heal from her traumatic experience. It is only logical this outstanding work is rewarded with a fair contract and safe working conditions.

r/actuallyautistic

Identifying Romantic Attraction

 1.1k · Posted by **u/STGS** · 1 month ago

I am a 39-year-old autistic single father of my middle-school-aged daughter. Recently, a boy her age has expressed interest in joining her Girl Troop, and at his father's suggestion, we had a get-together so the boy will have an acquaintance in the troop.



I found myself very impressed with the father's thoughtfulness in accommodating my daughter's needs and interests during the get-together, as well as enjoyed his company and conversation.

Now that I see him every other week (when the Girl Troop meets), my interest in him has only grown, and I am growing aware of his interest in me. He seeks me out when social opportunities arise among Troop parents, and he shares his personal information (his divorce and subsequent single life, his bisexuality, etc.).

This week, he has invited me to dinner while the troop sees a Broadway musical. I initially believed this dinner was for all troop parents, but he clarified that it would just be him and me.

I have found myself wondering if he is trying to set the groundwork for a romantic relationship with me. I am not particularly adept at identifying when a person is attracted to me, romantically or sexually, but there have been many opportunities for him to broach the topic of a sexual encounter and he has not taken them. My current understanding of the situation is that if he is intending for a partnership to emerge from his actions, it is a longer-term affair rather than a singular sexual encounter.

However, this is all speculation based on my observations. Can anyone with experience dating as an autistic homosexual above 25 advise me on if my analysis is accurate?

37 Comments

u/misscast ·  244  88

R u the only dads who show up to stuff? He might just be looking for a buddy that isn't a mom.

↳ **u/STGS** ·  186  2

Hello User misscast. This was a possibility I accounted for in my reasoning. He is equally friendly with the other adults, including male guardians, but does not bring up personal information as frequently with them, nor does he initiate the majority of conversations. The opposite is true for his interactions with me.

u/made_in_St_Petersburg ·  121  99

Hello, how much does your daughter's friend know about geology?

↳ **u/STGS** ·  74

Hello to you, User made_in_St_Petersburg. He is very knowledgeable when it comes to geology, but I fail to see how that is relevant to the question I have posed.

u/postmorty ·  188  621

I wouldn't rule out purely sexual interest just yet. He could be someone who wines and dines, if you know what I mean.



↳ u/STGS · ↑ 97 ↓ 2

I do not believe he is the type of person to “wine and dine,” User postmorty.

u/SwahiliStargirl · ↑ 210 ↓ 8

Do it, you won't.

↳ u/STGS · ↑ 158 ↓ 23

Is this an appropriate way to speak to your employee, User SwahiliStargirl?

↳ u/SwahiliStargirl · ↑ 143 ↓ 13

You basically co-run the program at this point, you workaholic.

u/flitflyflow · ↑ 988 ↓ 25

Sometimes we see what we want to see in other people ... which begs the question: do you want him to be romantically attracted to you?

↳ u/STGS · [deleted]

↳ u/flitflyflow · ↑ 3203 ↓ 0

Well, there you go!

r/Relationships

Is it appropriate to ask out the father of my son's best friend?

↑ 1.6k · Posted by u/Tiberius32233 · 1 month ago

So I (35M) want the father of my son's new best friend. The kids are both 12-ish (New Bestie is a little older) and have been practically attached at the hip since they met. So, naturally, I've been spending a lot of time with New Bestie's dad (39M) and he is very much my type (whip smart, calm and collected, a fantastic father).

What started as a crush has now become kind of all-consuming, and I asked him if he'd like to get dinner with me while our kids go see a movie.

The good news? He said yes. The bad news? I was intentionally kind of vague about if this was a date or not (one could say I chickened out), and now I'm having second thoughts on telling him I want it to be one.

If he's not into it, or we do try and it goes south, it might affect our kids' friendship, which is the last thing either of us want. I don't want to put him in a situation where he feels pressure to play nice with me just because his daughter and my son are friends.



Am I overthinking this?

💬 9 Comments

u/cowprintbra · 📈 333 📉 7

You are absolutely overthinking it. Tell the man you want to date him. Preferably before the actual date, though.

u/made_in_St_Petersburg · 📈 890 📉 69

See where the night takes you, friend. Is it not worth examining the thought that he may feel similarly and be hesitating for the same reasons you have listed? Boldly go!

↳ **u/Tiberius32233** · 📈 197 📉 76

Thank you for the vote of confidence! Though (and I am so sorry, it's just the literary nerd in me) I do think the proper grammar is to *go boldly*, not *boldly go*.

↳ **u/made_in_St_Petersburg** · 📈 181 📉 0

Potato, картофель.

r/TechSales

Child-Sized VR Headsets: Unworn

📈 512 · Posted by **u/RurusDad** · 1 month ago

I am selling a VR headset appropriately sized for my daughter. She was slight for her age (approximately a small in children's hat sizing). Bought for \$350 USD. Will take any offers.

💬 7 Comments

↳ **u/cowprintbra** · 📈 134 📉 0

I'm so sorry for your loss.

↳ **u/RurusDad** · 📈 223 📉 2

She's fine. She had a growth spurt.

↳ **u/cowprintbra** · 📈 68 📉 99

Oh.

u/misscast · 📈 89 📉 3

\$275?



↳ u/RurusDad · ↑ 124 ↓ 3
\$315.

↳ u/misscast · ↑ 92 ↓ 3
\$295.

↳ u/RurusDad · ↑ 101 ↓ 5
DM me.

r/Relationships

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[...]

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Thank you for the vote of confidence! Though (and I am so sorry, it's just the literary nerd in me) I do think the proper grammar is to *go boldly*, not *boldly go*.

↳ u/made_in_St_Petersburg · ↑ 181 ↓ 0
Potato, картофель.

↳ u/Tiberius32233 · ↑ 884 ↓ 99
Buddy, I need to buy you a drink.

r/actuallyautistic

UPDATE: Identifying Romantic Attraction

↑ 20.4k · Posted by u/STGS · 3 weeks ago

[...]

UPDATE: I was correct. He is attracted to me.

💬 5 Comments



↳ u/SwahiliStargirl · ↑ 333 ↓ 0

Hello????? Spill??

↳ u/STGS · ↑ 141 ↓ 88

I'm sure I don't know what you mean, User SwahiliStargirl.

↳ u/SwahiliStargirl · [comment removed by mods]

↳ u/STGS · ↑ 89 ↓ 10

That hardly seems appropriate.

↳ u/SwahiliStargirl · ↑ 173 ↓ 99

We are going to have words come Wednesday evening.

r/GirlTroopCookies

NYC: Tabling May 6th - 12th in front of West Side General Hospital

↑ 912 · Posted by u/Tiberius32233 · 3 weeks ago

If you missed the Jan-Feb cookie rush, never fear! Troop 1701 is tabling alongside NY Nurses United during their Nurses Week contract dispute strike!

All proceeds from cookie sales will go to the nurses' strike fund. You'll be giving back to your local healthcare workers **and** helping our kids get their Community Service Badges! Come stop by, 4:30 PM – 8 PM, May 6th – 12th!

💬 31 Comments

u/baddiewithaBSN · ↑ 284 ↓ 0

COME BUY COOKIES FROM THESE FABULOUS BABIES!!!

u/bundtcake · ↑ 76 ↓ 999

Why the weird hours? Kinda a short window.

↳ u/STGS · ↑ 204 ↓ 7

Hello User bundtcake. The Girl Troops are a youth organization. The typical New York City K-12 school day ends at 3:45 PM. We planned the tabling starting and stopping times to allow for the children to travel from their schools to the hospital and to travel home and have dinner at a reasonable hour.



↳ u/SuluHowDoYou · ↑ 962 ↓ 88

“Why aren’t these children selling cookies at 9 AM on a Monday?!!” Dude, they’re kids.

↳ u/STGS · ↑ 139 ↓ 10

Thank you for efficiently abbreviating my point, User SuluHowDoYou. I enjoy your flair of humor.

↳ u/SuluHowDoYou · ↑ 118 ↓ 9

LOL, no problem. I’ll be stopping by on the 11th with my daughter for some Deliciosos!

u/SwahiliStargirl · ↑ 145 ↓ 12

I’ll be there!!! Can’t wait :)

↳ u/Tiberius32233 · ↑ 101 ↓ 8

D says *ani lo yakhol l’khakot!*

u/made_in_St_Petersburg · ↑ 83 ↓ 10

Will this sale have pryaniki?

↳ u/STGS · ↑ 64 ↓ 1

Hello User made_in_St_Petersburg. No.

u/STGS · ↑ 972 ↓ 66

Well put.

↳ u/Tiberius32233 · ↑ 1700 ↓ 0

Thanks, babe.

↳ u/STGS · ↑ 1701 ↓ 0

User Tiberius32233, not in front of the subreddit.

[End of Thread]



Luck and Miracles: A Love Story

ArvizuM

A Star Trek Original Series Observation

Beyond space battles, rogue computers, and transporter malfunctions, there is something else happening on the bridge of the *Enterprise*. It's very subtle, perhaps even subversive. The relationship begins easily, shipmates as they get to know each other, and then evolves into a fierce friendship where one would die for the other. But beyond even that, there is something else happening: a deep love between two competent beings who really don't need each other emotionally—they already possess careers, goals, purpose—until they do.

It is the simmering affinity between James Kirk and Spock of Vulcan.

To appreciate this affinity, we must understand the two men as individuals. From the original series, we know far more scintillating details about Spock than about Kirk. That is one of the reasons that Spock has fascinated fans for decades: his alienness, his battles between his Human and Vulcan sides, those elegant ears. We accept Spock's captain, James Kirk, without much examination. He is—perhaps to many of us—just another Human overachiever whom we believe we know.

The Terran Captain James Tiberius Kirk is an exceptional decision maker; he is confident but never arrogant. He possesses a good sense of humor and is affable and even-tempered. He is a Terran history buff (“Space Seed,” “The Savage Curtain”). He reads Earth classics such as Shakespeare and Milton, and non-Terran novelists such as the writer of “Let Me Help” (“The City on the Edge of Forever”). He likes to drink alcohol to relax. He is mostly soft-spoken, but his tone changes when he is giving commands. If his athletic ability can overcome an enemy or threat, he never runs from a physical fight. He is sometimes lonely, but it never lasts long. His shipmates respect him and follow him without question, and so he suffers when he loses a member of his crew.

We never meet Kirk's parents or know if they are even alive, never visit his homeworld of twenty-third-century Earth, or hear third-party testimony about his childhood, not even about Tarsus. We know that he crosses his legs and leans his chin into his hand as he sits in the command chair. We know that he enjoys chicken sandwiches, disdains green leaves, and is addicted to coffee. We know that his two best friends are his first officer and his chief medical officer. We know that he loves his ship.

After having observed these simple attributes, that's all we know. Most of these are superficial or obvious details and in no way speak to what drives the man or to his innate psychology. Indeed, his



psychology *in toto* is little more than his affability, command talent, and lack of obvious character flaws. Although Human, sometimes it seems that James Kirk sprang fully formed from the forehead of Zeus.

Having said all that, there is one last thing that we do know for certain about James Kirk, and it is perhaps the most important thing: he is a lover—of various women certainly, but of one man in particular. The women come and go, but the one man remains—always at his side, always looking to him for love.

What actually draws James Kirk and Spock of Vulcan together besides basic proximity and mutual values? I propose a very specific psychological chemistry.

He Who Knows So Much, but Not the Right Things

Our understanding of Spock is another story.

We know much, much more about him than we do about James Kirk: notably, his complete backstory. We have met his parents, Sarek and Amanda, and we know that he was bullied as a child, that he rejected the Vulcan Science Academy, that he joined Starfleet against his father's wishes, and that he was consequently estranged from Sarek for eighteen years ("Journey to Babel"). Furthermore, we have been to his native planet of Vulcan and observed Vulcan rituals. We know that he was betrothed to T'Pol in childhood, and that as an adult he was overcome by a biological mating urge which forced him to return to Vulcan or die of a hormonal imbalance of calamitous proportion ("Amok Time"). We know that he served under Christopher Pike before James Kirk ("The Cage"). We know that he loves his mother, and we see him weeping in despair at never having told her so ("The Naked Time"). We know that he is fiercely loyal to his captains—past and present ("The Menagerie"). We know that he wages daily battle between his Human and Vulcan sides ("The Enemy Within"). We know that just the sight of his lost captain restored to life brings an exuberant, joyful smile to his usually solemn face ("Amok Time").

Spock is his own man in most things—a man in constant pursuit of the logic which governs his behavior, a man of science and certainly of non-emotion. He is brilliant, with incredible mental abilities, easily offering precise calculations and factual data. He is a computer expert and familiar with all the functions of the ship. Lastly, he is a touch telepath, which means that he can, in effect, read people's minds and even influence their behavior. He is a very powerful being who, Kirk says, is an "enormous asset" to him.

So, what we can surmise psychologically about Spock is much more concrete and telling than anything we know about Captain Kirk, a man so perfectly suited to his job that we hardly notice how



brilliant he is. We know whence Spock sprang, that becoming an individual in Starfleet was finally more important to him than having the approval of full-blooded Vulcans. We know that Spock admires Kirk's stellar abilities and is willing to walk beside him.

Spock arrives at Starfleet to be his own man, but did he also come there to find love and acceptance? Was he running away, or running toward someone beyond his Vulcan dreams? He is a man who would deny the pursuit of or even the understanding of the emotion of love. How, then, did he come to fall in love with a shipmate, however handsome; a friend, however empathetic; a captain, however gallant . . . of all the people in the universe?

An Innate Ability to Love

We believe that we know Kirk's sexuality, but do we really understand it? James Kirk has a quasi-unsavory public reputation as a ladies' man and a womanizer, but that unflattering opinion isn't quite fact, and is never so stated in the series. We see this when we examine the episodes and his actual responses to the women he meets. He is seemingly sexually adventurous, but he is no womanizer.

Before he assumed command of the *Enterprise*, Kirk's past loves included Ruth ("Shore Leave"), Janice Lester ("Turnabout Intruder"), Areel Shaw ("Court Martial"), that "little blonde lab technician" ("Where No Man Has Gone Before"), and Dr. Janet Wallace ("The Deadly Years"). During his first command, we watch as he falls deeply in love with Edith Keeler ("The City on the Edge of Forever"), Miramanee ("The Paradise Syndrome"), and we could argue, Rayna Kapec ("Requiem for Methuselah"). He also exhibits true feelings for Odonia ("The Mark of Gideon") and Elaan ("Elaan of Troyius"). Although he did not directly manipulate Elaan, as he did Sylvia ("Catspaw"), he does feel remorse for his official part at delivering her to a loveless and culturally unfathomable marriage. Their final parting in the transporter room was difficult and sad for both of them.

The episodes where Kirk manipulates women for a goal should be discarded, although even there, he empathizes with and expresses feelings for them. He manipulated Lenore Karidian to get the acting troupe aboard the *Enterprise* so that he could determine if her father was Kodos; at the end, when things take a tragic turn, he silently acknowledges through McCoy that he did have feelings for her ("The Conscience of the King").

His deep feelings of physical and emotional love fall primarily to Miramanee, a true wife and lover reflective of his basic feelings (his amnesia notwithstanding), and of course to Edith Keeler, a visionary who was his equal in intellect and core values. "Spock, I believe I'm in love with Edith Keeler" was spoken like the doomed epitaph that it was.



Not much is known about the other women with whom he was involved: Ruth was a warm memory that he wanted to revisit, and he held a fondness for Areel Shaw that made him quite happy to see her again. Odonia's sweetness and naïveté endeared her to him, perhaps echoing the confusion he felt as they wandered together through an empty faux *Enterprise*. He didn't fall in love with her, but she touched him so that he acknowledged his and others' need for someone like her in their lives. His feelings for Rayna Kapec came on deep and lightning quick, to the point where he would physically fight another man over her. Her tragic ending left him bereft and probably half dumbfounded at how this situation had even come about.

Edith, Miramanee, Rayna, Ruth, Areel . . . these are no conquests. These women are examples of the love that James Kirk has to give and that he does give when he can, even if tragically or briefly or impossibly. He appears to express his love as though it is something inside of him that must get out, like laughter or empathy. He is a man who exudes love through command of his ship and his close friendship with Bones, but more potently through contact with another being who needs it, craves it, and silently worships it.

Spock's Women, Or Are They Just Women?

As a Vulcan used to suppressing emotion, Spock is not free with his feelings, especially toward the love of a woman. Only two major instances are observed: Leila ("This Side of Paradise") and Zarabeth ("All Our Yesterdays"). Both these episodes made it clear that Spock was under the influence of external conditions and was not himself. Although it was hinted that he and Leila had some sort of relationship in the past, it was only described from her side. After exposure to the spores, Spock seemingly felt free to express his love and to experience happiness with her. As for Zarabeth, his physical desire for her overwhelmed his present-day logical and unemotional persona, resulting in jealousy and possessiveness. Both instances indicate that, under normal circumstances, he would not have responded to either woman so demonstratively. He seems aloof and uncomfortable around Leila before being affected by the spores; nor would he have tried to actually choke Doctor McCoy on Sarpeidon had his mind not been affected.

No other women in the series evoke such loving reactions from him. The Romulan Commander ("The Enterprise Incident") and Droxine of Stratos ("The Cloud Minders") seem to intrigue him, although the first encounter was driven by his mission objectives and the second by a need to distract her from Captain Kirk's backdoor criminality. And, of course, we know that he never, ever loved T'Pol.

Spock is a Vulcan among Humans. That Spock is neurotic about his Vulcan identity is consistent throughout the series. For years, he rejects his own sexuality and his personal obligations to T'Pol.



and yet insists that he be labeled a Vulcan in all regards. He is determined to remain unemotional (including even positive emotions), and his aloof demeanor is his trademark. He exhibits his superior qualities daily and is insulted if Doctor McCoy calls him out for never recognizing even his best Human qualities.

Spock can express empathy, though not as often as Kirk: after melding with the mother Horta, he is dismayed by her pain at being the last of her species (“The Devil in the Dark”), and he is vulnerable and kind during his poignant and sweet conversation with Leila on the ship after the spores have been eradicated. In 1930s New York, he displays a keen empathy toward Kirk when relaying the terrible information that Edith Keeler must die. He even mutters to Kirk, “I’m sorry,” a rare but utterly heartfelt apology. *Jim, I’m sorry to give you this terrible news, I’m sorry to hurt you, I’m sorry because I love you, and it doesn’t matter to me that you love someone else.*

At this point, the love between the two men is lapping at their ankles, like the tide coming in and going out, steady and gentle, but not yet recognized, except subliminally, by the two.

Normal: Isn’t That a Good Thing?

James Kirk’s psychology is perfectly, stunningly normal—so much so that he practically demands that we watch him more closely. He is not neurotic, has worked hard to achieve his command, and has gone through extensive training and starship assignments. His stability and normality are unhailed qualities that no doubt contributed to the early award of a Starfleet captaincy. Starfleet Command doesn’t need a hothead, a bully, or an arrogant know-it-all to run their starship.

Spock is not normal. He endeavors to be the exemplary Vulcan, as if he is always being watched by full-blooded Vulcans; suffers in adulthood from childhood rejection; and fights against even the most benign Human emotion. He longs for friendship and love, but he cannot allow himself to experience them—not even to acknowledge his love for his own mother, who loves him deeply. He is a superior being (intellect, physical strength, eidetic memory, telepathic abilities) and yet subjugates himself to the Human-centric Starfleet and, more intimately, to the Human James Kirk.

Why?

The Inevitable

Spock is a fascinating character, but the character of Captain James Kirk is much more intriguing because he is remarkably normal: no repression, no neuroses, no fixations (except coffee). He may



hit a glitch or two at times (“Obsession,” “The Ultimate Computer”), but he expertly overcomes them and settles back quickly to his natural, competent self. He is unexceptionally exceptional.

As an expressive person, James Kirk falls in love easily and often because he wants to give love and he has much to give. Falling in love is not a failing, but another exceptional quality—as significant as his talent for command. The multiple women whom he has loved in the past and loves during the series do not undermine his emotional openness, but support it. As a starship captain, he cannot maintain a lasting, loving relationship with these women, but he can with his shipmate and comrade Spock. He recognizes that Spock needs him, and James Kirk is patient, emotionally supportive, expressing an unstated love until the Vulcan can reciprocate a need of his own for more.

Because he has felt rejection his entire life—from his own father and his culture—Spock desires acceptance for who he is. He adheres to his captain because he wants to receive Kirk’s love, even if as a Vulcan-Human hybrid he is still discovering who he is. James Kirk accepts him completely, and for that, Spock clings to him with intense loyalty and fierce devotion. Never dismiss that blink-and-you’ll-miss-it moment in “The Empath,” when Spock sits next to the injured, unconscious Kirk as Gem approaches: for just a second or two, he gazes down at Kirk, transfixed, as if he’s looking at an angel.

He is in love.

That’s why they’re the perfect couple and were destined for each other. One gives love as freely as flowing water, and the other thirsts for that unconditional and flowing love. As a man who eschews emotion, Spock can’t believe his luck at having found affinity with the Human Kirk, and as a man who chooses a solitary life, Kirk can’t believe the miracle of finding love with another man, a man from another planet, a man like no other. Because it is his nature, he freely gives the love that Spock craves without any demands, without the expectation of it ever being returned. It is not transactional. Kirk is a font of love, and Spock thirsts for that love, quenching himself during intimate chess games and heart-pounding rescues. Spock will nearly kill himself or risk the ship to save James Kirk. Although he cloaks these actions in logic, he can never allow the loss of the one person who loves him without question (“The Paradise Syndrome,” “The Tholian Web”). His personal logic cannot accept even the possibility of that loss.

Captain James Kirk is the constant giver of love, and First Officer Spock is the deserving recipient of that love. Kirk must love like he must breathe. He simply can’t help himself. Something in Spock recognizes that fact and is drawn to it from the beginning. In time, as their relationship progresses, Spock will endeavor, with abundance and joy, to give love back to the ever-patient James Kirk.

And don’t we all know—with utter and complete certainty—that to be true.



Spock—*Captain, you took a big chance.*

Kirk—*Did I, Mister Spock? . . . An actual attack wouldn't have killed any more people, but it would have ended their ability to make war.*

Spock—*But you didn't know it would work.*

Kirk—*It was a calculated risk . . . The Eminians keep a very orderly society and actual war is a very messy business . . . I had a feeling that they would do anything to avoid it, even talk peace.*

Spock—*A feeling is not much to go on.*

Kirk—*Sometimes a feeling, Mister Spock, is all we Humans have to go on.*

Spock—*Captain, you almost make me believe in **luck**.*

Kirk—*Why, Mister Spock, you almost make me believe in **miracles**.*

(“A Taste of Armageddon”)



Celestial Bodies and Universal Constants

Lor Vee

When I first started this piece, I thought I wanted it to feel like the posters of old, where you can see the faces of all the characters while having space as the background and the enterprise front and center, too! I also knew I wanted to incorporate the three pairs of Kirks and Spocks we have until now, mainly because I thought people would recognize such a thing as something I would do. My favorite thing of the whole drawing is how TOS Jim is looking at his Spock, and in turn how the meld translates into the universe of possibilities. I hope I have done these two justice!



Sanity and Sangfroid

Mazarine A.S.C.

His Silent Crooning

How is it that I could hunger
So deeply for the act of affection?
The Human appetite only extends
To the pining, the yearning,
The wishing for an embrace.
The Vulcan Logic guards
A love so tender and unequivocal.
It loves to cage the heart.
I hold my head high
To quietly drown my sorrows,
my surrendering, my loss.
Logic waters the gardens of loneliness.
The thorns grow and twist
Along my veins.
I use them as a bind sheath,
Yet wonder when I'll be free
From my own self-imposed misery.
Or will I let you slip from my fingers
To protect myself from this arbitrary fear?



Through the Eyes of the Enterprise

I watch the yeoman by the replicator
And working signals while dreaming away.
Not too far away from her,
I watch the foolish ensigns and their antics
Chattering away on their shifts,
And the lieutenant who scolds them.
I loom before a commander who tenderly gazes
At the captain when his back is turned.
I watch lifeform after lifeform beam aboard.
Packed with thousands of secrets,
I remain.
Forty-seven hours later, I watch the captain
Return the tender gaze over a chessboard
To the unsuspecting commander.
I watch officers as they come and go,
Leaving behind families and cultures
To pursue the unknown,
Allowing the stars to guide their fates.
I remain.
I watch as the commander lets his guard down
And the hopeless romantic captain falls in love again.
I watch them leave.
The captain becomes an admiral and fades to gray,
The commander dons black and shields himself.
Yet I remain,
Housing memories that never touch.



The Truest Treasure

In this cold, unforgiving sea of stars,
We seek buried treasure
And aim to find the meaning of man
Outside of Earth's blue boundaries.
But ultimately, we fail to see that
The treasure patiently stands before us.
The most priceless gold fizzles in comparison
To the bonds we formed during our journey,
And to the loyalty of the beautiful Vulcan,
Who stands by my side evermore.



Gift Giving

Nev

There were few times that a captain was allowed the opportunity to relax. So much of their time was dominated by the tasks mandated to them and the lives of hundreds of crewmembers in their hands. Spock had rarely seen his captain set aside said responsibility. Even in the sanctity of his own quarters, Kirk kept that air about him, his shoulders set, his head held high.

Some of his restraint had melted away with time, and with the trust that had grown between the pair of them. A fledgling bond had blossomed quickly from the connection that had formed with proximity. A bond that Spock hypothesized might one day transcend the stars.

Yet, often the captain still maintained his distance, still stood an inch too far away for Spock to reach. He was too trapped by his own expectations and the rules he had imposed upon himself the day they had pinned the captain's badge to his chest.

Now, with the ship docked at Spacedock 1, orbiting high above the Earth, they had been afforded that chance at relaxation. At Kirk's invitation, they were sequestered away in the captain's quarters, avoiding the few officers still aboard the ship. So far, Spock was doing a poor job of decompressing, far too distracted by the man he shared the room with to focus on the journal he had intended to study over the course of their mandated break.

Jim, of course, was facing no such issues. Instead, he had set aside all responsibility in favor of a chance to read, uninterrupted, with no risk of a red alert to drag him away from the soft-backed book he'd acquired.

As a child, Spock had seen paper books, something that had died out long ago on Vulcan. His mother had brought her own small collection with her, primarily old books on language, many of them outdated but still well loved under his mother's hands. They were considered antiques, a vintage sort of collectible that could quite easily be replaced by the dozens of options available on a PADD or any computer system. Amanda had always purported that there was something about the physicality that she preferred, some element to the sensation of paper under her fingers that drew her back to them time and time again.

Spock occasionally wondered if Jim might have made the same argument. There was often something almost reverent in the way he handled the books in his care. Though he had not brought many books with him aboard the *Enterprise*, they were still present. In the instances that Spock had been within the captain's quarters, the small collection was in plain view on his desk.



Spock had never understood the appeal, and he would admit that even now it often escaped him. But he was capable of understanding the most important fact of the matter, that Captain Kirk was a self-proclaimed bibliophile. As a result, he hoped, Kirk would be amenable to the rare gift Spock intended to acquire for him.

Soon Spock would be forced to leave; he had made an appointment at a small store in San Francisco that he was loath to miss. In the meantime, he had intended to read about some of the breakthroughs he had missed in the time they had been wandering the endless expanse of space. That goal was being superseded by a different one. He was instead spending his time cataloging the emotions that flickered across Jim's face as he read.

Across from him, Jim shifted slightly in his seat, a soft smile overtaking his face. He lifted the book from where he had it in his palm; the small makeshift bookmark he'd acquired returned to its spot between the pages as he set it aside. The bookmark—a scrap of metal pilfered during repairs on the bridge—stuck out a half inch from the top of the book.

“Something on your mind, Mr. Spock?”

Spock blinked, eyes returning to the PADD in his lap before he answered. “Not at all, Captain. I simply have an appointment I cannot miss.”

“Oh? Leaving the ship for some alone time, Commander?” Jim was smiling at him, the kind of smile he seemed to save only for Spock.

“For a time, Captain.”

— * * * —

The store was tucked away on a small square a few miles from Starfleet's main campus. In his time at the Academy, Spock had never found a reason to visit it. Nor could he have claimed to be aware of its existence. The front of the bookstore was well lit. In a massive window sat a table full of multicolored covers and centuries-old romance novels on display.

A bell rang above the door when Spock entered. Stepping carefully into the small bookstore, he took in the maze of aisles marked by hanging signs to denote the genres. There were stacks of books scattered throughout, small piles of them next to the shelves and tucked under tables used to house more focused displays. It was larger than he had anticipated.

Spock couldn't help but think that Jim must have frequented this place in his time at the Academy. He would have spent as much of his free time as possible perusing the shelves, wandering the maze without a care for where the exit might be. Even now, this was a maze he did not think his captain would mind being trapped in for a time.



A woman popped around the corner after a few long minutes, a stack of books balanced precariously on one arm and a pair of glasses perched on the end of her nose.

For a moment, she simply blinked at him, taking in the pointed ears and Vulcan bowl cut before she spun on her heel to drop the books on the nearest spot of open counter she could locate.

She turned back to him with her hands settled on her hips as she gave him one final appraising glance.

“Then you must be Spock, right?” His quiet confirmation was met with a vigorous nod. “Here to see that first edition you were asking after?”

“Yes,” Spock answered, clasping his hands behind his back as he regarded her in turn. She seemed polite enough, if still somewhat focused on his ears. “You indicated that you would hold it until my arrival.”

“Honestly don’t think the hold would have been necessary. She’s been with me for a while. Now, you wait here, and I’ll go grab it from the back.” She returned with a small book wrapped in soft brown paper held together by a piece of twine. “You said it was for someone when we had that call. I assumed you meant someone special, so I went ahead and wrapped it for you.”

Spock took the package with care. He had intended to look the book over and be certain of its condition. But removing the paper seemed tasteless. Besides, it did seem like a touch that Jim might appreciate. Spock had never been one for the Human practice of gift giving, and wrapping paper had always seemed a waste, but it had already been used here. Would it not be a further waste to remove it now?

His mind made up, Spock turned the small package over in his hands, running his fingers along the lines of paper until he could trace the title of the book with his fingertips. There were two books, not just one.

“It was released in two parts. Since I had both, I went ahead and listed them together. Would’ve thought a collector would be aware of that.”

“They are not for me.”

“And you aren’t a collector, huh?”

“I am not.”

A moment of awkward silence persisted. Spock had never quite been able to find his footing in social settings that did not follow the rules he applied to interactions within Starfleet.



“Well.” The woman gave him a decisive nod as she turned back to the small pile of books she’d set aside. “I hope the one you’re giving them to appreciates them. Used to have an Academy kid that just adored them. Been a while since he’s come by, but I’m sure he’d be devastated to see them go.”

Spock paused, the books tucked securely beneath one arm. If his hunch was correct . . . “I do not believe he will have need to be.”

The door creaked shut behind him before the woman had the chance to respond.

— * * * —

Once, when Spock was young, his mother had taken him on a trip to Canada. There he had been introduced to a number of his Human relatives. Small hordes of children had poked and prodded until they’d determined him far too boring to be part of their games and had wandered off. That had also been his first true introduction to the Human way of gift giving.

On Vulcan his mother had given him gifts, usually small things. But they had never been wrapped, simply set out or handed to him when the opportunity arose. In his great grandmother’s house in Canada, there had been piles of gifts under a fake tree, all wrapped in decorative paper.

At the time, Spock had found the ordeal unnecessarily chaotic and needlessly wasteful. Though the small set of scales he had been gifted had been perfectly useful. A logical gift.

A book, especially one made of paper, could hardly be considered a logical gift, save for the fact that Spock believed that Jim would take great pleasure in receiving such an item. Especially one so coveted. There were very few copies not in the hands of private collectors or historical museums. Spock had spent longer than he perhaps should have hunting it down.

Though the gift was in many ways illogical, most things surrounding Jim were. Spock had come to accept it, even to prefer it.

Still, Spock hesitated outside the captain’s door, his hand hovering an inch from the button that would announce his presence. He had been standing there for approximately three minutes. The door remained his final hurdle in the completion of his appointed task.

The package, now tucked securely in the crook of his arm and held protectively against his chest, was just as it had been when he’d retrieved it. Though it was Human custom to include some type of messaging, Spock had deemed it unnecessary. He would be present to carry out any messaging himself, and he did not believe it would be needed to begin with.

Jim had an innate ability to understand Spock where even his own parents often floundered. If anyone could understand what Spock was trying to convey in this moment, it would be his captain.



The choice was taken from him a second later. The door opened with the soft hiss of hydraulics as Jim made to exit. Spock barely managed to step back in time to avoid the collision.

“Captain.”

“Spock, were you waiting out here?”

“I was not.” Spock paused. Waiting was not the correct term for what Spock had been doing. Nor did he particularly want to explain. “I had intended to bring something to you.”

Jim blinked and gazed at Spock with the slightest narrowing of his eyes, the look he occasionally got when Spock had done something unexpected. It was confusion, or perhaps curiosity, if Spock were pressed to name it.

Spock stepped around him before he had the chance for further questions, then turned back to wait as Jim raised both eyebrows at him and made to follow. He stepped back into his own quarters with a distinct air of amusement as Spock shuffled slightly where he stood.

Spock held the package out.

“For you.”

Jim didn’t bother to hide his now readily apparent amusement as he set his PADD aside to take the package in both hands. Jim, unlike Spock’s cousins years ago, did not immediately tear open the soft paper packaging. Instead, he held the gift for a long moment, considering it with a focus Spock had not quite anticipated. Slowly, he tipped it one way and then the other, testing the weight as he ran his fingers up and down the sides of the gift through the paper.

“Is this a book, Spock? I thought you didn’t understand the appeal of something that can be just as easily if not more readily acquired on a PADD.”

“I do not. And I maintain that opinion, Captain.”

Jim smiled slightly, then tapped his fingers against the package with a thoughtful expression.

“But this is a book?” The question was light, playful, a tone he often took when he was teasing, and one Spock had slowly become familiar with over the course of their mission.

Spock did not believe that it was a question he was truly supposed to answer. Instead, he locked his hands behind his back as he raised an eyebrow.

“I believe the correct answer is that you must open it to see.”



“Well, then.” Jim tugged gently at the twine until the knot slid free and he could simply unfold the wrapping. He slowly pulled away the last layer to reveal the soft green covers of the two books. “These are a first edition. You found me a first edition of *Little Women*?”

There was a note of something Spock might have described as wonder in the tone of his voice. A soft sort of reverence in the way he ran his fingers first over the cover and then the spines.

“They are, Captain.” The confirmation seemed more perfunctory than anything.

“I’ve seen these before. There was a shop a bit off campus that had a set. I used to go look around when I had the free time.” Jim said this quietly.

Then Spock’s hypothesis had been correct. “There was, yes.”

“You—you got them for me?” There was emotion in Jim’s voice, one of the many Spock struggled to name at the best of times.

“You had expressed an interest in them. I believed you would enjoy them.” Spock’s answer was as straightforward as he felt he could manage, the most logical reason for the choices he had made for Jim’s sake.

“So you got them for me? As a gift?”

“Yes.”

He was startled when Jim closed the distance, lunging forward to wrap Spock in a tight hug. His ear was pressed to Spock’s chest, over the place a Human’s heart would beat.

“Thank you, Spock.”

The grip around his waist tightened before Jim relinquished his hold. He stepped back to smile at Spock with wide, slightly damp eyes. Spock found suddenly that he didn’t want Jim to step back, that he much preferred the weight against his chest, the arms wrapped around his waist.

Spock didn’t think; one hand snapped out to catch Jim by the wrist, gently bringing him to a stop now that there were scant inches between them.

This time it was Spock who closed the distance, slowly, careful to allow his captain the chance to break the contact before he closed Jim in his arms. Jim melted into him, settling much of his weight against Spock’s chest.

He was a comforting weight, warm and affectionate. Jim’s hands rested at the small of Spock’s back as the world seemed to fade away for a moment. Spock’s nose brushed the soft mop of Jim’s hair



as he closed his eyes and let the moment last, the two of them simply breathing each other in as the seconds ticked by.

When Jim stepped back for a second time he didn't break the connection between them. His hands rested lightly on Spock's hips as he smiled up at him, blinking away the brightness that had pooled in his eyes.

"Join me for dinner in my quarters?" Jim asked.

"I am amenable."

The smile Jim offered then was brilliant, deepening the dimples that softened the captain's face even further. His grip tightened gently on Spock's hips.

"It's a date, then."

— * * * —

Spock was cozy, his shoulder snug against Jim's where the two were seated on the small couch tucked into the corner of the captain's quarters. He was close enough that he could feel the vibration of Jim's voice in his body, the swell of his chest as he breathed, the point of contact between them a line of warmth down Spock's side.

Jim's voice washed over Spock, steady and soothing as he read, the book balanced on his knee, close enough that Spock could read along if he so wished. He had found very quickly that he did not care to do so, instead allowing his eyes to drift closed as he listened to the rhythm of Jim's voice as he narrated the book.

There was something pleasant about the brush of paper as a page was turned, Jim's voice rising and falling as he read. Spock could see the appeal of it now, with Jim's weight against his side, and the story coalescing in vague pictures behind his eyes.

Jim turned the page again, his voice trailing off as he shifted ever so slightly. "Still with me, Mr. Spock?"

Spock hummed a low confirmation, his eyes fluttering open to see Jim smiling at him. Jim's face was lit by the soft light of the lamp on the table beside them.

"We will do this again?" Spock queried, his voice low and rasping after sitting silently so long at Jim's side.

He felt a brush of lips against his temple as Jim set the book aside. His voice was warm in Spock's ear as he spoke. "Anytime you'd like."



Sisyphus and the Dream of Happiness

Zjofierose

Spock straightens his shoulders and takes a deep breath. The door in front of him is identical to every other door along this corridor: beige and unassuming. Still, the sight of it fills him with mingled excitement and apprehension.

He allows himself a moment to acknowledge and process the emotions, identifying their source as the recent change in the level of intimacy between himself and the captain. He closes his eyes briefly, suppressing his feelings for consideration at his next meditation session.

He presses the button next to the door, blinking in surprise as it *whooshes* softly open for him. Jim has keyed it to recognize his biometrics, Spock realizes. He is forced to take another breath, calming the surface of his mind with the discipline of long practice.

“Jim?”

Spock steps into the captain’s quarters, his hands folded behind his back as he glances around the small living area. There’s no sign of the captain, but there’s a telltale off-key singing coming from the refresher unit. The indication of something which Jim Kirk does less than flawlessly never fails to amuse Spock, given Jim’s prodigy-level talent in nearly every other sphere of his life. The existence of areas where he is merely mediocre is refreshing.

The sound of the shower stops, and the singing changes to a muted muttering as Jim talks himself through whatever test he’s been running down in engineering these past few days. Spock has steered clear of it; the captain and Scotty become especially impassioned when they’re solving a problem, and while they are comfortable with each other’s escalating emotional volatility while in the heat of an experiment, Spock is less so.

Spock settles into a chair, folding his hands in his lap and looking around. He rarely has the chance to be alone in the captain’s quarters. He is rarely *in* the captain’s quarters, period, save for private meetings or, more recently, private activities, neither of which are conducive to observing his surroundings.

Jim’s quarters are . . . nearly empty, Spock notes with mild surprise. There’s the usual table with a matching set of chairs, at which Spock sits; a small, mostly empty bookshelf in the corner; and a collection of PADDs in a heap on the desk in the corner. Spock lets himself smile as he attempts to imagine Jim ever sitting at a desk. He suspects that the last time that occurred would have been prior to Jim’s dropping out of Riverside High.



A bottle of brandy and two clean glasses sit near the pile of PADDs, the bottle half empty and the glasses standard Starfleet issue. Across the room, there is a throw blanket draped across the sofa, a standard-issue piece of inflammable gray fabric. There is a pile of clothing next to it—a command shirt, an exercise shirt, and a mound of what Spock hopes are clean socks.

There are no photos on the walls; the display shelves next to the small dining table are empty of the usual captainly awards and tchotchkes; even the chess set is one that Spock is pretty sure Jim “liberated” from a rec room at the Academy. The only item of any obvious personal significance is an envelope on the table, stamped with multiple transit receipts and covered in stickers, bearing an Iowa address.

“Oh. Spock.”

Jim pauses in dragging a comb through his hair to smile at Spock. He is shirtless and damp, the muscles of his chest and belly flushed with the heat of his shower, a small black towel wrapped tightly around his hips.

Spock allows his gaze to linger. It is a relief to no longer have to hide his appreciation for the captain’s form, at least when they are in private. Jim’s smile slowly broadens as he watches Spock take him in.

“Is this work, or is this a social call?” Jim asks, moving toward the table. The dim light of his quarters highlights the musculature of his lean form. Spock has always preferred the compact strength of Jim’s narrow frame to the heavier, more showy bulk of some potential partners, or to the willowy softness of others. It is a match to his own lithe build, as with so many traits between them—Jim’s hidden brilliance, his quicksilver cleverness, his steely determination. They have been a matched pair since Captain Pike shoved them together more than half a decade ago, and the new evolution of their personal closeness only serves to emphasize the complementary nature of their strengths and desires.

“Purely social,” Spock answers slowly, remaining seated, raising an eyebrow. “Unless you have other plans for the evening?”

Jim’s damp towel lands neatly over Spock’s head, blocking out the light and muffling the sound, filling his sensitive nose with the smell of Jim’s skin and hair.

“Nope.” Jim’s voice is full of amusement, and Spock smiles under the cover of the towel as he feels Jim step closer. “No plans.”

Spock frees himself of the towel to find the firm plane of Jim’s stomach within reach. He resists, keeping his hands buried in the towel and nodding his head in the direction of the table.



“Do you want to open your package first?”

Jim lifts an eyebrow and steps away, turning his bare backside to Spock as he moves to the table and hefts the envelope in his hands. Spock hardly minds, taking the chance to appreciate the view of Jim’s firm gluteal muscles, the pale round strength of them, their fuzz of golden hair in the dim light of the room.

“It’s from Sadie and Simon,” Jim says, his voice fond.

“I had assumed, given the address and number of attached decorations,” Spock admits. “How old are they now?”

Jim hums thoughtfully as he pulls one end of the envelope open. “Let’s see, Sam got Sadie when she wasn’t quite a year old, and that was five years ago, so she must be coming up on seven. And Simon . . .” He trails off, letting two cards, a handful of candy, and a note with adult handwriting that must be from Sam fall out. “Simon was two when Sam adopted him, but that was just last year, so he must still be three, I think.”

“And how is Sam handling his increased responsibilities?”

Jim shoots Spock an amused glance as he opens the note from Sam, skimming it before he replies.

“Sounds like things are pretty good. Sadie’s starting school this fall, and Simon’s finished potty training.” Jim refolds the letter from his brother and turns to the two cards. He smiles, turning them over in his hands, the brightly colored construction paper an oddity in the otherwise Starfleet-issue room. “Cute. Looks like Sadie’s mostly getting the hang of spelling.”

He hands Spock the larger of the two cards. It’s a cheerful purple, adorned with stickers of spaceships and planets and one hamster. *Dear Uncle Jim*, Spock reads in the big, careful, childish printing, *I hope you are wel. We are gud. We love you! Love Sadie and Sy Simon.*

“Indeed.” Spock passes it back. “An important developmental milestone for any child.”

Jim snorts, passing him the other card. This one is a bright orange and features a number of crayon scribbles of indeterminate intentionality. “And what milestone is Simon showing?”

Spock examines the card seriously.

“He seems to be focusing currently on abstract art. Perhaps he has been studying Kandinsky.”

Jim laughs outright, taking the card from Spock’s hand and picking up the rest of items from the table. “I’m sure that’s it. No doubt Sam will start him on Pollock and Rothko next.”



"I believe Picasso might be the next logical step," Spock answers, his attention on the interplay of muscles on Jim's back as he crosses the room to the waste disposal unit, into which, to Spock's surprise, he shoves the cards, the letter, and the package, and closes the flap.

"Now," Jim says, crossing the room toward Spock, his mouth serious but his eyes smiling. "I believe we had some personal business to attend to?"

— * * * —

Afterward, they lie facing one another on Jim's bed, the sweat cooling on their skin. Jim traces idle patterns on Spock's ribs, and it puts Spock in mind of Simon's drawing, the abstract lines of crayon so lovingly rendered and so abruptly disposed of.

"Jim," he murmurs, "may I ask a personal question?"

The finger now tracing its way across Spock's shoulder pauses, then starts up again.

"Sure."

"Why do you not retain any personal items in your quarters?"

Jim frowns. "What do you mean? I've got all my clothes here. My datapadds."

"No." Spock turns onto his side, propping himself up on an elbow to look at Jim's confused face. "*Personal* items. Objects of sentimental significance." He pauses, unsure how to frame the question. "I believe that many people would have retained the children's cards and displayed them in their quarters. Is that not the case?"

"Oh." Jim flops down on his back, his gaze focused on the ceiling. "Yeah, I guess. But I've never really seen the point of keeping stuff." He gives an awkward shrug. "It all just ends up lost or destroyed, anyway."

"Not all of it, surely." Spock settles a reassuring hand on Jim's shoulder. He can feel the tenseness of Jim's muscles, though he's not sure of the cause. "Do you not retain items from your childhood back on Earth?"

"No." Jim's response is flat. "I was born in space, and minutes later everything my mother had brought with her, including my father, was blown into a million pieces. She was never much for having stuff after that, and we moved around too much to hang on to things, anyway."

Spock lets his thumb rub slowly across Jim's shoulder, keeping tempo with his breath. "And the *Enterprise*, too, has been heavily damaged or destroyed—"

"Multiple times, yes," Jim bites out. "You don't need to remind me."



“I did not mean it as a criticism, Jim,” Spock rebukes softly. “I am simply trying to understand.”

“Sorry.” Jim absently pats Spock’s hip. “Talking about my childhood makes me tense.”

This, Spock thinks, is an understatement, but he lets it slide, allowing the silence between them to stretch out long and full.

“Do you feel that possessions are only valuable if they are retained in pristine condition?”

Jim rolls his head to the side and blinks at Spock. Spock gives in to the urge to run his finger across the slope of Jim’s forehead and down across his cheekbones. There’s a small scar at the corner of his eye. Spock would like to examine it more closely, to know its cause, to memorize the texture of it with his tongue.

“No,” Jim says after a moment. “I guess I would say that possessions exist to be used.”

“A pragmatic view,” Spock tells him, and the corners of Jim’s mouth quirk. “What, then, would you say is the function of an item of sentimental value? One such as my robes from Vulcan, or the photographs the doctor keeps of his daughter?”

Jim sighs, a hint of annoyance entering his voice. Spock strokes the curve of Jim’s chin, letting his fingers trace along the slope of Jim’s neck.

“I know what you’re doing, Spock,” Jim says, rolling his eyes. “I’m choosing to play along.”

“And I appreciate it,” Spock answers easily, bending forward to press his mouth to Jim’s shoulder. Jim’s skin is cool and faintly salty beneath his tongue. “Please, continue.”

Jim sighs again, but the annoyance has faded from his voice.

“The point of sentimental objects is to provoke sentiment. To remind the possessor of the person or the experience which provided the object.” He presses the palms of his hands into his eyes and holds them there, resisting Spock’s gentle tug on his forearms. “It just seems so *pointless*, Spock. Like, why hang on to all this stuff when it’s just going to be lost or destroyed, anyway?”

“Why do anything?” Spock muses, his fingers tapping idly on Jim’s sternum. “Why live? Why join Starfleet? Why have any experience? Will not all of the things we do and experience also perish, either at our own demise or even sooner? Perhaps we should simply blow up the ship now, and save the universe the trouble.” He starts to rise, but Jim pulls him down to the bed, rolling him on his back and draping his body across Spock’s.

“Fine,” he grumbles, but his eyes are dancing. “Goddamn Vulcans and your goddamn logic. You’re right, there’s inherent value in sentimental objects.”



“And it is not negated by the loss of those objects,” Spock says, reaching down to pull Jim’s thighs open around his own hips. Jim’s flexibility is a point of continual fascination and pleasure for both of them.

“And it is not,” Jim grumbles, leaning down to kiss Spock firmly, “negated,” another kiss, this one with tongue, “by the loss,” Spock cups Jim’s knees in his hands and spreads his thighs wide, “of those objects. Happy?”

Spock drags his hands up the backs of Jim’s thighs and takes a firm grip of Jim’s ass.

“Very.”



The door opens when Spock presses the button, and he allows himself the small thrill of satisfaction that results.

“Jim?”

“Come in.”

Spock enters, his hands clasped behind his back. Jim hadn’t specified the reason behind his request for a meeting, but given the low level of the lighting, Spock would hazard a guess that it is not to do with ship’s business.

“Jim.” Spock comes to a stop next to his usual chair, standing at ease and letting a small smile play at the corners of his mouth. He glances at the table. “I see you have found a personal item that you are willing to keep.”

Jim rolls his eyes fondly, reaching out a hand to scratch behind the ears of the stuffed sehlat that sits in pride of place in the center of the small table. Fulfilling the request had taken Spock some months, and his father’s eyebrow had darted higher than he could remember having seen it since he was an adolescent. But the look on Jim’s face when Spock had presented him with his birthday present had been worth the hassle.

“For now, anyway,” Jim says, “until the ship gets blown up again,” and grins.



Silver Lining

Eldar_of_Zemlya

Humans might call it a “sexual fantasy.” Spock calls it a silver lining.



Mine

ForFucksSakeJim

Editors' Note: This story is a slavefic and features the consent issues expected in that genre.

The situation, to borrow one of Doctor McCoy's more colorful metaphors, had gone to shit in a handbasket. The one time that Spock had agreed not to beam down with the captain had led to an ambush and the subsequent capture of said man.

The captain's communicator signal had gone dark precisely 47.3 minutes ago, shortly after he reported contact with what they had expected to be a routine trading delegation on Omega VI. Lieutenant Uhura's attempts to reestablish communication had been met with nothing but static and an oppressive silence that seemed to mock their growing concern.

The bridge crew worked with practiced efficiency, but Spock could sense their mounting anxiety. Chekov's fingers flew over his console as he conducted detailed planetary scans, while Sulu maintained a lock on the captain's last known coordinates. A sudden burst of activity from Lieutenant Uhura's station drew everyone's attention.

"Mr. Spock! I'm picking up a transmission—heavily encrypted, but it matches known patterns used by slave traders in the Orion Syndicate." Her voice faltered for a moment before professional training reasserted itself. "They're advertising new merchandise." The encrypted transmission continued to scroll across Uhura's screen, describing human specifications that could only refer to Jim. Height, weight, physical condition—all recorded with the dispassionate precision of merchants cataloging livestock. "Can you trace the signal's origin, lieutenant?" Spock's voice remained steady, though his knuckles had gone white where they gripped the console.

"Working on it, sir. They're bouncing it through multiple relays, but . . ." Uhura's fingers danced across her controls with practiced precision. "Got it! The signal's originating from a vessel just beyond the planet's third moon."

"Chekov, scan for ships in that sector."

"One wessel detected, bearing 227 mark 4. Energy signature matches known Orion configurations, but zey're running with minimal power. Probably trying to avoid detection."



McCoy stepped closer to Spock's station, lowering his voice. "Jim's window of opportunity is closing fast, Spock. Once they get him out of the system . . ."

"I am aware, Doctor." Spock squared his shoulders as he moved to the captain's chair—Jim's chair. The irony of commanding a rescue mission from the very seat his captain should occupy was not lost on him. "Mr. Sulu, plot an intercept course. Lieutenant Uhura, alert security and have a tactical team standing by in the transporter room. Doctor McCoy, prepare medical for potential injuries."

"Time to intercept?" he inquired, already calculating possible scenarios and their respective probabilities of success.

"Three minutes at full impulse, sir," Sulu reported. "They haven't detected us yet."

"Good." Spock's dark eyes fixed on the viewscreen where the Orion vessel was now visible, a predatory shape against the stars. "Stand by on phasers, Mr. Sulu. Set to disable only—we need that ship intact."

"They're powering up their warp drive!" Sulu's warning came seconds before a brilliant flash of light filled the viewscreen, the Orion vessel vanishing into the void, taking their captain—taking Jim—with them.

The bridge fell silent save for the steady hum of equipment and Uhura's rapid keystrokes as she worked to track the warp signature. The emptiness of space seemed to mock them, a vast darkness that had swallowed Jim whole.

"Lieutenant?" Spock's voice was barely above a whisper, yet it carried the weight of command.

"Their warp signature suggests that they're heading toward the Rigel system, sir." Uhura's voice was tight with concentration. "Given their heading and the common trade routes used by Orion slavers, they'll likely make a stop at Rigel IV. The largest slave markets in the quadrant operate there."

The word 'slave' sent an illogical tremor through Spock's chest. The thought of Jim—brilliant, defiant Jim—being displayed as merchandise made something ancient and violent stir in his Vulcan blood. It was reminiscent of the time when Jim had died in the warp core, when Spock had sought revenge upon Khan, but it was different. This was a cold, calculated rage that his logic did not wish to suppress.

"Mr. Spock." McCoy stepped closer, his voice uncharacteristically gentle. "You know what this means. With Jim captured, you're . . ."

"Acting captain," Spock finished, the words tasting bitter on his tongue. "Indeed, Doctor." He allowed himself to feel the full weight of command settling onto his shoulders. It was not the first time that he had served as acting captain, but never had the circumstance felt so personal, so vital.



His mind drifted to all that had been left unspoken between himself and Jim. The lingering glances across the bridge, the chess games that stretched long into gamma shift, the way Jim's hand would sometimes brush his shoulder in a gesture that felt more intimate than any mind meld. He had always told himself that there would be time, that his feelings—yes, feelings—could wait until he found the perfect logical moment to express them.

Now, faced with the possibility of losing Jim forever, logic seemed a poor excuse for his cowardice.

"Plot a course to Rigel IV, maximum warp," Spock ordered, his voice carrying a steel edge that made several crew members glance up in surprise. "Lieutenant Uhura, contact Starfleet Command. Inform them of the situation, but make it clear that we are pursuing the hostiles regardless of their response. Mr. Chekov, I want detailed scans of all known Orion trade routes between here and the Rigel system."

"And what exactly do you plan to do when we find them?" McCoy demanded, though his eyes suggested he already knew the answer.

Spock turned to the doctor, and something in his expression made McCoy take a small step back. "I intend to demonstrate to the Orion Syndicate why it is highly illogical to take what belongs to the *Enterprise*." He paused, adding in a voice that only McCoy could hear, "What belongs to me."

— * * * —

"Absolutely not!" McCoy's voice echoed through the briefing room. "Jim would never approve of you going in there alone!" It had been almost a full ship's day as they traveled toward the Orion system. A day of pacing and planning and retrieving reports and updating command on their situation. A day of Spock's clipped responses and barely concealed agitation.

"The captain is not here to approve or disapprove, Doctor," Spock replied, his voice carrying that dangerous edge it had held since Jim's capture. "As I am now acting captain, the decision is mine."

Around the briefing room table, the senior staff exchanged uneasy glances. The plan Spock had laid out was precise, logical—and incredibly dangerous. The *Enterprise* would maintain position outside the Rigel system while Spock took a nondescript shuttle to the surface. He would pose as a wealthy private collector from one of the neutral worlds known for their interest in exotic specimens.

"At least let me send a small security team," Lieutenant Giotto pressed, his weathered face creased with concern. "They could pose as your entourage. I will personally volunteer to be one of those personnel."

"Negative." Spock's fingers steepled before him. "The Orion Syndicate is exceptionally vigilant about security details. They will be scanning for weapons signatures, communications devices, and



any indication of Starfleet presence. One person has a significantly higher chance of infiltrating successfully.”

“And if they scan you and detect your Vulcan biology?” McCoy demanded. “Last I checked, there aren’t many Vulcans in the slave trade business.”

“I should be able to operate undetected for the necessary amount of time. Doctor M’Benga’s prepared compound will temporarily alter my biosignature to appear as a hybrid species common to the neutral worlds. Combined with appropriate cosmetic alterations, my presence should not arouse suspicion.” Spock’s gaze swept the room. “I have calculated the probability of success at 73.4 percent.”

“And the other 26.6 percent?” Uhura’s voice was soft but pointed.

“Results in either my capture or my death.” Spock’s matter-of-fact tone made several officers wince. “Both are acceptable risks, given the alternative of leaving the captain in Orion hands.”

Spock stood, tugging his uniform straight. “Lieutenant Sulu will take command in my absence. Lieutenant Uhura has already established the necessary credentials and financial trails to support my cover identity. Should I fail to make contact within forty-eight hours, you are to return to Federation space and alert Starfleet Command.”

“Like hell we will,” McCoy muttered, but there was resignation in his voice. He knew that look in Spock’s eyes—the same one that Jim got when his mind was irrevocably made up.

As the senior staff filed out, McCoy lingered. “Spock . . .” he began, then seemed to think better of whatever he was going to say. Instead, he reached into his medical kit and pressed a small vial into Spock’s hand. “Concentrated neural inhibitor. Might help if you need to negotiate more aggressively.”

Spock’s eyebrow lifted slightly as he tucked the vial away. “Doctor, are you suggesting that I employ chemical warfare during a hostage recovery mission?”

“I’m suggesting you bring our boy home,” McCoy growled. “By any means necessary.”

— * * * —

Spock stood before the mirror in his quarters, watching M’Benga apply the cosmetic alterations that would disguise his Vulcan features. He allowed himself a moment to experience, fully and without suppression, the depth of his need to recover Jim. It burned in him like the fires of his ancestors, primal and undeniable. He would walk into that den of slavery and corruption not as a Starfleet officer, but as something far more dangerous—a Vulcan with a mate to reclaim.



“I am coming, Jim,” he whispered in his native tongue, watching his reflection transform into someone else entirely. “And they will learn what it means to take what is mine.”

The possessiveness that had overtaken him was in fact nothing new. For some time now, Spock had been acutely aware of his growing feelings toward the captain—feelings that defied his Vulcan training, yet seemed as natural as breathing. Two weeks ago, a mission crisis had necessitated that they share a mind meld; it had unexpectedly illuminated truths he could no longer deny. In that moment of perfect mental synchronicity, their minds had reached for each other with an intensity that left them both shaken.

The regard—the romantic feelings—had been mutual, and overwhelming in its depth. Jim’s mind had called to his own like a beacon in the darkness, familiar yet extraordinary, as if every neural pathway had been designed to complement Spock’s own. The revelation had struck him with the force of a photon torpedo—Jim was his *t’hy’la*, his other half, the one his *katra* had been seeking since before he knew to look. The ancient Vulcan words of bonding had risen unbidden in his thoughts: *parted from me and never parted, never and always touching and touched*.

Yet they had not had time to discuss the implications of this profound discovery. Ship’s business and diplomatic crises had conspired to keep them apart, save for one precious moment three days after the meld. Alone on the observation deck, the stars bearing witness, they had gravitated toward each other like binary stars locked in orbit. Jim’s breath had ghosted across his lips, their mouths a mere 2.3 centimeters apart, when the red alert klaxon had shattered the moment. The subsequent Klingon incursion and endless bureaucratic briefings had left their conversation perpetually unfinished, hanging heavy between them during every bridge shift, every shared glance that lasted a fraction too long.

The current away mission had appeared routine enough to override Spock’s usual insistence on accompanying his captain. The alien species—the Zygorrians—had explicitly requested that Jim beam down alone as a show of trust for the trade negotiations. The preliminary scans had revealed no weapons, no signs of hostile intent, and their first contact protocols had been impeccable. Even Jim had laughed off Spock’s concerns, clapping him on the shoulder with that brilliant smile that never failed to quicken Spock’s pulse.

“It’s a simple negotiation, Spock,” Jim had said, blue eyes bright with that characteristic optimism that both drew and terrified Spock. “These people have shown nothing but goodwill. Besides, I need you on the bridge coordinating with their orbital station about those mineral rights we discussed.”

Spock had acquiesced, though something in his human half had screamed in protest. In the transporter room, he had watched Jim dematerialize in the sparkling golden beam, like an aura



surrounding him, before he finally disappeared. Their last exchange had been a simple nod, a meeting of eyes that held the weight of unspoken words.

The first four hours had proceeded according to plan. Jim's regular check-ins were precise and professional, though Spock could hear the warmth in his voice even through the static of planetary interference. Then came the sudden cut in communications, the spike in energy readings that hadn't matched any known signature in their database, and the horrifying realization that the Zygorrians had been nothing more than a front for a sophisticated Orion slave operation.

By the time they had pieced together what had happened, Jim's biosignature had vanished from their sensors. Every second since had been for Spock an exercise in contained fury, in maintaining enough control to function while his human half howled in rage at having let Jim beam down alone. He should have been there. Should have insisted on accompanying him. Should have trusted the instincts that had warned him about the Zygorrians' insistence on isolation.

The last image he had of Jim—confident, smiling, alive with the joy of exploration—haunted him now. It twisted like a knife in his side, a constant reminder of how quickly everything they held dear could be snatched away. He had let Jim walk into that trap alone, and now his *t'hy'la* was in the hands of those who would strip away his dignity, his freedom, his very humanity.

Guilt was illogical—he knew this. Yet it burned in him like Vulcan's Forge, fueling a determination that bordered on madness. He would find Jim. He would reclaim what was his. And those who dared to lay hands on his captain would be reminded why Vulcan warriors had once been feared across the galaxy.

— * * * —

The slave markets of Rigel IV unfortunately lived up to every horror story that Spock had heard. The air was thick with incense meant to mask the stench of fear and unwashed bodies, while the gaudy decorations did little to disguise the essential brutality of the place. Spock's altered features drew little attention as he moved through the crowds, just another wealthy buyer among many.

He had spent the journey from the *Enterprise* practicing his role—the slight curl of his lip that suggested disdain, the casual way his hand rested on the credit pouch at his hip, the measured gait of someone who expected others to move aside. Now he employed every lesson in deception that he had ever learned from Jim.

“Looking for something special, sir?” A green-skinned female sidled up to him, her smile practiced and predatory. She didn't look like a typical Orion female, perhaps a hybrid with Ferengi ancestry. Her ears and brow ridge were pronounced and adorned with various articles of jewelry. “We have some fascinating new acquisitions.”



“Perhaps.” Spock let his voice carry the bored drawl of the privileged. “I heard rumors of a particularly interesting Human specimen. Starfleet trained, I believe?” He allowed his lips to quirk up slightly. “I have a collection of former command officers. They make such fascinating pets, once properly broken.”

The Orion-Ferengi woman’s eyes lit with avarice. “Ah, you mean the golden one. Yes, quite a prize. Though I should warn you, he has proven rather difficult to manage. Already, he has injured two guards.”

Something fierce and proud swelled in Spock’s chest at that. Of course Jim was fighting. He would expect nothing less.

“I prefer them spirited,” Spock replied smoothly. “The breaking is half the entertainment. Where is he being held?”

“The premium merchandise is kept in the inner sanctum. However.” She paused, her hand brushing his arm. “The bidding starts quite high.”

Spock removed her hand with just enough force to make her step back. “Credits are of no concern. Take me to him.”

The inner sanctum was cooler, darker, lined with force-field-contained cells holding beings of various species, all clearly valuable for one reason or another. But Spock had eyes only for the cell at the far end, where a familiar figure sat in a deceptively relaxed pose.

Together, Spock and the woman walked down the hall, passing by numerous other cells. The cells were nothing more than large durasteel rooms with metal bars on the side facing the hallway. A yellow tinge surrounded them, which Spock registered as a shielding matrix. A few of them were occupied, but Spock did not look in their direction; he only had eyes for Jim.

Jim’s golden command tunic was gone, replaced by the revealing garments typical of the trade. Bruises marked his face and torso, but his eyes—those remarkable eyes—burned with undefeated fury. When he looked up and saw Spock, there was a split second of recognition before his face smoothed into careful blankness.

“This one,” Spock said, letting his gaze roam over Jim in a way that made his stomach turn. “How much?” he inquired, his voice neutral despite the urge to incapacitate the trader and rescue Jim from this Hell.

The hybrid named the current bid, a figure that would have bankrupted a small colony. Spock countered with an offer that made her eyes widen.



“However,” he added, “I insist on examining the merchandise before finalizing any transaction. I have been disappointed before.”

The woman’s smile widened. “Of course, sir. Though I should warn you—he’s quite dangerous. Perhaps you’d like some guards present?”

“That won’t be necessary.” Spock’s hand brushed the neural inhibitor hidden in his sleeve. “I prefer to handle my acquisitions personally.”

The force field dropped with a soft hum, and Spock stepped into the cell. Jim remained seated, his posture deliberately loose, but Spock could read the coiled tension in his muscles. There was a chain attached to the wall and secured around his throat and hands, long enough that he could move about the small cage but short enough that it could not be used as a weapon. The Orion woman stood just outside, watching with obvious interest.

“Leave us,” Spock commanded without turning. “I prefer privacy.”

She hesitated. “Sir, I must advise—”

“I said leave.” This time he let real menace seep into his voice. The woman’s footsteps retreated hastily.

The moment they were alone, Spock moved closer, every sense alert for surveillance devices. Jim rose smoothly to his feet. Despite the revealing slave garments, despite the bruises, he somehow managed to look every inch the starship captain.

“Quite a disguise, Mr. Spock,” Jim murmured, pitch low enough that only Vulcan hearing could catch it. His eyes sparkled with something that, even now, bordered on amusement. “Though I must say, the role of slave owner doesn’t suit you.”

“Indeed.” Spock stepped closer, ostensibly examining Jim as any buyer would. It allowed him to whisper, “Are you injured beyond what I can observe?”

“Nothing serious. They wanted me pretty for the sale.” Jim’s lip curled in disgust. “I assume you have a plan?”

“Naturally.” Spock’s fingers brushed Jim’s arm, and the contact sent an electric current through both of them. “Though you may not approve of its directness.”

Jim’s eyes narrowed fractionally. “Spock—”

Jim was cut off by approaching footsteps. Spock altered his expression to one of annoyance, while Jim scowled at him.



“My sincere apologies.” The Orion woman’s voice dripped false sweetness. “But there’s been a slight change of plan.”

Spock turned slowly, maintaining his façade of aristocratic annoyance. Beside the woman stood a tall Orion male, his elaborate robes marking him as someone of authority. His smile was shark-like as he appraised both Spock and Jim.

“I am Verex, chief auctioneer of this establishment,” the male announced, his voice rich and oily. “And I’m afraid that this particular specimen has garnered too much interest for a private sale. The profits would be insufficient.” His eyes glittered. “Surely you understand. Business is business.”

Behind Spock, Jim let out a soft snort. “Figures. Even slavers can’t resist a bidding war.”

“Silence,” Verex snapped, though his smile never wavered. “You’ll be pleased to know that your spirit has only increased your value. We have had inquiries from three planetary governors and a Klingon commander.” He turned back to Spock. “The auction begins in one hour. You’re welcome to participate, of course. Though I should warn you—the opening bid has appreciated considerably.”

Spock’s mind raced through calculations, probable outcomes, and necessary adjustments to his plan. The neural inhibitor in his sleeve would be useless in a crowded auction house. Any overt action would likely result in both their deaths or, worse, their joint capture.

“How disappointing,” Spock said finally, letting ice creep into his tone. “I’m not accustomed to having my time wasted.”

“Consider it an opportunity,” the female Orion suggested, “to prove just how much you want this particular acquisition.”

“One hour,” Verex repeated, gesturing for Spock to exit the cell. “I trust you can find your way to the main auction house?”

As the force field reactivated, Spock caught Jim’s eyes. Jim’s slight nod told him to proceed with his plan, while the barely perceptible tension in his jaw suggested he had already been plotting his own escape. And there was something else in his gaze, something that made Spock’s pulse quicken despite his Vulcan control.

“Very well,” Spock said smoothly. “I look forward to the competition.”

As he walked away, following his escorts, his sensitive hearing caught Jim’s whispered words, meant for him alone.

“Better make it count, Spock. I’d hate to belong to anyone else.”



He had one hour to join the auction, save Jim, and preferably bring down the entire slavery operation. Spock allowed himself a small, dangerous smile. Jim would approve of those odds.



Spock now found himself in the merchant district of the slave market, his eyes drawn to a display of ornate restraints and collars. His outward expression remained one of aristocratic boredom, but internally, his blood burned at the thought of the rusted chain secured around Jim's throat.

"Ah, discerning customer!" The merchant, a portly Tellarite, hurried forward. "You have excellent eye. This piece just arrived from artisans of Risa." He lifted a collar of polished gold engraved with intricate patterns that caught the light. The attached chain was equally fine, its delicately crafted links belying their undoubted strength.

Spock lifted the collar, testing the weight. It was beautiful, he had to admit—far more suited to Jim's golden presence than the crude iron they'd forced upon him. "The craftsmanship is adequate," he said dismissively, though his fingers continued to trace the patterns.

"Adequate?" The merchant huffed. "This is finest quality! See how collar designed to rest against throat without chafing? The lock sophisticated enough to prevent tampering, yet metal is comfortable for long-term wear." He paused, eyes glinting shrewdly. "Perfect for prestigious purchase one might wish to display properly."

Spock's eyebrow lifted slightly. News traveled fast in these markets, it seemed. "I have not yet made my purchase."

"But you will bid on Starfleet captain, yes? Everyone talking about it. Such specimen deserves proper adornment." The merchant lifted the collar again. "We can even engrave it. Many masters like to mark property."

"An engraving, you say?"

"Any message you desire. Our artisan very quick—it would be ready before auction begins."

Spock considered for a moment, remembering Jim's whispered words: "*I'd hate to belong to anyone else.*"

"A single word," he decided, his voice low. "*Mine.*"

When he rescued Jim—because failure was not an option—he would replace that rusted iron with gold. And even after they were safely back on the *Enterprise*, even after this mission was recorded and filed away, Jim would know. He would remember the word etched into that collar and understand what Spock had been trying to tell him all along.



The merchant's eyes widened slightly at his tone. "An elegant choice, sir. Simple yet possessive. Shall I have it wrapped?"

"No." Spock lifted the collar, watching it catch the light. "I will take it as is."

As the merchant hurried away with the collar, Spock checked the chronometer. Forty-two minutes until the auction. His plan had not changed—the neural inhibitor was still hidden in his sleeve in case the situation called for it, and the *Enterprise* was still waiting for his signal.

Mine.

— * * * —

The auction house hummed with anticipation as Spock took his seat in the rear so as to overlook the audience that had gathered. The newly acquired collar was concealed in the folds of his elaborate robes. His eyes were fixed on the central platform where Jim stood, still defiant despite the crude restraints binding him. The rusted collar seemed to mock them both.

"Ladies, gentlemen, and distinguished beings," Verex announced, his voice carrying through the chamber. "We begin with our premier offering—a genuine Starfleet captain." He circled Jim like a predator, gesturing to various features. "Note the peak physical condition, the natural command presence. Imagine the secrets such a specimen might reveal under proper . . . persuasion."

Jim's jaw tightened, but his eyes found Spock's in the crowd.

"The bidding begins at one hundred million credits," Verex declared.

The Klingon commander's hand shot up immediately. "One hundred and fifty million!"

"Two hundred million," called one of the planetary governors' proxies.

Spock waited, watching the numbers climb. Two hundred and fifty million. Three hundred million. Each bid made his fingers tighten on the golden collar, its engraved message pressing into his palm. Four hundred million. Four hundred and fifty million.

"Five hundred million," he said finally, his voice cutting through the clamor. The room quieted slightly as heads turned to observe this new player.

The Klingon commander smiled nastily. "Six hundred."

"Seven," Spock countered smoothly.

On the platform, Jim's eyebrows rose slightly. His expression remained carefully neutral, but Spock could read the question in his eyes. Was this part of the plan? Or had something changed?



“Eight hundred million,” the Klingon growled.

“One billion.” Spock’s voice remained level.

A murmur ran through the crowd. The planetary governors’ proxies withdrew, leaving only Spock and the Klingon commander. Jim watched them both.

“One point two billion,” the Klingon said through gritted teeth.

Spock let the silence stretch for precisely three seconds. “Two billion.”

The gasp was audible. Even Verex’s practiced smile faltered slightly. The Klingon commander’s face darkened with rage, but after a tense moment, he gave a sharp shake of the head.

“Sold!” Verex announced, unable to completely hide his glee at the unprecedented price. “To our distinguished colleague for two billion credits. Would you like to inspect your purchase while the transaction is completed?”

“Indeed.” Spock moved forward, each step measured and deliberate. As he mounted the platform, he withdrew the golden collar from his robes. “And I will require this crude restraint to be removed immediately. I’ve brought more suitable equipment.”

Verex’s eyes widened at the sight of the gleaming metal. “Of course, of course! Guards, assist the gentleman.”

As the guards moved to exchange the collars, Spock stepped close to Jim. Their eyes met, and Spock allowed his fingers to brush Jim’s neck as he reached for the restraints. The touch sent electricity through them both.

“Mine,” Spock whispered, low enough that only Jim could hear.

Jim’s pupils dilated slightly, his pulse jumping under Spock’s fingers. “Quite an investment, sir,” he murmured back. “I hope I’m worth it.” His eyes narrowed as if challenging Spock, and in this angle and the harsh light, Spock found that Jim looked quite beautiful.

“More than you know,” Spock replied, and carefully closed the golden collar around Jim’s throat.

Jim’s eyes flickered toward the guards, and Spock remembered that they weren’t done yet. They still had to get out of there.

The guards moved to flank them as Verex, his rings glinting on his fat fingers, approached with a sleek datapadd. Around them, the voices of the auction crowd buzzed with a predatory hum. Spock kept his hand on Jim’s chain, noting how the captain had positioned himself slightly behind Spock’s



right shoulder—a calculated move that appeared submissive while actually giving him the perfect angle to watch the guards.

“Your banking credentials are most impressive,” Verex said smoothly, though Spock caught the slight tremor of greed in his voice. “Old money, from what I can tell.”

“Indeed,” Spock replied coldly, watching Jim catalog each exit from his peripheral vision. The chain clinked softly as Jim shifted, and Spock felt rather than saw several of the guards tense in response. They had clearly learned to be wary of their captive.

“The credits have cleared,” Verex announced, raising his voice to be heard by the assembled crowd. His eyes gleamed as he turned back to Spock and Jim. “However, as this is such a prestigious sale, perhaps the good sir would indulge us with a small demonstration?”

The murmur of the crowd grew eager. Several leaned forward in their seats. The Klingon commander who had lost the bidding war watched with particular intensity, his expression dark with something between anger and anticipation.

“A demonstration?” Spock’s voice remained cool, though his fingers tightened on the chain connected to Jim’s collar.

“Yes!” Verex’s smile widened. “Show us how you’ll handle such a spirited acquisition. Prove to everyone here the wisdom of your investment—or the foolishness of their loss.” His eyes flicked meaningfully to the Klingon. “Make him kneel.”

Jim’s shoulders tensed, though his face remained neutral. The gold collar caught the light as he turned his head just enough to meet Spock’s gaze, a dozen messages passing between them in that fraction of a second.

“Very well,” Spock said, his voice carrying an edge that made several audience members shiver. He turned to face his captain, his *t’hy’la*, wishing to convey every ounce of sorrow he felt as his hand fisted into the tawny hair. Jim cried out, a groan tangled in his throat as Spock’s eyes silently apologized.

“Let go of me!” Jim’s words cut through the air like a phaser blast, filled with such convincing hatred that several onlookers recoiled.

For a fraction of a second, Spock faltered.

Jim had spoken to him that way once before, on the bridge of the *Enterprise* after the destruction of Vulcan, when Jim had accused him of heartlessness, of not loving his mother, of not caring about her death. Spock had grabbed him by the throat and thrown him onto the console. Jim’s eyes blazed now with a fury that transported Spock instantly back to that dark day when grief and rage had



overwhelmed them both. Even knowing that this was an act, hearing that tone from Jim—his captain, his friend, his *t’hy’la*—struck something primal and painful within him. The last time Jim had looked at him with such contempt, Spock had nearly lost everything that mattered.

Spock wrenched himself out of his stupor. They had a mission to complete. Lives were depending on their performance. Once again reaching for Jim’s neck, he gripped it with faux fury while projecting a desperate mantra. *Sorry. I’m sorry. Forgive me.*

Jim responded in his mind. *You could never hurt me, Spock. I love you. I love you. You could never hurt me, Spock.*

“Fuck his mouth!” someone called out. Cheers of agreement erupted from the crowd, and Spock’s blood ran cold in his veins. It was one thing to make Jim kneel, to tell him what would be done to him once they left. It was another to violate Jim in such a public manner.

“Yes!” Verex exclaimed. “What a wonderful idea, don’t you agree, sir? Don’t you want to show the crowd just how you’ll utilize this fine officer and his holes?”

“Please. Please don’t,” Jim begged aloud.

“You shall do what I say,” Spock replied, hand fisting once again into the blond hair.

It’s okay, Spock. Listen to them. It’s okay.

The twisted consent burrowed deep into his psyche, made him all that more aroused and simultaneously disgusted by his response.

I love you. It’s okay. Fuck my mouth. It’s okay.

“You say no, Human!” Verex taunted. “Yet your body betrays you.” Spock ignored him. This was not how his and Jim’s first time was supposed to be. Not here in this infernal place with witnesses to their actions.

As the crowd’s cheers and catcalls continued to escalate, Spock’s eyes locked onto his captain’s, searching for any sign of distress or discomfort. He could feel Jim’s arousal, sense the conflicting emotions that warred within him—fear, humiliation, and a spark of desire that Spock knew was not just a product of their circumstances.

“I will give you what you want,” Spock declared, his voice firm and commanding, as he turned to face Verex and the crowd. “But know this—it will be on my terms, and mine alone.”

With a swift movement, Spock pulled on the collar, and Jim fell to his knees. The collar glinted in the light as Jim looked up at him, his blue eyes wide with a mix of fear and anticipation.



Spock's eyes never left Jim's face as he unfastened his pants, releasing his erection. The crowd erupted into cheers and applause as Spock grasped Jim's head, guiding him toward his cock.

Jim's lips parted slightly; Spock's cock was larger than he had ever dared to dream of. He could see as it rose from a weeping slit that its base was thicker than his own, and his mouth began to water at the sight of it. The double ridges shone in the dingy lighting of the auction house, beads of precum gathered at its head and slowly dripping down the length of it. How long had Spock been hard? How long had he been forced to keep his arousal to himself? Jim found that he really wanted to know. But, for now, he had to play his part. Jim looked back up at Spock, eyes wide as he tried to contort his expression into one of disgust.

Spock reached for him with one hand, hooking fingers inside his lips and spreading his mouth open, and Jim understood at that moment that, despite having given his permission, anything that Spock did to him now was beyond his control. Spock's free hand grasped the base of his own cock, pressing it forward until the head met Jim's lips.

Their eyes met, and despite the disdainful expression that Spock wore, Jim could still read the apprehension, the guilt. He allowed the first ridge to enter his mouth, bobbing his head slightly and pressing forth with his tongue in the privacy that it provided them.

Spock's cock was hot, hotter than anything Jim had ever encountered before and filling him with such burning desire that he was unsure if it was entirely his and not emotional bleedthrough from Spock. He wanted to experience the heat, wanted to greedily take what was being offered to him. Wanted to forget the whole charade. The very thought that it was Spock who was to use him set something on fire inside of him.

It's okay, Jim projected, hoping that Spock could hear him. *I can take it.*

Spock must have understood. Slowly, the full length of his cock entered Jim's mouth, hitting the back of his throat without warning and causing his eyes to water as he tried to swallow around his gag reflex. Jim struggled, attempted to pull away, but Spock gripped the chain, wrapping it around his wrist and pulling it taut. Spock's cock was now fully inside his mouth.

It was akin to being set ablaze.

I am sorry. Spock's words made a home within his mind. He understood the words, yet he did not comprehend their meaning until Spock pulled out of him. Only a moment passed before Spock thrust back into him, setting a controlled rhythm. He could feel the gentleness that Spock attempted to exude, feel the apology and the regret and the sorrow that bled from his thoughts like a raging current.

Spock's hips moved faster, Jim's tongue laving the underside of his cock as he pumped.



My release is nearing, Spock whispered to Jim's mind, his thrusts slowing as he fought for self-control, as if he could will away his own release. Jim hadn't thought of the possibility that Spock would respond to the physical stimulus all the way to its conclusion. Of course he would.

Come, Jim replied. *Come for me, Spock*. He continued his reassurances as he closed his eyes. *It's okay. I want it*. That was all that Spock needed to hear before his fingers tightened in Jim's hair and he came. Thick ropes of ejaculate filled Jim's mouth completely, then trickled out from between his lips and down his neck. He struggled to swallow what remained in his mouth, his body simultaneously going limp against Spock's legs.

The room fell silent for an instant before erupting once more into cheers, applause, and whistles. The guards erupted into laughter, their cruel amusement at Jim's apparent breakdown filling the air. "Looks like all it took was one good fucking to break him," one of them jeered.

Spock's eyes flashed possessively as he shot Verex a fierce glare. "That will be all," he growled, his voice low and menacing.

As he spoke, Spock's hands gentled, carding through Jim's hair with a tender touch that belied the involuntary passion that had driven him just moments before. "He is good with his mouth," he murmured, his voice denoting approval and admiration despite the guilt that rose like bile in the back of his throat. He was ashamed, yet he could not weep or beg Jim for his forgiveness. He only hoped Jim knew the truth.

Jim looked up at him, his expression neutral as his body remained slumped against Spock. The cheering of the crowd was monstrous, and Spock could not help but admire the way Jim looked right now—come splattered across his face with the head of Spock's cock still nestled within his warm mouth. Every primal urge within him was screaming that his release was being wasted, that he needed to collect it and thrust it inside of Jim.

There was still come along the length of his *lok* as Jim released him. Jim's eyes closed as he pressed open-mouthed kisses where it still lingered, his tongue lapping at the remnants. It was enough to make Spock hard again, and he wanted nothing more than to let Jim continue just so that he could come once more.

"You are and will forever be mine," Spock said in a husky tone as they made eye contact. Jim simply nodded his head, the act sending shockwaves up Spock's *lok* to the point that he wished to tell Jim to repeat the action.

Verex laughed. "It looks as though you purchased a mighty good whore there, sir." Spock wished that he and Jim were in the privacy of their quarters, wished he could properly make love to the man



before him. This should have been different, and part of him was unsure if Jim would ever forgive him for such a transgression.



The auction continued, each sale a reminder of the horrors they were witnessing. Jim remained positioned on Spock's lap, their location in the back of the hall providing both tactical advantage and a necessary camouflage. Spock's arm around Jim's back was steel, protective rather than possessive, though to observers it appeared to be the latter.

"Three more transactions logged," Jim whispered, his lips barely moving as he monitored the modified communicator hidden in a bracelet that Spock had brought with him. Each purchase was being recorded and encrypted, building their case against the operation.

A potential buyer wandered too close, eyes lingering appreciatively on Jim's bare skin. Spock's response was immediate—a low growl that rumbled through his chest, his arms tightening fractionally around Jim. The message was clear: *This one is claimed, this one is protected, this one is mine.*

"The Andorian delegation appears to be coordinating with the Orions," Spock murmured under the pretense of nuzzling his property. His breath was warm against Jim's ear. "Noted for the record."

Jim shifted slightly, feigning disgust, using the movement to scan another section of the crowd. "Two more ships just logged in to the system. Matching known slaver signatures."

Another observer approached, this one bold enough to reach out as if to touch. Spock's reaction was swift and terrifying in its restraint, fixing the being with a look that promised immediate violence. The would-be toucher retreated hastily.

"Steady," Jim breathed, though whether it was to himself or Spock wasn't clear. "Almost have enough."



When the final sale concluded, they had enough evidence to bring down three trafficking operations. Beneath the long, flowing sleeves of Spock's attire, Jim's hand found his, squeezing once. *Mission accomplished, captain unharmed.* Now they had only to make their exit without arousing suspicion.

Spock stood smoothly, maintaining his grip on Jim. "Come," he commanded, loud enough to be heard. But his thumb stroked once across Jim's wrist, gentle and reassuring. *We are almost free.*





When they finally reached the shuttle, Spock guided him protectively through the doors, his hand on the small of Jim's back. The relief of being away from prying eyes was felt by them both as they sealed themselves inside.

Without a word, Spock reached for the emergency supplies and withdrew a long parka. His movements were gentle as he wrapped it around Jim's shoulders, carefully avoiding the bruises that marked his skin. Jim immediately burrowed into the warmth, his eyes never leaving Spock.

"I need to pilot us out," Spock said softly. "However, you are not required to move from my side if you do not wish to."

Jim's response was to follow Spock to the pilot's chair, pressing close as Spock sat down before folding himself into his lap. His fingers twisted in the fabric of Spock's shirt as he curled against him, face finding shelter in Spock's neck. The familiar scent of Vulcan spice and regulation soap grounded him, reminding him that this was real—they were escaping, they were together.

"*T'hy'la*," Spock murmured, one hand leaving the controls to stroke soothingly along Jim's back. "You are safe now. No one will touch you again."

Jim breathed deeply, letting Spock's scent and warmth chase away the lingering memories of the auction house. The steady motion of Spock's hand on his back kept him anchored in the present as the stars streaked past the viewscreen.

"Take us home, Spock," he whispered against Vulcan skin and felt Spock's arm tighten protectively around him in response.

"The *Enterprise* is holding position just beyond the system's outer marker," Spock reported softly. "We will rendezvous in approximately thirty-seven minutes."

Jim nodded against Spock's neck, unwilling to move from the shelter of his embrace. The shuttle's familiar hum surrounded them, so different from the oppressive atmosphere they'd left behind. "They can't track us?"

"Negative. This shuttle's signature is thoroughly masked, thanks to Mr. Scott's modifications after the Mudd incident." Spock's fingers found their way into Jim's hair, carding through it gently. "Additionally, I engaged our scrambling devices the moment we cleared their space dock."

Jim hummed in acknowledgment, his breath warm against Spock's throat. The gold collar was still around his neck, but here, away from the auction house, it felt different. Like something reclaimed, transformed from a symbol of ownership to one of protection.



“Your temperature is slightly elevated,” Spock noted. “Are you experiencing any discomfort?”

“No,” Jim murmured. “Just processing. Being here with you helps.” His fingers tightened in Spock’s shirt. “Keep talking? Your voice . . . it helps, too.”

Spock adjusted their position slightly, allowing Jim to settle more comfortably against him. “The *Enterprise* has been monitoring all transmissions from the surface. Lieutenant Uhura has gathered sufficient evidence of the slave trading operation to justify a full Federation intervention.”

“Good,” Jim whispered. “No one else should—no one else should go through that.”

“Indeed.” Spock’s voice took on a harder edge before softening again. “Dr. McCoy is preparing the medical bay for our arrival. He has been most vocal about his intended examinations.”

This drew a weak chuckle from Jim. “Bet he has.”

They fell into comfortable silence, broken only by the occasional soft beep from the navigation console. As they approached the rendezvous point, the *Enterprise* appeared on their viewscreen.

“Home,” Jim breathed, finally lifting his head enough to see the ship.

“Yes,” Spock agreed. “Though I find myself reluctant to share you with the crew just yet.”

Jim turned his face back into Spock’s neck. “Then don’t. Not completely. Stay with me through medical, through—whatever comes next?”

“Jim.” Spock’s voice held a wealth of emotion in that single syllable. “I believe you will find it quite impossible to be rid of me after this.”

The *Enterprise*’s shuttle bay doors opened before them, welcoming them home. As Spock guided them in for landing, Jim pressed closer, inhaling that grounding scent of Vulcan spice one more time.

“Good,” he whispered. “Because I don’t think I can let go, either.”

— * * * —

The familiar hum of medbay equipment filled the air—the soft whirl of diagnostic machines, the gentle ping of bio-readings, the subtle throb of the ship’s engines beneath it all. After the oppressive noise of the slave markets, these mechanical lullabies of home felt like a blessing. The antiseptic smell, usually harsh and unwelcome, now represented safety and sanctuary.

Jim sat perched on the biobed in the private captain’s suite, his posture deliberately straight despite his exhaustion, as if some part of him was still performing for invisible watchers. The parka from the shuttle hung loose around his shoulders, covering the revealing slave garments he still wore



underneath. The moment their atoms had reassembled in medbay—Scotty having managed the delicate task of a direct shuttle-to-medbay transport to avoid prying eyes—Bones had practically lunged forward with a Starfleet medical blanket, wrapping it around Jim with gentle hands.

The harsh medbay lighting caught the gold collar at Jim's throat, making it flash and gleam as McCoy ran his tricorder over it, his scowl deepening with each reading. The juxtaposition was jarring—that ornate symbol of captivity against the familiar blue and white of Starfleet medical equipment, the collar's intricate patterns casting small dancing lights across the sterile surfaces of the biobed.

The temperature had been raised several degrees above standard—a subtle adjustment that spoke of McCoy's attention to detail. He knew how the cold of space could seep into traumatized bones, how shock could linger even in the safety of home. The warmer air wrapped around them like a protective cocoon, another layer of shelter around their wounded captain.

"Hold still, Jim," McCoy muttered, his movements gentle despite his gruff tone. He very carefully removed the collar. "Need to make sure this damn thing hasn't done any permanent damage." His eyes flickered to the tricorder's readout, and his frown deepened with each new injury it revealed. "Soft tissue bruising in the throat and palate. Some inflammation in the larynx."

Spock, who had been hovering close by despite McCoy's protests that he should be getting checked out, too, went absolutely still. The color drained from his face as the implications of the doctor's words hit him. In maintaining their cover, in playing his role so thoroughly, he had exacerbated Jim's suffering.

McCoy continued his gentle probing, a contrast to the fury in his eyes as he cataloged each injury. "Three bruised ribs on your left side—looks like someone got in a few good kicks while you were down." He shook his head, reaching for a hypospray. "This should help with the worst of the pain."

Again, Spock paled. He had forced Jim to move, to kneel, to perform while bearing these hidden injuries. To have done so, even unknowingly

"The bruised ribs occurred during the initial ambush," Jim said quickly, reading the guilt in Spock's expression. "You didn't—what happened in the auction house didn't make anything worse, Spock. If anything, buying me when you did prevented more serious injuries."

McCoy glanced between them, understanding dawning in his eyes as he loaded another hypospray. "He's right, Spock. Now come here and let me check you over while the osteo-regenerator works on Jim's ribs."

"I did cause you injury," Spock said softly to Jim. His hands, clasped behind his back, were white-knuckled with tension.



“You saved my life,” Jim countered. He tried to sit up straighter, wincing slightly, which only made Spock’s expression more stricken. “Bones, tell him. Tell him what would have happened if the Klingons had won that auction instead.”

McCoy’s hands stilled on his tricorder. “Jim’s right, Spock. The bruising will heal in a few days. But what those bastards had planned . . .” He shook his head. “You did what you had to do. And knowing Jim, I bet he pushed you to make it look convincing.”

Jim’s slight smile confirmed this, though it faded when Spock remained rigid. “Spock, please. Come here.” For a moment, it seemed Spock might refuse. Then, with careful, measured steps, he came to stand beside the biobed. Jim reached out and caught his wrist, pulling him closer despite McCoy’s muttered protest about letting him finish his scan.

The taste of bile rose in Spock’s throat. “You said you were not injured beyond what I could discern,” he couldn’t help but say.

Jim was silent for a moment, his voice low, “I didn’t want you to worry about it. You maintained our cover.” Jim’s thumb brushed over Spock’s pulse point. “You got us out. And if you hadn’t been quite so . . . thorough in your role, we both could have been killed.” With his unengaged hand, he reached out to touch the collar, now resting beside him on the biobed. “Though I have to admit, your choice of engraving was a bit on the nose.”

This startled a slight eyebrow raise from Spock. “It seemed appropriate at the time.”

“Damn right it was,” Jim murmured, then winced as McCoy pressed another hypospray to his neck.

“That should help with the swelling,” McCoy said. “Now, about—”

“In a minute, Bones.” Jim’s eyes hadn’t left Spock’s face. “First, I think Mr. Spock and I need a few moments. Wouldn’t you agree, Spock?”

The tips of Spock’s ears flushed green. “Jim, I—”

“Oh for—” McCoy threw his hands up in exasperation. “At least let me finish treating you before you two start . . . whatever this is. Spock, either sit down and let me examine you or get out. I mean it!”

But Spock had already settled on the edge of the biobed, his fingers still intertwined with Jim’s, the slight upturn of his lips suggesting that McCoy’s orders might go unheeded.

“Bones, please.” Jim’s voice was raw, whether from the earlier trauma or emotion wasn’t clear. “I just . . . I need my own space right now. My quarters.”



McCoy studied his friend's face, noting the fine tremors that Jim was trying hard to hide. "Fine. But I'm checking on you every three hours. Comm me immediately if anything feels off." His eyes softened. "And Jim, you're not staying alone."

"Spock?" Jim turned to his first officer. "Would you . . .?"

"Of course, Jim." The words were barely out before Jim's other hand found his wrist, gripping it like an anchor.

"Get me out of these clothes?" he asked, almost ashamed to make such a request. Spock merely nodded his head as McCoy turned toward the synthesizer and a fresh, black undershirt and pants appeared in the tray.

Spock circled him, his hands trembling slightly as he undid the ornate sash and clasp that held the garment together. The fabric fell away to reveal an array of dark bruises painting Jim's back in violent shades of purple and blue, some already yellowing at the edges. Spock's fingers hovered over the marks but didn't touch, cataloging each injury with barely contained anguish.

McCoy quickly stepped in with a dermal regenerator, running it over the worst of the bruising. Indicating a cluster on Jim's shoulder blades, he muttered, "These ones here look defensive. You put up one hell of a fight, Jim."

Spock helped ease the black undershirt over Jim's head, mindful of the bruised ribs. His movements were precise but gentle, treating Jim with a reverence that made the captain's throat tight with emotion. The soft fabric settled against his skin like armor, helping him feel human again.

"That's enough for now," McCoy said softly, seeing how Jim swayed with exhaustion. He tapped his communicator. "McCoy to Scotty. Two to beam directly to the captain's quarters."

— * * * —

The familiar tingle of the transporter had barely faded when Jim's composure finally shattered. His legs gave out, and Spock moved instantly, catching him as he crumbled to the floor. The sob that tore from Jim's throat was raw, primal—the sound of someone who'd held themselves together through sheer force of will for far too long.

"I have you," Spock murmured, gathering Jim closer as he shuddered. "You are safe, *t'hy'la*. You are home."

Jim's fingers clutched at Spock's shirt, his face buried against the Vulcan's chest. "I didn't—I couldn't let them see—I had to stay strong." The words came between gasping sobs. "If they'd sold me to the Klingons . . . If you hadn't . . ."



“But they did not.” Spock’s voice was fierce with protection, one hand cradling the back of Jim’s head while the other held him secure against his body. “You are here.”

“Stay?” The word was barely a whisper against Spock’s chest.

“Always,” Spock promised, his arms tightening protectively around his captain, his *t’hy’la*. “I will be here when you wake.”

They remained there on the floor, Spock’s back against the wall, Jim curled in his lap, until Jim’s breathing finally evened out in exhausted sleep. Only then did Spock allow his own carefully maintained control to slip, pressing his face into Jim’s hair as a single tear escaped.

“Mine to protect,” he whispered in Vulcan. “Mine to cherish. Mine to love.”

Jim stirred slightly in his sleep, burrowing closer as if in response to the words he couldn’t understand but somehow felt. Spock was prepared to maintain his vigil until Jim woke, and for all the nights thereafter.



Jim woke slowly, consciousness returning in gentle waves. He was warm, impossibly comfortable, and it took him a moment to realize that he was no longer on the floor but in his bed. Strong arms held him securely, and a steady heartbeat pulsed against his hand—faster than a Human’s.

“Spock?” he murmured, not lifting his head from where it rested against the Vulcan’s chest.

“I am here.” Spock’s voice rumbled in his ear. “You slept for 2.4 hours. I took the liberty of moving us to a more comfortable position.”

Jim huffed a small laugh. “Ever practical.” He lifted his head, meeting Spock’s dark eyes. The Vulcan’s expression was soft, unguarded in a way Jim had rarely seen. “You stayed.”

“I said that I would.” Spock’s hand moved to Jim’s face, fingers ghosting over the fading bruises. “How do you feel?”

Before Jim could answer, the door chimed. “Jim? It’s McCoy for your check-up.”

Jim tensed slightly, but Spock’s arm tightened reassuringly around him. “Enter,” Jim called, making no move to extract himself from Spock’s embrace.

McCoy walked in, medical tricorder already humming. He took in the scene—his captain curled against his first officer in bed, both fully clothed save for their boots—and merely raised an eyebrow. “Well, this is more comfortable than the floor, at least.” Spock had taken the liberty of updating the



doctor every half hour, including how Jim had fallen asleep with him on the floor when they first arrived, and that Spock was moving him to a more comfortable position.

“Doctor,” Spock acknowledged, though his hold on Jim didn’t loosen.

“How are you feeling, Jim?” McCoy began, slowly approaching the two of them.

“Good.”

“Vitals are better,” McCoy noted, scanning Jim. “Blood pressure’s almost back to normal. Throat inflammation’s down considerably.” He pressed a hypospray gently to Jim’s neck. “This should help with any remaining discomfort. How’s the anxiety level?”

Jim considered the question, aware of Spock’s thumb drawing small circles on his back. “Better. More . . . contained.”

“Having a touch telepath for a security blanket probably helps with that,” McCoy remarked dryly. His eyes softened as he looked at them both. “You did well, Spock. Kept him grounded through the worst of it.”

“It was . . . necessary,” Spock replied, though the tips of his ears had turned slightly green.

“Necessary,” Jim echoed, pressing closer to Spock’s warmth. “That’s one word for it.”

McCoy rolled his eyes. “I’ll be back again in three hours. Try to get some more rest, Jim. And Spock?” He waited until the Vulcan met his gaze. “Keep doing whatever you’re doing. It’s working.”

After McCoy left, Jim tilted his head to look at Spock again. “He’s right, you know. This is helping. You’re helping.”

“Then I shall continue to do so,” Spock said simply, “for as long as you require.”

“And if that’s indefinitely?” Jim asked, something vulnerable in his voice.

Spock’s response was to draw Jim closer, pressing a very human kiss to his temple. “Then indefinitely it shall be.”

Jim sighed contentedly, letting his eyes drift closed again. “Mine,” he murmured, echoing the word that had been engraved on the collar that had helped to save him.

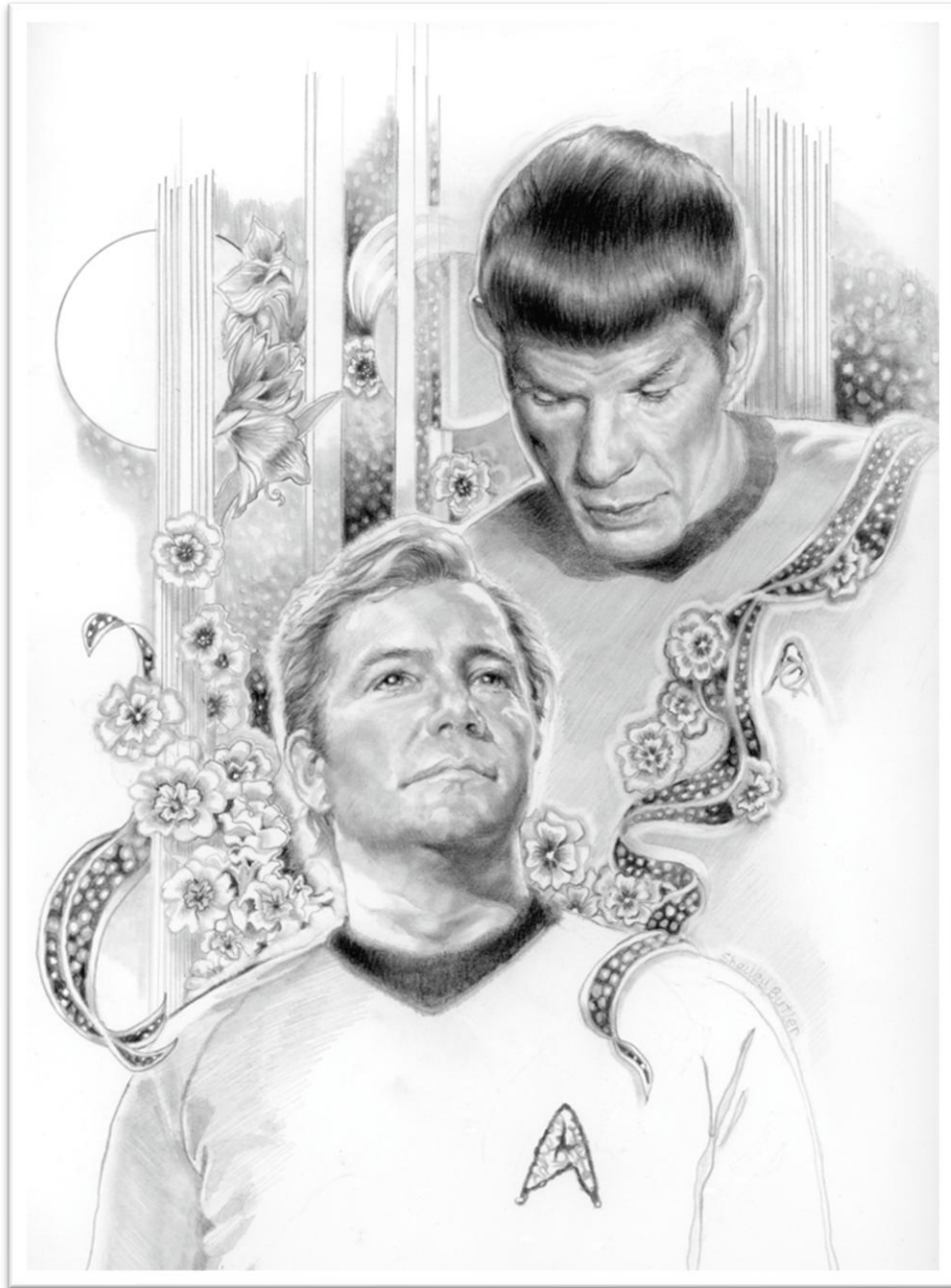
“Yours,” Spock agreed softly, settling in to watch over his *t’hy’la*’s sleep once more.



Connection

Shelley Butler

Drawing Kirk's face is always a challenge. But I just had to try to capture that expression of love for Spock, and to show their beautiful connection.



Touch, unrequited

lostone

Even the silence was fucking him over.

Jim swallowed hard, wishing for Spock's ever-present calm as he tried to ignore the oppressive weight of the ship's quiet. It was beyond weird, and unnatural, and wow was he overthinking way too much. Bones had told him that the quarantine was necessary, and Jim didn't make it a habit to argue with his CMO. Well, okay. He didn't *often* make it a habit to argue with his CMO. Especially now, when they'd been attacked by . . . goo.

Spock had *not* been amused at Jim's name for the pervasive, viscous substance that had shot out of the pod all over poor Ensign Smitty. At some point between the mission going terribly awry and Bones' Very Unamused face after he'd had to initiate quarantine protocols when the away team had tracked some weird, hitchhiking goo onto the ship, Jim had realized that maybe, just maybe, Pike's accusations of him being a magnet for trouble might have had some teeny weeny bit of truth to them.

Jim was afraid to move from his seated position as he shifted on the bed. He felt like each thread of his uniform was made from some horrid woolen fabric, itching and scratching and pressing on his hypersensitive skin.

Bones hadn't been sure if this was just a Jim thing or if this was an infected thing. They knew the goo could jump easily from person to person, and Bones and most of his med staff had already been infected before they realized what was going on, hence Jim sitting here like an idiot in his quarters, waiting for treatment. He had been exposed through the tears in his uniform that every single one of his bridge crew—even Spock—had mocked him for. Sulu was more of a blatant smartass about it—keeping a sign in the rec area that tracked how many away missions he could go without ripping the damn thing. Spock had just raised an eyebrow, but after all these years, Jim knew what *that* meant. Spock found it downright hilarious. Jim's quartermaster, not so much.

Thinking of Spock caused Jim to frown down at his stupid body and his stupid body's arousal. At least his increased heartbeat made him forget about his all-too-sensitive skin.

For a few seconds, anyway.



Bones, afraid that the goo was airborne, had shut down many of the ship's systems during the quarantine, especially after anonymous reports from the affected crew that "the air hurt." Bones had rolled his eyes, muttering about people being out of their damn minds. Before Jim had turned off the ventilation in his quarters, the cold air had scraped along his skin, making it impossible to concentrate. He'd been trying to take off his goddamn uniform shirt, and the act of lifting his arms had caused him to cry out in the silence of his quarters. Bones had warned him that most humanoids experienced a heightened focus on touch, but he hadn't said anything about *this*.

"I can't touch you, Jimmy," Bones had drawled. "There is a treatment, but it's gotta be administered by one of the non-Human crew. Jaylah, Lieutenant Jabok, and Ensign Lwk are running themselves ragged." Bones had sounded outraged that some alien substance would have the nerve to fuck with his staff. "Spock will fix ya right up. Looks like the damn hobgoblin won the lottery; he's immune—or close enough for city work. It ain't affecting him like it does Humans."

The door chimed softly. Jim swallowed. This was gonna be *fine*.

"Come," he said.

Spock entered alone. In the subdued glow of Jim's bedroom lights, he seemed sharper, more present. He looked just as collected as usual, and Jim's shoulders sagged in relief. He wouldn't wish this on anyone. Thank god that Spock was immune. It would be incredibly awkward if anyone else were put in this position. Spock was the lesser of the few evils.

Spock carried a closed kit, but he stopped abruptly at the sight of Jim on his bed. Had he been anyone else, the heels of his uniform boots would have squeaked on the floor. Okay, this was hardly the *most* ridiculous position Spock had ever found him in, but Jim couldn't help the way his cheeks heated up.

He had given up trying to get the uniform top off, and it was rucked up almost to his pecs. He'd only managed to kick off one boot, and of *course* he'd worn the bright yellow rubber ducky socks Nyota had given him for his last birthday. He'd undone his fly but had been too afraid to accidentally spread the goo on his dick, so he sat there half hard, in matching underwear, framed by his black uniform trousers.

Jim tried to straighten, and even the slightest motion made him hiss. Every nerve trembled.



Spock moved to his side in two strides. "You will remain still," he said, clipped voice leaving no room for discussion.

Jim quickly gave up on trying to get comfortable. "Bossy." He tried a smile, but even that caused him to grimace. "You're certain this is safe? For you, I mean."

Spock's eyes held his for a moment. "I am certain of this: you are in pain."

Jim could count on one hand the number of times Spock had initiated eye contact with him, and still have fingers left over. He gave a bare nod, wishing that the way his throat tightened was due to the goo. He swallowed. It wouldn't occur to him until much, *much* later that Spock hadn't answered his question.

Spock knelt at the bedside, and Jim found himself staring at the port window more intensely than he had ever stared at anything in his *life*. Jim felt the tug of his other boot being removed, and he tried—he really tried—to get his shit together. This was not what his stupid brain and even stupider heart had wished for after nights of chess and innumerable close calls after away missions and every fantasy that Jim could dream up. This was just Spock, his friend and subordinate, doing his duty for his captain. It was literally his job.

Jim wiggled the toes of his ridiculous socks. He glanced at the top of Spock's head when Spock huffed a breath. As Spock started to look up, Jim jerked his gaze back to the window.

"Curious. Your socks appear to be . . . an experiment in Human visual tolerance. I would conclude it successful."

"They keep my toes warm." Jim couldn't blame him for not commenting on his underwear.

"Of this, I have no doubt." Spock hesitated for a moment before standing. "I do not wish to cause you further discomfort, Captain, but your uniform will need to be fully removed in order to administer the doctor's salve." The click of the kit opening seemed loud in the silent room. Spock unlatched it, revealing a vial of translucent viscous oil, a bright pair of scissors, and the shimmer of bio-reactive cloth. "Doctor McCoy was unsure how the alien substance would react using a typical medical laser." Spock held up the scissors. Jim watched as he made quick work of cutting the uniform down the front.



Jim sucked in a trembling breath. He couldn't help jerking from the feeling of the cold stainless steel brushing lightly against his sternum. It wasn't pain. It didn't itch. Hell, he'd been with lovers who didn't make his body feel this good. Embarrassed even further, Jim immediately felt the need to fill the silence with words, ignoring the fact that the pitch of his voice sounded like he'd just hit puberty. "I'm, uh. I'm having a little trou—*ahhhh, fuck!*"

Spock didn't respond, removing Jim's uniform in two quick yanks of the fabric, only to freeze at the sound that Jim couldn't keep in his throat. Jim caught the wide-eyed, shocked gaze of his first officer before he squinched his eyes shut, pleasure coursing through his body in waves. Dimly, he heard the scissors hit the floor near his foot, but Jim couldn't give one solitary fuck.

Goosebumps broke out on his body, and Jim had to clench his fists as he panted, overwhelmed. He felt the bite of being electrified, the shock of being dunked in ice water, and the agonizing heat of being burned all at the same time—only it felt *wonderful*. Once his brain connected what he was feeling to 'Spock,' his body was all for it. Jim trembled and gritted his teeth, determined to get himself under control.

It could have been minutes or hours before Jim was able to open his eyes, wet with tears, and meet Spock's calm gaze. Spock opened his mouth, perhaps to apologize, but Jim briefly shook his head. "It's fine, Spock. Let's just get it over with. I take it the oil helps in some way?"

"It does." Was Jim imagining the deeper tone to Spock's voice? Jesus Christ, he was going to go fucking crazy before this was over. "The doctor has assured me that it will mitigate the effects of the alien substance."

"Great. Can I take a bath in it?" Jim tried a weak smile.

"That would be unwise at this juncture. Can you stand? It is important that you do not move unnecessarily."

Jim nodded, muscles taut, hyper-aware that precome had stained the bright yellow underwear. *Could* he stand? His dick now throbbed in counterpoint to his heart, which was beating much too quickly. At least if he were standing, he could pretend that Spock hadn't noticed his erection. (There was no way Spock hadn't noticed. Spock had literally made a career out of noticing everything.) Tensing slightly, Jim forced himself to stand. His knees almost gave out on him, but he managed not to moan this time, although it was a close thing. He grasped the headboard with both hands, as though having been thrown a lifeline.



This was fine. This was fuckin' great. This was . . . *oh god*.

The first stroke of the cloth along the back of his shoulders barely touched him, yet the cool relief immediately washed along his skin. He inhaled sharply at the way his nerve endings seemed to amplify, then immediately shudder into relief. Jim felt himself relax slightly with every careful, deliberate move of Spock's hand as he guided the cloth in slow, controlled movements.

He thought for a moment that he felt Spock's hand tremble, but quickly forced himself to stop his stupid wishful thinking. Spock wouldn't ever think of him like that. Sure, he had been on and off with Nyota, and Jim had made sure not to pry. It wasn't his business, and if Spock wanted to let him know any of the details, he was more than capable. Jim's deepest fear was that Spock could read him like a damn book, that he knew how much Jim wished for something more, and that he chose the path of least resistance rather than have an awkward and unwanted emotional conversation.

Jim sighed. "Mmm. That's . . . wow. That's so much better. I can finish, if you don't mind getting the rest of my back."

Each movement was brusque. Purposeful. Spock's touch barely grazed the base of his neck before drifting downward. His fingers seemed to map the lines of tension, tracing along the trapezius. The release of stress was incredible. It felt almost like the shock of a bone snapping back into place, over and over and over again, as the treatment calmed his oversensitive nerves. Jim had been so uncomfortable for so long that now he could only press slightly into Spock's touch, mutely asking for more. There was something . . . something he should be remembering about Spock's hands, but right now all Jim could concentrate on was the feeling of Spock finally touching him.

"I will finish." Spock's voice caused Jim to startle, almost lulled into a trance. Jim was rarely this still, but moving seemed much too much of an effort. The cloth moved, brushing down his spine. Jim's breath stuttered at the sudden rush of warmth pooling in his chest when Spock paused at the waistband of his uniform trousers, still valiantly clinging to his hips.

He heard Spock swallow. "Turn."

Spock exhaled, making Jim shiver for a completely different reason. Jim bit his lip. He felt foolish, and embarrassed by his body's reaction. No matter what Bones had ordered, Jim was going to have to do the rest himself.



“It’s okay, Spock. I can handle it from here.” The ache of wanting was impossible to ignore. Even so, Jim was desperate to give Spock an out. Jim needed to push all this back into the deepest part of him where it lived, where he could ignore it. Sometimes he envied Spock’s cool logic, his refusal to give in to his emotions. “I assume I need to use the cloth, or it starts the whole process over again?”

Spock was silent for long enough that Jim almost turned toward him. “Correct.”

Spock returned the materials to the kit. Jim was dying inside. He felt like a coward for not being able to meet Spock’s gaze, but he was, after all, only Human.

“Thanks, Spock. I don’t know what I’d do without you.” Truer fucking words had never been spoken. “You can tell Bones I’ll be fine.”

If Spock responded, Jim would never know; he was intent on reaching the privacy of their shared bathroom, where he could get rid of the damn goo, then use the oil in a way that Bones probably didn’t intend. Although knowing Bones, who knew?

Jim would never know that Spock paused in the corridor, hands clasped tightly behind his back, posture immaculate, with only the imperceptible tremor in his fingers betraying his fraying control.

Jim would never know that Spock could still feel the glide of the cloth against the heat of Jim’s skin, or that he still saw the image of his Jim, his head thrown back, every muscle frozen in shock, mouth open as he moaned

And Jim would definitely never know that Spock had deliberately smeared the substance onto his own skin after Jim had dismissed him. Spock closed his eyes for the briefest instant, willing the memory away and gathering his shields, before he made his way to his own quarters. He could feel the shock of sensation on the delicate skin of the inside of his wrist.

If Spock couldn’t have Jim’s touch, then he would gladly take the next best thing—logic be damned.



Contributor Roundup

Thank you to the hard-working contributors whose endless and inspiring creativity continues to fuel our fandom, rendering it the captivating and extraordinary space it has become. Special shout-out to the betas. We know it is a labor of love and couldn't do it without you.

(Contributors were asked to share only the information they felt comfortable sharing and were under no obligation to provide contact info.)



1lostone

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Alice West

[AO3](#)



ArvizuM



Bersakhi

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Beta: Linda



Cordelia Naismith

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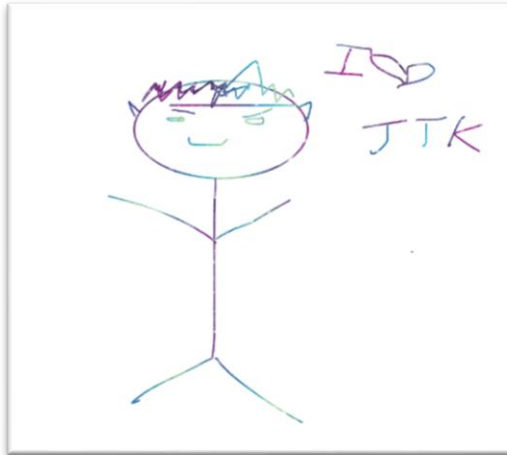
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Bonus Art!

Your intrepid editors have created a visual masterpiece for your ocular perusal. Without further ado, we bring you . . . **art**!

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T' Uhura



Alice West

