have you heard the news?

by spectralPhobia

Summary

An extended epilogue for ‘out of obscurity into the dream’
In the aftermath of the incident with the stone of Gol Jim spends a summer in S’chn T’gai household developing a relationship with his fiancé.

Notes

I dedicate this to ThereBeWhalesHere aka onedamnminuteadmiral whose comments have inspired me to write a small continuation for this story <3
Just tying up some loose ends that out of obscurity just glanced over.

See the end of the work for more notes

The air was a thick overheated paste clogging Jim’s lungs, an invisible brick wall pressing him into the ground; he fumbled for a hypo and the relief was instant - as McCoy promised, the tri-ox component worked wonders. It did nothing to alleviate the heat though, and within minutes of leaving the hub sweat was streaming down his neck despite him being dressed in nothing but a thin t-shirt and shorts. Spock, for his part, was covered in clothing from head to toe, and Jim was feeling even more overheated just by looking at him.

What a relief it was when Amanda showed Jim his room on the upper floor and presented him with an air conditioning remote.

The house suited the two ambassadors’ status: a huge two-storey building in strict lines and sandy colours with a small dome on top. Jim’s guest room was overseeing the garden Amanda has told
them about while en route from Earth, with a multitude of blossoming flowers she has collected
from different worlds, searching for the specimen that would thrive in Vulcan’s climate. The only
familiar flower Jim could see was a bush of orange roses.

Spock’s room was right next to Jim’s, and even though Amanda has introduced it as his personal
space, from the outline of the building it was clear it was constructed when Amanda and Sarek
have already given up on finding their son.

At the dinner table, Amanda set a meal of green vaguely porridge-looking soup, which, despite its
unappealing appearance, turned out to be delicious.

“My trademark recipe,” Amanda said. “I have altered it to suit both human and Vulcan palette.”

“Thank you,” Jim smiled, inhaling a spoonful. Spock was poking in the bowl with complete
disinterest.

“Thank you, Amanda,” he answered politely and finally tasted the soup.

Spock still hasn’t adjusted to addressing Amanda and Sarek as mother and father, which was
understandable; in Jim’s case, if he was ever given a chance to meet George Kirk, he would’ve
been quick to accept him, maybe even given him a hug - but for Spock’s logical mind it was
simply meeting two people whose connection to him didn’t really affect his current state.

Sarek was reading something from five padds at once; he was the one responsible for the legal
procedures and still got many court-related questions. He truly shined during Nero’s trial, giving a
speech so compact and persuasive that it concluded the trial in about half an hour, and used his
privilege to allow them to leave as soon as Jim was discharged from the hospital.

Seeing Uhura, Sulu, Chekov, and Scotty again was the best part of the trial. Their eyes were wide
as they listened to Jim and Spock each telling their version of the events, the realization of what
part they have accidentally played in uncovering the stone of Gol dawning on them right as they
were called to press a hand on a lie detector.

After the dinner Jim did a quick job of unpacking - he had very few belongings, and all of them fit
in the backpack. Instead of wasting time on hanging the clothes properly in the closet he tapped on
Spock’s door, requesting entry.

Spock was standing near the window with the lyre, apparently deciding where to place it. His
figure was almost black against the blazing red sun, the city distorted by the waves of heat on the
horizon; he took time before turning to Jim.

Jim’s gaze fell onto his hands resting on the lyre instantly, reminded of those fingers dancing on
the imaginary instrument in a non-existent world, when a haze of detachment clouded his mind.

“Would you like me to play for you?” Spock asked quietly as if afraid to disturb the scene.

“Only if you want to,” Jim said just as quiet.

Bony fingers brushed the strings, forming a melody that forever would be associated with an
anchor that held Jim together in the midst of sparkling sand, endless gardens, and deep water rising
on the edge. Spock didn’t sing this time, perhaps too shy to do this in real world, or simply seeing
no purpose in the act.

Besides, it gave him room to talk.
“The healer has informed me about a free time slot she will give us today to examine the link,” he said without pausing the melody.

Jim nodded in reply.

“Amanda and Sarek have also assigned me a therapist,” Spock continued.

“Want me to join you for some moral support?”

The music stopped, and Spock looked at him with vulnerability hidden within shadows falling on his eyes. “You would do this for me?”

‘There’s nothing I wouldn’t do for you,’ Jim wanted to reply, and he wanted to hug him and protect him from all the evils of the world - but all he did was say, ‘Of course.”

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Appointed time to see the healer came after the sun descended; Jim couldn’t help but wonder if it was made to accommodate him - after all, he still didn’t dare stick his nose out of the house during the boiling hot day.

The healer was a woman so old her features were almost indistinguishable in the wrinkly skin; a group of much younger Vulcans were surrounding her, snapping their gazes at Jim and Spock like turning on a giant projector. Amanda and Sarek didn’t follow them, saying the examination was a private affair; after hearing that Jim didn’t expect so many people - but from the bits of conversation he overheard he knew that their link was incredibly unique, so they must be interested in studying it.

The healer, T’Vran, spoke in Standard with a subtle accent of a person clearly raised in an environment not using it.

The meld - T’Vran’s hands on both Jim’s and Spock’s faces - was painless yet uncomfortable; Jim imagined being on a surgeon’s table, unexpectedly woken up in the middle of an operation and seeing them rattle around in his insides. He could feel Spock presence reassuring him that all will be well - and once the meld ended T’Vran proclaimed the bond to be healthy and thriving, capable of evolving on its own with no interference needed.

Jim could tell that information was surprising: the assistants were arguing in Vulcan, exchanging brain scans and other things Jim didn’t understand; then they switched to Standard, but it was still hard to process their needlessly complicated explanations about what the bond entailed.

“You must understand the position you are in, Mr. Kirk,” T’Vran said solemnly. “This is a treasured connection we have thought to be lost with time; possessing it makes you a part of our culture. You are expected to respect our traditions and treat this connection with honour and dignity.”

“I do,” Jim said, not even trying to conceal the pride, “I will.” It was his and Spock’s connection, a unique link they somehow awakened; it was theirs.

One of the assistants’ lips thinned.

“Are you certain the bond was not forged?” She asked.

“It would be impossible,” T’Vran dismissed, now watching Spock intently.
“I think it would be prudent to explain Jim what mental abilities the link has given him,” Spock said, and she nodded slowly.

“You will be able to sense each other’s proximity,” she said, “as well as general moods unless you erect a shield. With consent on both sides, you will have access to each other’s thoughts through skin contact, and if you allow it to evolve fully, your minds will be open to each other in distance as well. In general, the link has all the properties a betrothal bond has. So far, in does not require complete faithfulness and openness to exist,” he looked at Jim strictly, “however, I expect you to honour it as our ancestors did.”

“So we’re like married?” Jim couldn’t resist asking.

T’Vran stared at him blankly for just enough time to make Jim squirm.

“You are… like… engaged, to use human speech.”

Judging by T’Vran’s tone using it was the last thing she wanted.

“What about the soul meld?” Jim asked.

“Excuse me?”

For the first time they seemed to have asked an unexpected question.

“The second layer of the meld, when we merged souls or something… What was that?”

T’Vran stared at them for a few seconds - if she was human she would be frowning deeply.

“I will have your memories,” her hand almost touched Jim’s face when Spock’s sharp voice interrupted.

“You will be putting a strain on him.”

“I have worked with your mother, Spock,” T’Vran answered calmly. “I know the limits of human mind.”

Spock was close, and their minds were still connected, that’s why the healer’s deeper touch didn’t feel as painful as it could be, but the surgical operation feeling was now coupled with a highly uncomfortable intrusion and inspection of something very personal and precious.

He came out of it dazed, and T’Vran seemed to have already been talking to Spock for quite some time, her tone thoughtful and contemplating. The assistants’ voices have become more urgent as they exchanged more notes in the background. Spock was looking at him with clearly sensible worry, and Jim almost winced at how sharp it felt; the examination turned his side of the link more attuned to Spock’s mind, raw and sensitive.

“The sensitivity will pass,” Spock told him quietly, and Jim couldn’t help but notice the lack of precise time statement. “You simply need to take rest,” he glanced at T’Vran with slightly narrowed eyes.

“Mr. Spock, I will see you tomorrow at the appointed time,” she said. “Your mind is an anomaly that must be studied.”

Spock nodded shortly.

“Mr. Kirk,” she turned to Jim, “you have been given a gift. Treat it with respect.”
Jim nodded as well; he couldn’t do anything else. He tried to rub his temple discreetly, not wanting to show weakness in front of a ton of Vulcans.

The assistants watched him, making him feel distinctly uncomfortable, like he’s just barged into their sacred home in muddy shoes and threw his feet on the table. They treated them like a fascinating science experiment and an outsider, not like people.

On the streets, the gazes followed, even though Jim realized seeing an outworlder on their planet was unheard of. Some not-glared, probably the ones who weren’t watching the news or simply not recognizing him or not caring for his accomplishments.

Jim tried to focus on the link, imagining it as a silver string connecting their heads; what did T’Vran say, Spock was able to sense him?...

His features twisted as he tried to push a thought Spock’s way, visualizing it as a blob that had to squeeze through a thin silver tube, and Spock stared at him with a line of confusion between his brows.

“You will not be able to transmit a detailed thought at the moment, as the bond has not evolved to its full potential yet,” he said.

“But you got what I was trying to do, so the telepathy must’ve worked a little bit,” Jim jabbed a finger at him victoriously.

Spock raised an eyebrow. “It was quite obvious even for insentient beings.”

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Once home, Spock insisted Jim had to retire early.

The Vulcans’ habits were decidedly different: their furniture was ascetic, simple mattresses laying on blocks on synthetic wood: efficient, wasteless, ergonomic. Jim’s blanket was a thinnest cotton sheet, and even with the air conditioning he tossed and turned, as if the heat came alive and grazed its slimy hands all over his skin; his mind was buzzing with static, and the moment he closed his eyes images would blossom unexpectedly - the pitch black shaft and water covering him whole, the river that could smash him against the boulders any moment, the icy planet, the broken ship, and Spock’s scream as his mind was torn apart by the enhancer-

Jim’s eyes flew open; he didn’t realize he fell asleep. Sweat that had nothing to do with heat rolled down his back; he sat up, shivering, and turned the air conditioning up a bit.

He blinked - and then realized he wasn’t alone in the room. A silhouette hovered next to the foot of the bed.

“You are distressed,” silhouette said in Spock’s voice.

“Yeah,” Jim croaked through his dry throat, “I guess my brain didn’t have enough time to catch up on everything that happened, with the hospital, and interviews, and the trial… And now even though it’s over, the nightmares are still there.”

The mattress dipped, and Spock settled next to him.

“I can alleviate your anxiety. Please lie down,” he said, and Jim obliged, still not entirely convinced it wasn’t an elaborate dream. “Your nightmares are awoken as the consequence of the healer’s examination, it is unnatural for you to have another intrude in your mind,” he brushed a
finger over his temple gently; Jim suddenly was a lot more awake.

“I will spend the night with you,” Spock continued, fingers arranging in a meld position and stirring the link from its dormant state. “My presence in your mind will aid its recovery, and if I sense a nightmare I can lessen its effect. As you know, I am highly proficient in healing.”

With this, while Jim was still speechless at this unexpected turn of events, Spock’s fingers left his face, even though the link stayed active, and he settled into the pillows more comfortably, clearly assuming they would just go back to sleep as if nothing happened.

Jim cleared his throat. “What about you? T’Vran has intruded your mind too - how can I help?”

Black eyelashes fluttered as Spock met his eyes again. In contrast with his hair and the dark fabric of the linens he looked very pale.

“There is nothing you need to help me with.”

Jim shook his head. “You’ve been through a much rougher psychological attack, with the stone and the enhancer. Don’t pretend it didn’t affect you,” he brushed a hand over his shoulder. “Can alleviation go both ways?”

“If I want it to,” Spock answered.

“Then let me help you.”

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In the morning Jim woke up to an empty bed; his head felt blissfully remedied, there was no sense of a raw wound anymore.

Spock was already in the dining room, buried deep in reading while a tea cup stood aside forgotten.

“I am pleased to know my techniques worked,” he said after asking about Jim’s wellbeing. “If you consent, I would take the burden of the memories from you every time I sense distress concerning the events we have lived through.”

Jim agreed; while there was a sense of unnaturality in this (he was used to dealing with nightmares the old-fashioned way, that is, diving head-first into something dangerous to ignore them), there was many advantages, like spending the night curled up next to Spock with their link glimmering at the proximity.

“You know, before I realized my head doesn’t hurt anymore, I was one hundred percent sure it was all a dream,” Jim laughed, but Spock didn’t humour him with a dry comment, he only frowned, watching him thoughtfully.

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Jim followed Spock to the therapist’s office, citing the need to assure they were a legit professional - even though Spock wasn’t sure how Jim intended to evaluate them.

The office greeted them with a lowered temperature - that detail told Spock the therapist wasn’t a Vulcan. That made sense, Spock knew the errors of his mind were emotional at their core, which made Vulcan doctors not the best candidates to deal with them. Jim winced as they approached: he has psyched himself up against the therapist in advance, but Spock didn’t share his attitude - he
realized the sooner he will be fixed the better.

A middle-aged woman with thick bushy hair and a gentle yet authoritative voice greeted them; she raised a hand in a perfectly executed ta’al.

“Mr. Spock, Mr. Kirk, it is a pleasure to meet you,” she said, gesturing at the two cushy armchairs. “Please have a seat. My name is Deanna Troi, and I am of human and Betazoid heritage.”

Spock nodded; this was the best combination of species in his case: she would have experience to answer questions about telepathy, as well as explain the emotional problems, and also had an authority to consult Spock about being a hybrid. Betazoids’ ability to sense lies was also useful for a therapist.

Her candidature was logical, and Spock relaxed instantly; he now realized this was her intention behind the introduction of her species.

Jim squinted at her. “No thanks, I’m just a visitor,” he tapped Spock’s shoulder lightly. “If you’re okay with her, I’m gonna go hang out somewhere else.”

“It would be advantageous for you to go to therapy as well, Mr. Kirk,” Troi said.


“You nearly died.”

Jim shrugged, crossing his arms in defiance. “Happens every Monday.”

“Your attitude indicates your attempt to cover--”

Jim didn’t listen further, he simply rolled his eyes, turned around with a wave, and walked out of the office. This was supposed to be about helping Spock, not his presumably in-need-to-be-fixed attitude.

Quick strides carried him until he found a tall cactus-like plant where he finally found shadow and slumped, exhausted from almost running in such a temperature. Not a minute have passed when he heard an expected voice.

“Jim.”

Jim wiped his forehead.

“Why aren’t you with Troi?”

“I deemed consoling you more important,” Spock sat next to Jim with careful precision. “Why are you so adamant about refusing her offer?”

Jim shrugged. “Why would I reveal my life story to a total stranger, knowing full well she won’t tell me anything of substance? She’d say, oh, your life went south because your parents weren’t around - yeah, thanks, like I couldn’t figure this out myself.”

Spock didn’t respond, and Jim got a feeling he wouldn’t, not until he deemed Jim ‘ready’.

They have just began paving a long road home.

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McCoy called that day, while Jim was waiting for Spock to return from T’Vran’s second appointment. He eyed Jim scrutinizingly, as if trying to scan him through the screen of the padd.

“I’m fine, Bones,” he groaned in response to a million questions about his health at once.

“In a pig’s eye you are,” McCoy grumbled. “Do you take tri-ox?”

“Yes, once a day,” Jim replied patiently. “I’m not five, I can remember a basic thing like that.”

McCoy watched him for a few moments longer, and thankfully changed the topic, seemingly finding no signs of lies.

“The reporters keep searching for you, honestly, you’re lucky to have disappeared from Earth. Us locals have to endure their nagging, especially after the trial,” he made a face. “Don’t know why people ever want to be celebrities.”

“The money and the reality shows on paradise planets,” Jim said solemnly, and McCoy sighed.

“How is Vulcan?” He looked both disgruntled and curious.

“Weird,” Jim said, careful not to complain too much - he knew McCoy was looking for any chance to justify his animosity towards the planet and Jim’s decision to go there. “But the house is nice,” he held the padd up to allow McCoy to see the interior - he was sitting on the couch in the living room, which was a great place to showcase the elegant furnishings. “You’ve got nothing to worry about, this is the quietest, most peaceful society I’ve ever seen.”

He just didn’t want to think about the reason for this quietness.

“I don’t know,” McCoy sighed deeply again. “I wasn’t too hot on the whole idea from the beginning. Although I trust Amanda’s judgement, she’s lived here for twenty years…” His shoulders jerked in a half-shrug. “Well, at least you will have someone human to talk to.”

“Spock is great to talk to too,” Jim smiled wide and couldn’t resist adding, “Told you he was gonna be someone important.”

“Yeah, yeah, you’re a prophet, glad we cleared that up,” McCoy rolled his eyes. “Remind me to call Federation’s Psychic Challenge once you’re back. How is Spock adapting? Don’t let him spend twenty-four hours a day stuffing that big head of his with every piece of information he comes across.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t. I’m in charge of the entertainment, so everything’s cool. My padd has like a thousand movies we need to watch.”

McCoy chuckled. “That poor man. By the way, when he gets back, tell him to call me. Scotty here wants to talk, something about transwarp beaming?”

After assuring the message will be passed, exchanging goodbyes and promises to keep each other posted, Jim put the padd away and looked up - and jolted, seeing Sarek who’s managed to sneak up on him without a single sound. Jim’s eyes searched for Amanda or Spock instinctively - but of course they were away.

“I trust you realize the unique position you are in, Mr. Kirk,” Sarek said flatly, almost copying T’Vran’s words, “as well as the need to adhere to our discretion.”

“Of course,” Jim frowned. “I won’t go around recording everything for a vlog called My Life in a
Sarek stared at him, unblinking (perhaps he didn’t know what a vlog was?), and his gaze slowly lowered onto the padd.

“Thanks for not confiscating my communicators by the way,” Jim said sarcastically before he could stop himself. Sarek looked him in the eye again, in a way that made being T’Vran’s assistants’ centre of attention feel like a fun sleepover.

“Your gratitude is accepted,” Sarek replied - there was no way of telling if it was mocking or sincere. Jim didn’t stay long enough to find out; he excused himself and retreated into his room (it wasn’t running away, he just needed some cool air).

Compared to Sarek, Amanda was an angel; sometimes Jim wondered how the hell two of them could have ended up together. But then he thought about him and Spock - even though they weren’t together, not really - and McCoy’s voice in his head reminded him not to judge a book by its cover.

He wondered if the link meant Spock would get a mini-McCoy in his head too.

Amanda suggested to show them around the city after Spock came back from seeing T’Vran, and when Jim heard the music in her car he jumped.

“You like Beastie Boys?!”

Amanda turned her bright eyes at him.

“I do!” She smiled. “Sarek says it’s just noise, he doesn’t get the appeal of the 21st century Terran arts at all; I’m so happy to have another member of the family with a good music taste…”

She was saying something else, but only one word was ringing in Jim’s ears: family.

Everywhere he looked the construction was going on; after all, twenty years was barely enough time to recreate the perished cities, especially when the Vulcans refused to accept help from other civilizations.

The evenings were ephemeral; the red light filtered through the light blanket of a haze covering the horizon preparing for another long, long night. The lines got smoother in the city, repeating the tall curves of the mountains which the sun dyed in identical hues of orange. The engines of the aircars were silent, refusing to disturb the stunning peacefulness.

“The architecture in the centre is completely identical to the ShiKahr of the past,” Amanda said. “It was a beautiful city.”

Jim wished he got a chance to live in the unhurried pace of the real ShiKahr, where time was generous and everyone knew there will always be a tomorrow, to see the streets moved by subtle quiet life instead of scarce blimps of existence in the almost empty space.

Spock tilted his head up at the tallest building of the Vulcan Council, his expression unreadable and the link silent. This was supposed to become his first home, but for others it was merely a copy, memories and hidden meaning pervading the grains of sand - the ones he was unable to truly understand. He was but an observer here.

Jim inched closer and reached for Spock’s hand in mute support, but he shifted it away shyly.
“I have learnt about another tradition,” he explained, staring ahead resolutely. “This is considered an unacceptable form of intimacy in public.”

Jim wasn’t sure if it was like making out or more, but blood rose to his cheeks anyway. Now Amanda’s comments in the hospital made sense.

“Oh. Well… Sorry about that time in the shuttle. And the other times. I didn’t know.”

“Me neither. However there is no need to apologize,” Spock’s face grew greener, almost imperceptible in the orange light. “I welcomed it.”

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The next time Spock visited Troi she was talking on her communicator, gesturing him to wait.

“Sorry,” she said after finishing the conversation, black eyes apologetic, “I had to take that call. My Captain was informing me of Starfleet’s restructuration plan he needed my immediate opinion on.”

“I was not aware that you are a Starfleet officer, Miss Troi,” Spock said. “Would it be more appropriate to address you by your rank?”

“Yes, I am a Commander, Science track, USS Titan. And no, no rank is necessary, we are not on the ship and you are not an officer... Which brings the question of your possible future with Starfleet. Is it something you would like to discuss?”

Spock folded his hands on his lap. “If you find it necessary.”

“I believe it would be beneficial.”

This was how all their conversations were constructed. Logically, Spock understood that the reason behind Troi’s initial question was to give him as much autonomy as possible.

He wondered whether understanding the reasoning behind Troi’s questions made the therapy less - or more? - effective.

The discussion has ended up being mostly Troi’s stories about the specifics of serving in Starfleet and being a Science and Medical officer. Seeing how the only track Spock could see himself in was Science, it was educational - and Spock wondered if this was one of the reasons his parents chose Troi to be his therapist.

“I have two new tasks for you,” Troi said in the end of the session. “I want you to set a goal you would want to complete. What would you choose?”

“Mr. Scott has asked my advice about transwarp beaming recently,” Spock replied, “he has already completed his equations and asked my opinion about the best way of organizing and presenting them. My goal can be supervising this project.”

Troi nodded. “Very good. As you can see, you are valued even among the people whom you haven’t known for too long. And while I approve of your objective, let’s also choose something that depends on your own actions more. For example, is there a place on New Vulcan you wanted to visit?”

“Vulcan Science Academy,” Spock’s instant answer was. Not only it was quintessence of the knowledge he sought, but he would get a chance to meet with T’Pring again. So far, he has only
sent her one message saying, ‘Greetings, T’Pring. I have been informed that the case of your mother’s death was closed after my testimony. It would have been more appropriate to tell you about her role in my childhood in person, I apologize for not doing so.’

Troi approved of his choice - he suspected she would’ve approved no matter what place he named - and suggested he invited Jim as well; Spock thought it was to show Jim the initiative coming from him. Then he thought he should spend less time discerning the meaning behind Troi’s suggestions and more on his recovery.

Spock inclined his head in understanding, awaiting the second task.

“If you could change anything in yourself, what would it be?” Troi asked.

Spock didn’t hesitate. “Biology. The other disadvantages are susceptible to change, but biology is not.”

Being a hybrid herself she must’ve anticipated this answer; she understood him a lot better than expected. Politely, Troi never asked traditional questions like how did it make him feel, and even altered her speech patterns to suit the Vulcan ways of speaking. Spock appreciated her understanding.

“I want you to think about your attitude towards it and give me an answer the next session.”

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Jim was stretched on the couch, with his feet almost touching Spock’s thigh, occasionally reading some passages from a Temporal Science thesis aloud.

“This is an advanced topic for the first year, is it not?”

Jim nodded, “I need to be prepared if I want to enrol in an accelerated course.”

Spock glanced up. “You wish to be graduated in three years instead of four? I do not doubt your ability to do it,” Jim smiled at him, “but is there a reason not to follow the designed four-year program?”

“And graduate after Bones and Uhura?” He laughed. “No way! Can you imagine being their junior officer?” He shivered in an exaggerated fashion and buried his back deeper into Amanda’s decorative pillows.

“I am certain working alongside Miss Uhura would be a pleasant experience,” Spock said, and while there was no smile, his eyes crinkled with traces of humour. “However, no circumstances would make me chose a Medical track.”

Jim chuckled, aware of a stupid grin plastered on his face; there were many moments like this, when they shared a personal bubble after a joke, and he just couldn’t stop staring at Spock, and couldn’t stop smiling, and the emotions swelled up inside like a giant cotton candy cloud.

He needed an outlet for his affection, so he nudged Spock’s knee with his foot. Spock didn’t break eye contact, and Jim could feel the fondness trickling down the silver string.

Sometimes he wanted to ask what Spock considered them to be - friends, boyfriends, soulmates, or just two guys brought together by circumstances - but he knew that’s where he must exercise all the patience he had. He couldn’t force Spock into admitting something he wasn’t ready for yet.
“I have changed my mind,” Spock told Troi. “If I could alter something it would be my attitude to touch.”

“You are not alone, Spock,” Troi told him once after a long session that left him with an unpleasant drained sensation.

I am not at the moment.

Spock didn’t want to say it out loud; and he didn’t have to.

“I understand. You are concerned you may be left behind eventually,” Troi said. “But you have bonds to your parents and your friend: these are the people who will not leave you willingly. Your parents cared so much about you they challenged medicine, and it’s quite obvious Jim cherishes you too,” she smiled softly, mostly to herself.

“They may still be gone at any given moment. Everything eventually comes to an end.”

Spock didn’t usually bare himself like that, but the session has thinned his shields to the point of non-existence.

“You must understand the source of your troubles: the inability to correctly foresee and prepare yourself for a probable misfortune. It is impossible to predict the variables of life, so why waste energy focusing on it?”

Troi paused before continuing, choosing the words slowly.

“I will not lie to you and say no one will ever leave you,” she said, “false reassurances will have no effect. But you must remember that your value as an individual is not measured by the amount of people currently surrounding you,” she shuffled the padds, seemingly deciding what to say next. “I have always respected the way Vulcans deal with loss of any kind: accept it and move on. I am not saying this will be easy, but if you ever end up alone just hold on to your core as an individual.”

Her words were logical, and brought some needed reassurance.

“You are correct, nothing lasts forever,” Troi said gently. “Not even loneliness.”

Entering a routine was easy, as if they really did know each other for a hundred years in another life. They slotted together perfectly, knowing when the company was needed and when personal space was preferable; and when Amanda and Sarek were leaving to perform their ambassadorial duties Jim and Spock took care of the house, and Jim wondered if it was a preview of old married life he was accidentally given.

“Do you remember what day it is?” He asked one Saturday morning.

“April the twenty-third, according to the Earth calendar,” Spock glanced at the chess holoemitter which Jim was supposed to turn on, but Jim only watched him eagerly; there will be time for chess later.

“Four weeks have passed since the day you said we’d meld again,” Jim bounced in his chair
slightly.

“You seem very eager,” Spock noted, and Jim was happy to spot lovely green flush dusting his cheeks.

“How can I not be?” He gestured wildly. “I’ve left a friend there!”

An eyebrow rose. “You do realize the goat is just a figment of your imagination.”

“The next thing you’ll say that the tooth fairy doesn’t exist!” Jim pressed a hand to his chest.

A corner of Spock’s lips lifted. “The tooth fairy does not exist.”

Jim shook a finger at him. “Don’t be cruel, you’re making kids cry.”

Spock didn’t reply - he only gestured at his bed, and Jim leapt on it immediately, settling in a cross-legged position, and then Spock’s furnace-hot hand found his meld points and they stepped into their personal paradise of a land where every detail was a construct of one of their souls.

“Hey, Leonard!” Jim called. There was far-away bleating and the next moment the goat’s snout bumped into his hand. Jim petted it, staring at Spock victoriously.

He looked fascinated, saying, “You have impressive control over the mindscape.”

“Well, I’m not dying, that probably gives me advantage,” Jim smiled.

With the goat trotting alongside, Jim set to explore the land; now that he was fully conscious and utterly confident, even feeling like humming a merry tune, he wanted to study every tiny detail. He squinted at the horizon; the sky extended into an endless plane, clear and calm, not a droplet of water in sight.

Eventually, Jim walked through the lush greenery in the garden with practiced ease despite seeing everything only for the second time, and as he reached the arch he turned on the spot, extending a hand Spock’s way.

“Care to dance?”

Spock didn’t want to say he couldn’t, so he began, “We do not have any mu-”

The next moment a guitar tune swam through the air, coming out of every corner.

“You were saying?” Jim smirked.

Of course. The transference went both ways, he sensed Spock’s doubts.

“Come on,” Jim’s voice was softer now. “I’ll show you how.”

Being a mental projection had many advantages, like an ability to slide a hand into Jim’s grip and being drawn closer without instinctively tensing. The fingers that guided Spock’s hands to rest on Jim’s hips were incredibly careful as he led Spock in a simple rhythm, easy to follow even for someone who’s never danced before, while Jim hummed the melody.

Spock stroked the material of Jim’s shirt - it was a pleasant sensation, even though he realized clearer than before that it was merely a fabricated image, and suddenly he longed for an ability to touch him in real world like this, to feel the warmth of a living body under his fingertips.
The sand rose, puffing up into soufflé and cotton candy clouds that floated higher.

"With an echoes of the amplifiers ringing in your head," Jim sang loudly, suddenly spinning Spock around, feeling a flutter of his amusement in reply.

At Jim’s slightest whim the amplifiers grew out of the ground in the rhythm of music. The world obeyed him with supernatural ease, truly becoming an extension of his mind. Everything was possible here.

“I’m gonna dip you now,” Jim warned, and Spock’s eyes flew wide.

“What does that mea--” He gasped and tightened his arms around Jim’s shoulders as Jim bent his body in half; Spock threw his leg back to break the fall that never happened.

Jim straightened them slowly, relishing in the fact that Spock didn’t release him.

“That was a dip,” Jim murmured. Their faces were inches apart. He tried hard not to stare at Spock’s lips, but with the meld it was impossible to hide.

“I assumed we were about to fall,” Spock said with a hint of accusation.

“That’ll never happen,” Jim said. “I’ll always catch you if you fall.”

Spock looked at him, eyes the most gorgeous brown, and then tilted his head as if listening to something inaudible.

“We need to return,” he said unexpectedly and released him. “Two hours have passed; we have overstayed the recommended time for a deep meld.”

The amplifiers turned into the sparkling sand that cascaded down, bathing them in the warm waves.

“Why?” Jim frowned at the loss of contact. “I don’t feel hurt or anything.”

“This,” Spock gestured around, “is an anomaly partially created as a defence mechanism and partially caused by my mutated genes. The healer had no experience dealing with this type of mindscape and cannot predict what influence a prolonged deep connection would have on a psi-null mind.”

Jim, trying not to pout, pulled out a communicator and snapped a picture of the goat that appeared by his side the moment he remembered it.

“Well, at least I gotta show Bones his soulmate.”

“Jim,” Spock said, worry curling around them thickly, “this is a projection of a communicator, you cannot bring it back. This is what I meant, you are risking complete detachment from reality.”

“Right...” Jim frowned at himself, as the landscape dripped and blurred, there was a sense of being pulled somewhere, and when Jim opened his eyes he was in Spock’s bedroom again.

He nearly collapsed on the spot; his bent legs lost all feeling. After embarrassing fish-out-of-water wiggling he just flopped backwards on the bed, throwing hands up.

“How do you feel?” Spock leaned over him, looking him in the eye searchingly.

“Can’t feel my legs, otherwise totally fine,” Jim shook the static feeling out of his muscles. “No
contraindications against further mindscape visits,” he glanced at Spock pointedly, although he could feel unwavering determination about this restriction he decided to impose out of nowhere and knew it wouldn’t result in anything.

Spock’s face was close enough that if Jim was allowed to, he could reach up and brush a stray hair that fell out of place - but this was a physical realm with all the restrictions it entailed.

He wondered if there was even any point in flirting with Spock - it was obvious he simply wouldn’t respond to it at this moment, not when the list of “Ten qualities you like about yourself” Troi asked him to fill was empty.

***

In May they have heard about a meteor shower that should hit New Vulcan’s sky.

The telescope was set up in the observatory on top of the house, readied to watch splashes of light slicing up the night sky. Jim went out of his way to prepare to spend the entire night here in comfort: he brought snacks, as well as blankets and pillows even though he didn’t need them.

He called the set-up “romantic” - and if that description meant summoning very strong affectionate emotions, Spock had to agree.

Jim was at the telescope at the moment, searching for something.

“There,” he muttered, and waved Spock over, “come see the Agasorian nebula!”

And before he could move away to allow Spock full access to the telescope, Spock made a conscious choice to lean forward and press his cheek against Jim’s so that both of them could see the stars at the same time.

He could sense the thrum of surprise mixed with anticipation under Jim’s skin, and hear the quick intake of breath at the boldest thing he’s done so far. The meteors and nebulas faded in the background, leaving only the point of contact between bare skin.

If there were any doubts about never being parted before, they were erased; and Spock did the second boldest act of that day.

“Jim, I wish to join Starfleet.”

The telescope was instantly forgotten. “Really?!” Jim exclaimed, eyes brighter than the meteors slitting the night. Spock nodded, and Jim squeezed his hand; in his mind, there was something about shooting stars and wishes coming true.

Spock offered him a tiniest smile.

***

“You still haven’t completed the task I gave you two sessions ago.”

Troi didn’t sound accusing, it was merely a statement of a fact, but Spock didn’t like her being disappointed anyway.

Spock looked down at the empty list where he was supposed to pay himself ten compliments. “I apologize for my tardiness, I merely have nothing to say.”

Troi sighed sadly, barely audible, and scribbled something else on the list. The usage of paper was
supposed to make the list more memorable, and yet Spock still found it wasteful.

“In that case, I am going to alter the task. I want you to give this to Jim and ask him to fill it.”

The new list was titled “Ten qualities you like about Spock.”

The next morning Spock found the paper completely covered in tiniest letters. The list went on, ending with a note, “I’m running out of space, so if you want a continuation - just ask me!”

If Spock had any less control, the paper would’ve been torn in his tightened grip; it was simply unbelievable how much kindness Jim has decided to gift him.

That was the last session with Troi, as she was being summoned back on her ship. She gave Spock her communicator’s number, saying she wanted to continue communication through video or text messages if needed.

“You have come a long way, Spock,” her smile was gentle, pleasant. “I am very proud.”

And then, after months of studying and preparation, there finally came a time when they packed their suitcases, now significantly larger, made sure the lyre was secure in its case, and travelled to the hub that would take them to San Francisco where McCoy was waiting.

Amanda hugged Jim once more, saying, “Take care, Jim. I trust you to look after my son. And if you don’t…” Her embrace turned into vice-like clasp on his back, and she whispered in his ear, “If you hurt him in any way, I have powers of two governments to help me find you.”

Jim met her eyes with no fear.

“I would die before I hurt him.”

Cohabitation in the dorm room was easy: it was the same old routine, the only difference being two beds on each side of the room that was supposed to be divided by an imaginary line - but the beds were moved closer on the second night (for convenience, since it was easier to talk in close proximity, as Spock said) and the belongings mixed with each other as if they were married.

Which they were.

Almost.

Together with McCoy, Uhura, Sulu, and Chekov they became the most famed friend group (even though at first Uhura was still suspicious of Jim, but she and Spock has hit it off instantly, and by extension, Jim soon became her friend too). Jim blamed those four for being met as a celebrity when they first arrived in the Academy: their mysterious silence and refusal to answer any questions related to the stone of Gol caused the gossipers to create their own (too imaginative) versions involving a Federation-wide conspiracy theory, a race of mind-controlling ants, and a couple of exploding planets.

They followed each other to their respective classrooms, and soon they were addressed as a single entity, Jim-and-Spock, always hand-in-hand. The awed whispers that followed them died down eventually as the cadets moved on to the more interesting topics, leaving only the meddlers who couldn’t bear their fame and decided to make them pay for that.
Those were not the most disconcerting whispers Jim’s heard though.

Jim was in the library, picking up the texts to write an essay on when he heard it: the hushed conversation and the mention of a name his ears were specifically attuned to.

“Spock’s such a weirdo,” a girl was saying.

“A cute one though,” her friend replied.

“I know, right? Do you think it’s true what they say about Vulcan hands?” Another boy whispered. “Do you think I can get away with like passing him a padd and accidentally touching his hand - I mean they are pacifists, he wouldn’t hit me, right?”

The first girl giggled, “I’d rather touch those ears honestly. I mean, have you seen them? They look so soft; if you ignore the way he acts like a robot you can actually--”

“Quit talking about Spock like that,” Jim hissed and the group started, turning to face him.

“Who the hell are you?” The girl looked him over with an arrogant squint.

“I’m his fiancé,” Jim blurted out.

The other gossips’ mouths fell open, but the girl snorted. “Sure you are.”

Jim gave her the most condescending and intimidating look he could master, channeling his inner Sarek (when you spend a summer living in someone’s house you learn a few tricks from them whether they like it or not). At least he knew (hoped) none of them had a smidgen of a chance with Spock - he never showed any signs of romantic interest in anyone.

Not even in Jim himself.

***

McCoy had a hard time accepting Spock as his friend - not because he hated him, but because he was Jim’s friend first and therefore cared for his wellbeing.

“You have no excuses to keep playing with him,” McCoy said one day, scowling.

He was supposed to meet Jim in their dormitory, but came sixteen minutes early - and now Spock knew why.

Spock looked away.

“I do not understand what game you refer to.”

He understood.

He understood and guilt gnawed him because of it.

He’s already made Jim suffer for too long - firstly on a planet where he didn’t belong, and now in the Academy, when even though he was certain his feelings have progressed past close friendship he was too afraid to voice them. He has spent so much time accepting being allowed to feel - Troi was to thank for that - but there was still a danger of being consumed by emotions completely, becoming someone the stone of Gol was designed to destroy.

McCoy stared at him long and hard, the look conveying everything unsaid.
Spock knew he had to cease being so passive - but… he seemed unworthy of the affection he occasionally felt seeping through the link.

From that point on every time Jim touched Spock in McCoy’s presence - every time so careful, so tender, Spock didn’t deserve such patience - McCoy looked Spock in the eye sharply.

***

Jim knew he shouldn’t force it, but he didn’t like being left in limbo. His nature was to take action - even if that action was harmless in its core.

Spock came into the dorm room to find a single flower lying on his pillow. He twisted in between his fingers gently; there was no mystery about its origins - the red zinnia was his and Jim’s thing.

Attached were two invitations to a lecture the inventor of the latest warp core model was giving that weekend.

Two weeks later there was a leaflet for a Astrophysics convention, then a dinner reservation, then tickets for an opera, then a ginormous bouquet of every colour on Earth - and Spock started responding with his own invitations to various curious events and places; first to express his gratitude, and then purely out of pleasure.

***

Spock has told Jim to meet him at the showroom where Research & Development’s latest project - a portable holodeck prototype that could transform the space around the user into an incredibly realistic copy of their place of choice - has recently arrived in the Academy and was technically available for testing to anyone who would get a signed permission from the Professors. In reality, the Professors were nitpicking the tiniest faults of every student who wanted to put their hands on the holoemitter; but, of course, Spock’s spotless reputation has ensured he was allowed to not only test the machine but take it out of the lab. Jim’s hands were itching to get a hold of it, that’s why he sprinted towards the labs the moment his last class ended.

As he was rounding the corner he heard a distinctly offended voice saying, “Well of course they’d give it to you.”

Jim knew the guy and hated him with every fibre of his being: he shared classes with Spock, and Jim often thought about punching him for xenophobic comments. He managed to restrain himself so far, but one of these days there’s going to be the last straw-

“The conditions are equal for everyone,” Spock was replying levelly. “I have filled out a form and received a permission which is available for public viewing; your accusations are illogical.”

The guy, whose name Jim couldn’t remember (it was probably something stupid), snarled. “Yeah, right, just like being given a job offer on the Fleet’s flagship while still in the first year is so equal for everyone.”

“The job offer from Captain Pike has nothing t-”

“-any chance we had to even touch the machine was gone the moment you snapped your fancy green fingers!”

The guy moved to grab his arm, but Spock didn’t dodge with his usual swiftness, probably wary of damaging the holoemitter - and that’s when Jim swept in between Spock and the guy like a human shield.
“Leave him alone,” he growled, fists balling automatically - and Spock’s free hand came to circle around his wrist lightly.

“Jim,” he warned quietly, and the infuriating cadet snorted.

“Yeah, you better stay down, Kirk,” he looked sideways on the bunch of onlookers already gathered around. “What if someone sees you attacking me and decides it’s an amazing act of saving the world again and throws a graduation ceremony for you on the spot? Or why stop there - just promote you and your boyfriend to Admirals right away!”

“I said leave - him - the fuck - alone!”

“Don’t get all worked up, it’s pointless,” the guy rolled eyes at Spock’s passive face, “he doesn’t even care - but what else can you expect from an unfeeling half--”

Jim tore his fist out of Spock’s grip and simply plunged it into the guy’s face.

“Jim!” Balancing the holoemitter under one arm Spock wrapped another around Jim’s waist, preventing him from throwing another punch.

“Cadet Kirk!” Professor Montgomery’s voice boomed through the hallway, stilling the scene.

“He hit me, did you see that!” The guy shouted, clutching his nose.

Someone from the passersby said, “You totally deserved it, asshole.”

“Kirk, Dwynn, in my office, now,” Montgomery commanded and glared at Spock. “Mr. Spock, when we have let you use the holoemitter we have assumed you would immediately take it to your dormitory. I trust you can do it without breaking any more fights.”

“Yes, sir,” Spock answered immediately, and exchanged one last glance with Jim.

Despite saying from the beginning he didn’t consider Jim guilty, Professor Montgomery drilled them for eternity, something about solving the conflicts peacefully and Diplomacy 101 that was a required course for Command graduates.

Dwynn glowered a lot, clearly showing this wasn’t the last they’ve heard of him.

Everyone thought they somehow cheated: T’Vran and her assistants, clearly thinking a human and a half-blood not even familiar with his own culture getting the greatest gift they could offer was unfair; Dwynn and his cohorts convinced their academic success came from cozying up to the professors and using their status to get away with everything; the others, not getting an answer about what exactly happened on Vulcan’s anniversary and creating their own convoluted stories.

Spock was waiting for him outside the office, still holding the emitter, and they set off side by side the moment he exited, heading to their dormitory in a wordless agreement.

Spock glanced at his split knuckles, “You should see Dr. McCoy.”

His hand twitched - a tiny motion that would be unnoticeable if Jim didn’t spend months studying his body language.

Jim shook his head, “If he sees a bruise he’ll somehow use it as an excuse to give me a flu shot.”

“I can try fixing the damage through the meld,” Spock suggested.
“I thought you were done using your telepathy for this,” Jim said carefully. Apart from the Vulcan healers inspecting his mind through and through in hopes of finding a way to awaken this ability in others, no one knew about Spock’s skill. Amanda and Sarek asked not to advertise it, afraid Spock would get even more unneeded attention and mocking.

“There is no logic in hiding my ability from you,” Spock replied just as they reached their dorm.

Jim keyed in the code, and Spock put the holoemitter on the desk carefully, motioning Jim to sit down and taking a seat on his own bed across from him.

His fingers found their rightful place on Jim’s face, and a familiar sense of detachment overcame him - but this time he had no fear.

It was a small injury, and within minutes the skin was as good as new.

“Thanks,” Jim said, flexing his fingers.

“I should be the one to thank you. You are very kind to continuously stand up for me.”

Jim’s gaze drilled into Spock as he leaned forward.

“You have no idea what I’m ready to do for you,” he said fervently, wishing he was allowed to push all the overwhelming emotions at Spock - and by the way his eyes widened ever so slightly, Jim knew some of them were leaking through the link anyway.

“I thought you knew that,” Jim added awkwardly.

Spock moved back to sit on his bed, and Jim was disappointed until he very uncharacteristically cleared his throat, hands placed on his thighs.

To his surprise, Spock said quietly, “I do.”

Words belonging to a ceremony they’ve already had the moment they were born.

“There is something I have wished to tell you for ninety-two days, and I think now is the right time. My attitude towards you- my thoughts about you,” Spock began, staring at his hands, obviously uncomfortable with the conversation and yet determined to see it through, “have been changing gradually over the passage of time. Lately I have come to a realization that,” his fingers dug into his thighs, “some emotions are not to be suppressed, they are to be accepted. One of these emotions is related to you. Perhaps more than one - it is difficult to find a unit of measurement for a concept.”

Hope bubbled, and Jim had a feeling where this was going, but he didn’t rush it - not when it was important for Spock to process his emotions of his own. But he wasn’t strong enough to resist reaching out and squeezing his hand.

“You are the individual closest to me, not only because our minds have an incomparable resonance proved by the existence of the bond, but because of who you are as a person. You understand me, you are my best friend, and I do not believe words can adequately express my gratitude for your loyalty and kindness you express towards those who surround you. You do so much for me, and yet sometimes it is still not enough. Sometimes... I find myself desiring more than the intimacy we already have. This is how I feel about you,” he finished heavily, pressing his lips.

Jim admired his strength. Almost unconsciously, he slid off the bed and stood on his knees in front of Spock, channeling all barrelling emotions into holding his hands as tight as he could.
“I love you,” he said, and suddenly it was the easiest thing to say, and he wondered why he hasn’t spent the last year saying it every damn day.

“I do not know how to name the feelings I have,” Spock said quietly. “I apologize.”

Jim shook his head, a smile quivering his lips.

“It’s okay.”

Spock looked down at their hands and rearranged their fingers to be pressed against each other - and this was when Jim’s heart threatened to suffocate him because this was a gesture he knew too well, having observed it on Vulcan and dreaming about touching Spock’s hands in such a simple way.

He didn’t have to ask for a human kiss. His eyes were transfixed on Spock’s lips, and Spock was a touch telepath - and as they leaned towards each other, and their lips hovered within a hair of each other it seemed like the entire universe was born for the sole purpose of creating this moment. And then they were pressing against each other, lips sliding with both awkwardness and determination, hands clutching each other in attempt to merge their bodies like their minds, and Jim has climbing on Spock’s lap for a better position, and their link with alight with crackling energy. Spock’s hand was tangled in Jim’s hair, and all of this wasn’t enough, there simply didn’t seem to be a limit to satisfaction.

That must’ve been what perfection felt like, and when they had to part for air Jim couldn’t resist planting small kisses at the corners of Spock’s lips. With eyes still closed, Spock leaned his forehead against Jim’s, slight tremors running through his hand fisting Jim’s jacket. His breath was coming out more rapidly, and Jim slid one hand over his side to feel the hammering heart, while Spock was stroking his hair languidly.

Perhaps it was selfish, but Jim was proud that he was Spock’s one and only, his first and (hopefully) last.

“I love you, sweetheart,” Jim whispered. He said it once, and now the dam was broken, and he wanted to repeat the words again and again. “Can I call you that?”

“I approve of your choice of endearment,” Spock said, and Jim laughed, kissing him sweetly again.

Now that he knew what his mouth tasted like, how the hell was he expected to resist?

“Actually, there’s something I need to tell you… I’ve been calling you fiancé all this time.”

Spock nodded, finally looking at him. “Logical. It is what our status is.”

Jim stroked a finger over his ear, enjoying the green blush that caused, and kissed him again. Like he said, Spock was simply irresistible.

“Perhaps we should get working on that holoemitter,” Jim muttered against his lips. “Otherwise we’ll waste the entire twenty-four hours you’ve been given on making out.”

“I do not believe I would be opposed to such a turn of events,” Spock replied.

***

Mere weeks later in was Spock’s birthday, in preparation of which Jim has become especially secretive. Even though Spock insisted no celebration was necessary, his friends still presented him with a delicious homemade cake decorated with twenty-one candles in the morning.
Jim was positively buzzing, obviously impatient to present his own gift; this suspicion was confirmed when as soon as they were left alone he dropped a package into Spock’s arms.

“I’ve got something for you.”

Spock felt a strange jolt in his gut as he unwrapped the paper and saw the painfully familiar ornate blue fabric: T’Mira’s sash that he thought was lost forever.

“I suspected that ‘spending quality bonding time’ with Captain Pike on the Enterprise was not the only reason you took three days of leave,” he ran his fingers over the ornaments rapturously - now he could read them, the calligraphic depictions of Surak’s postulates.

Jim nodded. “It was important to you; I had to find it. Luckily, I had enough blackmail material on Lester to make her tell me where she sold it.”

“Thank you, Jim. However, in my opinion it would be more acceptable for T’Pring to have it.”

He hoped Jim wouldn’t take it as diminishing his efforts; but Jim only smiled.

“I knew you would say that. So I got you another one too.”

He took an identical package from under the pillow, and the unwrapped paper revealed bright emerald silk with a single line of calligraphy saying “Beloved.”

Jim rubbed a hand over his hair. “Your Mom and Dad helped me out with this one - with the translation and ordering the sash from the tailor on Vulcan. Consider this a gift from all three of us.”

Spock smiled at him; just how fortunate he was to be the centre of affection of this incredible man.

“Thank you, Jim,” he touched two fingers to Jim’s, hoping to convey the deep gratitude he felt for him.

A month later, it was time for Jim’s birthday (also known as the anniversary of their friendship, according to him), who welcomed celebrations now, and for whom Uhura, Sulu, McCoy, and Chekov threw an entire personalized party - even Mr. Scott took leave for a day to drink Romulan ale and Russian vodka and dance to loud old Earth music and holographic imagery.

Spock gifted Jim an antique chess set carved from real wood (a gift for both of the anniversaries), something he was hesitant to play at first, because such unique craftsmanship seemed to be more fitting for a museum.

With both of them bowing over the ornate box, Spock leaned forward and kissed him lightly on the lips - and as Jim wrapped his arms around his shoulders to lose himself in the bliss of his mouth he belatedly realized this was the first time Spock initiated some form of intimacy between them. A great birthday present indeed.

***

Jim was writing the third chapter of Scientific Proof That Destiny Is Real when Spock peeked over his shoulder, probably about to express another concern about his workload.

Jim waved the padd wildly before he had a chance to start a spiel about how accelerated course was impacting his health.
“Can you imagine?” He smiled encouragingly. “This could be groundbreaking! I have five more chapters outlined, I even got that obscure paranormal activity book from Tyieen...”

Spock’s eyebrows twitched as if he wanted to frown but stopped himself, and Jim felt some discontent crippling down the link - so different from his usual concern, now laced with… sadness?

“Are you okay?” Jim rubbed his shoulder lightly.

“Yes.”

Jim frowned. “You do realize I can feel everything you’re not saying?” He grabbed his second shoulder. “I won’t let you go until you tell me what’s wrong. Do you not want me to write-”

“You keep calling it destiny,” Spock said, staring somewhere above his head. “It does not exist.”

“Well, that’s what I’m trying to prove is wrong,” Jim nodded at the padd.

“But it is not real,” Spock said stubbornly. “Yet you insist on this concept’s involvement. Are you… staying with me simply because you believe something superstitious is entailed?”

Jim’s hands slid up, cupping Spock’s face. “Why would you say that? You’ve been in my head so many times - don’t you know exactly why I want us to be together?”

“You seem overly fascinated by imaginary concepts, like destiny, or the mindscape,” Spock pointed out quietly.

Jim couldn’t believe it - could it be that all this time Spock thought he was going to leave him eventually?... Although now that he thought about it, disconnection from reality, as well as abandonment, was one of Spock’s main fears, the one that helped him convince Jim to visit a therapist on campus in the end.

Jim mentally slapped himself for not connecting the dots earlier.

“To be honest... I don’t actually care about this thesis, I’m just doing this for fun and to prove Professor Montgomery wrong,” Jim gestured at the vague direction of the screen, refusing to look away from Spock. “I mean - ultimately I don’t care if it was written in the skies, or if it was just a set of incredible coincidences, or if everything was meant to happen because this is who we are as people - all that matters in the end is that right now I have you in my life,” he took Spock’s hand. “And if I never find out why - I won’t be too disappointed. I love you. That’s it, everything’s that simple,” he said, and he could feel understanding dawning on Spock as he returned the pressure.

Jim didn’t say it aloud often, simply because he didn’t want Spock to think he was required to reciprocate.

Maybe that was his mistake.

End Notes

A paradox: out of obscurity was super long and covered three days; the epilogue is super short and covers almost a year.
I've tried so hard to keep this under 10k, I've cut out everything I could... Still, it's the shortest thing I've ever written, so I consider this a win *thumbs up emoji*
Note: my understanding of how therapy sessions work is rather limited, but I stand by my choices here and I'm prepared to explain every word Troi said.
Also I think you understand why I chose her: first of all, out of obscurity was already relying on TNG heavily, so it only made sense to bring another character from there, especially when they suit the role so well.

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