Cpt C. Pike and C/ J.T. Kirk’s Pocket Manual of Starfleet Survival Tips

by InsaneSociopath

Summary

Jim Kirk has been living with him for an entire year.

An entire *goddamn* year.

And the weirdest thing is, Chris is pretty damn pleased about it.

Now if only everyone would let them live in peace…

Notes

The last chapter of this work is the Appendix. Check it out and let me know what you think :)  
As before, if you hover over any bold Points embedded in the text, a pop up will appear listing the point. Unfortunately this does not work for mobile users!
If you have not already done so, I strongly advise you go read Part One of this series before tackling this

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

I do not have time to write this.

I should not have written this today.

Oh well.

1. Avoid green slime at all costs.

Because slime and Admirals do not mix.

The intercom buzzes.

Chris silently scowls at it from over the top of his data PADD. He’s busy dammit; he asked to be left undisturbed!

It buzzes again.

“Pike here,” he growls, jabbing his finger overly hard against the answer button on the touch screen.

“Captain sir,” comes the unsure voice of his Yeoman. “Um. Admiral Nogura is here to see you sir. He’s errr…”

Chris raises his eyebrows, wondering at the unusual doubt clear in Hargritch’s voice. It’s Freshers week after all; Nogura has been down to Chris’ office a lot in the past few days, helping him deal with one incident or another.

“He’s what?” he asks through the intercom when his Yeoman fails to complete his sentence.

“Well he’s got a group of cadets with him sir. One of them is your- one of them is Cadet Kirk sir.”

Well that explains Hargritch’s hesitation, Chris thinks with a sigh. What the hell has that boy gone and done now?

“And errr well…” Hargritch suddenly continues. “They’re all… Sir I don’t know how to- I think it would be easier just to show you”

“Yeoman. They’re all what?” Chris asks with growing concern.

“Dripping wet and covered in pond scum sir. The Admiral included sir.”

Oh yeah, Chris just loves Freshers week.

“Don’t.” Nogura snaps out as soon as he’s stepped into Chris’ office, Jim and three other terrified cadets crowding in behind him. “Do not even ask Captain.”
“I wouldn’t dream of it sir,” Chris responds bemusedly.

They really are covered. Green slime, head to toe, the lot of them. Jim has a pink streak of skin showing around his eyes where he’s clearly attempted to wipe some of the gunk off with his fingers. Nogura too, has finger marks swiped across his face. The other Cadets however, look so shell shocked the thought of clearing their faces probably hasn’t occurred to them yet.

“I require your gym kit Mr Pike.” Nogura clips out curtly, not a trace of humour evident. “And the use of your Comm or a functioning PADD, seeing as my own are now thoroughly drowned.”

The three cadets not called Kirk visibly flinch at the Admiral’s icy tone.

“Oh sure yeah,” Chris replies, doing his best to sound calm and unintimated. “My gym bag is in the cupboard behind you, to the left of the door,” he nods, waving a hand towards it, “and you are welcome to any of the equipment on my desk.”

Nogura’s eyes immediately alight upon the laser fencing saber lying across the front edge that Chris had confiscated two days ago.

“Do not tempt me.” the Admiral grits out, his eyes still boring into the bladed weapon. “Kirk! Get that bag and come with me. And you three,” he adds, whirling to face the still cowering individuals besides Jim, “I will deal with you when I return. Do not leave this room and do not make a sound!”

Without even waiting for the stammered yes sir’s of the cringing cadets, the Admiral swipes up a PADD and strides back out of the door, a trail of damp, green drips staining the carpet in his wake.

Chris watches his retreating back and then cuts his gaze across to his miscreant of a pseudo-son. Their eyes meet and Chris raises his hands in an obvious what the hell gesture, face scrunching into a matching expression.

Jim smirks and nods his head sideways to the group still stood shivering silently in the corner of the office. And then very deliberately runs his finger across his throat, sarcastically over exaggerated grimace making the young man’s meaning very clear.

“Kirk!” Nogura’s still furious voice suddenly echoes down the corridor. “With me now!”

Jim winks at Chris and hurries after the enraged Admiral with a grin.

2. Always know your Doctor’s Comm number.

CPike177:- Prep some beds. I’ve got three soon-to-be-casualties in my office.

PBoyce83:- ???

CPike177:- New Plebe Cadets.
CPike177:- You know the slime ponds behind the Bioscience labs?

PBoyce83:- Oh god
PBoyce83:- Did someone drown?
PBoyce83:- Please tell me no-one drowned

CPike177:- I think they pulled Nogura in.
PBoyce83:- OH GOD
Jim returns before Nogura does.

Thankfully, he’s free of green sludge and dressed in dry clothes.

“Is that an Admiral’s jacket?” Chris asks as soon as the door swishes shut behind him.

“One of Nogura’s I think yeah. He dragged me to the bathroom down the hall and pulled us both into the showers. Then he yanked your gym clothes on and went storming off. I didn’t have anything to change into so I just sort of awkwardly stood there. Next thing I know his Yeoman is running in and throwing a towel and a pile of clothes at my head and telling me to get dressed and get back here.”

“What the hell happened Jimmy? I’ve never seen him so mad!”

Jim shrugs, glancing over his shoulder at the Plebes watching them silently and obviously questioning Chris’ informality. Chris scowls at them and their curiosity immediately vanishes back behind their previous terror.

“Nogura wanted to talk to me about his advanced ethics classes. Said I could have a place in it despite it being an Upperclassman course if I did him a couple of favours in return. So we went for a walk around campus so he could detail those favours, and we happened across a very large water fight behind the Cadbrom Biology Laboratories.”

“A water fight?” Chris asks incredulously, “In the Bio ponds? They’re more gunge than water! Some of them are toxic for god’s sake!”

“Well they were managing it. I guess one of them saw my cadet uniform and assumed I was with them, because Nogura and I are stood there gawping at their stupidity and I get shoved head first into one of the ponds from behind. Nogura tried to grab me to stop my fall and instead came in with me.”

“Jesus Christ.” Chris mutters, rubbing his hands down his face.

“Yeah, and then another one of them jumped on his shoulders and rubbed a load of slime in his face when he tried to stand back up.”

“Jesus fucking Christ.” Chris mutters again, sounding increasingly strangled.

“Eventually Admiral Nogura managed to throw her off and bellow at them all, at which point most them rather sensibly legged it. These three are just the unlucky ones who managed to get themselves caught.”

“Well,” Chris snorts sarcastically, after a long disbelieving silence. “At least I’ve managed to pre-warn Doctor Boyce of the three imminent fatalities. It’ll save me some paperwork if nothing else.”

One of the Cadets audibly whimpers.

Chris has precisely no sympathy for him.

“You have three options ladies and gentleman.” Nogura scowls, his arms crossed over his chest. Outwardly, he appears to have calmed down considerably, but Chris can still see the steel in his eyes.
“One. You say nothing, you sign this PADD, you pack your bags and you get the hell off my campus permanently.

“Two. You agree to one full year’s academic suspension and spend the time working under Commander K’noth in the mess hall kitchens. I hear she’s in need of some new pot washers.

“Three. You give me the name of the individual who pushed Mr Kirk and I into the pond, and I will reduce the suspension down to six months. If I also get the name of the young lady who shoved slime down my shirt and in my face, I will drop it down to three months and allow you to leave campus for the duration.”

The silence stretches as the three cadets exchange glances. Nogura leans back against the edge of Chris’ desk, accepting the cup of Matcha green tea Jim hands him, and narrows his eyes as they continue to hesitate.

“Sir,” the Cardassian among them begins hesistantly. “I’m the one who pushed Cadet Kirk in sir.”

Nogura stares levelly at her.

“Kirk. Take this young lady to get cleaned up and then escort her up to my office. My yeoman will be delighted to have her assistance for the next six months. Unless you have another name?”

She glances at the floor and shakes her head. Jim hustles her out of the door with a nod to the two senior officers.

The two remaining Cadets glance at each other.

“We’ll take the year with the Commander sir,” one of them suddenly speaks up. “We may have only been at the Academy half a week, but we understand how ‘Fleet loyalty works. We won’t rat out our companions to save our own skins.”

“Good man,” The Japanese Admiral nods approvingly. “Three months suspension for all three of you for being stupid enough to splash around in a well labelled biohazard, and for endangering Mr Kirk and I alongside you. You will receive Communications this evening with instructions for your duties. Now get out of my sight.”

“I was too lenient wasn’t I?”

“I’m not commenting Heihachiro.”

“You think I was too lenient Christopher? Oh wait, it’s you. You probably think I wasn’t lenient enough! I had to walk across campus dripping wet and stained green! Archer is going to end up with pictures!”

“It seems to have washed out sir, and Archer always has pictures of everything that happens in Freshers week.”

“My favourite uniform jacket is ruined. I still feel slimy. Oh Fresher’s week, sekai de ichiban daikirai.”

“You and me both sir. Fancy staying and helping to deal with the reprobate the SFPD is currently bringing our way?”

“Shinjimae Pike.”
3. Keep your enemies close, but your friends closer; they can be much crueler.

When Chris finally stumbles back to his flat that evening, Number One is waiting for him with ice-cream.

“Oh you are my favourite,” he moans shamelessly, cramming his mouth full of chocolatey heaven.

“Me or the ice-cream?” she asks him with a mildly disgusted look.

“Both. I love you both. More than beer, more than pizza. More than life itself. Marry me Amanda.”

“I think I’ll pass thanks,” she snorts with another disgusted look at him and the rapidly depleting ice-cream tub.

“Shame. I hear I’d be a fantastic catch.” He wiggles his eyebrows up and down for added emphasis. Number One chokes on her own spoon laughing, almost spitting ice-cream down her front.


“Wounded,” Chris grins, “my pride is wounded. I have a stunning personality, and heavenly good looks.”

“Have you ever actually looked in a mirror Christopher? A Xindi-Insectoid would run screaming. And they’d run twice as fast when they realised what a grump you also are.”

“Oh now that’s just plain mean! Jim! Tell Number One she’s mean and knows nothing! Jim! Jim?”

“He’s not here you dweeb. He went out with McCoy hours ago.”

Chris pulls a face.

“Ugh, don’t tell me. They’ve both been weirdly sappy all week. I don’t want to know what they’re up to.”

“Me neither.”

“Ick. Young love. Gross really.”

“Ick at love in general.” Amanda mock shudders.

Chris chuckles again.

“Here’s to being sane and single, and staying that way,” he salutes with his ice-cream tub, slouching further down the couch with a grin.

“Hear hear! Although you’re a liar. You’re totally a romantic. Don’t even deny it Christopher.”

“What? No!”

“Yes you are.”

“What the hell, no!”

“You were just moaning like a porn star over a tub of chocolate ice-cream!”
“What? What does that even mean?”
“Jesus Christ, you’re so oblivious!”
“I have no idea what you’re on about.”
“Exactly my point. Now shut up and go fetch me a bud classic.”

Chris squints at her, but does eventually go and get two beers from the fridge.

4. **Avoid falling asleep in unusual places**

Someone is touching his face.

Very gently, but definitely touching him.

“That’s it, up you get.”

“Wah-?”

When did he sit upright?

“Seriously, I leave you alone for one night and I have to put you to bed when I get back in. I thought you were supposed to be parental one.”

“Was asleep, I think.” Was he asleep?

“Yeah I noticed that dad. Lie down.”

“I was lying down, wan’t I?” That’s what he was doing before Jim made him sit up?

“On the couch, on your side, cuddling one the cushions with one of your own arms around your neck, yeah. Your back will love you for that.”

“Jim? Me an’ my back love you.” He slurs, already feeling his consciousness ebbing away again. He doesn’t remember lying down, but he must be. Right?

A hand ghosts over his hair.

“Love you to dad.”

5. **No really, Avoid green slime at all costs.**

He stands in his office and stares at the sludgy green patches staining the beige carpet.

“Mr Hargritch! Wasn’t someone supposed to come clean this up?”

His Yeoman pokes his head in through the door.

“It’s on the schedule for 1030 sir.”

“But I have a meeting here at 0915.”

“Yes you do sir.”
“With Admiral Marcus.”

“Indeed sir.”

“There are large green stains on my floor Hargritch, and in twenty minutes Marcus is going to see them.”

“Indeed he will sir.”

“Brilliant.” He sighs sarcastically.

Marcus spends nearly a whole minute staring at his floor.

“Did someone slaughter a Vulcan in here Pike?” he asks eventually.

“Ah, no sir. Just pond scum.”

“Now now, Captain. That’s no way to refer to the new Cadets.”

Chris chokes on his coffee, which makes Marcus’ shark-like grin even wider.

“So we’re in agreement then. We turn her away no matter how much money her parents try to shower us with.”

Chris nods and massages his brow with his thumb and forefinger.

“She didn’t just fail the entrance exam Marcus, she scored less than most middle schoolers would. And more importantly, she quite happily told Commander Spock to his face that he was sub-human.”

“Her attitude does somewhat leave something to be desired.”

Chris snorts.

“To understate, yes.”

“Well sign and hand me the rejection form then, and I’ll leave you to it.”

“Thanks, I’ll-”

A loud thunk followed by a startled yelp echoes through the door. Chris cuts off midsentence to glance curiously over Marcus’ shoulder. Marcus turns too when muffled yelling reaches their ears.

“Dare I ask?” the Admiral drawls, raising an unimpressed eyebrow and standing smoothly.

“Please do,” Chris replies, “Because I don’t know what’s going on out there either.”

Chris pushes himself to his feet and rounds his desk as Marcus strides easily to the door. The Fleet Admiral skims his hand briefly over the control panel, and it slides open swiftly.

And they’re both greeted by the sight of Jim clutching at his bloodied nose, Philip Boyce trying to pry his hands away and dab at it with a patchy blue cloth.

“Cwis!” Jim garbles nasally, batting Phil’s hands away again. “Some ath-hole jus’ shou’ed sanguis crassior aquae at me an’ then popped me in th’ nose!”
Then he notices Marcus stood just inside the office.

“A’miral Marcus Sir,” he stammers, standing immediately to attention with a hasty salute. Phil takes advantage of Jim’s temporary distraction to push the cloth against Jim’s top lip, somewhat stemming the steady flow of blood.

“Cadet Kirk,” Marcus nods back, looking taken aback.

Chris pushes past him and strides straight up to his kid, catching his hands before he can push Phil away once more.

“19 hours Jim! Less than 19 hours have passed since the last time you brought trouble to my office!”

“I didn’ mean to!”

“Nogura and pond scum, and now-!”

“Doctor Boyce, if you would please explain to me exactly what happened here,” Marcus interjects coolly.

Phil swallows and sighs, his eyes flicking shut for a long moment. Chris feels his anxiety ratchet up several more notches as he watches. Phil never looks so nervous. Not even when faced with certain death on away missions gone terribly wrong.

“Captain Pike’s father happened sir.” Phil says quietly, keeping his gaze fixed on the Admiral’s feet.

“What!? Edward was here?” Chris blurts out in shock. “What do you mean he happened?”

“Pike! Shut it!” Marcus barks. “Clarify your statement Doctor, I do not have time for vagueness.”

“Not Edward Pike sir. Christopher’s biological father, Carlton Pritch-Howard. He came to speak to the Captain sir, and ran into Cadet Kirk and I instead.”

Chris feels all the blood draining from his face.

He takes a deep breath, steps away from Jim, and staggers backwards until the back of his knees hit one of the low metal chairs lining the edge of far side of the hallway.

Oh god.

Chris’ father is here.

He’s here.

And he hurt Jim.

6. Never let your criminally-inclined biological father visit you on campus

That bastard hurt Jim.
Chapter 2

I'm only able to post this because I'm having issues with lab equipment, which means I unfortunately have more free time than I'd like to have. Once I get a solution sorted, I'll be back to having work up to my eyeballs :P

See the end of the chapter for more notes

7. Nosebleeds and Trams are not a good combination

“What the hell did you do now! Goddammit Jim!”

“What nothing!” the young man exclaims indignantly. They’re sat on the back seats of a tram headed across the bay; when Jim’s nose still hadn’t stopped bleeding after twenty minutes of Phil applying pressure to it, the doctor had sighed and ordered them all to head to Starfleet Medical.

Chris had originally reluctantly been planning to stay behind and finish briefing Marcus on the few details he knew about his biological father, but the Admiral had just looked at him and then curtly dismissed him when his intentions became clear.

“Pike. I have a daughter. Go to Medical with Kirk,” is all he had said. Chris hadn’t argued and had saluted and left without another word.

So now he’s here; crammed into the back of a swelteringly hot cable car with Jim and Phil, PADD with open Vid Comm call balanced precariously in one hand, and a bloody rag clasped in the other.

“If you did nothing, then why are you bleeding everywhere again Jim!” Leo scowls from his end of the call.

“He literally just walked up and hit me! All I did was hold my hand out and introduce myself!”

“Yeah, and what else did you say?”

“Nothing Bones! I swear down!”

“The day you say nothing, is the day-”

“Boys,” Phil cuts in tiredly, removing and refolding the increasingly sodden linen strip from Jim’s nose, sweat dripping from his brow, “can you save the domestic for later please? Perhaps when one of you isn’t haemorrhaging all over my hands?”

Leo shakes his head, and Jim scowls sulkily at the floor, but both acquiesce. Chris shuffles in his own seat and clears his throat.

“Well, we’ll be there in five or so minutes Leo,” he says. “if you could have a room set up waiting us, we’d appreciate it.”

Leo huffs a laugh and shakes his head again.
“I’ll see what I can do.”

When they shuffle up the reception desk in the ER, the young man on duty doesn’t even ask their names before giving them a room number and a PADD full of paperwork to complete. Phil drags Jim off down a corridor before the numbers “two zero two” have even finished being said, leaving Chris to stare despondently at the electronic forms alone.

8. Admiral Jonathan Archer always knows everything

When he finally finishes triplicating the forms and hands them back, he turns to travel up the corridor himself, but is halted by Archer stomping his way up to him.

“Sir,” Chris remarks, surprised by the Admiral’s unexpected appearance.

“I heard your father attempted to force his presence upon you earlier.”

Chris shrugs. Archer watches him silently.

“Look kid,” he eventually continues when Chris fails to say anything himself, “I only know the bare bones of it. Just what’s always been in your file, so I don’t know how seriously Marcus and I should take this incident.”

“There’s not much else to say Jon,” Chris sighs back. “Carlton Pritch-Howard met my mother in 2205. He wasn’t unintelligent, but he hadn’t had any success in settling into a single career path, or in following a single degree course through to its conclusion. Blamed that on an innate restlessness and wanderlust apparently. Regardless, he and my mom met when she was just finishing up her Psychology PhD at Harvard and decided they liked each other.”

“Yes, and then she eventually took him to your family ranch in the Mojave to meet the parents. I know this bit Christopher, you’ve told me before.”

“Yeah well, my Nan and Gramps couldn’t stand him, but they loved and respected my mom too much to object when Carl eventually proposed. Nine months later, my sister was born. Then they settled down to play happy families with my grandparents at the ranch; Mom commuting back and forth between there and LA for work, and Carl making himself useful helping out with the ranch horses and livestock.”

“Let me guess, they really were only playing at happiness, right?”

Chris snorts, and ruefully shakes his head.

“Mom is pretty sure Carl started meeting other women behind her back less than a month after Emily was born. She chose not to make a big deal out of it for Em’s sake, but she says the only reason she doesn’t regret keeping the peace for that long now, is because she eventually got me out of the deal as well.”

“Sounds like a charming fellow.”

“Mmm,” Chris agrees, leaning back against the reception desk and crossing his arms across his chest. “The best bit is when Mom told him she was pregnant with me, and he looked at her, looked at my sister, and immediately walked out. Said one brat was trouble enough, and two was asking too much. By the time I was born in July ’11, the divorce was finalised and Carl had disappeared into the wind.”
“Wow, I can’t wait to meet him in person.” Archer deadpans. Chris chuckles, and waves at the waiting room and accompanying coffee machine behind them suggestively. Archer nods, and they collect a cup of brown caffeine sludge each.

“I didn’t even know his name until after my tenth birthday Jon,” Chris continues, sipping at the too bitter liquid. “Edward was my Mom’s best mate from College and my sister’s Godfather. When Carl left, Edward came down to California to help my Mom with my sister and I so that her parents were free to keep the ranch running. And then he never really left again. Mom says I started calling him Dad pretty much as soon as I started talking, and neither of them ever bothered correcting me. Then they finally got married, and he officially adopted both of us. We took his name at the same time Mom did, and I’ve never regretted that.”

He pauses, grimacing at the grounds accumulated at the bottom of his cup.

“And you moved to the UK when you were twelve?” Archer prompts, swilling his own drink with a grimace.

“When I was twelve and Em was just sixteen, yeah. Edward got offered at a really good promotion within the agency he worked for. It meant he’d have to return to England, but Mom convinced him to take it anyway. So we packed up our wing of the ranch and left.”

“Wing!?”

“It’s a big ranch Jonny,” Chris laughs. “More generations of my family than I care to try listing have lived in it. It’s had quite a few extensions added to it over the years.”

“But it’s in the middle of a desert! There’s nothing there!”

“There’s vegetation and fauna and stuff!”

“Lizards and bushes so spiky you could impale someone on them don’t count Chrissy.”

“Ugh, wetland dwellers,” he scoffs back with a grin.

“You’re distracting from the point Cappy,” Archer harrumphs. “So you emigrated to the UK and picked up a horrific Yorkshire accent. How does Mr Pritchard-Howard come back into this tale?”

“Just after I finished my A-Levels off, he swept in out of the blue demanding to see Emily and I. Mom reluctantly agreed and gave him Emily’s Comm number as she’d already left for University. Then she told me it was my choice whether I wanted to meet him or not. I rather foolishly said I would like to.”

“He kidnapped you.”

“Yeah, basically.”

“And you call Jim a trouble magnet!”

“I was seventeen sir,” Chris rejoins dryly. “And I really wasn’t expecting it, especially as Edward was with me. All I remember is Edward suddenly going pale, clapping a hand against the side of his neck and toppling sideways. Then a white rag got shoved in my face and I woke up locked in a damp basement.”

“The report says they managed to confine you for two weeks.”
“Two weeks and two days. Then I worked out how to pick the electronic lock on the door and ran for it. Worked out I was back in LA pretty quickly and tumbled into the Starfleet Recruitment Office. I know you know that my Gramps was ‘Fleet back in his day; I figured they’d have my family’s contact information on record and I could go home without having to deal with the police.”

“Well you got that wish!” Archer laughs.

“I’m not sure Starfleet Intelligence were less intimidating that the LAPD sir,” he replies gruffly with a slight smile. “I was bloody terrified! There I was thinking it was just Carl being a bastard, and it turns out I’d been held hostage by bloody Terra Prime! I got thoroughly interrogated and sent for mandatory deprogramming in case I’d been brainwashed!”

“Well you still came and joined Starfleet afterwards didn’t you, so it can’t have been that bad!”

“Only because signing up was the biggest middle finger I could think of to throw in my father’s face! Jesus, Terra sodding Prime!”

“So Carlton was definitely involved with them then? The investigation files never say solidly one way or the other.”

“I never saw him after the meeting I was taken from back in York, and SI never managed to implicate him in any of the actual terrorist activities. He got a couple of years in a penal colony for non-violent kidnapping, and a couple more for “unwittingly colluding with Terra Prime” in carrying the kidnapping out, if you can believe that bullshit. But that was all they managed to pin on him. He walked free after three years for good behaviour. I haven’t seen or heard from him since.”

Archer sighs and leans back in his seat.

“You’re right,” he frowns, “not much more than what’s already in your file.”

Chris shrugs again. He really doesn’t know anything else.

“Well then,” Archer grumbles, “I suppose that’ll have to do. Shall we go find out if your wayward child has been patched up yet?”

With a final grimace, Chris throws his empty plastic cup into the recycler by the door, and follows Archer back out into the corridors of the hospital.

9. Starfleet Medical’s filter coffee is horrifically bad; don’t drink it.

10. Never break a posterior artery in the back of your nose.

Jim has gone very, very pale when Chris and Archer finally locate the small room he’s being treated in.

There’s a bowl of bloody compresses on a metal tray cart next to the sole biobed, as well as a dish of ice and a stack of clean dressings. Leo is fiddling with a sanitiser probe beside it, while Phil is stood between Jim’s legs where he’s sat on the edge of the bed, Jim’s chin gripped gently in one hand, and an icepack held against the bridge of his nose with the other.

“Christopher Pike, I am going to break your sperm donor’s legs!” Phil snaps out as soon the door swishes open to allow them access to the room. He doesn’t turn around.

“Get in line,” Chris shoots back, no hesitation.
Do you know what that asshole’s punch did? Do you? He ruptured the left angular artery just below his eye socket! Twice! If modern medicine hadn’t provided us with subcutaneous regenerators, Jimmy here could have bled to death! From a nose bleed! While I stood and watched helplessly!"

“But he’s fine now right?” Chris asks hastily, failing to hide his sudden swell of panic.

“Yes I’m fine,” Jim grumbles back, glancing sideways at him. “It was only a problem because the medication I’m taking to ensure I don’t come down with an infection courtesy of the Bio-ponds thins my blood.”

“You’re taking medication?” Chris asks him, sliding onto the bed to sit beside Jim. Jim mutters inaudibly and leans over to rest heavily against Chris’ shoulder.

“Nogura dragged me to the Clinic on Wednesday evening,” Jim huffs slightly louder. “Apparently all you Officer types talk about me behind me back, because he knew about my tendency to be allergic to everything under the sun and wanted to make sure I wasn’t going to keel over on him unexpectedly.”

“Of course we talk about you Jim,” Archer cuts in with a smirk. “You don’t have a high enough rank to talk back at us for it.”

“Like rank would stop me,” Jim snorts back, and then immediately regrets it. “Ow. goddamn, that hurt,” he whines, shifting both the icepack and Phil’s hands with his own.

“Well stop bitching and let me hypo you then, you infant,” Leo adds, stepping up next to Phil. He’s put the sanitiser down, and instead has a tray of hypos and medical shot jars clasped in front of him. Jim eyes him suspiciously, but eventually grunts and tips his head against Chris’ shoulder, exposing the side of his neck to the younger doctor.

“Will wonders never cease, he does possess a modicum of common sense after all,” Bones drawls.

“Love you too,” Jim grins tiredly.

Chris ruffles his hair affectionately and smiles when Jim’s eyes slide shut.

11. Always befriend a senior Admiral.

When Phil has finally stemmed the last of the bleeding and smoothed out as much of the bruising on Jim’s face as possible, Archer remarks that all of them look like they haven’t slept for a week.

“It’s Freshers week sir,” they all say simultaneously, with varying levels of enthusiasm.

“Well that’s me told,” Archer chortles. “Come on, I’ll buy you all lunch before throwing you all back to the wolves.”

“Can’t,” Leo huffs immediately, “I’m on duty ‘til 1800.”

Archer raises an eyebrow and pulls out his PADD, taps out a couple of sentences, and then slides it back into his inside jacket pocket.

“Not anymore you’re not McCoy. Chinese anyone?”

Halfway through devouring a king prawn chop suey, it suddenly occurs to Chris that it’s a Friday.
Which means it’s an O’Riley’s night.

He’s silently mulling this over, trying to decide whether to suggest skiving off their afternoon responsibilities and heading straight there or not, when Archer leans over and asks what time they’ve planned to meet up for drinks that night.

Before he can reply, the words “**Point 8**” immediately spring to mind. And Chris realises he’s broken his promise to himself.

He’d sworn that he was going to stop listing off Jim points. And well he had; **Point 184** had been the last one he’d made. Except apparently his subconscious has started up a new list without his permission. Worse, his subconscious isn’t even creative enough to use a different numbering system.

It’s probably futile, but he sighs internally, and promises himself he won’t write this new list down at least.

God knows Phil would never let him live it down if he ever found out about this one!

“I started a new list.”

Phil chokes on the mouthful of beer he was halfway through swallowing.


Chris shrugs and rattles the ice cubes in his tumbler of whiskey.

“I didn’t exactly plan it, it just sort of happened. This one is nicknamed ‘Fleet Survival Tips’.”

“What is it with you and lists!”

“Well with you and Jim forcibly inserting yourselves and your chaos in my life, I need some source of organisation.”

“Oh because mentally listing random points isn’t chaotic and insane!”

“Compared to you and Jim?” he grins cheekily. Phil squints at him unamused.

“You owe me another drink for that insult,” Phil points at him accusingly.

“Oh well if we’re playing that game, you owe me more drinks than you can hope to pay for in this lifetime.”

“Why am I friends with you Chrissy? You’re such an asshole!”

“Because you love each other so very much,” Jim slurs happily, suddenly appearing behind them and throwing his arms over their shoulders.

Instead of replying, Chris pulls his drunken flatmate into a bearhug with a chuckle.

“Come on kid, it’s after midnight. Let’s get your sodden-self back home.”

“Not having a curfew is **awesome**!” Jim slurs again against the side of his neck. “Can Bones come home with us?”

“Well I’m not leaving him here unattended,” Phil chips in, glancing to where Leo, Number One and
Archer are racing to finish a line of shots each at the other end of the bar.

“Definitely not,” Chris winces, as Archer celebrates his victory by drunkenly pushing Bones off of his stool to the thunderous applause of the Cadets surrounding them.

12. Avoid morning people; they are unnatural.

Despite the fact that Chris had to literally pour him into bed, Jim is annoyingly chipper the next morning.

“Soooo Daddykins, tell me all about your amazing Biodad.” He drawls in a pour imitation of Leo’s accent as they sit and eat breakfast in the kitchen.

“Do not call me that,” Chris grumbles back, trying to inhale a second mug of coffee.

“Awww but it suits you so much!”

“My hands around your neck will suit you if you don’t shut up.”

“You’re always such a ray of sunshine in the morning Dad, you know that?”

“Bring me more coffee brat.”

“Aye Aye Captain grumpypants!”

Chris manages to kick him in the shins as he stands. Nice and hard.

“I genuinely am curious about your biological father though Chris.” Jim asks rather more politely once they’ve washed up the breakfast pots. “you never talk about him. I didn’t even know you had a Stepdad until that first time you took me to Yorkshire last Christmas.”

“That’s because he really is as much of an asshole as I’ve always hinted he is.” Chris tells him, emptying his satchel onto the dinner table. He finds the PADD he was looking for and retreats to the couch, tugging Jim with him.

“How much of an asshole are we talking here? Archer with his misuse of HoloPics and social media kinda assholery, or Frank Wellcott and a belt kinda assholery?”

Chris manfully suppresses a flinch at the too casual mention of Jim’s childhood.

“Between the two,” he eventually mutters. Jim raises an eyebrow when he fails to expand on his answer.

“Look son,” he sighs when Jim refuses to stop staring at him expectantly. “I barely know him. In my entire life, I’ve met him face to face for maybe five minutes tops. He left before I was born, showed up for one meeting that got cut short when I was seventeen, and I haven’t seen him since.”

Jim cocks his head to the side speculatively.

“When he hit me, he snarled sanguis crassior aquae at me.”

“I know, you said.”

“That’s Latin for Blood is thicker than Water Chris.”
“I’m aware.”

“That’s what members of Terra Prime shout Dad, before they blow up Alien Embassies and kill people. The blood of humanity is greater than the water of space-spawn.”

Chris sighs again.

“I know Jim.”

“Is he? A member?”

“Maybe kid, maybe. But god, I hope not.”

Jim’s gaze unfocuses, and he slides down the couch until his head is in Chris’ lap. Chris slides his fingers into Jim’s hair and flicks the screen of his PADD back on.

He tries not to think about what his Father’s sudden reappearance might mean.

It couldn’t be anything good after all.

Chapter End Notes

Now now Archer, Yorkshire accents are most certainly not awful. Your author has one after all...
Someone is repeatedly pressing the front door buzzer for the flat.

It’s passed 2am and Chris is furious.

He doesn’t even bother grabbing a t-shirt before stomping out of his room, just pulls the left leg of his boxers back down and shoves his fringe out of his eyes.

He slaps the access panel next to the door rather viciously, and the door slides open with a short melodic chime.

The faces of four tired Cadets and one Ensign greet him.

“What?” Chris snaps, ignoring the way they’re all goggling at his state of undress.

“Captain!” the Ensign gulps, eyes snapping back up with a smart salute. “We were informed this was the residence of Cadet Kirk sir!”

“It is, what of it?” he growls back, crossing his arms and straightening his spine, feet planted shoulder width apart. He fixes them with his most unimpressed command scowl, and the two youngest looking cadets at the back of the group exchange nervous glances.

“Erm, we’re from the Engineering department sir. We were asked to retrieve the Magnatomic E-M Conduit from the Cadet and return it to the zero-gravity lab.”

“And two in the goddamn morning was the absolute best time to do so was it Ensign?” he hisses menacingly.

Chris is incensed. Beyond enraged. He knew engineers were an unusual bunch. Hell, Caitlin Barry was his Chief of Engineering for years out in the black and he’s never met a more eccentric individual. But this surpasses acceptable by quite a way. He was asleep dammit!

“It’s- It’s two am?” the Ensign stammers, looking paler by the second.

“Two am he asks? Yes, it’s fucking two am!” Chris yells throwing his arms over his head.

“…sorry Captain,” is the whispered, trembling reply.

He’s about to rage at them again, when a hand suddenly drops on to his shoulder from behind. He suppresses a surprised flinch and glances sideways at the mop of blonde hair just visible in his peripheral vision.

“Go back to bed Chris, I’ll deal with them,” Jim sighs tiredly, sounding exceptionally resigned.

Chris doesn’t move for several long seconds, maintaining his level glare. Then he steps sideways without breaking eye contact and allows Jim to move into the space created. Jim’s hand tightens on his shoulder for an instant, before it drops smoothly over his bicep and then falls away completely.

“You’ve got ten seconds to explain yourself before I decide to let the Captain handle you after all,” Jim tells them sternly, imitating Chris’ pose.

“Cadet Kirk, I don’t think-” the Ensign starts, some confidence returning to his voice.
“That’s Doctor Kirk to you right now,” Jim snaps over the top of him. Chris raises an eyebrow in impressed surprise.

“My work with the Electronic Engineering department is separate to my activities within the Academy. I have not one, but two scientific PhD’s under my belt, so you will address me with the proper respect.” Jim growls. The Ensign pales again.

“Well Doctor, you have the Mag E-M conduit. You shouldn’t have taken it in the first place, but-”

Jim draws himself up to his full height with a long indrawn breath. Even with only a view of his back, Chris knows that Jim must be scowling hard enough to rival McCoy at his worst.

The Ensign gawps like a fish, mouth silently opening and closing as the rest of his sentence clearly dies in his throat.

“We’ll errr… Come back at a more reasonable hour sir,” one of the Cadets squeaks. Then she grabs the upper arms of her two closest companions and starts dragging them down the corridor towards the turbolift. The fourth Cadet throws a hasty salute and almost runs after them, distraught look never leaving his face.

Seeing that he’s been left alone, the Ensign gulps as he looks up at Jim. Jim says nothing and watches him silently back.

“I’ll just… go then.” The now slightly shuddering young man swallows. And then he bolts away.

Jim sighs, and presses his thumb against the door panel, hanging his head as it slides shut once more.

“Idiots,” Chris hears him mutter under his breath.

“Please tell me you know who his commanding officer is?” Chris asks, voice still sleep rough, but amusement clear regardless. “Cause I’m gonna have a word with them about his subordinates being respectful.” Jim turns to him with a sharp twist, one eyebrow raised.

“I thought you would have gone back to bed already Chris?” he questions, a hint of his own amusement colouring his voice.

“What, and miss you dressing them down like that? I’m impressed kid; you can command a bridge to a standstill one day with a voice and manner like that.”

Jim smiles self-depreciatingly.

“I was literally just imitating you Dad,” he shrugs, eyes dropping to wood of the floor again. “That’s all it was; a play-acted version of you.”

Chris shakes his head and smiles.

“I wouldn’t be too sure of that son. I really wouldn’t be too sure.”

He leaves Jim stood quietly by the door with a smile and retreats back to his room and his hopefully still-warm bed.

13. Always practice your scary command voice he thinks, as he hauls his duvet back up to neck.

And then, more importantly:
Chris moans and tries to burrow further into the pillow.

“That brings Chris to almost instant alertness. He sits up quickly and throws the covers back. Jim scrambles back and grabs a discarded pair of cargos from off the top of his chest of draws for him, throwing them his way with an easy toss. Pulling on the black pair of pants hastily, he shoots Jim a questioning look.

“I don’t know Chris!” Jim hisses again. “I just got back from my run and they were stood outside our door. I didn’t know what else to do, so I left them in the kitchen with a mug of coffee each.”

“Best go find out what they want then,” he mumbles to the kid, squinting at his reflection in the mirror on his wardrobe door; his hair looks like disaster zone, but he doesn’t have time to fix it now beyond a hasty drag of his fingers through it.

Jim shoves a mint into his hand as they both stride out into the main room. He pauses to shoot Jim a grateful look, shoves it in his mouth, takes a deep breath.

And then he steps into his own kitchen full of apprehension.

“Aah! Christopher! Apologies for the early morning invasion.”

Barnett, Chris is relieved to see, is wearing his uniform, but is doing so very casually. His trousers are neatly pressed and tucked correctly into his boots, magnetic belt buckle gleaming in the early morning sunlight streaming in through the window above the sink. The visible top buckle on his jacket too, is polished to a shine, but it’s undone, along with the rest, revealing the decidedly not regulation t-shirt he’s wearing underneath. Unless of course, bright green tees with shark-riding, tommy gun wielding, grizzly bears printed on them have suddenly become regulation.

Komack on the other hand, is so neatly dressed, he looks ready to meet the President and Executive Branch of the Federation. Chris was expecting no less though, and decides to not let it worry him.

“Morning gentlemen,” Chris rasps, entirely unshocked that he still sounds so gruff. He doesn’t even try to salute and beelines for the still steaming coffee pot instead.

“Pike!” Komack snaps as he steps past him.

“Oh leave him be James,” Barnett rumbles amusedly. “We dragged the poor man unexpectedly from sleep after all.”

Chris nods appreciatively at the younger Admiral once he’s gotten a mug of his own in hand. He gulps several large mouthfuls of the scalding liquid, pleasantly surprised by the subtle bite the mint still in his mouth adds to the flavour.

“Better?” Barnett asks him once he’s drained his first mug and poured a second.

“Much, thanks.”

“Good, because we have unpleasant news.”
Komack and Barnett both straighten, and exchange matching grimaces, the levity from the moment before instantly gone. Chris glances between the two of them and wonders what on Earth could be so important that it merited a personal visit rather than a secure Priority One Comm.

“At 0430 this morning, a team of well trained and well equipped individuals broke into the zero gravity laboratory in the Tucker Building. They took two pieces of top of the line equipment and trashed the area where a third normally lives. They climbed straight down the shaft of the turbolift and cut through the lab door like security doesn’t even exist.”

“Novafire,” Chris chokes, “please tell me inanimate objects were the only thing they cut through?”

Barnett shakes his head sadly.

“Ensign Sinclair was down there with Cadets Hardstand and Monroe. I believe you met them briefly earlier this morning. I’m sorry Chris, you couldn’t have known; none of us could have.”

Chris puts his mug down hurriedly, before he cracks it by gripping it too hard.

15. Never be overly harsh with a member of Starfleet; your words might turn out to be the last they ever hear.

“Jesus fuc-” he snarls, biting his own word off. “Dammit, Jim and I scared the hell out of those kids last night!”

“What’s done is done Pike.” Komack says tonelessly. Chris wants to smack him for his seeming lack of care, but he digs his nails into the palm of his hand and glares at the floor tiles instead.

“Six men and women, all but one kitted out in black masked Tac gear,” Barnett continues, shooting Komack an unreadable look “We’re trying to get a trace on where they got their equipment from, but no luck so far. They were after the Superficial Photonic Harmoniser, The G-Null Endotronic Inducer, and the Magnatomic Electromagnetic Conduit.”

Chris’ head snaps back up when he hears that last one.

“That’s what Jim’s got,” he blurs.

“Yes, and thank god you told those kids to get stuffed and come back for it in the morning Pike, or Starfleet would be in an even more shit situation than now,” Komack snorts.

“I didn’t understand all her technobabble Chris,” Barnett sighs, “But the long and short of what Mayweather told us this morning, is that if you combine those three devices together with a bit of technical know-how, and an energy crystal or two, you end up with something that can create one hell of a bang. So yes, thank god you asked them to return at more sociable hours. If you hadn’t, we’d have the whole of San Fran on a high priority bomb alert.”

Chris stares wide eyed at the two Admirals, stunned into silence.

“There’s more Christopher,” Barnett grimaces. “I specified that all but one of them were in Tac gear for a reason. When this group found the Magnatomic Electromagnetic Conduit missing, they smashed everything in proximity to it, and then left a HoloCam data chip atop the wreckage. Our own Security feeds were tampered with, so we got next to nothing from our HoloCams, but there was a six second partial flat-feed on the data chip. As a result, we have one clear facial for the one guy in civilian clothing.”

Chris’ heart leaps into his throat; he suddenly has an awful, awful, feeling about that facial.
It would explain why he’s getting a personal visit about the incident.

Barnett leans down and picks up a grey ‘Fleet satchel from by his feet. It looks almost identical to Chris’ own, except it has an extra pocket stitched under the front flap. Barnett pulls a PADD from inside of it, and taps the power button on the edge of the case.

He pauses, and glances at Komack again.

“Chris- Captain, the data chip had your name printed on it.”

Then he passes Chris the PADD.

Six seconds.

Fifty-eight frames.

Old, 2D footage. Grainy, patchy, low resolution.

More than clear enough to see his Father’s eyes rise to meet his own through the screen.

And more than clear enough to read the Semper Prima Terra flickering underneath.

Sanguis Crassior Aquae: Semper Prima Terra

*Blood is thicker than water: always Earth first*

Terra Prime’s principal motto.

16. Latin mottos never mean anything good in this century

Chris almost breaks Barnett’s PADD in horror.

It’s only 0630.

Barnett and Komack instruct him not to leave under any circumstance.

To not let Jim leave either.

There’s a group of security officers in the hallway outside his door. Outside his and Jim’s door.

He slides down the cupboards, and sits in the corner of the kitchen floor.

The morning sunlight glistens warmly on the crisp white and cream tiles, and Chris worries about his friends and family.

0707. Seven minutes past seven.

“Chris. Dad. Phil’s calling.”

He glances up at his kid, and realises the cold tiles have leeched all the heat out of his bare feet, leaving them cold, numb and stiff.

“I’m coming Jim.” He sighs.
He forces himself to move.

Jim reaches down and grabs his hand, helping to haul him back upright. He pauses once he’s stood to hook an arm around Jim and briefly pull his shoulder against his chest.

“You know I’d never let anyone hurt you right?” he rumbles into the side of Jim’s hair.

“Dad, what’s going on?” Jim sighs, shoving his balled hands into his pockets.

“I’ll tell you as soon as I’m allowed to, I promise son.”

Jim smiles faintly, but he doesn’t look the slightest bit reassured.

“Dunnington and Risscount just showed up at my place, told me to pack for an extended time away, and then left a bunch of redshirts outside my door. What the hell is going on Cappy?”

“Remember my pre-Starfleet Adventure Phil?”

Phil watches him silently through the Vid Comm call.

“Oooo Boy…” he finally chuckles lowly, shaking his head.

Ten minutes later, Commodore Thaaj pushes the flat door buzzer and orders Chris and Jim to pack all their essential belongings into the crates he brought with him.

Having expected it after speaking with Phil, it takes the two of them less than twenty minutes to stow half their lives into the impersonal metal boxes. They’d already started stacking their stuff up on the dining room after all.

When they’re done, the two security officers from the hall load them all onto the back of an airvan, and Chris and Jim are left standing outside in the chilly morning air with only the taciturn Tellarite Commodore and a silent phasor carrying Crewman for company.

Eventually another airvan pulls up to the front of the building. This one has blacked out windows.

The back door slides open, and Archer scowls down at them from the back seats.

“You two,” he harrumphs, “are far more trouble than you’re worth.”

It takes them three hours, and they have to change vehicles twice and clothing once, but eventually they leave the city limits.

Jim doesn’t complain, but Chris can see his patience wearing thinner and thinner as the hours drag on by. Several times, he’s tempted to ignore Barnett and Komack’s orders and explain the situation to Jim, but as Archer hasn’t moved to fill him in either, Chris bites his lip and keeps his mouth shut.

Eventually, with the silence thickening uncomfortably between them, Chris shuts his eyes and lets the gentle swaying of the moving vehicle lull him into a doze.

Point 8.
Chris listed it for a reason.

They pull up outside of a small house at the edge of an equally small settlement.

Chris can hear children laughing and playing nearby, and the smell of fresh baked bread is wafting down the single street. A church bell tolls four times in the near distance, and Chris turns to peer up the road, spotting a sign emblazoned with a steaming mug, and another flecked with a rainbow of colours just beyond that indicating the presence of a small village kindergarten.

“Great Scottham.” Archer rumbles knowledgeably as he and Porthos step out onto the gravel driveway beside him. “Population of sod all, established in 2128. Three shops; the bakery and butchers, the dry goods store, and quite possibly Earth’s smallest coffee shop. Frequent[ed by one bus a week -excluding the local school buses of course- which does one run into the local town on a Saturday morning and returns the same afternoon. It has a tiny play park down that-a-way,” he waves over Chris’ shoulder, “and a multi-faith building just behind it. Boys, welcome to your new home for the foreseeable future.”

“Why are we here,” Jim asks bluntly, pulling a pair of sunglasses out his inside jacket pocket. Archer snatches them and pushes them onto his own face before Jim can blink. Chris forces himself not to laugh and upset Jim further.

“Because kiddo,” Archer smirks, adjusting the nose bridge of his stolen aviators, “it turns out Chris’ Father is a bomb building terrorist nutcase with illusions of grandeur and a tendency to send death threats to interstellar news broadcasters.”

“He WHAT!?” Chris chokes.

“It was shown for the first time at 0700 this morning,” the Admiral shrugs nonchalantly. “He named you, Jim, both your doctors, your parents, and your sister’s family. At 0703 this morning, Marcus, Nogura and I finalised plans to have you all moved to safehouses. Just to be safe, we’ve also sent all of your old crew still stationed on Earth off on a shakedown cruise under Number One and Spock’s command. But so far, precisely none of Pritchard-Howard’s promises have actually happened, so I’m feeling optimistic.”

Chris feels all the blood drain out of his face, and he sits heavily on the bottom edge on the open airvan doorframe.

“What about the academy?” Jim asks faintly, sinking to sit next to Chris. Chris allows himself to lean sideways against Jim’s shoulder.

“Don’t worry kid, I won’t let you get behind in your studies, even if I have to tutor you independently in everything myself. And as for Mr Pike’s responsibilities, Rick’ Barnett is temporarily taking over as Dean of the Academy.”

Jim looks away, his gaze focused off down the road and into the distance. Porthos siddles up to him and cautiously licks his hand. Jim scratches his ears absently.

“Come on you matching pair of pessimists, let’s go get settled in.”

And he turns and limps off towards the front door.

Chris does two things as he slowly rises and follows the Admiral:

First, he cups his hand around the back of Jim’s neck and rubs his thumb along his hairline, trying to smile reassuredly when Jim looks up at him.
And then he thanks the stars that they’ve both managed to succeed in carrying out **Point 11.**

Leo and Phil are both leaning on the walls of the hallway when they push in through front door, tension evident in every line of their bodies.

Jim strides immediately over to Bones and allows the gruff southerner to wrap his arms around him, burying his head in the Doctor’s chest.

Chris stops and stares at all the crates stacked against the walls, wondering how by Nova his life has ended up this much of a mess so quickly.

“Hey Cappy,” Phil says softly, coming to a slow halt by his side.

“Phil,” Chris breathes, screwing his eyes shut for a second.

“Come on Chris; Bones and I found Archer’s stash in the back of the kitchen. You look like you could use a shot or seven, and you know Jonny only ever hides the good stuff.”

“Phil,” Chris smiles weakly. “Don’t ever change yeah?”

“Yeah well.” Phil grins with a wink, “Sometimes a man’ll tell his bartender things he'll never tell his doctor. And it looks like you have a hell of a story to tell.”

17. An apple a day will keep the Doctor away. Thus, a shot of whiskey is a much better daily supplement.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Not to be melodramatic or anything, but Chris has never been so bored in his life.

They’ve been here a week and there’s just.

Nothing to do. Nothing.

They’re not allowed their Comms and PADDs for one thing. Apparently they’re a security risk. Instead they’re given a base-model writing tablet, the type that kids learning to read use. They have a basic word processor installed, a drawing pad programme, and a text-to-speech function. And that is it.

No Net access, no games or sims, no Vids or streaming. No search function, no mail box or message system. Definitely no social media apps.

They don’t even have a desktop; they load straight up into the word processor and you can double swipe right to access a clean drawing sheet.

Chris shoved his on top of the wardrobe in the room he’s sharing with Phil four days ago and he hasn’t touched it since. Jim took his apart in an attempt to recode it and make it more versatile. The burnt-out processor chip is still smouldering on the patio in the back garden.

Chris doesn’t think Phil’s even powered his up yet.

Which says it all really.

18. Never take your technology for granted

Leaving the house is also a big no-no.

Someone might recognise them after all.

Well, they can go into the garden out the back, which in all honesty is fairly sizeable. Big enough to run circuits through at least, and filled with enough trees, bushes and wildlife to make jogging laps pleasant. But still an enclosed area which seems to feel more and more restricting as the days tick on by.

Going out the front though? Or sauntering down the road to the village main square? Popping down to the store for a fresh carton of milk?

Not something they’re allowed to do.

Surprisingly, it’s not Jim or even Chris who’s chaffing against the restrictions the most.

Phil slowly seems to be losing his mind.

They’re all developing shorter and shorter tempers, but Phil is clearly a mere hair’s breadth from breaking something. Probably someone’s skull.
“Phil, more coffee?” Chris asks him casually.

Phil shoves his empty mug onto the countertop next to him so hard, it bounces off the back wall and cracks the handle.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” Chris mutters dryly, wiping up the resultant smattering of powdered ceramic and pottery chips with a damp cloth.

“And don’t put too much milk in it this time,” the doctor growls before stomping outside and slamming the patio door behind him.

Chris pinches the bridge of his nose and sighs deeply.

19. **Having an eidetic echoic memory is often unpleasant.**

There’s a Holoprojector in the lounge adjacent to the kitchen.

It’s locked into just the one channel, and Jim has been forbidden from undoing the restriction. Normally, Chris has nothing against the Federation News Broadcasting Company, as they’re nearly always factual and unbiased. But when it’s the *only* thing you can watch, it gets tiring very quickly.

They play the clip of Carlton at least once every half hour for the first three days. By the end of the week, it’s still being shown at least twice a day. Chris wishes he could purge its words from his memory.

*Humanity.*

*It is the core of what we are. What we have been. What we will always be.*

*We will not be erased. We will not be subsumed.*

*Two billion deaths.*

*That is the blood on Starfleet’s hands.*

*The only blood on ours will be that of the race-traitors who dare to falsely claim the title of peace keeping armada.*

*You have twenty-four hours to hand over those of tainted blood and stained hands.*

*Nine individuals in exchange for nine locations and the nine million lives around them.*

*Only when the Federation ceases to threaten the core of who we are shall there be peace.*

*Sanguis Crassior Aquae*  
*Semper Prima Terra.*

The Vid is another flat-feed, like that from the HoloCam chip left in the zero-G lab. It flickers dramatically between the menacing scowl of his Father and horror scenes from some of Starfleet’s and the Federation’s greatest failures. Elysium. The Bardock Files. Pontyfist II. The Hayden Incident. The recent Farragut attack.

Tarsus IV.

Chris feels sick every time *that* Holopic flashes across the screen. Knowing that that kid is *Jim*. 
God, he wishes.

He wishes he could undo that image.


Their names slide across the screen in time to the rhythmic cadence of Carlton’s ultimatum, burning themselves into the retinas of the viewer.

Chris is only glad that the names of his sister’s kids are absent from the list.

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<tr>
<th>Point 3</th>
<th>was supposed to be sarcastic, not a damn <em>prediction</em>.</th>
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“Do we need more cheese?” Jim asks him, absentmindedly tapping the stylus against his lower lip.

“We always need more cheese. Leo eats it like it’s going out of fashion.”

“He’s just stress eating,” Jim smiles weakly. Chris shakes his head in fond amusement.

“Well it’s as good a method of dealing as any I suppose.”

“He hasn’t broken any plates yet at least. Gotta be a bonus yeah?”

“Phil will calm down eventually Jimmy.”

“For his sake, I hope so. Jon is beginning to get a murderous glint in his eye.”

Chris hopes so too.

“Point 3 was supposed to be sarcastic, not a damn _prediction_.

“Well if you hadn’t been a fucking idiot, then it never would have happened!” Chris shouts at the top of voice, red in the face.

“I’m not the one who can’t leave shit alone!” Phil yells back.

“You never listen to me!”

“And who’s fault is that, you incompetent bastard!”

“Well it isn’t mine! If you would just-!”

“How the fuck is it not your-!”

“BOTH OF YOU, OUSIDE NOW!” Archer roars at them, the butt of his cane slamming against the
Chris sits at the bottom of the garden, alone and miserable.

He takes another swig from his beer bottle, tips his head back against the fence, and sighs long and hard.

20. Adults do not sulk.

“You gonna sit out here all night old man?”

Chris cracks open one eye and squints at Jim.

“Maybe,” he mutters bitterly, nudging his empty bottle with his foot until it tips over onto the flagstones with a clatter.

“It’s October Chris, and we’re somewhere north of Portland. Gonna get chilly out here overnight.”

“I’ll live.”

Jim sighs dramatically, and throws himself down into the chair next to him with a huff.

“Phil is sulking like a six-year-old too you know.”

“I’m not sulking.”

“Suuuure. What do you call this then?”

“I am not sulking. I am a grown man, and I’m justifiably unhappy with the immaturity of my current roommate.”

“You’re sulking Chris. Admit it, you are.”

“I am not.”

“Are too!”

“Am not! Look, I’m not having this conversation with you Jim. Go bother someone else.”

“Nope!”

“James!”

“Nope. I’m not leaving you out here to sulk and be miserable alone. Deal with it old man!”

“James T. Kirk!” he growls, suddenly angry once more. He opens his mouth to snap something else regrettable at the young man, but Jim gets his words out first.

“I’m not leaving you because you’re family, and looking after family is what you’re supposed to do. You taught me that Chris.”

Chris’ anger deflates again, and scrubs a hand roughly down over his face with a groan.

“I love you dad,” Jim continues softly, “and I’m not leaving even if your furious with me.”
Chris tips his head back again, and rests his hand atop Jim’s right wrist.

They sit in silence and watch the stars rise together.

When their breath mists the air around them and Chris starts to shiver, they push themselves to their feet and stumble back to the house.

There’s two bowls of Phil’s signature beef stew left on the kitchen counter for them, Chris’ with a vintage paper note propped against it.

We’re both idiots and I’m sorry is scrawled on it in Phil’s nearly illegible doctor’s handwriting.

Chris smiles, and tucks the folded note into the breast pocket of his shirt.

And then he takes his bowl of stew through to the lounge and silently slides onto the couch next to his best friend.


“I’m gonna sneak out and walk down to the store to get some more milk.”

“No you’re not!” comes Archer’s shout from across the kitchen.

“Dammit, how did he hear that?” Phil hisses to him. Chris shrugs.

“I’m one hundred and forty-three, not deaf! Nobody leaves the house!”

“Hundred and forty-three my ass.” Phil grumbles. “Coma years on mythical unexplored planets do not count.”

“They do when you come back with improved hearing and younger bones than you left with,” Archer suddenly grins from directly behind them.

They both deny jumping in shock.

With little else to waste their time on, it becomes a game. Pushing at the limits of Point 8.

A game they consistently lose, but an enjoyable one none the less.

How much stupid shit can they get away with under Archer’s nose?

“Now.” Jim mouths at him.

Chris casually drops a boiled egg into Jonny’s left boot.

“Take that out now Christopher!” the man in question immediately bellows from the top of the stairs.

Jim splutters in laughter from the kitchen doorway.

He and Bones exchange a glance and then hurriedly empty the sugar bowl into an empty plastic takeaway tub. Then they fill the sugar bowl with salt.
Two minutes later, Jon saunters into the kitchen, picks the bowl up, and pours it down the back of Leo’s jumper. Then he pulls the takeaway box out from under the sink and makes himself a mug of coffee.

“How?” Phil whispers to him incredulously as they watch Jon cheerily leave. Leo continues to curse and flail beside them, trying desperately to pull his sweater off.

Jim and Bones hide in the garage and dismantle the miniature lawnmower. Then they stand and wet themselves laughing as they watch Porthos chase the small machine around in circles, barking at it as it blasts “who let the dogs out” from the speaker jerry-rigged to the top of it.

Archer makes them scrub the bathroom with toothbrushes for that one.

“Nobody messes with my baby,” he growls at them, hugging the beagle to his chest.

They all wake up to find their toothbrushes encased in jello and the coffee machine wrapped in two dozen layers of foil and cellophane.

Faced with caffeine deprivation, they stop trying to pull pranks.

Chris has always been careful to not get too involved in Jim’s academics. There’s a line he doesn’t want to cross, one that separates appropriate from inappropriate. A line that is defined by their increasingly familial relationship.

But with fewer and fewer options for keeping them all entertained available, he supposes it wouldn’t hurt too much if he sat the kid down and talked him through a series of tactical scenarios.

“You have three photon torpedoes remaining, your phasor bank is powered down for at least another ten minutes. If you choose to continue broadcasting the distress call, power will be diverted away from your shields at a rate of seven percent per 30 seconds.”

“But every ten seconds longer we broadcast for, the chance of the signal being picked up increases by one percent?” Jim asks, gleam in his eye.

“Yes, but there’s no guarantee it will be detected by someone friendly to the Federation.”

Jim pauses and cocks his head to the side. Then he grins.

“I order the engineering department to eject the dorsal warp cell. Then I ask for impulse starboard side, full power, duration four seconds.”

“The use of impulse drains your shields down to thirty percent.”

“The use of impulse propels the ejected core towards the enemy warbird and pushes us below the blast zone.” Jim smiles smugly. “I order all remaining power into the shields.”

Jesus, Chris thinks, scribbling down the calculations on his baby PADD. The numbers state the core would hit the Klingon vessel and the USS Lexington would coast to minimum damage range.

Novafire! Jim did that maths in his head. In seconds.

Jim is going to be one hell of a tactician when he graduates.
“And then I reinitiate the broadcasting of the distress call, now with the freedom to restrict it to Federation channels,” Jim states, preening under Chris’ impressed gaze.

“And then what?” Chris asks, turning the circuit board in his hand curiously.

“You look for a turquoise coloured connection on the front edge, and solder the two nodes together.”

*Quid Quo Pro* Jim had grinned at him, before dragging him off to the kitchen.

They have the replicator in bits. Jim is trying to teach him to boost the processing power without adding any new chips or wiring.

“These two right?”

“Sweet, you’ve got it!”

“If my kitchen equipment isn’t back in one piece by 1800 and functioning at least as well as it was this morning, I will remove your fingers with the cheese guillotine!” Archer hollers across the room at them.

They tackle the leaky power cell on the small aircar covered in tarpaulin in the garage next.

Chris has no idea what Jim’s doing, but the power output reading is visibly increasing as he watches.

“So you see how I fused these two compartments together and diverted the voltage across this segment instead? That means that these two damaged blocks are being bypassed, but we’re avoiding a short circuit by ensuring that they’re still included in the overall Braydon system.”

“Kid,” Chris laughs fondly, rolling over so he can see Jim easier, “I lost track of what you’re doing over half an hour ago.”

“But you get the concept, right?”

“Go around the bad bit and use the good stuff? Make sure to get as much oil as possible on your person in the process.”

Jim gives him a flat look raises an eyebrow.

“I suppose you could simplify it to that,” he deadpans, flicking more oil at Chris.

Chris kicks the empty oil bottle sideways at Jim, scrabbling to his knees and crawling out from under the aircar rapidly.

It takes him three hours, two cycles of the sonics, two water showers with the temperature turned up as high as possible, and *all* of his shower gel before he gets the last of the oil out of his hair.

At least he finally understands why engineers always get a higher shipboard water allowance than the rest of the crew.

22. Never presume, and never speculate.

“How long was that?” Chris pants.
“Two minutes seventeen,” Phil tells him, turning the face of the stop watch towards him.

“Dammit,” Chris grumbles, his head tipped back and hands on his hips, gulping down the cool morning air.

“You need to cut another four seconds off to beat-”

“I know how fast Jim is!” he snaps frustrated.

“Well, he is twenty-two years your junior Chrissy.”

“Which means I’ve got twenty-two years more experience with which to whoop his ass.”

Phil snorts and throws him a water bottle.

“Ah yes. Because being a middle aged currently desk-bound prideful idiot will naturally give you an edge over the overachieving youth who runs at least five miles every morning for fun.”

“I’m not middle aged!” Chris protests.

“You’re forty-five. That’s officially into the realm of ancient.”

“But Archer-!”

“Doesn’t count.” Phil cuts over him with a laugh. “He had divine intervention.”

“Bones’ great grandfather is nearly as old as Jon.”

“Yeah, and he’s a sturdy southern gentleman with generations of natural genetic enhancement giving him an advantage. Therefore he’s also an outlier and also doesn’t count.”

“Natural genetic enhancements?” Chris asks dryly.

“McCoy men have a history of marrying good sensible women. Must have, to end up living so damn long and being gifted with those damn good looks.”

“You eyeing up your junior now?” Chris sniggers.

“I may be straight Chris,” Phil tells him with a waggled finger. “But I am not blind. I can recognise some good breeding without wanting to sleep with the results.”

“Gaaaayyyyy!” Chris whispers teasingly.

“Are you seriously still twelve Chris?” he’s asked with an incredulous look. “Besides, you’re gay.”

“No I’m not. I’m oblivious and uncaring is what I am.”

“You’re homoromantic. That’s the same damn thing.”

“Men have much nicer aesthetics than woman. When I even notice.”

“And on that point, we shall forever disagree. Now I’m going inside before this conversation further derails into childish pondering. And you are going to go shower before you poison my nostrils irreversibly.”

Chris watches Phil amble away with an amused smirk, and then turns to run another couple of laps about the garden.
23. Never let your guard down.

The morning marking the beginning of their third week in Great Scottham, Chris flops onto the couch besides Leo and flicks the holoprojector on.

Leo munches his oatmeal and raisins with a scowl as that damn Terra Prime clip is played again, his spoon clattering violently against the bottom of his dish.

Then the news cycle refreshes and Chris nearly drops his own bowl of cornflakes.

His parent’s house is on fire.

His house is on fire.

Emblazoned in 3D high definition across the screen for every viewer to manipulate and watch from every angle.

He grew up in that house. Survived teenagerhood and became a man in it.

And.

And.

It’s gone.

“Chris!” Bones chokes beside him, horrified. “Is that a person chained to the gate?”

And it is.

Bloody and broken. Plain to see given that Jon doesn’t have the viewer discretion settings activated.

It’s- it’s his uncle.

His Mom’s brother.

His Uncle Kevin.

Dead.

Killed.

Murdered.

The house burns endlessly behind his body, and Chris stares revolted and terrified at the crude planet carved into his uncle’s forehead.

Chapter End Notes

If I start writing now, you might get another chapter before I drag myself to bed tonight.

Maybe.
No promises.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

I am a man of my word and here is your second chapter of the day

Happy Easter all :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chris is quite tactile, but he’s not overly clingy by nature.

He’s a nudging shoulders kinda guy. A friendly back pat. Leaning on each other while you’re sat side by side.

Jim has a habit of sticking his head on his lap and nudging his hand until he gets his hair played with. And of strolling up behind him and hooking his chin on his shoulder. Or straight up wrapping his arms around Chris and refusing to let go. And Chris has no problem with that. But Jim is the exception, not the rule.

Normally, Chris isn’t one for long hugs or curling up against someone’s side. Maybe he once was, or maybe he would have grown into someone who was if Starfleet and the need to maintain a certain professional distance from one’s crew hadn’t trained it out of him. But he’s not and the ‘Fleet has moulded him.

So yeah, he’s never felt the need to be clingy per say.

But he is so damn glad that he does take comfort in tactile touches. And that his friends know that.

Because when he wakes up shuddering and panting at three in the damn morning, the image of his Uncle Kev’s accusing eyes seared into the back of his brain, Phil doesn’t hesitate to clamber into bed with him and hold him until he stops shaking.

24. The healing power of a good hug should never be underestimated.

“Here.” Archer says gruffly, shoving a PADD into his grasp. He doesn’t look like he slept any better than Chris did.

“Huh?” Chris mumbles eloquently, still trying to rub sleep out of his eyes. He knows he’s really not awake yet, but he could swear that the PADD actually has some modern conveniences built into it.

Jon looks at him sarcastically, and then pushes a mug of coffee into his hands as well.

“Thanks,” he hums, trying to juggle both items. He ends up putting the PADD down so that he can cup the mug with both hands. Then he realises he’s actually trying to drink from the PADD.

“I can’t believe we’re giving you our new flagship,” Archer mutters with a rueful shake of his head.

Chris watches the back of his head silently as the Admiral retreats, and then shrugs, turning back to his hot drink with a pleased sigh.
“Jon.” Chris says emotionlessly. Or tries to.

“Oh look, the Captain has sufficiently reduced the amount of blood in his caffeine stream enough to function,” Archer deadpans, ignoring the distressed edge in Chris’ voice.

“Jon.” Chris repeats. “When did you get these messages?”

“Some time in the night.” Archer shrugs. “There’s an eight-hour time difference between here and the UK, so I didn’t find it until this morning. We took all the time stamps off the Comm system for security purposes, so it could have been anytime between midnight and six am.”

“Thank you.” Chris croaks.

He puts the device down on the table next to Jon’s elbow, and heads back upstairs to find Phil.

“No problem kiddo,” he hears Archer breath quietly as he leaves.

25. No news might be good news, but actual news is usually better.

“They’re fine.” Chris tells Phil raspily. “Whomever is in the safehouse with them confirmed it in the night. They know what happened to the house and what happened to K- they know. And they asked that I have the words “not your fault” shouted at me a few times,” he hiccups with a laugh. “Typical Mom, always thinking of Emily and I first.”

“Any news from your sister?” Phil asks with a fond smile, shifting his arm so it rests more comfortably over Chris’ shoulders. They’re sat on the edge of Phil’s bed, warm morning light dappling them with the shadow of the tree outside their window.

“Just that they’re okay and together and alive and safe. I bet the kids are tearing at the walls and turning their parent’s hair grey,” he chuckles in answer.

“Well if our own situation is anything to go by. I’m surprised Jonny hasn’t killed any of us yet. Did he say anything about the rest of your family? Your other uncles and your grandparents?”

Chris shakes his head.

“Marcus- Marcus sent Barnett and a full honour guard to claim the- the body. Archer made him promise that Kev would be buried with full ‘Fleet honours. He was the son of a veteran after all, even if he never entered active service. I mean, he started training at the Academy, but then went into civilian data encryption for the Federation Council instead. Archer says the fact that he never graduated doesn’t matter. As for Ian and Tony… I think there are arrangements to have them moved, but if there are, Archer didn’t want me privy to them.”

“Mary and Benjamin?”

Chris laughs self-depreciatingly, pushing his knuckles into his eye sockets.

“You couldn’t pry those two out of the family ranch with a ten-foot rebar cantilever and a blowtorch Doc. Starfleet doesn’t stand a chance.”

“Well your Gramps does have that shotgun…”

“And if Carlton had shown his face even before this mess, he would have threatened to put a hole in his chest, yeah. Now he’ll pull the trigger before he can even blink, and throw him in a ditch for the
lizards and vultures for good measure. Won’t stop me worrying about them.”

“He can look after himself; himself and your Nan.”

“He’s a hundred and one and one and only has one eye. I think my Nan is the one to be afraid of,” Chris chuckles. “Hell of a mean swing, which I’m sure you remember fondly.”


“Your just jealous of my dashing handsome self. And that hat is vintage, show it some respect!”

Phil twists to eye him up and down, face screwing into an expression of disbelief.

“There’s certainly nothing “dashing” about you right now,” he snorts, gestured air quotes included. “Go shower and shave you reprobate. Bones and maybe Jim can pull of the stubbled look, but you just look a scraggly unhealthy mess.”

“Love you too. Ass.”

“Group project time,” Jon announces, dropping a large plastic crate onto the middle of the kitchen table.

“No.” Bones says without looking up from his plate of sandwiches.

“Yes. And you will enjoy it.” Archer tells him sternly, snatching up a sausage roll. Leo doesn’t reply, just glances at the Admiral with a raised eyebrow and then goes back to munching on his lunch.

“What’s the project then?” Chris asks loudly, before Jon can act on the irritation clear in his stance.

“It’s Halloween tomorrow, and there are lots of kids in this village. The locals have seen me in the store often enough this month to know that we’re here, so there will be people knocking on our door.”

“So we’ll hide in the back while you deal with them,” Bones grumbles, swigging his peach lemonade.

“I have been invited to help with the adult drinks stall in the village square. Which means you four are manning the fort alone. Now obviously, you can’t be recognisable. Hence, group project.”

“I’m hiding in the back.” Leo declares, pushing back from the table and stomping out of the kitchen.

Jim sighs.

“I’ll get him,” he mutters, swiftly following after his grumpy boyfriend.

Chris looks back at Jon, who is still staring at the ceiling in exasperation.

“Dibs on the sexy black cat costume,” he deadpans.

Phil spits his apple cider everywhere.

26. Halloween is the best silly human holiday tradition.
“I look like a gorram moron,” Leo moans, tugging on his tail.


“You make a real devilish demon Leonard,” Phil tells him with a smirk. “Besides, I’m sure that Jimbo will help you out of it later tonight if you ask him nicely enough.”

Leo gives him a flat look.

“Those are not words I ever wanted to hear from the mouth of my mentor.” He grimaces disgustedly.

Chris really didn’t want that mental image either.

Despite his earlier declaration, Chris does not get to wear a sexy black cat costume.

No, that honour goes to Jim, who looks mighty strange in skin tight lycra with his hair dyed pitch black.

Chris is more than a little disturbed if he’s honest. Especially by the necessary “sexy” descriptor.

Phil, to his endless amusement, ends up dressed as a zombie space pirate. He more closely resembles a dead steampunk with an eyepatch in Chris’ opinion, than any of the actual space pirates they’ve encountered over the years, but he looks good anyway.

Chris doesn’t actually mind that Jim stole his idea, because instead, he decided to go as Deadpool. Because why the hell would he not? Jim is clearly jealous, and has stolen his nunchucks twice now. He’s missing the katanas, because unfortunately Jon only had the one sword stashed in the attic and Phil shotgunned it first, but he’s got the red morph suit, with its hand stitched-on black panels, and two belts crossed across his chest.

Okay, they actually do all look pretty ridiculous. But Archer was right, they did all have fun putting the outfits together and taking this piss out of each other.

Even Leo, though he denies it at every given opportunity.

Technically, Jim was the one on duty the first time the doorbell rung, but they all ended up crowded in the hallway anyway, candy in hand and evil cackling laughs at the ready.

And then they’re all there again the second, third and fourth times.

Bones ducks out the back after that, and Chris lets him go, surprised that the young doctor stuck it out even this long. Jim continues to help out for the next few knocks, and then he too vanishes into the back garden.

Chris and Phil shrug at one another, and help themselves to some of the popping candy and lollipops.

27. Always take advantage of free candy

At some point they exchange stolen candy for the good whiskey, which Jonny once again failed to hide well enough.

By the time the Admiral returns, the two of them have been answering the door drunk off their faces
for quite some time.

“Unbelievable.” Archer sighs at them, not quite managing to hide his amusement. “Go the hell to bed. Idiots.”

“I brought you toast.” Phil winces, stumbling back into their room in just his boxers.

“I do not want food,” Chris groans into his pillow.

“Well I’m just gonna…”

He shoves the plate onto the cabinet between the head of their beds and collapses face down atop his covers with a groan of his own.

“Don’t go downstairs,” he mumbles to Chris. “Archer is in no mercy mode and my head is still pounding from all the yelling.”

“Duly noted.”

Chris closes his eyes and prays for death to take him swiftly.

Jim’s hair is still streaked with black when they eventually do stumble down to the kitchen. It’s the only thing Chris does notice before his attention is entirely taken up by Archer’s shouting.

Jon loudly informs them both that they owe him two hundred credits for the pilfered Macallan 12. Chris throws a tea towel in the man’s face, and then once again prays for death to take him swiftly when he sees the outraged look he’s getting in return.

“Go pack. Now.”

He’s lying out on the damp grass in the chilling evening air when Jon suddenly looms over him, all traces of his usual cheek and good humour gone.

“Now Christopher! We’ve been compromised.”

Chris scrambles to his feet faster than he would in a ship red alert.

He can’t believe he’s let Point 23 slip from his mind already. He’s a goddamn fool.

They load the crates into the back of the airvan still parked on the gravel of the drive with as much haste as they’re able.

The sun is just setting when the five of them scramble into the vehicle, Phil behind the wheel.

They pull out of the village and drive towards the old Interstate-5 highway, Archer stonily silent in the front passenger seat.

It’s full dark outside, and Jim is asleep on his shoulder.

Every time a set of headlights flash passed them, he tenses and grips the arm of his seat a little tighter.
Phil swaps out for Chris.

They consult Archer’s map, and then Chris chugs two cans of red bull and swallows a stim tablet.

And settles in to drive through the night.

They crossed the old Canadian border point and skirted wide of Vancouver hours ago. They’re well into British Columbia now.

“Salmon River.” Archer rumbles, speaking for the first time in at least six hours. “We’re heading for a place called Salmon River.”

“Never heard of it.”

“That’s the whole idea Chrissy,” he sighs, looking more resigned than Chris has ever seen him. “Just stay on BC-97 for now.”

Chris nods and flicks the cruise control back on.

There’s two vehicles following them. They’ve been sitting behind them for miles. Steady, unwavering. A couple of hundred metres or so back, headlights constantly flickering in the rear-view mirror.

Chris glances in the right wing-mirror again and swallows nervously.

28. It’s not paranoia if they actually are out to get you

“Jon. Jon, I think you better look at this.”

They’re still there. It’s been forty minutes and they’re still there.

Archer rouses and twists to peer out of the back window.

“How long?” he asks.

Chris grimaces.

“Too long,” he says.

“McCoy!” Archer barks into the back of the van. Both doctors and Jim immediately jerk awake. Porthos whines quietly, and climbs down into the front passenger footwell, and Archer musses his ears before yelling again. “Give everyone a stim and open up that crate with the red tape over the lid. And keep down.”

He turns back to Chris.

“Next service point, pull over. And be ready.”

His heart is in his throat and its pitch black and

*Oh god, where is everyone!*
He stumbles over a branch in the dark and tumbles into a hollow.

Somewhere to his left he can hear phasor fire and cries of pain.

“JIM!” he calls, racing back along the track, heedless of the attention he must be drawing to himself. “JIM, WHERE ARE YOU!”

Archer is lying face down in the carpark.

Chris daren’t run over and check on him.

He loses his phasor, hands scrabbling at the vice grip about his neck instead.

he can’t breathe.

He can’t breathe.

Oh god, he CAN’T BREATHE-

He gasps in sweet precious air, gripping weakly on Phil’s arm.

“Jim? Bones?” he croaks.

Phil nods back towards the carpark again.

“Jesus buggering fuck!” Leo cusses loudly, slapping vial after vial of antivenom hypos against Archer’s neck.

Chris staggers over and throws his weight down on Jon’s convulsing limbs.

Porthos howls unhappily from inside the airvan.

“Chris! Dad! Dad!”

Jim sprints out of the darkness, blood dripping ominously from his left hand. He looks calm. Too calm.

“It’s not mine,” he swallows when Phil reaches for his arm.

“GET DOWN!”

The whole world has gone white and his ears screech with ringing. He tries to sit up, but a hand on his chest holds him down.

He struggles.

He struggles and gets nowhere.
“Easy, easy Chris,” a soft voice murmurs.

A hand strokes through his hair and he blindly waves his own hand about until Phil clasps it.

“Jim and Bones?” he tries to croak again.

He still can’t see.

“Safe. Sleep Cappy, sleep.”

“Can’t see,” he spits panicked.

“Shhh, I know, I know. We’ll fix it, I promise.”

A hypo hisses against his neck.

The white fades to black.

He rolls over and his face encounters a soft warm mass of blanket.

He wiggles his fingers and finds the same by touch.

Then he opens his eyes, and oh thank the stars, the room comes into focus.

He has no idea where he is.

Beige his first impression. Warm, but plain beige, from the carpet to the walls to the ceiling. There are framed paintings hanging on the pattern wallpaper; forest scenes and rolling meadows and flower bunches.

A chair creaks beside him and his head whips around.

Nogura stares down at him.

“Captain,” he greets amicably.

“Admiral,” Chris returns. And wow, he sounds like he swallowed a dozen razor blades.

“You’re looking remarkably well for a man who took a flashbang to the face and was nearly strangled to death,” he’s told. Chris frowns and brings a hand to his eyes, wincing at the extensive scabbing he finds covering his left brow. “Don’t worry, I’m told it won’t scar; you’ll still turn the heads of all the ladies.”

“I hope not, I’m not interested in them,” he rasps back with a grimace that was supposed to be a smile. The joke falls flat regardless. “Where are…?” He trails off, not sure what he actually wants to know more; where they are, or where everyone else is.

“Boyce, Kirk and McCoy are all downstairs in the centre’s common room, hustling pool and leaving my security crew short of credit. Archer was transported to Vancouver ‘Fleet Facility early this morning. His prognosis was damn good thanks to the quick actions of your CMO and his protégé, but we wanted him somewhere with more equipment just to make sure he’d stay stable.”

A knot of tension in his chest he hadn’t realised was there loosens and he exhales shakily.
“Those guys. Terra Prime, weren’t they?” he asks, pulling himself to sit upright against the headboard. He winces as the bruised muscles in his neck protest the movement.

“Ex-Terra Prime now, thanks to the five of you,” Nogura nods. “No sign of your damn Father, but you took down eleven men and women between you. Four dead, six unconscious, one awake but incapacitated. Three of the four fatalities are the individuals who nearly put you down.”

Phil, Chris grimaces silently. It’s inevitable when you’re an active serviceman in the ‘Fleet -doubly so when you’re a top (the top…) CMO- but Chris knows how much Phil despises being forced to break his Do No Harm oath. He’s always depressed for weeks afterwards, but he never even hesitates to do it when it’s Chris’ life of the line.

And Chris’ life had most definitely been on the line.

“Come on, get up and get dressed Captain. I’ve been instructed to drag you downstairs for feeding and watering. Doctor’s orders.”

“Aye aye sir,” he breathes, closing his eyes and mentally preparing to face the world once more.

“Dad, thank god,” Jim gasps relieved, throwing his arms around Chris.

“I’m alright son,” he smiles into Jim’s neck.

He’s alright.

So long as Jim’s alright, he’ll also be fine.

29. **Always put your son’s wellbeing before your own. Always.**

Chapter End Notes

Back in the lab from tomorrow, so I guess this is likely to be the last from me for a while. I'll try to make time, but its unlikely. Keeping the comments coming; they make all the sieving and dealing with grumpy academics bearable ;)

**Update as of 14:00 on the 17th** Now with less mysteriously missing Porthos and (hopefully) fewer horrific typos!
30. There’s appropriate music for every situation.

I see you trembling like the earth is falling from your feet  
Like you've never felt the ground before  
An indication that you're over your head again  
That you don’t know how to settle the score

Chris is aware that laying sideways on your bed listening to melodramatic music and lamenting your situation is usually a pastime reserved for moping teenagers.

But.

It suits his mood right now.

Do the heavens ever spare the crop when the winter falls?  
Could we really hide if the reaper calls?  
And so it goes...  
The lamb will be led to the loam  
And you won’t return...

Goddammit, he’s so fed up.

“Chris. Come on, stop brooding.”

Chris turns his head to silently glower at Phil, and eventually the doctor stops nudging his side with his knees. Instead, he pulls his hands out of his pockets, shoves Chris closer to the wall, and flops down on the narrow bed next to him.

“No, not seeing it.”

“No not seeing what?” Chris grunts, pulling his earbuds out and dropping them gently onto his neck.

“Whatever is so interesting about the boring beige ceiling.”

Chris rolls his eyes.

“Nothing is interesting about the boring beige ceiling Phil.”

“So why have you been staring at it for three hours then?”

“Because it’s more interesting than your bloody face, that’s why.”

Phil stills, and slowly exhales out his nose, his eyes sliding shut for a second.

“For both our sakes, I’m going to pretend you didn’t say that.”

Chris sighs himself, pushing the top of his head down into his pillow.
“Sorry,” he breathes, suddenly feeling stupid.

“Asshat,” Phil mumbles back fondly, tapping the back of his hand against Chris’ chest. Chris smiles self-depreciatingly and fumbles along his collar until he snags one of his small headphones.

“Here,” he mutters, shoving the device towards Phil’s ear. “The Dear Hunter. Good for brooding along to.”

Normally, Phil probably would have made a disparaging comment about Chris’ “archaic” taste in music, but now he simply twists the bud into his left ear, sighs deeply, and leaves his hand resting on Chris’ chest.

Come away young man  
Where the ground is red, and you need a mask to breath  
Oh, it's been so hard  
But your luck could change if you'd just roll up your sleeves  
We had tried our best to warn before, but it didn’t get you far  
Now we’re here again, with a wish to mend, your agonizing scar…

31. Appearances can be deceiving. And sometimes not.

The Salmon River Facility, like the name suggests, is next to a fairly wide and strongly meandering river. Built in the middle of a recently formed oxbow lake, the Centre stands four stories high, and has a steeply pitched roof and a weathered wooden façade. From the outside, it looks like a fairly typical Canadian outdoor activity centre.

Actually, it looks pretty typical inside it too.

The third and fourth floors are almost entirely filled with four-bed dormitories and shared bathroom facilities. After some brief exploration, Chris quickly realises the bland beige colour scheme is pretty ubiquitous; even the tiles in the showers have failed to escape the uniformity. Only the occasional painting hung upon the walls manages to break up the monotony, and even then, they’re all framed in pale coloured wood.

A common room and entertainment hall take up most of the second floor. Thankfully for Chris’ eyes, a few more splashes of colour are present in this area of the building. A patterned throw hanging down the back of a couch; a deep blue rug lying at a crooked angle before the sizable log fire; a bookshelf filled to the brim with antique paperback books, sealed in hermetic wrap to protect their ancient pages.

Jim and Bones spend most of their time on this floor, sprawled together in one of the various pieces of comfortable furniture dotted around. Chris and Phil mostly leave them alone, allowing them to remain wrapped up in each other.

Jim definitely needs it right now after all.

He’d seemed fine for the first couple of hours Chris was awake. He’d dragged Chris to a table in the first-floor dining hall, practically hand fed him (and knowing his history, Chris had let him) and chatted away happily about any number of things. Electronics, the vastness of unexplored space, the small indoor pool attached to the side of the main building. His winnings from hustling pool. The HoloProjector upstairs which thankfully received more than one channel.

And then Chris had absentmindedly cleared his throat and winced when the move strained his sore
throat muscles.

Jim’s eyes had darkened, and his gaze had lingered on the dark mottling spreading up from his neck to join with those sprinkled across his brow.

“They’ll never hurt you again.” Jim had said emotionlessly, his hand drifting unnoticed towards Chris’ face.

“I’m fine Jimmy,” Chris had breathed, “We’re all fine and we all walked away alive.”

Jim had cocked his head, silently watching him fiddling with his fork.

“Phil got the one who held you down,” he’d said. “I went after the other two. I promised myself I’d never- after I finally got off Tars- I said I wouldn’t. But they hurt you.”

And Jim had shoved his chair back suddenly. And Chris had watched the veranda door swing shut behind him, leaving him sat alone reeling; confused and bewildered and horrified.

Chris shouldn’t have assumed that Phil was the one with a three-person body count.

And then when Jim had finally come in from the drizzle, cold soaked and panting, he’d vanished upstairs silently. Dried off. Gone straight to bed.

And for the next two days, he’d existed in a haze of blank expressionlessness that Chris couldn’t break through.

And Chris had started to worry himself sick.

And then this morning, he’d come downstairs to find Jim laughing happily into Leo’s chest. And well, it had hurt.

That Leo could break down Jim’s walls.

And Chris could not.

32. Patience is a virtue you should strive to possess

“It’s nothing to do with you Chris.” Phil speaks up suddenly.

“What isn’t?” Chris asks sharply, brow pinching. He shuffles up onto his elbows to look down at his best friend.

“Don’t look so offended, stars man. I meant there’s nothing wrong with you. And before you start, I’m not saying it’s a problem with Jim either.”

Chris scowls, and starts to climb to his feet. Phil huffs and pulls him back down onto the bed before he’s even half way upright.

“Lie back down and listen, you stubborn idiot,” Phil growls at him. “Remember how wound up you always were at the start of our Academy training? I had no clue what was up with you. You were just silent and angry and snarled at everything and yet you were damn determined to be the best at everything. And you were so furious at me all the damn time, just because I knew more first aid than you.”
Chris snorts, failing to repress the amusement stirring in him at the memories. 

“You were barely eighteen and I was twenty-three with a brand-new MD under my belt. I joined the ‘Fleet because my dad always wanted to go out into the black and never got the chance, and living his dream was something I could do for him. You were just an angry punk kid sticking his middle finger up at the world that he thought had wronged him. Sound like someone else we know?”

Chris mumbles sullenly under his breath, denying the comparison to Jim once again. Phil ploughs on regardless.

“You couldn’t stand me Chris, and I had better things to do with my time than spend it with some dumb ass angry basket-case who was five years my junior, hated everything and showed it by not talking to anyone. And yet six months down the line, there I was, letting you follow me round me constantly, and letting you repeatedly steal my coffee. I’ll be damned if I ever work out how that happened.”

“Puppy eyes,” Chris half chuckles, half chokes. “Number One’s always saying it’s the damn puppy eyes.”

In his peripheral vision, Chris sees Phil grin at the ceiling.

“She’s probably right; usually is, that women.”

“Why do you think I made her my First Officer?”

“Because you finally grew up and learnt some common sense. But it took you a while. Stubbornly silent angry Chris came first. Stubborn Chris who had to learn to let people in his walls and tell people what was hurting him.”

Chris sighs, suddenly beginning to catch on to what Phil is trying to tell him.

“You’re saying that Jim hasn’t learnt to let everyone into his walls yet.”

“Sort of. Look, you eventually opened up about why you were such an angry kid that first year right? But it took you years. And when you did, who did you tell?”

Chris pauses, and swallows.

“You and Elliot.”

“Me and egotistical Elliot, yeah. Not Archer or your other mentors, not your classmates or your roommate. And far more importantly, not your parents. You told your best friend and your asshole of a boyfriend.”

“And Leo is both to Jim. Well, considerably less of an asshole but…”

“And you’re the parent in this scenario. You didn’t say anything to Anna or Edward because you were foolishly trying to protect them; you didn’t want them to worry about you. Now multiply your experience by a factor of Tarsus, and you’ll see why Jim is clamming up around you.”

Chris roughly drags his hands down his face, scrubbing at his eyes sockets. He winces when his nails catch the edge of the last of the scabbing on his forehead.

“Blazes, it’s a miracle he’s even told me as much as he has, isn’t it? Gods, the amount of trust that must take.”
“Now he gets it!” Phil smiles, waving his hands exuberantly above them. “For a man famous for his ability to read people and manipulate any scenario to his advantage, you can sure be a blind moron at times.”

Chris jabs his elbow into Phil’s ribs.

“Yes thank-you, you’ve made me feel enough of an idiot for one day already. Cut the snark back a little, thanks.”

“Nope! You need it today. Still do apparently, otherwise you would have stopped moping to music like a depressed thirteen-year-old and gone and found your kid by now. Get up and go annoy him with your stubbornness. He’ll let you in eventually; he’s way more mature than you were at that age.”

“Tosspot.”

“Is that British? What does that even mean?” Phil laughs back, shoving him off the end of the bed.

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33. Always take advantage of your surroundings

As well as a swimming pool, the centre also has a large shed full of water sports equipment, both for indoor use, and for taking out on the oxbow lake or nearby river.

Chris stands in the doorway and considers his options.

There’s a large crate in the corner labelled “water polo equipment.” Having been dragged through the Academy by the scruff of his neck by Jonathan Archer, Chris knows the rules and tactics of the game inside out. As the latest and only current mentee of the Admiral, Jim is also probably becoming far more familiar with the sport than he ever wished to be. Chris knows for a fact that the young man was dragged to one of the Academy swimming pool by Jon at least half a dozen times over the last year.

So water polo. Definitely an option.

But there’s also a rack of brand-new looking kayaks.

And Chris knows that Jim loves anything resembling an outdoor adventure. It’s why he excels in tactical simulations so well.

“You want to go… Kayaking?” Jim asks, looking between him and the wetsuit Chris just dropped in his lap.

“Yup. Beautiful clear day; be a shame to waste it lying around indoors.”

“Are we even allowed outside?” Jim questions. He stands and holds the wetsuit against himself, stretching his arm out to check the sleeve length.

“Nogura never said either way before he left,” Chris shrugs. “Besides, are you honestly that bothered about potentially breaking some rules? Come on son, live a little,” he winks.

“Actually we were told not to leave the centre before you woke up.” Bones suddenly chips in from his place still sprawled on the couch. Chris glances down at him and smirks.

“And the oxbow lake is technically part of the centre grounds. That’s not leaving.”
“And when Archer inevitably hears about this?” Jim smirks back, drawing Chris’ attention back to him. “He’s a been a bit of a stickler for rules recently.”

“Interesting fact about Admiral Jonathan Archer,” Chris laughs. “He is the literal king of leaping without looking. His entire first year as Captain was literally just him sailing around the stars saying “I do what I want.” He’s got no ground to stand on when it comes to rule breaking.”

Chris and Jim are grinning like idiots at each other now. Jim tugs on the leg of his wetsuit again, and Leo drops his head onto the back of the couch.

“When you go and get your fool asses drowned, I ain’t leaping in to save you,” he grumbles. Chris takes that for the acceptance he was after and drags Jim away to the changing rooms.

34. Rules snap under too much pressure, but remember they’ll bend first; you can push harder than you think…

“Eighteen hours Pike! I’ve been gone eighteen hours!”

Chris looks across the lake back towards the jetty where Nogura is standing with his arms crossed over his chest. Smirking, he skims around to face the main building and paddles over.

“Problem sir?” he asks, pushing his sopping hair backwards out of his eyes. He grins, hoping to infect the scowling Admiral with his good cheer.

“Rule one. Do not leave the centre. What the hell are you playing at Captain!”

“I will demote you, you maverick. Kirk! Get over here and get out of the damn water! We’re leaving in an hour!”

A distant “yes sir” echoes dejectedly over the water, and Chris sighs. The good cheer the afternoon of playing around had restored to them evaporates in an instant.

By the time Jim has slid his kayak up the ramp next to Chris, they’re both back to frowning and silence.

They’ve been sharing just the one room between them, the four of them. Chris and Phil along one wall, Jim and Bones along the other.

The ever present security team of eight occupy another two rooms on the floor below them. The top floor has been echoing with the silence of the other empty rooms at night.

Not one of the four of them had bothered to properly unpack this time.

They’re ready to leave within thirty minutes of Nogura’s arrival.

35. Always consider your audience

“A shuttle sir?” Jim asks as they’re guided on foot through the woodlands surrounding the river. Chris repositions the crates he’s carrying in his arms and wishes he had a hand free to zip his jacket up higher with; the evening air is chillier than he had anticipated it being.
“Komack had an idea.” Nogura replies ominously, “Don’t know why none of us thought of it before. Obvious solution really.”

“Um, no offence sir,” Phil begins haltingly from beside Chris, “but none of us exactly has the best track record with Admiral Komack. Are you sure he has our best interests at heart?”

“He’s a gruff man, with no patience for tact or civility unless it’s absolutely essential. But he means no harm Boyce.”

Both Chris and Phil stop dead in the middle of the track, forcing Jim and Bones to halt behind them too.

“He pushed Jim down a cliff Heihachiro! How is that no harm!” Chris practically snarls.

Nogura stops as well when he hears Chris’ angry remark, turning back to face the group with an unreadable look.

“The annual Plebe introductory survival expedition in March,” Chris continues sharply, dropping his two crates to the floor less carefully than he probably should so his hands are free to wave about. “He took all of Kirk and McCoy’s food, sent them off into the wilderness alone, and then had Jim attacked. He came back half-starved and with half his body black and blue!”

“What, this the first you hearing o’ this sir?” Leo asks uncertainly, peering over Phil’s shoulder.

“No it’s damn well not.” Chris hisses, his rage still building. “You were there sir, on results opening day when Archer and Marcus started snarling at each other over Komack’s power grabbing ploys. I know you must know the basics at least. You heard all of it, same as I did. Sir.”

“Komack sticks his hands in ponds that don’t belong to him all the time Pike.” Nogura snaps sharply. But Chris can see the edge of guilt in his eyes. “He’s never stepped all the way over the line, and until Marcus decides he has, I will remind you that you owe him your respect as your superior. Now pick your crates up and we’ll discuss this later Captain.”

Chris opens his mouth to continue arguing, but Jim suddenly steps up against his back.

“Dad. Don’t,” he breathes right into his ear.

Forcing himself to take a deep breath, he unclenches his fists and reaches behind him to pat Jim’s shoulder before stooping down to reclaim his possessions. Phil also steps next to them and grips Chris’ wrist reassuringly for a long second.

Nogura watches the two interactions with narrowed eyes, but doesn’t comment. Chris watches him back, and sees the moment the Japanese Admiral deliberately glances over his head with a meaningful look.

Chris suddenly remembers the security contingent following silently behind the group and closes his eyes with a curse.

It’s like a douse of cold water; the remains of his anger cool immediately.

No wonder Nogura shut him down so forcibly.

Any one of that group could be an Operations Department goon.

Three orbit-worthy shuttles parked neatly along the edge of a small clearing.
Chris stows his crates in the foremost one, and is entirely unshocked when Nogura pins him roughly to the side of it as soon as he steps back out into the waning evening sunlight.

“You’re a hot-headed fool where that boy is concerned Christopher,” Nogura growls lowly at him, accent thicker than usual. “I get it Captain I do. If it were one of my two girls, heads would have rolled by now. But stop wearing your emotions on your sleeve. Things like this? They can use that against you. I know Jonathan told you to watch your back. So watch it. Watch it for your boy’s sake. Now get in the damn shuttle and not another word about Komack until Marcus, Archer and I have his game sussed out. I know all about his little plots, far more than you seem to believe. Understand Captain?”

Chris nods jerkily, tensing against the Admiral’s grip.

“Sir. It’s just-” he begins, staring hard over Nogura’s shoulder. “The break in the zero-gravity lab. Why did you send Komack to brief me on that? If you already knew our history, why him?”

“We only sent Barnett, Captain. Komack was already outside your flat when he got there, and he’d already been briefed himself. Let that be a warning to you. Now get in.”

Chris swallows through a second nod and does as he’s told.

Chapter End Notes

The Dear Hunter: The Flame (Is Gone)
Writing On The Wall
Writing On The Wall (A Capella)

The Dear Hunter is a bit of an odd band... For one, they need pretty much an full orchestra with them to perform live. For another, their most famous album series (and the term series is necessary) is five acts detailing the life and times of an unfortunate young man known only as The Boy. his Mum dies, Manages to fall in love with a working girl, ends up serving in "the war" (cough WWI cough), meets and then immediately watches his half brother die, mysterious dad turns out to be a dick of the highest order, goes home pretending to be his brother, becomes mayor, accidentally ends up corrupt, jumps in the river to save himself and ends up drowning....

Cheery tale really, and I'm only skimming the surface :P

Whatever, Chris has inherited my intense love for their music. So sue me :’D

(This one's a link to whole of their most recent album so you can get a feel for their overall style: Act V: Hymns With the Devil in Confessional)
I've been in this damn lab so bloody long today, I've started anthropomorphising the lab equipment...

Mr Sieve is not being a good boy today; he keeps drooling everywhere and refusing to let his spinny thingy actual spin.

Anyhow.

Written entirely in the three minute gaps between rotating specimens and equipment round. Expect an abundance of typos as a result.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

36. Hope for the best, prepare for the worst

“Dammit Phil, we don’t need this now,” he whispers quietly to the doctor as the shuttle rattles through atmospheric exit. Opposite them, Bones pales dramatically, but remains silent and steady; he really has made huge strides towards beating the aviophobia.

“First your father, and now this with Komack again.” Phil whispers back. “You don’t think the two problems are related, do you?”

“I don’t even want to entertain that possibility Doc.”

“Sounds like my worst-”

“Good evening gentlemen,” Nogura suddenly cuts in with the internal Comm. “We’re approaching our final destination for the day. Garrovick is waiting on the bridge to brief you, so I suggest you head up there as soon as we’ve docked. Nogura out.”

The internal Comm snaps off with a low beep and the four of them in the back exchange glances.

“Garrovick?” Jim asks curiously. “Isn’t she Captain of the USS Farragut?”

“Yeah. Terrifying woman.” Phil confirms. “Honestly, she gives Number One a run for her money. Five years ago she gave birth to twins in the middle of an armed stalemate with a Klingon warbird and carried on commanding right the way through. The Klingons we’re so impressed, they let the Farragut leave without further issue.”

“Daamnn,” Jim grins, drawing the word out into an impressed drawl. “Sounds like my kinda girl.”

“Monogamy Jim,” Leo grumbles quietly, still pale and breathing overly carefully. “It’s a trait I appreciate a great deal in my partners.”

Jim shrugs with another amused grin.

“Makes sense though doesn’t it?” Jim continues from before, “sending us out into the black. The
whole point of Terra Prime is that they’re terrified of space and want nothing to do with it. Not gonna follow us out here.”

“Probably the idea. Why the Farragut though?” Bones asks. “She’s already got a Captain and a CMO, so what are you two gonna do? I mean Jim and I sure; they’ll stick us with meaningless grunt work and shove us into a corner out o’ the way. But you two will outrank the whole crew. Well Phil’s and Garrovick’s ranks match up, but my point stands.”

“Diplomatic crew maybe?” Phil offers up. “Like when we visited Epicron IX over the summer.”

“No, last I heard the Farragut is still too bashed up from her tumble last year, poor girl. Command wouldn’t send her out on serious diplomatic missions already surely?” Chris chips in.

“Last I heard from Engineering was that she was pretty nicely cleaning up actually,” Jim states. “Overhauled her warp core and installed brand new top of the line impulse engines. Mayweather asked me to take a look at the blueprints for those. They were sweet. Made a couple of suggestions for better wiring relays and altered the exhaust shafting so the Raamae Flux lines were cleaner, but other than sorting that, I think she was good to go. And that was nearly three months ago.”

Chris is contemplating that and trying to formulate a possible Point 37, when the shuttle clunks and judders to a halt. Recognising the power down sequence for post-landing initiating, Chris unbuckles his harness and gestures to the door.

“How about we go find out how well she’s cleaned up for ourselves?”

37. Engineering can always throw something together twice as fast as you think is possible.

‘Cause oh yeah, it’s been a while since he was last on this girl, but his view of the docking hanger tells him she’s fixed up looking good...

“Oh you gotta be kidding me,” Bones draws as soon as he climbs out of the shuttle hatch behind Chris. “You oughta be in a biobed still sir! What the hell is your fool ass doing here?”

“Oh Bones Bones Bonsey Bones,” Archer drawls back. “Never underestimate the health of a man fond of beagles.”

“Not sure the beagles have any actual bearing on the matter sir.” Phil sighs, clambering down behind the rest of the group. “Regardless, we’re glad to see you back on your feet Admiral.”

Archer waves away the pleasantry with the hand not holding his cane.

“Movement would be good any day now gentlemen,” Nogura rumbles from the shuttle door still at their backs. “Jonathan. Wasn’t expecting to see you here.”

“We need to talk ‘Chiro. We’ve got a problem.”

The four of them remain curiously huddled at the foot of the shuttle ladder-rig for a few seconds while Archer and Nogura have a silent conversation over their heads. Then Jon grumbles at them and shoes them out of the hanger bay with a few pointed words and a couple of cane-rapped shins.

Eager to avoid further bruising, Chris drags his friends down the hall towards the main turbolift.

Their meeting with Captain Garrovick on the bridge is a whirlwind of confusion.
Chris finds himself appointed as First Officer despite outranking the Captain.

Phil and Leo are both handed to the senior Helmsman and told they’re going to learn to pilot constellation class ships whether they want to or not.

Jim is given a field promotion to Lieutenant Commander and appointed as the deputy chief of engineering.

Then they’re all pushed back into the turbolift, given a PADD with their bunk assignments loaded up on it, and told to report to their posts for the start of alpha shift tomorrow morning at 1015.

Given that the XO’s quarters are the second biggest on board the ship after the Captain’s, they reconvene there after stowing their belongings in their own rooms.

“What the hell is goin’ on?!” Bones groans as soon as he's stepped into the room. “Is this some kind of cosmic joke?”

“Sounds more like an Archer joke if you ask me,” Phil grumbles, flopping dramatically backwards onto Chris’ bunk.

“Pay back for the two and half weeks of driving him mad maybe?” Chris suggests, thinking of Point 21. He half-heartedly pulls a stack of clean laundry out of one of his crates and shoves it haphazardly onto one of the shelves of the narrow wardrobe, not bothering to organise it into clothing type first.

“But it’s a complete waste of our skills! Goddammit man, I’m a doctor, not a pilot!”

“You and me both Leonard,” Phil grumbles again. “I’ve survived for over 20 years on Starfleet ships without ever having to learn to fly the damn things. I’ve got better things to do with my time.”

Jim, Chris has noticed, has remained silent in the corner throughout the entire exchange. Arms crossed, he’s leaning back so he’s half perched on the edge of the small desk and work station. And he’s staring unblinkingly at his feet.

Chris kicks the now empty crate into the bottom of the wardrobe hastily, and slides along the desk until he’s pressed against Jim’s side.

38. Physical reassurance works as well as -if not better than- verbal with most people

“Son?” he asks quietly, an open invitation to share as much or as little as he wishes to.

“I’m a Cadet. Barely even a second year. I’ve just missed a month of the Academy, and they just want to drop me straight into a positon of authority?” Jim garbles almost hysterically. His head snaps up, his eyes latching onto Bones’ across the room. “No-one’s gonna listen to a thing I say! I’ll get treated like a kid wearing his Daddy’s too big boots!”

“No you won’t,” Chris says with quiet authority. Jim looks at him disbelievingly. “I’m serious kid, you’ll do fantastically and they’ll respect you fine.”

“You were bossing them all round with no problems this summer just gone kid,” Bones grunts, sitting with Phil on the bed. “How is this gonna go any worse? If anything, you got the rank to match the commanding tone o’ voice now.”

“He’s right Jim. You lasted a week doing actual Cadet-Ensign work, and then I had to pull some strings with ch’Vrothi to put you in a position to actually make use of that intelligence of yours. This
is just the next step up. And if worst comes to worst, I’m XO and I can kick some shins for you until they get the message and treat you right.”

“And,” Phil adds, “It doesn’t matter whether you’re a cadet or commissioned officer out in the black. Stripes and pips over-rule your level of education every time.”

“You sure?” Jim asks like a nervous kid. Which Chris supposes he is really, despite his tendency to forget how young Jim actually is.

“Sure as stars kid.”

It’s… odd. Not being in charge. Not being the Captain.

Archer and Nogura had been by to check on them before returning down to Earth via the Transporters. They’d confirmed that yes, these really were their assignments, and that no, no amount of begging and pleading (Bones), or self-doubting remarks (Jim) was going to change them. That yes, the plan was to put them out of Terra Prime’s reach, but no, there was no end-date on this “mission”. And then they’d wished them well and left them to it.

And now here the four of them are. Four days out of dock, cruising along at a nice steady warp 7.

Headed to god knows where, because no-one has bothered to inform any of them that yet. Not even Chris has been able to find out, and not for lack of asking.

Chris’ main concern is not actually discerning their mysterious destination (because he’s beginning to think that Garrovick doesn’t actually know either…), but trying to remember what the most efficient way to do all this goddamn XO paperwork is. It’s endless! In fact, he swears that the amount has increased since he was last an XO twelve years ago. How Spock manages to be both First Officer and Science Officer, he will never know.

“…So then she hit me round the back of my head! An Ensign! How was I supposed to know the difference between the External Thrust Dampeners and the Extra Dampening Thrusters!? Chris? Chris are you even listening to me?”

“Uh huh,” Chris nods distractedly, squinting at the next week’s crew rosters again. He’s made the adjustments the science department asked for, changed Lieutenant Foster onto Beta shift like the Captain asked him too, shifted the whole Engineering schedule forward five minutes to allow them all to inhale an extra mug of coffee every morning… He thinks it’s good enough to send to Garrovick for approval again, but he just has a feeling something is off still.

“… And then she said you were hotter than hot and she was going to take the first opportunity presented to trap you in the turbolift and have her way with you.”

“Sure Phil, I’m sure it’ll be- Wait!? What!??” he suddenly startles, head snapping up to shoot a horrified look at the Doctor lounging on his bed again.

“Ha! I knew you weren’t paying any attention! I’m kidding Chrissy, no-one’s gonna trap you in a turbolift.”

“Oh thank god,” he sighs, genuinely relieved.

“Well if you stopped ignoring me in the first place, I wouldn’t have to say stupid shit to get your attention.”
“I have work to do,” he mutters unhappily, forwarding the rosters to Garrovick with a couple of swipes on his PADD. That done, he pulls up the day’s reports from Security instead; given the ship hadn’t left warp for over three days, there’s nothing in them but confirmation that training programmes are being followed, but they still needed reading and signing off on regardless.

“You always have work to do. Spare me five minutes and listen to my moaning anyway. Please?”

Chris sighs, and rubs tiredly at his eyes.

“You know what fine, I could use a break. Moan away Doc.”

“Brilliant. So you know what else Ten’Bol had Bones and I doing? Laminar impulse declination calculations. Math! I swear, if I ever see…”

Chris shuts his eyes, and stretches his legs out with a relieved moan.

He might complain about all the paperwork, but starblaze, is he happy to back out in the black.

39. You can take the man outta space, but you can’t take space outta the man

Chris usually avoids the depths of Engineering for a reason.

40. Starship Engineering decks are always like a goddamn maze; avoid going alone!

“Kirk!” he calls again along the catwalk, skirting around the sudden shoot of steam that cuts across his path. “Mr Kirk!” Goddammit, he hopes he’s not lost again.

“Captain Pike,” he suddenly hears echoing back through the haze. And then, accompanied by a chuckle “Err it is still Captain right sir?”

“Sure is Mr Kirk!” Chris shouts back relieved, ducking under a low pipe and heading towards the sound of Jim’s voice. Rounding an exposed and sparking circuit board and hopping over the Crewman soldering the base of it, he dodges another hot air vent and finally finds Jim hanging upside down from a collection of rubber tubes, spanner in hand and his stained, red uniform shirt half tucked into his waistband to stop it bunching down around his armpits.

Chris has flashbacks to that photo in the album Winona gifted him for his 45th birthday.

“Sorry Captain,” Jim waves at him, “I’ll be down with you in a second.” Then he hooks the spanner onto a magnet on his belt and cups his hands to his mouth. “Jacabo!” he yells, the call echoing out behind Chris. “Come finish recoupling the Anterior Reciprocating Hydroflux Stream would you?”

“Sí Sir! I will be one moment!”

Jim smirks down at him, and then in one smooth rolling motion, unhooks his feet and flips back down to stand before Chris.

“Show off,” Chris drawls fondly.

“You just wish you were still flexible enough to do that sir,” Jim grins slyly.

“What do mean wish, you cheeky pup. I’ll have you know callisthenics and I get along very well!”

“Oh sure. It’s just perfectly normal for every joint in your body to creak like an unoiled hinge whenever you bend down to unbuckle your boots huh?”
Chris sends him a murderous look and waits silently.

“So what can I do you for sir?” Jim asks hastily, open palms raised before his chest defensively.

“Garrovick wants your reports from the Pickstack blowout.”

Jim nods knowingly, rubbing with one hand at his slightly stubbled chin.

“Miss Matthews finished the repairs bout three hours ago. Soon as that last bolt went in, I convinced her to go off shift and leave me to run things down here. I’ve got Henrik and Miles typing up the last of the damage forms now, and then I’ll check and sign them and get them to you and the Captain.”

“And the Jackhammer thingy-whatsit?”

“The Jackhammer Plasma Inducer is next on my list when we’re done here sir.”

“I’ll let the Captain know everything seems to be in order then. As you were Mr Kirk.”

“Aye-aye sir, thank you.”

“Oh and Jim? Bones said to tell you caramel tarts were on the mess menu for this evening, and that a Mr Gary Mitchell will save you a seat? Who is…?”

Jim grins at him, salutes without answering Chris’ question, and then turns and crawls away under a mass of wiring.

Chris smiles to himself and shakes his head before heading back to the bridge; whistling and with a spring in his step. Hopefully he won’t get lost trying to get out of here!

“Lieutenant McCoy. Bring us into steady orbit above the planet, standard range please.”

“Erm, aye sir, but err, how do I do that?” Bones asks back nervously, tugging on his gold command shirt.

Garrovick shoots Leo a reassuring smile, before glancing over to where Chris is stood by the Science panel.

“Mr Pike, if you could assist the Lieutenant please?” she asks him. He nods back and strides across the floor to the Helmsman console, sliding onto the stool placed to the left of the usual swivelling chair. Leo then watches attentively as he slowly slides the controls into the correct positions, pointing out the g-calculations as they flit across the screen and indicating how to adjust for them.

Once the two of them have got the ship settled at a stable 1050km above the planet, Leo clears his throat and swivels to face the captain’s chair.

“Geosynchronous orbit above…? Erm the planet? Geosynchronous orbit achieved above it sir.”

“Tyco-IV McCoy,” the Captain informs him with a frown. “Class M planet, but with a pretty damaged environment. I haven’t got the foggiest idea why the ‘Fleet is interested in this place. If I’m honest, even Navigations didn’t know this was our destination until this morning. Regardless, we’re to do a full geological and atmospheric survey and add to the preliminary reports gathered by a passing non-‘Fleet vessel some twenty years ago. Once we’ve established the planet’s stability, an away-team will beam down to the surface to gather samples, categorise the flora and fauna, and discern the extent of the damage to the ecosystem.”
Chris listens to the new information eagerly, looking between the Captain and the forward view screen which is displaying a stationary image of the burnt-orange planet.

**41. New planets will always get your adventurous blood stirring**

“Mr Pike, if you would put together a list of crew to form the away team please. Commander Or’Spree will assist you with selecting the appropriate science officers. Oh, and a cup of joe wouldn’t go amiss either Pike?”

“I’ll see what I can sort,” he chuckles, leaving Leo with a pat on the shoulder and sliding into the Captain’s ready room.

**42. Not everyone will always be as enthusiastic as you are**

“No, I don’t wanna be on the away team,” Phil grumbles, once again flaked face down on Chris’ bed. “I’m a Helmsman now Cappy, or didn’t you hear? No reason for me to go stomping around on a half-dead planet when I can stay perfectly safe on the bridge instead.”

“That’s more or less exactly what Leo also said. But one of you has to go, so I suggest one of you sucks it up and puts on your brave pants before tomorrow morning.”

“I dibs out based on seniority,” Phil immediately returns. “There isn’t even any sentient life down there to interact with; why would I want to go Chris?”

“You’d be going down as part of science and medicine if you did?”

Phil sits up rapidly, interest suddenly brightening his eyes.

“I can get out of this awful mustard yellow monstrosity?” he asks, pinching the offending garment between his thumb and forefinger, pulling it away from his chest.

“It’s *gold*, you ass. Command gold, not yellow.”

“Oh trust me Chrissy, it’s yellow. Disgusting puke yellow. Gold is just what they write on the label to appease your delicate command egos.”

“And for that, *Boyce*, you can consider yourself on the away team, and you can join me in the scout squad.”

Phil audibly groans, and then throws Chris’ own pillow at his head.

“Bridge to Engineering, this is the Captain speaking.”

“Matthews here sir.”

“Sending the landing party to the transporter room now chief.”

“On it sir. Kirk!” the comm fizzles, the sound distorted by increased distance from the speaker. “Do you know how to work the transporter kid or-?”

The end of her sentence is cut off by Garrovick closing the Comm line. Chris exchanges a mutual shrug with her; one that clearly means “Engineers huh? Weird bunch”.

Then they march into the turbolift side-by-side, Phil and two other members of the bridge crew on
their heels.

43. You don’t have to be on holiday to collect a souvenir or two

“Bring me back something interesting sir? A shiny rock or something yeah?”

“I’ll see what I can find son,” Chris smiles, checking his phaser is secured correctly to his belt.

Jim salutes, and Garrovick nods.

“Energise,” she calls, smirking affectionately at the pair of them.

Chris feels his fingers and toes tingle with the familiar warmth of dematerialisation.

Chapter End Notes

If you're familiar with TOS cannon, you can probably guess what's about to happen...
Sunday of a bank holiday weekend, and I’m still in the lab.

What is life.

The weirdest thing about travelling by transporter, will always be the way the world always seems to freeze and then change in an instant.

Faster that you can blink.

People who’ve never been beamed up before (or down, for that matter) are always horrifically disorientated after their first time. They stumble and shake and quite often, feel more nauseous than a kid full of ice-cream on a rollercoaster.

Once you get used to it, it’s not so bad. Just a bit of tingling in your extremities, and then a flicker in your vision.

Chris is definitely used to it now.

44. You can adapt to anything with enough exposure

“All good?” the Captain asks to his left. She receives a round of nods and verbal affirmations, and then flips her Comm open with a practiced flick of her wrist. “Garrovick to Farragut, Farragut come in. Initial landing party is clear, beam down group two.”

“Farragut here, roger that sir.”

Within ten minutes, there’s a group of thirty of them dotted about in the small valley chosen to be the landing site. The group of three Chris knows to be botanists from the science department are already kneeling in the rough gravel, tricorders out and peering intently at a small spiky shrub, it’s stem shrivelled and grey to Chris’ admittedly unpractised eye. Similarly, a young ensign has pulled a hammer from his belt and begun to swing hard, but precisely at a nearby rock face; both he and the blue-shirted lieutenant peering over his shoulder are wearing shimmering energy glasses, and when a larger chunk finally clatters to the floor, one of them sweeps down and carefully places it inside a clear specimen bag.

Chris watches the activity around him with his usual curious interest, smiling when the two microbiologists suddenly exclaim and start grinning and pointing at their tricorder.

“Regional scans taken yesterday show that the more interesting landscapes lie three or so clicks to the east of here,” Garrovick announces, striding up to face him purposefully. “Acres of pure tritanium outcrops. Better than a gold mine.”

“I took a look at the maps yeah,” Chris agrees, pulling up the relevant survey information on his PADD. “I reckon if we follow this valley bottom along for a click or so, and then skirt along the side of this outcrop system, we’ll be able to cut over this ridge and come down into the vale from there.”
“Agreed,” she grins enthusiastically. “Boyce! Ty’Wan! Greevey! You’re with us!” she calls, waving the individuals over. Phil huffs and stomps over, unwillingness clear in his every movement.

“Cheer up Doctor,” Garrovick drawls amused, “we’re just going for a nice little exploratory walk in the sunshine.”

“What sunshine,” he grumbles, peering up at the hazy rust coloured atmosphere blocking a good portion of the natural light. “Are you sure it’s safe to breathe this stuff? Doesn’t look clean to me.”

“It’s fine Phil. Pretty close to earth standard actually, just with slightly higher nitrogen levels.” Chris tells him with a pat on the shoulder.

“Then why is it red? That’s not natural Chrissy.”

“That’s just because this system’s sun is a red giant. Oh, and there’s some natural iron compounds swirling around up there too, but they’re not gonna rust your brain any further than it already has. Quit worrying grumpypants.”

“Oh, all the stories about you two were definitely true after all,” Garrovick laughs, starting to walk away. “You’ve been so professional on the bridge this last week, I had begun to wonder.”

“What stories?” Chris and Phil ask simultaneously, hurrying to catch her up.

Behind them, Ensigns Ty’Wan and Greevey shrug at each other and sling the scout equipment bags over the shoulders.

45. The rumour mill always knows more than you expect it will

“So are either of you two gonna explain what’s been going on between you and the Admiralty recently?” Garrovick asks he and Phil as they finish scrambling out of a small ravine.

“Going on?” Chris asks brushing his hands free of rock dust.

“Aw come on Captain Pike, don’t play dumb! Sudden break ins, Terrorist threats, you vanishing for a month, Archer showing up back at the Academy looking like he’s been put through a wringer, me being ordered to take you all aboard my ship and leave dock immediately. I heard your parent’s house got torched too. You know, goings on.”

“Well first off, it’s Christopher, not Pike,” he chuckles. “And Phil would probably appreciate given-name status too.”

Phil nods eagerly, and shuffles over to lean on the rock face they’re stood in front of.

“Well it’s Stephanie to you then,” she immediately offers back.

“Well Stephanie, it sounds like you know about as much as I do on the subject if I’m honest. Barnett showed up at our door the morning of that break-in, told us to pack, and next thing we know we’re being shoved into a house in the middle of no-where and told to stay put. Fast-forward two and a half weeks, we end up running to Canada with no idea whether or not someone’s on our tail. Then we sort of got ambushed a little bit, which is why Arch-”

“Ambushed!?” Stephanie cuts across him loudly. Then, more shrewdly, “Terra Prime right?"

“Terra Prime,” Chris agrees easily with a nod. He pulls his canteen out of his pack and tips his head
back to swallow a few mouthfuls of cool water. Wiping his mouth off on the back of his sleeve, he readjusts his shoulder strap and then continues. “We have a bit of history, Terra Prime and I. They tried to convince me to join them when I was a teen. I emphatically told them to get knotted. Apparently they haven’t forgotten.” He deliberately doesn’t mention his Father.

“Emphatically? What’d you do, blow their headquarters up?”

Chris laughs heartily, waving the two young Ensigns to come join them as they’re looking a little lost and isolated, standing awkwardly off to one side.

“No nothing so dramatic unfortunately. No, they borrowed me without my permission for a couple of weeks and then I took the first chance presented to me and legged it. No, the emphatic part would be my signing on to Starfleet less than a month later despite having shown no previous inclination towards doing so, knowing full well they’d be watching.”

“Well that’s one way of telling them to stick it I suppose,” Stephanie agrees dryly.

Chris shrugs, peering off towards the distant horizon.

“All worked out fine it the end I guess. Well, excluding these past few weeks anyway.” He shakes himself, pushing away the memories. “Anyway, shall we continue?” he asks, a clear sign that he doesn’t want to linger on the topic any longer.

Ty’Wan and Greevey look disappointed, undoubtedly unused to their superiors being so casual around them, but they re-shoulder their packs along with everyone else, and they follow them down the other side of the ridge and into the vale beyond.

 “…And then he picked her up and sat her on his hip like a toddler!” Phil laughs, hands waving in front of him.

“The Queen of Somalaria?” Greevey asks incredulously, her antenna twitching.

“Behave like a spoilt child, get tret like a spoilt child,” Chris grumps, looking back over his shoulder at the giggling trio.

“She really was a brat,” Phil snickers. “And standing at barely two-foot-tall, she was the perfect size for Cappy to manhandle into behaving.”

“I would have paid to see that,” Stephanie chuckles.

“Is Cappy a nickname sir?” Ty’Wan asks, the young Axanar looking nervous.

“One dreamt up by the genius of Jim Kirk,” Phil grins before Chris can answer himself.

“I wouldn’t call it genius,” Chris moans, “It’s not even original! Just some stupid epithet he came up with at the start of last.”

He’s interrupted by the buzzing of Stephanie’s Comm buzzing.

“Captain Garrovick here, what-”

“Captain!” cuts in the frantic reply. Chris thinks he recognises the sound of Lieutenant Commander Young, the Farragut’s Navigation Officer. “Captain! What’s going on down there!”

Stephanie pauses, a brief look of confusion flitting across her face.
“What’s happening to my crew Young?” she snaps out crisply, all professionalism in an instant.

“Their life signs are blinking out! One by one! Aren’t you with them sir?”

“Send their last known locations to my PADD Lieutenant. We’re going to investigate. Get the transporter room ready to beam us all up at a moment’s notice.”

“Aye sir!”

She snaps the Comm closed and fixes them all with a look of grim determination.

They fall into line behind her silently and turn back towards the ridge and the valleys.

**Point 23**, there to bite them in the ass again.

“Garrovick to Leman, Leman come in.”

Static.

“Leman come in.”

More static

“Jameson, Jameson can you hear me? Ken-Val? Ensign Ken-Val?”

No-one replies.

They keep walking.

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**46. The universe will *always* have one more nasty surprise in store for you.**

“What the hell!?” Greevey stammers.

Phil places his fingers on the side of the Crewman’s neck. He shakes his head.

Chris is not surprised. Henrick was as human as they come; he shouldn’t be blue tinged enough to rival an Andorian.

“Mark the location Ensign,” Garrovick orders sharply, “We’ll come back for him when we’ve found who or what did this.”

In the next ravine they find three more bodies, all still and lifeless.

Phil -ever the doctor, no matter what colour shirt you put him in- pulls a medical tricorder out of his pack as soon as he’s confirmed that they’re as deceased as they look.

“All the iron in their blood is gone. Just. Gone,” he swallows, showing Chris and Stephanie the readings.

Chris frowns, and places the back of hand on the forehead of the nearest officer.

“Still slightly warm,” he grunts. “Took the iron, but not the rest of the blood’s constituents, or the blood itself.”
“What could have done this sir?” Ty’Wan asks, looking nauseous.

“I don’t know, but as soon as I find out I’m gonna have words with it at phaser point.”

When they hear the screaming, they barely even glance at each other before sprinting towards it.

“What the fuck is that?” Phil gasps, sliding to a halt beside Chris.

The …thing floats over the still twitching body of a terrified science officer below them. Gassy and insubstantial, it glows like some kind of malevolent luminescent cloud.

It rises and almost seems to twist in the air.

The science officer lies still in the gravel.

“Get to Jestney,” Stephanie hisses to him, lying in the gravel by his side, “Comm the Bridge, get an emergency beam up straight to Medical.”

Chris doesn’t argue and nods.

They race down the side of the scree slope, sliding to a stop beside the downed officer, Jestney. Phil is on his knees immediately, hands running over the Ensign Chris now recognises as one of the geologists from earlier.

“He’s hanging on,” Phil breathes, eyes darting nervously around. “Barely, but he’s still here.”

Chris waves a hand behind them, and Greevey flips open her Comm and whispers a beam up request for herself and Jestney.

The two of them disappear in a swirl of sparkling energy, and Chris turns to Phil with a grimace.

Phil nods silently, answering his upspoken question.

He hauls him back to his feet hurriedly and they scramble after Stephanie and Ty’Wan.

47. Sometimes you can apply Point 34, but sometimes ignoring orders is straight up necessary.

And Chris and Phil both agree there’s no way they’re leaving those two down here alone.

He sprints.

Flat out.

Screaming.

Phaser out.

One shot.

Two.

Three.
He’s not fast enough.

Stephanie Garrovick goes down with a gurgle.

Chris shouts his frustration out at the uncaring sky.

“BEAM US UP!” he roars into the Comm open in his hand.

He grips Phil’s wrist hard as the cloud creature spirals towards them like a funnel of death.

Phil is screaming.

A wordless roar of agony.

They materialise in the Farragut’s transporter room and Phil still shakes and weeps.

Unashamedly panicked, Chris pulls his best friend into his lap, one hand pushing his head into his chest and begs anybody and everybody to fetch a doctor.

The hand he also grips is tinged blue.

It’s on the ship and Chris is still firing and Jim is barrelling into the room with a security team and more phasers and alarms are wailing throughout the ship and behind them Ty’Wan is clutching at the unmoving body of the Captain and-

And it’s chaos.

The creature shrieks, recoiling in a roiling mass from the phaser beams.

It disappears into an air vent and then Jim is there, pulling Phil from his arms, and shouting, shouting, shouting.

“-Need to get him to MedBay! Captain! We have to get-”

Chris’ hearing wavers in and out to the beat of the red alert sirens, and although his vision blurs and black unconsciousness looms in the corners of the room, he understands enough to stagger to his feet.

And then they’re limping, crashing, running, racing, down the corridors of the ship. Screaming echoes, phaser fire ricochets, they stumble against bulkheads and pipework, Phil held up between them.

The Medbay is swarming with people of all ages, races and species. A stuttering, screaming mass. Biobed alarms shriek, nurses scramble back and forth, patients cry out their pain.

And in the middle of it all, Doctor Puri stands like a beacon of hope, crisp orders falling from his lips and his control over his staff absolute.

*Just like Phil…* Chris thinks as the man in question is pulled from his arms once more.

48. **You can always rely on a doctor to be the calm in a storm.**
“Captain! Captain!”

He pulls his eyes away from Phil’s prone form and focuses on Jim, who is clutching his shoulder, a look of alarm clear on his face.

“It got onto the bridge Captain!”

Chris’ focus snaps back instantly.

“It doesn’t like phaser fire,” he calls out as they race through the ship once more. Jim follows him closely, grim determination evident in every line of his body. The small security team on their heels prime their larger rifles and pull into a tighter formation.

“It’s after iron,” Jim pants back. “It’s rich already in the natural atmosphere of the planet, right? But it’s concentrated in our blood.”

“How do we get rid of it or put it down Kirk?”

They sprint down the last leg of the deck, and turn sharply into the waiting turbolift. Chris grimly sighs, and then leans down to shut the eyes of the unfortunate Communications Officer slumped against the sidewall, pain permanently etched into his features.

“Something more reactive than iron maybe. It must be bonding with the element somehow to feed off it. Or draw energy from it.” Jim hypothesises frantically, dropping to one knee beside Chris and checking his own weapon over. “It doesn’t like the phaser fire because it excites the electrons of its molecules, causes it pain or something. If we can forcibly replace the iron in its makeup, maybe…”

Their eyes snap together as they both come to the same realisation.

And then the turbolift doors slide open smoothly.

**49. Silence just means you should be extra wary.**

Nothing moves.

Lieutenant Commander Young lies face up across the Navigation panel, phaser hanging limply from his hand, and his eyes staring unseeing at the ceiling. Commander Or’Spee is huddled in the Captain’s chair, his last act to order the sealing of the bridge’s ventilation system. Ten’Bol…

Ten’Bol shifts under the Armoury Panel and shoots them a terrified look.

“Copper blood,” Chris mutters to Jim with a nod at the horror-struck Ensign.

“Hasn’t touched her,” Jim agrees quietly, eyes scanning the room rapidly. He raises a hand and their security team behind him raise from the crouches in sync.

Chris copies the gesture and points rapidly at three different points throughout the bridge. Then he closes his fist and they dart forward as a team.

The sentient cloud remains conspicuously absent.

“Copper is below Iron on the reactivity series,” Jim whispers as they dash across to the Armoury Panel in a crouch. Ten’Bol snatches the offered phaser from his hand with a barely audible whimper,
and crowds against their backs.

“Spray it with copper?” Chris suggests, signalling to the security team with one arm again. “Clearly doesn’t like it.”

“Might work,” Jim shrugs, “Or it might be entirely unbothered. No different to spraying a human with room temp water. Left Ten’Bol alone simply because she was uninteresting.”

“Won’t know till we try.”

“How we gonna get enough copper?”

“Well you know Engineering better than I do kid.”

Jim meets his eyes again, ideas obviously flitting through his mind rapidly. Chris gently pushes the trembling Ensign back under the panel, knowing they’re going to have to move any second.

“We store copper sulphate by the barrel. It’s a waste product from the warp coolant system.” Jim offers hesitantly.

Chris nods encouragingly.

“I hope you have a plan to go with that son,” he chuckles humourlessly when Jim remains silent.

Then they dart towards the captain’s chair together.

It materialises in front of them. A swirling mass of promised agony.

They both yell in horrified surprise and dive in opposite directions.

“CHRIS! THE FIRE SUPPRESSION SYSTEM!” Jim bellows, throwing himself over the top of the Helm control panel and scrambling towards the forward view screen, the cloud swirling at his heels.

Chris raises his phaser and gets off two short bursts before the single remaining security officer brings his phase-rifle round and concentrates a steady stream on it.

Chris immediately crawls the rest of the way to the centre of the bridge and hastily shoves Or’Spree out of the chair with a silent prayer for forgiveness. Throwing himself down into it, he flips open the captain’s control panel and jams in the standard code for over-riding the sprinkler network.

The cloud ebbs and writhes and Chris throws himself sideways out of the chair and under the Engineering screens as it shoots towards him.

“I need to get to Engineering!” Jim hollers from the other side of the room, covering Chris’ retreat with his own burst of fire.

“On three kid!”

“I haven’t got time for thr-” Jim starts to shriek back, once again rolling over one of the panels.

“Three!” Chris shouts over him, skipping the rest and sprinting straight for the turbolift.

They both crash into the back door of the turbolift with a mutual groan, as the last security officer
slides in too, barrelling into their feet.

“Ensign Ten’Bol?” the grey-haired officer pants, all colour leeched from his skin in fear.

“She’ll be fine.” Jim tries to reassure through his own shuddering breaths. “No iron in her blood; won’t touch her.”

“Right,” the older man sighs, dropping his head to the floor. “Remind me to retire to a ground posting after this sir?” he asks Chris.

The sprinklers choose that moment to burst to life.

50. Sometimes the only thing you have left is hope. Don’t let it go

Dripping wet but utterly determined, they dance through the chaos of Engineering.

“WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU BEEN KIRK!” Matthews shrieks at them as they charge past her.

“Need copper in the water!” Jim yells back, launching himself at the fire control pump system and starting to climb the pipework. “Use the Copper sulphate waste!”

“Do as he says!” Chris commands sternly, skidding to a halt by Jim’s feet. Using pure guesswork, he selects options on the control panel until the pressure readings spring up on the screen.

Matthews takes one look at his face and starts ordering everyone in hearing to roll out the barrels.

Chris shouts another one of the Captain’s override codes at the screen, and then pushes the sliders up until the water dripping down on them intensifies into a hard downpour.

Screaming.

Down the corridor.

Fast approaching them.

“Jim hurry the fuck up!” Chris shouts up at him.

He can smell the sodden air becoming more and more metallic.

The grey seething mass pulses as it ghosts silently towards him.

There’s nowhere left to run.

He closes his eyes and begs for their lives.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

HTML now added
Appendix still three chapters out of date (fixing it now!)
But I figured you’d rather have a new chapter than wait for me to fix all the other stuff...

Chris does not consider himself a religious man.

He’s seen too much of the universe and the life within it and all the different cultures to really get behind any of the many, *many* religious ideals that exist. They contradict each other, they nearly always insist that they’re the one and only true version, and they all promise accession to some higher plane as if it’s a reward, as if you shouldn’t just be a *decent person* anyway.

That’s not to say Chris doesn’t occasionally think there’s some kind of being or entity out there responsible for the creation of life, the universe and everything. He doesn’t particularly like organised religions, but he’s got no problem with *belief*.

And you better believe he’s clinging to his own damn belief with every atom in his body right now.

Because he could *really* use some divine intervention right now. Because if this *cloud thing* gets him, it’s got a clear path straight to Jim.

And that? That is the last thing he wants to happen.

### 51. Even the bravest of individuals can be struck down by panic

“JIM!” he shouts, pressing himself back against the pipework. His hands scrabble at the damp metal, and he hauls himself up a metre or two off the floor, desperately wishing he’d turned around before he started climbing.

Facing outwards, he can see the cloud creature slowly getting closer and closer through the downpour. Bringing his death closer and closer.

His left-hand slips on the greased pipe and he flails wildly, desperately trying to regain his balance. One foot starts to slide, and his eyes widen.

He swings uncontrollably back against the pipes, grasping frantically until he manages to slam his hand around one of the slimy ducts.

“JIM!” he shouts again, the word long and drawn out in his increasing panic.

He manages to push himself another half metre upwards, breaths coming in gasps, arms shaking, grip increasingly precarious as the metallic water continues to rain down.

It’s barely half a foot from him now, ebbing just beyond the stretch of his arm. Almost as if it’s
taunting him, waiting for him to accept the inevitable and give into the imminent pain it’s offering.

It’s definitely sentient, whatever it is.

Chris shuts his eyes again and tries not to scream.

“SHUT YOUR EYES!” he hears yelled.

Chris ducks his head and holds his breath.

It’s like standing under a waterfall.

He was already soaked to the bone, spluttering out drops of water with every gasp for air, drips accumulating in his eyelashes and stinging his eyes. His gold shirt hangs heavily from his body, his feet cold in the creaking leather of his boots.

And then the water is falling so thick and fast down over him, he can’t breathe.

Can’t keep hold of the piping.

He falls the two metres to the deck and lands hard on his right leg.

He screams low and deep in his throat as white hot pain shoots straight up the right side of his body, loud enough that for a few seconds he doesn’t realise he’s not the only one crying out.

The creature is too.

A piercing, high pitched whistling, increasing in decibels as it writhes and expands and contracts in on itself. The ominous yellow-white glow sparking from within its smoky depths intensifies and darkens, becoming more and more green tinged.

Chris watches from a huddle on the floor, lying in a pool of cyan blue, the coppery fumes making him more and more nauseous.

He shifts, gagging and trying to cover his ears against the awful piercing noise, and his leg screams in agony, and oh god, he’s going to be sick and, and, and-

“Woah, woah! Captain, lie back!”

He wants to sit up. Needs to sit up. Jim was-

He opens his eyes. He’s in the Medbay. And Jim is leaning over him.

“Maybe warn us before you go soaking us all to the skin next time yeah?” Leo suddenly grumbles from behind Jim. “I had someone in open surgery and suddenly there’s water pouring in under the theatre door and people shrieking outside.”

“What happened?” Chris groans, pushing his still damp hair back out of his face.

“I hydrolysed half a barrel of pure copper sulphate and poured it over it and you,” Jim shrugs. “It really didn’t appreciate that and went screaming back to the planet surface. We managed to track it for about 2 minutes before it just seemed to dissolve and vanish.”

“Killed it?” Chris asks, trying to sit up in the bed. Bones not only lets him, but shoves a pillow
behind his back to support him.

“Hopefully. We pulled out of orbit as soon we had enough crew on the bridge to manage it just in case.”

“Good,” Chris says shortly, relieved. And then, “Who’s in command?”

“Technically you are,” Doctor Puri announces as he strides up and pulls the PADD Bones was holding into his own hands.

“Right.” Chris says faintly. Then he takes a deep breath and starts pulling his command persona back on.

“Ah, ah! Not so fast Mr Pike!” Puri admonishes him as he starts to scoot towards the edge of the biobed. “Commander Matthews is more than capable of handling the bridge and the Admiralty while I finish checking your leg has set correctly. And I need to run another tox screen on you; you swallowed an alarming amount of hydrated copper sulphate sir. Not to mention that it got in your eyes and brought you out in some nasty patches of eczema. It’s all been treated, but I need to make sure you actually are in the clear before I discharge you; you were unconscious for twelve hours after all.”

Chris looks down at his leg, hidden under the thin medical blanket. It aches dully, as if it’s been bruised. But the sharp stabbing sensation he knows indicates a splinter or a break is gone. And the cotton wool sensation in his head is already dissipating.

“Still low on fluids,” the younger doctor grunts.

“And all our fluids are being used by the majority of our other patients,” Puri sighs. “He’ll have to manage with rehydrating the old-fashioned way.”

“Water and electrolytes,” Leo smirks, meeting Chris’ eyes. “I suggest you stop by the gymnasium on deck three and liberate all the sports drinks from the vender.”

“Yeah,” he agrees tiredly, “Phil is always on me to drink more-”

He cuts himself off, and starts to scrabble to his feet again. “Wait! Where’s Phil!” he looks around wildly, but none of the beds in view contain his best friend.

“He’s fine! He’s fine!” Jim reassures him hastily, arms coming up to push back on Chris’ shoulders. “They split Medbay into two wards. You’re in the trauma injury and copper poisoning half. Phil is over that way in the blood anaemia half. I’ll take you to see him in a minute, just let the doctors finish their work first alright?”

Chris forces himself to relax and lets Jim shove him back sitting on the bed.

“Captains,” Puri says drolly to Leo, “they’re all the same, I tell you. All cool and calm and in control on the surface, and like this,” he waves at Chris, “the rest of the way down.”

“I had noticed sir,” Leo responds with a raised eyebrow and a smirk.

52. Starfleet Doctors are always sarcastic assholes
Phil is still unconscious.

And far too pale.

Chris stands beside his bed, crutches tucked under his armpits and listens to the steady reassuring beat of Phil’s heart beat monitor.

In beds all around him, other crew members lie unmoving. Tens and tens of them.

A lack of healthy colour seems to be a common theme amongst the many patients of the make-shift ward. From deathly white, to even deadlier blue, every bed is occupied by someone lacking the blood red tinge of good health. Wires and tubing are draped across everything, transfusions of iron-rich blood being administered across the board.

Chris wonders how by nova they’re managing to produce artificial blood fast enough to keep up with the demand.

“Sir, Commander Matthews asks if your able to attend the bridge?”

Chris looks away from the monitor above Phil’s bed and glances at the nervous Crewman hovering beside him.

“Only um, apparently Starfleet Command are hailing us again and they were demanding to speak to you before but you weren’t conscious and…”

The Denobulan trails off uncertainly.

“Return to your post Crewman,” Chris tells her blandly. “I’ll report to the bridge in a moment.”

Chris looks back down at Phil as the woman hurriedly scurries off. He sighs, and reaches out to squeeze Phil’s shoulder, pausing for a long moment before squaring his own shoulders and going to deal with the fallout.

53. The aftermath of a disaster is nearly always as bad as the disaster itself.

“Captain on the bridge!” Ten’Bol calls out from the helm, looking remarkably well considering the state Chris had last seen her in.

The Captain’s chair swings round, and Chris is met by the relieved face of Commander Matthews. She stands almost immediately and hurries over to where Chris is standing just in front of the turbolift door, mostly empty bottle of Lucozade shoved haphazardly into his belt.

“Oh thank god,” she sighs, “I’m not cut out for this command bullshit. Give me an engine room and a tool box any day, but angry Admirals demanding answers I don’t have? I think I’ll pass thanks”

“You seem to be doing fine to me,” Chris muses, glancing past her at the surprisingly tidy and organised bridge. He was expecting it to be a lot more wet at the very least.

“The one thing I can do, is fix shit. And trust me, the bridge was in need of fixing. More phaser burns and soaked through equipment than I’ve seen in my career, I swear to god…”

Chris chuckles, and shuffles on the spot, trying to distribute his weight more evenly between his two crutches. Matthews eyes widen in sudden horror.
“Shit! You’re leg! I forgot! Dammit, go sit down Captain. I bought us a fifteen-minute reprieve before Command call us back. What do you need to know before then?”

Chris smiles gratefully, and limps the rest of the way onto the bridge. He grimaces as he lowers himself carefully into the Chair, and waves his hand over the control panel in the arm. The general ship readouts spring up on the bottom left of the forward view-screen and his grimace deepens.

“I need to know Casualties, ship-wide damage reports, remaining operative crew, the current command structure and what supplies we absolutely need to acquire now,” he rattles off to her, wincing as the power stats drop another percent ship wide.

“Two hundred crew members lost, another one hundred and fifty still in Medbay,” Matthews lists with an unhappy frown. “Fifty of those are still in dire straits; Doctor Puri’s last update stated that we’d be lucky to get even a quarter of them back on their feet before we make it back to Earth.”

Chris scrunches his eyes shut for a second and forces himself not to rub a hand down over his face.


“One Hundred and thirty-two sir, and most of them are either Engineers or Medical staff. We’ve only got four fully qualified helmsmen still on board, and one of them is you, another me, and the third is still in Medbay awaiting treatment for copper sulphate caused conjunctivitis. Don’t even get me started on Navigators. We’re down to one.”

“Kirk knows the basics too,” Chris mutters. “Better than nothing.”

“So we’re down to one and a half Navigators,” Matthews shrugs borderline sarcastically, “that sounds so much better sir.”

“Better than none at all,” he grumbles, aiming for an optimistic tone and missing by a mile. “What about the ship?”

“She’s completely drenched to her hull plates still. Kirk managed to get most of the water in Engineering funnelled down into the bottom deck and I’ve got Crewmen pumping it back up into the tanks, but the only places we’ve managed to get mostly dried out are the Bridge and Medbay. The mess hall and officer quarters are next on our to do list, but with personnel so depleted, it’s not exactly a high priority job. It’s making people complain about the lack of dry sleeping places, but what can I do?”

She pauses. Chris swallows in unhappy anticipation.

“The main concern is blood supply sir.”

At this point, Chris gives into impulse and drags his hands back through his hair in frustration. He knew it was going to be a problem; he made Point 36 for a reason after all.

“How bad?” he asks, bracing for the worst.

“Puri commandeered the few remaining Science staff and set them to replicating blood by the pint, but with all the electronics soaked, they don’t have enough equipment to keep up with demand. So he organised a train of donors. Anyone who can spare a pint or two has been dragged down to Medbay and had a needle stuck into the back of their hand. But it’s still not enough. With so many people down with copper sickness as we’re calling it, demand still just isn’t being met. Puri is keeping it quiet, but he’s had to start picking and choosing who to treat.”
“Fuck,” Chris swears emphatically, allowing himself one instant of unprofessional composure. “Let me guess, the fact you can’t cross species with non-replicated blood isn’t helping?”

“Most of those the cloud targeted were human,” Matthews says quietly, “more than sixty percent of the crew are native Terrans like ourselves, and most of us are in Medbay. They’re dropping like flies down there sir.”

“Can the water damaged synthesising equipment be fixed?” Chris tries.

Matthews shakes her head.

“First thing we tried. Too many circuit boards and processor chips fried. The only compatible ones are in the mess hall replicators, and I already took as many as I dare. Take any more and we’ll start to starve too.”

“We’re really up the proverbial creek without a damn paddle. What about command chains? Who’s-”

“Sir!” he’s interrupted, “incoming Communication from Starfleet Command!”

Chris hurriedly straights from his slouch again, moving his crutches to rest between his knees and stretching his aching leg out.

“Put it on the forward view screen Ensign,” he commands.

54. Sometimes the Admiralty know even less than you do

“Captain Pike,” he’s greeted by the stern face of Admiral Marcus.

He already knew they were in trouble, but the fact that Nogura and Archer are also on screen really drives it home.

“A admirals,” he nods back, waiting for the inevitable interrogation to begin.

“On November 14th, stardate 2256.87 you approached Tycho IV and after a series of preliminary geophysical and atmospheric scans, Captain Garrovick ordered a landing party to beam down.”

“Correct sir,” Chris nods in agreement.

“Captain Pike, what the hell where you all doing there!?” Marcus growls at him.

Chris stares blankly back at him.

“Because we were ordered to….?” He eventually answers, blatantly showing his confusion.

“You were ordered to rendezvous with the USS Hawking and Captain Thirrwood at the other side of the sector Pike!”

Chris is usually a pretty calm and collected individual, particularly in any kind of professional setting, but there’s no denying that what he’s doing now is gawping open mouthed at the three Admirals.

“Ahh…” he starts, glancing quickly at the equally dumbfounded Matthews still by his side, “No we weren’t sir…?”

“Who ordered you to Tycho IV Christopher?” Archer asks sharply.
“We boarded the ship as directed sir, and proceeded to our posts,” he begins, levelling his voice out into confidence with well-practiced ease. “On the fifth day out of dock, it became clear to me that no-one on the bridge clue knew our destination. I had held suspicions to that end previously, but my recent experiences led me to believe that the information was being withheld for the crew’s safety at your orders sirs.”

“We ordered no such thing Pike,” Marcus snaps.

“That is becoming increasingly obvious sir,” Chris shoots back, firm in his confidence. “On the sixth day, Captain Garrovick was given our final destination and mission parameters by the chief Navigations Officer.”


“Indeed sir.”

“Get the Navigation Officer up here Pike, we need to have words,” Marcus orders.

“Erm. No can do sir,” Matthews interjects timidly. “Lieutenant Commander Young did not survive the creature’s attack upon the bridge.”

“And in any case, I really don’t think he knew where we headed until last minute either,” Chris adds, grimly pushing the memory of the young man arched back over the Navigation Panel out of his mind.

“So where was Garrovick getting headings from Pike!?” Marcus asks incredulously.

“No idea sir,” Chris admits with a shrug. “We had no reason to question the information that we were given and anyone who could provide a useable answer to you is now dead.”

“Alright, we can deal with the debrief later,” Archer scowls. “We hereby officially appoint you temporary Captain of the USS Farragut. What do you need to make it back in one piece Captain?”

“Honestly Admiral, I need blood and fast. Lots of it.”

He spends nearly another hour hammering out details with the three senior Admirals. Eventually, it is agreed that they should head to the nearest Federation Starbase, and that a relief vessel would be dispatched to rendezvous with them as soon as possible. Nogura vanishes from the office they’re streaming from briefly and returns with a transfer of navigation data which Chris’ sole remaining Navigation Officer accepts with an undisguised sigh of relief.

Finally, when Chris is beginning to feel the dull throb in his leg spreading back to his still bruised ribs, he is dismissed and the VidComm clicks shut with a low chime.

“Ohay then,” Chris sighs tiredly to Matthews, who is now crouched with a PADD by his feet, “hit me with the crew rosters.”

“First thing you need to do is officialise the chain of command sir,” she replies quietly, glancing up at him. She looks as exhausted as Chris feels.

“Congratulations Commander, you’re now my First Officer.”

“But-!” she starts to protest.
“You’re already doing the job,” he tells her promptly, trying to boost her confidence, **Point 42** at the forefront of his thoughts. “And who else am I gonna pick? The only senior crew still alive and conscious are you, me, and Doctor Puri. Puri is up to his eyeballs already, and Kirk can take over your Engineering duties. I know you don’t want the position, but present me with a better option.”

“Ugh, fine,” she grumbles.

“I knew you’d see it my way,” he smirks, trying to lighten the mood. “Now pull those rosters up and let’s see if we can make it to Starbase 39 before ship noon in two days.”

55. **The best way to cheer up a demoralised crew is usually to give them a challenge**
Puri kicks him out of Medbay.

Apparently he needs to get some “proper” sleep, whatever that means.

He had been sleeping. Just not in his bunk.

They’ve been docked at Starbase 39 for just over five hours. In that time, Chris had met with the Commodore in charge of the base and happily handed over all responsibility to her for the next twenty-four hours. Chris wasn’t an idiot after all; after pulling double shifts and cutting his standard down time in half for three days straight, he knew it was safer for everyone if he stepped down and took a break.

So once he’d ensured that the promised synthesised blood was making its way rapidly to Medbay, and that Matthews had taken herself off duty too, he’d trudged down to Phil’s biobed, and collapsed in the small plastic chair beside it.

Inevitably he’d dozed off, his cheek smushed against the hard metal edge of the bed. He’d been quite comfortable thanks to his general state of exhaustion, and curled up as he was, he’d been well out of the way of the busy nurses and Doctors.

And then Puri had come along and dragged him from his slumber.

And he’d gotten a surprisingly grisly lecture on incorrect sleeping postures and the dangers of trapped nerves and pinched arteries.

And then he’d been medically ordered to return to his quarters.

As in, Chris had actually been handed a written prescription ordering him to sleep in his own bed for at least eight hours straight. Puri had even submitted a copy of it to his medical file so that he couldn’t ignore the demand.

Sighing in resignation, he had looked longingly back at the main doorway to the Medbay and towards Phil just the once before trudging to the turbolift and heading to the Officer’s deck.

56. The privileges of rank can have their downfalls

Being CMO, XO or Captain for instance, means you get a four-foot bed in your room, rather than the usual narrow single. Which on the face of it, is pretty good.

Until you come back to your quarters and find that there’s a woman and three young men taking advantage of your bigger than average bunk without your permission.

Chris is pretty sure his brain shuts down for a second in surprised confusion when he walks in.

When his thought processes finally come back online, it registers that two of them are Jim and Bones. Jim is lying practically on top on Leo and Leo’s arms are wrapped tightly around Jim’s back. Every couple of seconds, Leo breathes out hard enough to puff up the top of Jim’s hair. Jim is as still
and silent as the dead.

The other two are top and tailing it -feet where the second pillow usually lives- and are equally entangled together.

Chris has no idea who they are.

“Right…” he mutters quietly to himself, still standing awkwardly in his own doorway. “Well, at least they all took off their boots first.”

He backs out slowly and returns to Medbay.

“Captain Pike, I thought I made myself clear,” Puri tells him sternly as soon as he tries to inconspicuously slide back into the anaemia ward.

“My room’s been highjacked.” he grumps back, dodging round the irritated looking Doctor.

Puri grabs his arm.

“You’re the Captain. Go unhijack it.”

Chris very carefully does not scowl. Or pout.

Puri narrows his eyes and then sighs.

“Nurse Hogins!” he calls across the room, “I will return momentarily. I have to escort a patient across the ship; you have the conn.”

The nurse Chris presumes to be Hogins waves in their direction in acknowledgement and then continues rehanging fresh IV bags. Chris continues to watch the process right up until the hand still clamped around his bicep suddenly starts tugging him back out into the corridor.

57. [see also: Point 52 ] Starfleet Doctors are terrifying bastards as well as sarcastic assholes

“Ah. I see.”

Doctor Puri makes the statement in the same rational and level tone of voice he states everything in.

“Captain I may be, but heartless I am not.” Chris laughs self deprecatingly. “I’m not turfing them out, I’m not that cruel.”

“I have to say though, it would be no less than Mr Mitchell deserved. He’s loyal and he works hard enough I suppose, but he’s also a rascal if ever I met one.”

“Mr Mitchell and I are yet to be acquainted Doctor.”

“Consider yourself privileged then,” Puri responds dryly. “And let me state for the record that’s it neither cruel nor heartless if they have it coming to them.” Then he claps his hands together rather loudly and strides up to the edge of the bunk.

Jim startles awake immediately. Wide eyed, he sits straight upright and almost knocks Leo off the side of the bunk. Leo curses and moans, scrabbling back onto the mattress using Jim as a handhold.

The woman mumbles and pulls the sheet up over her head.
Mitchell doesn’t even twitch and carries on snoring quietly.

“Lieutenant Mitchell!” Puri barks loudly, hands on his hips. “To attention!”

That ensures everyone’s focus is on him.

Jim and Bones stay sat at the head of the bed, Leo looking across to Chris with a raised eyebrow. Jim’s eyes widen again and he tugs nervously at the wrists of his long-sleeved redshirt when Chris pins him with a questioning look.

Mitchell however, scrambles out of the bed and snaps to attention so fast Chris can’t help but smirk. His brunette companion goggles and her eyes move rapidly between her sleeping partner and the doctor. Then she finally notices Chris, cringes horrifically, and slides out of the bed with a mortified look.

Chris doesn’t miss the accusing glares she sends Jim’s and Mitchell’s way before she snatches her boots up in one hand, salutes crisply and slips past Chris and out the door. She mutters a quiet apology as she passes him, so Chris lets her go with only a deeply disappointed look.

“Report to Medbay Lieutenant,” Puri snaps out, drawing Chris’ attention back to him. “Your annual physical is over-due.”

“But I just did it last month!” Mitchell immediately whines back, back still ramrod straight.

“Now if only the paperwork stating that hadn’t mysteriously disappeared. How unfortunate for you.”

“But-!”

“Medbay! Now!”

The Lieutenant hastily grabs his uniform and boots shirt from the floor and bolts from the room.

“Now then,” Puri continues much more calmly. “I have it on good authority you can handle these two on your own. Get some sleep Captain, lest you have to face my wrath.”

He punctuates his last statement with a finger poked into Chris’ chest and a steely glare. Chris has interacted with enough doctors over the years to know better than to answer back or try to pull rank.

And so the door slides shut behind him unchallenged.

Chris turns back to the two “guests” still in his bed.

“Save it,” he grunts when Jim immediately starts spewing apologies and starts to stand up. “I get it. Dry bed, big enough to share, high thread counts sheets. Just please ask me first time son.”

Jim nods enthusiastically, and Leo hooks his arm around Jim’s waist. When Chris nods, he pulls his boyfriend back onto the bed.

“If either of you snore, I will stab you in the face with one of Phil’s scalpels,” he tells the two of them, tugging his own boots off.

And with that, he throws his grimy gold shirt off, chucks the second pillow back against the headboard and collapses face down onto it.

If Jim and Leo stay or leave, he’s asleep too quickly to tell.
“Dikironium?” Chris asks incredulously.

It had taken another twenty-four hours for Marcus’ promised relief ship to arrive. Although Captained by Emile Torvygov, Vice Admirals Dakarai Risscount and Jayesh Patel had also been on board the USS Essex.

It’s with the latter two that he is now, cooped up in a small meeting room on board the Starbase and enduring what’s here sure will be the first of many debriefs.

“The readouts from the Science Department’s scanners indicate that yes,” Patel lilts in his usual accented staccato. “The creature, whatever it was, was formed entirely of this element. How it came to exist in nature, I cannot explain. But exist it clearly does.”

58. Nature and space regularly defy your expectations

Chris has seen enough weird shit throughout the galaxy that his expectations are practically non-existent by the point. But some things still manage to catch him out from time to time.

“You mentioned a sweet smell? A slight honey-like aroma perhaps?” Risscount asks gruffly. “Because these Vulcan scientific journals dedicated to the stuff state that it does have such a scent when created in large enough volumes.”

“Yeah, a little I guess. The first few times anyway. Things just started smelling of damp and copper pretty quickly.”

“Let’s talk about that again,” Risscount segues. “Your report states that you and Lieutenant Commander Kirk hypothesised that a more reactive metal might cause a reaction to the creature given its seeming preference for iron correct? Yet you then decided to go with copper, despite it being less reactive than iron. Why is that?”

“Immediately following the formation of our theory it came to our attention that the creature was avoiding crewmembers with copper based blood. Whether that was due to an aversion or simply a lack of interest, we couldn’t tell. But it provided more evidence that our guesswork hypothesis had earlier, so we ran with it.”

“And if you had gotten it wrong?”

“We’d all be very dead sir, so it’s a good job we didn’t,” He deadpans. He’s explained this at least three times to them now, so he’s running out of patience and civility.

Patel levels an unimpressed look at him. Chris returns it with a bland look of his own.

“What was the contingency plan if the copper had proven ineffective Captain?” he’s asked flatly.

Chris scrubs a hand down his face and rocks back in his chair.

“The Engineers knew what we were doing. They were the ones who rolled the barrels of Copper Sulphate out and winched them up to Kirk. If the copper hadn’t worked, they knew to try a different metal compound.”

“And you gave them that order?”

Chris shrugs. He’s already told them he didn’t twice.

“Kirk did. And he informed them rather than ordered. I was busy altering the water pressure.”
“Why did you set the sprinklers off ship wide and not contain them to the engineering decks? The resulting water damage to the Farragut is extensive to say the least.” Patel asks, still looking stern.

“It was all the ship or none of it. I didn’t have time to be more specific than a general override code. Even then, there was no guarantee it would follow us to Engineering, so covering the whole ship was necessary.”

“Why were you lacking in time?”

“Because I had a Dikironium Cloud Creature a split second away from permanently borrowing my red blood cells maybe?” Chris snaps back.

“This is not an interrogation Captain,” Risscount interjects levelly.

“If it’s not an interrogation then why do I feel like I’m on trial?” he snarls straight back “We were attacked and my crew was dying. So we threw a plan together and it worked. The creature is possibly dead and at least incapacitated and contained. I have explained this over and over. What more do you want from me?” He slams his fist down on the desk between them and shoves his chair back, standing and looming forward before he realises he’s done it.

59. Sometimes, calm is an unachievable state

“This is a waste of time,” Patel suddenly sighs to Risscount, looking as fed up as Chris feels. “Captain Pike is not a goddamn Terra Prime spy and we all know it.”

“A what!?” Chris splutters, his anger replaced by confusion and indignation in an instant.

“I know. Ridiculous accusation,” Patel continues with a roll of his eyes. “Downright insulting even. But apparently there are protocols that we must follow. Supposedly you were kidnapped and could have been brainwashed so we’re “obligated” to ensure your loyalty.”

“You should have heard the argument between Marcus and Archer over the matter Captain. You could hear the shouting from two floors away,” Risscount huffs, a hint of amusement in his voice.

Chris shakes his head and flops back into his hard metal chair.

“Who made the accusation?” he asks, already having a name at the forefront of his mind.

“A member of the Admiralty,” Patel answers swiftly.

“Which one?” Chris asks pointedly.

“We are not able to disclose that information at this time.”

“Bullshit,” Chris shoots back, “I have a right to face my accuser.”

“Not in the case of suspected Terrorism you don’t,” Risscount sighs apologetically.

“Whatever,” Chris grumbles, crossing his arms and slouching in his seat. “I already know it was bloody Komack anyway.”

“We can neither confirm nor deny that Mr Pike.”

“But you’re a perceptive man and we’re sure you can form your own reliable conclusions Captain,” Patel adds with a knowing smirk.

“Technically I have to continue insulting your capabilities for another hour or so before I can dismiss you Captain,” Patel eventually says dryly. “But as I’m certain you’re not going to accidentally admit to working for a terrorist organisation no matter how furious I make you, I think we should go take advantage of the bar on this Starbase instead.”

“I whole heartedly agree with this plan,” Chris chuckles, finally breathing a sigh of relief.

60. Alcohol is not the answer to your problems; it’s the question and the answer is usually an emphatic yes

“Komack accused me of being a Terra Prime spy.” Chris tells Phil quietly. “Like I would ever even consider joining them after what they did. Do you think I should tell Jim? He doesn’t even know I was kidnapped yet, let alone… I Just feel like I’m keeping secrets from him Phil.”

Chris pauses and shifts in his seat, tipping his head back against the wall behind him.

“Who am I kidding,” he continues, “I am keeping secrets from him. I don’t want to worry him; kid’s got enough on his plate already. I’m such a hypocrite aren’t I? Always trying to get Jim to tell me what’s on his mind while keeping my own mouth firmly shut. Ah Christ…”

He stops again, tucking his left foot up onto the edge of the chair so that it’s wedged under his right knee. Then he leans over and swipes his mug of water off the small table to their left and sips slowly at it.

“Matthews got into a huge argument with the Chief from the Essex this afternoon by the way. Disagreed with her method of filtering the copper out of our water supply. I thought she was actually going to belt him one at one point. Grabbed his shirt and waved her fists in his face. Torvygov and I tried to intervene when that happened, but she waved us off and then pulled rank on him. Used her current position as XO to formally reprimand him and then sent him packing. I was actually a little in awe. You would have loved it. Actually, I’ll get Jim to pull it from the ship’s monitoring feed and save it for you.”

He looks down at his best friend and smiles weakly.

“So hurry up and wake up you ass. You can’t watch it if you continue to insist on sleeping so damn long. And Leo is getting grouchy without you to bitch about patients with. Apparently Puri is too damn professional to join in his favourite pastime. Jim misses you too. I know he does because he comes down here almost as often as I do.”

He pulls his other foot onto the chair, hugging his knee with the hand not gripping his mug.

“I miss you Phil. So please wake up already.”

He hears a deep sigh and opens his eyes.

There’s a blurry pair of white doctor’s trousers in his sleep clouded vision.

“Mr Pike,” come the sharp warning.

“S’Captain to you,” he tries, slurring tiredly.
“Mr Pike, you have approximately thirty seconds to vacate my Medbay before I set my head nurse on you.”

Chris tilts his head up until he can squint at Doctor Puri’s face. He gets an exasperated expression complete with raised eyebrows in return.

“Tha’s playing dirty.” Chris tells him, sighing and climbing slowly to his feet. His legs tingle numbly, pins and needles already beginning to set in.

“Go to bed. Now.”

“Phil is so much nicer than you,” he says as he stumbles past the doctor.

“Doctor Boyce has had twenty years to be unduly influenced by you. Thankfully I am still immune. Now be gone with you.”

Chris pulls a face, but does leave, **Point 57** having proved its accuracy once again.

“Ideally I’d put you and the boys on the Essex and ferry you out to the Hawking as originally planned.” Archer tells him over the private VidComm.

They’ve been docked at the Starbase for nearly a week and a half now. Most of the ship has successfully been dried out, the bare minimum of essential electronics repaired, and the onboard tanks replenished with freshly filtered clean water. With less than a third of the Dikironium Cloud Creature’s surviving victims still not conscious, and more than enough blood now stored in the Medbay to see them safely back to the Earth, there’s no reason for the Farragut not to ship out.

“I can already see how that is never going to happen,” Chris snorts, tugging on his shirt.

“No, you’re going to have to remain Captain of the Farragut. Technically Jayesh or Dakarai could take over, but Dakarai hasn’t commanded a ship for nearly twenty years, and Jayesh took a ground posting long before he made Captain; the last time he was serving on an active ship, he was still a Lieutenant. The only other option then is the First Officer of the Essex, and she was newly promoted just two weeks ago; she doesn’t have the experience yet.”

“So back to Earth then? All four of us?”

“I’m not crazy enough to separate you. We’ll just have to take our chances with Terra Prime. And anyway, Philip is in no shape to be cavorting around the galaxy, so the point is moot regardless.”

“Where I go Jon, he goes too,” Chris insists firmly. Archer nods agreeably, even if his eyes are telling Chris that he wants to call him a cheeky demanding pup.

“And the same goes for you and Kirk and therefore McCoy as well by extension. Yes, yes I know, no splitting up the Pike Posse.”

“Pike Posse?” Chris asks laconically, amusement clear.

“Number One’s term for the four of you. The Admiralty have been using it to refer to you for months.”

“Well if that isn’t a textbook example of **Point 3**, I don’t what is,” Chris smiles ruefully.

“Dare I ask Christopher?”
“Eh, it’s nothing important,” he waves away with a smirk, “just a pocket manual of useful information I’m compiling for the Cadets of the Academy. I believe you’ll like Point 8 the best.”

“Oh? Do tell.”

“Admiral Jonathan Archer always knows everything.”

“You’re an odd one kid, but I hear no word of a lie. Well, I’ll see you back at HQ in five days. Try not to run into any more trouble on your way home okay? You’ve been enough hassle as it is.”

“I’ll do my best sir.”

“Oh, one last thing Christopher,” Archer quickly adds just as Chris is standing up to cut the connection off, “If I get even one more complaint from Doctor Puri about you kipping in the Medbay next to your still unconscious boyfriend, I will personally see to it that you spend the rest of your career making beds in Starfleet Medical.”

“He’s not my boyfriend!” Chris starts to protest.

But the Comm has already closed down and his complaint echoes unheard in his messy XO’s quarters.

61. The ability to leap without looking unfortunately goes hand in hand with the ability to jump to incorrect conclusions

Jim does it. Chris himself does it.

And Admiral Jonathon Archer is by far the worst culprit of them all…

Chapter End Notes

Alternative 61. Archer ships it
“How long ‘till we dock?” Phil rasps.

Chris picks the small glass of ice chips back up and holds it out. Phil smiles tiredly but gratefully and carefully pushes a couple of shards into his mouth.

“Four hours or so,” Chris grunts in reply, glancing up at the chrono on the monitor above Phil’s biobed. “I’ve got to be back on the bridge in thirty minutes to finish prepping for our final approach.”

“And then what?”

“Then I presume Archer, Marcus or Nogura is going to whisk us away to god knows where again,” Chris sighs.

Phil grunts wordlessly in reply, his eyes flickering shut once again.

Chris smiles weakly, shuffling in his usual hard plastic bedside chair.

“I insist they ditch us someplace with snow,” Phil grumbles quietly after a few minutes of comfortable silence. “I want a white Christmas for once in our damn lives.”

“Ice falling from the sky is damned unnatural,” Chris smirks back, falling into the well-worn routine easily.

“Desert rat,” Phil snarks back predictably.

Chris chuckles, and slides down in his seat, stretching his legs out.

“City slicker.”

“Country bumpkin.”

“Uncultured urbanite.”


“Cactus collector?” Chris cackles, “That’s your lamest comeback for years!”

“You do have a cactus on your kitchen windowsill though.” Phil coughs, trying to laugh and failing. Chris shoves yet more ice-chips in his direction.

“I’ll have you know that’s Jim’s cactus. It just appeared one morning and I didn’t question it. I hope it hasn’t died in our absence.”

“Well maybe if you’re lucky, you’ll be able to find out before the end of the day.”

“Yeah, I guess…” Chris trails off, smiling ruefully. “But even if we don’t get whisked away to places unknown as soon as we land dirtside, we’ve passed the two-month mark now. You know what that means.”

“Oh please. Like Archer would let the Quartermasters pack your flat up and reassign it.”

“Well I hope not, but the past few weeks have killed a lot of my natural optimism.”
Chris. I’m afraid I’m going to have to inform you that you never had any optimism in the first place. You are the physical embodiment of the dictionary definition of curmudgeon.”

“Ass,” Chris grins smacking Phil’s arm lightly with the back of his hand.

Novafire, Chris is so, so glad Phil is finally awake.

62. Never forget to be grateful for what you have.

Chris has always loved the sight of Earth’s space dock coming into focus on the forward view screen, hovering in orbit above the green and blue planet he’s proud to call home.

He’s more relieved than usual this time though, as the shining metal tower of disks grows larger and larger on the screen.

“Permission to dock granted sir,” the Ensign at the Communications Panel calls out. “We are cleared to approach bay 4C.”

“Acknowledged Ensign. Ten’Bol,” Chris continues, swivelling his chair to face squarely forward, “lock us on and take us in.”

“Aye Aye Captain,” Ten’Bol, smirks back, hands skimming rapidly over the Helm.

“Captain. I have two Admirals requesting permission to come aboard.”

Chris looks up from the PADD he’s using to sign off the last of the docking paperwork. With a frown, he hurriedly adds the current stardate and time, the Farragut’s current cryptolock number, scrawls his signature along the bottom and then hands the completed form to the Docking Commander patiently waiting beside him.

Then strides over to the Comm panel.

“Which two Admirals Ensign?” Chris commands sternly. The Ensign swallows and taps a series of buttons on the screen before them.

“Identities are being withheld sir. All I have is that they’re awaiting clearance to beam up directly to our transporter room.”

“And I suppose I’m not actually allowed to say no,” Chris mutters dryly.

“Um. From the tone of these messages, I would say not, no sir.” The Ensign stutters nervously.

“Alright. Contact whichever engineer is on duty in the transporter room. Tell our… guests I’ll meet them down there.”

To Chris’ surprise, it’s Jim seated at the control panel for the transporter when he walks into the room, back straight and chin up. Jim salutes crisply and Chris acknowledges it with a curt nod, both their lips twitching upwards in denial of the professional façade they’re both otherwise trying to maintain.

A green light blinks three times by Jim’s left hand, and when Chris nods again, he pushes three sliders upwards slowly.
On the pad before them, two swirls of glittering energy spring to life.

Chris clasps his hands smartly behind his back, and prays that at least one of the unexpected visitors is a friendly face.

“I’ve said it before, and I’m sure I’ll say it a thousand times again. You, Mr Pike, are a menace beyond your worth.”

Chris grins at Jonathon Archer’s scowl, and dodges the accompanying swipe of his cane with practiced ease.

“And you can shut it Lieutenant Kirk,” the Admiral adds, with a pointed glare in Jim’s direction when the young man snorts, “because you are almost as bad.” Jim affects an overly-innocent expression, which causes Jonathon to raise an unimpressed eyebrow.

The other Admiral accompanying Archer clears her throat pointedly, and while her expression remains neutral, her whiskers twitch in obvious irritation. Archer glances over his shoulder at her, and whatever look he shoots her makes her roll her eyes in a very human like manner.

“Alright, enough chitchat,” Jon acquiesces to her obvious silent demand, “Pike, Kirk. You’ve got twenty-five minutes to get all your gear up here, and collect McCoy and his belongings too.”

“And Doctor Boyce?” Chris asks, carefully keeping his tone bland.

“Why do you think I brought Admiral Yendu with me Captain?” Jon smirks back. “We’ll have Boyce up here and ready to travel before you can snap your fingers kiddo.”

And with that, the two Admirals stride passed him and out the door.

Despite most of the ship’s quarters now being mostly dried out, Jim hadn’t gone back to his own assigned bunk for the return journey to Earth. Instead, he’d moved his crate up to Chris’ room and slept there as often as he could get away with.

Which given that Chris is a self-acknowledged sap and total pushover where Jim is concerned, turned out to be every time the kid wanted to sleep. A highly unprofessional attitude to adopt, Chris knows. But with the ship and its crew still such a mess, he couldn’t find it within himself to care overly much about the technical breach of both propriety and regs.

When they finally push their way into the moderate sized room, they pause to exchange a glance and mutual sigh before they once again set about cramming their lives into the small metal storage boxes.

63. Learn to pack light. You’ll be glad you did

Archer does indeed have Phil ready and waiting for them by the time they march back into the transporter room, crates in hand. Seated in a fairly fancy looking hoverchair, he’s gripping a little too tightly to a pair of crutches resting on his knees and looking pale and pinched while Leo fusses over him and mutters about his blood pressure.

“Jim!” Phil exclaims when he notices their arrival, “would you tell your bitter half to give over already? I’m fine!”

“He’s not damn fine,” Bones growls, ignoring the hand Phil raises to push him back.
“He is damn fine!” Phil protests again, shooting Chris a pleading look this time.

“No you are not, you stubborn cuss-”

“Enough,” Archer snaps out impatiently. “Get on the transporter pad and quit bitching at each other.”

Phil and Leo are still mulishly glowering at their own feet when the whirr of transporter energy starts tingling at Chris’ finger tips.

The world blips and suddenly he’s staring at the far wall of an empty gymnasium hall. To his left, he hears Archer’s sudden gasp.

And then he hears the unmistakable sound of a body hitting the floor.

Chris whips his head round in shock, adrenaline flooding his system and quickening his heart rate even as he registers Leo’s shocked cry of dismay.

Yendu calmly turns the still raised phaser to point straight at Jim’s head.

God fucking damn blasted **Point 23. Again.**

“Now then Gentlemen,” her voice rumbles, far too deep and human-like for that of a female Caitian. “This phaser is currently set to stun, but I can up the ante with a single flick of my thumb, so I suggest you do exactly as I tell you. Drop the crates and put your hands behind your head.”

Chris holds the imposters gaze, and he can see the sincerity of their words. He lets go of his two crates with a clatter and slowly places both his palms flat against the back of his head. Jim and Bones swiftly follow suite.

“In precisely sixty-three seconds time, the fire door to your left will slide partially open,” the probable-terrorist rumbles maddeningly calmly. “You will all climb one after another into the back of the airvan parked against the opening. Doctor McCoy, you will go first and then you and Pike will assist your crippled colleague in next. Only once Pike has seated himself against the far wall of the van’s interior will I allow Kirk to follow you in. Any attempt at resistance, and I will not hesitate to put any one of you down permanently.”

Chris nods his understanding with a hard swallow.

He meets Jim’s eyes briefly, and knows he’s going to follow **Point 29** to the letter no matter what happens.

Watching Jim shuffle around the inside of the van and peer at the walls inspires Chris to make yet another point:

**64. Always at least consider your possible options.**

“No good,” Jim sighs, flopping back down onto the lone hard metal bench beside Leo. “We might as well be sat in a soundproof space-age Faraday cage. Whatever the vehicle is lined with, it’s not letting any signals or frequencies in or out. And it’s stuck down well; no way can I tear it off with just my finger nails. So I’m never going to get the back doors open either.”

“It’s alright Jim. S’not like we have anything to send a distress signal with anyway kid,” Leo grunts, pinching his brow.
"It was worth taking a look anyway though Bones," Phil sighs from where he’s lying on the floor, his head resting in Chris’ lap. And then, with obvious frustration he snarls “Christ, why does this shit keep happening to us? We can’t catch a gorrarn break! How the fuck did none of us think anything of Yendu until it was too late! I should have known something was up when she never said a word to me in Medbay!"

“Hell if I know,” Chris sighs, a general answer to all of Phil’s complaints.

He twirls a lock of Phil’s hair between his fingers and wonders himself why they can’t stop jumping from crisis to crisis without pause.

They drive for hours without pause.

The only way they keep track of the passage of time is because Phil was allowed to leave his antique analogue pocket watch tucked into the top pocket of his shirt.

Chris takes to watching the second-hand tick around its face. A maddening metronome measuring out the minutes of their captivity.

Opposite him, Jim crawls under the bench again, muttering once more about ways to unbolt the top beams and make use of them.

Leo watches him for several long minutes in silence. Then he sighs deeply, shrugs his jacket off and lies down, bunches it up behind his head, and shuts his eyes.

Chris glances back to Jim, who’s watching his boyfriend’s face slowly smooth out with a fond look.

Jim shrugs when he notices Chris’ eyes on him, and then when Chris nods encouragingly, lowers himself down to Bones’ side and presses his face into his chest.

Chris goes back to staring at the second hand of Phil’s pocket watch, now accompanied by the steady sleep-measured breaths of all three of his companions.

65. If a situation is beyond your control, sleep whenever you can.

The motion of the van changes.

The steady forward bobbing flow cuts out, and a slow side to side rocking takes its place. Then the low hum of the engine thrumming through the airvan’s frame stops too. Thankfully the sole dim orange-tinged light remains on above their heads.

Chris licks his parched lips and wonders what’s happening outside.

seventeen hours and twelve minutes.

Chris tries to forget the distressed look that just flittered across Jim’s face when Chris’ stomach audibly rumbled a minute ago.

“We’re on a ship,” Phil coughs dryly, curled unhappily against Chris’ chest. “Used to go sailing with my Papa. Water boats rock like this.”

Chris doesn’t answer; just resumes stroking his hand through the side of Phil’s hair.
“Time?” Leo groans, stretching until his back cracks.

“1407.” Chris mumbles dutifully. “Twenty-three hours and thirty-three minutes since we beamed down.”

“I really need a goddamn piss,” Leo groans.

Chris nods off again, and Komack with the stern face of his father scowls at him as he uselessly digs with his hands in the sand of the Mojave Desert in search of water he’ll never find.

He jolts awake when Komack—who-is-his-father—throws a too-still Jim down into the sand beside him.

The door wrenches open with a freezing blast of air.

“Pike, Boyce. Out. You wanna take a leak, then you got three minutes,” a gruff looking man with long greasy hair barks at them. He smacks the butt of his oversized phase-rifle against the metal of the door when they don’t jump immediately to their feet.

“Where are we?” Chris asks bluntly, as he and Jim carefully pull Phil upright and hook his arm over Chris’ shoulders.

“None of your business Spacer,” the man spits with a snarl. “Now get, before the bossman changes his mind.”

“And who is your boss?” Chris asks as he carefully clammers out into the damp salty sea air.

“I said shut your cakehole freak!”

The hard smack of the rifle’s handle across his left ear convinces Chris that he should probably stop asking questions.

66. You might want to snark, but sometimes you just shouldn’t

Phil was right. They’re definitely on some kind of ship in the middle of an ocean.

Old and rusted, it’s not exactly huge, but it’s at least big enough to have half a dozen decks and an array of battered machinery cluttering the open area of the stern.

They’re prodded over to the side railings, Phil leaning more and more of his weight on Chris as they slowly hobble over. Chris looks up when they stagger against the bitingly cold metal bars, and dark grey clouds rumble menacingly over the distant watery horizon. There’s a strong icy tang to the air, and in little more than their shirt sleeves, neither of them can help but shiver violently.

“Forget the damn paddle,” Phil chokes through a hysterical giggle, as Chris grimaces and tugs at the button of his pants “we’re up the fucking creek without the bastard boat.”

Following their return to their increasingly chilly mobile metal prison cell, Jim and Leo are also allowed a quick trip to the railings. Both come back shivering with the same bone-rattling intensity that Chris and Phil had, and in silent mutual agreement, the four of them huddle together in the centre of the floor.
Another three hours and twenty-six minutes tick by before the door bangs open again. Icy mist spills into the back of the van, and they all wordlessly shuffle backwards away from its frosty fingers.

“This is all you’re getting Spacers,” the same man growls from under his knitted cap, shoving a battered cardboard box towards them, “so make it last.”

“All we’re getting until when?” Jim asks with that level of too-calm that Chris is learning to hate.

“‘Til we get where we’re going.”

And then the door is slammed shut.

Jim slowly extracts himself from the jumble of limbs and reaches out to tug the box closer.

“Two cans of full fat cola, half a loaf of dry bread and a small packet of beef jerky,” he sighs, sliding back into the relative warmth between Chris and Bones.

“Rule of halves.” Chris and Jim say together resignedly.

“What now?” Leo croaks.

“We don’t know how long we’re gonna be stuck here for but we do know it’s not gonna be indefinite, so we eat half of what we’ve got that’s perishable now. Then when we can’t take the hunger anymore, we eat half of what remains. And then half of that the next time, and so on, ‘til we get more supplies.” Chris explains in a low rumble.

“Perishable?”

“The jerky’s not gonna go off any time soon,” Jim jumps in, “so we don’t start splitting that until the bread is gone. Plus, we should only open one can and keep the hole covered the best we manage. The other we leave until all the food’s gone.”

“And if we run out before we get given more?”

“Then we starve until we do get more, and then we switch to quarters instead of halves.”

“What if we don’t get more?”

“Generally, you avoid thinking about that,” Jim finishes wryly, before picking the loaf up and carefully beginning to break it up.

By mutual agreement, they keep Phil in the centre of their little huddle, the man still less than recovered from his encounter with the Dikironium Cloud Creature.

But even with Bones’ and Phil’s jackets loosely draped over them, and Chris’ and Jim’s spread on the floor beneath them, the increasingly frigid air still bites at them all, and Phil continues to shiver with worsening intensity.

Chris curses his father, Komack, anyone else who may have meddled with them enough to have caused this, and then fate herself.

And then he curls even tighter around his best friend and silently pleads for at least one good woollen
“Well what do we have here boys?”

Chris instantly recognises his father’s distinctive drawl and tenses.

“A mighty fine pile of Starfleet’s supposed best and brightest. They look pretty pathetic to me. Get them up.”

Having long gone stiff with the cold and hunger -even with Leo forcing them all to stretch out every hour on the dot- Chris’ feeble attempts to resist being dragged to his feet don’t get him very far.

“Quit it Pike,” the man gripping his underarms growls when he jerks again, digging his fingers painfully hard into his muscles. Chris realises from his tone and pitch that he must be the individual who was previously disguised as Admiral Yendu.

“You’ve gone bald,” Chris mutters hoarsely with as much of a smirk as he can manage, having decided to deliberately forget **Point 66** already. “You seem to have lost your whiskers Mr Kitty.”

He gets a knee in the stomach for his words, and he almost doubles over again, coughing painfully. Behind him, Phil clearly mumbles the word “idiot” from where he’s hanging limply between two underlings, but it’s tinged with just enough fondness to make Chris smile anyway.

“Got your whore mama’s smart mouth I see boy,” Carlton Pritch-Howard chuckles nastily, when they’ve finished being hauled out into the below-zero air. “Well I’ll soon knock that habit out of you.”

“Lovely to see you too Father,” Chris drawls before Phil can spit out the defensive retort obviously on the tip of his tongue.

“You ain’t no son of mine Pike,” Carlton spits at his feet, rage flickering over his face. “You lost your chance to reclaim that positon when I found out that you went and falsely claimed this Spacer bastard as your own flesh and blood.”

He punctuates the statement by driving the butt of one of his goon’s rifles into Jim’s groin. Chris surges forward, -aided by his own sudden rage- shrugging out his surprised captor’s grip, and catches Jim with an arm about his chest before his kid’s knees can hit the frosted-over deck.

“Aww would you look at that; daddy’s gone all mother bear,” Carlton smirks coldly, tucking one of his thick gloves back into the sleeve of his bulky Artic jacket. “How about we treat them to a family bonding activity hey boys?”

He gets a round of muffled snickering as his reply, and Chris feels a chill not caused by the winter air settle into his bones.

“Fancy doing some fishing Pike?” Carlton breathes right into his ear. Chris refuses to look up at him, and grips Jim closer to his chest.

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68. **If you think It can’t get much worse, it damn well will just to spite you**

He’s so cold he’s almost stopped shivering.

He’s tied chest to chest with Jim and they’re stood exposed on the very edge of the stern, the wind
whipping painfully at their insubstantial clothes. A small block of ice drifts passed them on the ocean’s surface.

The rope around his ankles chaffs and rubs.

Jim takes a deep breath and shoves his face into Chris’ neck.

And then Carlton shoves them hard off the back of the boat.
They’re only in the water for mere seconds.

But it’s enough.

In barely more time than it takes to inhale, the rope about their ankles goes taunt and they’re winched back out into the freezing air. Rigid with shock, Chris can do little more than weakly try to gasp in air, near-frozen sea brine coating his mouth unpleasantly.

He can vaguely hear shouting nearby, but it’s almost drowned out by the roaring in his ears, the panic racing through his system.

Shear, raw panic.

This is not the first time Chris has been subjected to an icy bath at the hands of Terra Nova.

And oh god, he thought he’d thought worked through the lingering anxiety brought about by his fortnight long stay in that damp LA basement.

But oh god, he apparently has not.

He really has not.

**69. If you ever develop any form of PTSD, be prepared for it to never truly leave you**

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Chris has talked about what happened it that basement precisely once in his life.

He’d been twenty-three, about to graduate the Academy with a Research Masters in Diplomacy and Tactics.

He’d also been utterly and thoroughly pissed.

Elliot had been handing him suspiciously blue shots for several hours, Phil had been too drunk himself to reign either of them in. And then Elliot -in his typical fashion- had said something overly harsh to him and he’d just cracked and spilled his guts to both them.
They mostly just left me alone in the damp and cold he’d told them. Mouldy mattress in the corner, a ragged and scratchy blanket, and a bowl full of questionable looking food every now and then he’d said.

Except that one night… he’d admitted.

Bored guards, a barrel of ice and water, and a ring of bruises around both his arms and across his shoulders from where they’d held him down that didn’t fade for weeks.

It had taken Chris another three years and Phil’s endless patience before he’d finally let go of the last of the anger he’d internalised courtesy of his horrifically first-hand introduction to waterboarding, but that one drunken night of confession had been a turning point in his journey to acceptance.

So he’d gotten over the anger eventually. He thought he’d gotten over the fear too.

But as he hangs there in the air, gasping for breath and vision reeling, he realises that he very much hasn’t

“…Chris! Chris! Stay with me buddy! Chri-!”

“-not breathing! He needs-!”

“…oing into cardiac arr-!”

He swims back to consciousness slowly, his mind hazy. Distantly, he’s aware his thought processes are sluggish and that there’s a distorted rhythmic tone sounding somewhere above him.

And that he aches.

70. Always remember that sometimes, pain means you’re still alive

It’s a bone deep, throbbing ache suffusing his whole body. Worse in his chest where he gradually becomes sure that he can feel tightly wrapped bruised and or cracked ribs. Worse in the sharp point centred on the back of his right hand where an old-fashioned IV line is probably stuck in.
Unsure of his surroundings, his situation, and himself, Chris tries to shift, realising that he must be lying down. His IV-free arm only moves about two inches to the left before it catches, refusing to move further.

There are restraints around his wrists. And his ankles, waist and chest too. Thick, wide restraints, probably strips of strong coarse material he decides, tugging against them experimentally. He gives up when the movement intensifies the pain pulsing in his limbs and torso.

Instead, he stifles the groan that wants to escape his throat and slowly forces his eyes open, desperate to discover where he could possibly be.

The ceiling -he muses when his vision finally clears- is a very unpleasant blotchy grey colour. It may have been white once upon a time, but it might as well be bare concrete now. Probably would look better if it was. Thankful that his neck hasn’t also been strapped down, he winces through the discomfort of raising his head and tries to glance around the rest of the room.

The first thing that registers is that the small room has walls an even worse colour than that of the ceiling, and that the door facing the end of the bed he seems to be lying on must be at least six inches thick and made of solid steel.

The second thing that registers is that he’s not alone.

A second bed is shoved in the cramped space between the one Chris is on, and the wall to his left. Jim is laid out on it, only his blond mop of hair and a sliver of too pale skin visible from beneath the mound of blankets piled on top of him. On the floor between them and handcuffed to the rusty frame of Jim’s bed, Phil is curled up atop another blanket, his breathing the regular slow pattern of sleep despite the tense furrow of his brow.

Chris drops his head back onto the bare mattress beneath him and glances to his other side, hoping futilely that Leo will also be in the room with them.

The only thing that greets him is another wall. He sighs in frustration and tries in vain to push down another sudden spike of anxiety. With his mind reeling and little else to occupy him, he goes back to staring hopelessly at the ceiling and desperately tries to not think about water and ice and cold and water and Jim.

Eventually not even the mental torment can keep him awake any longer and his eyes slide shut and sleep drags him back under.

Above him, the heart monitor continues its repetitive cycle.

“Well well well, what do we have here.”

Chris’ eyes reopen with a snap and he finds his Father leaning over him with a leer.

“Aw, look at it! It responds to my voice!” Carlton continues, mouth widening into an oily grin. “I wonder if it talks too!?”

Chris has a moment of strong indecision before he turns to look across at Jim, who had jerked awake at the same moment as Chris and was now watching Carlton’s back with a flat stare.

“Hey kid, can you hear that?” Chris asks hoarsely with exaggerated casualness, throwing caution and Point 66 to the wind again. “I swear there’s a weird buzzing noise coming from somewhere.
Almost sounds like someone talking, except for the obvious complete lack of sentient intelligence.”

“Funny,” Carlton sneers, “You’re a real comedian Pike.”

“There it is again!” Chris mock exclaims. Jim’s lips twitch upwards, and between them, Phil sits upright and rolls his eyes.

“One more sarcastic word out of you Pike, and I’ll put my belt across your spacer bastard’s back,” Carlton suddenly threatens, his eyes going cold and hard. “Yeah, that’s right Captain. I saw the marks and the brand. Your little pet Doctors insisted on not letting either of you die, so we stripped you both of your wet clothing to get you warmed up. And we saw everything.”

Chris swallows hard and clamps his jaw shut, cold fear washing through his veins.

“Who would have thought it? Wee little James Kirk, son of a false hero left to starve and die and suffer! Just the same as all those poor humans lied to by the Federation on a daily basis.”

Chris catches Jim’s eyes and tries to project as much reassurance as he can manage. On the surface Jim looks surprisingly calm and uncaring about Carlton’s harsh words, but Chris can see the unease and distress flitting across his face. In a silent show of support, Phil surreptitiously scoots sideways until his arms are stretched out, and drops his head against the side of the bed by Jim’s chin.

Then the unnatural playfulness reappears in Carlton’s demeanour and the man claps his hands together once in his enthusiasm, pulling Chris’ attention back towards him.

“Well then, now we’ve all agreed to play nicely, I’ve got a little job for the three of you. Don’t worry boys, it’s nothing to get worried about. Just a little bit of acting for you to try your hand at.”

He pauses, and cocks his head, a dramatically contemplative look crossing his features.

“You might not like my makeup and costume department though. They tend to prefer handing out real bruises rather than painting them on.”

Chris forces himself not to wince in the face of Carlton’s vindictive laughter.

Hanging by his wrists with one shoulder dislocated and one side of his face soaked in his own blood, Chris concludes that he does indeed, not like the costume and makeup department overly much.

Voices and jeering fill the air, the language as coarse and crude as that of the sailors of old. Chris staggers between the individuals hauling him across whatever echoing chamber they’ve been dragged into, desperately trying to keep his feet in order to avoid placing even more strain on his abused shoulder.

The coarse and musty material of the sack tied over his head gets pulled into his mouth with every one of his desperately sucked in breaths, and his cheek and brow stick grimly to the tacky semi-dried blood now staining it. Behind him, he hears Phil’s muffled groan of agony as his shattered femur is no doubt knocked into once more.

Somewhere ahead of him, Jim too is being dragged limply across the floor, his marked and scarred back and torso on view to every one of the Terra Primians, having been forced to go as shirtless as the rest of them.

Suddenly the pressure being exerted under his arms changes, and he’s being dragged upwards
instead of forward. He tries to move with motion, but before he can fully adapt, he’s twisted round and shoved backwards.

He lands on a hard wooden chair, and hands are bound roughly behind his back. A second coil of rope is then unceremoniously forced around his neck, and Chris swallows back another bolt of panic. But when all that happens when the rope tightens is that he’s forced to sit up straight from his rib-protecting hunch in order to relieve the pressure on his larynx, he’s relieved to realise he’s probably not about to be hanged after all.

The cheering around them loudens to a deafening roar.

“AND SO YOU SEE THE FEDERATION’S FINEST BROUGHT DOWN LOW, JUST AS THE FEDERATION BRINGS OUR PLANET DOWN LOW!”

His father’s voice booms unnaturally with electronic amplification, and the cheering continues to swell.

“THE PEOPLE OF OUR SACRED PLANET HAVE BLED ENOUGH FOR THEIR UNWORTHY CAUSE! NOW IT IS THEIR TURN TO BLEED! NOW IS THE TIME FOR THE OPPRESSED TO TURN AGAINST THE OPPRESSORS!”

The bag is suddenly ripped from his head, a clump of his hair being torn painfully along with it. He wincses in the suddenly blindingly bright light, his ears ringing as the movement jolts his probable concussion. He coughs unwillingly, and his now-broken ribs scream their protest.

He only just catches the sound of Phil’s agonised moan over the cacophony of other noise, and he grits his teeth in increasing rage.

“WE WILL STAND BY YOU PEOPLE OF TERRA, WHERE THESE MEN HAVE NOT. UNLIKE THESE FALSE ICONS, WE SHALL ALWAYS STAND WITH OUR PLANET’S BEST INTERESTS AT HEART!”

Chris hysterically wonders if Carlton realises the irony in insisting on referring to Earth as Terra, the name only xeno-species predominately use.

“SO KNOW THIS, FEDERATION. WE WILL STAND IDLY BY NO LONGER! YOU HAVE FAILED TO HEED OUR DEMANDS, AND NOW IT IS TIME FOR YOU TO PAY THE PRICE!”

The bright blinking red light on the professional Holocam set before him burns into his retinas as he distantly registers that it’s Bones slumping over unconscious against his side, fever hot and shivering.

“Semper Prima Terra!” The crowd roars. “Semper Prima Terra!”

71. Fanatics are utterly, utterly insane.

When the bag comes off Chris’ head once again, he realises they’re back in their small grey cell.

The beds and the few pieces of medical equipment are gone.

Leo is still out cold and Chris watches fuzzily as he’s dropped carelessly onto an unwashed blanket by the far wall. Phil near-sobs when he too is deposited without care for his injuries, but Chris sees him bite his lip and then drag himself across the floor to check on his protégé anyway.
Jim is somehow still on his feet when the door clangs shut behind them, but he sways and almost collapses as soon as the hydrologic bolts finish locking them in. Chris desperately wants to surge forward and catch his boy as he staggers helplessly to his knees and slowly starts to tip forward, but he’s in no shape to do more than weakly crawl in Jim’s general direction.

By the time Chris makes it over to him, Jim is lying on his side staring unseeing into the distance, his lips parted and his pupils the size of saucers. Forcing himself to ignore the pain, he reaches out and carefully pulls Jim into his arms.

“Jimmy,” he breathes into his son’s ear, “It’s okay Jim, we’re gonna be okay.”

He wishes he could believe his own desperate words.

Jim remains in drugged catatonia in his arms.

Phil passes out wrapped around Leo, muttering about electrical burns and induced cardiomyopathy.

Chris slowly grows numb to the pain and dozes off himself, his face pressed into the too-long golden waves of Jim’s hair.

Food arrives. Tasteless grey gruel with suspiciously hard lumps in it.

Chris chokes it down anyway and murmurs quietly to Jim until he too swallows several grimacing mouthfuls of the slop.

72. In the worst of situations, eat the food your given even if it physically pains you to do so

The empty bowls are kicked back towards the door, and Chris and Phil nod at each other from opposite sides of the room before pulling their respective charges back into their arms and wrapping thread-bare blankets back around them.

The large cut on Chris’ forehead begins to redden and become warm to the touch. He knows even before Phil and Leo’s confirmation that it’s become infected.

He carefully avoids contemplating the swelling in his shoulder that only worsens as the hours tick on by.

Jim begins muttering, his eyes flickering rapidly around the room.

The only two phrases Chris can understand are “It’s gonna be okay Kevin” and “I’ll never tell you.”

Chris holds him tighter against his chest, hoping that Point 38 will continue to work with Jim in this state.

“Green slime is bad,” he slurs to Jim, not entirely sure why he feels the need to share that information. He just knows it’s important and that people should be aware of it. “And you should avoid falling asleep in odd places.”

“Chris,” Phil grimaces, voice tight with pain, “I need you to follow your own advice and not fall asleep buddy.”
“Point- Point 4? ” He slurs questioningly. “I gotta follow Point 4? ”

“Your concussion and infected head wound definitely need you to follow Point 4 yes.”

“wha’s a Point 4? ” Jim asks dazedly against Chris’ bare chest.

“Iss a tip,” Chris frowns, “and Iss important.”

“A rescue would be good about now,” Leo groans from beside Phil, his hands spasming again.

“Make that your next point Chris,” Phil hisses wretchedly. “Timely rescues are a gift from God and you should always be humble enough to shamelessly beg for one”

Chris makes an agreeable noise and tries to pull up his mental list. Then he gives up and simply goes with

Point?? Phil, rescues, good. Yes.

The world has become a overly bright landscape of foreign colours, and he thinks he’s the one being held by Jim now.

Then the hand on his brow changes, and a series of hissing sounds by his ear.

And then there’s movement and Phil’s voice and then more movement and bright lights and shouts and a blur of motion, and then Phil again and-

“You’ve spent entirely too much time unconscious in recent months Captain.”

Chris suddenly realises that he’s awake and that he’s staring at the familiar sterile white ceiling tiles of Starfleet Medical. His first thought is one of immediate agreement with Admiral Nogura’s greeting statement.

“Believe me, I wish I could deny that,” Chris rasps.

“Ambushed in Canada, attacked on the Farragut, kidnapped and tortured by terrorists… I think it’s time you let someone else have a go at the heroics and let them get pummelled instead.”

“Oh please stars yes,” Chris agrees fervently with a wry twist of his lips. And then, finally turning his head to look at the senior Admiral: “Where are Phil and my boys?”

“Oh great, you’ve pluralised them,” Nogura deadpans. “Are we going to have to start giving McCoy special treatment too now? Is Kirk alone not enough for you?”

“I’m pretty sure you already do give him special treatment sir,” comes a new voice. Chris recognises it, but he can’t quite place it until-

Until Doctor Matheus Batch steps into his line of sight.

“I’m obligated to deny everything,” Nogura smirks.

“Your boys, as you’ve just coined them,” the Surgeon General continues, turning his attention back to Chris, “are in the three rooms adjacent to this one and are all fine. Boyce is being a menace and keeps trying to get of bed and won’t stop demanding to see all your medical charts. McCoy is
hovering by Kirk’s bedside right now, and the scars on his chest are going to be permanent unfortunately, but he’s upright and being his usual grumpy self. Kirk- honestly I’m slightly worried about his mental state, but the hallucinogenic drugs are now out of his system and the cuts on his upper body have been treated.”

“You’re worried about Jim?” Chris cuts in anxiously, pulling himself to sit more upright.

“He’s a little prone to… zoning out mid-sentence at the minute. And he obviously wasn’t happy about me seeing his bare chest.” Batch pauses, a stricken look flickering onto his face for a few long seconds. “But I can hardly blame him for that. Cristo, the boy survived the worst of T-IV as a child and came out with all his mental faculties intact. The strength he must possess for that feat alone. And now this? I must admit I am in awe.”

Chris shuffles uncomfortably, wanting nothing more than to clamber out of the biobed to go see Jim for himself.

“As for you, Mr Pike,” Batch continues after a small shake of his head, “Shoulder and pulverised ribcage aside, you also had a highly unusual reaction to the bacterial infection in the cut on your head. I strongly advise you to avoid Betazoid painkillers in the future, because as far as I can tell, they’re what caused you to deteriorate so rapidly. What should have been just a mildly uncomfortable throbbing in your brow accelerated into a severe blood infection in less than thirty-six hours. Another twelve and you would have been very dead.”

“Right.” Chris replies weakly.

“I’ve made a note of it on your official medical file, but you should be vigilant yourself in the future. Now if you’ll excuse me, if I have to go drag Doctor McCoy back to his own room for another round of dermal regeneration.”

Chris watches him leave with a tight feeling in his chest that’s not eased at all by Nogura clearing his throat and donning what Chris privately refers to as his serious-in-charge-Admiral face.

“You are aware from previous experience that you will have to go through Starfleet Intelligence’s deprogramming procedure?”

Chris grimaces and nods; he’s not looking forward to that hell, but he’s been expecting that order since the second he woke up in Medical.

“Good. Then I won’t elaborate,” Nogura nods back. “I do however have several other concerns to share with you. Firstly, you’ll be pleased to know that we intercepted your Father’s little terror talk show before it could be broadcast to the general public. Tracing the Holovid back to its uploading point is how we able to track your location and organise an infiltration. As for the Holovid itself, the Division heads and SI have been privy to its contents, but it has otherwise been classified at the highest level.”

Chris sighs deeply in relief; not for himself, but for Jim who must have been terrified of his childhood secrets being exposed to the world at large.

“Now I have already spoken to your boy concerning his identity of JT Wellcott. We have agreed that he needs a formal debriefing, but it has been negotiated that only myself, Archer, Marcus, a single SI representative and an individual of his own choosing shall be present for the meeting. As he was a minor at the time of the genocide, the conversation that occurs will be recorded such that his anonymity is guaranteed. It has also been agreed that he shall be allowed to inform Federation
Citizens of his past at his own discretion, provided he informs one of the senior officers who will present at the debriefing beforehand so that discrete vetting can occur.”

“Sounds reasonable to me, so long as Jim is happy with these decisions,” Chris agrees.

“You can discuss it further with him later Captain. Now though, I need to inform you that the rescue operation we mounted not only resulted in your successful extraction, but also allowed us to apprehend and arrest Carlton Pritch-Howard.”

Chris stops breathing for a second.

“He’s in Starfleet’s lunar high security detention centre, and has been scheduled for a full high Federation trial by jury in three weeks’ time. As he stands accused of high treason and terrorism and the evidence is overwhelming, we can almost guarantee the verdict already.”

“You caught him?” Chris croaks, the relief coursing through his body strong enough to make his hands shake despite the death grip on his bed sheet.

“We caught him Christopher,” Nogura soothes, “And he’s not getting away with any of his crimes this time. I’m afraid you’ll probably be called up as a witness, but we can prepare you for that in advance.”

“Okay,” he replies simply, to shocked to form a more eloquent response.

“And lastly, much to my own personal pleasure, there is absolutely no way you’re getting out of a promotion for this.”

For the second time in as many minutes, Chris stops breathing.

“Oh hell no!” he snarls a second later.

“Oh don’t worry, you’re still getting the Enterprise when she’s ready,” Nogura smirks with a roll of his eyes. “But you’re getting those Pips no matter how much you complain. And so is your Mr Boyce.”

“You can’t do this to me! I don’t want to be a Commodore!” Chris protests weakly, more relieved than he cares to admit concerning his claim on the new flagship.

“I can, and I will Admiral Pike. Now I’m off to inflict a new rank on your partner too, so I’ll see you around Christopher.”

Chris watches Nogura leave in disbelieving silence.

Oh bloody sodding Christ.

Admiral.

74. Unexpectedly skipping ranks can be a terrifying ordeal

Chris is so caught up in his astonishment, it never does occur to him to correct Nogura’s misconception regarding him and Phil.
If you haven't already gathered, this will get steadily more and more AU as we go on. I guess this is the point where that really starts to become obvious...

Canon will eventually crop back up again yes, but there will be certain difference in how it all plays out :)

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Appendix updates now added!

If you live in the UK, I too am praying for the end of this blasted heat wave.

Enjoy!
☞（ peninsula ✿ ☜）

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sitting in the back of his Mom’s new aircar, Phil asleep on his shoulder, Chris finally allows himself to truly relax.

His father is securely locked away and awaiting trial, most of his followers have also been rounded up and arrested, Phil, Leo and Jim are all out of the hospital, and he doesn’t have to even think about the ‘Fleet or his sudden promotion or anything work related at all for at least another week.

All he has to do is laze around, eat his Mom’s cooking and open his Christmas presents in a couple of days.

Chris thinks this sounds like a mighty fine plan and smiles softly out the window as the xeric burnt-red mountains of home flash by.

75. Home truly is where the heart is

Chris has barely set foot out of the aircar into the cool night air before he finds himself pulled into an embrace by his beaming Nan.

“For all that we live in the same state again now boy, you don’t come visit your Gramps or I near often enough,” she scolds him, the broad smile on her face as she steps back belying the severity of her tone.

Chris grins sheepishly back and mutters an apology. His mother smirks and winks at him as she passes with Edward, and Chris silently mouths traitor at her as punishment for her complete lack of offered help.

“I wouldn’t mind so much,” his Nan continues with a harrumph, oblivious to his and his mother’s short exchange, “if it didn’t mean your absence was also keeping my new great-grand child from me and your Gramps. All I’ve gotten is a couple of VidComms from you and a handful of Holos from your mother.”

“Ah well, I brought Jim with me?” Chris tries to appease. Though he knows his Nan isn’t actually too offended as she’s still smiling and chuckling.

“And so you should have done,” she mock-frowns, swatting him affectionally on the shoulder. “I hear he’s too skinny by far. Now wake Phil and the boys up and get inside with you all; your gramps has beef hotpot warming on the stove for you.”
As he told Jonathan Archer several long months ago, the Mojave Ranch is a quite the extensive property. The original house, now known affectionately as the Old Fort, was designed as a standard - if large- three-floors-and-a-basement box, with the third floor technically being an attic conversion. At some point around the turn of the 20th century, one of Chris’ ancestors took it upon themselves to extend the east end of the house out backwards and replace the original building’s upper wooden structure with brick and mortar.

By the time the 21st century rolled around, the east extension had become an entire wing with an independent kitchen, and the single barn and stables inhabiting the grounds had expanded to become a sprawling network of outbuildings and fenced enclosures.

Then, in the somewhat hazy period surrounding World War III, a portion of a second, otherwise unrecorded wing on the west end of the Old Fort had burnt down and another substantial annexe constructed atop its foundations. At more than twice the size of the two earliest sections, the West Hall is the area of the house most often in use, especially when any of Chris’ extended family happen to be in residence.

The smallest and most modern of the ranch’s additions is where his Gramps directs him to after they’ve wiped their stew bowls clean with slices of fresh-baked bread. So with Phil, Jim and Leo in-tow, Chris gathers his bags and heads out of the West Hall, through the South Wing and into the Annexe.

76. Sentimentality can be both a blessing and a curse

“This an entire four bed house!” Jim shouts down the stairs in a disbelieving tone. “I thought you said this was the smallest wing Chris!?"

“I did say that because it is!” Chris calls back, shoving the leftover blueberry pie his Nan had pushed into Phil’s hands earlier into the fridge.

“Oh my god, is this your childhood bedroom?” Jim exclaims suddenly, sounding more muffled. Chris sighs, and wishes again that he’d taken down the old posters at some point in the last three decades. Phil grins evilly at him, and then slides out the kitchen and up the stairs before Chris can stop him.

“Yes it is!” he hears Phil answer jubilantly. “Though unfortunately he took most of his stuff with him when they all moved to-”

The end of Phil sentence is cut off by the bedroom door closing behind them.

“Well,” Chris laments to Leo, who is leaning against the kitchen table with a bemused look, “at least my Mom emptied the wardrobe of all my old baby clothes and donated them to Emily when Jack was born.”

With a bit of persistence, Jim and Bones are convinced to take the old master bedroom with the en-suite, and disappear inside with sleepy goodnights and shoulder pats. Chris then decides he’s feeling nostalgic and toes his old door open, leaving his holdall and case in front of the wardrobe. Chuckling exasperatedly, he stares at the ancient and threadded spiderman sheets that the sturdy wooden single
bed has been freshly made with.

“I think the sheets are pay back for not visiting for two and half years Chrissy,” Phil rumbles good naturedly, leaning in the open doorframe.

“I can’t believe Nan still has these,” he mutters back, running his hand smoothly over the pillow. Phil shrugs, and then ambles over to stand by his shoulder.

“I can.” He says simply. “Terrorist bio-twats notwithstanding, your family is pretty amazing Chris.”

“Pretty sure you more than count as one of the family yourself these days.”

“Well I’m honoured,” Phil replies sincerely. “And exhausted. Have a good night Chrissy.”

He squeezes Chris’s forearm briefly before retreating quietly out of the room.

Chris is sound asleep when he suddenly becomes aware that there are hands on his shoulders. Years of Starfleet ingrained instinct spring into action, and he sits bolt upright, his own hands raising defensively.

His forehead smacks into something hard, and there’s a pained groan from the air before him.

“Phil?” he asks croakily, recognising the tone of the protest.

“’m sorry, ’m sorry,” Phil stutters, rubbing his chin with a wince, “I just- I just needed to be sure that you’re still breathing.”

Phil doesn’t often have nightmares, but when he does, they usually play out similarly to the way this one is obviously doing; with him worried to the point of panic that someone needs immediate medical attention. This is the third time in the last two weeks he’s come running to check on Chris in the middle of the night.

“Hey, hey,” Chris soothes, grasping Phil’s shaking hands, “I’m okay, I’m breathing, I’m stable.” Slowly, he tugs Phil forward, until he can place the doctor’s palm on the left side of his chest. He takes a couple of deep breaths, and Phil visibly begins to relax as Chris’ chest expands and contracts under both their hands.

“Sorry. Thanks.” He pauses. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine Phil,” Chris smiles, swinging his feet out from under the thin duvet.

“I should go back to bed,” Phil mutters, now clearly embarrassed.

“Maybe.” Chris shrugs, still holding his hand over Phil’s. “Or you could stay here. I don’t mind.”

Phil stares silently at their feet, unmoving.

“If you wake unexpectedly again, I’ll be right there for you to check on,” Chris shrugs, trying to sound nonchalant.

“I really should just.” Phil starts, only to cut himself off with a shrug and go back to silent staring.

Chris makes Phil’s mind up for him, and slides back into the bed without releasing Phil’s hands, effectively pulling Phil down with him.
Oh stars, Chris thinks despairingly as he quietly watches Phil’s face smooth out into sleep, maybe every one’s misconceptions about Phil and I aren’t so wrong after all.

77. In most cases, you can only remain oblivious for so long

And the longer you go on being such, the harder the adjustment when you do come to a realisation.

And the more stubborn your denial.

“Chris honey,” his mother calls from over by the West Hall’s kitchen stove, “would you come check this recipe for me please? I’m not sure if I need to alter it for Jim or not.”

Chris looks up from the strip of horse tack he’s trying to repair with his Gramps’ old hand tools, and then pushes back from the table and saunters over to peer at the PADD on the countertop by his Mom’s elbow.

“No, it’s fine,” he replies distractedly, fingers scrolling the page back to the top, “completely safe. But Phil can’t stand kidney meat. Says it’s slimly and gross.”

“I know love,” Anna chuckles, dropping a kiss against the side of his brow. “I’ve already started making him a separate pie”

“You already know that Phil won’t eat kidney?” Chris asks curiously.

“I know that man’s eating habits as well as your own sweetheart,” she tells him with a pointed look, “Now take that tack back out to the old coach house and remind Jack, Edward, and your Gramps that dinner will be ready in an hour and a half, so they best not wander off too far into the wilderness.”

Chris ignores the look, and sweeps back towards the table and then out the side door.

78. Always don the appropriate headwear

“See, I told you the hat was dumb,” Phil drawls to Jim as Chris steps on the back patio behind the ranch.

After leaving his Mom’s message with Andrew and Jack out in the stables, Chris had tracked back through the main house in search of his best friend and two miscreant cadets. Predictably, he’d found all three of them dozing in the shade, each with a cool bottle of beer in hand.

“The hat is not dumb,” Chris grumps, leaning down to pull a beer of his own out the plumbed-in ice cooler beneath the decking stairs.

“I concur, the hat ain’t dumb,” Leo agrees amiably, swigging from his Classic Bud. “Is that an original Stetson?” he asks.

“Eh, not quite,” Chris shrugs, kicking out another deck chair and flopping into it with a relieved groan. With his free hand, he pulls his shirt tails out of his belt and then swiftly undoes all his front buttons. “It is vintage, but it’s a 1900s make, rather than one of the old 1860s-70s types.”

Bones whistles appreciatively.

“Worth a pretty penny then,” he drawls.
“If I were inclined to sell it, I’d get a fair amount of credit for it yeah.”

“Cowboys and their toys,” Phil rolls his eyes, glancing at Jim again. “Just be glad he’s not wearing the matching boots Jimbo.”

“We’re on a real life working livestock ranch, I’d be disappointed if there weren’t cowboys,” Jim replies with a chuckle.

Phil rolls his head over and nudges his sunglasses up to glare at Chris.

“If you turn Jimbo into a cowboy too, I will give you some unpleasant and entirely unnecessary vaccine boosters at your next physical.”

“Nah you won’t,” Chris smirks, pulling his hat down over his eyes and lying back, “you love me too much.”

In the winter months of December and January, the average temperatures of the Mojave Desert normally range between three and eighteen degrees centigrade. At the minute though, the wide valley the ranch inhabits is experiencing an unseasonably warm spell, meaning that Chris might get to have his first Christmas day barbeque since 2243.

Like the previous year, Jim barges into his room far too early in the morning demanding that he get up immediately. And like the previous year, he also threatens to fetch the twins and unleash them on him if he doesn’t accede to his demands instantly.

Unlike the previous year, Emily doesn’t manage to tease him much over his usual morning grumpiness, because now as well as his Mom, his Nan is also armed with a tea-towel and hovering over him protectively.

Jim stares at the opened present in his hand silently for several long seconds.

Then he bursts out laughing.

“You wrapped him half a carrot?” Chris’ Uncle Tony asks incredulously.

“I presume there’s an in-joke we’re unaware of,” Summer, Tony’s wife, replies dryly.

“Are you going to explain to anyone?” Phil whispers in Chris’ ear.

Chris shakes his head with a grin.

Chris tries to help with the barbeque that afternoon, but he’s chased off by his mother and Aunt wielding pairs of hot greasy pairs of tongs while his grandparents sit and snicker at him.

With a deliberately over dramatic scowl, he stomps off to the cliff decking and throws himself with a huff onto the same deck chair Phil is currently occupying.

Phil glances down at where he’s now sprawled on the doctor’s chest with a raised eyebrow, but doesn’t comment and simply returns to reading the new paperback that Chris had gifted him with.

79. Never take your eye off small children for even a second
“Uncle Chwis!” Daniel near-screams, voice thick with pain. Chris turns around frantically at the wail of his name and finds Daniel running towards him, tears streaming freely down his face and blood dripping from the hand clutched to his chest.

Letting go of the old well bucket, Chris drops to his knees quickly and pulls Daniel into his chest, carefully tugging on the four-year-old’s arm so that he can inspect the cut and the broken spine protruding from it.

“Uncle Chwis, the bad plant got me!” the small boy sobs, rubbing his face against Chris’ shirt.

“One of the spiky cactuses?” he asks gently, hooking his free arm around Daniel’s back to lift him up. Daniel nods jerkily and a fresh wave of sobbing prompts Chris to rest his cheek against the top of his head.

“It’s alright little man. Let’s go find Mummy and Uncle Phil and we’ll fix you up okay?”

“Hurts!” Daniel bawls as Chris climbs carefully back to his feet, hauling Daniel up with him.

Having become entirely too closely acquainted to the barrel cactuses in the backyard during his own childhood, Chris feels nothing but sympathy for his young nephew.

“He’ll be fine,” Phil reassures Emily as they watch Andrew carry the now dopey boy off to his bed. “Just don’t let him scratch at the regen work too much, and remember to let Leo or I give him a second antibiotic hypo tomorrow morning and you’ll have nothing to worry about.”

“Thanks Phil,” Emily sighs wearily. Chris shuffles until he can hook his arm over his sister’s shoulders.

“Well it was an eventful end to Christmas day if nothing else,” Phil chuckles back ruefully. “At least he’ll have learnt to not go climbing in the flower beds now I guess.”

Chris watches Phil retreat to his bedroom from the doorway of his own room.

He looks over his shoulder at his still rumpled bed.

He looks back at Phil’s still slightly ajar door.

He hesitates a moment longer before growling “fuck it” under his breath, swiping up his pyjama pants, and padding across the landing.

80. Sometimes you’ve just got to suck up your courage and take a leap of faith

“So when are you going to teach me to ride a horse Cappy?”

Chris slowly lowers his mug of coffee back down to the surface of the scarred kitchen table and squints up at Jim, who is looming over him and still wearing the western cavalry hat that had been his actual Christmas present from Chris.

“You want to go out riding?” he asks, still to under-caffeinated to function entirely up to speed.

“Yes, but I want you to show me how to not get thrown off first.”

“Right,” Chris says dazedly, glancing out the window at the sun scorched valley. “Go ask my
Gramps for a bottle of special Beckett-Blonde sunscreen. Or we’ll both burn to a crisp.”

“And then we can go riding?”

“And then we can go to the coach house and learn all about horse tack and rider equipment.”

“And then riding?”

“Sunscreen first Jimmy.”

Jim’s grin becomes blinding for a second before he darts off down the hallway.

While Edward and one of the stable hands are showing Jim how to saddle a quiet piebald mare by the name of Honey, Chris shucks his shirt in deference to the heat, grabs a bucket of apples and saunters down to the end stall.

“Hey Tango,” he croons, leaning happily over the gate.

Tango raises his head slightly and snorts.

“Long time no see buddy! Do you want a treat?”

Chris rattles the bucket, so the fruit within bounce against one another. At the sound, Tango’s head comes all the way up, and he strides gracefully over to Chris so that he can butt his nose against his palm.

After wiping his now-damp palm unconcernedly on the top of his denim jeans, Chris grasps the topmost apple and slowly brings it level with the top of the gate. Tango eyes it eagerly for less than a second, before he’s inching forward and crunching into it.

“You’re gonna get bitten one day doing that,” Phil suddenly rumbles amusedly from behind.

Chris turns casually and leans back on the gate, Tango snuffling over his shoulder. He rubs Tango’s nose affectionately and then holds the apple up for him again.

“Nah, this fine fella would never be so ill mannered, would you boy?”

“Well don’t come crying to me when he does Chrissy. You want a hand saddling him up?”

“Sure,” Chris grins amiably, hooking his thumb into one of his belt loops and returning Phil’s fond look, “he’d love a second pair of hands to make a fuss of him. Besides **Point 81** states that **Furry friends are friends for life.**”

“Oh hell,” Phil mutters with an eyeroll, “he’s back up to 81 already.”

“RACE YOU TO THE CREST OLD MAN!” Jim yells as he goes galloping past.

Chris laughs freely, and barely needs to flick the reins to get Tango to surge after his miscreant son and his mount.

Chris senses Phil rolling over on the other side of the bed.

“I warned you what would happen,” Phil grumbles.
“What?” Chris replies sleepily, confused.

“If you converted Jim into a Cowboy too. I warned you.”

“’m not afraid of you, you’re too soft,” he rumbles back quietly with a smirk

“Do you want to bet on that Curly?” Phil chuckles, using Chris’ old Plebe nickname.

“Yupp. Odds are well in my favour after all.”

And before Phil can reply again, he rolls over himself, throws his arm over Phil’s chest, and lets himself slide all the way into sleep.

Chapter End Notes

I feel it necessary at this point to a) remind everyone Chris is Asexual, and b) clarify that he is indifferent bordering on repulsed.

He is not, however, Aromantic...

And I really needn't state just how bloody oblivious he is lol

And now that's out of the way with, take a look at Tango!
Oh yeah, and Chris too :)
Arriving back at the Academy turns out to be both anticlimactic and eventful.

82. Nothing will ever run as smoothly as you’d like

“Ok so you know how I was supposed to be assigned a new apartment on account of the new pips?” Phil grumbles from where he’s lying on Chris’ couch, arm over his face.

“Mm hmm,” Chris mumbles back, mouth full of cheese and onion crisps.

“Well they managed to majorly screw up the transfer. Admiral Crosby was very apologetic, but until the flat I’m supposed to be getting actually becomes vacant in three days, I’ve got nowhere to live.”

“So you thought you’d come crash with me.” Chris surmises, entirely unsurprised by Phil’s presumption that he’d be okay with that.

It’s a completely correct presumption after all.

“Yup. I mean, I could take Archer up on his offer to use his spare bedroom. And Batch and Barnett also offered me beds. Or Crosby said there’s a handful of empty Cadet and Crewmen dorms. But—”

“But you’d rather stay here,” Chris finishes, nodding. “Come on, let’s shove your stuff in my room then.”

“Oh. Right. I thought you’d rather I…” Phil trails off as he climbs to his feet, glancing meaningfully at the couch.

“What.” Chris deadpans. “You really think I’d make you sleep out here after the last couple of weeks?"

“I just… didn’t want to presume.”

Phil looks awkward and uneasy, which are not expressions Chris is used to seeing on the Doctor’s face. So Chris rolls his eyes at him.

“You’re an idiot,” he drawls fondly, before picking one of Phil’s bags up and trudging over to his door.

Having not been back to the flat between leaving the hospital and leaving for the Mojave, the kitchen cupboards are very, very bare. There’s a bag of dried pasta, a couple of tins of tomatoes, a stale box of Jim’s cereal and a suspicious smelling jar of raspberry jam.

And pretty much nothing else.
“Jim! Phil! I’m going to the store!” Chris calls.

Within five seconds, Jim is tumbling into the kitchen, babbling a list of things he wants at a mile a minute. Chris, used to such behaviour from the young man, simply waits until he finally pauses for breath and then points at the list attached to the wall behind the coffee maker.

“Can’t you just replicate something for dinner?” Phil asks when he too appears in the doorway.

“It doesn’t taste the same,” Chris and Jim both whine at the same time. They glance at each other and smirk.

“Then why did you spend so much time gushing about the superiority of your replicator last year!? I had to listen to you proclaiming its excellence for weeks!”

“It’s the principle of the matter,” Jim explains with some vague handwaving gestures. “You should never have to use a replicator, but you should have a fantastic one just in case you do.”

“I’ve watched the both of you eat replicated food in the flat dozens of times!”

Chris meets Phil’s gaze unblinkingly.

“Instances of laziness are exceptions,” he says pointedly.

“Why is now not an exception?”

“Because I’m not feeling quite that lazy yet.”

Phil sighs dramatically.

“Alright Cappy, just let me get my jacket.”

Chris blinks.

“What? Are you coming with me now?”

Jim is looking sheepish.

Chris eyes him suspiciously.

Jim notices him eying him suspiciously and proceeds to look even more sheepish.

“What did you do?” Chris asks as he buckles his boots up.

“I haven’t done anything,” Jim replies far too innocently.

“What are you about to do then?”

Jim’s butter-wouldn’t-melt look morphs into forced outrage.

“Why would I be about to do something?”

Chris rolls his eyes and stands back up. Reaching behind him, he tugs his heavier winter coat off of its hook and shrugs his shoulders into it, and Phil finally emerges from the master bedroom with his own jacket thrown over his arm just in time to hear Jim’s last question.
“Jimbo, you’re always about to do something you shouldn’t. Chris might not notice most of the time, but I do.”

“What?” Chris starts.

“Anyway…” Jim announces exceptionally loudly over him. “You two should go have fun and make an outing of it yeah? Maybe stop for coffee, a muffin… take your time, relax…”

Like Chris earlier, Phil narrows his eyes at Jim.

“You invited Bones over didn’t you? And told him that we’re going out,” he states more than asks.

“I have absolutely no idea why you would think that.” Jim says, blank faced. “See you later yeah?”

Phil watches him silently for several long seconds, and Chris wonders again what the big deal is; Leo practically lived with them even before the whole Terra Prime ordeal. He can’t see why that would change now.

When several more seconds tick by agonisingly slowly, Chris decides he’s bored of the standoff and pushes the doctor out of the front door despite Phil’s complaints.

Half way across campus, Chris suddenly stops.

“Oh. Oh!” he exclaims. “Jim wanted us gone because Leo is coming over. And they want to…” he trails off and gestures awkwardly with his hands, his face screwing up to show his displeasure.

Phil slowly closes his eyes and take a deep breath.

“Sometimes Chrissy, I worry about you.”

“You and me both buddy,” he chuckles back weakly, desperately trying to purge the conjured images from his brain.

**Point 77** doesn’t always apply to situations about yourself!

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84. Be wary of stalkers

There’s a cadet watching them quietly from the end of the aisle.

“He’s still staring,” Chris mutters to Phil. He reaches forward and drops two packs of rice noodles into the cart.

“Will you just ignore him,” Phil groans, holding up three different bottles of soy sauce. Chris nods at the variety in his left hand, and that too goes in the cart.

“But it’s creepy! Put the Risan hapteek back, Jim can’t have it.”

“You and I can eat hapteek though. Just designate a cupboard for Jim-fatal foods and tell him to keep out.”

“That’s not really fair on him.”

“I tell you what’s not fair; not being allowed to buy hapteek just because your grown-ass adult flatmate is a walking immune system disaster.” He pauses. “Okay you’re right, that guy is creepy.”
“Shall I Captain scowl him?”

“You can go one better than that now and Admiral scowl him.”

“I think that’s two better actually. Do you want Earth sweetcorn or the purple Vulcan stuff?”

“Earth, but not tinned. Wait until we get to the fresh aisles.”

“Good idea. Goddammit, I’m gonna shout at that kid any second now Phil.”

“On a count of three, we’re both going to swivel and stare at him until he gets the message.”

“On three or after three?”

Phil just looks at him.

“On three you dork. When have we ever gone after three?”

“Fine,” Chris grunts back. “Just pass me that jar of pickled onions first yeah?”

“Silverskin right? To match your fine self?”

“Shut up you ass.”

“How many packets of candy and biscuits am I allowed to buy Chrissy?”

“I live with Jim Kirk.”

“So a lot then?”

“More than you think we’ll need, and then a few packets more.”

“Um sirs,” the young lady at the checkout mumbles nervously. “I don’t mean to alarm you, but there’s a guy in cadet reds behind you taking HoloPics of you.”

Phil stiffens minutely beside him, but neither of them turn.

“Do you want to go confront him or shall I?” the doctor says lowly.

“Watch my back.”

“Always.”

“Cadet!” Chris barks in his harshest command voice, **Point 13** at the forefront of his thoughts. Distantly, he’s amused that half the customers in the store suddenly snap to attention.

The individual the remark was aimed for however, freezes like a deer caught in the headlights but doesn’t straighten up smartly.

“Hand over the HoloCam!” Chris continues, still allowing the edge of his voice to harden with a hint of growl.

“Sir!” the young man finally squeaks. “I’m sorry Captain Pike!”
But despite the terror written across his face, he makes no move to pass the ‘Cam into Chris’ outstretched hand.

“That’s Admiral Pike now Cadet! Now give me the HoloCam!”

“I’m working with the Campus Daily Voice sir!” he stammers, “It’s a joint project with the LGBT Society! We’re doing a series of special edition articles on the community within the ‘Fleet and we thought you and your partner, Doctor Boyce, would-”

“I don’t care what you thought young man,” Chris cuts angrily across his babbling, “if you wanted photos of us for your news journals, then you should have sent a formal request to my Yeoman, not stalked us around the Campus Store like a criminal reprobate! Now hand over the device, get out of the store, and I will see you at 0900 sharp in three days’ time to discuss the consequences of your actions!”

“But-!”

“I will suspend you Cadet!”

The young man turns as pale as a ghost and shakily puts the ‘Cam into Chris’ hand. Then he gulps, and darts around him and practically runs to the doors. Watching him leave with a bolt of satisfaction, Chris grins and slowly makes his way back to the till.


“What?” Chris asks puzzledly.

“Erm. Sudden Epiphany. Can we go? Just let me pay and then I need- We need. Talking. That has to happen. There, credit chip. Come on!”

Chris finds himself dragged out of the store almost as fast as the Cadet that just left ran, desperately clinging to his share of the bags of shopping.

Phil doesn’t stop until they’re right on the edge of campus, in the small shaded copse where they used to spend lazy summer afternoons during their Academy years. Dropping his bags onto the lone picnic bench, Phil wrings his hands and starts to pace in an agitated manner.

“Phil, what’s going on?” Chris asks carefully, placing the rest of the bags down and zipping up his jacket against the cool evening air.

“I thought- down in the Mojave, I thought- When you… I thought you’d finally- But no, you’re still just- just an oblivious idiot! And then just now, you didn’t say anything to contradict that guy, and I just can’t do this anymore!”

Chris knows he’s frowning hard at the floor, but the only other option his brain is giving him is wide-eyed panic.

85. Practice neutral facial expressions because you will need them.

“What exactly are you saying Phil?” he asks carefully, cautiously.

Phil throws his hands in the air in one of the most melodramatic movements Chris has ever seen him do.
“You! You just don’t ever get it do you! It’s right there, under your nose and you just- never notice when people-!”

“Hey!” Chris cuts him off indignantly. “I’m plenty good at reading people thank you! My entire career is founded around that ability!”

“Except you’re not when it comes to someone being interested in you! You’re totally blind! People could walk around with neon pink signs saying “I like you Chris Pike” flashing at you over the heads, and you still wouldn’t notice!”

“I can’t help that! It’s just the way I’m wired because-!”

“I know! I Know God Fucking Dammit Man” Phil bellows.

Chris can’t help it, he flinches away.

Then Phil’s face drops, and guilt flickers across his eyes in waves.

“I’m sorry Chris,” he continues much more quietly and calmly. “I know you can’t help it. And there’s nothing wrong with that. It’s fine. More than fine. Actually Chris honey, your complete and utter lack of sexual interest suits me down to the ground because I’m still sexually attracted to women and femininity. But—”

“But what?” Chris asks nervously, feeling fainter by the second, ninety percent sure he knows where this is headed.

“But that does not change the fact that I am absolutely dreading moving into this new apartment of mine. Because then I won’t get to hold you at night, and watch you sulk into your coffee every morning, and ruffle your ridiculously fluffy hair when you get out of the shower every day, and get to join in with the way you and Jim just fit together in that ridiculously brightly painted apartment of yours and—”

Chris chokes out a half laugh, half sob and clenches his fists to stop his hands from shaking.

“-and stars help me, you ridiculous, oblivious, kind, caring, amazing man, I’m goddamn head over heels in dizzying love with you.”

Chris realises he is breathing into the top of Phil’s shoulder, Phil’s arms tight around him to keep him upright because his own knees don’t want to hold his weight.

“Oh thank fuck,” Chris giggles hysterically, “I had no idea how to tell you that I love you first.”

Cool evening sunlight dapples through the branches above them.

Somewhere to their left, a bird whistles shrilly, and an overly brave squirrel chitters and then rustles at their shopping bags.

“I feel like I’ve tripped into a sodding Disney movie,” Chris grumps, still leaning on Phil’s shoulder. There’s a thumb rubbing small circles on the nape of his neck and he doesn’t want it to stop.

“Does that mean I get to kiss the princess?”

“You’ll have to find one first,” Chris snickers. “Jokes aside, you know I hate being kissed. It’s wet and slimy and just gross and really boring, despite what Elliot tried to tell me.”
“And that is one of the many, many reasons I broke Elliot’s nose.”

“Wait? That was you!? But you said-!”

Phil steps back a little without dropping his arms, allowing them to meet each other’s eyes.

“Sweetie, everyone has boundaries. And maybe you have more than a lot of other people, but they’re there for a reason and they 100% deserve respect. And Elliot ran roughshod over every one of them. So yes, I hit him. Honestly, the mess you were after that last night, I should have done more than just hit him. But my point is, I will never push you to do anything you’re uncomfortable with cheesecake.”

“You’re going to use weird pet names at every opportunity now aren’t you,” Chris mock-groans, avoiding the more serious topic.

“Damn right I will blossom!”

“I suppose I love you anyway you asshat,” he grumbles with a smile.

86. Don’t be afraid to follow your heart.
Jim sighs in a disappointed manner as soon as they walk back into the apartment.

“I owe Number One credit don’t I?” he says dryly, hands on his hips. “Thanks guys. You couldn’t have waited another couple of months?”

“You did not start a pool.” Phil groans. “Please tell me you didn’t start a betting pool.”

87. In the ‘Fleet, there’s a betting pool for nearly everything

“Number One, Archer and I did not start a betting pool,” Jim says obligingly.

“Well that solves the problem of how to tell Jim,” Chris chuckles, smoothing his thumb over Phil’s hand, which is still clasped in his own. “Wait. How long have you had a pool running for?”

Jim shrugs nonchalantly.

“This pool? Since about two thirds of the way through my first Academy year. How long has there been a pool for? Well you’ll have to ask Number One that because apparently people have been placing bets on the two of you for years.”

Phil’s free hand comes up to pinch his brow and he sighs silently.

“Chris sweetpea, when is Amanda getting back dirtside again? Because I need to kill her.”

“In two days. Can I help?”

Point 3 once again proving itself worthy of the list.

“The couple that slays together, stays together,” Jim winks in an exaggerated manner.

“Jimmy. Stop talking before Phil makes you our first victim.” Chris sighs.

“Aw but teasing you is fun Dad! Dads? No, one of you is gonna have to be Papa. Bones! Get your lazy ass out of bed and come help me solve this Dad naming conundrum!”

There's a muffled string of nearly unintelligible curses from Jim’s room, and Jim’s ever-present smile widens into a grin. Chris feels a fond smile tugging at the corners of his own mouth, and leans back until his shoulders are resting against one side of Phil’s chest. Phil then pulls their still linked hands upwards until they’re resting together on the front of Chris’ shoulder, and then rolls his eyes when Jim puts his own hand over his heart and mouths adorable at them.

“He’s definitely gonna be our first victim,” Phil mutters quietly in his ear, dropping his chin to rest on Chris shoulder.
When they’ve finally managed to pack the groceries away in the kitchen and Jim has declared his intent to cook (and banished the rest of them to the front room), Leo turns to them and sincerely wishes them congratulations.

“Seriously, we’ve been watchin’ the two of you dance around each other for too long. We tried not to interfere much because these things have gotta come natural, but we were startin’ to consider some drastic methods! Even ya poor mother wanted to bang your heads together Chris! But honestly, we’re happy for you. Now, do you want me to take Jim after dinner and clear off the rest of the night?”

Phil chuckles ruefully and slips his arm around Chris’ waist.

“No, we’re good Bones. Just don’t go pulling faces if we start being mushy in front of you.”

“Start?” Leo snorts with a deliberate glance at where Chris is now absentmindedly playing with Phil’s fingers.

“Oh, we fully plan on embarrassing the hell out of you and Jim,” Chris smirks evilly, another point springing to mind. “So expect us to get much, much worse than just this.”

**88. Always tease your juniors**

Leo winces.

“This is payback for something Jim did, isn’t it?” he drawls.

“I warned you when you started dating him that he would be the death of you,” Phil snickers, clapping Leo on the shoulder.

“That you did,” Leo sighs with smile. “That you did.”

Chris answers the door in his pyjamas, disgruntled at the slightly too early Sunday morning wake up. Still yawning and rubbing at his gritty eyes, he jabs at the control panel, and hopes he can get rid of whoever the visitor is fairly quickly so he can go back to bed with Phil for another hour or so.

Only it turns out to be Number One standing in the hallway. Surprised, as she wasn’t supposed to be arriving back at Earth until that afternoon, Chris stutters out a hello. She smiles slightly and starts to return his greeting, only to pause and look him up and down. Chris, long used to her penetrating stare, is nonetheless disconcerted.

“What?” he asks, trying (and probably failing) to not sound distressed.

Her eyes widen minutely.

“Oh, today is definitely my lucky day,” she grins.

And now Chris really is terrified, because Number One never grins. Small smiles, twitches of the corner of her mouth, snorts and sarcastic comments, yes. But grinning? Never.

“What!” he asks again, feeling much more awake suddenly.

“Philip Boyce, get your scraggly self out of Christopher’s bed!” she calls over his shoulder.

And oh right, she’s just realised that they’ve both abandoned singledom for each other.
“I’m not scraggly,” Phil pouts a few seconds later, stumbling out into the main room and rubbing at his stubble. “Chris bearhair, let One in the door would you and put some coffee on.”

Realising he is indeed blocking the flat’s entrance with his body, he steps aside and gestures his old XO inside with a sheepishly apologetic smile. Sliding the door shut behind her, he turns and follows his two best friends into the kitchen.

“How did you know?” he asks gruffly, pulling mugs out of the cupboard above the coffee maker. “About Phil and I?” he clarifies when she raises an eyebrow but remains silent.

“I have my ways,” she replies serenely.

“You’re wearing my old Yankees t-shirt pumpkin,” Phil mumbles as he rummages through the cereal boxes. And you still have my leather wristband on.”

Chris glances down.

“So I do,” he mutters blankly. “Don’t bother with food yet love. Jim’ll no doubt show up with pastries and stuff in an hour.”

“But I’m hungry now.”

“There are cereal bars on the next shelf up.”

“I will have a crème egg please,” Number one requests, peering over Phil’s shoulder.

“Are crème eggs vegetarian?” Chris wonders out loud.

“Apparently,” Phil muses, peering at the foil wrapping before handing the chocolate over.

“Vegetarian but not vegan,” Amanda nods. “And extremely delicious.”

“Coffee’s ready,” Chris announces with a yawn, turning to the small table in the corner with all three mugs in hand. He slides them onto the surface, before picking his own back up and then hopping up to sit on the countertop behind him. “Actually, throw us that bag of gummy bears Phil?”

“You’re not eating candy for breakfast Chrissy,” the doctor scowls at him.

“Oh, so it’s okay for One to do it but not me?”

“Amanda has been out of bed for more than five minutes Bambi.”

Chris sulks into his coffee, but as Phil and Number One’s amusement washes over them, he doesn’t actually feel annoyed; he’s content.

And he’s happy.

**89. Domestic bliss is as real as it is cliched.**

“So what are we doing for Jim’s birthday next week?”

“Nyota’s booked a slot at that new trampolining place across town.” Chris replies, scowling at the Comm he’s just received. Nogura wants to see him in his office. On a Sunday.

“And then drinking?”
“Phil dear, this is Jim’s birthday we’re talking about. Yes there will be drinking.”

“Fantastic.”

The Academy campus is thrumming with life as Chris ambles over to the Command building in the early afternoon. Cool winter sunlight warms the air just enough that he’s able to leave his jacket partially unzipped, the collar of his green plaid shirt also part unbuttoned. Given the informality of the summons he received, and the fact that it’s the weekend, he’s decided to forgo the uniform; that, and the fact that his new Admiral jackets aren’t being delivered by the Quartermaster division until tomorrow afternoon.

And off the off chance that Nogura disproves of his decision (highly unlikely), well he’s an Admiral too now, and if he can’t harmlessly abuse the power that comes with the rank, then what use is it?

He smiles and nods at a couple of human cadets who recognise him and send him crisp salutes, and then pauses to track the progress of a low orbit shuttle skimming across the city’s skyline. A slight breeze brings the smell of fresh cut grass with it, and he breathes it in deeply.

90. Sometimes, its good to just take a moment and let the peace wash over you.

Chuckling as a young Ensign comes running out of the Tucker building loudly cheering about some sort of scientific success, he glances at the glistening windows of his destination, runs his thumb over Phil’s wristband again, and then continues to saunter up the path with his hands in his jeans pockets.

“Christopher!” Nogura grins cheerfully when Chris is shown to his office by his Yeoman.

“You’re in a good mood sir,” Chris smiles himself.

“It’s a beautiful day, and a brand-new term starts tomorrow! I got to shout at an idiot this morning, Komack has conveniently gone on leave for a month, and I finally got to promote you despite your objections!”

“Oh, glad to be of service sir?” Chris snarks weakly.

“And so you should be!” Nogura grins slightly manically. Then his face softens, and Chris relaxes a little. “Well anyway, I just need to brief you on your new position before you officially start tomorrow. It should have happened before you disappeared off with your parents before Christmas really, but you looked so exhausted from the deprogramming procedure that we decided to postpone it.”

“New position sir?”

“Oh stop with the sirs Chris; we’re almost equals now. ‘Chiro, or Heihachiro if you really must.”

“Oh okay sir. Shit sorry. Sure ‘Chiro.”

He cringes internally at how flustered he sounds; it’s not like he’s never used Nogura’s first name before.

“Christ I sound like Jim, stumbling over my words like that,” he laments out loud with a self-deprecating chuckle.

“Common office opinion is that Jim sounds like you actually,” Nogura smirks. “So it’s no matter.
But yes, your new position. We’re retaining you as head of the Academy, seeing as it was an Admiral’s job in the first place. All the Division Head positions technically are, with the exception of Recruitment. We just roped you in because you should have been an Admiral for years anyway, and your far too competent to do a lesser job. It would have been a waste of your skills just to stick you in a teaching or administrative role like we usually do with temporarily Earth-bound ship-officers. But your new rank means you get some new fun responsibilities on top of that."

“Let me guess,” Chris grimaces wryly, “more meetings and even more paperwork.”

“A modest increase in meetings yes, but thankfully just a… switch in some of your paperwork. If anything, being an Admiral means that just your own signature should stand now, rather than having to get everything cross signed by a superior, so you should be able to get through it quicker.”

“Yaaay,” Chris deadpans, keeping his face as serious as possible but wiggling his fingers in front of his chest.

“Keep that sense of humour,” Nogura snorts immediately, “you’re going to need it. Because Marcus has decided he wants step down as Fleet Admiral within the next five years so he can spend more time with his daughter. Jonathan and I already took our turn herding this flock and we’re not doing it again, we can’t take Richard out of JAG or the whole division will go to hell, Dakarai is all set to retire to at the end of the year and won’t be talked out of it, Jayesh hasn’t had anywhere near enough experience out in the black, and there’s absolutely no way in hell Komack is ever getting anywhere near the position while Archer or I still live and breathe.”

“No.” Chris says sternly, suddenly entirely unafraid to point menacingly at Nogura and glare at him. “You are not taking this where I think you are.”

“There’s always Admiral Thoroth, I suppose,” the Japanese man continues completely unconcernedly, “but we didn’t recall her from post on Starbase XII for a reason when we promoted her. Or in a pinch, we could drag Z’roy K’nott back to Earth and train them up, but that would mean breaking up their family unit.”

“This is not happening,” Chris groans, pushing back the second desk chair and throwing himself into it.

“The only other people who could technically be trained up are the other division heads, but they don’t have the background in tactics and diplomatics needed to run this paramilitary circus.”

“You promised me I would still get the Enterprise!” Chris yells frustrated.

“And you will! She’ll be ready in what? Another year and a half? With all the personal interest we’ve been showing your boy, he’ll graduate in time to join you with no problem. Matheus has agreed to alter McCoy’s schedule so he can graduate early too; apparently your young doctor would probably have managed it anyway, but this way we can be certain it’ll happen. Boyce will get priority assignment with you anyway because we try not to split up reg-conforming partnerships as you well know. So you stay here for another year and a half working a lot more closely with Archer and I, and at the end of it we promote you again. Then you go out with the new flagship and your posse, do a two-year deep space exploratory mission like we promised, and then a year of working with us in our own sector. That gives you nearly three years to train Kirk to take on the Enterprise’s XO position and for you to pick a worthy successor for her Captain. Then we start the handover process for your final promotion.”

“I’m literally going to get zero choice in this aren’t I?”
He wishes he did, because **Point 74** just became infinitely more horrifying.

“Well, this plan means Marcus will have to stick around a year longer than he wants to, so you could always choose to give up the Enterprise now and make my life easier?”

“In your dreams,” Chris drawls back, beginning to be resigned to his fate.

“I thought as much. Now come on misery guts, let’s go get you a hard drink or two.”

“Oh god yes, but you are so buying ‘Chiro.”

**Point 60** to the rescue.

“Actually,” he winks, flashing a bronze coloured credit chip between his fingers, “Archer’s paying as this was all his crackpot idea.”

“Good,” Chris mutters grumpily, leaning over and half-inching an orange from Nogura’s fruit bowl, “serves the old mad bastard right.”

91. **Never, ever trust High Command.**

Nogura has to carry him back to the apartment, he’s so drunk.

Phil is the one to open the door to collect him from the older Admiral’s arms, Jim cackling over his shoulder.

“Phil!” Chris slurs happily, “Phil I love you and they’re destroying my life and I’m letting them!”

“So I heard cuddle muffin,” Phil smiles fondly. “Come here you big lummox.”

Chris leans forwards and lets himself be caught by his better half happily, wrapping around him like the octopus he’d rather be.

“I wanna be an octopus Philly!”

“That’s nice dear?”

“They have limbs!”

“They sure do dream boat. Thanks Heihachiro. For getting him home I mean.”

“I would hardly thank me Doctor,” the Admiral smiles, eyes crinkling like tissue paper, “I’m reasonably sure is current state is entirely my fault.”

“He’s got tissue eyes Doc!” Chris whispers.

“Do I talk like that when I’m this drunk?” Jim laughs, coming up beside him and inserting himself into Chris’ octopus hug. “Phil will you move his other arm up like- yeah like that. There we go Dad, the two of us can carry you now!”

“You talk like me, an’ I talk like you, and we all talk together! Go forth and carry me noble steeds! For they are making me lord of all Starfleet!”

“Right that’s it. To bed with you now.” Phil winces.
“Well good night gentlemen. And once again, I’m very much not sorry!”

Chris tries to wave goodbye to ‘Chiro as the door slides shut, but Jim and Phil are already turning and now he can’t see anything because the room is doing whirlies, and oh, not good…

“Phil. Gonna be sick.”

He is sick. No “going to be” about it.

Phil and Jim both sigh deeply.

“You are so lucky that I love you with all my heart right now Christopher.”

“Love you too silly Philly.”

Chris stares mulishly at his French toast, and considers once again, sucking up his pride and begging Phil for a day of medical leave.

Furious Phil or not.

Point 3 is literally never going to stop being true is it?

“Christopher Pike, when were you going to mention that you were promoted?”

“Never,” he grunts into the top of his desk, his forehead resting on the cool glass surface. His screws his eyes up even tighter and wishes the painkiller Leo had given him had lasted longer.

“Feeling a bit worse for wear are we Admiral?” Number One bites out mercilessly.

“Please stop shouting,” he begs weakly, threading the fingers of both hands into the back of his hair and massaging his scalp gently.

“I spent three hours with you and Philip yesterday, and neither of you thought to mention your unexpected rank elevations? Or you could have Comm’d me while you were at your Grandparents perhaps? Seeing as you have apparently known for weeks.”

“I’m sorry,” he whispers, genuinely contemplating bursting into tears; the uncharacteristic dramatics of it might make her soften towards him.

She must hear the true misery in his voice anyway because there’s a deep sigh and then he’s vaguely aware that’s she’s moving all the way into his office and rounding the desk, stopping to crouch beside him.

“If I get you to lift your head up, is there a possibility you actually will throw up on me?” she asks gently.

“Honestly?” he mumbles, “Yes. Definitely.”

“Why did you not stay at home then darling?” she asks quietly, her hand smoothing slowly over his back.

“No sympathy for self-inflicted misery. S’my own fault I’m like this.”

“I’ve been friends with you and Philip for long enough to know when you’re parroting his words at
me and not sharing your own feelings on the matter Christopher.”

“S’true though. Shouldn’t have drunk so much on a work night.”

“And Philip shouldn’t have made you come into the office anyway. Alright wait here, I’m going to sort some things out and you are curling up on the couch and sleeping this off.”

“You’re the best,” he mutters, breathing deeply against a sudden wave of nausea.

“And don’t you forget it mister. Now onto the couch with you.”

“Yes Ma’am,” he stutters, and tries to brace himself for the few short steps over to the far wall.

He’s dozing in the blissful darkness of his blacked-out office, a blanket thrown over him and an empty plastic box by his head for emergencies, when the door beeps quietly and slides open. Silently protesting the sudden influx of light by pushing his face further into the back cushion, he tenses when he recognises the sound of Phil’s gait; they had not parted on good terms this morning.

“Oh love, I’m sorry,” Phil whispers, dropping to his knees in front of the couch. “I shouldn’t have been such an ass this morning. I was mad for you, not at you and I shouldn’t have taken my anger out on you by forcing you to leave.”

Responding vocally is beyond him at the minute, so he shifts his arm backwards until his hand is just touching Phil’s knee.

“Here, I brought you some hypos,” the doctor continues softly. “They should help with the nausea and dim the headache some. Oh gods, you’re vitals are way off. I’m gonna let Jim beat me for doing this to you.”

This time, he manages to grunt in acknowledgement and tries to decide if it’ll be worth rolling over.

“Okay honey, this is gonna nip just a little and then you should start to feel better.”

The forewarned nipping sensation pinches at the side of his neck, but blessed coolness rapidly follows, spreading out and up to his pounding skull in seconds. He almost whimpers in relief.

“What on Earth did Heihachiro have you drinking you last night jelly bean? I haven’t seen you this worse for wear since that Barbeque where you introduced Jim to Johnny.”

“Liquid death,” Chris groans, twisting round and shuffling over to press his face into Phil’s thigh. A hand cards into his hair almost immediately, and another comes to rest on his side, fingers gripping reassuringly. “I’m pretty sure there were blue shots at one point.”

“Blasted Romulan Ale. No wonder you’re in such a state. And damn that man for giving it to you. Damn him for dropping that bombshell on you period.”

Chris tries to chuckle but it ends up sounding far more like a sob.

“I know Kitten, I’ll kick his ass for you later. Right now, I need you to go back to sleep.”

“…K.” Chris mutters, happy to comply.

When he wakes again, he still feels rough, but not nearly as much as he had earlier.
Phil had lain down with him at some point, because he’s now using his chest as pillow.

“You awake Chrissy?” the man in question rumbles beneath him, his arm tightening around Chris’ back.

“Nope, not at all” Chris denies, inhaling Phil’s aftershave deeply.

“Sensible choice,” Phil hums. “I’ve got shit news after all.”

“Really?” Chris sighs disappointedly, “More?”

“Got a Comm while you were out of it. From Barnett. I’m sorry love, but it’s about your father’s trial. It’s-”

“What?” Chris asks worriedly, tilting his head up to squint at his partner’s eyes.

“Carlton has declared his intent to enter a plea of ‘not guilty’. Which means the whole trial has to go public. And not only have you and I been called as witnesses, but he’s demanding Jim be placed on the stand too.”

“Marcus promised me Starfleet Intelligence would leave Jim out of it.”

“That was before Carlton’s lawyer took the witness denial to the press. The apparent breach of defendant rights has gone viral.”

Chris swallows hard.

“Phil? Would you like to help me commit Patricide?”

“Gladly monkey nut, gladly.”

93. Sometimes, you’ve just got to commit murder.
94. Cohabitating ought to come with some sort of manual or something…

“Chris?”

He looks up when he hears the questioning tone accompanying his name.

“Do you think if I moved the bedside table and maybe rotated my chest of drawers around I could get a bigger bed in here? So it’d be easier for Bones and I to share?”

“I don’t know Jim,” Chris replies wryly, shifting on the couch so he can see his kid through his bedroom door more clearly, “that would depend on whether or not we’re still pretending that Leo doesn’t live here.”

“I don’t know Chris,” Jim shoots back sarcastically, “that would depend on whether or not we’re still pretending that Phil doesn’t live here too.”

“Phil has his own apartment which is where he is right now,” Chris protests, contemplating throwing a cushion in Jim’s general direction in indignation.

“Bones has his own room too if you want to use that insubstantial argument! A room which he actually sleeps in more than once a week. Unlike Phil!”

“Phil is only here… He goes home- Sometimes. He doesn’t…”

He trails off weakly as Jim continues to stare at him in silence with both eyebrows raised.

“Oh yes alright, Phil basically lives here,” he admits grumpily. “This is beside the point anyway. How big is this hypothetical bed going to be?”

Jim grins cheekily at him at his admission, and Chris contemplates that cushion again.

“Probably a four foot, providing I can get hold of one. I don’t think I’d get a full double in here.”

“Oh alright,” Chris sighs, pushing his PADD onto the coffee table and then pushing himself to his feet, “get that laser tape-measure of yours out then, and let’s try moving some furniture around.”

When he stomps tiredly into the flat after work the next evening, Phil is predictably sprawled in one of the chairs at the dining table, still in his white Medical uniform and muttering over a collection of PADD’s.

Less predictably, Jim and Leo aren’t the only other people hanging about.

“Spock!” Chris exclaims cheerfully, spotting the Vulcan first. Then he greets Uhura cordially too when he spots the Cadet behind him.

“Admiral, I believe congratulations for your new rank are in order.”

“Oh not you too Spock,” Chris groans back. “Thanks I guess, but honestly it’s no big deal.”
“If you insist Admiral,” the Commander not-frowns.

“We do insist. Vehemently,” Phil chips in, standing up with a stretch and a groan. “I really can’t wait until all the compliments stop and the teasing starts instead. Jokes and sarcasm I can handle, but all this sincerity is making my teeth ache.”

“I’m sure I can oblige in that department,” Jim chuckles, fiddling with the back of the Holoprojector.

“If you want to experience evisceration by Admiral and Commodore, go ahead Kirk,” Uhura smirks with a glance towards Phil, who is scowling at Jim unimpressed.

“Nah,” Jim denies self-confidently, “they both love me too much to actually kill me.” He stops and looks up, grinning and holding up four Atari controllers. “Now which one of you losers wants to try beating me at Starcommander Six?”

Leo and Uhura get solidly beaten by everyone at the tactical video game, and both concede with a fair amount of grumbling and some bowls of consolation ice-cream.

Spock holds his own admirably until he’s faced with Jim’s utterly random play style, at which point he bows out in a dignified manner and joins Bones in the kitchen.

Phil -having been friends with Chris for over twenty-seven years and having followed him from the academy onto every one of the ships he’s been posted to- leaves Jim staring at him in shock, as the kid only narrowly manages to avoid the doctor’s well-planned trap with his digital fleet intact. Chris out right laughs when Jim has to resort to playing dirty to beat his other half.

Chris’ own tactics don’t work against him quite so well though, and he beats Phil’s empire into submission in fairly short order. Phil pouts as his last planetary stronghold is overrun by Chris’ forces, but snuggles up against his side anyway to watch him take on Jim.

An hour, two trays of pizza rolls, four mugwas, and two beers apiece later, and Chris finally crows triumphantly as Jim’s last ship explodes in a scientifically inaccurate fireball. Jim whines piteously and tries to point out that the game considers it to be a draw as Chris only had one half-working ship left himself, but Chris is insistent that he was the last man standing, and is therefore the winner.

Eventually, Uhura gets tired of their friendly bickering over the matter, and commandeers the Atari to put the newest Mario Kart on instead. Chris approves wholeheartedly.

**95. Some games, are just classics.**

“Chris, you need to come to this meeting at 1400,” Archer grumbles at him over the open VidComm. “It’s nothing particularly interesting, but you need to start getting familiar with the ins and outs of the Quartermaster Division.”

“Sure,” Chris sighs back tiredly, signing off on a teaching staff’s extended-absence request at the same time. Usually such concerns would be left to the department the professor belonged to, but in this case the individual concerned is the deputy head of Ethics and Politics, which apparently makes it Chris’ problem.

“Oh and while I’ve got your attention, Richard is coming to your apartment tomorrow evening to have a long conversation with you and your posse about the upcoming trial. So make sure you’re all in and have a bottle of something strong to hand.”
“Jonny,” Chris moans, “tomorrow is Friday.”

“And?”

“Friday O’Riley beers?”

Jon pauses and actually looks like he’s reconsidering to Chris’ surprise.

“I’ll get him to meet us in the bar instead,” he nods agreeably. “I’m sure we can manage to remain unobtrusive tucked away in your back booth.”

“Thanks,” he grins back; after the last few months, they’ve all been sorely missing their routine evening out.

“No problem kiddo,” Jon rumbles with a smirk. “Don’t forget the meeting. 1400, Crossby’s office.”

Before Chris can voice another agreement, the Comm blinks off, leaving him staring at his own tired reflection.

“Gotta start going to bed earlier,” he mutters to himself, thumbing at the bag under his left eye.

96. Sleep is most assuredly not just for the weak.

“Good evening gentlemen,” Barnett rumbles in his usual baritone. “and Lady,” he adds with a nod when Number One leans forward and pins him with a pointed look. Then he slides into the booth opposite Jonny and catches the pint glass Jim slides his way.

“Richard,” Archer nods back, sipping from his own drink, “Did you get everything you need from my office okay?”

“I believe so Jon.”

The JAG Admiral pulls his messenger bag up onto the table and flips it open, pulling out a handful of PADDs and data chips. A couple, he pushes towards Archer, who immediately pulls his own PADD out and starts copying information across. The others, Barnett spreads out across the table, shifting the bowl of fries so that more space is created.

“First things first,” Barnett begins. “I am aware of a least one incident relating to this case occurring while one of you was a minor.” He looks at Chris knowingly, and Chris knows he’s referring to the kidnapping incident when he was seventeen. “Therefore,” he continues, “I want to make it immediately clear to all of you that you are not obligated to answer any questions that the defence may put to you regarding that incident.”

“Erm,” Jim coughs self-consciously, shooting a slightly pleading look first at Chris, and then at Archer. “What about other childhood experiences which may or may not be hypothetically tangentially related to this case?”

Barnett looks to Archer with a raised eyebrow. Archer ignores him to hold Jim’s gaze instead. Then the senior Admiral nods and Jim closes his eyes for a long second before nodding back

97. The more people who know a secret, the more chance it’ll become common knowledge

But sometimes Chris thinks, You just gotta tell people anyway.

“James T. Kirk and JT Wellcott are the same person,” Jon says levelly.
Barnett frowns, clearly not understanding.

And then his face starts to drop.

“Wait. You don’t mean the JT. That JT…” he trails off hesitantly. “Whose records begin and end with Ta-”

Jim cuts the Admiral short by grimacing hard, peering round the bar to ensure minimal attention (making Chris think approvingly of Point 35), and then lifting his white V-neck tee up to reveal his left pectoral.

“Oh Christ,” Richard mutters lowly, dragging his gaze away from the famous brand and instead staring blankly at his hands resting on the table in front of him. Chris, who is sitting next to Jim, lets out a deep breath and then throws his arm over Jim’s shoulders, unashamedly pressing his lips to the side of his kid’s hair for a long second.

“This is currently confidential at the highest-level Barnett.” Jon tells the man sternly. “The only people aware of this not seated at this table are Nogura, Marcus, Doctor Batch and the two SI officers who were present at the debriefing. And it stays that way for as long as possible, understand?”

“Half of Terra Prime also know Johnny,” Phil mutters lowly. “Pritch-Howard knows for certain, and half the organisation saw Jim without his shirt on. It’s not going to stay a secret for long.”

“Well okay,” Barnett breathes out shakily. “This changes a few things, but we can work with it. If Pritch-Howard really does know, he’s going to want to pull it out in the open in a rather dramatic fashion. That way he takes a lot of the focus off himself, and simultaneously makes the ‘Fleet look bad for supposedly lying and covering this up for so many years.”

“I sense a “but” coming,” Leo grumbles, swishing his bourbon on the rocks around his tumbler. “But as we’re now anticipating that move, we have two options. One, we tell the general public before the trial and deprive him of his ammunition so to speak.”

“You do that,” Chris interjects worriedly, “and the public interest in this damn trial is going to rocket even higher. It’s bad enough as it is! Jim won’t get a moment of peace for weeks.”

“Which is why I’m also presenting you with option two: we mask the marks and we lie by omission.”

“Shit sorry Jim,” Phil suddenly sighs despondently, leaning back and dropping his head against the wooden panel work behind him with a dull thud. “Of all the stupidly obvious solutions… I’m a real total fucking idiot.”

Jim only looks at the doctor with a sympathetic half-smile, making Chris regard them both with a confused frown.

“If you’re about to suggest the spray on Chemidermis used by burn victims, then you can relax ‘cause I already tried it,” the young man grimaces. “The duriplasto concentration in it is too high; brings me out in some pretty vicious hives.”

“…Yeah but,” Leo drawls slowly, a thoughtful look on his face, “There’s a duriplasto free version used by Andorians. It’s not widely known about, even in the ‘Fleet, but all we’d have to do is change the pigmentation from blue to match your own skin tone.”
“Exactly,” Phil groans. “I invented the damn Andorian version. Ensigns th’Vol and zn’Vol were members of Yorktown’s engineering crew for going on four years, and they were always coming into my Medbay covered in burns. Chemidermis is great for accelerating burn healing when used in conjunction with a regenerator, and I got fed up of not being able to use it on them.”

98. Even experts can sometimes miss the obvious

“So what?” Jim asks Barnett, looking not just a little pleased at the prospect of hiding his distinctive markings. “You’re suggesting that we hide the brand and whip scars, make a big deal out of JT having them, and then I lift my shirt and show everyone my unmarred chest? Let them form their own conclusions?”

“Pretty much,” Barnett agrees smugly. “And your allergies have just added another layer of believability. So long as you’re okay with the jury seeing that portion of your medical record, we can demonstrate that you can’t use Chemidermis and so can’t possibly have used it to hide your dual identity.”

“Okay, do it.” Jon nods commandingly. “Tomorrow morning kid,” he says directly to Jim, “grab that Vulcan buddy of yours, come to my office and we’ll make sure a lot of your records either vanish permanently or get altered. Untraceably of course.”

“And I’ll hit the lab and rustle up some non-blue fake skin,” Phil adds with a glance at Leo. “How are your synthesis skills mini-me?”

“You’re the expert, but I can help with making sure it’s compatible with Jim’s immune system.”

“Then gentlemen, I believe we have a plan to tackle this issue,” Barnett concludes before draining the last of his pint with a smirk.

“Sir,” Jim suddenly says sharply some hours later, making every commissioned officer sat in the booth look up at him immediately. He’s staring intently out into the bar, so Chris follows his gaze, his focus narrowing on the two figures currently pushing their way through the front entrance.

“Rich get those files packed away right now,” Jon snaps out crisply, a furious look flitting over his face for a second before smoothing out into practices neutrality. Chris feels his own face contort for a second, before he too schools it blank.

“What?” Phil asks, unable to see beyond the end of the bar from his position in the corner.

“Komack and Finnegan,” Chris bites out shortly, helping Barnett hastily shove the last of the PADDs into a pile so he can sweep them into his bag.

“Fucking fantastic,” Phil groans. “Don’t let them antagonise you fruit loop.”

“No promises,” he growls back, just as the two men finally spot them. Komack’s face splits with a disturbing grin, and sweeps across the floor towards them.

“Gentlemen! What a pleasant surprise!” he smiles menacingly. The mischief dancing in his eyes makes Chris’ hackles rise even further.

“Admiral Komack. Cadet… what was it again young man?” Jon asks too cordially, using their ranks pointedly.

“Oh Jonathan, I know you’ve grown dreadfully forgetful in your old age, but you can hardly have
forgotten Mr Finnegan. He’s one of the Academy’s top Cadets.”

“Oh so you’re Cadet Finnegan?” Jon asks, unimpressed. “Yes, I do recall your name. A three month suspension wasn’t it? Assaulting an Officer, verbal xenophobia, drunken disorderly? Yes, a shining example of how an exemplary Cadet should conduct himself.”

“And yet despite your accusations, it wasn’t Mr Finnegan the LAPD felt the need to arrest. How was your stay in the overnight cells Mr Pike? I never did ask, but I hear you had a skull-crackingly good time.”

Phil snarls, and Number One has to put her hand on his arm to keep him in his seat. Under the table, Chris pushes his ankle against Phil’s and tries to exert a reassuring amount of pressure.

“Ah yes of course!” Komack exclaims, turning to laugh at Chris’ other half. “I hear congratulations are in order! Well, if one considers such… relationships to be worthy of praise. Can I expect an announcement of engagement any time soon? An adoption perhaps? Seeing as Mr Pike here will never manage to reproduce of his own accord, if certain rumours are to be believed. Even if he were to date someone of a… more appropriate child bearing orientation.”

“Wow.” Archer deadpans over the top of Finnegan’s snickering. “Homophobia and Aphobia all rolled into one. How unimpressive and predictably bigoted of you Komack.”

“Well Jonathan, you can hardly expect to be unbiased regarding such things given reports of your own inclinations. I bet you do so sorely miss your Mr Tucker.”

Jon’s face goes as dark as a storm cloud and he stands up, the butt of his cane slamming audibly against the wooden planks of the floor.

“Get out,” he says quietly, too calmly, his every muscle vibrating with restrained violence. Chris swallows hard and tenses for a fight, uncomfortably aware that not even the most senior of Admirals can be expected to hold out against Point 59 when faced with a statement like that.

“Yes. Indeed.” Komack smirks, “Come along Finnegan; I fear this bar has been tainted by its current occupants. Let us depart for some place more suitable. Admirals… Cadets. I shall see you in court next week; it certainly promises to be an interesting affair.”

And with that he turns and strides back out of the bar, Finnegan on his heels like an overeager puppy. Chris exhales in relief, absently noting Jim, Phil, Leo and Number One also doing so.

“That.” Barnett near-spits, “Was bang out of order. He’s always been a rather tactless and unpleasant individual, but he just crossed more lines there than can ever be excused.”

“If you’ll excuse me,” Johnny growls, yanking his Comm and PADD out of his inner jacket pocket, “I have to go Comm Marcus regarding an urgent matter.”

Chris watches as his mentor and still somewhat-idol strides stiff with anger over the barkeep, and then after a short conversation with her, into the back storage-room with at least three fingers of neat top shelf whiskey.

“I’m honestly surprised Komack’s nose didn’t just get forcefully shattered,” Number One comments dryly when the silence settling around the table finally grows too stifling.

“Is he?” Jim asks curiously. “I mean, is Archer… Well, like basically all of us sat around this table. You know um. Queer in some manner? We do tend to unintentionally congregate into friendship
groups after all. Eh, no offense Admiral Barnett sir; I’m aware you’re happily married with children. Not that I’m assuming anything based on that… Sorry, I’ll stop asking awkward questions.”

Chris contemplates mentioning Point 22 out loud, but he still hasn’t found a non-awkward way to explain his listing obsession, so he chokes the urge back. Thankfully, Barnett speaks up instead.

“I think you can call me Richard at this point kid,” the man sighs with a chuckle. “And the answer is no, not to the best of my knowledge. At least not actively, if you take my meaning. But he and Trip were excessively close, brothers in all but blood by all accounts. Never went beyond that, but I think Jonathan sometimes wishes it had. Before it was too late.”

“And the situation with T’Pol now?” Leo adds. “The living together? That’s just platonic right?”

“They’re the only two left,” Chris replies softly. “From the original Enterprise; everyone else is gone. Jon would be too if he hadn’t gotten kidnapped just after he stepped down as Federation President. He was missing for seven years, and then one day he was found comatose in a Betazoid hospice with 50 years of aging just gone. Didn’t wake up for another three.”

“You should see his medical reports fairy cakes,” Phil tells him, running his thumb around the rim of his empty pint glass. “He didn’t just get younger, he came back enhanced. Stronger bones, better hearing, higher white blood cell count. A bunch of other stuff. Matheus showed me the reports back when I was promoted to Surgeon-Captain.”

“And he’s got no recollection of anything that happened at all,” Richard shrugs. “He let a Vulcan Elder take a peek up here,” he taps his brow indicatively, “and there wasn’t even a hole where memories used to be. Just a seamless blend from being knocked unconscious to waking up in ‘Fleet Medical ten years later.”

“Spilling all my secrets Ricky?” Jon suddenly snorts, sliding back into his seat, a fresh tray of house bitter balanced in one hand.

Barnett rolls his eyes.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” the senior Admiral mutters dryly, handing out the drinks. “Ah well,” he sighs resignedly. “Here’s to sharing secrets and friendships I guess.”

When Jon raises his fresh pint and drinks deeply, Chris tips his back too.

“To friendships and family,” he confirms when everyone’s glasses clank back onto the table.

He ruffles Jim’s hair fondly as he says it, and silently lists off his final point of the day:

99. There are so many things that will always be far more powerful than bigotry and hate could ever be

And love and acceptance will always top that list.

Chapter End Notes

Yes Jim, you definitely can get it to fit...
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

100. Even the manliest of men should cuddle one another once in a while

Especially in bed…

Chris admits he may be biased regarding this point.

“Chris doodle bug, wakey wakey.”

Chris ignores the soft voice and pushes his face further into the warm pillow under him.

“Bubble bunny I need you to at least ease up on the death grip.”

“Nooo,” he moans back quietly.

“I’ve got to go to work sweetpea.”

“But is Sunday,” he grumbles, beginning to wake up despite his wishes otherwise.

“Trust me honey, the patients waiting for me don’t care what day of the week it is.”

With another low whine, Chris slowly forces his arms to unwind from around Phil, and he slides off his chest so that he’s lying on the cool mattress beside him instead.

“Honestly sun beam, for a grey haired old Starfleet Admiral, you’re a rather clingy individual,” Phil chuckles at him, pressing a quick chaste kiss against the top of his left ear. “I promise I’ll be back before noon duckling.”

“Better be,” Chris mumbles, yanking the covers back up around his neck.

101. It’s best not to be too attached to materialistic goods.

Crash!

Chris sits bolt upright in bed.

“Goddammit Jim!” Leo yells.

Chris pushes his fists into his eye sockets and wonders if he dares go find out what Jim just knocked over.

“Err. Oops?” he hears Jim say rather sheepishly. “And also, ow!”

Chris glances at his chrono. 1021. He should probably get up now anyway. Unfortunately.

With a sigh, he swings his legs out bed and peers round, looking for a discarded t-shirt.

“I’m so sorry about the coffee table,” Jim mutters once again, flipping the bacon over. It sizzles
enticingly in the frying pan, and Chris fishes a bread knife out of the draw to carve into the fresh loaf with.

“Allosexuals,” he grumbles teasingly, nicking the still warm crust-end before Jim can. Jim melodramatically pouts at him, and he snickers around his mouthful.

“It was just one leg,” Jim groans. “I didn’t even shatter the glass and I’ll get it fixed, I swear.”

“Yeah, and maybe try containing the gymnastics to your room in future son? I know you’re probably excessively flexible and all that, but I don’t think the furniture can handle any more of your adventurousness.”

“Please stop talking about my sex life in your dad voice.” Jim winces, grabbing the salt and pepper.

“Just be glad I said gymnastics instead of sexscapades.”

Jim looks at him incredulously before kicking him playfully in the shin.

The front door buzzes just as Chris is stacking the last of the breakfast plates in the drying rack.

Jim yells that he’ll get it, and then suddenly there’s lots of excited weirdly high pitched squealing and laughter from the young man. Wondering what Earth is going on now, Chris pats his hands dry on a tea towel and pokes his head out into the main room.

Johnny is standing bemusedly in the hallway, and at his feet Jim is lying on his back, having his face washed by an enthusiastic Trip while Porthos and Aramis snuggle against his side.

“Puppies and Kittens. The only known creations in all the universe guaranteed to reduce grown men to giggling toddlers,” Chris deadpans, leaning in the kitchen doorway.

“I don’t know Cappy, tribbles are pretty cute too,” Archer smirks, stepping over Jim, who is still giggling into Trip’s fur. Chris nods consideringly, and then waves the older man into the kitchen, beelining for the coffee maker.

“So I need a favour from you,” Jon shrugs, accepting his steaming mug with a smile. “I have to go to the Federation Headquarters with Megan Singh this afternoon and finalise the security arrangements for the trial opening tomorrow.”

“Yeah, I remember you mentioning it on Friday as we left the office.”

“Yes well, there’s a strict no pets or animals allowed in the building rule, and T’Pol unexpectedly had to leave for Vulcan this morning.”

“So now I’m the nominated dog sitter,” Chris drawls dryly. He supposes this his own fault for telling the Admiral about Point 81 the other day.

“Well Porthos can come with me anyway because nobody’s brave enough to tell me no, but I’m not leaving the other two shut up in the house alone all day. Trip will eat something he shouldn’t because he’s a menace.”

“You do realise I’m supposed to be taking my parents out for dinner tonight?”

“Make your boys cook and eat in instead,” Jon shrugs cheekily. “Family bonding before all hell inevitably breaks loose tomorrow.”
“I’m not allowed to say no, am I?” Chris mock-grumbles back.

“Well you could,” Jon winks, “but you have to get down on your knees and look my babies in their cute little eyes as you do it. Plus if you do manage to say no, I’ll just ask Jim instead.”

“Despicable,” Chris snorts, “that’s what you are.”

102. Learn how to deal with grumpiness and short-tempered people

Chris is sprawled out on the couch with Aramis snoozing on his chest when Phil stomps back in grumpily after noon.

He grunts a vague greeting at Chris, pauses briefly when he realises Chris has a furry lump using him as a pillow, and then shrugs and continues towards the bathroom.

Then he groans loudly in protest when he realises that Leo is in there using the shower.

Grumbling even more, he peels off his grimy once-white medical jacket, throwing it on the dining table, and stalks over towards Chris and the couch.

Which is when he falls over Trip and staggers into the broken remaines of the coffee table.

Chris scrambles up and over to him hastily, but by the time he reaches where his scowling partner is lying sprawled on his back, he's already kicked out at the wooden holoprojector stand in irritation and knocked all the consoles and game data chips off.

Having heard the commotion, Jim pokes his head out of his room at precisely the instant the Atari Revolution clatters to the floor and he practically screeches in protest.

Phil snarls something curse laden and aggravated back at him.

Jim and Phil proceed to glare at each other mulishly. Chris cringes at the rising tension he can sense in the air.

“That’s it, I’ve had it!” Phil barks angrily. “I’ve had enough of this Christopher Pike! This damn flat is not big enough for all four of us!”

Chris pales and clenches his fists as sudden anxiety causes the bottom of his stomach to drop out.

Scrambling to his feet noisily and none too gently hauling Chris up with him, Phil turns to him and stabs his right index finger into his chest.

“You, Christopher” he bites out harshly, “are going to go and Comm Crossby right this instance and demand she assigns us one of the Admiralty Family apartments. I want at least two damn bathrooms, an actual spare room, a kitchen with a gorram dishwasher and a utility room with our own clothing refresher unit!”

Chris swallows and nods rapidly, indescribably relieved that Phil didn’t just announce he was moving back out after all.

“And make sure the study is big enough that I can have my own desk in it too!” the doctor shouts as he stalks over to the bathroom door once more. “I’m fed up of working on the dining room table without a Comm station!”

Then he bangs on the bathroom door, yelling at Bones to hurry the hell up, and vanishes into the
master bedroom without a backwards glance.

Chris and Jim exchange startled and bemused glances.

“I’m just gonna go… Comm…” Chris trails off, pointing over his shoulder at the study with his thumb.

“Yeah,” Jim agrees. “That would probably be… wise.”

He opens the front door again and grabs Trip’s collar to stop the excitable husky from darting out into the corridor.

“Oh sweetie,” his mom sighs, taking in his frazzled appearance. “What’s happened now?”

“Erm,” he begins eloquently, allowing her to enfold him in a hug, “Nothing drastic. Apparently -as of an hour ago- I’m moving across the other side of campus next week. After this damn trial. During it, if Phil gets his way.”

“You’re moving in with Phil?” Edward asks confusedly, reaching down to rub Trip’s ears. “I thought he was living here with you? What about Jim and Leonard?”

“Oh. No.” Chris refutes, pushing his fringe out his eyes with his free hand. “We’re all moving. Into a bigger flat, all four of us. One with an en suite attached to the master bedroom. And a sonic dishwasher.”

“Moving up in the world,” his Mom teases him, stepping back and whisking into the kitchen with a bag of groceries. Chris thumbs the front door shut and then lets Trip go bounding after her, wagging and huffing excitably.

“You really are though son,” Edward smiles at him gruffly, clapping him on the shoulder. “I’m proud of you Chris and don’t you go forgetting that, no matter what nonsense Carlton spits tomorrow.”

“Thanks Dad,” Chris grunts back with a smile of his own.

“My little baby boy, a big bossy Admiral,” Edward grins, tweaking his ear. “All grown up and ordering his own kids around.”

“Dad I’m forty-five,” he grumbles, swatting Edwards shoulder with the back of his hand.

“Dad I’m forty-five,” Edward mimics in a high pitch voice.

Chris barges him with his shoulder and calls him an ass.

Edward retaliates by throwing his arm around Chris and grappling him into a headlock.

Chris eventually manages to wrangle his way out and pin Edward to the couch on his stomach, the older man laughing and begging for mercy. When Aramis jumps up and decides to help by playfully growling and butting his nose against them both, Chris lets his Dad go and they both collapse into the cool leather chuckling.

“I’m too old for this son,” Edward groans through his laughter.

“Don’t lie to me, I’m fully aware you still go to Judo sessions every week despite being in your late seventies. Oh and Mom told me in explicit detail all about your attempt at crowd surfing at your gig
“Long live rock and roll,” Edward smirks, making the classic metal M fist with his right hand.

103. Harmless teasing should always be indulged in

“So what exactly happened to the coffee table this morning?” Phil asks when they’re all sat groaning contently around the dining table that evening.

“Yes I had been wondering,” Anna muses, topping her wine glass up. She holds the bottle up, offering, but only Edward asks for more.

“Oh the coffee table?” Chris grins, looking smugly across the table at Jim.

Jim goes bright red and sinks in his chair.

“Dad no,” he moans.

“What exactly happened to the coffee table Jimmy?” Chris chuckles evilly. “Or perhaps Leo feels like sharing?”

“My Momma didn’t raise no fool Pike,” Bones snorts, not looking the slightest but embarrassed to Chris’ disappointment. “My mouth is staying firmly shut.”

“Dad no,” Jim moans again.

“Now you see, Jimmy here is apparently a fan of wild monkey sex,” he starts, grinning wider.

“Oh he definitely is, no ‘apparently’ about it,” Leo chortles, defying his previously announced inclination towards silence.

“Bones shut up,” Jim whines. Edward pulls a face somewhere between impressed and surprised, while Anna just outright looks amused.

“And sometimes Jimmy thinks it’s a good idea to venture out of his room to have said wild monkey sex.” Chris continues.

“Not gonna lie,” Bones smirks, “the couch was definitely my idea this time round.”

“Oh god,” Phil groans dramatically, “This time? This time? How much bleach am I going to have to pour on the couch to properly sanitise it?”

“And let me guess sonny,” Edward laughs, looking at Jim, “You fell off the couch onto the table.”

“Oh no,” Leo denies. “He jumped off the couch onto the table. Landed crotch first and everything. Never seen such a sight in my life, totally killed the mood.”

“And now woe is me,” Chris moans melodramatically, “my coffee table snatched from life too soon, destined for the kindling pile.”

“I hate you all,” Jim groans, pushing his empty plate aside so he can drop his forehead onto the table.

Jim escapes the teasing that’s still going strong an hour later, by volunteering to walk Trip and Aramis back across to Archer’s house.
Chris lets him go with a fond hair tussle, and only one or two more innuendo laden remarks.

**104. Ties are evil**

“Oh for goodness sake Pop Tart, let go and let me do it.”

Chris drops the ends of the necktie with a grumble and stares irritated at the ceiling while Phil quickly and efficiently knots and then smooths it down his chest.

“How have you not learnt how to do this yet?” the Doctor chuckles at him, reaching round his neck to flip his shirt collar back down.

“Well it’s not like I’ve ever needed to,” Chris mumbles back self-consciously. “My elementary and middle schools here in the US didn’t have uniforms, and then in England my uniform didn’t have a tie. Then I jumped straight from college into Starfleet. I’ve always just worn my dress uniform for formal events since then.”

“You seriously have never worn an actual suit before?” Phil asks incredulously. “Not even for a family meal out when you were a teenager? A wedding? A funeral? High school prom?”

“The only two weddings I’ve been to were my Mom and Edward’s, and my sister’s. The former involved my parents basically eloping to the register’s office so I was wearing jeans and a baseball jersey of all things. At the latter, I was made to wear tails and a cravat which Mom wrestled me into. The only non-fleet funeral I’ve been to was your Dad’s, and well… you know how that went. And I missed my college prom because I was in an LA basement learning to hate ice-water.”

“Well you look good in a suit snuggle-puss. Even if you can’t do the tie yourself.”

“Snuggle-puss? Really?”

“How do I look?” Jim asks, grinning for all his worth. He stretches his arms out and spins slowly on the spot.

“You missed a tiny spot just under your left armpit,” Phil mutters, running his eyes over Jim’s back and torso with a critical gaze.

“Bones has got the spray can. Gimme a sec and we’ll fix it.”

He skips back into the bathroom with a definite spring in his step, humming happily as he goes.

“I’m glad someone’s happy today,” Chris mumbles tiredly, tugging at his damned evil tie again. Phil bats his hands away and straightens his collar again.

“He’s had those marks for 10 years now Chrissy,” Phil rumbles into his shoulder, standing behind him and pushing his hands into Chris’ pants’ pockets. “10 years of always keeping a shirt on and not going swimming and hiding away from the world. I’m not surprised he’s bouncing off the ceiling with joy.”

“Fifteen years for some of them,” Chris growls angrily, quietly. “Still tempted to go finish bashing Wellicht’s face in. With a length of metal rebar. And an overpowered electric cattle rod.”

“Johnny probably meddled after we left sugar plum.”

“I damn well hope so.”
“What are you to whispering about now?” Jim asks, bounding back out into the main room with Leo behind him, smiling softly.

“Sappy declarations of eternal love,” Chris deadpans, his eyes crinkling in amusement when Jim pulls a face and mimes sticking his fingers down the back of his throat.

“Oh go get dressed you reprobate,” Phil huffs, “before I find something expendable to throw at you.”

The aircar smoothly pulls up in front of the private turbolift under the Federation Headquarters. The four men in the back sit silently and exchange resigned glances.

“Once more unto the breach,” Jim mutters, reaching for the door handle.

105. Legal proceedings are always intimidating.

The Central courtroom is teeming with hundreds upon hundreds of people from almost as many different species. Chris looks around at the noisy crowd and slides into relaxed command-mode, rather than allowing himself to sigh or wince or grimace. Behind him, Phil squares his shoulders too, and also assumes a passive facial expression, so Chris reaches back to briefly squeeze his hand before following the security officers out into the room.

“This session is hereby called to order! Before I begin, I shall remind everyone that anyone speaking out of turn or otherwise causing a disruption, no matter their rank or position, will be ejected from the courtroom and forbidden from returning for the duration of the trial. Sole exceptions will be for individuals called to the witness stand, and a temporary reprieve only will be granted.”

The judge pauses and glances about the room sternly.

Chris daren’t even swallow for fear the sound would echo in the resultant silence.

“I now declare this trial to be in session,” she continues, still leaning over her stand, both hands braced flat before her. “The accused shall now be escorted into the room and shall state his full name and Federation planet of origin, make his oath and enter his plea. The prosecution may proceed from there.”

She sits down in her seat and Chris breathes slowly and steadily out, clenching his fists in his lap.

The not guilty plea comes as a surprise to precisely no-one.

“No further questions your honour,” Barnett rumbles with a respectful nod.

“Would the Defence like the opportunity to cross-examine the witness?”

The impeccably dressed woman acting as Carlton’s lead attorney, looks Chris’ mother up and down on the witness stand with a look of conceit so strong that it has icy rage forming in Chris’ gut.

“The Defence would be please to accept the opportunity,” she drawls in harsh, sharply accented Standard. The judge raises an eyebrow at the condescending tone, but nods her approval in silence.

“Doctor Pike,” the attorney begins “you have previously stated that you first became acquainted with
my client in the year 2205 in Boston, Earth.”

“Yes, that is correct.” Anna confirms, looking slightly puzzled.

“And you were at the time, completing a doctoral degree in behavioural psychology. Your specific area of research was in progressive measures for the rehabilitation of abused children and teenagers back into society was it not?”

“It was yes.”

“And your career path following your graduation followed along a similar path; working with troubled youths?”

“It did yes.”

“So you ought to have been familiar with signs of trauma and unsociable behaviour. And yet you failed to notice any such signs in your ex-husband. Perhaps because such signs don’t and didn’t ever exist?”

“Objection your honour!” Barnett interrupts, “Mr Pritch-Howard was not, as Miss Müller is clearly implying, a “troubled youth” at the time of their meeting. Regardless, this line of questioning and the implied conclusion are irrelevant to the case; an individual does not have to have an unfortunate childhood to become a criminally-minded adult.”

“Objection noted.” the judge agrees harshly. “The jury are to disregard the previous line of questioning when considering their verdict.”

Chris notes that Müller doesn’t look the slightest bit concerned by this pronouncement; if anything she looks even more smug.

“Well that’s a shame,” Carlton suddenly drawls from his clear-aluminium encased booth. “I thought her inability to discern my character was very relevant.”

“Mr Pritch-Howard, this is your one and only warning. Remain silent until addressed or this trial will proceed without your involvement,” the judge snaps.

Carlton cocks his head and grins slimily, crossing his hands behind his back.

“But she managed just fine to diagnose wee little Jimmy Pike’s childhood trauma. Is it James T. Pike now? Or is he still a Kirk?”

“Pritch-Howard-!”

“Orrrr,” Carlton draws out over the judge, ignoring her completely, “is he still a Wellcott? JT Wellcott perhaps? Of the ill-fated agricultural colony Tarsus IV? That JT?”

An excited murmur rises around the courtroom, swallowing Barnett’s loudly voiced objections and the Judges angry calls for silence.

“Either way the lad is about to lose his precious Grammy,” Carlton snorts, his sentence clearly audible over the ruckus thanks to his booth’s sound system.

“Wait what?” Phil blurts out shocked from next to Chris.

But Chris is already moving.
He’s on the front row of the witness benches, right at the end by the aisle. A clear path to the witness stand.

But still too far.

Too damn far.

The front door to the accused booth swings open as if it was never locked, and the containment field lowers without so much as a fizzle.

The security officers to either side move instantly, but they’re not fast enough. Could never hope to be fast enough.

And Chris is too far away.

“Mom!” he bellows panicked, throwing himself with reckless abandon towards her.

But.

He’s too fucking far away…

Their eyes meet just as the raw plasma bolt hits her square in the chest.

There’s blood on his hands and he’s screaming, begging, crying.

Holding her.

“No no no no no no!” he stammers.

106. Love is eternal. But life? Life is not.

The light goes out of his Mom’s eyes as he sobs and comforting arms wrap tightly around his chest.

Chapter End Notes

I added lots of fluff first so please don't kill me?
107. Sometimes the only alternative to feeling everything is feeling nothing.

Slowly.

Slowly the terror and the rage, the shock and the panic. Slowly they give way to all-encompassing numbness.

Around him, the uproar in the court room continues to build. But he ignores it, becomes deaf to it. His own panting is too harsh in his ears to hear anything else.

“Chris, you have to let go honey. Let Leo take her.”

Let go?

Let go?

The arms around his chest tighten a fraction, the steady, solid warm weight against his back presses slightly closer.

He still can’t bring himself to let go of his mother, cradled carefully in his arms but entirely unmoving.

Her blood is still hot on his hands.

“No,” he whispers, his voice hoarse and thick with tears.

And then his dad is there kneeling, his hands on Chris’ cheeks, agony writ raw in his eyes.

“Chris son, please let Leo take her. Please”

It comes out almost like a keen, and Chris stares at his dad despondently. Looks at the sorrow and the pain clear for all to see, the tear tracks glistening on his reddened cheeks.

His arms go slack, and he collapses back against Phil fully.

Carefully, Leo lifts her into his own arms, twisting to slide her onto a hover stretcher that Chris hadn’t noticed until now, is certain wasn’t there a second ago. He squeezes her hand as it slips from his, his grip firm despite the slick blood coating his fingers.

“We need to move sweets,” Phil rumbles in his ear, not quite stuttering. And then, looking over his head, “Johnny help me get them both upright. And will someone please get that damn journalist out of here!”

“Where’s Jim?” Chris rasps, gaze swivelling to where Archer is trying to convince Edward to climb to his feet. He’s shaking his head, fists clenched and staring at the mess of Anna’s chest, flinching away when Archer places a hand on his shoulder.

“He’s just there with Bones,” Phil reassures, nodding towards them. And he is, Chris notes distantly, with his face ashen and his jaw clenched.

Suddenly he realises he’s now standing, Phil gripping under his arm to steady him. Beside him, Jon has finally coaxed Edward up, and with Jim’s help, is pulling him off towards the back wall and the
small door inset in it.

Chris stumbles after them, leaning heavily on Phil, his heart still racing. Leo keeps pace with them guiding the stretcher, as do the contingent of heavily armed ‘Fleet security guards. He’s vaguely aware of a crowd pressing in around them, outside of the circle of red shirts but he tries to ignore them in favour of concentrating on putting one foot in front of another.

The comparative silence when they step out into the back corridors and the door hisses shut behind them is almost deafening. His own ragged breaths seem to amplify, echoing hollowly. Several steps in front of him, Edward stumbles, groaning loudly, and Jim grabs his arm, pulling it over his shoulder and mumbling something to him too quietly to hear.

“In here,” Nogura snaps out, abruptly appearing in the corridor before them. He gestures to an open turbolift, standing to one side to usher them in.

The space inside is cramped. Even without the security contingent in with them, Chris ends up with his head resting on his Dad’s shoulder, his arm in contact with the wall and Phil once again pressed up against his back. On the other side of the small compartment, Nogura and Archer are whispering furiously, expressions angry and their gestures short and aborted.

Jon pulls a small PADD out of his jacket pocket, and the two senior admirals grimace and nod at each other before Jon stabs harshly at the screen several times.

The turbolift lurches to a stop suddenly, and Edward’s hand comes up to grip at the front of Chris’ blood stained shirt, his arm near-crushed between them. The harsh white lights lined in the ceiling panels above them flicker once, and a mechanical click reverberates loudly through the metal plated walls.

For one heart stopping moment of terror, Chris thinks the turbolift is about to plummet to the bottom of the shaft and that the emergency gravity well at the base will fail. But then there’s a great jolt of motion again, and they’re hurtling sideways instead.

Chris lets out a shuddery breath and reminds himself sternly that Jon would never intentionally harm them.

108. Trust your friends and family, lest you go mad.

Especially when trauma means you can’t think straight yourself.

After a series of mind-boggling direction changes-noticeable despite the inertia-dampeners- the lift finally slides to a stop and the door opens with a whirr, revealing a dark, cavernous space beyond. Nogura steps out first, turning to look at Jon with a raised eyebrow when lights suddenly spark to life, exposing what Chris can only describe as a fairly large upscale bunker.

The walls are blinding white, but are obviously little more than grey concrete breeze blocks painted over. Not a single window or screen is inset into them, and the only entrance seems to be the turbolift they’re all still crowded in. There’s a row of utilitarian single bunks against one wall, a kitchen counter with a single metal sink and a replicator on it against the other, and three worn and well used couches in the furthest corner, surrounding an outdated holoscreen and a scarred metal coffee table. The remaining corner holds a frosted glass box, which Chris desperately hopes contains some sort of bathroom facilities.

Everything is coated in a thin sheen of dust.
“I need you all to stay here for a couple of hours while ‘Chrio and I go find out what the hell happened up there,” Jon sounds out crisply, gesturing for them to all step out. Leo follows last, gently pulling the stretcher with him, guiding it between the doors with an ease that speaks of long practice.

“Where is here?” Jim asks dully, gazing around the room dispassionately.

“Deep under the Federation Headquarters. I was President for eight years, which meant for eight years I lived in this building. I got to know a lot of its secrets. I doubt anybody has been down here since I last was. In fact, I doubt anybody other than T’Pol and I even knows it exists. But just in case somebody who’s not me does find their way down, there’s a second hidden exit in the base of the last shower cubicle. You just turn the heat setting to sixteen without turning the water on, pull the dial towards you as far as it will go, turn it back to one and shove it back in.”

“How will we know if it’s you or not?” Edward rasps, scrubbing shakily at his eyes with his fists.

“I’ll knock three times on the inside of the turbolift doors before they open. There’s a warning chime that’ll sound a good minute before the lift actually arrives, and then there’s another thirty seconds before the pneumatic bolts on the door releases so you’ll have time to scramble if you need to.”

Archer pauses and takes a deep breath.

“As an absolute last resort,” he continues, “there are four phasers strapped to the underside of the cutlery drawer by the sink. Do not do anything stupid with them.”

And then he and Nogura step backwards back into the lift, the door hisses shut, and they’re left in ringing silence.

Cold, alone.

And miserable.

Leo pushes the stretcher up alongside one of the bunks and sets it to stasis mode. Edward immediately shuffles over, sits on the edge of the bed, takes one of Anna’s hands and stares off unseeing towards the back wall.

Chris, not knowing what to do with himself, stands in the middle of the room, a vacant look on his face, until Phil and Jim tug him over to the bathroom in the corner and carefully wash the blood of his hands and arms. Then Phil pulls both their ties off, undoes their top buttons and steers them to the couches in the corner. Pushing him down into the middle of the longest couch, both he and Jim sit either side of him and he feels the tears building again.

109. The ones you love should always be there for you

Phil’s arm come down around his shoulders, his thumb rubbing along his hairline above his ear.

Jim’s hand is solidly gripping his knee.

He breaks with another harsh sob.

He’s so emotionally exhausted, he’s only vaguely aware that he’s dozing off wrapped in Phil’s arms.
“Christopher.”

Chris hums acknowledgingly, registering that he’s lying with his head in someone’s lap. Fingers are carding through his hair slowly, a gentle, randomised pattern.

He forces his gummy eyes open and his Dad in crouched in front of him, a weary but resigned look on his face.

“Now I want you to listen to me, and I want you to listen well,” Edward starts, voice gruff. “No matter how old you get, how many wrinkles and creaky joints you earn, how many birthdays pass you by, you will always be my boy. I was there when you were born, I raised you as my own, because as far I’m concerned, you are my own. I have watched you grow, watched you learn and flourish, and watched you become a man in your own right. I loved you from the first, and I will never stop loving you. I am proud to be known as your father and I am beyond proud of you. So I want you to promise me one thing son. One thing.”

Chris frowns in silence, holding his Dad’s gaze steadily, feeling the sincerity radiating from him in his bones. Slowly, he nods.

“I want you to promise me that you will never, ever blame yourself for what happened; I know what you’re like kiddo and I’m telling you not to. Your Mother loved you just as much as I do. You and your sister have always been our most cherished treasures, and she wouldn’t have wanted you to blame yourself for something completely beyond your control. You were there to hold her, to let her know she wasn’t alone in her final moments, to remind her that she is, was and always will be loved. Let that be enough son. For me, for her, let it be enough.”

Chris swallows, and forces himself to nod again, ear rubbing on the wool of Phil’s dress pants.

“Now sit up so I can hug you, you great lummox,” Edward half laughs, rubbing at his suspiciously moist eyes with one hand. “Forty-five and fully grown or no, you always were a cuddly son of a gun.”

“Well I had to be,” Chris tries to joke weakly, sounding hoarse. “Growing up with you around, throwing your arms around me at every given opportunity. I had to adapt to survive!”

“It’s the twenty-third century boyo, I’m allowed to be touchy-feely and male now don’t you know.” Chris chuckles into his Dad’s shoulder, face pressed in tight and his arms tight around his back.

Silently, he promises to actually try and keep his promise to his Dad.

110. Never blame yourself for situations beyond your control

“I just want to know how he got a plasma boltgun,” Jim mutters, drawing star constellations in the dust on the coffee table with his finger. “Archer was obsessive with the security for today. Every single person going in and out of that room was being full body searched and scanned, the room was rigged with enough 3D HoloCams and detector equipment to rival the bridge of Constellation class at red alert. The backgrounds of every security officer were checked half a dozen times and their rotas randomised by one of Spock’s algorithms. The door opening and the forcefield opening? Yeah you could hack that remotely if you were a computer genius and didn’t mind inevitably being caught. But the boltgun? How?”

“Five hundred on Komack being a treasonous sleeper agent back stabbing traitorous bastard,” Chris growls, folding his arms across his chest and forcing himself not to pace.
“Don’t jump to conclusions based on personal prejudice son,” Edward sighs, scrubbing a hand down his face and slouching further into the couch.

“Oh no, my creds are definitely on Komack too,” Phil grimaces.

“Thirded,” Leo adds, tapping the wall he’s leaning on with his heel repeatedly.

“After the disaster of Talos IV?” Jim shrugs, “and his insistence on defending Finnegan? The Canadian survival training and his attitude in general? I’ve got to say Edward, they’re probably right. As an Admiral, he has clearances that even Archer and Marcus can only partially monitor. He was in the perfect position to slip something in that he shouldn’t have.”

“But surely he would have to go through the security gates just the same as the rest of us?” Edward asks, looking a mixture of incredulous and angry.

“He’d have found a way.” Chris grumbles, turning so he can lean his knee against Jim’s shoulder, who is sat on the floor despite the dust. “He is intelligent enough to have made it into the senior Admiralty despite his controversial opinions after all. If he’d been just a little bit less sharp-minded, Nogura would’ve been able to stop him ever rising above Commander in rank.”

“Well in that case, as soon as we have some solid evidence, I call dibs on first punch,” Edward says tonelessly, glancing away. “And then when you’ve had your own turn at breaking his face, I’m gonna snap his neck.”

“Deal,” Chris nods harshly, an unpleasant smirk twisting his features.

Chris grips his phaser tightly, and stands with the others around the open Jeffery-tube like chute under the shower, senses on high alert as he waits desperately for three knocks.

When three louds bangs do indeed echo out into the room, his shoulders droop in relief, and he glides over to the exit to the glass walled shower room, peering round the edge towards the door, with Jim at his back. He doesn’t relax his hold on his weapon though; between years of experience out in the black and the events of the past few months, he’s learnt well to not let his guard drop.

He’s forgotten **Point 23** too many times before now and payed for it too often.

Then the door finally does hiss open and Porthos comes bounding over with a happy bark and a wagging tail. Archer is quick to stride out after the beagle, grumbling under his breath and clomping loudly with his cane. Chris waves a lazy salute and then bends down to rub at the small dog’s ears.

“Right, back into the lift with you all,” he snaps out, clearly still fraught and agitated. “Leonard, there’s a security group waiting upstairs to escort you to the hospital. The rest of you are going to Nogura’s house where his wife can keep an eye on you all. Well don’t just stand there! Hop to!”

Standing by the door to an ambulance shuttle, Edward kneels beside the stretcher one final time and places a gentle kiss between his wife’s closed eyes. Chris stands behind him, one hand on his shoulder and carefully keeps his breathing steady and even.

***111. Goodbyes are not just difficult, they’re agonising***

They sit in silence, huddled together in Nogura’s front room, tea cups left half full and abandoned on the table between them.
And they wait.

Leo shuffles into the house just as the last of the sun’s rays are filtering through the wooden blinds over the front windows. He looks tired and worn, and he shakes his head before dropping to the floor to sit leaning on the wall next to Jim.

Asumi Nogura mutters to the computer and a single lamp flickers to life in the far corner of the room.

They all remain seated and silent.

“Before I show or tell you anything, I want your sworn words that you will not act until Heihachiro, Alex or I say you can,” Jon commands sternly, as he and Marcus set a large metal crate down on the rug in the centre of the room.

“My lad and I will gladly make you tha’ promise Admiral, but I ain’t guaranteeing we’ll stick to it,” Edward rumbles, his native Yorkshire accent unusually strong.

“You do not act, or you do not get any information,” Marcus reiterates harshly, bending over to press his thumb to the scanner on the side of the crate.

“I’ll make sure they behave,” Phil sighs, shooting Chris a meaningful look. One that clear says “don’t you dare do something stupid”.

Marcus, Nogura and Archer all look at each other and then together, they flip the lid of the crate open.

An array of screens unfold and a series of drawers slide open along the front. Marcus gives the system a voice key when prompted for it, and then files and coding are pouring down one screen while HoloCam footage flickers across another. Reaching down into one of the shallow drawers, Nogura pulls a hand full of data chips out, slots them into the base of the screen.

“As you may have gathered gentlemen, Starfleet Command has a bit of an infiltration issue at the moment,” Archer grunts, reaching over Marcus’ shoulder to tap at the speed slider at the bottom of the HoloCam footage. “Until recently we’d been assuming it was only one or two individuals, and that they were, at worst, in the lower ranks of the flag officers. Then you came to me last year with a complaint about withheld rations on a routine training exercise and I did a little digging and turned up some unexpected gold. Highly tainted gold, but gold none the less.”

“I fucking knew that bastard was involved,” Jim spits, his fist bashing hard onto the floor next to him.

“If you break my vintage mahogany floorboards Kirk, my Asumi will have your guts for garters,” Heihachiro states dryly with a raised eyebrow. “But yes, Komack is up to his eyeballs in it.”

“However, it turns out it isn’t just one or two individuals after all,” Marcus continues, pointing to the image Archer freezes on the screen. “Not one mole, but a whole labour of them.”

A date stamp from less than three days ago.

A stark white cell, a lunar detention centre stamp inset into the floor.

Komack shaking hands with Carlton Pritch-Howard.

Another older man with a striking resemblance to Jake Finnegan with a dress uniform jacket slung
over his arm standing to Komack’s left. There are Commander stripes visible on one sleeve.

A shorter individual lurking in the shadows of the corridor, almost out of shot and her face too blurry for identification. Her Commodore’s jacket however, is clearly recognisable.

A huddle of other men and woman of varying ages and ranks, clustered off to the side. Not one of them looking the slightest bit concerned by the proceedings.

A man face down on the floor between them all. Unmoving. A Betazoid guard by his clothing.

The blood pooling under him contrasts starkly with the clinical atmosphere of the rest of the cell.

**112. Traitors dig their own graves.**

Unnoticed by anyone but Chris, Edward slides out of the room silently.
The next fifteen minutes pass very slowly for Chris

Marcus and Archer continue peering at the screens, muttering over the different holofeeds flickering across them. Nogura drags Jim into the kitchen, loudly stating that they all need eat, crisis or no. Chris remains sat next to Phil, his other half pressed solidly against him, one hand being gripped tightly. Together, they watch the two senior Admirals in the middle of the room. Every minute or so, another Starfleet officer is added to the growing list of suspects and Phil sighs loudly.

Leo stays sat on the floor, absentmindedly rubbing Porthos’ ears and frowning at a Medical PADD. Chris decides not to ask whose data he’s reviewing; he has no doubt he won’t like the answer.

“Nogura thought we could all do with a shot of something strong and expensive,” Jim suddenly mumbles, shuffling back into the room with a bottle clasped in one hand and a tray of glasses balanced on the other.

“Damn right we all do,” Archer grumbles as he swipes one of the glasses and tips back the pale green liquid contained within.

Marcus pauses for a second, before taking a glass of his own and following suite. Phil sighs once again and gestures Jim to come closer.

“What even is this stuff?” the older doctor asks quietly, holding the swirling, slightly pearlescent substance up to the light.

“Rissan happlebrush,” Jim answers, hefting the bottle to squint at the label. “Apparently it tastes like citrusy Scottish single malt. Nogura figured Edward would like-”

Jim cuts off mid-sentence, staring at the empty corner of the room where Chris’ dad had previously been sitting.

“Please tell me he’s just gone to the bathroom or something,” Phil says hastily, pushing himself to his feet and darting towards the hallway, Leo and Jim hot on his heels.

“Oh you’ve got to be kidding me,” Archer groans as he listens to the trio begin to call out Edward’s name.

Chris stays sat and tries to look neither smug nor guilty.

113. If you’re quiet enough, you can get away with rather a lot.

“He’s definitely not in the house or the garden,” Jim pants, skidding to a stop beside Marcus.
“We gathered that kid,” Archer growls, nodding towards the far-left screen. On it, Edward can be seen glancing from side to side just before stepping off a tram at the bay-end of the Academy campus.

“…That’s near the Torvey Building,” Jim mutters as he watches the holocam footage track the older man jogging across the road.

“Fuck,” Marcus bites out abruptly, stabbing a couple of keys and scrolling down a blue-lit menu rapidly. “He’s gone into the surveillance dead zone behind the Admin building.”

“Dead zone?” Chris asks roughly, his voice dry and hoarse from neither speaking nor drinking enough for several long hours. He shuffles to the edge of the couch and clasps his hands together tightly, wishing Phil would come back into the room and sit beside him once more.

“Megan Singh asked to take that holocam sector offline for repairs yesterday morning,” Marcus growls, now flicking swiftly from one Holofeed to another. “Water damage in one unit, and the whole lot in that circuit were in danger of short circuiting and blowing.”

“He’s gotta come out of it soon though,” Archer sighs, leaning more of his weight onto his cane. “We’ll get back on his trail.”

“Can’t you send someone after him?” Jim asks with a frown. “Security or a trusted Lieutenant or someone?”

“We might risk alerting Komack if we go anywhere near that building.” Marcus grunts. “Right now he’s sitting pretty thinking we still don’t know for sure that he’s involved with Terra Prime.”

“But if it’s just one person, surely that won’t set off alarm bells?” Jim disputes. “Especially if its someone who’s not directly connected to us.”

“Give me the name of one single individual that you both trust implicitly and can guarantee that Komack’s not watching Kirk. One name, then I’ll agree with you.”

Jim opens and closes his mouth a few times, then rolls his eyes and drops backwards onto the couch next to Chris. Chris automatically puts his arm over Jim’s shoulder and pats his arm consolingly when Marcus shoots him a “I thought as much” look.

“So what’s the plan then?” Chris asks with a cough. Marcus finally looks away from Jim with a final narrowing of his eyes, and goes back to tapping at the centre screen.

“We’ve got all the evidence we need to move on Komack as soon as Marcus’ people give us the signal that they’re ready to go,” Archer states.

“And who are Marcus’ people?” Phil asks dryly, appearing in the doorway of the front room.

“That,” Marcus responds sternly, “is a question for another time and a high security briefing room.”

“Oh, so Section 31 then,” Chris mutters sarcastically, exchanging an overexaggerated eye roll with Phil. “What?” he continues dryly when Marcus looks at them both alarmed, “I’ve been a department head for nearly two and a half years now. I’d have to be deaf and stupid not to know about 31.”

“Erm,” Jim interrupts nervously, “What’s section 31?”

“A branch of Starfleet Intelligence,” Archer answers before Marcus can give a more evasive answer, distaste clear in his tone. “They’re a… shady bunch shall we say.”
“You can disapprove all you like Jonathon,” Marcus mutters, still scanning holofeeds, “they’re essential to the operation of Starfleet.”

“Essential my ass,” Archer snorts. “But the point is, we’re nearly all set up to take Komack and his network down. Give it five more minutes and we-”

The older Admiral cuts off as his long-range Comm starts beeping loudly and rapidly from his inside jacket pocket.

“Oh now what?” Marcus grumbles.

114. Twice as old just means twice as capable of finding trouble

Cussing under his breath, Jon undoes the top buckle of his jacket and extracts his Comm from his inside pocket. Flipping the lid open with a well practiced flick of his wrist, he waits for the usual activation crackle to finish, and then twists the dial to answer the call.

“Archer here,” he says crisply, holding his gaze level with Marcus.

“Sir, this is Lieutenant Z’or calling from containment block beta-four-A of the Mars detention facilities. We might have a bit of a situation here.”

Chris exchanges a blank look with Phil as the slightly crackly voice comes over the wavelength; the obviously young officer sounds exceedingly nervous.

“How did you get this frequency Lieutenant?” Archer barks out, staring levelly at the bank of screens as Marcus starts rapidly flicking through Holofeeds until the external from the Mars martial centre pops up.

“It’s listed under high priority contacts for emergencies sir,” the young lady stutters, audibly swallowing. “I just logged into the server and pulled up the operational manual for unauthorised access by officers who outrank you.”

_There’s a whole manual for that?_ Jim mouth across the room at him with a mildly incredulous look. Chris shrugs back, long used to ‘Fleet bureaucracy cropping up in the most unusual of places.

“Which officer tried to access the block Lieutenant?” Archer asks commandingly.

“Erm, there were two of them,” she replies hesitantly. “Officers I mean. Both of them human; one Commodore and a senior Admiral. The latter ordered me to record him on the logs as Admiral Pike, he even had official ID stating such. But I know damn well that’s not who he is -I served under Admiral Pike for a term when he was a Commander and I a Cadet. That’s why I went looking for an emergency contact. I knew something fishy was going on.”

“Lieutenant, please tell me you haven’t let them into the facility?”

“Well I did,” she chuckles nervously, “But I don’t have to let them back out again do I? And this is the high security wing so I’m manning the only exit.”

Archer’s tense, worried expression suddenly morphs into one of amusement.

“No. You don’t have to let them back out,” he chuckles.

“Got them,” Marcus interjects, waving at the centre screen. “Though I do want to know how the hell
they got off planet so quickly without us noticing.”

“Definitely Komack,” Archer nods in agreement, glancing at the screen. Then, bringing his Communicator back up, “Lieutenant Z’or, if you can keep both of them locked in until I say so, there’ll be a very nice promotion and reassignment coming your way.”

“Sir?” Z’or asks hesitantly, “What about the third individual that was-”

“Hold up Jonathon,” Marcus suddenly snaps. “They’ve got an unwilling passenger with them.”

Chris jumps to his feet hastily and feels the blood draining from his face. For the first time since he let his Dad slip away unnoticed, he regrets the decision.

Because there on the screen, being dragged fully into view, is Edward.

A trail of blood running down his bare arm and dripping from his fingertips.

**115. You might think you’re sure of something, but always second guess yourself just in case.**

Phil grips his hand tightly, and Jim is leaning on his left shoulder. Leo stands behind Jim, one hand resting on his boyfriend’s lower back.

They stand, the four of them in a huddle, as Marcus tries to order them to remain in Nogura’s house.

They don’t even have to issue their denials themselves.

Archer laughs in Marcus’ face and tells him to stop being ridiculous for them.

“They must have beamed straight from here to Mars,” Chris mutters gruffly to Phil as they all bundle into the airbus waiting just outside Nogura’s front door. “Dad only went into that blind patch five minutes before Komack has him in the detention centre.

“If they made a jump that far in one go, they must have used the new transporter room in the Avery Annexe,” Phil adds quietly, clicking the buckle of his seat harness together. “It’s the only pad that’ll let you beam that distance and go through the Earth’s defence shielding.”

“But that’s on the other side of campus to the Admin building,” Jim chips in. “If that’s where they beamed from, how’d they get Edward across campus so quickly without Marcus noticing on the holofeeds?”

“Short range medical transporter,” Phil and Leo say at the same time.

“There’s one just outside the entrance of the Admin Building for emergencies,” Phil continues, with a disapproving frown. “Normally you can’t access them without a verified medical code or an authorization frequency from an emergency operator. But I bet it’s pretty easy to override that if you’re a senior Admiral.”

“It is because I’ve done it,” Nogura grunts from the driver’s seat. “He could easily have used an SRMT to hop over to the Avery Annexe with no-one the wiser. It’s what I would have done in his position.”

“I’m going to get that damn protocol changed as soon as this mess is ended,” Marcus grumbles from the other front seat. “Every use of those SRMTs is getting centrally logged with both medical and security, no matter how high your ‘Fleet clearance from now on.”
“I second that notion,” Archer adds with a grimace.

“So… Where are we going?” Chris asks as they leave the city limits.

“If you’re going to running the show in a few years, then it’s time we start letting you in on a few ‘Fleet secrets,” Marcus grunts back.

Jim loudly clears his throat, and then points between Bones and himself with a questioning look.

“And you two,” Marcus continues, swivelling to glare into the back of the bus, “should not be here under any circumstance. But it seems I have little choice in the matter, so you better swear on each other’s lives to never breathe a word of this to anyone. Ever. Or you’ll wish I’d left you in Terra Prime’s clutches.”

“Cross my heart and hope to die,” Jim mutters, exchanging a concerned look with Chris.

Phil, Chris notes, wisely stays still and silent beside him.

They pull into a sunlight vineyard, the air bus rumbling slightly as it hovers down a narrow dusty track between two fields.

There’s a low but wide tower at the end, a simple metal tub with a solitary windmill creaking intermittently in the sporadic breeze.

Marcus stops before it, and then flashes the headlights twice at the base.

A port appears in front of them.

They drive slowly into the darkness.

There’s a distant rumbling in the pitch black, and then a jolt as they suddenly begin to drop slowly.

Chris fumbles beside him until he manages to grasp Phil’s hand and squeeze it reassuringly.

116. There’s always one more surprise

“Good god, this place is huge!” Leo breathes out in shock.

And it is.

A massive, sprawling underground complex.

“Welcome to the San Francisco branch of Section 31 gentlemen,” Marcus announces, striding off across the large, open warehouse like space they clambered out of the airbus into. “Do yourselves a big favour and don’t touch anything.”

“He’s not kidding,” Nogura smirks as he too strides off after Marcus. “I poked a lunch box last time I was down here and it exploded.”

Across the other side of the massive hall, they’re intercepted by a stony-faced individual dressed entirely in black, gloves, headband and all.
“Commander Lux,” Marcus greets, nodding at the crisp salute he’s given. “I’ve got some temporary recruits for you.”

Lux eyes the group of them huddle together sceptically.

“How much prep time do I have to batter them into shape?” the commander asks gruffly, his voice deep and gravelly.

“About 10 minutes,” Archer answers overly cheerfully, Porthos wagging by his feet, “So I’d hop to.”

“You Admirals never ask for much, do you?” Lux grumbles before jerking his head towards a set of metallic double doors and stalking towards them.

“You’ve got three minutes to put all this tack gear on. Any man not ready and waiting by the door when I get back is getting left behind.”

“What do you mean you’re not coming with us?” Chris frowns at Archer.

“I’ve seen more than my fair share of phasor fights already kid,” Jon replies wryly. “Nogura and I will catch up with you once you’ve got Komack secured and Edward back to safety.”

The strap on Chris’ collar is driving him mad.

“Bloody antiquated Velcro,” he grumbles, rubbing at the patch of skin being irritated by it once again.

“Stop scratching at it,” Phil grunts as he re-laces his left boot for the fourth time.

“This is insane and y’all are insane,” Leo moans as they’re finally motioned over towards the oddly red-tinted transporter pad. “And I’m even more insane for going along with y’all’s insanity.”

“Kneel down and keep your heads down” Lux barks out angrily. “You stay towards the back of the team, and keep your phasors in hand and charged. If anyone of you steps so much as a toe out of line, I will not hesitate to put you down and leave you for the detention centre security to find. Got it Normies?”

“Why am I still letting this insanity continue?” Leo growls anxiously as he drops to one knee between Phil and Jim.

Chris leans over and pats the younger doctors arm consolingly. Because honestly, he’s pretty sure they’re all insane too.

“Get down, get down!”

Chris slams to the deck, pulling Phil down with him.

Fire races over his head, hot and scalding as he shields his other half’s body with his own.

The hairs on the back of his neck crackle and the sharp smell of singed flesh and metal assaults his senses.
They appear to have a flame-thrower,” A young black-clad Denebulan deadpans as she drags both Chris and Phil back around a corner in the corridor.

Phil’s hands are still shaking in his when Chris hears a triumphant cry that sounds distinctly like Jim echo into the open cell they’ve taken shelter in.

Seconds later the sprinkler system bursts to life.

“Oh for god sake,” Phil moans as they’re quickly soaked to the skin, “What is it with you and Jim and fire suppressant systems?”

“Hey if it works, don’t knock it,” Chris grins back as water drips from his eyelashes.

“I’m firing the lot of you,” Marcus grumbles, slicking his sodden hair backwards.

“Pike. I knew you’d come running to save your daddy dearest.”

“Let him go Komack!”

“Not until you give me Pritch-Howard and let my associates and I leave this cell block without further issue.”

“You know we can’t do that Komack. Just drop the phaser and let him go!”

“Place your weapons on the floor gentlemen, and then walk backwards into the open holding cell behind you. Once you’re inside, place your hands on your head, allow me to raise the security force field, and then I shall place Pike senior in the cell opposite without harming another hair on his head.”

“No can do Komack!”

“Drop your weapons gentlemen, or I shall pull the trigger of mi-”

Komack crumbles to a heap on the floor as a fiery red-headed human woman drops from a vent above him and jams an electric stun rod against his neck.

“What?” she shrugs with a smirk, “He only said you men should throw your phasers away.”

117. Keep an ear out for loopholes. They can be both your saviour or your downfall

“She’s hot,” Jim whispers in his ear as he wipes yet more water out of his eyes.

“You confuse me son,” he grumbles back, following Phil and Leo as they race down the corridor towards where Edward is leaning on the wall with a pained grimace.

“You’re all idiots and I don’t know why I’m allowing you to be,” Marcus sighs as he supervises the cuffing and removal of the still unconscious Komack. Further along the corridor, muffled yelling can be heard as several of the section 31 operatives rather ruthlessly apprehend the Commodore that accompanied the rogue Admiral.

“It’s his fault,” Phil grins, pointing at Jim over his shoulder with his thumb.

“It’s always his fault,” Leo adds before Jim can protest, carefully unloading a hypo against Edward’s
“And on the rare occasions that it’s not his fault, then its Chris’ fault instead,” Phil finishes.

“I say we disown them,” Chris smirks, throwing his arm over Jim’s shoulder.

“All of you, idiots,” Marcus sighs again.

The sprinklers continue to soak them all, but Chris smiles happily.

Because now? His family is finally safe.

Damaged, disheartened, and demoralised.

But safe

Chapter End Notes

hmu on Tumblr. I actually use it these days :P

Drop a prompt in my ask box, ask me about whatever you want. I'm game

EDIT: I'm not entirely sure why my brain thought it was 33 and not 31, but they've all been fixed now :)
With everyone associated with Terra Prime finally ferreted out, rounded up, and shipped off to a variety of off-world detention centres, Chris finally gets to jam all the contents of their small apartment into moving crates and start shifting them across to the new flat in the Admiralty block.

The process is a bitter sweet one.

On the one hand; more space, new beginnings, better amenities, a fresh start.

On the other…

On the other, he has, over the years, collected an awful lot of knickknacks. Picking through them is both nostalgic, heart-warming, and heart breaking. Every one of them has a story to go with it, and while he revels in sharing some of them with Jim, it hurts whenever he comes across one that was a gift from his mom.

There’s also the fact that this small officer’s apartment is where he and Jim forged their bonds and became family. Where he and Phil spent their first night together after admitting their feelings for one another.

Memories.

Scattered about like well-loved dreams.

Half-forgotten but still there at the edge of your mind.

The black mark above the replicator from where it exploded that Jim never did manage to clean off. A series of scuff marks on the wall by the holoscreen from where young Daniel threw a toy shuttle at it that one time.

The horrifically bright paint scheme Chris decided on because he was still sick of the gun metal grey his assigned quarters on ships always were before he was a Captain and allowed to order it to be changed.

The remnants of the coffee table, still stacked against the back wall. A testament to Jim’s over adventurousness.

A round stain on the desk in the study, because Phil is incapable of using mug coasters, no matter how often he’s reminded of their existence.

The chunk of plaster missing to the right of Chris’ bed. Made by Jim when he was being an ass and insisting Chris get up in the middle of the night on Chinese New Year to watch the fireworks. He’d thrown himself on the bed in a huff when Chris continued to refuse, and knocked the lamp against it.

The little smiley face drawn in the dust on the top shelf of one of the display units.

“lyl, Mom” written underneath it.

118. Always look to the future, but don’t ever forget the past.
So yes, he’s excited about what’s to come.

But he’s also unbearably sad to be leaving this all behind.

Bones has to spend that first night in the new apartment at Medical, for reasons he seems reluctant to share.

Chris can guess why, and doesn’t press.

He misses his mom too much already.

Because of Leo’s absence though, Jim shuffles aimlessly around with a vacant expression that evening, clearly feeling like a spare part. Edward watches him silently from where he’s almost huddled in the corner, while Chris forces himself not to make Jim sit down beside him so he can hold him still.

Instead, he watches him pace.

Eventually, Chris can restrain himself no longer and so rolls to his feet. Jim pauses as he approaches, and finally a small spark of alertness returns to his eyes.

“Come on son,” he tells his boy, nodding towards the master bedroom where Phil has already passed out for the night.

“Huh?”

“Come on. Time for bed for the lot of us.”

When Jim shuffles but doesn’t move, he gently clasps his wrist and walks backwards until Jim starts to follow.

“Jeans off, remove your wristbands and hoody, and lie down son.”

Jim raises one eyebrow sarcastically at Chris pronouncement, but the effect is lost in his otherwise sleepy expression and the yawn that immediately follows.

“I’m twenty-four dad,” he mumbles, expression merging into one of faint embarrassment. “More than a little too old to be sleeping with my parents really.”

“Like Phil and I give a damn,” Chris smiles. “Now into bed with you and I’ll be back in five once I’ve sorted my own dad out.”

Edward insists on sleeping on the couch, despite them now having a spare room and Jim’s room being empty for the night.

“Sleeping in bed alone just feels so wrong,” his dad sighs when Chris tries to object for the third time.

He drops the subject immediately, and goes to unpack some spare blankets.

“What’s this?” Chris grumbles when Marcus and Nogura both show up at the apartment the next morning and hand him a stack of PADDs. Chris is still working on his first cup of coffee, and he’s very glad that he’s recently learnt to not care what senior Admirals think of his appearance.
He is glad however, that he choose to put actual flannel pants on last night, rather than just sleeping in his boxer shorts.

“Arrangements,” Nogura grunts, frowning a little at the Mr. Grumpy Chris is wearing. “You need to double check them with your father and- I mean, with your dad and your grandparents, but we used the instructions on record for both the basics and the details so it should be mostly sorted.”

Chris stares at the stack of PADDS in silence.

Mind gone blank.

Eventually, Marcus sets them down on the kitchen worktop, nods and leaves. Nogura watches him with a sympathetic expression for a few more seconds, before he too, turns and heads for the door.

Chris stands.

And stares.

“Can’t,” he grunts to his Dad.

The stack of PADDS stares up at them both like a void.

“Can,” Edward replies, quivering. “We both can.”

An arm around his shoulder, and slowly.

Slowly he makes himself pick up the top PADD.

The funeral is beautifully arranged.

The funeral is still awful.

Its raining throughout the ceremony, despite the normally arid climate of the Mojave. A fine drizzle that seeps into your clothing and drips down into your boots until you’re as miserable as the weather.

Phil stands beside him, hand griping his. Edward on his other side, their shoulders pressed together. Emily and Andrew with Jim and Leo behind them, Leo with one arm around his other half’s back. Chris can hear Jim’s unsteady breath in his ear.

He grips Jack’s shoulder, who stands before him, stoic as a young, upset teenager can be. Grace gripping her brother’s hand and the twins the quietest they’ve ever been pressed against their shins.

The rain does very little to hide all their tears.

**119. Not all emotions are pleasant, but they should all be embraced and dealt with accordingly.**

Chris just wishes he knew how to deal with something this awful.

“I’m probably beginning to sound like a broken record,” Edward smiles ruefully when it’s finally, finally over. “But she really was proud of you Christopher. And she loved you to the end of the universe and back.”
“I know Dad,” Chris mumbles, trying to smile back. Probably not succeeding. “I know she was, and I loved her too.”

“And I’m proud of you too son. So, so proud of you.”

Chris doesn’t try to answer this time, just steps into his Dad’s arms and accepts the hug being offered.

Returns it.

“Now come on son, let’s go indulge in one of your Mom’s favourite activities.”

Chris can feel his Dad’s smirk through his shoulder.

“Drinking too much and laughing at everyone?”

“Oh we’re gonna snigger at so many bad outfits my boy.”

“Hi-vis yellow sweater at bearing 60 mark 0,” Jim mutters, chuckling drunkenly.

“I’m not sure if his vile sweater or his overly-tight legging things are worse,” Edward snorts as he tips back his bottle and drains the rest of its contents.

“I’m going with both as a combo,” Chris grins, trying and failing to pick his pint glass back up.

120. Try to find joy in even the most bleak of experiences.

Phil disappears to pull the old Spiderman duvet off Chris’ childhood bed when they stumble back into the ranch far too late into the night.

Chris has already collapsed face down on to the double bed in the other, larger bedroom and is having another giggling fit when Phil finally staggers back in whistling the Spiderman theme horrifically off key.

“Can he swing from a web? Yes he can ‘cause he’s a pleb,” Chris sings not quite in tempo with Phil as he rolls sloppily onto his back.

“SpiderPleeebb, Spiderpleb,” Phil chuckles, tripping down next to him, duvet still gripped in his arms.

“Mom bought me that,” Chris says softly, reaching out to stroke the faded and worn sheets with one hand. “I was eight and she bought me that.”

“Your mom had good taste,” Phil smiles at the ceiling, trying and mostly failing to spread the too small cover over them both.

“Well duhhh,” Chris drawls, deciding to sprawl over Phil’s chest. “She likes you, so her good taste is obvious.”

Phil is silent as Chris then has to take in a few shuddery breathes and forces the tear back once again.

“She always liked you,” he mutters sadly when the urge to breakdown again has lessened. “Just like I do.”
“Love you too honeybee,” Phil breathes into the top of his hair, one hand gently stroking up and down his spine.

“You’re the best person ever,” he mumbles back as he lets sleep drag him down.

The next weeks are a blur.

There’s half a week of lazing round at the Mojave ranch, eating and drinking and laughing and trying to ignore the hole left in all their hearts. And then the outside world is bearing down on them again, demanding their attention and a return to reality.

Edward stays, offering to take over a lot of the business side of the running of the ranch, much to Chris’ grandparents’ relief.

Emily and her brood head back to New York to pick up the threads of their old life and re-enrol the kids in their schools and academies. To reopen their penthouse loft and try to move forward.

Phil rounds the rest of them up and somehow gets them a private shuttle back to the Academy. Chris suspects Archer had a hand in it, but Phil doesn’t explain so he doesn’t ask.

So before Chris knows it, they’re back in San Francisco with the daily demands of Starfleet filling their days.

It’s a… relief, if he’s being entirely honest with himself.

That he gets to pretend, even though nothing will ever be the same again.

“I need whiskey, I need a shower, hot food, and then a week’s worth of sleep,” Chris groans as he slinks in through their front door after a very long day with Marcus off Campus. He feels grimy after spending thirteen hours snooping around in distasteful affairs.

“In that order? Or can I feed you first?” Jim asks from the kitchen, his voice echoing brightly into the hallway.

“I really don’t care what order,” he sighs back as he kicks his boots into the closet and wrestles his way out of his uniform jacket.

“One plate of roast beef, crisp roasties, and homemade Yorkshire puddings coming up then.”

“You make Yorkshire puddings now?” Chris asks, leaning inside the kitchen doorframe. Jim is flitting back and forth between the hob top and the replicator, a whisk in one hand and a bunch of asparagus in the other.

“Edward sent me the recipe yesterday. Apparently I’m not allowed to use store bought or replicated one’s ever again on pain of dismemberment.”

“You’re never getting out of making roasts ever again now, you know that right?”

“I can live with that Dad.”

121. Exercise your skills and talents as often you can.

Chris stares at the prospective financial data and feels a migraine coming on.
“Where have all these numbers come from,” he winces, jabbing at the unexpected sums of money with his index finger.

“These are the unclassified versions of the budget,” Nogura explains, swiping left to reveal even more income columns. “This is all Starfleet Intelligence funding, this is anonymous donors that we keep off record, and this Section 31’s annual overturn.”

“That’s a lot of credit,” he states, not sure whether to be surprised, horrified, or amazed.

“Yeah, and this is just the Terran branch sheets. There’s another classified set for the Casa Menisee research centre which is half way across the sector, and another for the Jupiter construction yards.”

“There are construction yards behind Jupiter!? Since when?”

“Don’t ask me kid. Marcus set that up about five years back and I’m still not sure what’s actually being built there. Research equipment I think.”

“Well that’s reassuring,” Chris mutters dryly, still scrolling down through the data.

“He hasn’t killed us all, doomed us to slavery, or started an interstellar war yet, so I think we can trust him for now Pike. He’s not doing too bad actually, considering the shitstorm that the job always comes with.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

122. Always celebrate achievement

“Guess who passed basic flight!” Jim squeals with glee, barrelling into the front room and pitching himself over the back on the couch to land with a jolt on Chris.

Still wheezing from the elbow in his stomach, Chris makes a vague waving motion towards where Leo is stood scowling from the hall instead of trying to answer verbally.

“Oh yeah you bet he did!” Jim exclaims proudly. “My baby was soooo brave and even managed to score in the top 10 for his class! He’s been recommended for the advanced piloting course!”

“Jim, please stop talking about me as though I’m a toddler,” Leo grumps, folding his arms and scowling. Jim springs upright (sending Chris into another wheezing fit, damn that lad), and slides up to his boyfriend with a pout.

“But you did so good!” Jim whines, gloomphing into Leo’s chest (good word that, Chris thinks to himself, gloomphing).

“Yeah, and now I want a couple hours of excitement free peace thank-you very much.”

Jim pauses, and turns back towards Chris with a considering look.

Chris shrugs at him and continues to massage his sore sternum.

Then, to Chris horror, a smirk curls up the corners of his boy’s lips and the ever-present spark of mischief burns brighter in his eyes.

“I’ve got a better idea Bonsey,” he grins lowly, voice going husky.

“Oh yeah?” Leo replies after a beat, eyebrow raises and his own smirk developing.
“No!” Chris tries to object, but they’re already darting for the door and Jim’s room.

“Oh for the-! At least turn the damn sonic sound dampening system on!” he hollers at their rapidly retreating backs.

Two minutes later, he huffs in disgusted irritation and goes to meet Phil at Medical.

A meal out sounds far more appealing than spending another damn second at home listening to that.

123. Remember that absent friends will always come back eventually

“Oh Number One thank god,” Phil exclaims, wrapping the small fierce woman in a hug.

“I assume things have been proceeding well on Earth since our last meeting?” she asks, looking across to Chris.

“Oh boy, do we have a tale or two to tell you all,” Leo smirks, clapping Spock on the shoulder as the Vulcan tries to stay back and just nod politely to the group. He jolts and shoots Chris a slightly wide-eyed look that makes Leo grin.

“We’ve had a few adventures,” Chris adds, exchanging a knowing look with Jim.

“They say adventures,” Leo drawls, pointing his thumb over his shoulder at him and Jim. “I say near death experiences.”

“…I see.” Spock states neutrally, head tipping slightly to one side in that curious way of his.

Leo still doesn’t move his hand.

“I suspect you really don’t Spock,” Number One chips in dryly. “Christopher could find trouble in a padded safety cell. Stars know what chaos he managed to cause with an actual terrorist organisation baying for his blood. And with mini-Chris in tow too; I’m shocked Earth is still in one piece!”

“Although I know worry over the unalterable is illogical and therefore unnecessary, I still fear it may be -to borrow from human vernacular- “better for my nerves” if I were to remain ignorant of the details.”

“Spock,” Leo smirks knowingly. “Despite the odds against you, you may yet turn out to be a wise man. Now down to business; drinks anyone?”

“Oh hell yeah,” Jim grins.

The reply is echoed cheerfully through the group.

Chris looks down at the small tester paint pot by his left foot again.

“Blue,” he says.

“I prefer the green,” Phil frowns.

“Kitchens should be blue. It is the way.”

“The way? On what planet?”
“This one. Definitely this one.”
“You’re delusional marma-jam.”
“We’re getting the kitchen painted blue Philip!”
“…Green.”

Chris loves Phil to the end of the known universe and beyond, but he is absolutely, 100% not ever backing down over the kitchen paint selection.

Even if he has to hack the Quartermaster request and make it unchangeable.

Somethings are just wrong if not done properly, and kitchen colour schemes are one of them.

He’s definitely hacking the Quartermaster request database.

“What the hell is this?” Phil gasps as he strides ahead of Chris into the kitchen.

“That, is genius and style in action,” Chris starts to say. Except he doesn’t get much further than the word genius before his sentence dies in a choked off garble of disbelief.

“I really like sunshine yellow,” Jim beams from the kitchen table, stirring a bowl of tomato soup. “Good choice guys!”

“Your son,” Phil audibly growls to Chris, “adopted or not, is a little shit.”

“Point 59. Jim Kirk is going to be the death of me,” Chris grumps, throwing himself sulkily into the chair beside Jim and sticking his little finger in his bowl for a taste.

“I have no idea what you mean,” Jim continues to smile innocently.

The yellow walls glare down at them all knowingly.

124. Keep your secret valuables secure and hidden at all times.

Jim has his book.

The small blue notebook filled with his handwritten points.

The points that are all about Jim.

“Not gonna lie dad,” the young man mutters without looking up, “this is very endearing, but also a little creepy.” He flicks over another page. “Okay, maybe quite a lot creepy.”

“Please put it down,” he blurs in a strangled voice.

It takes a lot of effort not to launch himself at the couch where Jim is lying to wrestle the notebook out of his hands.

“Point 134. Jim doesn’t handle being ill any better than I do. I’m guessing this is from when you found out about Tarsus, given the page is all blotchy with tear stains. Oh yeah, Point 136 is
“definitely because of Tarsus.”

“Jim please,” he begs, hands opening and closing nervously by his sides.

“I had wondered about the random points thing you and Phil snigger over. I assumed it was an old in joke from the Yorktown that I would never understand.”

“Jimmy, son of mine, light of my life and bringer of happiness. Please stop reading my book of random musings.”

“But it’s about me,” Jim states, sounding slightly awed and scanning several more pages. “No one’s ever paid this much attention to my mannerisms before. Paid attention to me.”

Chris sighs sadly, and forces himself to move. Jim tenses up as he approaches, but relaxes when he only sits on the edge of the couch and folds his hands in his lap.

“I don’t know why I started,” he admits with a self-depreciating smile. “Phil thinks I’m mad. Number One straight up called me insane. Hell, maybe I am. But start I did. And now you’ve found out about my odd little obsession. Which you know, was not the plan.”

Jim gazes up at him, puzzlement clear in his eyes,

“But… why are they about me?”

“This set, the originals that you’re nosing through. Yes, they’re all focused on you. The other, less so.”

“Wait, there’s more than one set?”

Chris rolls his eyes to ceiling and curses himself for his ill thought out phrasing.

“Okay yes, there’s more than one set. But I was going to say these are all about you because you were the main thing in my life worth focussing on when I started. Of course I paid attention to you kid. How could I not? You barrelled unexpectedly into my life and made everything better. You still do make everything better son.”

Jim grins and punches him gently in the arm.

“Sentimental old fool,” he chuckles, clearly trying to lighten the mood.

“You state that like it’s a new revelation,” he deadpans back.

“Point 184. I love James T. Kirk as if he were my own flesh and blood,” Jim reads out. “Nope. Definitely not a new revelation.”

“That’s the last one of that list,” Chris muses. “Phil said I should call it Captain C. Pike and Cadet J.T. Kirk’s guide to unexpected Co-Habitation,” he chuckles.

“Good name, even if I didn’t actually contribute” Jim snorts. “What about the other lists? Got any name ideas for those?”

“List, singular,” he clarifies. “The current one is more of a general survival guide to life in Starfleet based on recent personal experiences.”

“Oh, like a pocket manual?”

Jim splutters mirthfully again, and sits more upright, his knees tapping against Chris’ back.

“Does that mean I get to actually make a point in this one?” he asks. “Give me an idea of what you’ve been coming up with, I wanna know the format I should use.”

“Well **Point 1** was *Avoid green slime at all costs* and **Point 8** is *Admiral Jonathan Archer always knows everything.*”

“Wise words. What’s the next number?”

“Hundred and twenty-five.”

“Okay, let me think. Wait, wait. Alright, what about: **125. Keep your friends close and your loved ones closer.**”

“Jimmy,” Chris grins, “I couldn’t have phrased it better myself.”

“Too damn right you couldn’t old man,” Jim snarks back, wrapping Chris in a hug.

Chapter End Notes

Well… I guess I'll see you around guys :)}
APPENDIX

Chapter Notes

As always, let me know if you want anything adding! I will take fanart prompts (if I have time), and I will add your own fanart if you alert me to its existence :)

Please also let me know if you find any broken hyperlinks or missing images!

NB: If you are looking for a new upload, you probably need to go back a chapter!

Click the links below to jump to the relevant section

Chris' list of points (Part II Edition)
 - 1-29
 - 30-61
 - 61-93
 - 94-125
 - Starfleet Ranks
 - Starfleet Division Heads
 - Floorplan: Chris' Office
 - Floorplan: Mojave Ranch
 - Art: Chris' Biological Father
 - Art: Archer's Shirt
 - Family Tree
 - Pre-Fic head canons

Chris’ “Starfleet Survial Tips”

Clicking the Underlined number at the start of the point will take you to the place in the relevant chapter where the point was originally made.

(The links for Chapter 1 don’t currently work, as I have yet to go back and add the anchors. Sorry!)

Chapter 1

1. Avoid green slime at all costs.

2. Always know your Doctor's Comm number

3. Keep your enemies close, but your friends closer; they can be much crueller.

4. Avoid falling asleep in unusual places

5. No really, Avoid green slime at all costs.

6. Never let your criminally-inclined biological father visit you on campus
Chapter 2

7. Nosebleeds and Trams are not a good combination
8. Admiral Jonathan Archer always knows *everything*
9. Starfleet Medical’s filter coffee is horrifically bad; don’t drink it
10. Never break a posterior artery in the back of your nose.
11. Always befriend a senior Admiral.
12. Avoid morning people; they are unnatural.

Extra!
184. Chris Pike loves James T. Kirk as if he were his own flesh and blood.

Chapter 3

13. Always practice your scary command voice
14. Never let anyone wallow in unnecessary self-doubt
15. Never be overly harsh with a member of Starfleet; your words might turn out to be the last they ever hear.
16. Latin mottos never mean anything good in this century
17. An apple a day will keep the Doctor away. Thus, a shot of whiskey is a much better daily supplement.

Chapter 4

18. Never take your technology for granted
19. Having an eidetic echoic memory is often unpleasant.
20. Adults do not sulk.
22. Never presume, and never speculate.
23. Never let your guard down.

Chapter 5

24. The healing power of a good hug should never be underestimated.
25. No news might be good news, but *actual* news is usually better
26. Halloween is the *best* silly human holiday tradition.
27. Always take advantage of free candy
28. It’s not paranoia if they actually are out to get you

29. Always put your son’s wellbeing before your own. Always.

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Chapter 6

30. There’s appropriate music for every situation.

31. Appearances can be deceiving. And sometimes not.

32. Patience is a virtue you should strive to possess

33. Always take advantage of your surroundings

34. Rules snap under too much pressure, but remember they’ll bend first; you can push harder than you think…

35. Always consider your audience

Chapter 7

36. Hope for the best, prepare for the worst

37. Engineering can always throw something together twice as fast as you think is possible.

38. Physical reassurance works as well as -if not better than- verbal with most people

39. You can take the man outta space, but you can’t take space outta the man

40. Starship Engineering decks are always like a goddamn maze; avoid going alone!

41. New planets will always get your adventurous blood stirring

42. Not everyone will always be as enthusiastic as you are

43. You don’t have to be on holiday to collect a souvenir or two

Chapter 8

44. You can adapt to anything with enough exposure

45. The rumour mill always knows more than you expect it will

46. The universe will always have one more nasty surprise in store for you.

47. Sometimes you can apply Point 34, but sometimes ignoring orders is straight up necessary.

48. You can always rely on a doctor to be the calm in a storm.

49. Silence just means you should be extra wary.

50. Sometimes the only thing you have left is hope. Don’t let it go
Chapter 9

51. Even the bravest of individuals can be struck down by panic

52. Starfleet Doctors are always sarcastic assholes

53. The aftermath of a disaster is nearly always as bad as the disaster itself.

54. Sometimes the Admiralty know even less than you do

55. The best way to cheer up a demoralised crew is usually to give them a challenge

Chapter 10

56. The privileges of rank can have their downfalls

57. [see also: Point 52] Starfleet Doctors are terrifying bastards as well as sarcastic assholes

58. Nature and space regularly defy your expectations

59. Sometimes, calm is an unachievable state

60. Alcohol is not the answer to your problems; it’s the question and the answer is usually an emphatic yes

61. The ability to leap without looking unfortunately goes hand in hand with the ability to jump to incorrect conclusions

(Or alternatively) 61. Archer ships it…

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Chapter 11

62. Never forget to be grateful for what you have.

63. Learn to pack light. You’ll be glad you did

64. Always at least consider your possible options.

65. If a situation is beyond your control, sleep whenever you can.

66. You might want to snark, but sometimes you just shouldn’t

67. Prior experience with starvation is not recommended, but may come in useful.

68. If you think it can’t get much worse, it damn well will just to spite you

Chapter 12

69. If you ever develop any form of PTSD, be prepared for it to never truly leave you

70. Always remember that sometimes, pain means you’re still alive
71. Fanatics are utterly, *utterly* insane.

72. In the worst of situations, eat the food your given even if it physically pains you to do so.

73. Timely rescues are a gift from God and you should always be humble enough to shamelessly beg for one.

Chris’ concussed and dazed *alternative 73.* Point?? Phil, rescues, good. Yes

74. Unexpectedly skipping ranks can be a terrifying ordeal.

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**Chapter 13**

75. Home truly is where the heart is.

76. Sentimentality can be both a blessing and a curse.

77. In most cases, you can only remain oblivious for so long.

78. Always don the appropriate headwear.

79. Never take your eye off small children for even a *second*.

80. Sometimes you’ve just got to suck up your courage and take a leap of faith.

81. Furry friends are friends for life.

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**Chapter 14**

82. Nothing will ever run as smoothly as you’d like.

83. Being a member of Starfleet means sometimes coming home to an empty kitchen.

84. Be wary of stalkers.

85. Practice neutral facial expressions because you *will* need them.

86. Don’t be afraid to follow your heart.

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**Chapter 15**

87. In the ‘Fleet, there’s a betting pool for nearly everything.

88. Always tease your juniors.

89. Domestic bliss is as real as it is cliched.

90. Sometimes, its good to just take a moment and let the peace wash over you.

91. Never, ever trust High Command.

92. ???

93. Sometimes, you’ve just got to commit murder.
Chapter 16

94. Cohabitating ought to come with some sort of manual or something…

95. Some games, are just *classics.*

96. Sleep is most assuredly *not* just for the weak.

97. The more people who know a secret, the more chance it’ll become common knowledge

98. Even experts can sometimes miss the obvious

99. There are so many things that will always be far more powerful than bigotry and hate could ever be

Chapter 17

100. Even the manliest of men should cuddle one another once in a while

101. It’s best not to be too attached to materialistic goods.

102. Learn how to deal with grumpiness and short-tempered people

103. Harmless teasing should always be indulged in

104. Ties are evil

105. Legal proceedings are always intimidating.

106. Love is eternal. But life? Life is not.

Chapter 18

107. Sometimes the only alternative to feeling everything is feeling nothing.

108. Trust your friends and family, lest you go mad.

109. The ones you love should always be there for you

110. Never blame yourself for situations beyond your control

111. Goodbyes are not just difficult, they’re agonising

112. Traitors dig their own graves.

Chapter 19

113. If you’re quiet enough, you can get away with rather a lot.

114. Twice as old just means twice as capable of finding trouble
115. You might think you’re sure of something, but always second guess yourself just in case.
116. There’s always one more surprise
117. Keep an ear out for loopholes. They can be both your saviour or your downfall

Chapter 20

118. Always look to the future, but don’t ever forget the past.
119. Not all emotions are pleasant, but they should all be embraced and dealt with accordingly.
120. Try to find joy in even the most bleak of experiences.
121. Exercise your skills and talents as often you can.
122. Always celebrate achievement
123. Remember that absent friends will always come back eventually
124. Keep your secret valuables secure and hidden at all times.
125. Keep your friends close and your loved ones closer

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Starfleet Ranks

Officers:
Crewman (technically unranked)
Ensign
Lieutenant
Lieutenant Commander
Commander
Captain
Fleet Captain

Flag Officers:
Commodore
Rear Admiral
Vice Admiral
Admiral
Fleet Admiral

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Cross posted from the Appendix of Co-hab so you know who my random OC Admirals are when they crop up…

Starfleet Division Heads (Correct as of August 2255)
(Listed by descending rank)
StarFleet: Fleet Admiral Alexander Marcus
StarFleet (vice): Admiral Jonathan Archer
StarFleet (vice): Admiral Heihachiro Nogura
JAG [legal]: Admiral Richard Barnett
Finance: Admiral Arthur J. Dunnington
Operations: Admiral James P. Komack
Quartermaster: Vice Admiral Helen Crossby
Diplomatics: Vice Admiral Dakarai Risscount
Research and Development [Science]: Vice Admiral Jayesh Patel
Engineering: Rear Admiral Susan Mayweather
Surgeon General [Medical]: Doctor (RADM) Matheus Batch
Security: Commodore Megan F. Singh
Academy: Fleet Captain Christopher Pike
Recruitment: Fleet Captain Akilah Abdullah

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Floor Plans:

Chris' Office
The Mojave Desert Ranch
For general info, the small orange block is the old well house, which open to the air on the three outwards sides; this is where Chris is stood when Daniel meets a cactus…

For scale, the Annexe (pink) is the size of a reasonably sized four-bed family house. Yeah, it’s a big place lol
Art:

Carlton Pritch-Howard, at the request of 3DBABE1999

Fancast: A roughed up Clint Eastwood as Captain Christopher Pike’s Biological Father, Mr Carlton Pritch-Howard.

[“The best bit is when Mom told him she was pregnant with me, and he looked at her, looked at my sister, and immediately walked out. Said one brat was trouble enough, and two was asking too much.”]

SnowHeart posted a comment on Chapter 10 about Archer and fan clubs and shirts and I just had too…
The following was written in response to a comment posted by Reversed_Cookie_Monster. This is what Jim was up to between escaping Tarsus and the start of this fic:
The kids are all brought back to Earth by Starfleet and taken to a children's hospital in San Fran. Sure that his kids will be looked after, he immediately sneaks out and runs away. As soon as he can, he hacks his records, and deletes what few limited bits of information the federation has on JT; there’s not much, because he’d flat out refused to talk to anyone while on the ship back.

However, he knows he's still in a bit of a state, so he checks himself into a small children's hospital up near New York using a fabricated ID he constructs using the remanents of his JT profile. He tells the staff there that he's an orphan from a distant mining colony planet and that he's already seen the appropriate authorities about his circumstances and was directed here. Seeing as his federation file agrees with this, they never question it and mostly leave him to his own devices. At this point in time, the photos from Tarsus have not yet been leaked, so they don't make any connection based on his scars.

He stays at the hospital for about a year or so, spending his time chewing through online college courses at an alarming rate (not much else to do with his time after all...). When he turns 16, he checks himself out of the hospital, emancipates himself under the name Jim Kirk, and then hacks and deleted all trace of JT from both the federation and hospital databases.

He spends the next few years bouncing around the globe, drinking, getting into fights and discovering girls (and boys. And everything in-between or outside. He's not picky). When he needs credit for rent and food etc. He bugs local mechanics into letting him help out with fixing shuttles and the like, but he generally lives day to day and never keeps Permanent address. When the T-IV photos and databases get leaked just after his 17th birthday, he starts being even more careful about always keeping his chest covered.

Sometimes, he flicks through supposedly secure databases and checks up on his kids, makes sure they’re doing alright. But he never goes to visit them; he wants to put that part of his life behind him.

Eventually he realises that he's actually quite good at this mechanical and engineering and computer stuff and applies for some PhDs back in the states. He's bored and he's been in India for too long now anyway, so why not?

His supervisors are eternally exasperated with him, because he never shows up for meetings, rarely hands in chapters for feedback and is practically never on campus. But he produces results, hands in completed laboratory notebooks, writes and publishes papers. So they let him get away with it. He occasionally pops up and sits a few undergraduate exams as well, so the college tolerate him too as he's good for statistics. Soon he’s completed one PhD and bullied his supervisor into keeping on as a post-doc.

At some point, while catastrophically drunk one night, he decides it would be a fantastic idea to go visit Frank and pay him back for the years of hell. He has vague notions of burning the Kirk family farmhouse down and dragging the man to a police station.

Only when he makes it to Iowa, Frank is nowhere where to be found and the farmhouse is in a suspiciously clean and tidy state. He's standing there on the front veranda, peering in the kitchen window, still tipsy and thoroughly confused when his mom suddenly appears. One hell of a viscous argument, an entire bottle of whisky and a lot of crying later, Jim sobs out the entire story of T-IV to his mom. In return, she promises to tell no-one and to do her damnedest to actually be there for him in the future. They exchange comm numbers, and Jim leaves still unsure and untrusting, but at least hopeful they might have turned over a new leaf.

About six months later- now in possession of a second, shiny doctorate- his Mom convinces him to actually go and talk to some of his kids. She thinks it will be good for him to discuss his experiences with someone who was actually there. Jim is reluctant, but he promises to try it out. He goes to see
wee little Kevin who now lives with his aunt Margaret and isn’t so wee anymore.

It was a good suggestion, he decides later, and he heads back to Iowa to thank his mom for talking him into it.

But she’s not there. There’s just a note saying she's gone out on a fleet assignment. A little put out that she hadn’t comm’d to tell him, he grabs some credits, his favourite leather jacket and heads to the local bar.

Only once there, he goes and hits on the wrong woman and a bunch of jackasses give him hell over it. The next thing he knows, he’s draped backwards over a table, blood pouring from his nose and a pounding headache trying to crack his skull open.

Enter Chris Pike.

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End Notes

There is absolutely no update schedule. I have sand to sieve and a thesis to write \_(ツ)_/¯

Want more Chris & Jim? Check out my other series The Resurrection Chronicles. Part 3 is particularly Chris-centric.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!