In the Time of Logic

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Summary

Ambassador Soval struggles to maintain diplomatic relations between Vulcan and Earth as tensions mount after the Xindi attack. There is growing unrest on Earth where xenophobia is blossoming. Along the way he meets a Human who may change everything. This is a drama where an unexpected romance blossoms amidst a backdrop of conflict and turmoil.

This story follows the canonical events as well as missing scenes through the perspective of minor Enterprise characters as well as OCs, with appearances by major characters, during the Xindi Crisis through the events of "Terra Prime".

Notes

This isn't a new work, but one I had posted on another site, and I figured hey, why not share the love. Enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes
The little boy scurried over to his mother. His small arms were outstretched, reaching for her. She scooped him up in her arms to inspect his injuries. She noted only minor lacerations. He had been exploring on his own outside their home when he had fallen. Red dirt was embedded in the scrapes on his knees, and green blood was beginning to surface. He was endeavoring to control his emotions, but the sting of the injuries was too much. Two large tears – one in each eye – threatened to fall at the slightest provocation.

She placed him down next to her on the bench where she sat overlooking the desert landscape beyond their home. Looking down at him she began to speak in a gentle tone. "Soval, what does Surak teach us about pain?"

The little boy looked up slowly as to not dislodge the tears. "He teaches us not to feel it," he said.

"No," she corrected. "He teaches us to perceive it; to endure it, but to not let it control you. The pain is real, but you have the power to suppress it." She said.

The little boy closed his eyes. His face contorted for a moment before he smoothed his features. The two tears rolled down his cheeks, but no more followed. He was concentrating intently on the task when a tall male from inside the house approached the little boy and his mother outside. His boots clicked on the tiles of the patio where they sat on the bench.

"T'Rysa, you coddle him. You must desist in this." He stopped, as he looked at the little boy's face taking notice of the tearstains. His face was severe and unmoving. "Tears," he stated. "His emotions are unbalanced. His cannot control them," he said, his tone condescending. "This is not the first time."

"He is young still. Barely a child, Strev. His control will strengthen in time," she said looking up at her husband.

"He is too much like you," he said. His face was as unflinching as stone as he turned on his heel and walked back toward the house.

T'Rysa waited until Strev was back inside before she spoke again. "My beloved," she whispered as she knelt before the little boy. "You must learn to control your emotions. In moments you cannot you must learn to mask them from others. For now I will give you the strength," she said. Her face was serene; however he could see intensity behind her gaze. She raised her right hand and placed her fingers gently on his face. She aligned her index and middle fingers with his temple and rested her thumb on his chin. The little boy's brown eyes were wide as he stared into his mother's green ones.

"You must never tell anyone about this. Not even your Father," she said staring at him. He nodded contrite. Holding his face, she began, "My mind to your mind, my thoughts to your thoughts… Our minds are one."

Suddenly his thoughts opened like an endless desert stretching in all directions. He was not alone. He could not comprehend it, but he could feel his mother's presence in his mind. A rush of sensations engulfed him and for a moment he felt as though he was drowning in them. When he remembered to breath he was overwhelmed by feelings of love and warmth. All the emotions he had never seen his mother express. Emotions he never knew she felt in this abundance. She channeled them into him. He instantly felt a calm and tranquility he never felt before. It gave him strength. When she determined it was enough she ended the connection gently letting her fingers fall from his face. She
was breathing hard. The little boy placed one of his small hands over hers and slowly she stilled.

"You must promise me to never speak of this to anyone. It is a long forgotten birthright from the time of Surak. But many have grown to fear it since," she said. "This gift lives inside of you as well." She stated staring into his eyes as she stood up.

"I promise," he said looking up at her.

It would be many years later before he would break that vow.
Soval looked in the mirror. A tall, imposing Vulcan with gray hair and brown eyes stared back at him. He studied the lines of his face. It was true he was well past his youth, but he was not yet old. At least not by Vulcan standards. But by what had transpired only five days prior he certainly felt so.

He was aboard a *D-Kyr* class Vulcan Convoy ship. They were two days out from their scheduled return to Earth. While he had been on Vulcan he had released T'Amara, his wife, from their marriage bond. She had called for the *kal-if-fee*. He did not want to challenge her decision. So he simply released her from their marriage. He had felt betrayal and anger, but he knew it was not logical to keep her in their marriage when she desired only to end it. There was no love between them. No affection. Only duty. His father and her family arranged their betrothal early in their childhood shortly after his mother had left. He wondered if she had stayed whether it may have been different.

He had to give T'Amara some due respect. She had stayed with him for many years. Even after he became the Vulcan Ambassador to United Earth. She had endured his first *pon farr*. And the ones that followed. She also bore him a daughter. But living on Earth proved too challenging for her. She returned to Vulcan after their third year on Earth. She had said she wanted their daughter raised on Vulcan. It was logical. But as Ambassador he continued to retain a permanent residence on Earth. They still met, but only sporadically, and for his *time*. It was not a marriage. At least not one the one he had envisioned.

After she left; he was alone. He was an outlander in a strange world. But as the Vulcan Ambassador, he had no choice but to ingratiate himself with the Humans. It was not as difficult as he had anticipated. In time, over many years, an unexpected affinity for Earth blossomed in the void. He found the Humans to be exhausting most of the time, but also surprisingly resilient and forgiving. The near constant contact with them required him to meditate often to maintain his emotional equilibrium. Sometimes his control slipped. But the Humans rarely seemed to notice. They were too busy wearing their own emotions in plain sight for all to see.

Over the years, he developed a rapport with Admiral Forrest of Starfleet of United Earth. Though he was a human, his quiet nature was agreeable to Soval. In the years that they worked together Soval found he rarely let his emotions guide his actions; often taking time for thoughtful evaluation. Soval admired his control. It was commendable, especially for a human. But now was one of the rare occasions Soval was at odds with Forrest. He needed to speak to with him.
Constance Corcoran uploaded the information to her PADD from the damaged data module as the cruiser sped along the road toward Starfleet Command Headquarters in San Francisco. She was sitting in the passenger seat as Major Hayes drove. He was a handsome man in his early forties and had been part of the team sent to the old Port of Seattle to locate a xenophobic terrorist cell, but they had moved on before they arrived. Constance was only able to recover the data module, but it could contain key information. She had to get it to Admiral Forrest.

"You know I really enjoyed working with you, Officer Corcoran," said Major Hayes. He turned his head to look at her briefly before he returned his eyes to the road. Constance glanced at him for a moment.

"You know I've asked you to call me Constance," she countered. He smiled when she said this.

"What I mean to say is that I believe the MACOs and Starfleet Intelligence worked well together. I would imagine there will be other joint missions in the future," he said.

"I'm not sure Admiral Forrest would agree considering we were unsuccessful in apprehending any members of the cell," she said. In fact, this particular group continued to successfully elude capture. She finished uploading the data on her PADD and stowed it in her bag. She would review the data once she arrived at Starfleet. She was hoping they had finally stumbled upon something that might shed some light on their organization infrastructure and possible tactics.

"The data module alone you've collected was well worth our collaboration. And we did locate their base of operations. We've forced them to be on the move. They are more apt to make a mistake now and we'll be able to apprehend them when they do." Major Hayes turned onto the drive that led to the Starfleet Headquarters parking lot.

"Yes, hopefully," she answered. But she was not convinced. They were quiet as he pulled up to the front of the building.

"You are a hard one to read," Major Hayes said, glancing at her as he stopped the cruiser. Constance quirked her eyebrows as she unbuckled her seatbelt. Major Hayes looked nervous as he shifted in his seat. After a moment he spoke again. "Listen, I'm going to regret it if I don't ask so I'm going to come right out and say it. Would it be alright if I asked you to dinner one night?" He kept his gaze straight ahead. He looked as though he was afraid of what she might say.

Constance thought for a moment. She was surprised by his interest. Perhaps she had been so engrossed in the mission she had not noticed when he had noticed her. It had been a while since she allowed herself to be involved with anyone romantically as she was naturally rather guarded, but there was something that seemed wholesome about him. He was nice, like he might be one of the good ones.

"Sure, why not," she said simply, flashing him a genuine smile. His cheeks flushed as he returned her smile.

"Alright, I'll be in touch soon then, Constance," he said with renewed energy. She smiled again and shut the door. He drove away as she began walking toward the entrance.
Admiral Forrest's office. It was a bright room with rows of round windows that overlooked the Bay. The sky that day was an unusually brilliant shade of blue. Alien in comparison to the reddish hue of the Vulcan sky, but one he had grown accustomed to in all his years on Earth.

"I'm sorry, Ambassador, but I have not changed my mind," said Admiral Forrest once Soval had expressed his reason for the visit. Soval set his teeth. He felt a thread of anger course through him. The recent dissolution of his marriage was threatening his control.

"It is a death sentence. You watched the footage from the Vaankara. This course of action is not logical," he countered.

"I am aware of where you stand as well as the High Command, but Starfleet Command has made their decision," Forrest answered simply. "And if there is any chance of finding these – Xindi; then I'm sorry, but I must agree."

"If I cannot change your mind, as you say, then I must insist that you remove Sub-Commander T'Pol from Enterprise," Soval commanded as he paced in front of Forrest's desk.

"I beg your pardon, Ambassador, but is she not yours to recall? Let me remind you, she is not a member of Starfleet." Forrest said. His pink face had taken on a slightly darker hue.

"Yes, I am aware of the fact. However, for reasons that I, myself, do not comprehend she has expressed her desire to remain on Enterprise. I believe her to be emotionally compromised." Soval said.

It was not entirely incorrect. He was aware of her neurological condition, Pa'nar Syndrome. He also knew how she struggled with her emotions, not unlike himself. In truth, he did not want her to suffer the same fate as those on the Vaankara. She had served as one of his diplomatic aides before he assigned her to the Enterprise and over the years he had come to regard her almost like a daughter.

Admiral Forrest's com unit buzzed. "Admiral, SI Officer Corcoran says she has a meeting scheduled with you?" A voice cracked over the com.

"Uh, yes, Ensign Asano, it's alright. Send her in," said Forrest pushing the button on his desk to end the com link. Soval turned to face the door, his diplomatic robes billowing out behind him. He stood erect with his arms in front of him; his hands clasped together. His lips pursed slightly as the door opened. A young human female with dark brown hair pinned neatly in a bun at her neck entered. Her appearance was not particularly unusual or even unique, however there was something in the way that she carried herself that was curious. She walked briskly toward Admiral Forrest's desk where she stood at attention.

"Officer Corcoran," Admiral Forrest said standing. He moved to walk around his desk. "It's been a while. It's good to see you." Soval noticed she was nearly a full head shorter than Admiral Forrest.

"Thank you, Sir," she said before she immediately pushed the PADD she brought into Forrest's hands. "We were able to acquire the intel that they were smuggling--" She stopped. She turned her head spotting Soval out of the corner of her eye. Evidently, she had heard him. He had moved from his position by the door. She had obviously not seen him when she first walked in.

"Excuse me," said Admiral Forrest. "Ambassador Soval, this is Intelligence Officer Constance Corcoran of Starfleet Intelligence," he finished. Her name was quite an alliteration Soval thought. He nodded stiffly. Officer Corcoran nodded in return, but looked wary. She turned her attention back to Admiral Forrest.
"Sir, I could come back if that would be more convenient," she said quietly. Soval noticed her glance at him again from her periphery.

"It's alright. I trust Ambassador Soval, Constance. Whatever your findings I'd like him to hear them as well." Forrest said. Soval noticed her shoulders relax infinitesimally. It appeared to him that their relationship included a measure of trust and familiarity given his use of her given name.

"Well, we were able to locate the cell's base of operations. They were using an abandoned shipping container at the old Port of Seattle. However, when we got there it had been cleared out; everything torched. They must have been tipped off." She reached over to key in a code into the PADD she had given Admiral Forrest. "The data module was damaged, but I was able to recover this from one of the computers."

A hologram of blueprints to a building was projected above the screen of the PADD.

"The United Earth Embassy on Vulcan," Soval stated. He moved in closer to get a better look.

"Yes," said Officer Corcoran as she briefly made eye contact with him. "And if you look closer it includes the blueprint for the security layout and access points." She pointed to several areas on the hologram.

"This is highly classified information. How on Earth did they get a hold of this?" Admiral Forrest asked incredulously.

"I'm not sure, Sir, but whoever they are they made every effort to hide the fact that they had acquired this information." She said. Admiral Forrest sighed. He paced slowly in front of his desk.

"Thank you, Corcoran. I'll be in touch. Do not get too comfortable being back here in San Francisco." Officer Corcoran raised her eyebrows and nodded slowly. If she understood what he was implying she did not to show it.

"Yes, Sir," she said, as she turned to leave. She moved to walk around Soval, but he had stepped back at the same time to let her pass. In their awkward shuffle her hand accidentally grazed Soval's. An electric shock ran up his arm. Evidently she had felt it too as he heard her sharp intake of breathe. She met his eyes; her lips parted slightly. She gripped the offending hand into a fist. Admiral Forrest frowned.

"Is everything alright, Officer Corcoran?" Admiral Forrest asked.

"Yes, Sir, it was… nothing," she said as she furrowed her eyebrows. Soval detected a thread of hesitancy in her voice. She glanced at Soval again, before she exited the Admiral's Office. Soval's eyes followed her out. He was not expecting the physical contact. As touch telepaths Vulcans endeavored to avoid physical contact whenever possible. Sometimes it could not be avoided, but he usually had the time to mentally prepare for it. However, the shock was unusual. He was not sure what it meant. He made a mental note to meditate on it later. Admiral Forrest moved to sit down again at his desk.

"It appears that there is growing unrest on Earth. Our intelligence has picked up on an increased number of xenophobic groups forming since the Xindi attack," Forrest said, rubbing the bridge of his nose. He looked tired.

"That is not to be unexpected," Soval answered.

"Ambassador, I think I understand why you want to have Sub-Commander T'Pol removed from Enterprise." Admiral Forrest stated, referring back to their previous conversation. "I don't have any
children. My career has been my life; however I've known Officer Corcoran for over seventeen years. In that time, I have come to regard her with a sort of fondness. I don't know what it is like to have a daughter, but I would imagine it wouldn't feel much different. I would never want to see anything happen to her, but there comes a time when we have to put our emotions aside."

Soval's nostrils flared as he stood silent. He felt annoyance blossom inside of him. He did not need a lecture on emotions from a Human. But he knew Admiral Forrest was only sharing these intimate details as a way to empathize with his situation as convoluted as his analogy was. T'Pol was hardly to be compared to Forrest's Intelligence Officer. His annoyance subsided. Admiral Forrest continued.

"I cannot have T'Pol removed. If Captain Archer wants her to stay and she does not want to leave who am I to disagree? Besides, Enterprise needs a science officer. There would not be enough time to find her replacement before they leave for the Expanse." Admiral Forrest finished. Soval could see his point; however it was still unacceptable for a Vulcan to enter the Delphic Expanse unnecessarily. He knew he was not going to accomplish his goal through Admiral Forrest. He would have to give her an ultimatum.

"I see that any further argument would be fruitless, Admiral, but I appreciate your candor," he said. Forrest gave him a weak smile. Soval inclined his head and left the office. He knew now that he would have to involve the High Command.
Reassignment and Revelations

Constance had barely arrived at her home in Mill Valley on the outskirts of San Francisco when she received a call from a Lieutenant Martinez telling her to pack her bags. She was exhausted. She lay down on her bed trying to remember the last time she had a decent night's sleep. It had been too long. But Admiral Forrest had warned her not to get too comfortable. Martinez informed her that she would depart that afternoon for Vulcan where she would be working as lead of the communications team at the United Earth Embassy. It was a far different assignment than she was used to as an Intelligence Officer, but she trusted Admiral Forrest. The Vulcan Convoy ship that she would be leaving on was scheduled to depart in two hours. She did not have much time.

Pulling a few items from her closet and stuffing her clothes into a duffel bag she stopped for a moment when she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. She reached up to touch the skin under her eyes. She noticed dark shadows forming. The constant stress and lack of sleep was taking a toll on her now far more than it did when she was in her twenties. She was still young, but now that she was nearly thirty-seven years old she wondered how long she wanted to remain in this line of work. She immediately chided herself and banished the thought from her mind. Of course it was her calling. She had wanted to work in intelligence ever since she could remember. But monitoring subspace buoy transmissions was a different story.

Suddenly, her PADD beeped interrupting her internal reflection. It was an incoming video call from Major Hayes. She realized she would have to let him know that she was being transferred to Vulcan. She was a little disappointed. That would mean their date would have to wait. She picked up her PADD and touched the call receive button on the screen.

"Hello Constance," Major Hayes said as his face appeared on screen. He had taken easily to calling her by her first name.

"Haynes," she said in return, smiling.

"I'm afraid I have some bad news," he said his own grin fading.

"Oh?" She said moving to sit on the edge of her bed.

"Constance, they are sending me into the Expanse," he said. She raised her eyebrows in surprise. He continued to speak when she remained quiet. "I have been assigned to lead a team of MACOs aboard Enterprise. Captain Archer requested for military on his ship while they search for the Xindi and General Casey was all too happy to oblige him," he said. She unconsciously bit her bottom lip.

"Well, I actually have some news as well. I'm being transferred - right now, in fact. Admiral Forrest is assigning me to the United Earth Embassy on Vulcan to monitor the subspace buoy transmissions between Starfleet and Enterprise during the mission," she said.

"Wow," he said running a hand through his brown hair. He looked surprised. "Well, if there was anyone I would want monitoring us in space it would be you," he said with a crooked smile. She laughed wondering if that was really true. After the brief moment of levity passed between them the tone turned more serious. They both were silent as they suddenly seemed to realize the full gravity of the situation.

"I just wanted to let you know before I left," he said. "And to also tell you that I plan to take you out the minute I get back," he said. He looked solemn.
"I look forward to it," she said quietly. "And Major," she added. "Good luck and stay safe. I know how you like to play the hero," she said giving his a small smile.

"Of course, and you too, Corcoran," he said. She smiled as she ended the call. She prayed they would be successful. Earth was counting on them, but she knew the mission was no longer a simple one of exploration.

When she finished packing she showered quickly. She slipped on a gray long sleeved formfitting tee shirt and black Starfleet issued cargo pants and ankle boots. She twisted her long hair into loose bun at the back of her neck. She threw her duffel bag over her shoulder glancing back at the mirror one last time as she left for the Starfleet launch bay.

It was day two of the five day journey to Vulcan traveling at Warp 5. Soval was settling into his quarters to meditate. He lit a candle and settled into a meditative posture focusing on the flame dancing in front of him. He took slow measured breaths. He planned to take this opportunity to bring balance to the turbulent emotions that were bubbling under his façade of calm. Just two days prior he had presented T'Pol with the High Command's ultimatum to terminate her rank of Sub-Commander if she defied immediate recall to Vulcan. To his astonishment she immediately resigned her commission and choose to remain on Enterprise. He had not realized the depth of her emotional attachment to her human crew. It clearly was affecting her reasoning.

When she defied the direct order it had infuriated him. He felt as though she was rejecting what it was to be Vulcan. It was as though she was dismissing all the years of careful counsel and grooming. She had been one of the brightest on his staff and he spent more time with her over the years that he did with his own daughter. It had taken every ounce of his control to appear placid. After her transmission he had stormed out of the room and had to meditate immediately. It was not until the second day of the journey when he was starting to feel more like himself again.

After he had finished meditating he decided to walk to the cafeteria for a cup of tea. Normally he would have brewed some in his quarters, but he needed to stretch his legs. It was quite late. Most of the others on the ship were most likely asleep so it was highly probable that he could move about undisturbed. He was accustomed to the Earth time zone of San Francisco and the Convoy was set to the time zone of the Vulcan city of Shi'Kahr so that when they arrived they would be acclimated to the time difference with no time lost.

When he reached the cafeteria he saw that it was nearly empty save a few Vulcan dignitaries from other Embassies and one human. He recognized Admiral Forrest's SI Officer, Constance Corcoran, who was sitting at a table alone, by one of the large round windows, staring out into space. He had recognized her immediately from her posture alone. She was sitting slightly slouched with a cup clasped in her hands staring wide-eyed out the window; it was very un-Vulcan. He remembered that due to Enterprise's decision to enter the Delphic Expanse the High Command had agreed to allow the Vulcan Convoy ship to ferry a few Human officers to United Earth Embassy. It was unusual; however they relented in light of the extenuating circumstances surrounding the Xindi attack.

He walked over to the replicator and ordered a cup of tea. When he was finished he turned to leave, but before he did he glanced back at Officer Corcoran. She was still looking out the window. He was reminded of their accidental contact. He remembered her hand brushing his and the unexpected shock that had accompanied it. He had meditated after the incident; however it still lingered in his mind like an ember. He was not in the habit of trying to decipher the Human thought process, but he briefly wondered if she thought about it. He glanced back at her as he exited the cafeteria and saw that her eyes were watching him.
For the remainder of the trip Soval did not see Officer Corcoran again. When the ship arrived on Vulcan he immediately disembarked heading for the offices of the Vulcan High Command. Administrator V'Las was expecting him. He was an older, irascible Vulcan with gray, almost white hair; however his blue eyes were as steely as they were in his youth.

"Ambassador Soval," he said in greeting inclining his head briefly. Soval flashed him the ta'al as he inclined his head in return. Soval watched him pace slowly in front of his desk. V'Las was not particularly tall, however he carried himself as though he were. "I understand the Humans remain as stubborn as they were one hundred years ago. They did not heed our counsel regarding the Delphic Expanse," V'Las spat. It was less a question than it was a statement. Soval's eyes narrowed slightly.

"No, they did not. However, it was not to be unexpected," Soval said evenly.

"No matter, let them destroy themselves if they wish," V'Las stated. "Perhaps we would have less to be concerned about if they annihilated themselves." He moved to sit at his desk. Soval remained standing with his arms crossed behind his back in typical Vulcan fashion. V'Las's last statement was steeped in distaste. Soval's own feelings about humanity were sometimes ambivalent; however it occurred to him that they may stand at odds when it came to the Human race.

"I understand T'Pol has turned defector," V'Las said changing the subject. "Perhaps living amongst these Humans has clouded her logic. She is of weak character if she has been made to believe in their cause," He stated, his cold eyes boring into Soval. V'Las seemed to be insinuating the same of him given Soval had been her mentor. Soval had disapproved of T'Pol's decision, but despised the implication that she was of weak character. He knew her far better than that.

"Perhaps she remains for reasons unknown to us. I have meditated on the situation and am willing to give her the benefit of the doubt. We will need the information she may provide should they return from the Expanse," Soval said.

"This is true. No matter, we can wait. Either she will perish like the others or be a wealth of information." V'Las appeared to be in thought. His eyes darted back and forth as though he was calculating the odds in his mind. Soval did not like how casually he spoke of the possibility of her death. He pressed his lips together.

"We need to make certain that we stay in the favor of the Humans for now. We will need the information they receive from the subspace buoy transmissions while they are in the Expanse. With T'Pol no longer under our jurisdiction you will need to curry favor with Admiral Forrest. I trust this will not be difficult for you," V'Las said. He turned to look at Soval. His eyes continued to bore into him.

"Hardly," Soval answered raising an eyebrow. "We are in alliance with Earth as tenuous as it is currently." V'Las nodded turning away.

"Good, keep me apprised of any developments." V'Las said dismissively.

Soval nodded slowly as he turned to leave. He did not like this deceit. He did not agree with Starfleet's decision to enter the Expanse; however there was no logic in deceiving an ally.

It had been a little over three months since her arrival on Vulcan and Constance finally felt like she...
was setting in. She had quarters at the United Earth Embassy and though it had all the amenities of Earth it still maintained the sterile feel of being a replicated environment. One of the few redeeming qualities was that there was a rather large and beautifully manicured courtyard within the walls of the Embassy and she spent time there whenever she could manage. They were not permitted to leave the campus without invitation. From what she learned it seemed that the Vulcans were extremely private about their culture. It did not seem like a fair exchange in her opinion. Vulcans were allowed to explore Earth, though the few that she had met preferred to remain at their compound in Sausalito.

Every day she followed the same routine. She awoke, got dressed, and headed to the Communications Command Center, the CCC. She usually spent all day there only taking short breaks to eat small meals in the courtyard. After her shift she would head to the gym for her sparring session. Starfleet required continued training in hand-to-hand combat, and she was finding that it was one of the best ways to de-stress. It was also helping her sleep at night. She was getting used to the regimented schedule. It left little room for her to worry, let alone think at all, which was oddly comforting considering how stressful the job was becoming. It had been nearly six weeks since the Enterprise arrived at the edge of the Delphic Expanse. The test signal they sent right before they entered was a success; however they had not received any transmissions or responses to their hails since. They had learned from the Vulcans that the Expanse was an extremely hostile and unpredictable environment, but they had not expected this degree of technical difficulty with regards to communication.

It was only a day later when they finally received the first subspace buoy transmission from inside the Expanse. Constance had just returned from her break when she picked up the hail. It appeared that the crew and ship were fine; however they had been experiencing spatial anomalies and had been having trouble sending and receiving transmissions from the subspace buoys. She patched the transmission through to Admiral Forrest and left the CCC to run to his office.

Admiral Forrest had arrived on Vulcan about a week after Enterprise entered the Expanse in order to maintain control of the Communications Command Center while they monitored for subspace transmissions. Everything was riding on the success of Enterprise in the Delphic Expanse so every transmission was of critical importance in maintaining contact with Enterprise. Constance saw that Ensign Kazuo Asano, the Admiral's aide, had also arrived and was stationed at a desk directly outside his office. He was young, in his mid-twenties, and he had shiny black hair cut in a standard crew-cut.

"Ensign Asano, I need to see the Admiral immediately. We are receiving the first transmission from Enterprise in the Expanse," she said. Asano's brown eyes widened.

"Of course, I'll buzz you in," he said as he watched her sprint into the Admiral's office.

"Officer Corcoran," Admiral Forrest stated when he noticed Constance making quick steps toward his desk.

"We are receiving a transmission--," she started, but Forrest was already raising his hand to silence her. She was out of breath and silently grateful not to have to speak for a moment.

"Yes, I just finished speaking with Captain Archer. We really needed this. Personally, it's been a constant source of worry not getting through to Enterprise," he said. "Sit down, please. You are the hero of the hour," he said.

"I'm hardly, I'm sure," she said raising an eyebrow as she took at seat across from him at his desk. She did not feel like she deserved the praise. "I'm just doing my job."

"I know. And I know it must be tedious in comparison to your last post, but what you and your team
are doing is extremely important and valuable work. I wanted someone I trust completely to lead the team. That is why you are here." He opened a drawer in his desk. "Here," he said. He poured some sort of brown liquid into a small glass and handed it to her.

"Umm, is this--," She began as she sniffed the glass.

"Bourbon," he said finishing her thought as he poured himself a glass. "I think this small victory calls for a small celebration," he said, raising his glass in her direction.

"Sir, I'm still on duty," she said.

"I'll make an exception. In fact I insist you take the remainder of the afternoon off. I know you haven't taken a single day off since you arrived and I doubt we'll have another transmission from them today," he said. He lifted his glass again. Constance followed suit. She took a small sip. The bourbon stung her throat. She coughed and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand.

"Thank you, Sir," she managed after she took another sip. It seemed to go down a little smoother the second time around. She felt herself relax for the first time in a long time.

"So, how are you adjusting to life on Vulcan?" He asked. He took another sip and settled back in his chair. After the transmission it seemed that his mood was much improved.

"To be honest it doesn't feel that different. But maybe that's because I'm always here at the Embassy," she said taking another sip.

"Yes, the Vulcans are strange about the cultural aspects of their society," he said. "They would prefer to reveal things to us on their own time. I have wanted to visit Mount Tar'Hana for some time. Perhaps I will when this is all over." He looked thoughtful as he took another sip. "Anyway, it's not as though we really have the time now." They sat in comfortable silence for a moment.

"It looks like this assignment may take a bit longer than we anticipated. We might all end up being here a while. You aren't getting homesick are you?" He asked. She appreciated his concern. He was the closest thing to a father she had.

"No, I'm doing fine," she said. He raised his eyebrows.

"You know fine stands for--," he started.

"Fucked-up, Insecure, Neurotic and Emotional," she interrupted. "I know, I know," she said laughing. She remembered that Admiral Forrest had a penchant for late twentieth century hard rock, especially the band Aerosmith. He was truly an old soul. It was strange considering how quiet and reserved he appeared otherwise. He had once mentioned he first heard this type of music when he had taken a History of Music class in college before enrolling at Starfleet and had been a fan ever since.

"We probably shouldn't tell the Vulcans what the acronym stands for," he said.

"Yeah, that might not be a good idea," she said as they both laughed.

She thumbed the edge of her glass. "You know what I really miss? Apples. The replicator here can't seem to get them right somehow. It's weird like they end up tasting more like a pears or something," she said finishing her glass. Admiral Forrest laughed.

"Well, I miss real coffee. Whatever the replicator is set to is not the genuine article," he said. She smiled placing the empty glass down on his desk. Admiral Forrest's com buzzed.
"Admiral Forrest, Ambassador Soval is here to see you, Sir," said Asano over the com. Constance unconsciously straightened in her seat.

"Thank you, please send him in," Admiral Forrest replied. Constance watched as the Vulcan Ambassador swept into Admiral Forrest's office in full ambassadorial garb. He wore his usual expression of sculpted stone and his eyes glided over her before resting on Admiral Forrest. Constance took a brief moment to study his profile. His mere presence was formidable. He certainly knew how to command a room. She found despite his staid demeanor, and perhaps because of it, his appearance was striking and distinguished. She immediately wondered if the bourbon had gone straight to her head.

"I appear to have interrupted something," Ambassador Soval said his voice rich and resounding.

"Not at all. We were just discussing the replicators and their inability to replicate Earth apples," said Admiral Forrest as he winked at Constance.

"And odd thing to be concerned about at a time like this," Ambassador Soval stated. He looked as perturbed as someone could appear without moving their face.

"Clearly you've never had an apple then otherwise you might be more sympathetic to our plight," Constance snarked. Admiral Forrest appeared to be struggling to suppress a smile. Ambassador Soval narrowed his eyes a fraction.

"Constance," said Admiral Forrest. His tone was mild, but he said her name slowly in caution. "I don't think the Ambassador knows you well enough to know when you are joking," he said lightly. Constance stood. She realized she only reached Ambassador Soval's shoulders.

"I beg your pardon, Ambassador," she said glancing up at him. There was something imperceptible about his stare and she suddenly felt self-conscious. She glanced at Forrest, "Thank you, Admiral, for the time off." She returned her gaze to the Vulcan Ambassador. "Excuse me," she said as she inclined her head politely before taking her leave. She felt something in her stomach stir as she headed toward her quarters.
Losing Control

Two weeks had passed since their last meeting before Admiral Forrest asked for Soval to come directly to his office at the United Earth Embassy. Since their previous meeting they had been keeping in contact via com link as Soval's duties kept him from attending in person. But this time Admiral Forrest requested his physical presence before apprising him of the details of the latest transmission. It was quite out of character for Admiral Forrest to demand an audience so it was logical to assume he was planning on imparting something of extreme importance or sensitivity requiring him to appear in person.

He headed for the United Earth Embassy. When he arrived at Admiral Forrest's office he was not there. Admiral Forrest's aide appeared rather rattled by having to inform him that he was nearly forty minutes early for their scheduled meeting. Soval did not feel like waiting.

"Ensign, can you inform me of his exact location?" He asked. Ensign Asano's eyes were wide.

"Umm, he is currently in the gym, Sir, I mean Ambassador," he stammered. "Do you want me to page him?" Beads of sweat were beginning to glisten on the Ensign's forehead.

"No, that will not be necessary. I will go there myself," he stated turning.

"Of course, I'll escort you," Asano said running to catch up to him. "It's on C Floor," he said. Soval followed him into the lift. The door slid shut and he felt the lift lurch as it began to make its decent. When they reached C Floor, Asano led them down a long white walled corridor which opened up to a large viewing window of what appeared to be a dojo of sorts. Beyond the glass he could see people sparring. It reminded him of the Vulcan martial arts, Suus Mahna. He spotted Admiral Forrest in the far corner giving instruction to a set of opponents. As his eyes swept the room he recognized Officer Corcoran facing a rather large male opponent. Ensign Asano interrupted his reverie.

"I'll get Admiral Forrest. Wait here for a moment please," he said walking toward the door to the gym.

"Ensign, I understand I am early. I will wait until they are finished sparring," he said. It was true. Their meeting was not scheduled for another thirty minutes. It was illogical to think anything would change in that time. Besides he was suddenly curious to see this display of human martial arts.

He watched as Officer Corcoran and the tall male began pacing around each other attempting to discern some sort of weakness in the other. Corcoran was wearing a fitted tank top and sweat pants. Her bare arms were taut and slick with moisture. Her opponent was nearly twice her size and at least double her weight.

"Don't count her out," Asano said looking over at him. Evidently he noticed Soval watching the pair. The ensign moved to stand next to him his eyes following the two opponents. "She is fast."

"I do not doubt it," said Soval. His eyes narrowed as he clasped his hands behind his back.

He watched as the large male threw a jab at her head. Corcoran deftly ducked to the left. She took the opportunity to go on the offensive and strike back at him. The male had anticipated her maneuver and avoided her strike instead catching her arm and pulling her toward him. He used her forward momentum to throw her to the floor. She landed on her front with a resounding thump. She was able to roll onto her back but the male used his forearm to pin her down by her chest as he knelt behind her head. With incredible speed she curled her legs up wrapping them around the male's neck. Using
her core strength she flipped him down onto the ground onto his back. Her legs remained tightly wrapped around his neck as she rolled her body up. She linked one of her arms behind the knee of one of his legs effectively pinning him. After a few seconds he smacked his palm against the mat indicating his submission. Officer Corcoran immediately released him and moved to stand. She extended her hand to help him up. They were both smiling. He shook her hand before turning to grab a bottle of water.

Soval was intrigued. It appeared Officer Corcoran was more disciplined than he realized. He watched as she walked over to the benches along the opposite wall to grab a towel and wipe her forehead. The male she had been sparring with moved to stand next to her as she watched two others move to face off. Soval felt his nostrils flare. Now that they had finished sparring he did not like the man's continued proximity to Officer Corcoran. He suddenly had an overwhelming desire to disembowel him with a lirpa. Almost as if she could sense his discontent Officer Corcoran moved to stand further away from the man. Soval relaxed a fraction. The abrupt emotion surprised him. He was not sure what to make of it, but he did not have time to devote thought to it. He watched as Admiral Forrest moved toward the door. When he exited he spotted Soval.

"Ambassador, I was just on my way to meet you," Forrest said looking at his watch.

"I arrived early. Ensign Asano showed me to the gym," he said falling in step with Admiral Forrest as they headed back to Forrest's office. They walked in silence. After they exited the lift Admiral Forrest escorted him into his office. Forrest did not speak until the door was safely closed behind them.

"Ambassador, perhaps you should have a seat," Admiral Forrest said moving to sit behind his own desk. It was foreboding. Soval was aware of the human propensity to invite someone to sit before imparting unpleasant information. It was quite illogical; however Soval accepted his invitation and sat down in one of the chairs across from the desk. He sensed that the Admiral was struggling with how to start the conversation.

"We received a transmission from Enterprise this afternoon. I waited to schedule our meeting until this evening because I was not sure how to tell you this. Enterprise found the Seleya," he said. The Seleya was a Vulcan D'Kyr class ship that had been caught in a subspace eddy that pulled the ship into Expanse nearly nine months prior. The crew had been charting the thermobaric clouds surrounding the Expanse. In fact, the Vaankara had been sent into the Expanse in search of the Seleya. To say that they were unsuccessful was an understatement. The last transmission from the Vaankara revealed that the crew had turned violent killing each other. Whatever happened to the Vaankara may have happened to the Seleya. Soval narrowed his eyes and opened his mouth only to close it again. When he regained composure he spoke.

"What is the status of the crew?" He asked. Admiral Forrest swallowed.

"They were exposed to an extreme amount of Trellium-D. It's a mineral ore ships use to insulate their hulls against spatial anomalies. It disintegrated their neural pathways. Enterprise did everything they could, but–," he stopped. Soval knew what he was inferring. He stood up abruptly and moved to stand by the window. "There's more," Forrest continued. "T'Pol was also exposed but they were able to get her back to the ship before she experienced any permanent damage." Soval looked at him. He felt anger and pain flare inside of him in equal measure. It was all he could do to appear composed.

"And what steps were taken to make certain the crew was beyond assistance?" He asked. He could hear his voice raise a decibel.

"Doctor Phlox assured us in his professional opinion that their neural pathways were so far degraded there was no possibility of saving them. If I know Captain Archer then I know he would not have
abandoned anyone he felt he could have rescued," Admiral Forrest stated.

"Perhaps you don't know him as well as you think," Soval said angrily. His words were laced with vehemence. Admiral Forrest pressed his lips together and folded his hands in front of him. If it had been anyone else Soval would have been chagrined by his emotional outburst. He looked at the floor. Admiral Forrest was quiet, but spoke after a turn.

"I'm so sorry, Soval. I know that this is a great loss to you and to Vulcan," Admiral Forrest said. Soval appreciated his sympathy. He knew Admiral Forrest meant well, but he could not possibly understand the gravity of the situation. Not only had the *Vaankara* succumbed to the Expanse, but so did the *Seleya*.

"Admiral, I must leave now. You will please forward me any and all information you have received regarding the *Seleya* as well as T'Pol's condition. I will need to prepare my report for the High Command." He said resuming his usual stoic self-control.

"Of course," Admiral Forrest said moving to stand. His expression was somber as Soval turned to leave. He felt Admiral Forrest's hand rest on his shoulder for a moment. He glanced at him briefly in acknowledgement before he resumed his exit. He needed to meditate.
Constance was busier than ever in the aftermath of the Seleya incident. The crew of the Enterprise had discovered that the mineral ore Trellium-D could protect the ship from spatial anomalies, however were unable to use it as it was fatal to Vulcans. It appeared to be quite a potent neurotoxin. They did find other ways to boost their signal and slowly transmissions to and from Starfleet became more reliable and more frequent. Unfortunately her sleep had taken the opposite turn. It seemed to elude her. She attributed it to stress, but with each passing night she was beginning to dream with more frequency. It was almost frightening how often and how vivid the dreams were becoming.

Constance was doing her best not to let it affect her work. One afternoon, after she had taken her lunch in the courtyard she returned in time to receive an audio-only hail from Enterprise. It was Major Hayes. He asked to speak with her directly.

"This is Officer Corcoran of the CCC on Vulcan. How may I be of assistance," she stated automatically despite the fact she knew it was Major Hayes on the other end.

"Constance, it is good to hear your voice," Major Hayes said. She smiled. His voice was warm and friendly. She found herself trying to remember the last time they spoke. She had so many questions.

"How are you doing aboard Enterprise?" She asked.

"It's definitely not without its challenges, but I think my squad is finally settling in," he said. Though they were MACOs she doubted any of them had spent any extended period of time in space.

As they continued chatting Constance found herself falling into easy conversation. Major Hayes had always been an attentive listener. They talked for a while. He asked about life on Vulcan. Constance really did not have much to say given that she had not left the Embassy since arriving so the conversation naturally turned to her sparring sessions. It seemed that Major Hayes had also begun nightly training sessions for the senior officers aboard Enterprise. He was having particular trouble with Lieutenant Reed who was finding Hayes to be overstepping his bounds.

"Well, it sounds though he feels like you're taking over his duties. It's hard to let go of the reins when you are used to your own way and being the only one in control," she said.

"True, but I've also got a job to do to as well." She could hear him sigh over the transmission.

"He'll come around. Besides, just be glad you don't have to work with a certain Vulcan Ambassador," she grumbled. Her mind wandered to Ambassador Soval. He was so severe and cold in comparison with Major Hayes.

"Well, the Vulcan Commander T'Pol is not particularly warm, but she is not bad to be around. In fact, she is proving exceptionally competent at hand-to-hand combat. From what I understand Vulcans practice a defensive type of martial arts called Suus Mahna," said Major Hayes as their conversation began to go in the direction of martial arts and the different styles. They continued talking for a little longer until Major Hayes stated that he had to go. Constance said her good-byes and found that for a brief moment she had forgotten how extremely tired she was.

That night, back in her quarters, she decided to try a special sleep tea before bed. An officer on her team had recommended a blend that included an Andorian herb she was unfamiliar with as well as
chamomile, orange blossom, and mint. She was ready to try anything. After drinking her tea she settled down in her bed. She closed her eyes in a silent plea for sleep.

That night she dreamt she was wandering through a vast desert. It reminded her of being in Phoenix where she grew up. But as she looked around she knew she was somewhere she had never been before. The landscape was different. The air was sweltering as the orange sun was baking down on her. She was vaguely aware that she was walking in circles. She was lost. Squinting in the blinding light she called out, but she knew no one could hear her. Red desert sand whipped around her as a hot breeze blew past. It stung her skin. She was exhausted. Her legs seemed to move of their own accord. She tripped on a rock and fell down hard in the red sand. She was lying on her side. She could not move. In the distance she could see a tall figure running toward her. She squinted but she could not make out who it was. As it moved closer she could just make out broad shoulders and a masculine form. It was a man. His silhouette was strangely familiar, but he was still too far away to discern who he was. She was suddenly aware that she needed to reach him. She stretched out her arm toward him. Please help, she thought…

She awoke with a start. She was in her bed in her quarters. She was drenched in sweat and breathing heavily. It was almost as though she had been there in the desert. She rubbed her arms. They were stinging. Sitting up slowly she grabbed the cup of water from the side table next to her bed and gulped it down. It was her most frightening and vivid dream yet. Strangely she felt like it meant something, like a premonition. It was unnerving. Without another thought she walked to the bathroom to take a shower in an effort to quell her lingering emotions.

The days continued to pass in this way. Dark shadows seemed to take up permanent residence under her eyes. She spent most of her time receiving and recording transmissions. When she had a spare moment she would sit in the courtyard to take a breather. They had received word that the Andorians had assisted Enterprise. She was grateful for the Andorians help, but she could not help feeling spiteful about the Vulcans lack thereof. Earth was in crisis and they could not rely on their closest allies. It was infuriating to say the least.

When she had expressed her feelings to Admiral Forrest he had been defensive. Ambassador Soval was equally so. He had been in the room when she brought the matter to Admiral Forrest's attention.

"Officer Corcoran, let me remind you that you are not here to give your opinion. You are here solely as lead of the team monitoring communications between Starfleet and Enterprise. That is all," Admiral Forrest said standing.

"Admiral, with all due respect, how can you stand here while the Vulcans do nothing? The Andorians are doing more to help us and they haven't been in alliance with us for over a hundred years," she said sharply. She felt her insides burning. Ambassador Soval moved to stand in front of her. His eyes bore into hers.

"Officer Corcoran, the incident aboard the Seleya was hardly a shining example of what an ally of Vulcan would be expected to do. I would say that your argument has barely a leg to stand on, an Earth expression I believe. Who are you to understand the complexities of diplomacy? The High Command warned Earth of the dangers of entering the Expanse. Starfleet dismissed our counsel and now expects our assistance? Even after the Enterprise left the Seleya stranded without even trying to rescue any of the crew or obtain any shred of physical evidence as to what exactly may have happened to them," he said. His face was expressionless, but his words cut into her like a hot blade.

"You are right, Ambassador, perhaps I do not have your years of experience in understanding the dynamics of diplomacy, but I do understand right from wrong. You, Vulcans, have always looked down on us!" She could hear the words coming out of her mouth as though she was standing beside
herself. She sounded like a petulant child. And she hated herself in the moment for it.

"Officer Corcoran!" Admiral Forrest interjected, but Constance could not stop herself. She felt the blood pounding behind her eyes as her emotions ran away with her.

"At least we do not sit around and do nothing while our people are dying. You just observe from afar and pass judgement on those who would help and presume you would have done differently. We have a saying and it's – the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing," she said glaring at Soval, her cheeks flushing, her breathing unsteady. He did not break her gaze. She noticed that his lips had become a line.

"That is enough!" Admiral Forrest bellowed. "Officer Corcoran, you are out of line. You will take the rest of the day off to reflect on your behavior. You are dismissed. That is an order." He glared at her stonily. She had never seen him so angry. She instantly regretted her outburst. The lack of sleep was affecting her. Her nerves were raw and her emotions were bubbling just below the surface. The weight of her words caught up with her, and she realized how inappropriate and childish her tirade had been. It was true that she did not understand the intricacies of interstellar relations. And after what Ambassador Soval had just disclosed she could almost understand the Vulcans' reticence in assisting them in light of the Seleya incident. Thoroughly ashamed, she bit her lip and left Admiral Forrest's office without a backward glance. She could not bear to look at the Vulcan Ambassador.

She did not want to return to her quarters. And it was too early for her sparring session. She had nowhere to go. The United Earth Embassy was starting to feel like a prison and she did not know what to do. Passing the courtyard she decided to go outside. She wandered to her usual bench and sat down. She kicked her feet around in the red sand rolling the small pebbles under the soles of boots. She was vaguely aware that it was the same color as the sand in her dreams. She felt tears of anger forming in her vision. She hastily wiped them away with the back of her hand. She was frustrated and angry with herself. She had let her emotions get the best of her. Her mind wandered to Ambassador Soval. Her thoughts were beginning to dwell on him more frequently. She thought about the man in her dreams. No, it couldn't be him, she thought. It was as though she was trying to convince herself. She tried to push him from her mind, but the effort only served to solidify his residence there. She had never cared about what a Vulcan was thinking, but she now wondered what he thought of her.

She sat in the courtyard garden a little while longer. She was feeling homesick for the first time since her arrival on Vulcan. Even though she was surrounded by people she still felt alone. There was no one she could really relate to. Major Hayes was far away in the Delphic Expanse. And most of the people she had met at the Embassy had known each other for many years. She felt like an outsider. There was a similar comradery with her Intelligence team back in San Francisco; however she was no longer there. The sun was beginning to set and a chill was setting in the air. Despite the extreme heat on Vulcan during daylight hours the air cooled drastically in the evening. It made her shiver. Leaving the courtyard she slowly walked back to her quarters.

Chapter End Notes

The line containing "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing" is a quote by Edmund Burke.
The Turbulent Sea

That evening Ambassador Soval returned to his residence in Shi’Kahr. Though he maintained a permanent residence on Earth he often returned to his ancestral home whenever he was back on Vulcan. He entered his meditation room which adjoined his sleeping quarters. Lighting a candle he sat down to meditate. His thoughts wandered to Officer Corcoran and their last encounter. He had never met a human, besides Captain Archer on occasion, who could so easily incite an emotional response from him. He needed to meditate on why she of all people was affecting him. As he stared into the flame of the candle as he felt his thoughts transported to his place of meditation in his mind.

It was all wrong. He was floating in water. He instantly felt panic clutch his chest. As he bobbed, he felt his body rise and fall as a wave rolled under him. He was in an ocean. Salty sea water splashed into his mouth and he coughed and gagged. I am going to drown, he thought. Looking around he saw endless blue sky and sea birds flying by above him. He followed their flight and saw that there was a beach in the distance. He tried to swim toward it, but the current was pulling him further out into the sea. The more he fought, the further it seemed to pull him out.

"You shouldn't be here." He heard a voice say. He looked around. Officer Corcoran was treading water next to him. She wore a look of confusion. Her long dark hair was wet and lay coiled against her face and neck. She seemed to have no trouble staying afloat.

"Don't fight it. We are in a rip current," she said. He noticed she seemed to be more relaxed than he felt. Humans were naturally more comfortable being submerged in water as nearly seventy-two percent of their world was covered in it. He was becoming fatigued; his clothes were weighting him down in the water. She seemed to sense this and swam closer to him. She linked her arm around his torso and began swimming parallel with the beach.

"It's okay. I've got you," she said her tone softening. It was illogical, as she was far smaller than him, but he found her words oddly comforting. Her face was very close to his. He could feel her trying to swim for the both of them. Though she was small and slim she was surprisingly strong. Pushing aside his unease, he held on to her as they swam together toward the beach. They were out of the current. When they made it to shore she helped him out of the water, but did not let go of him. He gently pushed himself away from her as he tried to remove his outer robe. She was standing very close to him. He noticed she was wearing some sort of water apparel that clung to her wet skin in an almost sensual manner. He averted his eyes, but not before he felt something primal unfurl inside him.

"What is happening? Why are you here?" Officer Corcoran asked. Her face was full of worry. He felt her emotions roll over him when he suddenly knew. He felt sick. With every effort he could manage he ripped himself out of meditation.

He was back in his home on Vulcan. He was still sitting in his meditative posture, breathing hard. The flame of the candle danced in front of him. He focused on breathing. It was as though he had had an epiphany. He had immediately realized what happened the moment he felt her emotions as clearly as his own. He recognized the very roots of an empathic bond that had formed between Officer Corcoran and himself. It seemed impossible, but as he searched his mind he could feel the tenuous threads of their connection. It was fragile, but, undoubtingly, there it was.

Suddenly everything seemed to make sense, falling into place like pieces of a puzzle. It explained the possessiveness he felt when he watched her spar. And it explained the turbulence of Officer Corcoran's recent emotions. It was why she was appearing in his meditations. He assumed the same anomaly was occurring in her dreams. It was clear that the bond was reciprocal though he was not
sure she was consciously aware of it. He remembered their accidental contact. When they had brushed hands all those months ago. It must have triggered a psychic connection. He was shocked that it could happen with a human. It was unsettling, but he knew what he must do. The bond was in its infancy and he was determined to sever it before she became aware of it.

The following week Ambassador Soval was on his way back to Earth to meet with Starfleet and negotiate the prompt disposal of the pieces of the Xindi Probe that had been recovered by a Vulcan ship in Asia. The High Command suspected that the Andorians had assisted the Enterprise in the Expanse as a ruse to obtain the Xindi technology. They suspected that the Andorians would not be above trying to steal the portions of the probe they had recovered from the Xindi attack on Earth. It was logical to dispose of the pieces before the Andorians were even aware of their existence. Ambassador Soval was now tasked with convincing Starfleet to move the pieces from storage and destroy them.

When he arrived on Earth he was immediately escorted to Starfleet Headquarters under heavy guard. It appeared that the xenophobic Earth group known as Terra Prime was beginning to gain a following and attacks on non-Humans were increasing. Admiral Forrest met him in the lobby and escorted him to the Starfleet Command. As they walked Admiral Forrest spoke.

"Ambassador Soval, it is good to see you again. I believe that the last time we met it was under less than pleasant circumstances. I want to apologize for Officer Corcoran's behavior," he said. Soval glanced at him as they walked.

"There is no need Admiral, I took no offense, as I believe I should not have said what I said either," he said simply.

"Constance is more than competent in her posting. In fact, the work is well beneath her capabilities. I assigned her to it because I trust her, however I believe monitoring the transmissions is taking its toll. It is a heavy burden. Nearly every day they are learning firsthand the casualties of our mission. I just received word that Major Hayes was killed," Forrest stated. He looked stricken. Soval was quiet.

"I understand Officer Corcoran worked closely with him during her last posting," Soval remarked. It struck him that he should have not known that fact. The bond, he thought.

"Yes, I believe his death is affecting her though she would never admit it," Admiral Forrest said not noticing his slip. "People on Earth are starting to become desperate. They believe we are on the verge of an apocalypse," said Admiral Forrest shaking his head. "The sooner Enterprise finds the Xindi weapon the better." They reached the council chambers and Admiral Forrest opened the door for him. He entered with Admiral Forrest close behind.

The negotiations regarding the Vulcan High Command's desire for the destruction of the remaining pieces of the probe went extremely well. It appeared that Starfleet Command was in full agreement that no one should be in possession of the pieces including themselves. With the increased xenophobia on Earth they felt it would be better for everyone to destroy the pieces immediately. Ambassador Soval assigned two of his aides to oversee and assist in the destruction which was scheduled for the following day. He was being recalled to Vulcan to brief the High Command on the success of the negotiations. The Vulcan Convoy ship was scheduled to leave the following day after the destruction. He had expected resistance to High Command's counsel in regards to the destruction of the probe, and was surprised when Starfleet agreed almost immediately. It appeared that even the humans could embrace logic in the face of adversity. In truth, Humans were an enigma Vulcans could not yet decipher. They displayed a confusing array of qualities that were often paradoxical. They were often governed by emotion in one moment and by reason and logic in the next. Sometimes he was not sure what to make of them. And yet they were able to achieve so much in so
It was the fourth night of his return trip to Vulcan aboard the Vulcan Convoy ship. Soval made his way to his quarters. He had just come from dining with his aides. He needed to mediate before his return to Vulcan in the morning. He walked over to the corner of the room where he kept the candles and picked one up to light it. As he settled onto a cushion on the floor he focused on the flame. In the back of his mind he could feel a deep sorrow overcome him. He tried to assuage it, but it was becoming more pronounced. A feeling of loneliness coupled with it. It was coming from the threads of the bond. He knew the emotions did not belong to him. They were Officer Corcoran’s. He knew he should not yield to the connection if he wished to sever it, but a part of him could not help but reach out. He touched the bond in his mind. He could feel her anguish, and it pained him. He tried to project calm. He wanted to relieve her of her discomfort, but he knew there was nothing he could do.
Constance passed Admiral Forrest's office and remembered he was back on Earth. Her stomach sank with the realization. It had been a week since she learned of Major Hayes death. She still felt numb, almost hollow inside. It was all she could do to focus on her work.

When she reached her quarters she entered and shut the door. It was a small, but comfortable room with a bed and a desk. She had a small bookshelf that she had decorated with a few keepsakes and books in paper that she had collected over the years. There was an old framed photograph of her parents by her bed. The window across from the door overlooked a few smaller buildings in typical Vulcan architectural design as well as an expanse of a red-hued desert. She did not have a direct view of the city center, but she did not mind. The desert reminded her of where she grew up in Arizona before she had moved to California.

But now she could not even bear to look out the window or at anything at all. She threw herself on her bed and hugged her pillow. Her emotions were riding high like a tidal wave and she could not stop them from crashing down on her. She sobbed into her pillow. Hot tears flowed as sorrow and grief consumed her. It was true that she had not known Major Hayes for very long; they had only worked together once during a joint mission. But they had been keeping in touch and begun to become very close. In time she found herself holding out hope for the future and what it might bring. His death was affecting her more than she realized. It also stirred the long repressed memories she had of her father and mother. They had died in a shuttle pod accident when she was twenty years old. It happened just after she had joined Starfleet while she was assigned to Admiral Forrest back when he was just her Commander. She had thrown herself into her work, and Forrest had helped her overcome her grief. But now it was raw and as fresh as it was seventeen years ago. She closed her eyes. Through her pain an echo of calm washed over her. Her wracking sobs slowly subsided. As she stillled her eyelids became heavy. Slowly she drifted into an unsubstantial sleep.

Constance awoke early and decided to take a shower. Looking at herself in the mirror she could see swollen red eyes staring back at her. She looked terrible. She had cried nearly every night for over a week and barely ate anything. She had no appetite. Her face was becoming gaunt and she was aware her cheekbones looked more pronounced. Looking away she splashed cold water on her face before climbing into the shower. After showering she put on her uniform and walked over to her bookshelf absent-mindedly touching her keepsakes. She still had an hour before she had to be at the CCC. As she sat back down on her bed the door to her quarters chimed. She walked over and pressed the com.

"Yes?" She inquired.

"You have a delivery, Officer Corcoran," the voice said. She frowned. Pressing the button to open the door she saw recognized the young uniformed guard from the lobby. He was holding a small black box.

"Thank you," she said as she relieved him of the delivery. She tried not to make eye contact. They were not well acquainted, but she still did not want to be seen in such a vulnerable state. There were few people who had ever seen her cry. Admiral Forrest was one of the precious few, and she wanted to keep it that way. He nodded and turned to walk away. She shut the door. The black box was actually a small stasis unit. There was a note attached to it. She opened the envelope and unfolded the paper inside. It read:

_I came into possession of these before returning from Earth. I was informed it was the season for them. Perhaps they will help you concentrate on the task at hand._
She opened the stasis unit and saw that there were four genuine Earth apples inside. Something inside her stirred. It was the smallest of gestures; however she could not help but feel it had injected life into her. An unexpected tear pricked her eye as she gently touched one of the apples. She had not realized how much her life had changed in the past year and how much the work was affecting her until now. The note was terse, but coming from the Vulcan she knew it was meant as a peace offering and it touched her. She picked up one of the apples and brought it to her nose. **Vulcans and their exceptional memories.** As she thought about the Ambassador she felt a long buried emotion rustle inside of her.

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The days stretched by and finally the unthinkable happened. *Enterprise* returned from the Expanse. The moment that it became known the United Earth Embassy nearly exploded in jubilation. Emotions ran high as everyone was scrambling to learn what had happened. Everyone except the Vulcans. They almost seemed to feign disinterest and continued to move in a dignified, calm manner as though nothing of significance had occurred.

Ambassador Soval and Admiral Forrest were the first to be recalled to Earth. They were being summoned to serve on an official council to debrief the captain of the *Enterprise* on the findings during the mission. A Vulcan convoy ship was immediately scheduled for departure to Earth. Within a day of learning of the *Enterprise’s* return a *D’Kyr* class cruiser was already on its way to Earth carrying the Vulcan Ambassador as well as Admiral Forrest, his aide Ensign Asano, and Officer Corcoran.

On the last day of the journey, Ambassador Soval entered the cafeteria sitting down at a table with his aides. He heard the jovial tones of Human conversation. Looking up he saw that Admiral Forrest, the Admiral's aide Ensign Asano, and Officer Corcoran were dining together across the room by one of the large round windows. He briefly made eye contact with Officer Corcoran as she noticed him looking at their group. Looking away he stood and walked over to the replicator. A moment later, he felt someone standing next to him. It was Officer Corcoran.

"Ambassador, I have no wish to disturb you, however I never thanked you. I wanted to do so now."

"Expressing thanks is an Earth custom. It is unnecessary," he said. In truth, gratitude made him feel uncomfortable.

"Well, in case you haven't noticed, I am from Earth," she said. He assumed her comment was meant to be taken with a degree of levity as it was quite obvious she was human. "I just wanted to say thank you. It meant a lot to me. Perhaps more than you realize," she said quietly her face coloring slightly. He noticed her ears had turned pink.

"You're welcome," he said in customary reply and inclining his head in acknowledgment. She looked somewhat relieved as she turned around. He watched as she returned to her table. He frowned inwardly as the familiar feeling of possessiveness returned. For the first time he felt like he might not be in control of the situation.
When they had arrived on Earth they were escorted to San Francisco Bay Stadium where the crew of the *Enterprise* received a hero's welcome from all of Starfleet and Earth it seemed. Soval had listened to Captain Archer's speech. Though it was humble, Soval wondered if he fully appreciated the sacrifices of his crew and everyone who had been involved in the nearly year-long mission. Soval would get his answer at the debriefing the following day.

Specialists from the High Command had examined the data regarding the *Seleya*. Archer had handled the situation exactly as he had imagined. Not only did they not rescue any of the crew, but they triggered a reactor breach when they overloaded the ship's power grid which ultimately killed everyone aboard the *Seleya*. Soval knew that the breach had been accidental, however he could not help but feel immense ire over the situation. To make matters worse they did not even try to recover the computer database. When he questioned Archer about his actions Archer responded with anger. He was as arrogant and emotional as Soval had remembered him to be. During the debriefing he had even insinuated that Soval himself was to blame for what had happened to the crew. Over the years, Soval had grown was used to Archer's constant friction with him and the High Command, however this was the most insulting, baseless accusation yet. It was all Soval could do to remain seated when Archer nearly spat in his face.

Soval knew that Archer had been biased against advice or counsel from the High Command since well before he joined Starfleet. Soval himself had a hand in the delay of the Warp 5 program many years ago. Captain Archer's father, Henry, was the architect of the Warp 5 engine, and never saw his dream come to fruition. Captain Archer remained resentful for years to come over this event alone. However, Soval believed it was better one human suffer disappointment that risk an entire species. Soval remembered First Contact with Humans and what they had been capable of nearly a hundred years prior. Humans were so keen on becoming the technological equals to Vulcans that they never stopped to think that maybe they were advancing too fast. It had taken Vulcans nearly a thousand years to rebuild their civilization and travel to the stars and the humans achieved the same feat in under a hundred and were showing no signs of slowing down. And it seemed that between the destruction of the Monastery of *P'Jem* to the incident involving the *Seleya* they had not learned from their mistakes.

As a result of Archer's outburst, the debriefing was put on hold indefinitely. Soval was not sure for how long, but Admiral Forrest ordered Archer to take a minimum of two weeks leave. Soval was being recalled to return to Vulcan in the meantime.

That same afternoon he boarded the Vulcan convoy ship. It was only during dinner service in the cafeteria when he noticed T'Pol. He had not been aware that she was taking her shore leave on Vulcan. She was sitting by the far corner of the room by one of the large round windows with one other person. It was none other than Commander Tucker from *Enterprise*. He watched as they sat together conversing quietly. T'Pol was looking as placid as ever as Commander Tucker chatted animatedly. T'Pol glanced over and saw Soval looking in their direction. Commander Tucker also turned to look back. When he made eye contact with Soval he nodded out of courtesy. T'Pol excused herself and walked over to the replicator. Soval stood from his table to follow her.

"Ambassador," she said turning to look at him as she ordered a cup of tea.

"You are taking shore leave?" He asked. It was unusual for Vulcans to take vacation. He could not blame her though. Few Vulcans understood what kind of mental discipline was required to work so closely with Humans. And she was the first Vulcan to serve aboard a Human Starship for any
extended period of time.

"I'm returning to Vulcan to visit my mother," she said.

"And Commander Tucker?" Soval asked. T'Pol was quiet for a moment.

"His sister was killed during the Xindi attack and desired not to take his leave on Earth. He has in the past expressed an interest in visiting Vulcan. As invitation is required and my family home has room for guests I felt obliged to ask him to join me." T'Pol said quietly.

Soval looked over at Commander Tucker. He was an intelligent, good-natured Human male who worked aboard Enterprise as Chief Engineer. Soval had met him on numerous occasions as he often was in the company of Captain Archer. He looked to be in his mid-thirties and though T'Pol was well over sixty standard years old their ages were relative for a Human and a Vulcan. In fact Humans aged rather quickly and lived relatively short lives whereas Vulcans matured more slowly and on average lived well past two hundred years old.

Soval did not press any further. It was not his place. However, it was quite clear to him that something was going on between T'Pol and Commander Tucker. He only wished that they would be more discreet. Most Vulcans would find an intimate relationship with a Human to be improper and unnatural. It was a decidedly prejudiced view, but very few Vulcans really understood Humans. Soval had once held a similar position; however it had changed over the years after working so closely with them. When T'Pol spoke again she changed the subject.

"I understand that the debriefing was put on hold," she said.

"Yes, Captain Archer was quite inflammatory--" he started. T'Pol cleared her throat.

"Ambassador, pardon me for interrupting, however I feel there is something I should tell you," she said. Soval was quiet. T'Pol took it as a cue to continue.

"Before the spheres were destroyed I took several readings. What we learned was that the Expanse had been growing exponentially. In some regions it had been expanding by several kilometers per hour. If the spheres had not been destroyed it is logical to assume that the Expanse would have continued expanding eventually encompassing hundreds of systems." She gave him a pointed look. "Including Vulcan," she said. "Perhaps you should not be so hard on Captain Archer," she finished. He raised an eyebrow. T'Pol took a sip of her tea. He could only nod in acknowledgement before she returned to her seat across from Commander Tucker.

Soval was surprised. T'Pol clearly had strong emotional attachment to Captain Archer. Soval wondered briefly if it was because her own father died when she was young. Though it was disturbing her words were even more so. If what she said was true then Captain Archer deserved all the gratitude he could muster. It was humbling to say the least. Soval swallowed. He turned and left the cafeteria. He needed to return to his quarters to meditate.
Annoyance

It had been nearly three weeks since Constance returned to Earth along with Admiral Forrest for the debriefing, but he never imagined it would be so short lived. She could not believe she was going back to Vulcan. She had thought that she would resume her previous posting for Starfleet Intelligence in San Francisco. But the Chief of Starfleet Intelligence had been impressed by her service over the years and the intel she had acquired regarding the xenophobic organization, Terra Prime. He desired to form an intelligence team that would continue to monitor for xenophobic cells in space. This was coming in light of the rumblings that Terra Prime influence had made its way to the Lunar colony. They did not want to discount the possibility that xenophobic influence could make its way to the United Earth Embassy on Vulcan as well. It was of the upmost importance that Earth and Vulcan maintain their alliance.

In truth she did not mind. She felt as though there was nothing back on Earth for her any longer. She had very little family left, and Her previous team had disbanded and some of the other officers were assigned to other posts throughout the Alpha and Beta Quadrants. Not only that, but she had been more excited to return to Earth with the prospect of Major Hayes returning as well. After recent events everything had changed.

She was being transported back to the Embassy via yet another Vulcan convoy ship. She was starting to wonder if Starfleet had any other ships other than Enterprise and Colombia. Even still, she was getting used to being on a Vulcan ship. It was quiet and she enjoyed the solitude it afforded. Most of the Vulcans aboard either ignored her or did not seem to notice her at all. It did not bother her; she spent most of her time in her quarters anyway. However, by the third night of the journey, she was starting to get cabin fever. She had to do something about it. When she knew that most of the Vulcans would be meditating or sleeping she took the opportunity to sit by one of the large round windows in the cafeteria. Thankfully, it was blissfully empty. She had brought a book, but found herself staring out into space. She wondered if she would ever get tired of watching the stars fly by.

Out of curiosity she tried a cup of hot Vulcan tea from the replicator. It was surprisingly spicy. It tasted like a combination of cinnamon and ginger, but with more of a bite. Of the Vulcan foods that she was adventurous enough to try most were either extremely bland or extremely spicy and had little about their appearance to distinguish what flavor profile they would be end up being. It was like Russian roulette. She had once eaten a dish so spicy that she had tears running down her cheeks and it had taken nearly twenty minutes before she could feel her tongue again. Thankfully no Vulcans had been in the vicinity when the incident occurred.

That evening she had decided to stick to what she knew so she cut up an apple she had brought back with her from Earth and was carefully eating it with a fork. Though there were no Vulcans around she did not wish to offend any that might come in by eating it with her fingers. She opened her book slowly taking a sip of her tea.

Her solitude was short lived. Twenty minutes into half-heartedly leafing through the book she heard the door to the cafeteria chime. She glanced up briefly. She was surprised to see the Vulcan Ambassador, Soval. She had not seen him since he had been recalled to Earth for the debriefing and that had been concluded nearly a week ago. He briefly made eye contact with her before he walked over to the replicator and ordered a cup of tea. She began furiously flipping through her book in effort to appear preoccupied. She almost did not notice when Ambassador Soval stood at the table in front of her.

"May I sit?" He asked indicating to the chair across from her. It was clearly a question, but his tone
was commanding. Constance was taken off guard.

"Of course," she said after a second. She sat a little straighter in her chair and closed her book. He sat down across from her, and took a sip of his tea. She realized she had never really looked at him. Of course she had seen him, but never had taken the time to really study him. He was not handsome in a conventional sense, but his features were striking even for a Vulcan. He had unusually full lips and dark wide set eyes. His upswept eyebrows gave him a serious, almost defiant appearance. Pointed ears poked out from the usual Vulcan male hairstyle. He was not as lean and wiry as other Vulcan men and was instead tall with broad shoulders and had a more muscular build. His graying hair gave him a mature, distinguished appearance and it gave her leave to wonder about his age. It was always difficult to tell with Vulcans given most of them lived well beyond two hundred years old.

When she realized she had been openly staring she felt a blush beginning to form and she willed herself to look away. She turned her eyes to his clothes instead. She noticed he was not wearing his usual ambassadorial robes and was instead wearing a casual tunic type shirt and pants. It was as informal as she had ever seen him. After a moment he broke the silence.

"I have been informed you are returning to the United Earth Embassy as head of an intelligence team preemptively monitoring for terrorist cells," he said. He stared at her, unflinchingly holding her gaze. It was a little unnerving at first, but she continued to stare back at him. Vulcans often maintained eye contact to indicate their undivided attention, but humans often mistook it as a form of intimidation.

"Yes, you were correctly informed," she answered. She was not sure where his line of questioning was headed.

"You will report any threats pertaining to Vulcan directly to me," he stated. His presumptuousness struck a nerve. Oh, so that's how it's going to be, she thought. She purposefully disregarded his statement.

"I will no longer be reporting directly to Admiral Forrest. My direct superior is the Chief of Starfleet Intelligence on Earth. And Starfleet Intelligence operates outside the bounds of Starfleet Command," she said.

"Yes and the Chief of Starfleet Intelligence informed me that as head of the division on Vulcan, you will keep me apprised of any pertinent information regarding the safety of Vulcan so I may alert the High Command." It seemed that the Chief had neglected to tell her that she was also to report to the Ambassador Soval. She bit her lip. She did not like to learn of key information second hand.

"Of course, however we have to operate with some mode of transparency. I will expect you to be equally forthright in sharing information," she stated sharply. She knit her eyebrows as she glared at him. He looked slightly taken aback by her unexpected candor. He pressed his lips together and set his chin.

"It is a reasonable request," he stated after a turn picking up his tea. She softened slightly at his acquiescence.

"Listen, I know you are concerned. I assure you I take my position very seriously," she said.

"Concern is a human emotion. On Vulcan we follow stringent protocols which, I know from experience, are lacking on Earth," he said. "I certainly hope you understand what is at stake," he said. She suddenly felt the blood rushing to her face. She endeavored to invoke every ounce of control she had in her body to project a Vulcan-like calm. She knew it was illogical, but she felt as if he was trying to get a rise out of her. She would not give him the satisfaction. Especially since he was the one who had interrupted her much desired solitude.
In fact, the more she thought about it the more she was annoyed she became. Who was he to suddenly question her abilities? Only the Vulcan Ambassador to Earth, of course, but she did not like anyone assuming she was not up to par without the evidence to back it up. He was easily becoming the most confusing, contrary person she had ever met. One moment he seemed normal and thoughtful even, for a Vulcan as least, and in the next he was infuriatingly condescending. It was about all she could take.

"Ambassador Soval, please excuse me. I need to retire," she said. She stood abruptly. She left without another word completely forgetting her book and tea on the table.

It was the last night of the journey to Vulcan. She had tried to spend most of the day away from her quarters but the anxious feeling she felt the night before was returning in full force. She was desperate to get off of the ship. With few options she reluctantly decided to head to the cafeteria again. She silently prayed that she would not have another run in with the Vulcan Ambassador. She saw enough of him in her dreams. And before long they would be working together even more often. He could be so infernal. She was not sure how she was going to handle dealing with him. She wondered at how Admiral Forrest got along so well with him.

When she reached the cafeteria she saw that it was empty. After ordering a cup of tea she walked over to her usual perch and she sunk into the chair. Staring out the window she watched at the stars slide past. It was oddly calming; she felt her eyelids growing heavy. She was emotionally drained. She was not sure how long she was sitting there staring out into space when a noise behind her brought her back to reality. It was Ambassador Soval. He was standing in front of where she sat at the table. Her heart sunk. She did not want to get into it again with him.

"May I sit?" He asked. It was déjà vu all over again. She swallowed and nodded reluctantly. He seemed uncomfortable. She did not know him well, but she had spent enough time with him to know when he was not acting in his usual dour manner. He sat down carefully smoothing his robes before he went on to speak.

"I realized I was wrong in my approach to you the last night. You are doing a great service for our worlds," he stated. He avoided making eye contact. "I should not have spoken to you in such a manner." Constance blinked. She could barely believe her ears. For a moment she wondered if she had fallen asleep and was dreaming.

"Are you apologizing to me?" She asked raising an eyebrow. He pressed his lips together and set his chin.

"Yes, Officer Corcoran, I am apologizing to you," he said through his teeth as he narrowed his eyes. She could tell by his tone the words did not come easily. She softened slightly in her appraisal of him. His apology, though forced, had surprised her. Vulcans were not in the habit of thanking or apologizing for things, and she appreciated the effort.

"Thank you," she said quietly. They sat in awkward silence for a moment. Ambassador Soval pulled something out from a pocket in his robes. It was her book. She had forgotten that she had abandoned it in her haste to leave the night before. Her eyes were wide.

"My book… Thank you," she said taking it from his grasp. She turned it over in her hand. She had been so careless. The book had once belonged to her father. It was one of the few things she had left of him. She suddenly felt very weary.

"Can we start over?" She asked looking at Ambassador Soval. He shifted in his seat.
"I'm not sure I understand your query," he said.

"I mean this thing between us. If we are going to be working together we need to learn to trust each other. We can't always be arguing and trying to make a point at every turn," she said. She unconsciously rubbed her thumb along the rim of her mug. He looked at her holding her gaze. She was starting to get used to staring into his eyes.

"Yes," he said simply. His reply was clipped, but she knew it was genuine. Perhaps he too was tired of being at odds with her. She nodded and took a sip of her tea. It felt as though the tension between them was dissipating.

"The book you left—" He stated, looking over at the book in her hand curiously.

"Yes, War and Peace, it's a novel from the nineteenth century. This is only the first volume," she answered before he could finish, turning the book over in her hands.

"And you are reading it on paper," he stated. His tone sounded curious if not a little lofty as though he was amazed she would still be using such a primitive artifact. Truth be told the book was very old. The worn edges and tanned pages revealed its age. It was the first U.S. edition, printed well before United Earth had even been a thought. The six volume set had been inherited from her father's collection.

"Well, I like the smell of books," she said a little defensively. She realized how odd the statement sounded said aloud. She blushed. They had just agreed to start over and she still had her hackles raised. She started again desperate for some sort of segue. "There are studies that have shown that humans can smell genetic compatibility of a potential mate. Not that that has anything to do with the book. It's more in reference to the fact there are some smells that are more pleasurable-" she was rambling, incoherently at that.

"What the hell was she saying?" he cursed herself mentally. The Ambassador, however, did not miss a beat.

"You are referring the studies conducted by Claus Wedekind on Earth. We had similar studies on Vulcan. There was some merit to the findings. Vulcan females do have a heightened sense of smell," he stated. She was grateful he did not seem to notice her momentary misstep. Or if he did, he was being kind enough to ignore it. They sat in silence for a moment. After a turn she spoke again.

"Can I ask you a question?" She asked looking at him.

"You just did, but you may ask another," he said. She noticed that the edge of his lips curled, almost imperceptibly. It softened his normally austere appearance by a fraction. He looked almost relaxed. She wondered if this was his attempt at humor. Perhaps it was another consequence of his years on Earth.

"Do Vulcans dream?" She asked. It was a serious question. She noticed that he straightened in his chair. He looked down at his hands for a moment before answering.

"No, not typically," he said slowly.

"Oh," she replied. She was disappointed. He had been appearing in her dreams with such frequency that she had thought it might mean something. The only thing it seemed to indicate was that she was crazy. When she looked at him again his demeanor had changed. His face was stoic again. He was wearing his usual Vulcan look of non-expression.

"Why do you ask?" He sat up even straighter in his seat.
"Curiosity, I suppose," she lied. "Humans dream all the time. I've been--," she stopped and looked away. It seemed ridiculous to continue when it obviously did not mean anything. And she certainly was not going to tell him that he was the star of her nightly trips to La-La-Land. She looked out the window as she absentmindedly thumbed the rim of her mug of tea again.

He watched her fingers looking even surlier than usual if that were possible. He stood up abruptly. She looked back up at him. "Officer Corcoran, please excuse me. I need to meditate before I retire," he stated. She gave him a small smile and bit her lip. A small part of her worried she had done something to offend him.

"You can call me, Constance," she offered. "Most people do," she added quickly looking away. She did not want him to think she was pushing the boundaries of their acquaintance or whatever this was. He nodded in acknowledgement and turned to walk toward the door. She watched him leave. Her felt her heart flutter involuntarily. Her stomach tightened as she recognized her symptoms and knew there was nothing she could do to stop it. She looked back out the window and wondered how she had arrived at this point.
Soval was unsettled. He had just learned that Officer Corcoran, Constance as she asked him to call her, was vaguely aware of their connection. She had hinted at the dreams. He was not sure how to proceed. He had thought that the bond would eventually fade; that he could somehow sever it. However, it seemed to be growing in strength. It did not help that she was to remain on Vulcan and that they would most likely be working together with more frequency.

He was also keenly aware of her allure. She was intelligent and had an almost Vulcan-like curiosity. Qualities Vulcans prized in others. And though she was human, she was quiet and thoughtful except when she was passionate about something. Which he seemed to notice more often than not. It was a reflection of the emotions she held so close to the surface. He found the combination of the conflicting facets of her personality oddly attractive. It was unsettling. In all the years of working with humans he had never found himself in such a quandary.

He knew, despite their propensity to clash, she was also attracted to him. He had begun to take notice that her heart rate increased when he was around her. And he also noted her pupils dilated when she looked at him. He did not need to understand Human emotion to recognize the physical manifestations of attraction. He touched the threads of the bond in his mind. They were slowly solidifying into something stronger, and he could feel emotions passing across it when something of significance occurred. It was nothing like he had experienced before. He had been bonded to T'Amara, but their connection was placed by a Vulcan priest when they were children and it was never like this. He now wondered if the stories of t'hy'la were true. Only a year ago, he would not have thought something like this could be possible with a human.

As the weeks passed Soval found it easier than he thought it would be to work with Constance. She had seemed to fall easily into her new role. Their bond seemed to halt for the time being neither growing nor fading. Constance seemed no more aware of it than when she had subtly hinted at her dreams. She had kept her word to start over, and in time he found her to be as even-handed as Admiral Forrest. In truth, the two were rather similar in that regard. It was true she was a little more exuberant; however she was just as thoughtful in her evaluations. Though he spent a great deal of time away from Vulcan on ambassadorial duties, whenever he did return she scheduled regular meetings with him to keep him apprised of any new developments.

The sun was high in the sky as he walked from the High Command Building to the United Earth Embassy. The familiar heat of Vulcan was a welcome respite from the cold, sterile environment synonymous with space travel. He had just returned to Vulcan that morning. He had a meeting scheduled with Officer Corcoran at her office at the United Earth Embassy that afternoon. It was a short walk, only a block away, and he found it agreeable especially after his journey. The alien white stone of the Embassy façade was in stark relief against the red Vulcan sky. It was yet another reminder of the differences between Vulcans and Humans. When he reached the Embassy he checked in with security and afterwards was directed to the lift. Upon reaching the third floor he made his way down the familiar white hallway and stopped at the last door on the left. Officer Corcoran's name had been etched on the outside of the door since the last time he met with her. He pressed the com button outside the door.

"Come in," he heard her voice say over the link. The door slid open as he walked inside. Constance was sitting at her desk looking over a PADD. A few stray strands of hair that had escaped their pinning framed her face. It seemed to indicate her level of concentration on her work as she seemed to take no notice of them. Most Vulcan women he knew wore their hair short; it was logical not to
have to spend so much time on one's appearance, but he found her appearance pleasing. She had dark brown hair that contrasted with her pale skin and olive green eyes in an appealing manner. When she looked up she motioned for him to have a seat.

"Hello, Ambassador, thank you for coming," she said. He found that humans were often thanking and apologizing for things that neither required it nor were in their control. He nodded in acknowledgement before sitting down.

"There has been no chatter to report. All seems well for the moment," she stated. He raised an eyebrow. It was quite out of character for her to waste his time unnecessarily. However, she continued, "I do have a question for you though. Would there be any reason for a member of the Vulcan Security Directorate to be spending so much time here at the United Earth Embassy?" She clicked on something on her PADD and an image of a Vulcan appeared on the screen. It appeared to be footage from a security feed. That is why she had wanted him to come. He recognized the man as Stel. He was Chief Investigator for the Directorate under the authority of the High Command.

"I thought your position here was to monitor your own people. I see now that you are also gathering intelligence on Vulcans," he stated pressing his lips together. She sighed, looking exasperated. 

"Ambassador, I meant no offense. I believe you know me better than that by now. I was only curious. I've checked the logs and I see that he has visited the Embassy more than a handful of times," she stated scrolling through her PADD again. He sat back in the chair. It was odd. However, he did not know the circumstances or facts regarding Stel's reasons for visiting the Embassy. He did not want to assume anything without having all the pertinent information. It would not be the first time the High Command kept him in the dark, to borrow a human expression.

"His name is Stel. He is Chief Investigator at the Vulcan Security Directorate. I am not aware of what business he has here, however I understand that he reports directly to the High Command. Given that fact I feel certain that it is nothing to be alarmed about," he said evenly.

"You don't think it's at all odd?" She said frowning.

"I prefer not to speculate without having evidence," he stated. She bit her lip. He noticed it was a habit she exhibited when she was deep in thought.

"I trust you, however I'm still going to need to review this further," she said. He was aware the human propensity to follow their instincts. Therefore he knew it would be illogical to try and dissuade her. She put her PADD away in one of the drawers of the desk. She suddenly looked very serious.

"There's another reason I asked for you to come here today. Something I need to discuss with you," she stated. She shifted uncomfortably in her chair. He could feel anxiety that did not belong to him flash across the bond. He furrowed his eyebrows as he looked at her.

"I'm not sure how to say this or what you might think, but I can no longer keep it to myself," she swallowed. She appeared to be in turmoil with what she was about to say. "Ambassador – I've been having dreams about you," she said. Her face colored. "I know how bizarre it's going to sound, but the dreams – they feel so –," she stopped and exhaled looking up at the ceiling. She could not finish. "I know you must think I've gone insane; I probably have," her eyes widening as she shook her head. She sat quietly and looking down at her hands. He knew she was waiting for him to say something, anything. He had no other choice. It was time to address the connection between them.

"I know what is happening," he said slowly. She looked up at him quickly and frowned. Her lips parted slightly as she turned her head to the side. He knew it would be illogical to approach the
subject indirectly so he decided to be forthright. "An empathic bond has formed between us." He said as he clasped his hands in front of him. She stood up from her desk and walked over to the window. She shook her head looking flummoxed.

"Wait. What?" She asked looking thoroughly confused. He could tell she was not expecting this disclosure.

"An empathic bond," he stated again.

"I heard you, but do you mean like some sort of telepathic connection?" She asked. Her face had paled. A tenor of fear crossed the threads of the bond.

"Yes," he stated. He felt concern building in his chest. He had not been sure what her reaction would be, but he had not expected her to be afraid.

"I – I thought Vulcans were touch telepaths. Can you read my thoughts?" She asked looking back over at him.

"No, that would require physical contact, and even then we are careful in guarding ourselves from inadvertently reading the thoughts of others. Only feelings and emotions can pass through the connection." He said looking at her. She blinked. Her shoulders relaxed infinitesimally and she was quiet for a moment.

"So right now you are feeling concern," she said tentatively. She must have touched the bond in her mind. He was surprised how easily she seemed to navigate it.

"Yes," he said slowly.

"You once said concern was a human emotion," she said vehemently. He could feel anger radiating from the bond. It was quickly followed by a wave of remorse. "I'm sorry – I'm just so confused by this. How did this happen?" she asked.

"Vulcans form bonds with those they are close to. Like their children, or their spouses. However, it first requires physical contact to initiate it," he said.

"The first time we met I touched your hand by accident. I felt something–," she stated looking out at the expanse of desert from her view out the window. She looked down at her hand.

"Yes, I believe the contact was enough to initiate a preliminary connection. And the reciprocal attraction between us was enough to cause the bond to form," he stated. His face was stolid. She glanced at him and back out the window. She blushed. It spread until her ears were pink. He was aware of her embarrassment at his mention of her apparent attraction to him. He was silently gratified that she did not seem to deny it. She swallowed.

"What do we do now?" She asked quietly looking over at him from her position by the window.

"I had initially desired to sever the connection, however I am now of a mind to leave it," he said quietly. She was very still. She appeared to be thinking.

"Hypothetically, if we left it alone, what would happen?" She asked. He stood from his chair and walked to stand next to her by the window.

"I have never had this type of connection with a human before, however due to its present state it is logical to assume, hypothetically, it would continue to progress into something more… substantial," he said. He looked down at her. She stared back at him unflinching. Her eyes were soft yet there was
an intensity of feeling behind them. He felt an all too familiar emotion pulsing from the bond – yearning. He saw that her pupils were dilated, and her breathing was shallow and measured. Her lips were parted ever so slightly. He was suddenly very aware of their proximity. It would take less than a step to close the distance. He found himself filled with an overwhelming curiosity to know what it would feel like to press his lips against hers. After a turn, she took a step back and looked away. The moment passed, and her attention was focused back out the window. He slowly returned to his position in front of her desk.

"I need some time to think about this," she said after a moment. She crossed her arms protectively across her chest almost as if to guard her heart.

"Of course, it is only logical," he stated resuming his usual state of suppressed emotion. She moved to sit down at her desk again. Soval turned to toward the door before looking back at her again. "I will leave now if there is nothing further," he said. She gave him a meaningful look and shook her head. With that he left. He let out a breath once he heard the door close behind him.
Constance felt like she was having an out of body experience. It had been two days since she had spoken to Ambassador Soval and she was still reeling from what he had revealed to her. It was hard to wrap her mind around the fact that she was so intimately connected to a Vulcan. She found some relief while she worked; she was able to temporary forget about the existence of their connection. However, as soon as she was back in her quarters she found herself touching the bond whenever she was alone. She was drawn to its presence as though it was a chipped tooth. She could not help but prod at it. It glowed faintly in the back of her mind. It was alien and familiar at the same time. Sometimes she thought she could sense emotions passing through it, but she could not be sure. Most of the time it simply maintained its silent presence in her mind.

In an effort to take her mind off of what transpired she threw herself into her work even further devoting long hours reviewing every communication to and from the Embassy. She had even started reviewing security footage. However, her distraction was slowly becoming an obsession.

She looked for all footage that captured Stel. She found that he had been conducting a security evaluation of the United Earth Embassy in an effort to assure that it was safe in light of the amount of Vulcans who passed through each day. It still seemed odd to her. It was as though it was a guise for some other nefarious purpose. She could not shake the feeling that something was not right. She looked at the clock. It was late. She realized she could no longer put off what she so desperately was trying to avoid.

When she returned to her quarters that night she found herself once again drawn to the bond. It pulsed gently in the back of her mind. She thought about Ambassador Soval. Her feelings for him were changing from indifference to something deeper. She had barely noticed it before as it had been happening so gradually, but she now realized she cared for him. In the time that they had spent together she found that she had prematurely passed judgement on him. She had judged him based her preconceived notion of Vulcans. It was exactly what she hated people doing to her. She realized that beneath his austere façade he treated her with respect and also with a gentle patience he seemed to reserve only for her. He was the one out of his comfort zone trying to accommodate her human tendencies. Perhaps she should at least acknowledge what was happening between them instead of trying to avoid it.

After her sparring session the following night she returned to her quarters to shower and change. By the time she had finished it was nearly seven-thirty in the evening. She knew Admiral Forrest had returned to the Earth Embassy that morning and had an appointment with the Ambassador that evening, but perhaps she could speak with the Admiral afterwards. She desired his opinion. He had worked with the Vulcan Ambassador for many years and knew him far better than anyone else she knew. Perhaps he could shed some light on her predicament.

As she finished combing her hair she heard a deafening boom followed by low rumbling. Her room shook as the lights flickered and shut off. The picture of her parents fell from the nightstand and clattered to the floor. The glass inside broke, spreading shards across the floor and under the bed. She nearly fell but managed to retain her balance as she ran to the door. The door open button did not respond. She slammed her palm against the emergency release and manually pulled it open. It was heavy. The rumbling got louder and the ground continued to shake. It was almost like an earthquake. The lights in the corridor flickered and chunks of ceiling and wall began to fall and crumble. Looking down the hall she realized it was missing. It was simply gone. As the dust began to dissipate she could hear shrieks of people screaming.
A ceiling tile above her fell and before she could move it hit her hard on her left shoulder and she fell to the ground. She smacked her face against the floor and cried out. As she slowly pushed herself up she rubbed her shoulder and the realization of what happened dawned on her. Standing slowly she looked for the nearest stairwell. She took a step. She was unsteady on her feet, but it did not matter. If her assumption was correct then Admiral Forrest was in trouble. She prayed that he was not in his quarters at the time. Sprinting down the steps she headed for his office.

Soval's ears were still ringing when he came to. He blinked. Only moments prior he and Admiral Forrest were in the midst of conversation when a thundering explosion erupted around them. He was now lying on his side on the floor. His face stung; he quickly suppressed the feeling of pain. He coughed. There was rubble and dust all around him. Something heavy was on top of him. When he tried to sit up he realized the heavy object was Admiral Forrest. He sat up gently pushing Admiral Forrest over. His eyes were closed. There was a deep gash on the side of his head and dark red blood was flowing from it readily. It was running down his face and soaking his uniform at the collar. Debris from the explosion must have hit his head. Soval could hear that his heart still beating, but it was very faint. He ripped the hem of his robes and balled the fabric in his fist. He pressed the cloth against Admiral Forrest's head in an effort to staunch the bleeding. He looked around. There were crumpled shapes of other people lying in the rubble, but he detected no movement.

"Help!" He called out. "This man needs immediate assistance." Admiral Forrest's face was ashen. Soval was aware his condition was very serious. Blood was slowly soaking through the makeshift bandage. Admiral Forrest's breathing was very shallow.

"Hold on, Max," he whispered. After what seemed like many minutes had passed he heard footsteps. Three medics appeared out of the dust. They were climbing over smoldering broken glass and downed walls crunching their way over to them.

"Are you alright?" One of the medics asked arriving first to their location.

"Yes, my condition is of no concern at the moment. This man needs immediate medical attention," he said trying to keep the edge out of his voice. Admiral Forrest had just saved his life. It was imperative that they get him to the medical bay as soon as possible.

The medic looked at Admiral Forrest and immediately motioned for the other two to come over. "We need to get this man to the Med Bay. He is losing a lot of blood," he said with urgency. The other two medics unfolded a field stretcher and loaded Admiral Forrest onto it.

"This is Medical Officer Teller to Med Bay. We have two survivors from the lobby. One is in critical condition. We are on our way. Please remain on standby," said Officer Teller into his communicator. The other two medics were already navigating quickly through the debris with Admiral Forrest. Officer Teller helped Soval to his feet. He glanced at Soval's face.

"We'll need to take a look at that laceration in the Med Bay," Teller said. Soval nodded following him through the far doors. He had no time to think about his own injuries. As he followed the medics he saw that there were several bodies lying around them. A few of them were Vulcan. The devastation was extensive. Looking up he could see stars. It took him a moment to realize the ceiling and floors above were simply missing. It was a strange sight. A massive, gaping hole that extended from the entrance through all the upper floors was now in place of what used to be the front of the Embassy. Dust and debris floated down from the now exposed floors above. It appeared that their proximity to the corridor protected them from the worst of the explosion. What was once the lobby was now a smoldering pit of destruction. If it was not for the far door of the southeastern corridor it would have been difficult to discern exactly where he was.
The lift was damaged in the explosion and emergency lightening lit the corridor. The medics rushed to the stairwell. Sliding the door open manually they began carefully navigating down the steps. They were headed down two floors to B level. Soval's ambassadorial robes were dragging behind him. They were slowing him down. He had shredded them beyond repair when he had ripped them earlier to use as a makeshift bandage. He stopped on a step and carefully pulled off the robes. He wore a plain black tunic and pants underneath that were now covered in dust and ash. Free of the heavy outer garments he was able to descend down the steps with ease. He held onto the handrail; his shoulder smarted where he had landed on it.

When they reached B level the medics began running toward the double medical bay doors at the end of the corridor. Soval followed quickly behind. Their increased urgency suggested Admiral Forrest's condition was grave.

"Get me the cardiostimulator, Stat!" Officer Teller yelled. The medics placed Admiral Forrest on an empty bed and were tearing open his shirt. He was no longer breathing. Soval looked around. The Med Bay was filled with people scrambling to help the injured. He did not know exactly where to stand. He opted for a position by Admiral Forrest's head out of the way of the medical personnel.

"Charging to 300 millijoules. Clear!" Officer Teller bellowed. He placed the device in the center of Admiral Forrest's chest. Unlike Vulcans, the human heart was located between the two lungs just below the sternum. Soval heard an electrical hum and Admiral Forrest's chest raised violently in response. The heart rate monitor still alarmed in flat line. "Charging to 350 millijoules. Clear!" screamed Teller. Admiral Forrest's body jumped in response to the electric impulse, but the heart rate monitor still registered no activity. The steady drone of the alarm filled the air. It seemed as though it was the only thing Soval could hear. Officer Teller cursed. He interlaced his fingers and began pumping his chest in an effort to manually stimulate Forrest's heart. "Come on," Teller pleaded through grit teeth. Several minutes passed. Teller eventually stopped and wiped his forehead with the sleeve of his lab coat. He glanced at Soval giving him a grim look before addressing the other medic across from him. "Please note time of death at 2023." Teller angrily ripped off his gloves and flung them into the biohazard chute next to the bed before moving on to the next patient.

Soval stood there looking at Admiral Forrest. He looked as though he could be sleeping. Maxwell Forrest had saved his life. His sacrifice was not lost on him. It was illogical that Forrest had jumped on top of him when he had every opportunity to save himself. Soval could not make sense of it. The monitor continued to alarm. When a female medic finally shut it off it broke his internal reverie.

"Come on, let's get you cleaned up, Ambassador," she said gently. She guided him to an empty bed nearby. He watched as other medical personnel began covering Admiral Forrest's body with a sheet. Soval wondered why they did this. It was as if they thought covering the body would change the state of it. Admiral Forrest was still dead whether he was covered or not. He continued to watch them as the female medic began to gently clean his lacerations with something that smelt vaguely antiseptic.

Suddenly the Med Bay doors flung open and Soval heard shouting. He recognized one of the voices. It was Officer Corcoran. She looked disheveled. Her clothes were covered in soot and her bottom lip was split and bleeding.

"Ma'am, please calm down," one of the medics said gesturing for her to sit. "We need to have a look at you."

"How many times do I have to tell you I'm fine? Where is he? I need to see Admiral Forrest. I was told he was brought here," she said looking past the medic. She must have spotted them covering his body on the bed nearby. She pushed past the medic and ran to the bed.
"No, no, no, no," she chanted. She ripped the cover back from his face. Her own crumpled. Her hands shook as she gripped the sheet. She stared down at Admiral Forrest. Tears silently poured down her cheeks. They made track marks through the soot and ash that covered her face. She touched his face gently. One of the medics gently grabbed her arm and tried to lead her away.

"Let go of me!" she hissed as she violently ripped her arm out of the medic's grasp. She continued to stare at Admiral Forrest's face. Soval could feel her anguish through the bond. He walked over to the bed and stood next to her. Officer Corcoran looked up at him, but her eyes were unfocused. He gently led her by the arm to a nearby chair. She did not fight him. She slumped down. The tears had stopped. Her face was blank. Soval noticed over the years that even humans attempted to suppress their emotions when they became too overwhelming. Constance wiped her face with the back of her hands. One of the medics was using a portable device to scan her for injuries.

"Stop, I'm fine," she said, trying to wave the medic away. She could be so stubborn. She finally seemed to focus and looked up at Soval after a moment. "You are alright," she stated quietly when the medics were out of earshot. They had not spoken since he revealed their connection. Seeing her so upset brought back the familiar feeling of possessiveness, but Soval pushed it aside. It was illogical to think of personal interest at this time.

"Admiral Forrest saved my life," he said. She looked up at him and back at where Admiral Forrest was lying under the sheet.

"I have to alert the Vulcan authorities and the High Command," he said. "The embassy is considered Earth soil; no doubt Starfleet has already been alerted. The High Command will apprise Starfleet of the details in the absence of Admiral Forrest," Soval stated. He looked over at Admiral Forrest's body. They had just been discussing the possibility of joint fleet operations. It was difficult to accept that that reality was now unlikely. Soval felt anger flare up inside of him. It was such an unnecessary waste of life. Constance looked up at him again. Her face was unreadable.

"We have to find who did this," she said as her face darkened. It was as though a cloud had passed overhead. He could feel her emotions seething with anger across the bond. They were not unlike his own.

"Yes." Soval answered as he set his teeth. A mutual understanding seemed to pass between them. She nodded. He swallowed as he turned and left the Medical Bay.
It took a while before Soval could actually leave the premises. The explosion had destroyed the atrium leading from entrance. Nearly a third of the Embassy had been destroyed and people were beginning to be evacuated. Parts of the building were still structurally sound including most of the levels below ground. However, it was determined that until a full investigation was completed all remaining Embassy employees would be moved to the High Command Building nearby and housed in temporary quarters.

Once Soval was released he immediately headed for the Administrator's office. When he reached V'Las's office his aide informed him that the High Command had been apprised of the events that had transpired and that V'Las was expecting him. Soval nodded and made his way into the office. V'Las was sitting at his desk. When he espied Soval he stood up and walked around to stand in front of his desk. Soval raised his hand in ta'al. V'Las waved his own hand dismissively.

"Ambassador Soval, it is pleasing to see that you are not seriously injured," he said. He glanced at Soval's face which was bruised green and sported linear gashes that extended from high on his cheek to his ear. Soval crossed his hands behind his back.

"Admiral Forrest saved my life," he stated.

"Yes, most unfortunate that he did not make it," he said. He tone was insincere. "However, it seems these humans can act logically when the situation calls for it," V'Las stated. Soval furrowed his eyebrows. It seemed as though V'Las was insinuating that the life of a Vulcan was more important than that of a Human. He felt his anger flare again. It took considerable effort to suppress the feeling. It was all he could do to appear placid. V'Las continued.

"We have a few suspects. One of them being Syrannites. We have reason to believe that Syrannites were involved," V'Las stated. Syrannites were a small group of Vulcans who believed they were following the true path of Surak. Soval raised his eyebrows. He was not expecting that disclosure.

"Syrannites have always been peaceful – non-violent," he countered.

"Yes, yes, all radical groups are non-violent until they aren't," V'Las said sharply. He began pacing in front of his desk. Soval remained unmoving.

"Do you have evidence of the Syrannites involvement?" Soval asked.

"Yes, of course, however such information is not shared lightly. We are constantly wary of any attempt to infiltrate the High Command so naturally this information is not disclosed readily. We also suspect that the Andorians could have planted the bomb. It is possible that they could have operatives anywhere," said V'Las. Soval knew that both allegations were very serious, and he did not like to act on them without seeing the evidence to support the assertions himself.

"I, personally, helped negotiate the peace treaty with Andoria two years ago. What exactly would the Andorians gain from attacking the Earth Embassy?" Soval asked.

"They are aware of our alliance with Earth. They probably wish to create conflict between Vulcans and Humans," said V'Las.

"That hardly seems logical," said Soval.

"Do not ask me to dissect the Andorian thought process. They are paranoid, arrogant, and illogical,"
V'Las said irritably. He continued to pace in front of his desk. Soval watched him walk back and forth. V'Las was acting oddly.

"Anyway, we have contacted Starfleet regarding the situation. They are sending the Enterprise to head the investigation. I have assigned Stel from the Vulcan Security Directorate to lead the investigation on our end," V'Las said. He drummed his fingers lightly on his desk. Soval nodded slowly. He remembered Officer Corcoran had mentioned that Stel had visited the Embassy several times in the past month. Before he could mention the coincidence V'Las began to speak again.

"Chief Investigator Stel is familiar with the United Earth Embassy. He conducted a study of their security protocols last month. Clearly, they were not adequate," V'Las stated. Soval raised his eyebrows a fraction. He now understood the reason for Stel's visits to the Embassy. Obviously, there was nothing deceptive about the visits. Officer Corcoran's instincts had been wrong.

"The Enterprise will arrive in three days. You will join us when we speak with Captain Archer. In the meantime I will need you to assist in preserving the site until Captain Archer arrives. I have already ordered Stel to post guards around the perimeter of the Embassy and assist in the evacuation," V'Las said. Soval nodded.

"Of course," he said.

"Good, well, you may leave. I do not wish to delay you any further," V'Las said as he pressed a button on his desk. The doors to the office slid open. Soval inclined his head and turned to leave. He realized he had a lot to think about.

Constance's heart ached. Admiral Forrest was gone. She had not even had a chance to say good-bye to him. It had been weeks since they last spoke since she no longer reported directly to him. It made her feel guilty. She was determined to find out who could have done this.

By the end of the day it was clear how much damage had been done. The United Earth Embassy was all but destroyed. Forty-three people had died as a result, and many more were injured. Among the dead were twelve Vulcans. Their bodies were quickly removed from the premises. The thirty-one humans including Admiral Forrest were placed in caskets adorned with Starfleet flags and moved to the High Command building while they awaited the arrival of the Enterprise for transport back to Earth. Constance was also given private temporary quarters in the High Command building. The caskets were being held one floor below her and she decided to visit. She wanted to say her good-byes to Forrest.

It was a large room probably once used for storage and it was now filled with dozens of people in mourning. Those who had worked at the Embassy as well as some Vulcans were milling around quietly. Through the hushed tones Constance could hear the sounds of muffled crying as she weaved her way through the rows of caskets. She stopped when she reached Admiral Forrest's casket and felt her chest tighten. She placed a hand over the emblem on the flag draped on top. It was hard to believe Admiral Forrest was lying just below inside. A hot tear rolled down her cheek; it was all she would allow herself. She knew Admiral Forrest would not want her to make a fuss. Despite her sorrow it made her smile. He would have told her that he simply did what he had to do. He had always put duty and honor first. He was truly one of the best men she had ever known.

After a few minutes of quiet reflection she noticed movement in her periphery. Someone had moved to stand beside her. She glanced up and saw that it was Ensign Asano. He looked very pale, and his eyes were puffy. He gave her a weak smile.

"How are you doing?" Constance asked as she wiped her cheek with the back of her hand. It was a
stupid question but she asked it more out of courtesy. He looked terrible, but otherwise uninjured. His eyes, however, seemed unfocused.

"I don't know. I guess I still can't believe this happened," he said. His shoulders were slumped.

"What are you going to do now," she asked.

"Starfleet is recalling me to Earth as I am no longer aide to Admiral Forrest. I'm scheduled to leave on Enterprise when it arrives," he said. His voice was hollow. Constance did not know what to say. In truth there was really nothing she could say. She reached over and squeezed his hand. He looked at her and his lips became a line as he forced a small smile.

"I should go," he said sadly. He squeezed her hand in return and turned to leave. He glanced back at Admiral Forrest's casket one last time before weaving his way toward the exit. Constance remained for only a few minutes longer. The anguish in the air was almost palpable and she felt if she stayed any longer it would swallow her whole. She silently said her good-byes before she slowly headed back to her temporary quarters.

Enterprise arrived at Vulcan only a day earlier and they had already begun their investigation of the bombing. Soval, along with V'Las and Stel, had met with Captain Archer. Soval was increasingly disturbed by V'Las's apparent hunger for power. V'Las had all but flatly stated the Syrannites were responsible for the bombing of the Embassy. Not only that, but Stel was also in agreement. Soval could barely contain his disbelief. The last time he spoke with V'Las the theory had been mere conjecture. And now it seemed V'Las was intent on finding the Syrannites to blame despite the lack of evidence.

It was not logical to blame the Syrannites. It was true that they often opposed how the High Command governed and voiced their dissent publicly, however they were always peaceful. It was widely known that they were pacifists so it made little sense that they would be involved in such an act of violence. He also knew that they openly practiced mind melding. It was still considered by the whole of Vulcan society to be a deviant practice. As a melder himself he found a sort of kinship with them. For years he was forced to hide his abilities and now privately wondered if there was something to what the Syrannites believed.

What was more disturbing and made him question V'Las's intent further was his obvious desire to obstruct the Enterprise's investigation. He was not allowing Captain Archer or his crew assist Stel in any way and took it a step further in only allowing them to investigate the site itself and not allowing them anywhere else on Vulcan. Soval knew it was illogical unless V'Las had something to hide. It further cemented his belief that V'Las was up to something. He had to do something about it.

He knew what he was about to do was bordering on treason, but he believed it was in the best interest of Vulcan. He beamed aboard Enterprise and told Archer to recheck everything. He was careful with how he worded his advice. He did not want to overly bias Archer. He wanted him to learn the truth on his own. He even provided the gaps in the surveillance satellite so that Archer and T'Pol would not be detected when they beamed down to the surface of Vulcan in search of the Syrannites. As he stood next to Commander Tucker and watched Captain Archer and T'Pol enter the transporter he wondered briefly if this was going to be a moment he would come to regret. What he did not realize was that moment was yet to come.

Soval stared down at the man lying in front of him. He was badly burned. Nearly half of the skin on his body was blistered and raw. It was probably a blessing that he was in a coma. Soval doubted that the man could withstand the pain of his condition had he been conscious.
He was standing in the Sick Bay of Enterprise with the curtain drawn for privacy. Commander Tucker and Doctor Phlox stood nearby and were watching him intently. Earlier when he had returned to Enterprise he was surprised when Commander Tucker asked him to meet him in the Sick Bay. However his surprise soon morphed into anger when he heard Commander Tucker's request. Commander Tucker desired for someone to perform a mind meld on the comatose man. Soval was infuriated by his audacity. However, his anger was brief after he learned what had transpired.

Commander Tucker revealed that the DNA on the bomb that had destroyed the Embassy had been planted and had evidence to prove it. All they needed was a witness. Tucker had indicated that the man that was now lying in front of him, Corporal Askwith, had likely seen the bomber. Soval was faced with a difficult dilemma. They needed to find out who bombed the Embassy. But Soval knew that if he revealed his abilities as a melder he would be going against not only his people, but a promise he had made to his mother many years ago. He thought about Admiral Forrest and the other forty-two innocent lives. And he also thought about the Vulcan proverb *the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few*. It was of little comfort, but it gave him the strength for what he needed to do. He would perform the meld.

Now, with the comatose man laying before him Soval was deciding on the exact placement of his fingers. The man's face sported burns and multiple contusions and it was difficult to discern which pressure points he should utilize. He decided to use both hands. When he found the proper placement he looked back at Commander Tucker who had unconsciously edged closer for a better view. He stepped back when Soval gave him a pointed look. He closed his eyes.

"My mind to your mind, our minds are one, our thoughts are joined," he whispered.

He was expecting a sudden onslaught of emotions, but they did not come. Perhaps it was because the man was comatose. He was silently gratified as he had never melded with a Human before. As he navigated his mind he soon found the access point for his memories.

The scene changed suddenly as he accessed his most recent memory. It was the evening of the bombing and he was sitting at Corporal Askwith's station in the United Earth Embassy as though he were the Corporal himself. It was strange as though he was putting on a mask. He could almost feel the emotions the Corporal felt that day. Soval sifted through each moment of his memories searching each face. Suddenly a hooded figure appeared before him with a package. He recognized the man. Or rather he felt through Askwith's memory that the Corporal had recognized the man. Soval searched for his face. It was hidden beneath the hood, but he was determined to discern who it was. As the man passed the retina scanner he slowly turned and Soval was afforded a glimpse of his face.

He gasped abruptly letting go of the comatose man's face. His heart was pounding in his side. He was visibly shaken. Commander Tucker stepped forward looking concerned.

"Ambassador, what did you see?" he asked. Soval was breathing hard desperate for composure. When he was able to speak again he looked at Commander Tucker.

"It was Stel," he said. Commander Tucker's mouth opened and he glanced over at Doctor Phlox.

"We need to speak with V'Las. Captain Archer and T'Pol are going after the wrong person," he said as he left the Sick Bay. Doctor Phlox moved to grab a glass of water for Soval. He handed it to him before he spoke.

"Ambassador, if you will follow me I will show you to a more private area for you to gather your thoughts," he said leading Soval to his office.

Soval was grateful as he needed to meditate before he confronted V'Las. He knew V'Las would not
take it well. He was not sure what was going to happen, but every Vulcan he was aware of who revealed their abilities as melders were outcast from society. It was of little consequence now. Arresting Stel and clearing the Syrannites was of the upmost priority, and Soval was ready to face the challenge.
Constance was trying to keep busy while she sat in her temporary quarters in the High Command building, however there was little for her to do. She found herself going crazy. She had not heard from Soval in a while and found herself uncharacteristically worried about him. It was strange, but somehow she knew he was alright through the bond. Though it glowed faintly in the back of her mind she felt that if something had happened she would have felt it through their connection.

She was now focusing on trying to contact Starfleet Intelligence in San Francisco. For some reason her transmissions were taking longer to connect than was normal. It was odd. She could not imagine that there were that many people trying to open a connection to Earth at the same time. The system was designed to support hundreds of transmissions at the same time. She pulled out her PADD and entered the system mainframe through the backdoor codes. As an Intelligence Officer she was familiar with hacking into computer networks and systems, but never hacked into Starfleet Communications. She hoped that they would forgive her.

As she traversed through the nearly endless security codes and encryption she noticed a series of parameters that did not make sense. It seemed as though someone was piggybacking off of their network connection. And they could in essence monitor any and all communications between them and Starfleet. Someone was spying on them. She immediately opened a channel to Enterprise. She detected a second signal relaying in the background. She immediately closed the channel. Her heart was beating fast. It was V'Las. It had to be. There was no one else that could be monitoring them. The Syrannites in the Forge were protected by the geomagnetic field and could not transmit or receive communications. It could not be them. The logical conclusion was that the High Command was spying on them just like they did with Andoria. She swallowed. She had to speak with Soval.

Constance was pacing in her temporary quarters in the High Command. She was waiting on Ambassador Soval to return. She knew from the bond that something had happened, but she did not know what. An apprehensive feeling pulsed from the bond. Soval had just contacted her via the com in her quarters. He told her he would meet her in her there in five minutes. He did not say much, but he said he had been summoned before the High Command. Judging by his clipped reply it did not go well. The apprehensive feeling was bleeding into Constance and she felt that waiting on Soval was like waiting for water to boil.

The door to her quarters chimed and Ambassador Soval's face appeared onscreen. She pressed the button to open the door and Soval swept in. He was wearing ornate Ambassadorial robes over a dark tunic and pants. Even though his expression was neutral Constance could tell he was agitated. He was pacing around her quarters in unusual fashion and there was a small crease forming between his eyebrows. If she did not know him better she would have thought he looked formidable, intimidating even, but she knew he was just deep in thought. He stopped pacing and carefully stripped off his robes and laid them on the chair by her desk. He walked over to the corner of the room where there were small cushions and a candle. Since her quarters had been designed to accommodate Vulcans it included a small meditation nook. He lit the candle and settled into a meditative posture and closed his eyes. Constance followed him to the floor sitting across from him. They had not been alone together since he revealed their empathic connection. She knew something serious must have happened to require him to need to mediate immediately and in her presence. After a moment she spoke.

"What happened?" She asked tentatively. Soval's eyes were still closed and he seemed to be concentrating on his breathing.
"I have been relieved of my position as Ambassador," Soval said.

"What? Why? They can't do that," she said incredulously. He opened his eyes and swallowed.

"I assure you that they can and they have," he said evenly. Constance was shocked. It seemed that V'Las of the High Command wielded more power and influence than she realized. "There is a conspiracy that runs deeper than just those in the High Command. V'Las wants to start a war with Andoria, to what end I do not know. This potential war would devastate Vulcan and Andoria and possibly even Earth," he said. Constance did not know what to say. She did feel a sense of validation, however it was not comforting.

"Then why bomb the Embassy and why blame the Syrannites then?" She asked.

"It is believed that the Syrannites have found an artifact from the Time of Awakening that could change how the High Command governs. If it truly exists the High Command would be forced to reevaluate their position. And V'Las's militant agenda would be put on hold," Soval said. "It is clear from how V'Las reacted to the evidence that blaming the Syrannites had always been a part of his plan."

"Then we have to help them. I know that V'Las has been monitoring private communications between the Enterprise and Starfleet. I've tried, but I can't disable his monitoring system from here. I need access to the Vulcan Communication mainframe to disable it if we are going to retain any sort of element of surprise," Constance said.

"It is located in the Communications Control room. It would be impossible for you to disable their system and avoid detection. If V'Las captured you he would not hesitate to kill you. He already orchestrated the Embassy bombing that killed forty-three people," Soval said. His voice almost sounded strained. Constance knew he did not want anything to happen to her.

"Then help me. You know this building better than I do," she said.

"No," he said sharply. "It is too dangerous," he added. He closed his eyes again. His face was once again devoid of any outward expression of emotion.

"I'm going to attempt to disable it regardless if you help me or not. I stand a better chance of success if you do. If I am successful I would be able to alert Starfleet without V'Las finding out. I'm doing it for the forty-three," she said, resolutely. He had opened his eyes and was staring at her. She stared back at him determined. He did not break her gaze, but eventually he sighed. She may be stubborn, but she knew for once she had logic on her side.

"Perhaps, of the virtues, a more appropriate name for you would have been Prudence," he said as he moved to position himself directly in front of her. Constance rolled her eyes at the sarcasm of his statement, but could not help but smile a little. The small quip eased her anxiety a little.

"What are you doing?" Constance asked when she noticed he was positioning himself directly in front of her. She straightened as Ambassador Soval moved very close to her. Their knees were nearly touching. She stared into his eyes. They were dark and intense.

"You asked for my assistance. I'm going to show you where the Communication Control room is, but I will also need for you to do something for me as well. I'm going to need the codes for disabling the surveillance satellite above the Forge. They change every six hours for security reasons. Beam-ins are impossible in the area due to the geomagnetic field. If we are unsuccessful in alerting Starfleet, V'Las's next move will be to wipe out the Syrannites refuge in the Forge. Captain Archer and T'Pol will need to be rescued by shuttle craft. We will need the codes if there is to be any hope
of getting them out of the Forge," he said. He began to lift his hand toward her face, but stopped. Constance unconsciously moved her head back slightly. Soval raised an eyebrow.

"I am going to initiate a mind meld. Our thoughts will be joined. I will be able to show you in your mind where you need to go," he said. Constance swallowed. She had a million questions, but they suddenly seemed unimportant. It was time that she put her faith in Soval. She knew he would never intentionally endanger her. She nodded slowly and moved her face closer to his. He lifted his hand toward her again and gently placed two fingers on her temple and rested his thumb under her chin. A gentle buzzing sensation emanated from where their skin touched. His fingers were warm. It felt incredibly intimate, almost sensual in nature. It had been improper when they had accidentally touched hands nearly a year ago even though the contact had been fleeting. Now Constance sat directly across from a Vulcan male with whom she shared a mutual attraction, alone, in her quarters, and he was touching her face. They may as well be having a torrid affair for how illicit the act of his simply touching her bare skin was, not to mention how taboo a mind meld was. She stared into his eyes for a moment before Soval began to speak.

"My mind to your mind, our minds are one, our thoughts are joined," he whispered. Constance closed her eyes. Suddenly she felt the sensation of falling and she nearly gasped. Her mind seemed to open in all directions. She felt as though she was floating in space with nothing around her stretching in all directions.

"Can you hear me," she heard Soval ask. His voice seemed to reverberate. She turned around. He was standing in front of her.

"Yes," she said. Her voice sounded strange as though she was hearing how she sounded through someone else's ears. She looked up at Soval. A warm sensation was growing in her abdomen. They were standing very close. She could almost feel the heat of his body emanating from him. It was arousing. She found herself staring up at his mouth. She had the sudden urge to press her lips against his. She wondered what it would feel like to have his arms pressing around her waist in all their Vulcan strength. A shiver ran up her spine, but she was far from cold. She noticed the tips of his ears were darkening and a slight green flush spread across his cheeks.

"Try to guard your thoughts and emotions," he said. "I will do my best not to intrude in your mind."

Suddenly, the scene changed and she was in the High Command building again, however it had a dream like quality about it. She followed Soval as he walked. It felt as though she standing outside her body.

"There is an air duct that can be accessed through a service shaft on the third floor," he said. Constance remembered her quarters were also on the third floor. "You will need to enter this code," he said. She watched as he touched the Vulcan symbols on the control panel by the door. His long fingers deftly tapped and swirled on the appropriate points of each symbol and the door unlocked. He locked it again so that she could try. Her fingers followed the same fluid movements and the door unlocked. She saw that there was a service ladder along the far wall.

"You will need to climb that until you reach the ninth floor. You will then enter the air duct on the far right. It will bring you just outside the exterior wall of the Communications Control room," he said. The scene shifted again. They were suddenly in the Communications Control room. Constance was starting to feel dizzy. Soval walked over to one of the computer consoles. It looked like a round touch screen bubble that was raised to about waist height. The script onscreen was in Vulcan.

"You will need to sign-in. My sign-in has been disabled, but I have the sign-in for one of my aides. Once you sign in you will only have minutes, before they suspect a breach. You will need to work quickly," he said. The room changed again and they were suddenly in the middle of an all-white
space. It seemed to glow. Soval was standing in front of her again looking down at her. She did not
know what he was thinking; perhaps he was guarding his own thoughts, but he seemed to be looking
at her with a sort of veneration.

"You can do this," he whispered. The connection ended abruptly. Soval had dropped his hand from
her face. Constance suddenly felt very nauseous. A cold sweat suddenly overtook her and she felt
little black spots appear in her vision. Before she could protest she felt herself begin to fall backward
in slow motion as she was enveloped in black.
Bravery and Resilience

Soval held Constance's head in his hand. Her eyes were closed and her forehead glistened with perspiration. She had fainted. He had only melded with a Human one other time and the man had been comatose. Perhaps the meld had been too overwhelming. It had not been the ideal conditions to be performing one, but Soval had no choice. He wanted to give Constance the best chance at success. He could tell by her heartbeat and breathing that she was physically sound. He decided it would be prudent to place her on her bed instead of leaving her on the floor. He stood and carried her over to the bed. Her body was small and light in his arms.

He gently rested her on the bed and went to retrieve a cloth by the sink in the bathroom. He wet it and wrung it out. He walked back to the bed and placed it on her forehead. Slowly her eyelids fluttered open. Her eyes focused on him and she tried to sit up. He helped her to sit back against the headboard. She rubbed her forehead.

"Are you alright?" He asked gently. His chest tightened. It was unpleasant to see her in such a vulnerable state. It seemed unnatural.

"I think so. It was so strange. I feel strange," she said furrowing her eyebrows. She rubbed her temple gently.

"Human neurology was not designed to support such a focused telepathic link. I apologize, I should have been more transparent—," he started. She had placed her hand on his arm to stop him.

"It's okay. You had no choice. Besides I realize now that I would not have stood a chance without your help. Thank you," she said. She left her hand on his arm as she closed her eyes for a moment.

He took the moment to regard her. She was so resilient and beautiful. Humans were so adaptable; perhaps it was the key to their advancement in recent years. It was fascinating to see a species that could so easily adapt to handle nearly impossible situations with such fluidity.

He had inadvertently learned of her feelings for him during the meld. She was not Vulcan so he had prepared himself for the sudden onslaught of her emotions, but what he had not expected was how strong they would be. True they were not as volatile as Vulcan emotion and Humans may not need to suppress them, but he realized they were capable of deep and intense emotion. It was fascinating to see firsthand how quickly they changed and how many they could feel at once. It took a strength he had not known Humans had to be able to live with such a constant torrent of feeling. All of them blending and fading into each other as quickly as a sandstorm.

He had felt how deeply she cared for him. He had not intruded on her thoughts, but she had unintentionally projected how she felt and he had inadvertently read her thoughts. Though it was not his fault he harbored some guilt in learning of her deepest desires and feelings without her expressed permission. It was as though she had bared herself to him without realizing it.

Constance opened her eyes again. She moved to stand despite Soval's protests and assured him that she was fine. Even though he wanted to stay and to keep her close to his person he knew that he needed to leave. He needed to get back to the Enterprise before V'Las found that he had also broke his loyalty oath to the High Command.

"Won't they be monitoring for transporter beam-ins?" She asked.

"Yes, however I know the gaps in the satellite surveillance," Soval replied. Constance raised an eyebrow.
"Hardly seems like something that an Ambassador would be privy to," she said.

"I was not always an Ambassador. You are unaware that, like you, I also was once an Intelligence Officer a long time ago," he said as he dug in his pocket. Constance said nothing, but he could feel a sense of understanding coming from the bond. Soval pulled a communicator from his pocket and handed it to Constance. "Use this," he said. "I have one as well. They are synced and set to an encrypted channel. Monitoring short range communication is not a priority for the High Command," he added as an afterthought. Constance took the communicator. It was Vulcan-made and a little different from her Starfleet issued one. It was unlikely the High Command would feel it necessary to monitor their own people.

"I will let you know as soon as I disable their monitoring system and retrieve the codes," she said. Soval nodded and stood. He walked toward the door before glancing back at her one last time. He hoped that this would not be the last time he would see Constance. When he turned back to the door she called to him.

"Soval," she said. Her use of his given name surprised him, however it was not unpleasant. She stood from the bed and walked over to him. Before he could avoid the contact she grabbed his hand and squeezed it reassuringly. Her grip was soft and warm. "Good luck," she said looking up at him. He nodded and left. Her last thought passed to him just before she let go of his hand. It echoed in his mind. *Come back to me,* it said.

Constance had little time. As soon as Soval left she proceeded with her mission. Thankfully, he had left his ambassadorial robe in her quarters. It would provide some cover in the unlikely event that she was seen. It was far better than being seen sneaking around in human clothing.

She quickly changed into a black tank top and cargo pants. She shoved the communicator Soval had given her in one of the pockets. She then slid on his robe over her clothes. It smelt like him, and she found herself breathing in the scent deeply for a moment. It was strange, but also comforting. She carefully rolled up the sleeves. The robe was much too big on her, but there was little she could do about it. She smoothed her hair on the sides to cover her ears. It was illogical to think that a passing Vulcan would not recognize her as a Human, but it did not hurt to try. She pressed the com button by the door and the screen turned on providing a view outside the door. There was no one in the hallway. Before she had time to change her mind she pressed the button to open the door and forced herself into the corridor.

Trying to remember Soval's directions she headed to the right and to the end of the corridor. The hem of the robe dragged on the ground behind her as her boots padded quietly against the carpet. She reached the door. It was just as she remembered it in the meld. The Vulcan script on the control panel next to the door seemed to glimmer. Remembering the code her fingers touched and swirled on the appropriate points and the door slid open.

She was slightly relieved to be in the safety of the service shaft. She doubted that anyone would find her there. She turned to the ladder and looked up. She was on the third floor and had to climb six flights to reach the ninth floor. Grabbing one of the rungs she began her ascent. She climbed as quickly as she could manage. Each passing floor was marked in Vulcan script. She counted each floor as she passed them. When she reached the ninth floor there was a narrow air duct just as Soval had said there would be. She gingerly stepped one foot off of the ladder and onto the ledge along the circular wall. She looked down. Though she had only climbed six floors it was still quite a distance to fall. Her palms began to sweat. Judging by the ledge and the tight squeeze that was the air duct she doubted it was designed for ingress of any kind. She only hoped it would support her weight.

As she slid into the air duct she immediately wished she had removed the robe. It was making her
claustrophobic, but thankfully it was not long before she reached the grate at the end. As she peaked out between the slits she saw that the Communications Control room was empty. In fact it did not appear to be a room that was regularly entered. It seemed to serve as more of a housing unit for the computer inside. She suspected the air duct served as part of a cooling system for the electronics inside.

Pushing against the grate it popped off easily and clattered to the floor. Constance cursed silently hoping that no one heard. She then followed shortly after sliding out of the air duct and on to the floor. As she stood she walked over to the computer console. Everything was in Vulcan. She had a basic knowledge of written Vulcan from school and she hoped it would be enough. She quickly signed in using Soval's aides sign in. The lights in the room suddenly dimmed and a red light blinked by the door. She realized what Soval meant when he said that she would have to work quickly. It appeared that signing in triggered a silent alarm of sorts. She knew it would be a matter of time before Vulcans would be flooding in.

She began to access the surveillance satellite grid on the map of Vulcan. As she spun the planet on screen she found the satellite that was in orbit above the Forge. She clicked on it. The access code appeared on screen. It was long. She knew there was no way she was going to remember it. It was rendered in traditional Vulcan calligraphy and she could barely discern the individual glyphs as they flowed into one another similarly to Human cursive writing. She pulled out the communicator and called Soval. He picked up almost immediately.

"Soval, I have the codes to the surveillance satellite. I don't have much time," she whispered.

"Go ahead," he said.

"Please forgive my pronunciation," she said. She had no time for embarrassment. Reading Vulcan was one thing, but speaking it was another. She only hoped he would understand what she was saying. "The first code is Dif – Itar – Zun – AsAl – Gen – Um – Shai – Tsek," she said slowly as she struggled to make sure that she did not miss anything. She continued shortly with the second code. Her mouth moved clumsily over the Vulcan vowels and consonants. But Soval did not question her. When she finished she spoke again.

"I'm now going to try and disable V'Las's monitoring system, but I don't have much time. An alarm was tripped," she said.

"You have accomplished the most important task. I implore you to leave now. The probability that you will be discovered is high; it is illogical to stay," he said. His voice was sounded sharp, but she knew it was out of concern.

"I'm sorry Soval, but I have to try," she said as she snapped the communicator closed. She felt anxiety that did not belong to her flash across the bond. She turned back to the console and tried to access the transmission channels. She was getting frustrated. She was moving too slowly through the Vulcan script. When she finally discovered references to Starfleet communications security codes she knew she had found what she was looking for. Before she could continue she heard a noise. It sounded like footsteps from beyond the wall.

Her heart was pounding in her chest. She immediately signed out and used the sleeve of the robe to wipe the console of her fingerprints. She prayed that there was some sort code outside the door that would slow down whoever it was and buy her some time.

She ran to the air duct and slid in backwards. She pulled the grate behind her and snapped it in place. Just as she was shimmying backward in the air duct she heard the door in the Control room slide open. She froze. Through the slits in the grate she saw a Vulcan male looking around the room. He
walked slowly around the console. She held her breath. He walked by the grate of the air duct and stopped. It was all Constance could do not to make a sound. She knew that with their pointed ears came superior hearing. After what seemed like an eternity he continued walking around the console and left the room. The door slid closed behind him.

She let out a breath. Slowly she continued shimmying out of the air duct and back on the ledge. She grabbed the sides of the ladder and carefully climbed onto a rung. She had to get back to her quarters as quickly as possible. Placing the instep of either boot on the outside of the ladder she slid down quickly. When she reached the bottom she let go. Her palms strung slightly from the friction. Her hands had been perspiring slightly out of nervousness. She turned to the door, and pulling the hood of the robe over her hair, she hoped that the hallway was still empty. She pressed the exit button and the door slid open. There was no access code for exiting the service shaft.

Looking around she saw that the hallway was empty. Not wanting to risk her good fortune she sprinted to her quarters. As soon as she was inside she slammed the button to shut the door. Drained she fell back onto the bed. Her heart was still pounding in her chest. She closed her eyes and thought about Soval and hoped that he would be more successful than she had been.
Treason

Soval was aboard *Enterprise* and was standing on the bridge when they received a hail from Administrator V'Las. He and Commander Tucker had disabled the surveillance satellite above the Forge using the codes he received from Constance. With the codes he was able to override the satellite's computer and trigger a malfunction in the imaging processor. He could not have designed it better. The geomagnetic anomalies surrounding the Forge meant that errors occurred often. It was the perfect guise. However, the malfunction would only temporarily disable the satellite allowing for a six minute window for Ensign Mayweather to man a shuttle with Lieutenant Reed in a rescue attempt of Captain Archer and T'Pol. They would have to time it perfectly.

The shuttle had barely entered the Vulcan atmosphere when it was attacked by two Vulcan fighter ships. The two patrol craft, armed with particle weapons, fired upon the shuttle. As they monitored the shuttle from the bridge they saw that it was returning to the ship. They were aborting the mission. The shuttle must have sustained heavy damage. Soval was disturbed that the shuttle pod had been fired upon at all. There was no way they could have been detected entering the atmosphere. The satellite had been disabled. The only logical conclusion was that the High Command was continuing to monitor their transmissions.

It was clear to him now that Constance had not been able to disable V'Las's monitoring system. She had disregarded his attempt to persuade her to leave after she retrieved the satellite codes. It had briefly angered him more out of concern for her safety, but he knew how headstrong she could be. But now he felt worried that she had been caught and reached out to touch the bond in his mind. Before he could examine it Ensign Sato informed them that three ships were closing in on *Enterprise*'s position and that they were being hailed by Administrator V'Las. No doubt he would be infuriated that they remained in orbit above the Forge in defiance of a direct order from Starfleet. His face appeared onscreen. Soval could see Minister Kuvak standing in the background.

"I demand to know why you launched a shuttle pod," growled V'Las. He face was flushed an unpleasant green.

"And I want to know why the hell you fired on it," Commander Tucker snapped back, standing his ground.

"You received no authorization. Answer the question." V'Las demanded. Soval knew that V'Las did not like his authority to being challenged – least of all by a Human.

Commander Tucker relented. He revealed that they were searching for the Captain and T'Pol.

"Archer's on the surface." V'Las stated slowly, sounding incredulous. Soval could tell he was surprised by the revelation.

"He and T'Pol are in the Forge," said Commander Tucker. "They were searching for the Syrannites."

"Admiral Gardner ordered you to leave orbit over an hour ago," said V'Las, his eyes narrowing dangerously. His face continued to flush an even darker green. His disclosure confirmed Soval's suspicion. The High Command *had* been monitoring them. Soval stood up from his station on the bridge to stand next to Commander Tucker. He never felt more defiant than he did now. V'Las's
steely blue eyes darted in his direction.

"I advised them to stay," Soval said. He knew there was no turning back now. V'Las and the whole of the High Command were now bearing witness to him breaking his loyalty oath by assisting Commander Tucker and Enterprise. The penalty was execution. It was one of the few crimes on Vulcan still punishable by death.

"I presume you assisted them in disabling the surveillance satellite," V'Las said glaring at Soval. Soval kept his face smooth of any expression. He did not want to reveal that he had had help in obtaining the codes.

"I gave them the codes," he stated simply. It was a half-truth. He only hoped that V'Las would believe him. V'Las's face was unreadable. Though he appeared composed his voice had a strained quality about it. His eyes glided from Soval to rest once more on Commander Tucker. He demanded that they leave immediately or else he would order the ships to open fire on Enterprise. Soval was not surprised. He knew V'Las was not above destroying a ship full of Humans and one renegade Vulcan to get what he wanted.

"You really think he'll fire on us?" Commander Tucker asked Soval. Soval looked at him. Commander Tucker was so young. His face was determined, but Soval knew he still carried the insecurity of youth that only dissipates with age and experience. However, bravery in the face of adversity was a quality not many possessed. It was clear Commander Tucker was not lacking in that trait despite the dire situation they now faced.

"V'Las will stop at nothing to accomplish his objective," Soval stated. Commander Tucker did not waste time.

"Polarize hull plating," he ordered Lieutenant Reed. The lights in the bridge dimmed at Enterprise entered tactical mode. Suddenly the ship lurked violently as the Vulcan ships began firing on the Enterprise. A shower of electrical sparks rained down on them from one of the ceiling panels. The ship veered off kilter as it made a sharp change in heading to avoid one of the Vulcan D'Kyr combat cruisers. It did not stop them from being fired upon once more. They were outnumbered three to one. Engineering was reporting a breach in the hull. In the same moment their weapons went offline. V'Las hailed them one last time threatening to destroy the ship if they did not leave orbit immediately.

Commander Tucker looked defeated. His forehead was glistening. It appeared the heavy burden of command of the ship was weighing on him. He looked over at Soval. Soval sensed he was deferring to his counsel.

"He's right. We should withdraw," Soval said. "Our deaths will do nothing to help the Captain or T'Pol."

Commander Tucker looked stricken at his mention of Archer and T'Pol. He looked around at the crew. Soval could see that he was weighing his options. Commander Tucker spoke after a moment.

"Get us the hell outta here," he ordered before he moved to sit in the Captain's chair. He was silent as the ship made the jump to warp.

Soval looked around at the crew. Though they had just endured a terrible setback they looked resolute. Commander Tucker jumped up from the chair and headed for the Captain's Ready Room once they were under way. He gave Soval a look that indicated that he should join him. Soval stood up from his station pausing only for a moment before he followed after him.
Constance was lying on her bed when the intercom to her quarters buzzed. She sat up abruptly. She was not sure who would be visiting her now. It was quite late in the evening. Her stomach lurked. Perhaps something happened to Soval. She jumped up and pressed the button to open the door. It slid open revealing a rather severe looking Vulcan male. He was tall and slim with dark hair. She immediately recognized him as the man from the Communications control room. Her heart dropped into her stomach as tried to conceal her surprise.

"Yes, is there something I can help you with?" She asked evenly. She was endeavoring to project a Vulcan-like calm keeping her face smooth of the anxiety she was feeling inside.

"Officer Corcoran, I have been asked to retrieve you. Administrator V'Las wishes to speak with you," he said. Constance swallowed. She knew it had to be regarding the satellite codes. She did not know what to do. She could not escape. Her only option was to feign ignorance.

"Of course, can you tell me what this is regarding?" She asked, frowning.

"I'm not at liberty to say. V'Las will apprise you of all details. Please come with me," he said. She nodded. She was still wearing her tank top and cargo pants. Holding up a hand to indicate she needed a second, she walked over to the closet and grabbed a long cardigan. As she slipped it on she discreetly slipped the communicator Soval had given her within the pocket of the sweater. She was silently gratified that she had hidden Soval's ambassadorial robes in the back of the closet earlier. Turning back toward the door she smiled serenely at the man before she followed him out.

Constance's heart pounded in her chest as she stood next to the man in the lift. Her anxiety mounted with every floor they passed. When they reached their destination he directed her off the lift and into a small room off a nearby corridor. He deposited her inside before turning to leave without another word.

The room was dim and glowed darkly red under the lights overhead. She walked back to the door and pressed the button on the control panel to open the door. It did not respond. She swallowed. It did not bode well. She looked around and saw that here was an oddly shaped chair and a table in the center of the room. The room itself looked as though it might be used for interrogations. Her anxiety flared up inside her again. She decided it would be best to sit down. After what felt to be an eternity the door slid open again.

An older Vulcan male with white hair swept in. His billowing robes were more ornately embroidered than any she had ever seen Soval wear. She assumed that he must be Administrator V'Las. He was not much taller than her, and though his features were smooth of any outward expression his face was quite repellant. His eyes were a piercing blue and decidedly too small for his face. There were deep lines on both sides of his nose and he had nearly no lips to speak of. Only an ugly, gaping slit for a mouth. Constance much preferred to be gazing at Soval who had, over time, grown quite handsome to her. Her heart tightened in her chest to think about him. The Vulcan before her began to speak.

"Officer Corcoran I presume," he said. He circled around her in the chair, and stopped when he reached the other side of the table standing directly across from her.

"You must be Administrator V'Las," she replied watching him. Though his face remained unmoving his eyes looked maniacal.

"I won't insult your intelligence by explaining the reason I have summoned you here. I think you know why," he said. Constance stared at him.
"I'm not sure what you mean," she lied.

"Don't play dumb with me, girl, I know you accessed the service shaft on the floor of your quarters. Do you think we would not be monitoring that area in light of the recent events that have transpired?" He stared at her. His blues eyes pierced into hers in what seemed to be an effort to intimidate her. She remained unmoved. Instead she purposefully set her chin and remained silent.

"It is illogical to deny it," he growled. "Tell me what you were doing in there," he hissed. His mouth contorted unpleasantly. Constance was revolted, but remained resolutely silent. The door slid open once more and the Vulcan who had delivered her to the room reappeared. He was looking over at V'Las.

"Excellency, Minister Kuvak is asking to speak with you," he said.

"Tell him I will be with him momentarily, Sub-Lieutenant," V'Las commanded. The Sub-Lieutenant nodded before he turned away and the door slid shut behind him once again. V'Las turned to glare at Constance once more. She remained silent as she returned his gaze.

"You may be a member of Starfleet, but I highly doubt you will be missed. In fact, we may be able to convince them that the casualties of the Embassy bombing had been miscalculated and that you were among them," he said. Constance swallowed. She knew what he was suggesting, and her instincts told her that he was not bluffing. It shook her to her core. However, she had to remain resolute. If he found out what she did to help Soval not only would he not hesitate to kill her, but Soval would most likely be sentenced to death for treason. She thought about her parents and imagined them watching her and willed herself to remain strong.

"If silence and solitude is what you desire I'm more than happy to oblige," he said finally. He turned abruptly to face the door. He looked back at her once more. "Did you know that Vulcans can go weeks without water? As I understand it your species can only go three days. I'll have you know that I am very patient," he said. "Perhaps I'll let you wait here a while and then we can test how easy it is to break you," he said. He turned back toward the door and exited. The door slid shut behind him.

Constance swallowed. Shaking she stood up and uneasily walked over to the door. She tried the button on the panel again, but the door remained shut. It was locked. She felt sick to her stomach. She turned around resting her back against the door. She slid down slowly until she was sitting on the floor. Shivering, she reached out to touch the bond in her mind and begged for the strength to hold on.

Chapter End Notes

Some dialogue from the beginning of the chapter is from the episode "Awakening". I wanted to explore Soval's perspective of the scene and though I changed and tweaked some of the dialogue a bit of it remains the same from the episode. Just an FYI as I am certainly not trying to pass it off as my own.
Soval was back in his temporary quarters on Enterprise. He sat on the edge of the bed with his eyes closed; fingers steepled resting on his lips. He had just revealed to Commander Tucker that the High Command was planning on attacking Andoria. He was aware of the implications of his disclosure. It was a disturbing revelation. However, in light of his current circumstances he had little choice but to involve the Humans.

He revealed that the High Command had been informed that the Andorians were designing a weapon based on a Xindi prototype, similar to the probe used in the attack on Earth, and that their plan was to use it against Vulcan. For months, V'Las had been pressing the assertion that the Andorians were planning an attack, but with little evidence he had difficulty convincing the rest of the High Command. However, with the Syrannites out of the way, along with their pacifist views, V'Las would now be able to convince the rest of the High Command to agree to launch a preemptive strike against Andoria. It was a clever gambit. There was little evidence that the Andorians had even gotten a hold of the prototype, but the mere allegation that they might have was so disturbing that he knew it would take very little to convince them. It had been V'Las's plan all along. The consequence of which would be an interstellar war with one of the most paranoid, militaristic species they had ever encountered.

Soval had to warn the Andorians. It was imperative if he was going to save his own people. A war with Andoria would be devastating to both their worlds. However, there was one obstacle. He, himself, was not in possession of any physical evidence. He had nothing with which to convince the Andorians other than his word and that held little weight with the ice dwellers. They were more than unlikely to believe him. Andorians had been mistrustful of Vulcans for years.

The Humans were the key. They seemed to effortlessly reconcile the Andorians abrasive, combative natures with their own compassionate empathy and open-minded attitudes. Soval could not make sense of it though he had seen it for himself firsthand. Captain Archer as well as Commander Tucker fostered an unusual rapport with the Andorians. Andorians were an arrogant and often violent race who valued honesty and loyalty above all else. Humans with their many facets were naturally equipped to deal with them, more so than Vulcans, as much as it displeased him to admit. Vulcans had for years tried to understand the Andorians using logic, but it was impossible to apply it to them. They were too often mercurial and paranoid – emotions that Vulcans could not reconcile.

Commander Tucker was just as concerned with the lack of evidence knowing the Andorians disposition of mistrust. However, he believed that they could convince them. Specifically, a particularly quick-tempered Andorian Imperial Guard named Commander Thy'lek Shran. He suggested that they speak with him and asked Soval to assist in finding him.

Soval had dealt with Shran on many occasions. The last of which was during the negotiations over the sovereignty of the planetoid, Paan Mokar, which the Andorians called, Weytahn. He had believed that they had come to regard each other with a mutual respect during treaty negotiations. But that had been nearly two years ago. The most recent Vulcan intelligence detected Shran's ship, the Kumari, hiding in a Nebula on the outskirts of Vulcan space. Soval only hoped that the intel was not out of date.

He had little time to mediate before their inevitable meeting with Shran. Though Human emotion could be quite a distraction dealing with Andorians was infinitely more so as they made little attempt to guard their incendiary emotions. It was difficult enough to harness his own, in high stress situations. Ever since he was a child he struggled, more than most Vulcans, to maintain his emotional
equilibrium. He was determined to use every second of the little time he had to prepare for their meeting.

And you believe him, Pink-skin? Soval replayed the words of in his mind. He had endured months of treaty negotiations and Commander Tucker had convinced Shran to trust Soval with a single statement in the affirmative in less than ten minutes. There was no logic to it. It was difficult to accept exactly what had just happened. As Shran left to consult with his superiors, Commander Tucker shot Soval a knowing look before he exited to return to the bridge. Though Humans were not telepathic it was fascinating to see how much they could convey with a single glance. Soval was left to ponder over what had happened.

Only ten minutes prior, Soval had finished explaining that V'Las was planning a preemptive strike against Andoria, effectively declaring war. Shran had stood before him in what appeared to dubious disbelief. His antennae were pointed forward in incredulity. His beady eyes were narrowed and his blue skin flushed an even more brilliant shade as he aggressively paced back and forth in front of Soval and Commander Tucker.

He was rather short even by Andorian standards. Soval suspected his overly-aggressive and domineering behavior was less a given of him being Andorian and more to do with his height, or rather, lack thereof. Commander Tucker's word apparently carried quite a bit of weight and Shran immediately left to return to his ship. Afterwards Soval, mentally exhausted in dealing with Shran, returned to his quarters to mediate once again.

It was there, in the midst of mediation, he felt himself being transported. By the time he realized what was happening it was too late. He was in a darkened room that glowed faintly. The walls were colored a distinctive blue that was a far cry from the gray hue of the hull of Enterprise. As Soval looked around he realized where he was. Shran stood before him with a phaser pistol pointed directly at his heart. He was on the Andorian ship.

Soval was strapped to a strange chair. There was a metal bar across his lap and his wrists had been tied together. There was a strange apparatus above his head that was emitting some sort of energy field. Soval was trying desperately to control his breathing as he lay exhausted in the chair. He was perspiring profusely after what had just happened.

Shran had ordered his lieutenant to increase the setting on the device and Soval felt as though his skull was splitting in two. Evidently, Shran did not believe him. Soval should have known it would not have been so simple to convince the Andorians of the inevitable attack.

Shran was now trying to extract information from him using his instrument of torture. It did nothing to cause physical pain, but was designed to disrupt the delicate balance of his neurology to disable his suppression system. Soval briefly wondered how many Vulcans had been subjected to this heinous device during its inception. His thoughts flickered to his mother and how hard she had worked to help him learn to control his emotions as a child. It was of little use now.

As the setting was increased again Soval felt another burst of pain blossom in his mind. He tried desperately to assuage it, but the device was making it impossible. He was suddenly filled with violent desire. He wanted to rip Shran's antennae from his head, and told him as much. But he did not want to stop there. He imagined himself ripping off Shran's head and watching his blue blood spray all over the walls of the ship and on himself. It was a disturbingly satisfying feeling. The images were quickly followed by the application of the same technique on the heads of his lieutenant and all the Andorians on the ship.
"Where is your fleet's actual location?!!" Demanded Shran. He had moved to a position in front of Soval. He was so close could feel his breath on his face. Shran's teeth were bared as he glared at Soval his antennae pointed forward in a most acute angle.

"I've already told you everything," Soval hissed. Shran had been questioning him for hours by now. And yet he continued to ask the same questions over and over again expecting different answers. It was insanity. Soval was breathing hard as he desperately tried to maintain composure. However, it had become quite impossible. The scene before him was ludicrous. He was lying in a strange chair aboard the Andorian ship and was being subjected to this paranoid torture scheme. Soval found himself overcome by how hysterical the situation had become that he was unable to stop himself from laughing manically. Evidently, his expression of emotion was disturbing to Shran.

"This is amusing to you, is it?!" Shran said. He was losing patience. Soval took a labored breath before he looked at Shran. He closed his eyes for a moment.

"Ambassador, I implore you to tell me where your ships are assembling. There are several higher settings. Do not make me use them," he said. Soval could see a flicker of concern cross his features.

"How many times must I tell you?! You hear, but you do not listen," Soval snarled. His could not continue. The mental agony was more than he could bear. Shran set his teeth and moved to grab him roughly by the collar. Suddenly, there was a deafening boom and the ship lurched. One of the lights above them exploded as they were showered in sparks. Shran let go of Soval as he was momentarily thrown off balance. Something was firing upon the ship.

"REPORT!" Shran bellowed righting himself. His antennae were pointed forward menacingly as he paced in front of the controls of the device.

"Commander, the Earth vessel is firing upon us," a voice cracked over the intercom. Shran frowned looking over at his lieutenant.

"They must have compensated for the flux," Shran said as he paced in front of Soval. He appeared to be debating whether or not to return fire.

"Going to start a war with the Humans as well," Soval laughed. "You are fools! As was I to think you'd listen," he said derisively. Shran contorted his face angrily. The ship lurched again violently. More sparks flew from the damaged lighting panel. Enterprise must have fired upon the ship again. Shran gestured violently at Soval.

"Get him out of that thing!" Shran hissed. Evidently, with a little help from Enterprise, Shran had realized that situation he now faced. It seemed he was choosing to trust Soval. The lieutenant and another guard moved forward quickly to pull the bar of the device off of him and released his wrists. Soval felt his control return, however something was not right. Exhausted, they lifted him out of the chair. He could barely walk. He was leaning heavily on the two Andorians. Shran looked troubled as he glanced at Soval as he passed him.

The Andorians led him out of the interrogation room. They pulled him roughly along the corridor as they made their way to the transporter deck. As he was forced onto the transporter pad he felt a strange sensation in the pit of his stomach as he was whisked back to Enterprise.
When Soval was back on Enterprise he was immediately taken to Sickbay. Commander Tucker had left the bridge to meet him there. Dr. Phlox quickly led Soval to one of the medical beds. There was something terribly wrong. He could feel everything. He could not control his emotions. He grabbed Dr. Phlox by the arm as they laid him on one of the beds. Phlox cringed slightly. Evidently, his grip was stronger than he realized.

"You have to help me," Soval implored angrily. His emotions were unbalanced. Though he was released from the device he worried that it had permanently damaged his suppression system.

"Ambassador, I'm going to do everything I can," he said. "You must try to calm yourself. I'm going run some scans-," he started. But Soval felt impatience erupt in him. He needed balance. He grabbed the Doctor's collar violently as he tried to pull himself up. Phlox grabbed his hands trying to peel his fingers back as Commander Tucker ran forward to release Soval's grip of him.

"Hold him down!" Doctor Phlox yelled, free of Soval's vise-like grip. He turned to the counter behind Soval's head and grabbed a hypospray. Though Commander Tucker was Human he was strong. Even with his superior Vulcan strength Soval was too weak to fight off the younger man. Commander Tucker looked down at him with a mix of anger and concern.

"What the hell did they do to him?!" He asked pinning Soval's arms at his sides. His eyebrows knit as he stared down at Soval. Doctor Phlox was filling the hypospray before he looked back down at the Soval.

"Please forgive me Ambassador, but I am going to need to sedate you," he said as he injected the hypospray into his neck. Soval felt anger flare inside him again, but it was immediately dulled as the faces above him became unfocused. As his vision tunneled he slowly felt himself fall into silent darkness.

Constance was crippled. She gripped her head in her hands. She was tearing at her hair. She was drenched in a cold sweat and was shaking uncontrollably. She was going to vomit. The bond was throbbing so intensely in her mind like some terrible drumbeat. It was all she could do to stay conscious as she lay on her side on the floor. She was still in the interrogation room, and it felt like it had been several hours since V'Las had left her alone.

The pulsing subsided for a moment. She was able to pick herself off of the floor long enough to pound helplessly on the door. Suddenly, the most brilliant burning pain flashed across the bond like a lightning strike. She cried out. Something happened to Soval. She was sure of it. The pain was excruciating. It was radiating from the bond that had turned black in her mind. She felt as though she was being burned alive. It was his pain she was experiencing and it was agonizing. The echo of it continued to wash over her in terrible waves as though it was her own. She tried desperately to project feelings of peace and tranquility at the blackness, but it continued to pulse growing larger and larger threatening to consume her mind.

She lay back down on the ground in fetal position rocking back and forth. She was desperate for the pain to stop. It was never-ending. But, slowly, it subsided. She felt herself still. She lay there a while silent. The bond was fading from black. She was afraid to examine it, but after a moment's hesitation she reached out to touch it. It recoiled slightly, but began glowing again strangely.

Suddenly, the door slid open. A Vulcan male and female she did not recognize rushed in when they
"Help me get her up," said the male. He gently interlaced his arm under one of hers and the female did the same.

"Are you alright?" The male asked. Constance shook her head. She was holding back nausea.

"Minister Kuvak, what was she doing in here?" The female asked. She was did not appear to be much older than Constance. Her face was devoid of any outward emotion.

"I'm not sure. V'Las must have been keeping her in here. I recognize her though. She's a Starfleet Intelligence Officer. Perhaps he had been planning on interrogating her," Minister Kuvak, replied shaking his head. Constance suddenly felt the urge to throw up again. Sensing her discomfort Minister Kuvak looked over at the woman.

"Can you take her down to her temporary quarters. Call for a healer if necessary. Enterprise just returned and is now in orbit," he said. The woman nodded. She linked Constance's arm about her shoulder as she led her out the door and toward the lift.

When they made it to Constance's quarters she immediately rushed into to the bathroom and vomited in the toilet. Normally she would have been embarrassed; however after what had transpired she no longer cared what anyone thought. She felt some relief, but something still did not feel right. After washing her hands and rinsing her mouth out she returned to her room and sat on the bed. She looked up at the Vulcan woman before her.

"Thank you, uh--," she started. She did not know her name. The woman seemed to sense her quandary.

"It's T'Lor. I'm an aide to Minister Kuvak. Would you like me to call for a Healer?" She asked.

"No, it's not necessary, thank you. I just need rest," she said. Constance still felt strange, but she was more concerned about Soval. She wanted to ask about him, but thought the better of it. She was not sure what would happen if anyone discovered their connection.

"I heard Minister Kuvak mention that Enterprise had returned. Is everyone aboard all right?" She asked.

"They suffered no casualties as far as we are aware if that is what you are implying," she said bluntly. Evidently, T'Lor had not spent much time around Humans, if any, as she spoke in the rather stilted manner. Constance nodded. She wanted to know what happened, but she knew she was unlikely to get any further information from the woman. T'Lor turned to leave the room.

"If there is anything you need please not hesitate to let us know. We will apprise you of when you will be able to return to Enterprise for transport to Earth," she said. Constance nodded. The door slid shut behind her.

As soon as she was out of sight Constance touched the bond in her mind. It was pulsing strangely. She needed to see Soval. She wanted to see that he was alright for herself. She had no plan to return to Enterprise. Not yet at least. Though she was desperate to know what happened she sensed that something was not right. Soval needed her. She could not understand it, but she could sense he was near. She remembered the communicator that he had given her. She pulled it out of the pocket of her cardigan.

She turned it over in her hand before she turned it on. She tried to reach him on the encrypted
channel, but received no reply. Upon examining the device further she noticed it served two functions. The second setting was a homing beacon of some sort. She flipped the switch. A map on screen appeared and red dot blinked slowly.

With renewed energy she stood from the bed. She changed into a fresh shirt and pants, and pulled Soval's robe from the closet. She was going to need it is she was going to be sneaking out of the High Command Building and through Shi'Kahr in search of him. She did not care what it took; she was going to find him.

When Soval awoke he realized he was alone. His head was throbbing. He searched his mind for a moment. He felt more in control than before, but something was still not right. In the back of his mind he felt the bond pulsing. A feeling of concern that did not belong to him was emanating from it. Part of him was relieved. At least he knew that Constance was still alive.

Looking around slowly he saw Doctor Phlox standing a few feet away studying one of the screens. When he saw that Soval had awoken he walked over to him. His lips were pressed together tightly.

"Ambassador, how are you feeling?" He asked. He looked very serious as he scanned Soval with a portable device. Soval sat up gingerly. Suddenly, he remembered why he was there.

"The Andorians--," he started. Doctor Phlox seemed to pick up on his concern.

"Everything is going be to all right. You've been unconscious for nearly twenty-four hours. It seems that your actions may have helped to avert a war." Phlox smiled tightly before he continued. "The Vulcan fleet withdrew their ships," he said. Soval felt himself relax infinitesimally. "We have just received word from Captain Archer. He and T'Pol are safe," Doctor Phlox finished.

"And V'Las?" Soval asked.

"He has been relieved of his position. It seems that Captain Archer along with one of the Syrannites discovered some sort of artifact called a Kir'Shara," he said. Soval was surprised. It did exist. Phlox continued. "Captain Archer was carrying something. They need to remove it before he returns to the ship. I was told that they have sent for a Vulcan priest to assist in extracting whatever it is. It may take a few days," he said. Soval digested the information. He rubbed his temples. His head was still throbbing. Doctor Phlox swallowed.

"As far as your condition, while I am pleased to tell you that you have not suffered any permanent neurological damage there is something else," he said. Soval furrowed his eyebrows.

"I have detected a neurochemical imbalance, no doubt brought on by the device, but I cannot correct it," he said. The throbbing grew stronger. Soval felt the blood drain from his face as he realized the implication. He recognized what was happening, but it was impossible. It was too early. Two years too early.

"I need to meditate," he said sharply, moving to stand. Doctor Phlox stopped him.

"I have seen this once before. I will do whatever I can to assist you," he said. Soval was disturbed. He did not know where Phlox had seen it before and he did not want to know. It was not something Vulcans shared with outsiders. All he knew was that he needed to get off of the ship and to his ancestral home as soon as possible. The bond pulsed enticingly in the back of his mind.

He immediately thought of Constance. He was filled with sudden overwhelming desire. He could recall ever moment that they had shared. How intimate it had been to meld with her, to learn of her own desire for him. He remembered how soft her skin was. How she felt in his arms when he had
carried her. He needed more; so much more. He needed to *claim* her. His mind unconsciously reached out to the bond. The ancient pull was strong. The bond was pulsing even brighter than before.

He immediately suppressed the feelings. It was impossible. She was Human. He was Vulcan. They were not even betrothed. It was wrong. He could *kill* her.

"I need to get off the ship." He said, as calmly as he could manage. "And I would appreciate discretion in this matter," he said quietly. Doctor Phlox nodded.

He needed to return to his home on Vulcan. He would meditate the fever away. He knew of Vulcans who had done so before. It was not impossible. The bond continued to pulse, tempting him in a terrible way. He made every effort to block the connection. It was difficult as he felt his own resolve weakening. The throbbing in his head was getting worse. He did not have much time. He needed to return to his home to mediate before the fever consumed him.
The Fever

He had made it to his ancestral home on the outskirts of Shi’Kahr, and had immediately ensconced himself in his meditation room. With each passing minute Soval was becoming exponentially more uncomfortable. His emotions were breaking through his carefully constructed barrier of self-control. It was increasingly difficult to contain them. His mind screamed for release. He closed his eyes for a moment taking careful consideration of his heart rate and breathing. He could not lose control, he would not. He was focusing on the flame burning before him when he heard the sound of the door behind him sliding open. When he looked back and saw who had entered, he was taken aback. It was Constance. He had not seen her since the meld. She slowly slipped into the meditation room sliding the door shut quietly behind her.

"How did you– You shouldn't be here," he snarled. He was furious that she had come. No, he was enraged. The ancient drives that drew bondmates together at the precise moment before pon farr were extraordinarily strong. He had hoped to shield her from them. But, evidently, she had felt the pull through the bond despite his attempts to obscure it.

With her background in intelligence he knew her to be incredibly resourceful. It should not have surprised him that she found him in his home in Shi’Kahr. It did not matter now. His only option was to convince her to leave before it was too late. She did not know the danger she was in. She walked over to where he was sitting before a candle. Her feet padded softly on the ground. She knelt beside him and reached a hand to touch his face.

"Are you alright?" she asked, ignoring his outburst. Her eyes were wide. Concern and fear radiated from her in equal measure. He gripped her wrist with lightning quick reflexes before her fingers could make contact with his face.

"Don't touch me," he growled, glaring at her. She did not pull away. He could feel the thin veneer of what little control he had left waver. It was going to more difficult to dismiss her than he thought. A part of him wanted to rip her clothes off and take her right then and there in order to sate the delirium that was descending. The thought immediately shamed him.

"I felt you – inside my thoughts," she hissed. "I know you need me. I don't know exactly what's happening, but somehow I–" Her voice faltered. "Know," she finished, swallowing. He released her wrist.

Determined, she moved closer toward him. Her slim arms reached up toward him as her hands moved to touch his face. She stared into his eyes before she moved to close the distance between them. Her mouth found his. Her lips were soft as she gently pressed into the kiss. His control faltered. He tried to resist, but soon found himself returning her kiss with equal fervor. It deepened as she parted her lips gently pressing her tongue against his; prodding. He felt the beast inside him roar. His teeth grazed her bottom lip. He suddenly felt like a Le-matya and she was his prey. His control returned briefly and he was able to regain some semblance of composure. He forcibly pushed himself away from her.

"No!" He heaved. His breath was ragged. "I–I cannot. I am not in control. I implore you to leave now!" He spat. He could feel the onset of what was to come. The fever was just beginning to break the surface. He focused on controlling his breathing. His eyes were dark and fathomless as he stared at her.

"No," she said defiantly. If he was not so compromised he would be extremely vexed by her very human obstinacy. "I won't leave you," she said forcefully. "I–I love you," she stammered.
Her words shocked him. And for a moment she looked almost as shocked to say them. She touched her hand to her mouth as if the stave off any further unexpected revelations. However it was too late. Her declaration touched something so deep, so primal, inside of him. His heart ached. He was horrified and elated at the same time. To be the recipient of such an intense level of emotion was both astounding and humbling. He found that her emotions had touched their counterpart in him. His affinity for her was deeper than mere affection. It took him by surprise when he realized he felt the same.

When she regained composure she moved toward him again. This time he remained still. He could not move. He was transfixed. He watched as she gently entwined her fingers in his. It was an erotic gesture. He felt the familiar shock of electricity run up his arm. The flood of her unchecked emotions overwhelmed his senses. Before he knew it his mouth was on hers again. He broke away for a moment as he struggled to remove his tunic. He pulled it over his head. Reaching down he found the hem of her shirt. In her impatience Constance tugged it off her head. The collar caught in her hair dragging it from its clip. Her long dark hair fell around her bare shoulders.

In the dim light of the candle he absorbed her form. He pushed her onto her back on the floor and ran his hands over the pale skin of her throat and across her bare chest memorizing every curve and plane of her. He was fascinated by the gentle current of electricity that connected them. He was vaguely aware that their bond was reaching the culmination. The realization only served to stoke the fire growing inside of him.

With renewed urgency he discarded his pants tossing them to the side. Beneath him she tried to do the same, but struggled to free her legs. Impatient, he grabbed the fabric pulling them off the rest of the way. He could vaguely hear them ripping in his grasp. It was of little matter. He threw them across the room. She lay naked beneath him drawing shallow, measured breaths. The tension between them was palpable. He could hear her heart. It was beating fast; its rhythmic tattoo compelling him forward. His instinctual drive was taking over. He was quickly becoming desperate. He needed to be inside of her; to claim her. He knelt above her as he spread her legs. The crimson blood that coursed through her veins stained her pink and her opening reminded him of a rare desert flower on Vulcan. She was so beautiful.

He positioned himself for ingress, but stopped. His control returned for a second, and in that moment time seemed to halt. He was suddenly very aware of what his was about to do. She was so fragile; so human. He tried to block the connection, but he was already laboring to control his own emotions. He knew she sensed his hesitancy through the bond. She looked up at him as she gripped his forearms. They were like steel cables pinning her down.

"It's okay," she whispered, her eyes searching his. It was as though she was answering his unspoken question. Her consent was all he needed as his control began to fade away like a distant memory.

With her permission he thrust into her to in one fluid motion. She gasped audibly under him as he opened her. He felt the top of her head curl against his chest. He could feel her body tense ever so slightly as she received him in full. Pain flared briefly across the bond, but it was bearable and quickly bore desire. He held them there together for a moment, connected, at the apex. His control was dangling precariously by a thread. He strained to keep the little he had left. He could sense her arousal through the bond and it was almost more than he could bear. They were both breathing hard as they looked at one another. He knew he could inflict extreme injury with little effort; it was all his could do not to relinquish control as the fever was beginning to burn him. With considerable deliberation he pulled out a half measure and then entered her again thus beginning their slow dance. They moved like the ocean tides of Earth. A higher force compelling their bodies to move in tandem.

In growing desperation she pushed against his chest. He could feel her intensifying desire though the
bond. He pulled himself until he was sitting up as he slid her along his length and into his lap. His hands were like vises on her thighs. Her body warm and pliant against him. His emotional threshold was dissolving; his logic falling away in pieces. The intimacy of their union was intoxicating. Each thrust became quicker and more desperate as she pushed back against him, wrapping her arms around his neck. They were eye to eye locked together like two halves of a strange creature.

His breath was ragged as the fever raged inside of him. She stared back at him with equal intensity. The fever was passing through the bond and into her. Her eyes were like flames. It was a thought she could see inside of him; every emotion, every feeling. With fluent efficiency, he moved to stand still carefully holding himself deep inside her. He gripped her slim form flush against his body as he carried her to the adjoining room and to the bed. Laying her down his lips hungrily found hers. His hips continued their assail of her as his mouth moved over her neck, her shoulders – her breasts. He felt her fingers entwine in his hair; her mouth brushing against his cheek as he concluded his oral exploration of her body. Her breath became desperate cries against his ear as he continued to plunge into her over and over again in an effort to extinguish the raging flames of the fever.

They persisted through the night. The candle had long extinguished as their bodies continued to come together in the dark. Although her arousal remained apparent he could feel through the bond that her physical exhaustion was mounting. But he also felt her determination to be the equal to any Vulcan mate. For once he admired her stubbornness. What she did not know was that her persistence was unsurpassed; her desire unmatched. He was finally reaching the pinnacle of the plak tow, and unbelievably she was as well. As he was brought to release he felt the fever break. The equilibrium of his emotions slowly returned. His body pulsed gently as he moved from his position on top of her. Lying on his side Soval gently pulled Constance into his arms.

She slept in his arms. He was concerned. He knew Humans needed more sleep than Vulcans by nature, but he felt a thread of guilt sweep over him as he looked down at her. Dark purple bruises had blossomed all over her pale skin. There was a bite mark on her shoulder above her collarbone. He did not remember marking her, but it was evident that he had. It did not break the skin, but blood had surfaced in the indentations. Her breathing was shallow and labored. He wondered if she had bruised a rib. Humans may be resilient, but their physiology was not designed to withstand a Vulcan male's pon farr.

He gently dislodged himself from her side. Sitting on the edge of the bed he carefully covered her with the sheets. She stirred and opened her eyes a fraction. She gave him a weak smile and gently squeezed his hand. He felt a gentle buzzing sensation passed between their fingers. Through the bond she tried to assuage his concern. Just need sleep – go, she thought to him. Her thoughts were a jumble, but he understood. Their bond now seemed laser focused and he found himself surprised how easily thoughts and feelings now passed between them with only a simple touch.

Without thinking he stood and bent down to press his lips against her forehead. He had never kissed anyone like that before. It was a very human gesture, but Constance was very much a human. Perhaps it was an effect of the bond. He walked over to the bathroom where he turned on the sonic shower.

His pon farr cycles of the past had never been born with the compassion and desire he had experienced with Constance. They had been endured. Long hours that stretched into days as he had suffered mental torture. His non-existent emotional threshold filling him with shame as his logic was ripped from him. However, he appreciated his past experiences, unpleasant as they were. They had been necessary. They furnished him the restraint he had needed with Constance. He did not want to think of how she may have fared had she experienced his first pon farr.
When he finished showering and carefully dressing he took a moment to watch her sleep. It was fascinating to see how peaceful she looked. She had just endured a traumatic experience, and yet barely seemed affected by it. It was startling how quickly humans adapted to change. He was grateful for her and what she had endured for him.

While Constance continued to sleep he took the time to check his messages. He received a communication from Minister Kuvak requesting that he meet him at the High Command Building. His message was brief, but he mentioned that there was something of great significance he wanted Soval present for. Apparently, a High Priest from Mount Seleya had been summoned and was due to arrive at the High Command in the early afternoon. He did not have much time.

Soval glanced over at Constance again. She was still sleeping. He was a little unsettled knowing he would have to leave her so soon to meet with Minister Kuvak, but there were pressing matters that he could not put off. He glanced around the floor retrieving her clothing from their various locations around the room. He began to carefully fold them remembering how they ended up there. It was only logical that she would want to dress after she awoke. As he folded one of the garments something tumbling out of a recess and clattered to the floor. He bent down to pick up what it was that fell. It was the communicator that he had given her. He turned it over in his hand. It must have been how she found him. He set it by her by the bed.

He picked up his own communicator and slipped it into a small niche in the folds of his robes. He was planning on returning immediately once he attended to the matter at hand, but until then he wanted her to be able to reach him in the event of an emergency. He turned toward the door to leave looking back at her once last time. He did not want to part from her. His only consolation was in knowing what he would have to do when he returned.
Constance awoke to find herself alone in a darkened room. She forgot for a moment where she was, but when she sat up she instantly remembered. She drew in a breath when she moved her legs off of the edge of the bed. The intake of air hurt a little. She pressed a hand to her side. She was sore. As she sat up she noticed a communicator sitting nearby on the bed. Soval must have left it for her. Gingerly, she stood feeling the full effects of their enterprise the night before. It had lasted for hours and into the early morning. She had never experienced anything remotely like it before.

But by now the room was very dark again, and she wondered how long she had slept. She moved away from the bed slowly until she met with a wall. Touching it, she ran her fingers across the surface. There must be a switch somewhere. She continued searching, but could find nothing. Perhaps there was some sort of motion sensor. She waved her right hand hesitantly and then her left. Nothing happened. She stopped, immediately feeling foolish. Suddenly, she had an idea.

"Lights," she said in English. Still nothing. Then she remembered she was in a Vulcan home. Perhaps if she spoke in Vulcan, she thought. She tried to remember the word. Ha'gelek, she said, the Vulcan word for lamp. A small light in the corner of the room turned on. It illuminated the walls in a warm glow. The room was quite large although it was minimal in its décor and furnishings. It was as though each piece had to have a logical reason for being there. Looking around she saw that in addition to the adjoining meditation room there was another door across from the bed.

When she found her way to the door she saw that it was a bathroom. The lights illuminated automatically as she stepped inside. She looked at herself in the mirror. There were bruises all over her body. Livid purple marks blooming like spring flowers in May. They were tender to the touch. She ran her fingers lightly over her shoulder and frowned. Was that a bite mark? No wonder the Vulcans were private about their culture. Turning, she saw that there was a shower. It was not a hydro-shower, but it would have to do. She turned it on waiting for the sonic pulses to begin. She wanted to clean herself up before Soval returned.

She thought about what happened the night before. It was strange, but she could not remember specific details. She could only recall feelings and fleeting images. She remembered how his emotions had been overpowering. They had crossed the bond and enveloped her. She was shocked at how penetrating they had been. Emotions so deep and fathomless.

Her own emotions had taken her by surprise as well. She had told him that she loved him. She had not known it herself until she had said it out loud. Was it even possible to love someone after so short a time? She barely knew him, but at the same time felt as though she had known him forever. Though he had not returned her declaration he did not need to. She had sensed that he felt the same. She needed to speak with him. She was not exactly sure what had occurred and she needed an explanation.

When she finished cleaning herself up she returned to the bedroom. She saw that her clothes were neatly folded on a chair near the bed. She picked up her oversized pullover and slipped it on. When she examined her leggings she realized that they were torn. The waistband had been ripped down the middle. She slid them on anyway. The pullover hid most of the damage although she was afraid they may slid off. An image of Soval desperate and intense flashed in her mind. She remembered his face looking down at her and how it had more expressive than she had ever seen before. His desire for her had been overwhelming. She remembered how possessive he looked when she laid naked beneath him. She blushed as she felt her own arousal flare at the memory. She swallowed as she brushed out her hair with her fingers the best she could and laid it about her shoulders.
Though she wanted desperately to speak with Soval about what happened the night before she had no idea when he was due to return. Part of her wanted to return to her temporary quarters so that she could send a message to Starfleet Intelligence. She wanted to touch base and to find out what happened while she had been detained by V'Las. She looked at her watch. It was late in the evening, and glancing out the window she could see that the sky was dark. It would provide the perfect cover if she wanted to return to her quarters unnoticed.

She waited a few more minutes before she decided to leave. She hoped that Soval would understand. Touching the bond in her mind she projected an apology and a feeling of warmth. She was not sure exactly how it worked, but she hoped that he would understand what she meant. With a sigh she left his home and headed out into Shi'Kahr. Their talk would have to wait.

When Soval arrived at the High Command Building he was immediately escorted to V'Las's offices. However, V'Las was not there. As he had come to understand, V'Las was being detained and questioned by the V'Shar in an effort to discover what his underlying motivations had been. Soval wondered about them as well, but was interrupted we he saw that several people gathered around. Minister Kuvak spotted him and walked over.

"Soval, it is agreeable to see you," he said with an almost smile. Though his face was placid there was a feeling of excitement that seemed to exude from him. Soval extended the ta'al and Minister Kuvak returned the gesture. When Soval looked past Minister Kuvak he spotted a young Vulcan woman nearby. It was T'Pau, one of the Syrannite leaders.

She was well known and had been vocal in her dissent over the years regarding the authority of the High Command and of V'Las himself. Soval had met her once, several years back, when she was studying Vulcan philosophy. She used to give lectures on what she believed were Surak's true teachings. It was a dangerous occupation. As time passed and the High Command began to hunt down suspected Syrannites her active role in the movement forced her to flee into the Forge. She had been encamped there for the past two years. When she saw Soval she stood tall, set her chin forward, and greeted him with both a nod and a flash of the ta'al.

"Ambassador Soval," she said in deference. Soval raised an eyebrow.

"I no longer hold that position," he said. "However, it is agreeable to see you again." T'Pau nodded.

"Minister Kuvak wishes to reinstate you to your post with immediate effect," she said. "I am also in agreement. You have done a great service for our people. There is no one else more qualified to serve as Ambassador to Earth," she said. He had expected her to be in opposition. Commander Tucker must have apprised them of the events that had transpired.

"I appreciate your confidence in my abilities. I come to serve," he said in reply.

"And your service honors us," said Minister Kuvak. "And as I said before your accomplishments have been noteworthy. It is only logical that you return to your rightful post." He turned and began to walk toward the center of the room and gestured for T'Pau and Soval to follow. Soval could see a rather large pyramid shaped artifact sitting on the table.

"The Kir'Shara," he stated. He could not take his eyes off of it.

"Indeed," said T'Pau. She was beaming. Surak's original writings. His original teachings. It was astounding. The discovery was going to change everything.

"We have the Humans to thank for bringing logic back to Vulcan," T'Pau said, as she slowly made
her way back toward Minister Kuvak. Soval moved to stand next to her and saw that Captain Archer was sitting in a chair nearby. His eyes were closed as though he was deep in meditation. Perhaps he was. An older Vulcan dressed in ceremonial robes, no doubt the High Priest from Mount Seleya, stepped forward and positioned himself in front of Captain Archer.

"He is going to extract the katra of Surak from Captain Archer," T'Pau whispered. She looked as though she was witnessing a miracle.

"Archer carries the katra?" He asked. He was nonplussed. He had not known Surak's katra had been in existence let alone carried by a Human. And Captain Archer, no less. Soval watched as the priest lifted a grizzled hand toward Captain Archer and let it rest on his face. His spindly fingers spread until they found the correct pressure points. He began to speak allowing for their minds to become one. His voice was as dry as the desert wind. The priest had to be well past two hundred years old.

Soval felt a strange sensation in the pit of his stomach. It was though he was witnessing an arcane act. For so many years he had hid his ability as a melder and to watch the priest perform the meld on Archer was quite an esoteric experience. Soval's thoughts immediately shifted to Constance, and how intimate their meld had been. He knew carrying a katra, especially that of Surak, father of all they knew to be true, took a strength that not many had. He found himself discovering a newfound admiration and respect for Captain Archer. Finally, after a few minutes had passed in near silence, the priest gently let his hand fall from Archer's face.

Archer opened his eyes. They glided over to Soval. As they made eye contact something unspoken seemed to pass between them. It was as though the friction that had once existed between them evaporated. Archer's eyes crinkled as he smiled.

"Ambassador," he said, as he stood up gingerly. He walked over to the table were the Kir'Shara was displayed. He pulled out one of the chairs and sat down. Soval followed suit.

They spoke quietly for a few minutes. Archer recounted everything that had happened since he and T'Pol had arrived at Gateway before their trek into the Forge. Soval apprised him of the events that occurred aboard Enterprise. Though Archer was relieved that he no longer was in possession of Surak's katra he still looked rather worn. The Forge was a particularly unforgiving region and it was amazing Archer had survived. Not wanting to inopportunely him any further Soval stood and directed him to the corridor. T'Pau joined them as Soval escorted him out. Captain Archer was eager to return to his ship.

"Captain," Soval said raising an eyebrow. "You will be pleased to know that Minister Kuvak intends to take a less aggressive approach in dealing with Earth." Captain Archer nodded looking pleased.

"Indeed, it is time that we accept Earth as an equal. We must come to embrace our differences and learn to appreciate them. Infinite diversity in infinite combinations," said T'Pau. Soval nodded.
When Constance returned to her temporary quarters in the High Command Building a fresh wave of anxiety rolled over her. The realization of what had occurred in the past forty-eight hours was finally beginning to sink in. The situation between her and Soval was far more complex than she originally realized. And she had little time to think about it.

In an effort to calm down she walked to the bathroom and filled a glass of water. She gulped it down without taking a breath. Breathing hard, she had not realized how thirsty she was as she refilled the glass. She began rummaging through her medical kit where she found an analgesic. Shaking two pills out onto her palm she swallowed them. She was still very sore, but it no longer hurt to breathe. The pain reliever would at least help her function more comfortably. With her basic needs taken care of she remembered the task at hand.

She needed to contact Starfleet Intelligence back on Earth. Moving around the chair to sit down at the desk she picked up her PADD. She needed to speak with the Chief of Starfleet Intelligence. If it was late at night in Shi'Kahr she knew it would be in the early hours of the morning in San Francisco back on Earth. She did a quick mental calculation. Four thirty-four in the morning to be exact. It was early, but it did not matter. She needed to speak to the Chief immediately.

The PADD pinged quietly as a connection was established. Almost immediately the Chief of Starfleet Intelligence's face appeared onscreen. He looked exhausted although he did not appear as though she had awoken him. His expression was a mix of concern and discontent.

"Officer Corcoran," he said. He looked very serious. "We were starting to get concerned when we hadn't heard from you." More than two days had passed since the last time she contacted Starfleet Intelligence. Previously, she had maintained daily communications with SI on Earth. So, it was quite unusual that she missed a call. With everything that had transpired she knew that it was a red flag for them.

"Yes, Admiral Washington, I apologize that I have not been in communication. It's a long story," she said.

"Yes, no doubt. Admiral Gardner has relayed most of the details of what happened from his communications with the crew of the Enterprise, but I'd like to hear your take on the situation," he said.

Constance launched into a full debrief of the last forty-eight hours. Admiral Washington was not surprised when she revealed that V'Las had been monitoring their communications. She detailed how she had attempted to disable the Vulcan monitoring system and V'Las's detention of her.

"This is extremely serious. The Vulcans are not allowing us to extradite V'Las for his crimes. Though we understand that V'Las has been arrested and relieved of his command what has transpired is no less than an outrage," he said. He pressed his lips together and shook his head. He took a deep breath before continuing. "An Earth Embassy had been destroyed. Forty-three people killed. While the Vulcans are taking a step back in their approach to Earth this cannot be disregarded and dismissed as easily," he said.

Constance nodded. Admiral Washington revealed that while Minister Kuvak was eager to establish a more positive relationship with Earth it did not excuse the recent events. She knew V'Las's detention of her would not help to ameliorate tension.
"Terra Prime is gaining quite a following. We have been monitoring them, but the Embassy bombing has exacerbated the problem. Chatter increased tenfold after the bombing. There is growing unrest and xenophobia," he continued. Constance pressed her lips together. It was not surprising.

"We are recalling you back to San Francisco with immediate effect. You will leave on Enterprise. Captain Archer and Ambassador Soval are also being recalled to Earth. There will be a debriefing," he said. She remembered that Enterprise would also be delivering the bodies of the victims of the Embassy bombing including Admiral Forrest. She could foresee returning to an emotional and volatile Earth.

"Until then, your detention is to remain classified. We do not need it getting out that V'Las had planned on a torture interrogation of a Human," he said. Such a revelation would surely serve to incite groups such as Terra Prime, she thought. Constance swallowed.

"I'd also like you to get a full medical evaluation," he said. His request surprised her.

"Sir, I hardly think--," she started, but he interrupted before she could finish.

"I'm just concerned. You've been through a lot," he said. That is quite an understatement, she thought. "I know how close you and Admiral Forrest were," he said. She was quiet at the mention of Forrest. He continued. "The debriefing is going to be comprehensive and exhaustive. They are going to have a lot of questions. I just want to make sure you'll be up for it," he said.

"Yes, sir, I understand," she said. Admiral Washington smiled tightly before he closed out the transmission. Constance sat back in the chair. Perhaps she needed to be checked out. It was starting to become overwhelming. The Embassy bombing. Admiral Forrest's death. Her bond with Soval and the intimacy that occurred between them. She still had not talked with him about what had happened the night before. There was little time now. She was being recalled to Earth. She touched the bond. It was glowed faintly in the back of her mind.

She needed to speak with Soval. She pulled the communicator he had given her out of her pocket. She studied it for a moment as though it was going to tell her what to do. Before she decided against it she called Soval. It pinged as it searched for a connection. Within moments she could hear Soval's voice.

"Officer Corcoran," Soval said. "Are you well?" He asked quietly. His voice was impassive, but she could feel a tenor of trepidation that had crossed the bond. He was concerned for her after what he had put her through.

"Yes, don't worry. I'm fine," she said in return. It was not entirely true, she was still very bruised and sore, but she wanted to assuage his concern. It was hard to know what to say without causing alarm. She took a moment to gather her thoughts before she continued. "I'm sorry I left before we could talk. I needed to contact Starfleet Intelligence," she said. She was sorry. She had wanted to stay, but she had to put her own wants and needs aside. A lot had happened in the past few days that took precedence over her, or rather, their situation.

"There is no need to apologize; there was sufficient cause. I did not stipulate a time when I was to return," he said. He spoke without inflection, and she wondered what he was thinking. In the time that had spent together in the past few months she had picked up on subtle facial cues that revealed a glimmer of what he was thinking. A quirk of an eyebrow. A crease between his eyes. An almost imperceptible curl of his lip like a ghost of a smile. Speaking with him via communicator took away the visual element limited though it was.

"Soval, we still need to discuss what— transpired last night, however I am being recalled to Earth. As
are you for that matter," she said. She was not exactly sure how to address what had occurred. They had engaged in the most intimate of acts, but it was far different than anything that she had ever experienced before. Made more so by the fact that they shared an empathic bond.

"Yes, there are other matters that require immediate attention however your request is valid," he said. She was quiet for a moment. "We will schedule a time to discuss what transpired between us," he said. His tone softened a little as though he sensed her unease. "It is important that we do, but it can wait until the appropriate time." She touched the bond in her mind. It was glowing warmly and she felt some relief. She suddenly wished she could see his face.

"Thank you," she said. "I will see you at the debriefing then."

"Yes," he said. She ended the communication and exhaled. She sat back and looked out the window into the darkness. Her stomach fluttered in anticipation of the unknown. If she had ever lamented for excitement and the unexpected out of life her wish certainly had been granted several times over by now. The past events and those about to unfold were beginning to weigh on her, and for the first time, she wished she knew how to suppress her emotions.

It had taken five days for the return trip to Earth. And in that time Constance's unease had grown considerably. News had spread of Enterprise's eminent return and already there was to a somber procession planned for the victims of the Embassy bombing. Captain Archer had held a brief conference aboard Enterprise before their return. He briefed all aboard on the protocols for such an event. Security was going to be extremely tight for the occasion.

As her shuttle broke through the clouds and descended toward the Starfleet launch bay she could barely believe that she was returning to Earth. She had spent the better part of the past year on Vulcan, and a small part of her was eager to return. However, when she stepped out of the shuttle she immediately saw the throng of people who had arrived and were waiting. Her stomach lurched at the sight, and for a brief moment she wished she was back on Vulcan. Hundreds of people had turned out to witness the solemn homecoming. The sky above was overcast. Dark gray clouds swirled above them threatening rain. It was quite fitting, she thought, as though the Earth itself wanted to cry out. A gust of wind blew her hair to one side as she was ushered to the side of the launch pad. The Starfleet flags that lined the walkway of the launch pad flapped ominously in the breeze.

The shuttle she had arrived on departed and she stood silent as they awaited the return of the cargo shuttle that had left to dock with Enterprise and relieve it of its precious cargo. Her thoughts flitted to Admiral Forrest and then to Soval. As she stood still she could see a few Vulcans standing on the other side of the launch pad. They looked impassive as ever. Soval was among them. He was dressed in long ornate robes that made him stand out even amongst the other Vulcans in the delegation. His face, though expressionless, seemed grim. His lips were pressed tightly together, and Constance could tell from the tension running across the bond that this was not something he wanted to witness.

As the minutes ticked by the crowd behind them began to become agitated. Disgruntled murmuring could be heard as they waited for what seemed like an eternity. She knew that families of the victims were among them and seeing the Vulcan delegation was magnifying the apprehensive feeling that hung thick in the air. Security officers continued their checks as they paced before the crowd. They looked somber as a cargo shuttle appeared overhead and began its decent. It set down on the launch pad and Constance's hair whipped around her face as the exhaust from the engines disturbed the air around them. She wished she had pinned it, but it was too late now.

The cargo bay doors of the shuttle slowly opened and for a moment everyone stood silent. Constance
held her breath as the first of the caskets was gently lifted down and carried down the walkway. She watched as all eyes were on the casket. The hum of the crowd grew louder as it was punctuated by distinct wailing. It was quite an emotional scene. Slowly, one by one, the other caskets followed behind as they were removed from the cargo ship.

As the last casket was brought out a man pushed his way through the crowd of people and positioned himself in front close to the Vulcan delegation. He began shouting into the wind as security quickly moved to surround him.

"Murderers!" He shouted above the howling of the wind. The crowd began undulating as tension mounted. "Monsters! Alien freaks! Go home!" He screamed at the Vulcans as security grabbed him under his arms and dragged him out of sight. The crowd was becoming increasingly agitated, and Constance quickly realized that this situation was becoming precarious. She felt her anxiety building as she watched the crowd groan and writhe in unison.

Suddenly, a precession of shiny black hover cars pulled up. The Vulcans moved quietly as security personnel quickly ushered them toward the cars. Constance began to instinctually move toward them, but was pushed back by a security officer. She and the crew were being ushered away in the opposite direction toward Starfleet Headquarters nearby, but she could not tear her eyes away from the delegation. This was not the Earth she knew. She silently prayed for their safety. As though Soval was answering her unspoken thoughts he turned and looked at her before he was ushered into one of the black hover cars and out of sight.
Debriefing

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The Vulcan delegation was immediately escorted back to the Vulcan Consulate in Sausalito. It was still raining when they pulled up to the compound. It was almost a city unto itself; except on a much smaller scale. A city within a city. One of Soval's more junior aides was awaiting his arrival with an umbrella. His name was Vosik. One of his previous aides, Tos, had been given his own diplomatic posting and Vosik had been promoted to the vacant position. He met the younger Vulcan one other time while the High Command had been evaluating candidates for the position. Evidently he was the chosen one as he now stood before Soval.

"T'nar pak sorat y'rani, S'Haile," said Vosik managing to extend the ta'al while holding the umbrella in the other hand.

"Honorifics are unnecessary, Vosik. You will address me in English going forward as we are now on Earth," he commanded, bluntly. He was getting wet despite the umbrella.

"Yes, Ambassador," said Vosik walking along side of Soval. Soval maintained a strict rule of not speaking in Vulkansu even at the Consulate. He was aware his approach bordered on excessive, however it was imperative, if not logical, that any Vulcans posted on Earth master the universal language of their adopted world. Fluency in the language was a matter of discipline, however the difficulty lie in deciphering the endless idioms and embracing the use of words that carried emotional connotations and overtones. New colloquialisms were created almost daily. Even after thirty years Soval found himself at a loss when it came to certain illogical phrases. *It's raining cats and dogs,* came to mind.

For now, he did not have the time to go over the idiosyncrasies of Human language with Vosik. He had a headache from the earlier event at the launch bay. He was disturbed by what had occurred, but he was not surprised. The repercussions of V'Las's actions were already proving to be both damaging and far reaching. It was going to be difficult to repair relations with Earth which, as the Vulcan Ambassador, was his duty to mend. He hoped that they were not irreparable.

The flood of emotion that had emanated from the crowd had also been mentally draining. Although they were touch telepaths Vulcans were still extremely attuned to the emotions of others. He needed to mediate. The first day of the debriefing was scheduled for the following day. Excusing himself from Vosik and promising the younger man a later audience he made his way to his quarters.

The debriefing was held at the Starfleet Headquarters at one o'clock in the afternoon the following day. The sun was high in the sky and it beat down on the pavement as Soval was escorted by hovercar to the tall building. The weather was nearly the complete opposite of what it had been the day before. It seemed to be almost as uncertain and changeable as Human emotion.

When he arrived he was escorted to the same room where Captain Archer had been debriefed on his mission into the Delphic Expanse only a few months prior. However instead of serving on the council, it was Admiral Gardner and Admiral Black, who were seated at the panel along with several other United Earth dignitaries. Soval was instead directed to one of the chairs along a wall. Tos, his former aide, was also seated along the wall nearby. It seemed that no Vulcans would be serving on the Council, and would only be observing the proceedings. It was not unexpected given the recent events. Looking around he saw that Commander Tucker, as well as several others, had been
summoned. Constance was also in attendance as she had previously indicated. Both she and Commander Tucker sat in seats facing the panel. Constance briefly made eye contact with Soval and he could feel her apprehension bleeding from the bond.

Just as the silence in the room was becoming almost deafening Admiral Gardener spoke. He sat in the middle of the panel and addressed all the occupants of the room; hands clasped in front of him.

"As you all know you have been summoned here for a debriefing regarding the recent events surrounding the bombing of the United Earth Embassy on Vulcan. As you are also aware, though I feel obliged to reiterate, the following proceedings are classified and not to be discussed outside those in attendance. Failure to comply with such protocols will result in court martial," he said. Admiral Gardener cleared his throat before continuing.

"The agenda for today will include the testimonies of Commander Tucker and SI Officer Corcoran," he said looking down at his PADD briefly. "Let me remind you all that this is not a court of law. We are here as part of standard procedure, however this is a serious matter that requires thorough examination. The debriefing will conclude after the final testimonies of Captain Archer, Commander T'Pol, and Ambassador Soval which will occur at a later date," he finished. He eyed both Commander Tucker and Constance solemnly.

"Commander Tucker, you will go first. Please move to the front and have a seat," said Admiral Black waving a hand dismissively at the empty chair that had been placed directly in front of the panel. Commander Tucker stood. He looked serious as he walked slowly over to the chair and sat down, legs spread slightly. He was wearing his blue flight suit uniform, and it appeared that extra care had been taken in carefully grooming and parting his blond hair for the occasion.

"Commander Charles Tucker III, Chief Engineer of the NX-01 Enterprise," stated Admiral Black as he glanced at the young man and back down at a PADD in front of him. It appeared that Admiral Gardener was not in fact heading the debriefing.

"Yes, Sir," said Commander Tucker.

"You assumed command of Enterprise in the absence of Captain Archer and Commander T'Pol during the investigation of the Embassy Bombing while they were on Vulcan," he said. His gaze was steady. Though gray hair hinted at his age his sharp eyes hinted at his resolve.

"Yes, Sir," replied Commander Tucker.

"As we have all been apprised of the details of the mission several times over we'd like to hear, in a bit more detail, the logic behind some of the decisions you made while in command of the Enterprise," Admiral Black said. Commander Tucker sat expectantly.

"In your report you mention that you had believed that there was a conspiracy to hide evidence regarding the bombing. Specifically, you mention that DNA evidence was fabricated regarding one of the suspected bombers, T'Pau. Why is it that Starfleet was not immediately informed of this information when it became known?" He asked. Commander Tucker leaned forward.

"Well, Admiral, I wasn't sure how far such influence of a possible conspiracy extended," he said.

"Are you implying that you believed that Starfleet Command was colluding with Administrator V'Las?" Admiral Black interjected.

"Of course not, however there was little time to disseminate the possibility. It seemed reasonable to discuss my concerns with Ambassador Soval before involving Starfleet Command," Tucker said.
"Is Ambassador Soval your direct superior?" Admiral Black asked, evenly.

"Well, no," said Command Tucker. Soval wondered why Admiral Black would ask such a question. It was obvious he knew the answer. It became clear that he was only asking as a way to get Command Tucker to admit he broke protocol. Soval noticed Command Tucker glance at him briefly before returning his gaze to the panel. Though Command Tucker seemed calm it was probably taking great effort on his part to appear so.

"And yet you felt obliged to defer to his judgement," Admiral Black continued.

"Well, given that Starfleet has been deferring to Vulcan counsel for nearly a hundred years I figured it was not unreasonable to consult him," he said sharply. Admiral Black's eyebrows climbed on his forehead. Admiral Gardener seemed to pick up on the tension.

"How about we move on," Admiral Gardener stated, clearing his throat. Admiral Black glanced at Admiral Gardener before acquiescing.

"Moving on," said Admiral Black folding his hands in front of him. "You were later ordered to immediately return to Earth after Admiral Gardener gave the directive. Why did you violate a direct order and set a course for Andoria?"

"It was really more of a pit stop," Commander Tucker stated.

"Commander Tucker, let me remind you that this is very serious matter. You were lucky that you were not summoned to a court martial for your actions. Answer the question," stated Admiral Black.

"Listen, I made a decision and I stand by it. If we hadn't done what we did we might have been in the middle of a war right now, court martial or not," said Commander Tucker. It was true. If they had not warned the Andorians the probability was high that Vulcan and Andoria would have been engaged in war, and V'Las would have accomplished his objective. Regardless of that fact, it was illogical of Commander Tucker to provoke his superiors. Soval glanced at Constance. Though he could feel her apprehension her expression betrayed nothing. He commended her control as it seemed, in that moment, far stronger than his was at times. She was unflinching as she watched the exchange between Commander Tucker and Admiral Black. No doubt she was anticipating her own testimony with the panel.

The exchange between Commander Tucker and the panel continued for another hour. Although Admiral Black seemed to drill him relentlessly it was only because he desired a complete picture of the events that had transpired. It was similar to how Soval had handled the debriefing of Captain Archer when he had returned from the Expanse. It was logical that the Starfleet would desire the same clarity. The Humans were similar to Vulcans in that regard.

When Commander Tucker's testimony concluded Admiral Gardener signaled for a brief recess. Commander Tucker got up from his seat and nodded at Soval before heading out the door. Constance also stood and glanced at Soval before passing him on her way out the door. Soval waited for Tos before exiting.

"It is agreeable to see you, Ambassador," said Tos, glancing at Soval.

"Yes, I regret we meet under less than pleasant circumstances, however I believe there is an Earth expression that is appropriate, we made our bed and now must lie in it," Soval said grimly, referring to the situation the Vulcans now faced.

"Indeed, the phrase is crude yet surprisingly appropriate," said Tos. They headed for the Starfleet
Headquarters cafeteria. They had an hour before they were required to return to the debriefing. When they reached their destination Tos ordered a cup of tea and Soval followed suit. They moved to sit by one of the tables by the window that overlooked the San Francisco Bay.

"How are you finding your new posting?" Asked Soval. Tos had been appointed Chargé d'affaires for the Vulcan Consulate in Berlin.

"Berlin is quite fascinating. It is interesting how divergent Human culture can be in different regions on Earth," replied Tos. Soval nodded. Their discussion eventually moved to the recent events. Though he was interested Soval found himself half listening to Tos. He had espied Constance at the other end of the cafeteria and found himself half engaged in watching her. She was speaking to Commander Tucker who had his back to Soval. She was not smiling, but was politely nodding at something Commander Tucker had said. She noticed Soval looking in their direction, and appeared to excuse herself from Commander Tucker and began to walk toward were he and Tos were seated.

"Ambassador Soval, it is a pleasure to see you again. I hope I am not interrupting," said Constance. The pleasantry she offered was ubiquitous enough to be said in front of Tos, but he could tell from the bond she was pleased to see him. Both Soval and Tos moved to stand. It was archaic by both Vulcan and Human standards to stand in the presence of a female, but it seemed appropriate in the circumstances as the table that they were sitting at was only meant for two.

"Allow me to introduce, Tos, Chargé d'affaires for the Vulcan Consulate in Berlin," said Soval. Tos nodded politely in acknowledgement before Soval continued. "This is Officer Corcoran of Starfleet Intelligence," he finished. Constance nodded politely.

"Pleased to meet you," she replied. "The weather is quite a departure from the weather of San Francisco, I understand," she said.

"Indeed, quite," replied Tos. He looked as though he was remembering something unpleasant. "Officer Corcoran, Ambassador, if you will excuse me there is something I need to attend to before I return to the debriefing," said Tos as he quietly departed leaving Soval and Constance alone. They had not spoken in person since the infamous night, and Soval found himself uncharacteristically at a loss for words. Constance was the one who broke the silence.

"I'm not looking forward to this interrogation," she said, as she slowly sat down in the chair previously occupied by Tos. Soval also moved to sit back down. They had twenty-nine minutes before they were required to return to the debriefing.

"It is hardly an interrogation," said Soval stiffly. "They only desire to have an accurate account of what transpired," he added, his tone softening slightly. Constance gave him a small smile.

"I know it'll be fine. I just want to get it over with," she sighed.

Soval pressed his lips together. It was simply a debriefing, however he understood her disconcert. Such proceedings were not, in a word, pleasant. They sat in silence for a moment before Constance spoke again.

"They are reassigning me to a post on Earth," she said. "I won't be returning to Vulcan. I just found out this morning." Her voice had a strange quality about it. He was not sure what to make of it.

"And this disappoints you?" He asked raising an eyebrow.

"No, not exactly," she said glancing out the window. "Although, I will miss working with you," she added. She seemed mildly embarrassed by her own admission as a flush of pink spread across her
cheeks. The concept of 'missing' something that was not tangible was foreign to Soval. However, the idea of seeing less of her seemed disagreeable to him as well. He had grown accustomed to their meetings over the past few months, and even came to look forward to them in some regard. Perhaps he understood the concept better than he thought. Most especially after the intimacy that had transpired between them. In fact, he already had a plan of how to remedy the situation. She shifted in the chair before she changed the subject.

"I'm sorry for what happened at the launch bay yesterday. I'm ashamed that you had to witness that," said Constance.

"There is no need for you to apologize," he said.

"I know, but it's shameful that people are still so close-minded and ignorant. I feel like I should apologize on their behalf," she said.

"Again, it is unnecessary for you to apologize; however I appreciate your intention. I've lived on Earth for more than thirty years so I am familiar with many aspects of Human behavior," he said. "Besides, this behavior is hardly exclusive to Humans; there will always be those who are opposed to change." Constance nodded.

"It is enough that you are not 'close-minded'," he added quietly so as only she could hear. Constance colored again slightly. She looked down at her watch.

"We should head back soon. Perhaps we can continue our discussion after the debriefing although we should probably keep it private," she said looking around. Soval doubted anyone there suspected the connection between them, but she was right. With the current state of xenophobia on Earth it was dangerous for either of them to be seen in each other's company outside the usual diplomatic reasons.

"Indeed," he said. "I will message you with a time and place to meet, and you can review it to determine whether it is agreeable to you." Constance smiled before standing.

"I look forward to it, Ambassador," she said. Soval nodded before they both headed back toward the debriefing.

Constance now sat facing the panel in the same chair Commander Tucker had occupied. Admiral Black looked very serious as he reviewed something on his PADD. The Chief of Starfleet Intelligence, Admiral Washington, was also seated on the panel. He glanced at her his expression stony as they prepared for her testimony. After an age, Admiral Black finally spoke.

"Officer Constance Corcoran of Starfleet Intelligence," he stated.

"Yes, Sir," she said.

"You were assigned as head of the intelligence team on Vulcan," he said.

"Yes, Sir," she answered.

"How long have you worked for Starfleet?" He asked. Constance was not sure where he was going with his line of questioning. She was sure he had access to her personnel file.

"Seventeen years in total, the last ten were for Starfleet Intelligence," she said.

"So, it is safe to assume you understand the correct protocols for one in your position?" He said brows raised.
"Yes," she said slowly.

"You took an oath when you joined Starfleet Intelligence to defend and protect United Earth against all enemies foreign, interstellar, and domestic and yet you hacked into Starfleet Communications in direct violation of that oath," said Admiral Black.

"Well, I had little choice. The High Command was monitoring communications. I was only trying to disable—," she started before Admiral Black interrupted her.

"We understand your motivations. However, what you fail to realize is that you may have inadvertently opened our network to a number of security breaches." Constance pressed her lips together. She was aware, at the time, of the implications of her actions, but they had paled in comparison with what she had learned. Admiral Black continued.

"We train operatives who are expected to follow protocol, not rogue agents. Fortunately for you and to the disappointment of some you will not be disciplined for your actions this time, however I must make it abundantly clear you are not to break protocol in the future or you will suffer the consequences," he said. Constance remained silent. She realized she was being let off the hook and if a sound chastising was her only punishment then so be it.

The debriefing dragged on for another hour and a half. The panel asked Constance to go over every minute detail of what had transpired. Even though some details seemed unimportant because they had been unable to extradite V'Las it was likely they were trying to understand his underlying motivations. When they were finally satisfied with her testimony the panel stood. Admiral Gardener spoke.

"As a reminder, the proceedings of this debriefing are classified. We will resume tomorrow at the same time starting with the testimony of Captain Archer. You are all dismissed," said Admiral Gardener. Those in the room moved to stand and slowly filed out of the room. Constance was about to leave when Admiral Washington stopped her.

"Officer Corcoran," he said. She turned to look at him. Earlier that morning she had received a message from Starfleet Intelligence informing her that she would be resuming a post on Earth instead of returning to Vulcan. "I am assuming you received your new assignment," he said.

"Yes, Sir," she said.

"It may be some months before the United Earth Embassy on Vulcan is up and running again. And in light of the little stunt you pulled in hacking into Starfleet Communications we could really use your skills here," he said. Constance suppressed a smile. Despite how serious he looked during the proceedings it appeared Admiral Washington had something to do with the leniency of her slap on the wrist.

"Terra Prime, is gaining quite a following as you are aware. You were instrumental in locating their base of operations a year and a half ago," he said. "Recent intel suggests that it is likely that they are planning something. We need to stay vigilant; can I count on you when the time comes to call upon you?" He asked.

"Of course," said Constance. She was surprised he should even feel it necessary to ask.

"Good," he said. "For now go home, rest, you deserve it," he said squeezing her shoulder before he turned away. Constance watched as he exited the debriefing room. She took a deep breath as she followed shortly behind him. For the first time in a long time she was heading home.
Chapter End Notes

T'nar pak sorat y'rani – formal greeting

S'Haile – honorific Sir/Lord

Vulkansu – Vulcan Language

I referenced the VLD for the Vulcan Language.
Welcome home, Fare thee well...

It was two days after the debriefing and Constance was sitting outside on the deck of her home drinking coffee. Real coffee, not replicated, with real cream and real sugar. She took another sip as she stared out at the view before her. Colossal red wood trees loomed above her like ancient pillars standing at attention at the entrance of the forest that abutted her home. She had almost had forgotten what those trees really looked like. It had been months since she had returned and she breathed in the smell of the damp forest around her. It was so vastly different from the dry, desert air of Vulcan. She took another sip of her coffee closing her eyes as she listened to the sounds of the forest.

Her home was located in a rather secluded area of Mill Valley. Once a popular place to live, it had been revitalized after the Third World War into a burgeoning, bustling town just outside of San Francisco. However, the newly rebuilt town had been all but destroyed by the Great Quake of 2119 that followed. It had taken years to rebuild, well over thirty in fact, and it never fully recovered. Though many people had returned it still remained rather isolated. Although Constance enjoyed the vibrant energy of San Francisco she had found herself drawn to the calming refuge that was Mill Valley, especially after her parents' death. Shortly after their deaths, Constance had used her inheritance to purchase the house and the parcel of land that sat on the edge of the forest.

Constance sat relaxing, looking at her PADD as she slowly scrolled through her messages. As much as she loved her home she spent little time there. Working for Starfleet Intelligence kept her on the road often, so to speak, so she relished every minute she was afforded when she returned. She stopped when she reached one of the messages and re-read it. It was from Soval. She had agreed to meet with him that afternoon, and he was confirming the time. No doubt they would finally be addressing what occurred between them.

What did she want to know really, or rather, what did she want? She wondered. When they had first met she had been rather wary of him. The truth was she was rather wary of most people at first, but it did not help that every subsequent meeting with Ambassador Soval had resulted in almost instant friction. They seemed to clash at every turn. He had been condescending, and she had been snide. She had never met anyone who simultaneously irritated and intrigued her. Her feelings had been so conflicting that a few of their meetings had been nearly explosive. The Seleya incident came to mind. However, as the months passed and they met with more frequency the irritation was slowly overcome by mutual respect. There were times that she even looked forward to the prospect of his company. When had her feelings changed from tempered indifference to those of deeper affection? She could not pinpoint the moment, but she realized upon further examination that her feelings had indeed changed and had been that way for some time.

Perhaps it was after learning of their empathic connection when she really knew. It had frightened her at the time, and she had shoved the feelings into the deepest recesses of her mind. Part of her did not want to say it out loud, but she realized she had been falling for him all along. To be so intimately bound to someone on a far deeper level than anything physical felt natural somehow. She realized that no one had ever come that close to her and she wondered how he had managed it without her realizing.

The xenophobia on Earth had grown to such a pitch that they had to be careful deciding on where to meet. It was unlikely that anyone, Vulcan or Human for that matter, would condone such an intimacy let alone a relationship between the two of them. Soval was the Vulcan Ambassador to Earth. The position was one of both distinction and controversy. It symbolized the burgeoning alliance between Vulcan and Earth, but also highlighted how tenuous the treads of the connection between their worlds really were. One hundred years was hardly a blip in the history of the cosmos,
and Earth did not even have their own Ambassador yet.

Perhaps he would not want to be with her. The thought made her stomach turn. She instinctively touched the bond in her mind. It had become so engrained that she could not imagine it not being there. Perhaps he would desire to sever their connection after all. She bit her lip. It would be logical. In fact, it would be quite illogical for them to continue whatever this was between them. Not to mention dangerous. To risk the alliance between their worlds at a time like this seemed beyond self-serving. She shivered knowing she should at least brace herself for the possibility. It was both selfish and illogical, but she was not ready to let go.

Looking back down at her PADD she saw the time. Getting up she walked back into the house to get ready. They were meeting at the San Francisco Unity Cemetery by the Bay. It was where members of Starfleet were laid to rest, including Admiral Forrest, and seemed a fitting place given the necessity to keep their meeting as inconspicuous as possible. They would be hiding in plain view. No one would question either of their reasons for being there. Admiral Forrest was once her superior and father figure of sorts and had been one of the few humans Soval had actually developed a genuine rapport with.

Tugging on a long sweater over her head she began carefully arranging her hair as she regarded herself in the mirror. She had only known Soval a year, and already he had changed her life completely. Finishing up she absently brushed herself off as she grabbed the keys to her hover. Although the cemetery was popular haunt Constance knew it would not be overly crowded and she did not want to be late.

It was nearly it was nearly forty-five minutes later when Constance walked up the familiar path when she saw that Soval was already waiting. Her stomach lurched at the sight. He had forgone his usual Ambassadorial robes and was wearing a simple long sleeved tunic and pants in a dark navy blue color. She was used to seeing him in such attire, but he looked particularly out of place meeting in the cemetery and standing out against the watery background of the Bay. His arms were clasp behind his back as she walked up to him. His face was smooth like sculpted stone. He looked very Vulcan, and very alien in that moment.

She smiled as she walked up to him. Her earlier worries seemed to momentarily disappear as she continued to gaze at him. Not exactly sure how to greet him she managed a hello as he met her eyes and nodded in acknowledgement before moving to stand by her side. For once it seemed neither of them seemed to know exactly where to begin.

Soval watched as Constance walked up to him. She wore a small smile, and he vaguely felt a swell of pleasure emanate from the bond. She was happy to see him. To his surprise the feeling pleased him as well. An instinctual desire to touch his fingers against hers in \textit{o\textsuperscript{h}e\textsuperscript{sta}} tugged at his arm, but he immediately suppressed the feeling knowing what was to come.

She wore a long, beige sweater that extended past her waist and black tights and lace-up boots that stopped mid-calf. Her dark hair was not pinned in its usual neat bun, but instead fell loosely around her shoulders. He instantly remembered the last time he had seen her hair arranged in this fashion, and was for a moment uncharacteristically distracted by the thought.

"I was–," he started as he squeezed his hands tightly behind his back trying to relieve the tingling sensation in his fingers.

"How did–," Constance said at the same time. She stopped and colored. Soval glanced at her from the side.
"Please," he stated, indicating that she should continue. They could discuss matters of business with ease, however it seemed those of a more personal nature were harder to broach.

"I was just going to ask how your testimony went yesterday," she said, quickly glancing at him from her periphery. After Constance had given her testimony at the debriefing she was no longer required to attend the hearing. She had not been in attendance when Soval, Captain Archer, or Commander T'Pol had given their accounts.

"It concluded satisfactorily," he stated. They began to walk together slowly. "I believe Captain Archer assisted in ameliorating tension between Starfleet and Vulcan. Which is an adequate start," he said.

"Yes, unfortunately I think we still have a long way to go, but I am hopeful," she said. He nodded. She looked over at him again, and he felt her studying him. He remained quiet as they continued walking. The sun shone brightly, however the temperature remained quite cool given that it was still early spring. They continued to walk in silence for a few minutes before they reached rows upon rows of marble placards that indicated places of rest for those who had fallen in the line of duty. Soval had not been aware that they had been heading in any particular direction until they reached one placard in particular. It was Admiral Forrest's. Constance glanced over at him as they both stopped.

"Admiral Forrest had a very optimistic view of future Human and Vulcan relations," said Ambassador Soval after a turn. Constance continued to stare at the marker.

"Yes, he really believed that underneath it all we aren't all that different." Constance leaned down and touched the lettering on the gravestone with her fingertips briefly before turning away. Her face was expressionless, but Soval felt the dark emotion that had crept up inside of her through the bond.

"Perhaps he was right," replied Soval slowly as he watched her. Constance sighed before beginning to walk again slowly.

"Soval," Constance started after they had returned to the path. "What happened that night we were together in Shi'Kahr?" He glanced at her for a moment. She was referring to the incident. A flash of apprehension emanated from the bond.

"It would seem that we engaged in sexual intercourse," he said. She shot him a pointed look that told him that further explanation was necessary. He had already meditated several times on the matter, and though he knew what he wished to tell her it did not seem to come any easier. Finally he spoke.

"It is called Pon Farr," he said, glancing at her and then out at the Bay. A large freighter with shipping containers was passing by. He watched as it slowly slid past them. "It is the Vulcan time of mating," he said, returning his gaze to her. Constance frowned, but said nothing. No doubt she was unfamiliar with the term as it was an extremely private aspect of Vulcan culture and not something that would be taught in any language course. In fact, outside of necessity, it was hardly ever mentioned even by Vulcan society.

"It is brought on by a neurochemical imbalance every seven years. During that time we must mate or die," he said. She raised her eyebrows.

"Mate or die," she repeated. "And that was your time?"
"It was rather premature, but it is not unreasonable to assume it was." It was a logical conclusion even though it was quite irregular being nearly two years early and unusually short in duration. Soval concluded the irregularities were brought on by the Andorians' infernal torture device. Constance bit her lip.

"Is that the only time you mate?" She asked.

"No, however it is the one time that it is necessary," he said. She looked very serious. A part of him wanted to reach out and touch her to know what she was thinking in that moment.

"I wanted to – thank you. You have saved my life," he said quietly. Her features softened. She moved closer to him as they walked.

"One does not thank logic," she said lightly. She had quoted an old Vulcan proverb. Soval raised an eyebrow before she continued, her face becoming serious again. "Somehow I knew you needed me in that moment, and I wanted to be with you. It just made… sense," she said, simply. Made sense. It was an odd turn of phrase, however Soval had come to learn it was how Humans described their inexplicable steps to a logical solution. She had witnessed the loss of his control first hand, and hardly seemed bothered by it. She never ceased to confound him. Soval stopped and was quiet for a moment while he regarded her.

"There is something I must tell you," he said solemnly. "That night in Shi’Kahr was of greater significance than perhaps you were aware. It solidified the empathic connection between us."

Constance stopped and frowned.

"What do you mean?"

"We are now bound by more than simple convention. We share a mating bond," he said.

"A mating bond," she repeated. Her face paled slightly as she seemed to grasp the implication of his disclosure. "You mean like we are married?"

"The term does not translate exactly, however, essentially – yes," he said. "It is different for Vulcans." She raised her eyebrows.

"We hardly know each other," she breathed.

"That is not entirely correct," he said. In fact, he had learned a great deal about her in the months that they had worked together. She pressed her lips together and closed her eyes briefly.

"That’s not what I mean. I mean that we do not know each other well enough to get married," she amended.

"It is of little consequence now as we have already bonded. A marital ceremony would be little more than formality at this point." Constance stopped and turned to face Soval. A rather large seagull flew low overhead and she did not even move.

"Vulcan couples usually meet only a few times before they are joined," Soval said, offering further explanation.

"Well, it is a little different on Earth as you probably know. We, Humans, often spend months, years even, getting to know someone before we commit to spending our entire lives with them," Constance said finally moving again as she looked out at the Bay.

"That is quite illogical. Especially in light of your shorter–" Soval pressed his lips together. He was
not exactly sure why he humoring this exchange especially in light what still needed to be said.

"Well, we are not always logical. Sometimes we think with our heart," she said, a little defensively. Soval raised an eyebrow. It was such an emotional sentiment, one that no Vulcan could ever reconcile regardless of how poetic it sounded. However, there was still more that needed to be said, and illogical as her statement was it seemed to make it that much harder.

"I have researched and meditated on our situation. It is possible to sever the bond between us. A Vulcan priest would be required to perform the ritual, however it can be done," he stated. He closed his eyes for a moment bracing for what he needed to say next. "It needs to be done." Constance looked up at him rather quickly, surprised.

"Is that what you want?" She asked.

"The bond we share could risk the alliance between Vulcan and Earth. It would be illogical for us disregard this possibly," he said.

"That is not what I asked."

"My personal inclination is of no importance," he stated, flatly.

"It is to me," she said staring up at him. He softened slightly under her scrutiny. She was hurt, and he knew it was paining her to hear the words. In fact it was paining him to say them. He did not want to sever the bond between them.

"No, it is not what I desire, however we must put the relations between our worlds above personal interest," he said. They stood there in uncomfortable silence before she finally spoke.

"You are right," she said softly. Soval glanced at her in surprise. He felt illogically dismayed by her sudden acquiescence, and immediately suppressed the emotion. He should have been pleased at how quickly she was embracing the logic behind his reasoning, but for the first time it disturbed him.

"I'm not sure how people would feel about a Vulcan and Human being together. It may tear our worlds apart," she continued. She sounded sad. "And I'm not sure Earth is ready."

Soval nodded pressing his lips together.

"When would we undergo this ritual to sever the bond," she asked. He noticed her voice shook slightly. She looked out at the Bay avoiding his gaze.

"As soon as I return to the Consulate I will inform Minister Kuvak of the need for him to send a Vulcan priest to Earth," he said. "It will need to be discreet so I will set up a time and plausible reason for you to be required to come to the Consulate." Constance swallowed nodding slowly.

"Alright," she said simply. They turned around and began walking back in the direction that they had come in when they first met. Constance remained quiet as they continued to walk. When they reached the gates Constance finally turned to Soval. She crossed her arms in front of her chest, and gave him a sad smile.

"This is so difficult," she said. She bit her lip and knit her eyebrows. He knew from the bond she was trying desperately to suppress her emotions.

"Yes."

"I still care for you," she said.
"I know," he said softly, not breaking her gaze. They stayed this way for a moment. There was so much Soval wanted to say, but he could not. He wanted to comfort her but it would not help the situation, and it did not seem logical to make it any harder than it was. He could see tears forming in her eyes, but she was endeavoring not to let them fall.

"Good-bye Soval," she said as she turned away. She began walking past the gate, and as much as he wanted to he did not stop her.

Soval sighed. It was immeasurably difficult to watch her walk away. He watched as her retreating form disappeared in the distance. If he had given himself over to his emotions he would have declared *koon-ut so'lik* and made their bond official. He would have spent the rest of his life on Earth, content, with Constance, but it was not his path. He was Vulcan, and his path was set long ago in service of his people. He tried to take comfort in the logic behind his decision, but it did not come. He was overcome by the grief of knowing their bond was to be severed. He touched the bond in his mind. He knew he should not yield to it knowing it would soon be gone, but he wanted to savor the last moments of his connection to her, to Constance.
Parted and Never Parted

The week that followed passed rather painfully, however towards the end Constance felt she was beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel. At least she thought she could. She finally was accepting that she and Soval were going to sever their bond. She really could not be mad with him. He was Vulcan and could not help being internally guided by his infernal Vulcan logic and the needs of the many bullshit. And, sadly, it made sense in a heroic, ultimate sacrifice sort of way.

Fuck that, she thought. She was mad at Soval. At least a little bit, but she realized most of her anger was directed toward herself. She had let him go without a fight, and basically acquiesced to his reasoning – hook, line, and sinker – without so much as a single word in protest. But there was no use in dwelling on it. What was done was done. And in the end it was the logical course of action.

Besides was she really ready to be married? She had expected their relationship to grow, it was the natural way of things, but his disclosure had surprised her. It was as though her unconscious mind had made the decision for her without consulting her. It had frightened her at the time, but the more she thought about it the less frightening the prospect became. She found that in her heart it was exactly what she wanted. But it was too late. So she had taken to displacing that desire, and tucked it away along with the other what-ifs in her life.

What was particularly strange, and what she found was actually bothering her was that a full week had passed, and she never heard from him. The bond still continued to thrum quietly in the back of her mind although she tried her best to ignore it. She had even taken to building a sort of mental wall around it so when the time came to parting from him it might not be as hard. She was not sure if it was working exactly, but she continued the mental exercise. Still, try as she might, a part of her was happy it was still there for the time being.

Perhaps he was just waiting to hear from the Vulcan priest, she thought. She knew it was a five day journey from Vulcan to Earth, but seven days seemed excessive. She tried not to over analyze it too much as she was prone to do sometimes, and was grateful that she had other things to keep her busy.

Although Admiral Washington had technically given her some time off she was still required to take her quarterly polygraph test for Starfleet Intelligence. She also continued her hand-to-hand combat training which was also required. She was no field operative, but she needed to remain in top physical condition. And if she was going to be brutally honest it was helping her stay level which was exactly what she needed. Instead of wallowing in self-pity she was able to take out her anger and frustration during her sparring sessions.

That night, a week following the fateful conversation with Soval, she received a transmission from Admiral Washington. She had just returned home and was still toweling off the sweat from her last combat session. She glanced at the time. It was quite late to be receiving a transmission. Quickly trying to appear presentable she raked her fingers through her hair with one hand, and pressed the call accept button on her PADD with the other.

"Hello, Admiral Washington," she said as his face appeared on screen.

"Officer Corcoran, how are you? I can see I've caught you at a bad time." His eyes flicked to her damp hair.

"No, not at all. Just finished up a training session. You know, Starfleet regulations, Sir," she said as she flashed him a small grin.

"Well, good, I just received the results of your last polygraph. It looks like everything checks out," he
"That's good to hear," she said. It was strange that Admiral Washington was going out of his way to call her personally in regards to the results of a routine polygraph especially at that particular hour.

"Listen, that's not actually why I am calling you. I need you to come to the office," he said.

"Like, right now?" She asked. She set the towel she had been holding down.

"Yes, immediately actually. Something has come up." She raised her eyebrows and nodded in the affirmative.

"Of course, Sir. I'll be there straight away," she said. Admiral Washington smiled tightly and nodded before he closed out the transmission. Constance was reeling. She wondered what exactly had happened that required her to meet at Starfleet HQ this late in the evening. She sat back on the stool in her kitchen and exhaled a breath. Shaking her head she stood. Without wasting any more time she grabbed her sweatshirt that was lying on a nearby chair, her keys, and headed out into the night.

Constance now sat in Admiral Washington's office as she waited for him to come back. She looked at her watch. It was nearly eight forty-five in the evening. He had stepped out briefly to speak with his aide, and left her to look around his office. She had scrambled to at least appear presentable before jumping in her hover, but she ended up just looking frumpy. She did not even have time to take a quick shower. She looked down at her sweatshirt and sighed before turning her attention to Admiral Washington's office.

It seemed that he had acquired even more pictures in digital frames since the last time she was there. Happy family photos displaying his wife and children floated by in the frames. Constance wondered what it would have been like if she and Soval had remained together. Surely they would not have had a million silly photos, but would they have had children? Could Humans and Vulcans even procreate? She had never really thought about it before, and the image of a squirming baby with pointed ears was immediately dashed from her mind as Admiral Washington returned to his office.

"Thank you for waiting, Officer Corcoran," he said taking a seat behind his desk. Constance smiled tightly.

"I need you to do something for us, for Starfleet Intelligence, that is." Constance raised her eyebrows.

"Of course, anything," she said.

Admiral Washington folded his hands in front of him and sat forward. "As you are well aware, SI has been trying to keep tabs on the xenophobic group, Terra Prime. However, it has become quite difficult more recently." He waved one of his hands in exasperation as he continued. "They don't operate under the traditional hierarchy of a terrorist organization. They operate as cells, and as soon as we neutralize one another pops up somewhere else. As of now we have been unable to identify their leader, but we believe that might change," he said.

"Wow," she said. It was quite a bombshell.

"Anyway, this is where you would come in," he said. Constance frowned.

"Me?" Admiral Washington nodded.

"One of our covert operatives is currently undercover in the field. We received a message from one
of her long time informants on an encrypted channel and he is requesting for her to meet him. He claims he has information regarding the head of the organization."

"Umm, I'm not sure where I fit into this," she said.

"He is asking to meet her tonight." He looked solemn.

"And she cannot be reached... " she said slowly. Admiral Washington nodded. Constance could see where this is going. "I'm not a field operative, Sir, I work with computers. I'm part of the team that storms the castle after the place has been cleared. I gather the intel," she said.

"That's exactly what you would be doing," he said. He pushed his PADD toward her. A photo of a rather pretty female face appeared on screen. Constance assumed she was the operative. She looked to be Constance's age, a little younger perhaps, with brown hair and blue eyes. In fact she looked a lot like Constance. But it was not an exact match. Constance had green eyes for one and slightly darker hair.

"Surely, he would know that I'm not her. Especially if they've been in contact," she protested.

"They've never met in person." Well, that's convenient, she thought. "I can't be your first choice," she said.

"You're not, but you are the only one here that fits her description. He has never seen her, but a few of his associates have so he has a basic idea of what she looks like. We only have a small window, and an opportunity like this is unlikely to occur again. We already have a support team assembled," he offered. She sighed. It looked like there was no getting out of it. She studied the PADD one more time then looked back up at Admiral Washington.

"What would I have to do?"

It was the evening of the seventh day following his discussion with Constance, and Soval was attempting to meditate on the events of the past week. The day after their talk Soval had contacted Minister Kuvak on Vulcan in regards to sending a priest to Earth and was met with unexpected resistance.

"Ambassador Soval, as you are aware with the recent dissolution of the High Command, Vulcan has been working diligently to demilitarize the fleet and subsequently scaled back on some of the ships currently in service."

"Yes, I am aware, however I am not requesting a military envoy. Only that a Vulcan priest be sent to Earth," he said.

"Yes, however the ships that are in service have been deployed by Minister T'Pau to assist the Enterprise in detecting a Romulan drone," said Kuvak. Soval was surprised; however he did not let it touch his face.

"Why was I not made aware of this?"

"Minister T'Pau just issued the order," said Minister Kuvak. Soval pressed his lips together. Evidently, the newly formed Vulcan government was not running as smoothly as one would hope. It was clear that T'Pau was doing everything in her power to ameliorate the tension between Earth and Vulcan which was commendable, but Soval now found it quite inconvenient.
"Is this an emergency?" Kuvak asked. They had known each other for many years and Soval could hear the concern in his voice although his expression remained neutral.

"No, Minister, it is not," said Soval. It was true. Even though it was decided that the bond would be severed there was no immediate concern. Minister Kuvak nodded.

"Then I will relay your message to Minister T'Pau. No doubt she will contact you as soon as she is able," said Minister Kuvak. He raised his hand in ta'al and Soval returned the salute before ending the transmission.

In the days that followed Soval found it difficult to meditate or even concentrate while the bond glowed in the back of his mind. He found himself constantly thinking about Constance and at the most inopportune moments. He wondered how she was faring, no doubt better than he was as he could barely discern any emotion from the bond. It seemed that she had found a way to effectively block him, and although a part of him was fascinated by her control, the other was dismayed that he was unable to glean any hint of emotion from the bond. He only knew she was physically sound as no one, not even a Vulcan, could block the disruption of a bond in the event something dire. He also knew he could simply contact her through physical means, but it seemed illogical knowing it would be for no other reason other than to quell his own desire to hear her voice. And so his self-made purgatory continued.

On the morning of the third day following their conversation he finally heard from T'Pau.

"Ambassador Soval, it is pleasing to see you," she said as her face appeared onscreen in his office at the Consulate.

"And you as well, Minister," replied Soval.

"I regret that I have not contacted you sooner; however I was informed that the matter was not urgent. How may I be of assistance?"

"I am requesting that a Vulcan priest be sent to the Consulate," he said. T'Pau's face remained blank, but she raised an eyebrow. There were few reasons why a priest would be required over a healer. And even fewer as to why one would be requested to make a journey. Usually the interested party travelled to see a priest not the other way around.

"Are you asking for yourself?" Soval hesitated for the briefest of moments before answering.

"Yes," he said.

"To what is this regarding?"

"A bond. The dissolution of one," he said. T'Pau looked somber.

"This is a serious matter," she said. She was quiet for a moment. "It would better for all involved that you instead be recalled to Vulcan to remedy the situation."

"That is not possible," he said. A ghost of a frown appeared on T'Pau's face.

"And why is that?"

"The bond is... unconventional. It is with a Human," he said. T'Pau's eyes widen briefly as she took a deep breath and she looked down for a moment. She appeared calm, but there was obvious tension in her movements.
"These Humans certainly continue to defy expectation," she said finally. She, herself, had witnessed Captain Archer carrying a *katra*, Surak's no less, and so the reality of a bond forming between a Vulcan and a Human could hardly seem that unfathomable. Whether it was desirable was something else entirely.

"I will come," she said setting her chin. "I do have experience in these matters, and for the sake of all involved, this should remain as discreet as possible." Soval nodded. "Does anyone else know of the reason for your request?"

"No," he stated.

"Then let's keep it that way," she said. "I shall see you in five days' time," she said before she closed out the transmission.

The five days were nearly complete, and T'Pau was due to arrive on Earth that very evening. Soval was attempting to meditate in preparation, but he was finding it unusually difficult. He felt apprehensive, and he could not account for the feeling. He touched the bond in his mind, and was surprised to find that it was more open than it had been in the past week. He still had not contacted Constance, but planned to the following day. He could feel his resolve weakening, but he was still determined to sever the bond. As unpleasant as the event was to be it had to be done.
We Meet at the Appointed Place

Constance was now waiting in the back of a hover truck in a dark alley between two rather tall buildings in the outskirts of the city. In fact, it was a rather desolate part of San Francisco. Only an hour had passed since she had finished getting ready at Starfleet HQ. Thankfully they had let her take a navy shower, which she felt was really for everyone's benefit. Admiral Washington's aide had dressed her in a plain white shirt and jeans along with a burgundy leather jacket. They had also pulled her hair into a rather severe ponytail which was signature to how the operative she was impersonating wore hers. All the while Admiral Washington briefed her on what exactly she was to do. She was to meet with the informant where he would hand off a package to her. It was quite simple really.

The support team consisted of two men, one of whom was named Mark. He was the driver, and he remained in the front seat watching for any signs of the informant. Ewan – "the Ears" he called himself – sat next to Constance in the back with an earpiece on while the truck idled quietly in the darkness.

"Now remember Mark and I will be watching the exchange the whole time," he said as he handed her an earpiece. His hand shook slightly as he fumbled in handing her the device. "Sorry," he mumbled glancing at Constance briefly through thick rimmed glasses. She smiled reassuringly. It had been years since she’d seen anyone wear glasses given that most people with poor vision underwent laser revision. Perhaps he was just scared, she thought. It perplexed her though and she frowned inwardly realizing he probably had one of the most dangerous occupations on Earth working for SI so a little laser revision could hardly be that frightening in comparison. Everyone has their quirks, she thought. She shrugged and stuck the earpiece in her ear. Ewan began to speak again and this time she could also hear him through the earpiece.

"Listen he thinks you work for the local news network as a reporter. All he is going to do is handoff a package. That's it. Piece of cake, right? You just need to take it and come back to the truck. I doubt he'll want to chit-chat, however if he starts asking too many questions just tell him you are afraid of being followed and that should scare him off. He's informing on his own faction so no doubt it is a fear of his own," said Ewan.

"I know, it'll be fine," said Constance as she smoothed her ponytail one last time.

"Alright, it's time," said Mark. Ewan glanced at the front, and then back at Constance.

"Just walk to the corner, and wait there. He should arrive within a few minutes or so," he said. Ewan slide the side door of the hover truck open and Constance jumped down. She glanced up at Ewan one last time as he gave her a thumbs-up before closing the door.

Slowly, she began walking through the alley between the two tall buildings heading toward the street corner. Her boots clicked quietly on the damp pavement. She still could not believe she had agreed to do this, but Admiral Washington had assured her it was quite routine; only a simple handoff. When she reached her destination she looked around. She did not see anyone, but after about a minute and a half of waiting she saw a person appear out of the shadows across the street. They began walking in her direction.

She squinted in the darkness. It looked like they were carrying something, but she could not be sure what it was. As they came closer she saw that it was a man holding a large envelope. He must be the contact, she thought. She felt momentarily relieved.
"Ms. Brooks?" he asked as he walked up to her. That was the operative's alias.

"Yes," Constance replied.

Without another word the man pulled a phaser pistol from the package and tossed the envelope on the ground.

"You can't all be that naïve," he said. "Your informant is dead. And I know you are SI."

Constance's stomach dropped. All the combat training in the world was no match for a phaser pistol at close range. If only she could disarm him. She took a step forward, but before she could react she heard what sounded like two shots being fired through her earpiece, then a sharp mechanical squeal, and then static. She grimaced and instinctually covered her ear.

"And you're bugged? I hope Starfleet realizes the mistake they made," he said closing the distance. Her heart clenched. She thought at Mark and Ewan. They had been led into a trap, and they were now more than likely dead. Her heart sunk, but she knew it was only a matter of time before she probably would be as well.

"I was instructed to tie up loose ends. And you're one of them," he said before he fired two shots at Constance. She instinctively dove to the side, but they made contact. Constance felt a flash of pain as she crumpled to the pavement just in time to watch him fade into the distance as her vision went to black.

Soval heard a knock and looked up to see his aide, Vosik, standing in the door frame of his office at the Consulate. It was quite late, and he was surprised that the aide had not left for the day yet. Soval had just finished mediating himself, and was now reviewing some reports on his PADD.

"Pardon me, Ambassador, but I was to inform you when Minister T'Pau arrived." Soval nodded.

"You may escort her to my office," he replied and he watched Vosik nod politely before disappearing. Soval moved to stand and smoothed his robes as T'Pau swept in. Soval made sure to see that the door was closed securely behind her before she spoke.

"It is agreeable to see you, Ambassador," said T'Pau.

"I trust your journey was not too arduous," he said, his face devoid of emotion.

"Not at all. It was quite tolerable in comparison to a trek through the Forge. Besides you have given me much to think about on the way here," she said as she glanced at him. She seemed to be waiting for a reaction. Soval set his chin and suppressed a frown. He was aware the situation was unusual; however it did not merit what he perceived as levity from T'Pau. She seemed to pick up on his displeasure.

"I was merely alluding to the peculiar nature of these Humans. They are far more unexpected than I realized. They have given me much to think about," she said.

"Indeed," he said before sitting down again at his desk. He was well aware of the propensity of others to prematurely underestimate Humans as a species. However there was only one that continued to confound him and that was Constance.

"Are you sufficiently prepared for the conference tomorrow?" T'Pau asked as she took a seat across from him. She was referring to the conference that was being held to informally discuss the possible formation of an alliance, or rather coalition, of planets. There had been several such conferences in
the past, however all ended unfavorably in regards to the proposal. However, this one was to be different as Starfleet was planning on parading the crew of the Enterprise around in an effort to stir more interest in the idea.

"Yes, Nathan Samuels will be in attendance and is planning on speaking as well," he said. Nathan Samuels was a United Earth government official and he was very keen on the idea of forming an alliance.

"Well, as Ambassador you know where Vulcan stands on the issue," said T'Pau evenly. Soval nodded. T'Pau sat back in her chair as she changed the subject. "Now, in regards to the situation you now face—your bond with a Human… This is quite unprecedented," she said. He pressed his lips together.

"I am aware it is… irregular, however as you are well aware we have little choice with whom we form bonds with," he said stiffly. He found it quite uncomfortable to be speaking so openly about such intimate matters. Bonding was the one aspect of their culture where Vulcans could not apply logic.

"Yes, this is true. However, I am still at a loss at how this could have happened with a Human. Although in light of recent events—," she stopped and sighed. "Who is she and what is her name?"

"Her name is Constance Corcoran. She works for Starfleet Intelligence," he said. She raised an eyebrow in response.

"We must tread carefully. Unfortunately, Earth is not the only place where xenophobia resides." He opened his mouth to reply, but at that very moment a white hot, searing pain overcame him and it was all he could do to keep himself from falling out of his chair and onto the ground. It was coming from the bond in his mind. It felt as though it was ripping apart and his head was splitting in two. He swallowed thickly holding back the nausea that followed. He gripped the desk for balance. T'Pau quickly moved to stand.

"Ambassador," she said rushing over to help him sit up. Her face was unmoving, but he could hear the concern in her voice.

"There's something terribly wrong," he choked.

"The human," T'Pau said as though she knew. She was more intuitive that he realized. Soval only nodded. Disruption in a bond often signified something quite grave.

"She's… injured. I can feel—," he started. He closed his eyes as he attempted to regain composure.

"I have seen this before. Try to concentrate," said T'Pau straightening. She gripped his forearm in an effort to steady him. "Do you know where she is?"

"What do you mean?" He was clenching his teeth.

"Try to reach out to her mind," she said calmly. Soval closed his eyes as he touched the bond in his mind. He had spent so much time trying to avoid it that it seemed strange to be examining it now. He imagined he was in his mediation space and he simply needed to find her. He looked around. There was nothing, but endless, blinding whiteness. And pain. It was growing. He continued further through the whiteness. He was getting closer. He continued to feel his way across the threads of the connection. She was still alive. He could her heart beating faintly. He could almost smell the air around her and the acrid smell of blood. He felt his way further and into her mind—into the recesses of her memories. After a moment Soval opened his eyes.
"I know where she is," he said.

Vosik drove the hover in near silence. His knuckles were white as he gripped the steering wheel. No doubt he was now regretting his posting as the Ambassador's aide at that moment.

"It is imperative that you drive faster," Soval said trying to keep the edge out of his voice.

"I am driving at the exact rate of speed as prescribed by the speed limit sign that we just passed," he said. Soval closed his eyes and set his teeth. He wanted to ring Vosik's neck. T'Pau sensed his control was slipping.

"Vosik, you _will_ drive faster as necessity outweighs the risk at this moment," she said. Vosik looked at T'Pau through the rearview mirror, and then back at the road as though he was weighing the logic behind her words. The hover picked up speed. They were entering the outskirts of the city.

"Turn left," Soval said. They were headed for a particularly secluded area of town. There were hardly any streetlamps and hardly anyone out for that matter. They passed several streets before Soval spoke again. "Now, take a right." The hover turned into a side street. They drove a little further. He began to recognize the area from Constance's memories. He abruptly opened the door as the hover continued, but Vosik stopped it as soon as he realized Soval was attempting a moving exit.

Soval jumped out and continued on foot a ways until he made it to a street corner. Looking around he could see a crumpled figure lying on the pavement across the street. It was Constance. He ran over and knelt on the ground beside her. She was lying in a strange position. He gently rolled her over.

"Soval?" she whispered as her eyes focused on him briefly before closing. There was crimson blood everywhere. T'Pau appeared at his side a moment later.

"Help me get her jacket off," he said. T'Pau moved to cradle Constance's head as Soval removed the jacket as gently as he could, but it did not stop Constance from groaning in pain. T'Pau glanced at Soval.

"She looks badly injured," she said. The white shirt she was wearing was stained bright red, but Soval could see that it was not uniform. It seemed to be originating from her one of her arms. He ripped the shirt back from her shoulder to inspect the injury. Her skin was paler than usual and when he made skin contact he immediately was struck by her emotions. There was overwhelming fear, but it was dissipating, followed by pain, relief in seeing Soval, and then overriding exhaustion.

"The injury appears to be contained to her shoulder, but she's lost a lot of blood" he said. He took off his robe and began shredding it apart to create a makeshift bandage. He mind briefly flickered to the memory of Admiral Forrest when he lay bleeding out before him. Soval suppressed the memory and began wrapping her shoulder. When the makeshift bandage was secured he positioned his arms under her and lifted her gingerly. Constance winced through her teeth, and Soval could feel her pain flare through the bond.

"We need to take her to one of their… healing centers," said T'Pau walking quickly to keep up.

"It's called a hospital," he spat. He climbed into the hover and instructed Vosik to head in the direction of the San Francisco Medical Center. Once they were securely in the hover Vosik began driving, but as they headed further into the city they encountered heavy traffic. Uniformed police officers were directing hovers to an alternate route. They began noticing that more people lined the streets. Several were chanting about a coalition. It was hard to tell if they were for or against it.
"What is going on?" T'Pau asked looking around.

"It looks like some sort of gathering. It appears to be in reference to the conference tomorrow," he said. Soval looked down at Constance. "She's not going to make it to the hospital under these conditions. It will be quicker to return to the Consulate. Vosik, change course," he said.

"Soval," T'Pau said his name in caution. Vosik looked in the mirror briefly before turning the hover around.

"The healers there have a proto-type re-generator," he continued.

"The Humans don't have that type of technology yet. To expose them to it would be highly inappropriate and unwise–"

"Then what do you suppose we do? Wait for her to bleed out further and then deliver her to one of their sub-par medical facilities where it will be too late?"

"We should not interfere," she interjected.

"I see that you are adopting the same policy as that of the High Command," he said. T'Pau shifted uncomfortably. Soval could see he struck a nerve. "Does not Surak teach us that all life is precious? You've seen the Kir'Shara. Besides, we have already interfered," he said. T'Pau pressed her lips together and remained silent. Soval looked down at Constance. She stirred and opened her eyes. For a moment a look of surprise crossed her features and she began moving in an effort to sit up.

"Starfleet– loose ends–," she murmured. There was a slight slur to her words before she lost consciousness again. It seemed that the blood loss was starting to affect her cognition. Soval's concern was building. A hint of a frown crossed T'Pau's features as she glanced at Constance and then at Soval.

"To what do you think she was referring?" T'Pau asked.

"I'm not sure, however I will contact Starfleet as soon as we arrive at the Consulate," he said. T'Pau pressed her lips together. Within ten minutes Vosik pulled up to the compound. It was nearly midnight, and thankfully most of the inhabitants were likely asleep. T'Pau and Soval climbed out of the hover and into the darkness. Soval transferred Constance to T'Pau's arms before issuing an order to Vosik.

"Vosik, go with T'Pau, wake one of the healers. I need to contact Admiral Gardner and Admiral Washington," he said. Just as he turned to leave in the opposite direction something caught his hand. It was Constance. Her fingers entwined in his for a moment.

"Soval… I–," she murmured before her hand dropped and her head rolled back against T'Pau. Constance did not finish the sentence, but Soval knew what she was going to say. He had felt her thoughts when she had touched his hand, and he realized he could not lose her. T'Pau quietly witnessed the exchange, but said nothing.

"I will take her to the Healer now," said T'Pau. Soval nodded.

"I will return once I speak with Starfleet," Soval said. T'Pau nodded as Vosik led her through the door. Soval watched as the three of them disappeared inside before he turned to head toward his office.
Convergence

Once Soval was ensconced in his office he saw that T'Pau had already messaged him on his PADD. Apparently, Constance's condition, though serious, was stabilizing and the healer was already using the proto-type re-generator which seemed to be proving effective. Soval felt some of the apprehension that had gripped him beginning to dissipate, so he immediately set himself to the task at hand and called Admiral Gardner. There was none of the rapport Soval had shared with Admiral Forrest, but their working relationship had been adequate up until now. Admiral Gardner picked up almost immediately.

"Ambassador, I apologize, I can't talk right now. I'm in the middle of a situation—"

"Officer Corcoran is at the Consulate," Soval said evenly.

"Wait. What? Let me call you back over a secure connection," he said as he abruptly closed the transmission. Soval observed that 17.6 seconds passed before he received an incoming transmission from Admiral Gardner on his console. He accepted the transmission and Admiral Gardner's face appeared onscreen. He looked quite agitated.

"Ambassador, I need an explanation as to how Officer Corcoran ended up at the Vulcan Consulate," he demanded waiting for an answer. Soval narrowed his eyes.

"And I would like an explanation as to how an SI Officer ended up shot and bleeding out on the streets of San Francisco in the middle of the night," he said sharply. Admiral Gardner frowned.

"That information is need-to-know, Ambassador," replied Admiral Gardner mechanically. Soval briefly wondered why four years ago he had pushed so hard for Gardner's appointment as Captain of the Enterprise over Jonathan Archer when he was so clearly seemed inadequate now.

"I see. This would not have anything to do with Terra Prime would it? Especially in light of the upcoming conference tomorrow in regards to the discussion of forming a coalition of planets? I am starting to lose faith in Starfleet's ability to protect foreign and interstellar entities in light of that fact that they cannot seem to ensure the protection their own officers," he said. Admiral Gardner swallowed uncomfortably before he finally relented.

"Alright, alright. I get it. I'll explain everything, but first you have to tell me if Officer Corcoran is okay? What is her condition?"

"She was shot. In the shoulder. She lost a lot of blood, but her condition has stabilized. She should recover," he said.

"This unbelievable," said Admiral Gardner as he shook his head while rubbing his temples. "It's quite the coincidence that you seemed to be in the right place at the right time, but thank God that you were."

"Indeed," Soval said flatly, knowing full well there was no coincidence; however Starfleet did not need to be apprised of that detail.

"Well, this is shit show," said Gardner sighing. Soval concealed a frown as Gardner continued. "What I am about to tell you is confidential. It does involve Terra Prime. We had an opportunity to undermine their organization so, of course, we jumped at the chance. What we did not realize was that the intel was bad and it cost lives," he said. He shook his head before continuing.
"We were so wrapped up in the possibility of finally bringing Terra Prime to their knees. Admiral Washington insisted that such an opportunity was unlikely to occur again. So he sent Officer Corcoran out into the field. It was supposed to be routine. She had a support team, but they were ambushed. Two other officers were killed. We thought she had been taken hostage…” he said looking stricken.

Soval took a deep breath. It was disturbing to him how close Constance came to being killed, and it infuriated him at how recklessly Admiral Washington handled the lives of his officers. He should be relieved of command, and if the Vulcan High Command was still in place he would have been.

"Needless to say, Admiral Washington has been placed on administrative leave, pending an investigation," Gardner said as though he read Soval thoughts. It was something at least.

"Tomorrow is the conference. How can you assure the safety of those in attendance?" Soval asked.

"We have taken every precaution. We are monitoring all satellites in orbit as well ramping up security by threefold. I assure you that we have it under control despite this minor setback," he said. Apparently an injured officer and two dead ones was a minor setback. Soval did not want to know what was required to happen for it to be deemed major.

"You will forward the security protocols for this event to the Consulate immediately for our security officers to evaluate given the circumstances. If they do not appear adequate we will respond appropriately and abstain from attending the duration of the conference," Soval stated.

"Of course, that is quite reasonable. I'll forward them over immediately. And I'll go ahead and send Starfleet Medical personnel to retrieve Officer Corcoran," he said.

"That won't be necessary. We believe she should not be moved in her present condition, and we would prefer to monitor her progress over the next day or two before we release her. In the meantime we will send you a comprehensive report on her condition and progress," Soval said sternly. Admiral Gardner looked as though he was going to protest, but thought the better of it when he saw how serious Soval looked. He only pressed his lips together before nodding briefly.

"Alright, Ambassador, I will forward those security protocols to you then," he said.

"Yes. You will," said Soval before closing out the transmission. He sat back in his chair. It was almost one in the morning. He was mentally drained. Standing, he left for his quarters. He needed mediate.

Constance sat up abruptly and immediately wished she had not. Her shoulder was killing her and she winced as it began throbbing. Looking around she saw that she was in a bright room, minimal in its décor, lying in a bed that was actually quite comfortable despite the pain in her shoulder. Where was she? Looking down at herself she saw that she was dressed in unfamiliar clothing that was rendered in a fabric that was also unfamiliar. She was wearing a lightweight scoop neck tunic and loose matching pants. They looked Vulcan in design. She touched her shoulder. It was heavily bandaged. Peering further down into the tunic she saw that she was not wearing a bra. Her hands instinctively moved to her hips, and then she realized that she was not wearing any underwear either for that matter.

Just then the door to the room opened, and a young Vulcan woman walked in. Constance frowned.

"You should be lying down," said the woman.

"Who are you?"
"My name is T'Pau. Must I repeat myself?" She moved to sit down in the chair that was next to Constance's bed.

"I'm actually feeling alright," Constance lied, as she propped herself up against a pillow. T'Pau raised an eyebrow, but did not protest further. Constance realized she was being stubborn, but she wanted answers. And that desire outweighed the pain she was feeling.

"Where am I?"

"You are at the Vulcan Consulate. You were shot in the shoulder. You lost a lot of blood. Our healers have seen to your injury," T'Pau said evenly. Her delivery was rather blunt, but Constance was used to the way Vulcans who spent little time around Humans spoke. Constance instantly remembered the previous night, and her assignment. She had thought she was going to die. She crossed her arms instinctively as she suppressed a shiver.

"Who undressed me?" She asked looking down.

"I did. The healer needed access to the injury," she said. Constance glanced at her shoulder. Although it was bandaged and the tunic covered most of it, both did nothing to hide the fading yellow mark that was clearly a remnant of the night when Soval had bitten her. She pulled the neck of the tunic higher as T'Pau's eyes impassively flicked to the mark and then back to her. Constance realized that T'Pau may know far more than she was letting on. Constance felt her face color as she changed the subject.

"I'm sorry if I have a lot of questions," she said avoiding T'Pau's penetrating gaze. "I just want to know what happened. How did I end up here?"

"Ambassador Soval knew where to find you," said T'Pau. She continued to stare at her intently. Soval must have figured out something was wrong through the bond much like she had known something had happened to him after the events that had followed the embassy bombing.

"Then you know," said Constance returning her stare.

"If you are referring to your bond then, yes," she said evenly. Constance swallowed, but she remained resolute. She was not going to be ashamed by what she felt was completely natural.

"I assume you have been sent to perform the ritual to sever it then," she said. She could not conceal the disdain that leaked into her voice as she busied herself with arranging the sheets around her waist in the bed. Though she had resolved to accept the situation she did not have to be happy about it.

"Yes," she said. Constance pressed her lips together, however T'Pau continued. "However, I am no longer certain the situation requires such a drastic action." Constance looked up quickly. T'Pau continued to look impassive. Her heart leapt in her throat. She could almost hug the woman, but refrained from doing so as she doubted T'Pau would continue to feel the same after such an emotional display. Instead she only nodded calmly. T'Pau moved to stand.

"I will leave you now to rest. I was instructed to tell you Ambassador Soval will be by to check in on you after the conference," she said.

"Thank you," said Constance as she moved to lie down again. She smiled to herself as she closed her eyes. The pain in her shoulder seemed almost a non-existent. T'Pau glanced at her for a moment before she quietly swept out of the room.

Later that afternoon, after the conference had concluded, Soval made his way to the guest quarters at
the Consulate where Constance was recovering. T'Pau had kept him apprised of her condition, which had improved, however he still felt illogically distracted during the conference. When he returned to the Consulate he found he could no longer refrain from seeing her and opted to check in on her before meditating.

When he arrived at the door T'Pau discreetly left her post outside of it with a mention that she desired to get a cup of tea. Soval nodded as she left, grateful to her for the privacy, and pressed the button to open the door. It slide open and Constance stirred when she heard the sound. She sat up gingerly, her eyes focused on him as he walked toward her. He could feel her barely contained elation through the bond, and it took him only three paces to cross the room. Instinctively, he raised his index and middle fingers of his right hand out to her, and without a thought she copied the gesture. They touched their fingers together in ozh'esta. He instantly felt her contentment, immediately followed by intense desire, arousal, and need. Her emotions slammed into him, and she curled her fingers around his as she pulled him closer and he realized the simple touch was not enough.

As she pressed her lips against his and he found himself responding with equal fervor. He leaned in closer pushing himself against her. He opened his mouth to kiss her more deeply letting his teeth graze her bottom lip. He pulled back for a moment pausing to look down at her. He was careful to avoid her bandaged arm and his eyes continued to move further up her shoulder until they rested on a familiar fading bruise. Though it had all but disappeared she still wore his mark. He felt a primal desire unfurl deep inside of him at the sight and all the passion and possessiveness of that night briefly returned as he pulled her into another kiss. His mouth moved insistently against hers as he gave himself over to his baser impulses. He ran his hand slowly down her side, over the thin fabric of her tunic, pausing at the swell of her breast before resting it on the curve of her hip. He was vaguely aware there was very little clothing between them as he pulled her closer feeling her chest brush lightly against his. He felt his control teetering and after a moment he broke apart from her breathing hard as he was brought back to reality.

He moved to position himself so he was sitting next to her on the bed and she rested her head against his shoulder. He could feel her contentment thrum quietly from the bond as they sat together in comfortable silence for a moment. Finally, she spoke.

"This means something. The bond we share. It's... different," she said as she looked up at him. "I don't think this is something everyone gets to experience in their lifetime. We can't just throw it away," she said softly as she interlaced her fingers in his.

"I quite agree," he said quietly, watching her complete the human gesture of handing hands finding the act not at all unpleasant, however far too erotic to ever be permitted in public.

"I think that might be a first," she said as she flashed him a smile before resting her head back on his shoulder.

He moved to rest his chin on her head as he breathed in her scent. She was right. What they shared was deeper than anything he had ever experienced. And the experience of almost losing her made him realize how precious their connection was. They would find a logical way to make this work and though he was not sure how yet, he was content for the moment.

"T'Pau said that you went to attend a conference today," she said changing the subject.

"Yes, it was regarding the formation of a coalition of planets," he said.

"Did it go over well?"

"There was more interest in such a possibility than there had been in the past." Constance raised her
"That seems like good news. More steps in the right direction toward peace and acceptance. But the support for Terra Prime still scares me," she said. "It's as though we've taken one step forward and two steps back. T'Pau filled me in on most of what happened last night. Do you know if they've apprehended anyone yet?"

"Not that I am aware, but the Vulcan Consulate has been working with Starfleet. Security has been increased in light of the recent events," he said. Constance nodded. Through their contact he could feel her thoughts flicker to the previous night and the two other officers. He could feel her sadness through the bond.

"It's illogical to think that any of this was your fault," he said replying to her unspoken thoughts.

"I know, but--" She sighed. Soval could feel her exhaustion. It was starting to affect her emotions, and he knew she needed rest. He moved to stand up gently letting go of her hand.

"I need to meditate, and prepare for tomorrow. And you need to rest. The second day of the conference is to resume in the morning," he said.

"Yeah, that's probably a good idea," she said, wincing a little as she repositioned herself.

"I'll call for a Healer for the pain when I leave," he said as he gently pressed his lips against her forehead.

"No, no I'm fine, Soval," she said. She was so stubborn. _Were all Humans prone to this degree of willfulness?_ He wondered. It was becoming strangely endearing, and he eventually acquiesced to her illogical reassurances. Slowly, he made his way to the door. As he left he turned to look at her one last time before finally embracing the contentment he felt.

The next morning T'Pau arrived to find Constance out of bed and walking around the room. She had turned on the console on the opposite wall and was watching the local news. It was nearly all T'Pau could do to suppress a frown.

"What are you doing?" She asked as she set the tray that she was carrying down on the table by the bed.

"Good Morning T'Pau," said Constance brightly ignoring her question. She eyed the tray T'Pau had brought.

"You should still be in bed in resting," she said.

"I'm feeling much better. That re-generator thing really works won-- Wait, did you bring a cheeseburger and fries? For breakfast?" Constance bit her lip in an effort to keep from laughing.

"Yes, I ordered it from the replicator. I was told it was a comfort food among Humans with an adequate amount of protein which you will need for recovery," she said.

"Umm… we don't usually… Never mind," she said. She knew Vulcans were vegetarians so at least T'Pau had been kind enough to order something familiar for Constance that no doubt repulsed her. Constance saw that there was also coffee so at least she gotten something right. But when she took a sip she immediately set the cup back down. _Maybe not_, she thought. She grabbed a fry instead forgetting to use a fork and watched as T'Pau's eyes widened. Constance set it back down.
"Sorry," she said as she wiped her fingers on a napkin. Just as she picked up a fork she heard static coming from the console. Both Constance and T'Pau looked up at the screen. Suddenly, what appeared to be a live feed featuring rather cute infant appeared with a caption, Terra Prime, and the sound of a deep male voice stating: "Do not be deceived. This is no ordinary innocent child…" Constance's mouth gaped open when she saw the caption, and she dropped the fork she was holding on the floor as she stood, her eyes fixed on the screen.

Her stomach lurched as she stared at the child. It had distinctly pointed ears, but it also looked eerily human, especially around the eyes which were large and round and featured down swept eyebrows. It wasn't possible, she thought. The voice confirmed her suspicion stating that the child was a hybrid. It was clearly the offspring of a Vulcan and a Human.

"What is this?" she murmured as she stepped closer to the console. T'Pau also stood transfixed. The voice narrating continued, stating: "Terra Prime is dedicated to the protection of life in all its diversity… For the next twenty-four hours we will guarantee safe passage to all aliens leaving the Sol System."

Suddenly a man's face appeared. It appeared to belong to the voice as he continued his threatening message. "Terra Prime will defend the sovereignty of every single human being. And we will begin by destroying the institution whose blind arrogance and moral cowardice put us all at risk - Starfleet Command." The screen zoomed in on a photo of a building. It was Starfleet Headquarters in San Francisco.

Constance immediately moved to the door. T'Pau followed her.

"Where are you going?"

"I need to see Soval," she said. T'Pau moved to stand between her and the door.

"You are in no condition to leave. Besides the Ambassador already left for the conference early this morning," she said. "I'm sure he is fine," she stated after she observed the look on Constance's face. T'Pau was right.

"What do you suppose we do then?" Constance began pacing uncomfortably.

"Wait here. I need to contact the rest of the High Council on Vulcan. Then we can make an informed decision," she said. Constance nodded reluctantly. T'Pau turned to leave. Constance sat down on the edge of the bed as T'Pau disappeared. She glanced back at the screen, the image of the infant burned in her mind.
Terror Prime

Soval stared at the infant on screen with roused curiosity as he heard the muffled gasps and the murmuring of those around him. He straightened in his seat. The infant clearly had the pointed ears of a Vulcan, however the eyes were so... Human. As they continued to watch the screen the message confirmed that very fact. The possibility of offspring between a Human and a Vulcan seemed so out of the realm of feasibility that only a year ago Soval would have thought the odds of time travel more probable. It was shocking however, but it was not the most disturbing piece of the message.

Terra Prime and their leader, John Paxton, were demanding that that all aliens not only leave Earth, but the entire Sol System. And they were giving them a deadline of twenty-four hours to evacuate or else they would proceed with their heinous objective which was to destroy Starfleet HQ in San Francisco. He could not think of a more unreasonable timetable, but Terra Prime was no longer lurking in the shadows and this was not a veiled threat.

Soon the ringing of communicators echoed throughout the room. Soval's own communicator pinged at the same moment and he got up from his seat to take the communication in the hallway. It was his aide, Vosik, who had remained in Sausalito at the Consulate.

"Ambassador, we just received a vid com transmission--"

"Yes, I have seen it as well. It is disturbing to say the least," said Soval.

"Ambassador, there are protestors outside the walls of the Consulate," Vosik informed him.

"Are the gates secure and everyone inside?"

"Yes, Sir," said Vosik. Soval closed his eyes for a moment, thinking.

"I am officially issuing the order for emergency evacuation. I will alert the High Council. We will need them re-route several D'Kyr ships to Earth for the evacuation of all Vulcans out of San Francisco as well as Berlin. Contact Tos, and alert him of the evacuation order," Soval said. Tos, his former aide, was Chargé d'affaires for the Vulcan Consulate in Berlin as Soval was the official Ambassador to all of United Earth.

"Yes, Ambassador, but what about the Human female? She still remains at the Consulate." Human female, as if that was all she was. Vosik was referring to Constance. Soval was starting to get quite tired of Vosik. After this situation was resolved he planned on placing a request that Vosik to get reassigned to another post. Perhaps the Vulcan Embassy on Andoria would be more appropriate, he thought.

"I will be returning to the Consulate. She will be evacuated as well," he said. Vosik was silent for a moment.

"Yes, Ambassador," he said.

"You have your orders now, Vosik. You are to ensure that Minister T'Pau is aware of the evacuation order as well," said Soval as he closed out the transmission. He immediately called Minister Kuvak on Vulcan to alert him and the rest of the High Council of what had transpired. Minister Kuvak assured him that one D'Kyr ship which was already headed for Earth was five hours away and would be directed enter orbit above Sausalito. The other was being re-routed from its current destination and could arrive in Earth's orbit in eleven hours. They would be cutting it close, however
he would make sure everyone was safely evacuated – he had to. However, he was not going to leave Constance behind. That much was certain.

When he returned to the delegation he saw that it was growing tumultuous as emotions were running high. The Andorian Ambassador Thoris and his aide were especially riled. Nathan Samuels, the Earth government official who had pushed so desperately for the formation of a coalition, was trying to calm them.

"They are using words that aren't even in the universal translator!" Thoris was telling Nathan Samuels as he held his communicator up for Samuels to hear. Soval could discern the indignant chanting of Human protestors. Ambassador Thoris glanced at Soval, his antennae tense and straight.

"Earth-men talk of peace, however they can't seem to unify their own people," he said, his blue skin flushing a darker shade as he stormed off. A cowed Samuels glanced at Soval before moving on. Soval was not surprised, and in the moment found himself in agreement with the Andorian Ambassador.

Soval moved to rejoin the rest of the Vulcan representatives. They were waiting for the hovers to arrive so they could return to the Consulate. When the hovers pulled up they began heading for the exit doors. Soval glanced back up at the monitor one last time. It was frozen on the image of the child.

"What's happening?" Constance asked when she saw T'Pau return. T'Pau was carrying some clothes which she set on the bed before speaking.

"The Ambassador just issued an evacuation order. It is, no doubt, a precaution, however this is very serious," said T'Pau.

"I need to contact Admiral Gardner," said Constance as she began picking up the clothing that T'Pau brought. The jeans from the other night were among the clothes in the pile, evidently washed, and there was also a formfitting shirt of Vulcan design. No doubt her white tee-shirt she had been wearing was beyond saving after being soaked in blood and thoroughly shredded.

She was just about to ask T'Pau for privacy, but thought the better of it. She had waited what seemed ages for T'Pau to return so she was not about to send her away now. Without a second thought she began to immediately strip off thin tunic she was wearing. There was no time for modesty. No doubt they had all the same parts or at least similar enough. She winced as she brought the tunic over her bandaged shoulder. T'Pau moved to help her remove it while she continued.

"We should wait for the Ambassador to return," said T'Pau. "And it is unsafe to leave as there are protestors at the main gate." Constance looked out the window as she tugged on the fresh shirt. In the distance she could see a throng of people shouting and waving angrily on the other side of the wall by the main entrance.

"Where the hell did they come from? And why are they protesting? Paxton promised a twenty-four hour window," Constance said, as she began closing the shades to the window. Fucking idiots, she thought. She slipped out of the loose pants and slid on a pair of underwear before shimmying into the jeans.

"I'm not sure. But I need to leave and assist with the evacuation," T'Pau said as she turned to leave. Constance sat down on the edge of the bed as she slid her ankle boots on.

"Wait, I'm coming with you. Let me help you at least," she said. Constance finished zipping the
boots before jumping up to follow T'Pau.

"You are in no condition--," 

"I wasn't asking permission. And, I'm not completely crippled," she said. "See?" She shrugged her shoulder slightly as proof of her recovery suppressing a stab of pain that shot up her arm which she tried to hide. It was still painful, but she was determined not to be stuck in that room any longer. T'Pau looked at her for a moment.

"Very well. Just stay close. I will direct you on where you can be off assistance," said T'Pau looking slightly unconvinced by Constance's show of good health. Perhaps she realized it would be of little use to argue with her. Constance gave her a small smile and nodded in thanks before moving to follow her out the door.

Soval was in a hover on the way back to the Consulate with along with the other representatives. He had just got off a call with Admiral Gardner who informed him that Captain Archer and the Enterprise were planning to disarm the array on Mars. Once again it seemed that everything was riding on the success of Enterprise. However, if they were unsuccessful there would be little left to return to in San Francisco if Paxton was a man of his word.

Soval also learned that the infant, the hybrid child, was a biological match to Commander Tucker and T'Pol. He closed his eyes and rubbed the bridge of his nose digesting the information. He still could barely believe his ears. It appeared that even though it took some medical intervention, it was clear that the fact this child existed proved there were more similarities than differences between Vulcan and Human physiology.

He briefly wondered how Commander Tucker and T'Pol were handling this revelation, but he had little time to think about it. Even if Starfleet was successful in stopping Paxton and his xenophobic mission he still had to take every precaution in the event they were not. If Terra Prime fired their weapon from the array on Mars it would not only take out all of Starfleet HQ, but very nearly half the city. It was imperative that they begin evacuating the Consulate immediately.

As the hover pulled up the Compound, Soval could see protestors standing in front of the main gate as the pulled closer. The hover stopped and waited for the gate to open. A few of the protestors took to pounding on the front of the hood and the windows, but they quickly moved back as the hover continued slowly through the main entrance.

Soval saw that there were several shuttles awaiting transport to the launch bay which would then take them to the D'Kyr ships once they arrived. T'Pau was standing outside the Administrative building directing Consulate staff to the line of shuttles. Once the hover came to a halt Soval stepped out and immediately went to T'Pau.

"Minister, I see that you are making quick progress of the evacuation," he said, looking around.

"Yes, almost everyone is has been evacuated. Two shuttles have already left for the launch bay," she said as she directed more of the staff to the next shuttle in line.

"Where is Officer Corcoran?"

"She's inside clearing the rooms making sure everyone has been accounted for. I did not think it was a good idea for her to be seen outside with the protestors at the main gate," she said. They both glanced at the main entrance where the distant chanting could still be heard. Soval thought about Constance and knew that she should have been recovering, however it seemed little could stop her
"That was logical. However, she will be coming with us. It is clear that Terra Prime has operatives within Starfleet. Until they are apprehended it would be best that she remain with us," he said.

"I agree. However, I caution you. This is to remain discreet. As far as Terra Prime is concerned they believe that they killed the operative that Officer Corcoran impersonated. We don't need them to know that they failed and that Officer Corcoran is, in fact, very much alive," said T'Pau. Soval pressed his lips together. T'Pau glanced around making sure that there was no one close enough to hear their conversation.

"I will make sure she is not seen. We need to be ready to leave soon. I received a communication that the Hana'Sek will be in orbit an hour earlier than previously estimated," he said. T'Pau raised an eyebrow and nodded as Soval left her and headed for the Administrative building.

Constance was busy clearing the rooms as she made her way to the front of the building. It was a trivial occupation as it seemed that the Vulcans were good at following directions. When it had been announced that they would be evacuating, they all began to calmly move in an orderly fashion toward the exit doors. Constance was almost certain that she was unlikely to find any stragglers, and suspected T'Pau only gave her the job to keep her from being seen outside. But at this point Constance was just glad to be doing something.

She continued to make her way down the corridor. The rooms were all empty, and she shut the lights off in each room once she confirmed that they were cleared. As the last of the staff made their way outside, the building grew very silent. She found it to be rather creepy in an apocalyptic sort of way. Desks and chairs sat empty as she passed by, and a part of her was almost waiting for something to pop out at her from one of the darkened recesses.

When she finally finished and reached the front lobby she saw Soval walking in at the same time. Though his expression appeared neutral he seemed relieved to find her. When he reached her he briefly brushed fingertips with her before directing her toward the doors.

"We need to leave now," he said, sharply.

"Where are we going?"

"We are evacuating to the D'Kyr Hana'Sek that will soon be in orbit. Then we are leaving for Vulcan until this situation is resolved," he said. Constance stopped.

"I need to return to Starfleet. I need to contact Admiral Gardner," she said.

"I understand your reasons for wanting to stay, however you can contact the Admiral once we are aboard the Hana'Sek. As your mate I cannot allow you to stay here or return to Starfleet. It is too dangerous," he said. Constance was quiet. "This is only temporary," he added. Constance finally nodded in acceptance, but it did not stop how she felt. She felt as though they were running away, and Terra Prime was getting exactly what they wanted.

"I just hate feeling so damn helpless," she said.

"You are far from that I assure you. And if eases your mind, it would be helpful to me to know that you are safe," he said. Constance glanced up at Soval before grabbing his hand and squeezing it tightly. He gave it a gentle squeeze back before letting go.

"We will also need to keep our relationship discreet while we are aboard," he said glancing at her.
"So you are saying I'd better do this while I still have the chance," she said, as she reached up and drew his mouth to hers. She could tell he was taken by surprise from the bond, and she closed her eyes for a moment as she felt him acquiesce briefly. As she broke away she was determined to savor the memory knowing it would likely be sometime before they would be doing that again.

"That was not what I was inferring, but, yes – essentially," he said straightening and regaining composure. She smiled a little, shaking her head.

"Alright, then," she said lightly, but as they headed for the doors her thoughts grew grim. She could see that there were still protestors at the front gates. How did it come to this? Soval glanced at her no doubt feeling her apprehension.

"Let us hope that Enterprise is successful," he said.
Constance was wearing one of Soval's ambassadorial robes in an effort to disguise her identity from the protestors outside the main gates of the Compound. She followed quickly behind Soval down the steps of the Administrative building where they headed toward the last shuttle where T'Pau was standing. The light outside was starting to fade as it crept later into the afternoon. Constance could still hear the protestors chanting. *Did they never relent?*  

"Is everyone accounted for?" Soval asked, looking at T'Pau.  

"Yes, however I have to inform you that the first shuttles that left are encountering a pattern of heavy traffic. They aren't aware of what is causing it," said T'Pau. T'Pau appeared in control; however her voice had a strange quality about it. She almost sounded nervous. Constance glanced at Soval.  

"Can I see your communicator?" He raised an eyebrow before nodding as he reached into his robes. "I know the number to Admiral Gardner's direct line. Let me see if I can get through to him and at least see what is going on," Constance said. He reluctantly handed her the communicator and she entered the transmission code. Gardner picked up almost immediately.  

"Hello– Who is this?" The Admiral did not give his personal line out to just anyone.  

"Admiral, it's Corcoran, don't hang up," she added quickly.  

"Officer Corcoran. Where are you? Have you left the Consulate?" He sounded rather rushed.  

"No, I'm still here," she said frowning to herself. She looked over at Soval and T'Pau before turning away to speak. "Ambassador Soval and the Vulcans are trying to evacuate the Consulate before the deadline, but some of the shuttles have run into some heavy traffic," she said. She could hear Admiral Gardner breath heavily through the transmission.  

"Then you haven't heard. Okay, you need to leave now. Paxton's message has panicked the city. He's targeting Starfleet Headquarters, but there's no doubt that the array would take out half the city in the process," he said. Constance's mouth went dry. "The mayor of San Francisco has just declared a state of emergency. Everyone has been ordered to evacuate the city limits. Traffic out of the city is becoming a nightmare," he said.  

"Oh my god," she whispered. Constance's heart sunk. The city of San Francisco had a population of a little over one and a half million people. If the array took out even half that amount that would mean that hundreds of thousands of lives hung in the balance. Constance swallowed thickly. "What do you suggest we do?"  

"Leave now. Head for the launch bay. Traffic is not as bad heading into the city. You might still have a chance if you leave now," he said.  

"Understood, Admiral– I'll be in touch," she said not knowing if that would be true, but she was not going to think of the alternative.  

"Good luck," he said. Constance closed out the transmission and looked at Soval. He and T'Pau had heard the entire conversation.  

"Well, we should get in then," said T'Pau climbing into the shiny, black shuttle. Soval helped Constance in before following behind her, and indicating to the driver to go ahead and leave.
The three of them were the only ones in shuttle save for the driver. Everyone else, including Vosik, had left in the other shuttles only minutes before them and were headed toward the launch bay to depart for the Vulcan ships and leave before Paxton's deadline. Since there was no one aboard to disapprove, except perhaps T'Pau who no longer seemed quite so uncertain about the idea of a relationship between a Vulcan and a Human, Constance opted to sit next to Soval.

Their legs pressed against each other as she felt the shuttle move. She watched out the window as they slowly passed the throng of protestors and headed toward Route 101. The three of the sat silently as the shuttle pulled onto the highway only to come to a near crawl as hundreds of hovers had crowded on in an effort to escape. Constance swallowed. If this was the traffic into the city she did not want to know what it looked like leaving it.

During the journey, Ambassador Soval took several calls from Minister Kuvak. They had barely moved as the time passed, and they had missed the shuttle departing for the Hana'Sek. Luckily, there was still another scheduled for a later departure to the second D'Kyr that was to arrive in orbit. However, they did not have much time.

Hours seemed to stretch by, and it was still as though they were getting nowhere. Constance had quit looking at her watch a while back after the second hour had passed and by now she had no doubt that several more had elapsed given how sore she had become from sitting. But now the shuttle was very nearly stopped and they were only halfway across the Golden Gate Bridge. Constance felt her apprehension intensify as it dawned on her for the first time that they might not actually make it out in time.

It was quite overcast and the sun had just set behind the clouds casting an odd light on the sky. The thick gray, billowy masses blanketed the sky and she felt as though the somber panorama was threatening to swallow her whole. Before she knew it she felt herself starting to shake, uncontrollably. Soval instantly reached for her hand and she felt the familiar electrical current run up her arm. He held it tightly. She could feel from the bond that he was projecting feelings of calm and tranquility to her, and she looked up at him her eyes searching his. She could almost see the concern that he was masking, and she could tell from the bond that he was trying to spare her worry.

They were finally nearing Starfleet Headquarters, but the Starfleet Launch Bay was located near the San Francisco Airport a bit further south – which, under normal conditions, was a twenty minute drive at most – but at the rate they were going they were not going to make it even halfway there before Paxton's deadline was up. They had a better chance walking, but even then, no doubt, the shuttle would be long gone. It appeared they truly were relying on Enterprise to pull through, but by now the prospect seemed all the more grim.

Suddenly, Soval let go of her hand to get up and walk to the front of the shuttle to speak to the driver. Constance turned to watch as he whispered something that she could not hear. Constance looked over at T'Pau who had raised an eyebrow. Evidently, she had heard what he said with her superior hearing. Suddenly, without warning, the shuttle got off the highway and onto Lincoln Boulevard passing Starfleet Headquarters. Constance frowned.

"Wait, where are we going?" She looked at Soval who instead began speaking to T'Pau in Vulcan. She had never heard Soval speak Vulcan. Constance had a limited understanding of the language from school, but Soval was speaking rather fast – too fast. He apparently did not want her to know what he was saying. Constance strained to keep up with the conversation only picking up a few words here and there, but not enough to string together whatever it was they might be discussing.

Constance continued to frown as she watched them both. T'Pau's face was neutral, but it appeared she was deep in thought. Finally, they both stopped speaking and T'Pau nodded. Soval looked at
"We are not going to make it to the Launch Bay in time to depart on the second shuttle. It appears that we are not going to be able to leave the Sol System before Paxton's deadline," he said reverting to English. Constance figured as much as they were no longer headed in that direction, but she still could not believe that this was happening and found it strange that the two of them seemed to be taking this rather calmly.

"So, what are we doing? Just giving up?" Constance stared at Soval as T'Pau interjected.

"No, however the only logical course left is to wait. There is little else for us to do. We can't be transported out of the area, and there is no time to left to leave the city," said T'Pau. Constance shook her head in disbelief. They were in dire straits.

"However, there is something I desire to do regardless if this ends unfavorably or not, and there's not much time," said Soval looking at Constance.

"And what is that?"

"I wish to declare koon-ut-so'lik – I want to marry you."

After some discussion, the three of them, two Vulcans and one Human, headed out along the path toward the ocean. The sun had set hours ago and they walked along the path in the moonlight. Constance could smell the salty sea air as it whipped at the grass that lined the narrow walk. The ocean looked black in the moonlight and it roared as frothy, white waves crashing ferociously on the rocks. Despite the circumstances it was all rather beautiful. They were at Land's End, an ocean-side park near Starfleet Headquarters along the coast. Constance remembered her father taking her there as a child and walking along Mile Rock Beach. She had no idea then that one day she would return on the eve of the possible annihilation of San Francisco to marry a Vulcan.

The wind was especially strong and Constance's hair whipped around her face as they stopped at a vista overlooking the ocean. Soval reached a hand up to gently push a particularly wayward strand behind her ear. She could just make out the Golden Gate Bridge in the distance. It was lit with lights that twinkled in the darkness. She still could not believe that she had agreed to this – not that it was not what she wanted – but she had never thought it would be this soon. However, now standing at the precipice of what might be the end of her life it seemed only right to spend the last few moments married to the man she loved.

"Are you sure you want to do this? I mean I don't even know how old you are," she said. It seemed silly to think about considering they were very likely to die before Enterprise had a chance to stop Paxton from carrying out his threat. Soval raised an eyebrow.

"I'm one hundred and twenty-four standard years," he said. Constance raised her eyebrows and gave him a crooked smile. She had not been expecting that, but it really did not matter. However, a moment later her face fell.

"But that would mean that you are still more than likely to outlive me – that is assuming that we make it through this. Humans only live to about a hundred and that's if we are lucky. Wouldn't that bother you?" She asked looking up at him expectantly.

"No, any time with you I am afforded must be sufficient and I want the time I have left to be spend with you as my wife. Nothing is promised in life as you know," he said looking down at her. His words were both succinct and a bit haunting, but they touched her. She closed her eyes briefly as she
pressed her cheek into his shoulder leaning against him, both of them looking out at dark ocean. T'Pau finally spoke after a moment.

"We don't have a lot of time," she said as she moved to stand in front of them. Constance was not sure what time it was, but she guessed that it had to be close to the early hours of the morning. She glanced over at T'Pau. She was going to preside over the ceremony. It was a little unconventional as these rituals usually occurred on Vulcan at a place chosen by the bride's family. However, they were not on Vulcan. They were on Earth by the ocean in the moonlight and it was beautiful. It would have to do. T'Pau indicated that Constance should stand by her right and Soval stand by her left. Once they were situated T'Pau spoke again. "You may now kneel down," said T'Pau. Constance glanced at Soval and watched as he moved to knee, and she quickly followed suit.

Soval's eyes never left hers as he lifted his hand extending his index and middle fingers to her, and Constance copied the gesture touching her fingers gently against his. A gentle tingling sensation emanated from where their fingers touched. She smiled at Soval as T'Pau began to speak.

"This is the Vulcan Heart. This is the Vulcan Soul. This is our way…" T'Pau's strong voice carried on the wind as Constance felt a shiver down her spine. Soval's expression was neutral; however she could feel from the bond how much this meant to him – how much he cared for her. She could not stop smiling even when she felt tears threatening her vision as she was overcome with emotion. This is my life and it looks alright in this moment, she thought. In the distance she could hear a distinct rumbling, and she felt the Earth move beneath them, but she was not scared.

"I love you," she whispered to him as the clouds opened up above them and a magnificent white light enveloped the sky. She could barely see. The light was so brilliant and blinding. She closed her eyes as she felt Soval's arms close around her. And for the first time in a long time she felt at peace. This is the end, she thought.
Epilogue

It was not, in fact, the end. As it turns out Captain Archer and the crew of Enterprise were successful in thwarting John Paxton's and Terra Prime's objective, however they did not destroy the array. It did, in fact, fire upon Earth; however, thankfully, it missed San Francisco by several kilometers. Instead the path of the beam was directed into the Pacific Ocean. Local residents of the San Francisco area had said that they had never seen anything like it. The flash of light from the beam of the array was said to have been seen for more than 800 kilometers in all directions. That is farther than the distance from San Francisco, California to Las Vegas, Nevada.

T'Pau survived the incident as did Constance and Soval. However, she returned to Vulcan where she remained a minister on the High Council in the newly formed Vulcan government where she would preside for the rest of her life. The Kir'Shara had a profound impact on her as did witnessing a Human carrying Surak's katra. Having, also, presided over Ambassador Soval's and Constance Corcoran's marriage the event helped shape her view of future Human and Vulcan relations. It was a good thing as in the years to come her own grandson, Sarek, who eventually became Ambassador to Earth, would marry a Human schoolteacher named Amanda and they would eventually have a child named Spock... but that is another story. To this day, T'Pau remains the only Vulcan to have ever turned down a seat at the Federation Council.

Ambassador Soval remained the Vulcan Ambassador to United Earth for another six more years until 2161 when the United Federation of Planets was organized. The Federation Charter was drafted and was then signed on October 9, 2161; Soval being one of the signatories. Shortly after Soval was appointed an Ambassador to the Federation, and Skon replaced him as Ambassador to Earth. It would be many years later when Skon would, in turn, would be replaced as Ambassador by his son Sarek.

Soval continued to retain a permanent residence on Earth for many years while living with his wife, Constance. She, herself, continued working for Starfleet Intelligence even after they cleaned house following the Terra Prime debacle, however it was not as an Officer. Constance returned to work at Starfleet Intelligence after a brief sabbatical as a Counterterrorism Analyst which was sorely needed by the newly realigned agency.

Both Soval and Constance, after residing at the Vulcan Consulate for a brief stint, chose to relocate to her home in Mill Valley which, in time, became their home. They never did have children. They did attend the memorial for the hybrid child, Elizabeth, who proved that it was a possibility, but neither felt it was ever the right time. As time passed they did adopt a female dog which Constance named T'Bone much to Soval's chagrin. Soval likened the creature to a Sehlát, once, abet on a much smaller, less vicious scale when it ripped one of his ambassadorial robes to shreds. The years that followed passed in relative bliss for the couple and Constance, who was once asked if she could change anything about her life would she, quickly replied:

"No. No, I wouldn't change a thing."

THE END

End Notes
Thanks for reading. Let me know what you think - good or bad - I'd love to hear from you!

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