The Grass on the Other Side is Definitely Greener

by DarkWaters

Summary

Jamison Kirk never became captain of the Enterprise. Instead, she is first officer to Captain Spock. The relationship between them, personal and professional, is painful. When a transporter accident takes her to a parallel universe Jim finds a Spock that is so different to her own. He is open, comfortable in his skin, and happy and, when he shows an interest in her, she begins to fall in love but is scared of eventually being rejected and treated with indifference like she was with her own Spock. Is the grass truly greener on the other side?
Chapter 1

Chapter One

Commander Kirk finished her report on the defensive drills performance that the crew had been put through last week. She knew it was a day late but she'd also had to rearrange shift and crew rotations, finalize orders for shore leave tomorrow at Starbase Omicron III and fill out the requisition paperwork for security. They needed a whole new batch of standard issue phasers. Half of the last supply couldn't change settings from kill to stun and vice-versa.

She'd then needed to confer with computer maintenance and security since there'd been a security breach their last mission which resulted in a minor information leak (hope the Klingons like knowing how much soap they used) and she'd struggled with what to write in the condolence letter to Ensign Jaa'hras' family since Captain Spock deemed it was more appropriate for her to do it since she was her direct commanding officer as head of security.

Jim thought that was wrong and just plain cold but he was her superior officer despite her misgivings and she had to follow his orders. She was trying to make a relationship with him but it was becoming more difficult as time wore on. She wanted that epic friendship that old Spock had talked about but she just didn't see it happening the way things were going. As it was, they had a strained professional relationship that created tension between the crew and the captain.

During the final phase of the Narada attack, Spock and her had seemed to reach some sort of understanding and mutual respect, working to compliment each other but it seemed that that incident was a one off. They seemed to be like two puzzle pieces that were never meant to fit together no matter how hard she tried.

She knew that it had been "strongly suggested" by the admiralty (read-ordered without the order) that they serve together but things just haven't meshed right with them.

She couldn't help the feeling of wrong when she put on her red uniform in the mornings and met with her security department for AM briefing before heading to the bridge to work with tactical. As first officer to Captain Spock and head of security, she had double the workload to do and it never seemed to be good enough for the Vulcan.

Quickly stopping by the restroom on the way to the bridge, she looked in the mirror, smoothing the fly aways from her blond hair that she'd pulled back in a bun. She straightened the red, long tunic and black leggings with her boots and she couldn't help rolling her eyes, the melancholy lifting slightly. There was a running joke in security that red had been chosen by command to hide the bloodstains. With how many times she'd been hurt on away missions, she believed them. She'd gotten more than one disapproving look and dressing down from the captain on the state of her dress as well as her "reckless behavior" and she didn't relish another.

For some reason, she desperately wanted to please him, make him happy, and it was becoming a major chink in her armor. Her confidence had started sinking the longer she served with him. She wondered if she was losing who she was by being his subordinate. Starfleet Command had effectively "clipped her wings" by placing her in this position. She'd definitely become a better team player by working as a head of a department and was closer with the crew since being a captain tended to isolate you from them but it wasn't easy maintaining a leadership role when your opinions were frequently dismissed or criticized by your commanding officer. Even HQ had started to notice crew efficiency and morale was down with the way things were and, as an attempt to bring things back to par, shore leave had been approved earlier than standard. The flagship just
didn't stand out the way she was supposed to. They were basically a carbon copy of every other vessel out there.

Jim had always played close to her heart, only letting a select few people in but Spock? She wanted him there despite his animosity towards her and sensed that there should be something more but there wasn't.

During her time on the Enterprise she'd developed close friendships with the crew; Hendorff, Sulu, Chekov, Scotty, and many others. Bones had been her brother and confidant since the shuttle to the academy. Uhura was a hard one. They were amicable and professional but nowhere near close in friendship. Perhaps it was subconscious on Jim's part?

She'd been trying to stamp out her feelings for Spock for the past year. Ever since Khan and her death in the warp core, the Captain had withdrawn further and had made a habit to ride her harder and would frequently dress her down every mission when she suffered injury or when it was a failure. He rarely beamed down as regulation dictated the captain remained aboard ship but he still controlled and micromanaged everything.

The few times he joined them on away missions he would become incensed when she would do her damn job to protect him. It was her responsibility but she also couldn't bear the thought of something happening to him. She knew he interpreted her motives as something more than simple duty and he was right but she would never go for more. She couldn't do that to Uhura nor did Spock even show an interest in even being friends let alone anything more.

Sighing at her reflection, Jamison knew the burning pain every time she saw him kiss Uhura or turn her down for a meal together or a game of chess. She knew that he would never care for her in that way but she had hoped for at least friendship instead of the indifference and resentment. A command team needed to be in sync and work together to be successful and they were barely managing.

Admiral Baker had promised Jim her own ship, the Ulysses, after two years. They'd wanted her to get more experience and Jim had been forced into her current predicament. Fucking Starfleet politics. She only hoped that, once she received the assignment, that time and distance would heal her and kill her feelings towards Spock. The old adage of "out of sight, out of mind" might make things bearable. She'd said as much to the elder Spock (currently hiding behind the name of Selek). His eyes had shown his disappointment and heartbreak at the situation but he had conceded to the knowledge that this wasn't his universe. That things would be very different despite his belief that it should have been a Kirk as captain of the Enterprise with a Spock at their side.

Stepping onto the bridge, Jim stepped down onto the recessed portion of the bridge where Spock was sitting in the Captain's chair. For a second, her vision wavered and she swayed slightly. She saw herself sitting in the chair, Spock stood by her side with Bones but their uniforms were different. She was in command gold while Spock was in science blues, looking at her with...affection and respect. Blue and gold swirling together, perfect, a sense of rightness filling her. As soon as she processed what she was seeing, it started to fade and waver from her sight, almost making what was real and what she possibly was imagining cause a double vision effect with the two images overlaying each other.

Shaking her head, she held out the PADD to Spock who was watching her with narrowed, suspicious eyes. "Commander Kirk, are you ill?"

She snapped to attention, her face heating in embarrassment. "No, sir."

Spock looked her over from head to toe and she hated the scrutiny. She couldn't wait until the
Ulysses. She chafed under his command and the feelings she harbored for him just confused her.
Eleven more months. Just eleven more months.

"Very well." Taking the PADD, he quickly scanned the contents, typed in his own notes and scrawled his signature before handing it back. "Commander, in the future, I expect reports in a timely manner. Please adhere to standard Starfleet operating procedures with regards to submission of reports and requisitions."

Jim saw Hikaru shake his head slightly and blink in shock at the helm and she flushed again, this time in a volatile mix of anger and humiliation. She bit back her instinctive reply and just managed a stiff jerk of her head in acknowledgement.

The rest of alpha shift continued in silence punctuated only by the beeps of the consoles. Jim couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief when her replacement came to take over. The second she handed over her station she left the bridge as if wild dogs were chasing her and made her way to the medbay.

Bones was finishing turning an ensign who had turned purple from a roommate's prank back to his original human pink when he came back to find Jamison in his chair with it tilted back, feet up on his desk, and a mischievous smirk on her face just to irritate him.

"Bones! What's up, Doc?"

He moved towards her and shoved at her legs. "Feet!" He glared at her as she ignored him and tilted back further.

He stepped forward and pushed the chair forward. "Dammit, Jim. I do not need to have to fix a fractured skull."

"Didn't you always tell me I have a hard head?" Jim smiled as she was shoved forward and out of her perch by the irritated Doctor. Really, he was more like a marshmallow with cactus spines. Making her way around his desk, she made sure to bounce slightly. She knew she was successful in eliminating all potential anger towards her when she heard a huff of air from McCoy that was a small laugh.

She leaned a hip against the edge of his desk. "So, Bones, what are the big plans for shore leave?"

McCoy pulled out two glasses and poured a small measure of his Andorian whiskey. Really, Bones had the best liquor. She grabbed hers and sipped slightly, letting the liquid warm her mouth.

"Drink, ogle women, get turned down. The usual." He grumbled.

Jim's grin widened and she held out her arms dramatically for effect. "Ye of little faith, my friend. Your wingman is here!"

McCoy snorted into his whiskey, coughing when it went the wrong way. "Bullshit, Jim. I'd never get laid if I brought you with me!"

Rolling her eyes she took another drink. "I am the best wingman."

McCoy raised an eyebrow skeptically."You remember the Caitian twins?"

She definitely did. Who knew Caitian women were do flexible...or so open to new things? "Oh, yeah! They were awesome."
"I wouldn't know. They went home with you." He growled.

"Sorry." Jim cringed sympathetically and threw back the rest of the whiskey. "So, you're abandoning me?"

"Yup."

"Et tu, brute." She scowled and nudged her glass back to her friend who huffed a laugh at her expense.

"It's not like I'm not gonna see you after we get back, kid. It's only a day's worth of shore leave. What are your plans?" Bones finished his own and leaned back in his chair.

She'd kind of been hoping to spend a little more time with her best friend since she'd been working almost 24/7 the past month.

"Eh. I don't know. We'll see where the wind takes me." She hints for another drink and McCoy fills her glass a little more. "Got any ice?"

Rolling his eyes at her he put away the bottle. "I'm a doctor not a bartender."

Jim threw her drink back, smiling at her prickly marshmallow friend. She loved riling him up.

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Jim was having fun, her pain from Spock moved to the side in the chaos of her shore leave. It had been a long time since she'd been able to shove away that hurt even if it was for only a minute.

She was far on the other side of the base where Starfleet personnel didn't frequent as much. She'd actually been surprised by the lack of people on this end but pleased by the relative privacy it afforded her. Jim had had the fortune to run into a group of ferengi and it had taken a little effort but they started to become more fun as time went on. She fucking loved ferengi! They were awesome.

She was looking over her four cards while Nevok glared at his diminished Latium pile while she smiled from across the tongo wheel. "Your turn hu-mon. The risk is yours. Confront, evade, acquire, retreat."

Jim smiled, her white teeth shark-like. "Confront." She put her cards down and the four ferengi hissed at her and tossed theirs down. "Yes!" She laughed as she gathered the Latium strips from the spinning bowl in the center of the table.

She put five strips back and spun. "Opening risk is five strips of Latium. The purchase at three and the sell is eight."

She was just gathering her cards when she felt a chill run down her spine and the hairs on the back of her neck raised. Jim turned and saw Captain Spock looking at her and his eyes showing his displeasure.

"Commander Kirk, what is it that you are doing? You are aware that gambling is unbecoming of a Starfleet Officer."

The ferengis around the table glared and hissed at the newcomer and Jim's skin prickled in humiliation. She had nothing to feel guilt for. The station allowed the game and she was not on duty. Her usual haunts had held no appeal and she'd been sure she would have been able to avoid
Spock but he seemed to be able to hone in on her as if she had a tracking device imbedded in her. She made a mental note to ask Bones. She wouldn't be surprised.

"I'm furthering inter-species relations?" She joked but the answering frown from Spock caused it to fall flat.

Turning back to her opponents she put her cards face down and collected her winnings. "Looks like I'm out boys. Thanks for the Latium."

Qol shrugged. "You play well for a hu-mon fe-male."

Spock was rigid as she walked up next to him. "Commander, there is a plasma storm which will arrive at our location in one hour. You are to report to the Enterprise to organize preparation efforts to ensure that the station and ships are ready to withstand the storm and then return to implement evacuation efforts. I will be speaking with the station commander to obtain station protocol procedures for such an occurrence."

Jim nodded and fell in step next to Spock. She couldn't understand his animosity towards her. She just knew that if he gave a little that they'd be an amazing team. She admired him for his skills and intelligence, but he definitely struggled with building a rapport with the crew. It was a difficult task for her to constantly smooth relations between him and the crew. Ever since they'd been flung together on their five year mission he'd become...almost cruel and cold. She wouldn't say that he'd become more Vulcan because she actually got along well with Ambassador Sarek and other representatives from the colony but he seemed to hold a special anger towards her.

Sarek and her had actually even had a few late night conversations when she needed advice on handling delicate negotiations as well as advice on dealing with his son. He almost seemed like he regretted something or was disappointed but she couldn't understand why. He was nothing but respectful and kind when they talked. She had even understood his subtle sense of humor. She wasn't sure if he and Spock talked but she suspected that they had some form of tension between them since Sarek would ask about him frequently.

Selek (aka old Spock) would call once a week and they played chess long distance. She suspected he cheated because he kicked her ass too many times but she still loved it. Often he would recommend a great book or help her with her trying to learn Vulcan or Andorian or Klingon and he showed such love and affection towards her that she couldn't help but feel so happy after their calls even though he called her Pi'Jim meaning little Jim. She was not little. Well, maybe a little short.

"I will be placing a demerit notation for this incident in your record, commander."

Jamison bit her tongue on her instinctual reply that she had been off duty during her 'offense', forcing it down and feeling hurt at the rebuke.

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The storm was in full swing and the station shuddered around her as she guided the last of the station personnel towards the transporter platform. It was proving to be far worse than what their science department had estimated. They had been forced to evacuate the space station sooner than planned and rely on the other docked ships to assist in housing the people who lived and worked on the station. All of the ships had been ordered to disembark and move away to minimize the risk of damaging the docking pylons.

Bright sparks shot out from the transporter controls and the tech was thrown back into the wall, angry burns covering his hands.
"Shit." Running over, she helped the tech stand and pulled out her communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise. Do you read?"

Static filled the room but the voice of Lt. Uhura came through relatively clear. -"This is Enterprise."

Jim handed the tech off to one of the few remaining people and looked over the panel, groaning at the sight of the melted console that controlled three of the four transporter platforms. She could only transport one at a time.

"Enterprise, this is Kirk. We have a wounded transporter tech and will need medical standing by. The station transporter has been damaged by a power surge and I can only get one off at a time. Can you compensate?" She shouted and waited, hoping that they could cut through the interference alone. It had taken both systems working together but now it wasn't possible.

-"How many people are left?" Uhura asked.

Quickly doing a headcount, she sighed in relief. "Only four. Five if I include myself."

-"This is Enterprise. Lieutenant-Commander Scott advises against using our transporter without support from Omicron III." Spock interjected from the ship.

She cursed and clenched her fist. They needed to leave and it needed to be now. "Understood. Sending first person, now. Alert medical."

The injured crewman was assisted onto the platform by a young Bolian woman and he quickly disappeared in a glittering shower. She quickly ran through the sequences again to get the remaining people onto the Enterprise. The lights flickered as Jim sent the last person over.

She was activating the program to send herself remotely when the station jerked hard, knocking her into the panel. She had two seconds to see the sudden power surge and get her arms up to try to protect herself when the console exploded in her face and knocked her to the to the wall and she bounced back, smacking her face on the console.

She felt the bone snap in her wrist as she fell and screamed out in agony. Small shards of glass and plastic fell and cut her arms and shredded her sleeve. She couldn't see for the blood running down from her forehead. The side of her face burned and throbbed. Bones was gonna kill her.

Tearing off part of her shredded sleeve, she quickly pressed the fabric against her head in an attempt to stem the flow. Everything seemed disjointed and muted and she wondered if she'd hit her head. She looked at her left wrist and could see bone protruding through the skin and she giggled slightly, feeling as if she was drunk. Bones really was gonna kill her.

-"This is the Enterprise. Do you read us? Jim, I swear to god if you are dead I'm gonna bring you back to life just to be able to kill you again! Answer the damn comm!"

She stood on wobbling legs and picked up her communicator that she'd dropped next to the ruined console. "Yeah, Bones. M'here." Jim slurred.

The station shook and she ducked just as a piece of the ceiling crashed down next to her.

-"Dammit, Jim. What the hell is going on? We've been hailing you for over five minutes and your vitals are all over the place!"

The controls were a charred mess and the transporter pad itself was little more than smoking
craters. The irony was that she'd been wanting solitude and now that she definitely had it by virtue of being stuck on the abandoned station was unbelievable.

"The transporter is completely ruined over here." She slurred and swayed, the wreck of the panel blurry in front of her.

A pause. "Jim, are you hurt? You sound strange."

Jim giggled, feeling cold and tired. "My bones, Bones. Get it?"

Her makeshift bandage started to slip with the constant flow of blood from the stubborn cut at her hairline and she pulled it off, looking at it in a form of detached fascination.

"Jim? Jim?!? Answer me, dammit!" McCoy shouted and Jim slid down the wall, clutching the communicator to her.

"Panel exploded." She grunted.

"Commander Kirk, Commander Scott and I will be transporting you off the station." Spock's voice broke in.

"Aye-aye, cap'n" She mumbled and pulled herself up, swaying slightly and felt the telltale tingle of the transporter. She had a flash of seeing Spock's command gold and Scotty with a white-faced McCoy before they dissolved again before her eyes.

Her stomach lurched as she tensed upon rematerialization. Jim looked towards to controls and what she saw made her wonder if she'd hit her head harder than she'd thought.

She stepped back in terror and heartbreak. Captain Pike stood in front of her, whole and hale and next to him stood Spock but...he looked different. His hair wasn't in the traditional bowl-cut she'd become accustomed to. It was more of a human design with it parted on the left side and he was wearing science blues.

"-the fuck?" She slid down and fell on her butt, her focus switching between the two men in front of her. Spock looked at her but there was none of the irritation that she usually saw displayed on his face, instead, he looked increasingly worried. Pike kneeled down to her level and reached out to her.

"It's alright. I'm not going to hurt you. I'm captain Christopher Pike and you're on board the USS Enterprise. Can you tell me how you got here?" His voice was calm and low.

The moment he touched her she panicked and scrambled as far as she could. It was his voice, his face, even his expressions! It was Chris. It wasn't possible! "You're dead! Oh, God! Why are you here?" Her breathing became erratic. She just couldn't get enough air. Everything seemed to be pressing in on her.

There was a rushing sound in her ears muffling the sounds surrounding her. She saw the door open and Bones rushing in, his face grim as he took her in. He started asking her questions but she couldn't hear them. She shook her head as he started pressing a gauze pad to her forehead. A gentle touch to her arm from the imposter Pike and she flinched away from Pike and towards McCoy.

"Don't fucking touch me! You're not real! You're dead! I saw you die!" He couldn't be here! Was she crazy?

With her focus on Pike she completely missed what was happening. She felt a sting on her neck and she saw McCoy dumping a spent cartridge and now ordering a new group of medical staff
carrying a hover stretcher.

The lights grew dim as her world tipped sideways, blue and gold clad arms catching her and gently lowering her to the floor. Fingers, warmer than a human's touched her neck to check her pulse and she felt a small golden presence filter in, concern, excitement, and curiosity filling her from the foreign feeling and her mind reached out to it desperately to try and gain an anchor but it was quickly gone as her world went dark.
Chapter Two

Commander Spock stood next to his captain and gripped the railing with white knuckles, looking over the unusual power surges their ship was experiencing as the Enterprise shook like a child's rag doll. Controls were sparking, shorting out, and, in the case of the communications console, a small fire had erupted. All over the ship crew members and engineers were desperately trying to find the cause and put an end to it. Chief Engineer Scott was calling to try and get answers from science while the science team was trying to get answers from them. It was as if they were experiencing some form of electrical or plasma storm but they were in calm space.

"Commander, any ideas as to the cause of this? Or does the Enterprise have a bad case of the hiccups?" Pike asked.

Spock sent a message to the Lt. Cmdr. but received a negative, and rather scathing, response when asked if there was an answer related to engineering. He scanned over ship's systems and raised an eyebrow in surprise.

"Captain, the energy spikes seem to now be focusing on transporter room two."

Pike frowned and started for the turbolift. "Well, Spock, let's get a closer look."

"Captain, I advise against you leaving the bridge. It could be dangerous."

Pike turned his head, determination lining his face. "I want to know just what or who's been shaking my ship."

Spock followed the captain as they made their way through the ship, his curiosity spiking as the lights from the platform started glowing at their arrival. Sparks flew from the transporter controls and the matter/energy pads. Spock instinctively shielded his commanding officer.

A young woman with blonde hair pulled back in a messy bun and in the red uniform worn by Starfleet security materialized on the pad in a shower of energy. He could see the rank on the cuff of one sleeve listed as a commander. Spock's breath caught at the blue eyes that focused on him in confusion.

She was holding her left wrist which he could see was at an odd angle with the bone piercing through the skin. Her uniform was singed and cuts littered her arms and a deep gash near her hairline was bleeding profusely. She had burns covering part of her face but the worst was on her arms and hands, her right cheek was starting to swell profusely indicating a broken cheekbone or eye socket. He stepped forward with Captain Pike at his side and he became increasingly concerned when her eyes landed on the captain and widened in confusion and terror. She quickly backed away from them.

"-the fuck?"

The blond slid down the wall, turning pale and shaking. Spock hit the button to summon medical. Captain Pike moved slowly towards the blonde as if he was approaching a skittish horse that might bolt at any moment. She was clearly terrified and in need of prompt medical attention.

Spock kept a slight distance to ensure he didn't overwhelm the blonde but his captain seemed to be affecting her more than himself. Pike reached out a hand towards the woman but stopped short.
when she flinched away and shook in clear fear and Spock was concerned that shock may be setting in.

"It's alright. I'm not going to hurt you. I'm captain Christopher Pike and you're on board the USS Enterprise. Can you tell me how you got here?" The moment he touched her she scrambled away from him as if his touch would burn her. "You're dead! Oh, God! What are you doing here?"

Pike shot a questioning look to him and Spock's brows drew together. He shook his head to show he didn't understand the meaning behind woman's words. She'd started to become more distressed as time went on, her breath coming in short staccato bursts. Her emotions battered against his shields and he felt a desperate need to comfort her and soothe her fears. She seemed familiar despite him never having seen her before. There was something about her.

He started edging towards her to see if there was a way to assist when the door opened to admit Dr. McCoy. He took in the scene and immediately went to their visitor. Spock knelt behind the doctor as he ran his tricorder over her.

"It's ok, kid. Can you tell me your name?" He put down his tricorder and pulled out gauze and pressed it on the deep cut on her head. He scowled as she didn't answer.

"Doctor, I do not believe she can hear or understand you in her current state of distress." Spock told him.

McCoy snorted and rolled his eyes as he prepared a hypospray one handed. "Yeah. I figured as much. Her blood pressure's falling and she's becoming tachycardic. She's going into shock. Help me lie her down."

The second Pike touched her it was like a live current had gone through her. The blonde flinched away and her body stiffened. "Don't fucking touch me! You're not real! You're dead! I saw you die!" She leaned towards the doctor but her focus was completely on the captain and his was similarly reciprocated.

"Captain, keep her busy while I give her a sedative. I need to get her calm and start treatment as soon as possible. Some of those cuts and burns are nasty and that break is definitely bad."

Pike nodded and talked to her in calm, soothing tones while McCoy seized the opportunity and injected the blonde. They only had a moment's warning before her eyes rolled up and she suddenly slumped into their arms.

Spock went to take her pulse and immediately sensed a golden thread from her mind reaching for him desperately. He felt an echo of his own curiosity and a brightness to her mind but there was pain as well. Her mind was dynamic and creative with quicksilver thoughts running through at speeds that rivaled his own. His katra felt as if it was home there in this stranger's mind. T'hy'la!

There was a tugging on his wrist and Spock jerked back to himself, forcing himself to break the small link his shields had failed to prevent and assist the medical staff in loading the unconscious commander onto the stretcher. It was only after she was taken away that Spock noticed how calm the ship was and Pike's own consternation over the situation.

It was then that Spock noticed that the Enterprise was no longer shaking and everything was returning to normal. It was...strange. Black burns scorched the equipment and the smell of smoke permeated the air but everything was still.

"I swear, if I didn't know any better I'd say that was a young Winona Kirk except the eyes are
different. They look just like George's." His lips pressed into a thin line. "Get McCoy to do a DNA test to see if we can identify just who our guest is. The fates clearly wanted her to come here." He threw up his hands to emphasize the now calm ship.

Spock agreed.

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Jim groaned and opened her eyes to the harsh glow of sickbay only to close them as the lights overhead assaulted her pupils causing the sensation similar to needles being stabbed into her brain.

A hiss and sting at her neck and her eyes snapped open, the pain quickly fading but, in its wake, she felt slightly fuzzy which signified painkillers. Stronger ones than what she was used to. Bones knew she hated those. It made her head feel as if it was too heavy for her neck to support.

"Ah, you're awake. How're you feeling, kid?"

Jim turned to her right and saw McCoy standing next to her and dumping the spent cartridge. She took stock of herself and saw her left wrist in a splint and her cuts had been healed, leaving new, pink skin in it's wake which would fade in a few hours or so. Her arm had a phantom ache which meant it had been treated with an osteoblast treatment and was on it's way to healing but she'd be out of action for a week. Her skin felt too tight around the right side of her face and she pressed her fingertips to it and felt the swollen, sensitive skin covered in the oily derma-gel used to treat burns. She was also in one of those stupid medical gowns.

"Like shit, Bones. What the hell happened?" She started to sit up only to have the doctor place a hand on her shoulder and, instead, raise the bed to a semi-reclined position. She frowned at the gentle behavior and wondered if she was hurt worse than she'd originally thought.

"Did I hit my head or something? I saw-" She swallowed down the lump in her throat and her chest ached as she saw the image of Chris dead in front of her when the Daystrom building was attacked in her mind. "-I saw Christopher Pike in the transporter room and Spock was there but something wasn't right."

McCoy frowned and started checking her over, his movements sure and steady as he scanned and poked and prodded at her. "Do you know where you are?" She jerked back instinctively as he shined a bright light in her eyes but he was faster and he gripped her chin to still the movement.

"Medbay. What's going on?" Jim looked around and noticed some differences to what she was used to. She saw a small boy, about five, sitting on a biobed near her having a cut on his leg being tended to by a nurse but she didn't remember any children being listed on Omicron III nor did she beam any aboard. There were more medical staff and the color scheme was slightly different. Something wasn't sitting right as she looked at her surroundings.

"Can you tell me your name?"

He'd started tapping on the monitor next to her head and a hologram of her brain appeared next to her, rotating and he scrutinized it. Normally, by now, she'd be getting the third degree from her friend or, hell, even jokes about her "hard head". He was treating her as if she was a complete stranger. He was kind but something didn't fit.

"What the hell, Bones? You know who I am." She frowned at him but something seemed different about him. His hair was slightly longer, not quite regulation length and his uniform was a darker blue than it usually was and it had short sleeves. He waited expectantly and she complied.
"Jamison Tiberius Kirk."

"Date of birth?"

Jim tilted her head, noticing that Bones was noting her information on a PADD with "New Patient" listed at the top. "January 4th 2233."

"I noticed some abnormalities on your scans but I'll get to them later." He placed the PADD on a nearby table and leaned back. "My name is Doctor Leonard McCoy."

Jo laughed nervously, her stomach tightening. "C'mon, Bones. What's going on?"

He frowned and picked up a neural scanner, placing it on her forehead and she saw a glint of gold on his left finger, a wedding ring. She pushed him away in a panic, her breathing beginning to speed up. This wasn't her McCoy! "Where the hell am I? And who the fuck are you?" Alarms started blaring as her heart rate increased.

McCoy, or rather this man who looked like her Leonard McCoy, put his hands out in a non-threatening manner. "Miss Kirk, I'm not going to hurt you. I just want to help. You're very hurt right now and I know you're scared but you're safe."

She was about to ask him again what was going on when the privacy curtain was pulled aside and Spock walked in but he wasn't wearing his command golds. He was wearing a blue science division uniform and the stripes on his sleeve listed him with the lower rank of commander. His hair was different too. It was brushed away from his face and forehead in an almost human fashion. He looked at her with curiosity bright in his eyes but also concern. It wasn't a characteristic she usually associated with her captain. Usually there was disdain or anger or even disappointment.

Then followed a ghost. She felt the blood drain from her face as she saw her mentor and father-figure walk up to her. It was confirmation that something was very very wrong. She scrambled off the biobed, moving to where the wall was against her back to put some distance between herself and these imposters.

"I'm Captain Christopher Pike and this is my first officer and science officer, Commander Spock." He moved closer, his eyebrows close together in a frown but it wasn't anger. It was worry. "How are you feeling? You look like you had a rough time and you gave us quite a scare when you appeared here."

Jim couldn't answer. Her eyes were glued to him. She wondered if she was dreaming but, at the same time, she could tell he was real. She wanted desperately to believe that he was there; that Khan had been some sort of nightmare and he had somehow survived his madness but everything seemed wrong. "What's going on?"

"You were somehow transported onto our ship, the Enterprise. Commander Spock is investigating the sensor readings we were able to collect but we were experiencing power surges and a lot of our systems were damaged at the time you arrived." He indicated the vulcan next to him.

He turned to McCoy and the doctor started talking after shooting her a worried look. "This is Jamison Tiberius Kirk. She appears healthy except for the injuries sustained from some unknown incident. Her blood pressure and pulse are high right now but that's understandable due to stress. DNA tests revealed a match as to her parentage. Mother Winona Jane Kirk and father George Samuel Kirk with a sibling of George Samuel Kirk Jr. Her DNA is almost identical to our James T. Kirk with the exception of an X chromosome where there should be a Y."
Pike turned his attention to her and moved closer. His expression changed to one of wonder. "You
look just like your mother."

"-the fuck? What are you talking about? What the hell is going on? One minute I'm on Omicron III
and now..." Jim couldn't help the feeling of panic threatening to overwhelm her. She shoved the
visual evidence of it away but her heart continued to beat wildly against her ribs.

It was a strange mix of emotions seeing him alive. There was heartbreak but she was happy to see
him. The only things she'd had left of him since he'd died had been her memories and pictures from
her time at the academy, camping trips (yeah. Bones had hated that, citing every disease, possible
accidents, and parasites that could kill them in "the wilderness"), when she'd graduated, and a
multitude of other times they'd spent together. He'd become like a mix of a father and friend to her.

Black spots started appearing in her vision and she started to waver on her feet. Three sets of
concerned eyes landed on her but it was Spock who got to her first, taking her arm in a strong grip
to guide her back to the biobed and carefully lean her back into a semi-reclined position. She felt a
jerking sensation in her stomach at Spock showing such care towards her.

He then laid his hand on her arm and she felt a sense of calm flow through her and her heart
slowed. The thoughts that had been swirling in her head like a tornado turned into a gentle breeze
and her vision cleared. She'd never been touched in such a gentle manner by Spock and that almost
as painful as seeing her dead mentor suddenly alive and in front of her. Kirk pulled her arm away
but a sense of hurt hit her and she realized it came from Spock.

Captain Pike continued. "We believe that you were somehow transported here from an alternate
universe; an alternate reality where events unfolded in a different sequence or manner to our own.

In our reality, our Kirk was born James Tiberius Kirk. He died at age thirteen along with his
mother and brother." Pike cleared his throat and was clearly struggling with something. Jim
shuddered and immediately knew how he died. Tarsus IV. The difference was that in her timeline
she'd been sent there alone. "George Kirk Sr died when the USS Kelvin was attacked by a
Romulan named Nero. He saved the lives of over eight hundred crew members and civilians."

Pike's explanation made a strange sort of sense but she didn't have a science major. It seemed that
there were a lot of similarities but just as many differences between their universes. Kirk's
experience and knowledge was limited to the mandatory academy lectures and, even then, the
theory hadn't even been broached since it had never been seen as a possibility until the Narada. Her
forays into the advanced sciences were limited to computers, botany and genetic engineering with
flora. She'd been one of the leads in the creation of quadrotriticale grain. Sulu had been ecstatic at
the fact that they were both botany nerds.

She couldn't help staring at the three men. It wasn't that she wasn't used to crazy shit. She saw it all
the time on her ship but this was definitely so far in a realm of weird that she was actually
frightened. She had experience with the whole alternate universe theory. It was the leading
scientific explanation for their own universe and to explain Nero as well as Vulcan's destruction at
his hands. Hell, it had been pinpointed by the older Spock that the division had occurred the
moment the insane Romulan had come through the singularity and destroyed the USS Kelvin.

God! What would Bones be thinking when she didn't show up on the transporter pad in her own
universe? He'd be sick with worry or even grieving thinking she was dead! Would they even
realize what had happened? She had friends and her family back home and she needed to get back
there.

"We're currently working on a way to get you back to your own universe but we're limited so we're
gonna need your help. I want you to work with Commander Spock as soon as Dr. McCoy clears you and you feel well enough to try and figure out a way to accomplish that goal." Pike explained, and maybe Jim was imagining it, but he looked regretful as if he didn't want to follow through with his duty. Her eyes trailed to Spock and his expression turned blank as his captain spoke of her impending return to her home.

"I'll try my best, sir, but my field of expertise does not lie in quantum physics."

Pike's lips quirked in amusement and his eyes softened. "I know. If you're anything like my version of Kirk I know you'll do your best. He was a veritable genius but science was never his strong suit either."

Nodding to Spock, the captain straightened and moved towards the privacy curtain. "I'll leave you in Doctor McCoy and Commander Spock's capable hands." With a nod he left.

Running her hands through her hair, Jim sighed. "Well, what do you want to know?"
Chapter Three

McCoy stood in the transporter room, helping the last of the Omicron III personnel off the transporter pad, triaging and evaluating need of care, when he felt a violent jerk on the ship. Transporter tech Stiles almost lost his footing but quickly regained it, tapping the comms.

"Omicron station, this is Enterprise. Do you read?"

No response. They try three more times, each time there's still no response. Pulling up Jim's readings on the wall panel next to him, McCoy's grip on his medical kit gets tighter. Her vitals are showing symptoms of pain and some readings are creeping into the yellow. An uneasy feeling starts to settle in his very bones at her silence and he steps up to signal him herself as Stiles contacts the bridge.

"This is the Enterprise. Do you read us? Jim, I swear to god if you are dead I'm gonna bring you back to life just to be able to kill you again! Answer the damn comm!"


More crashes sounded in the background and he prayed that none of them compounded any of the injuries she already had.

"Damnit, Jim. What the hell is going on? We've been hailing you for over five minutes and your vitals are all over the place!"

"The transporter is completely ruined over here." She slurred and swayed, the wreck of the panel...
blurry in front of her.

There was a pause and McCoy felt panic bubbling at the thought of his helplessness; at being too far, and yet too close, away to help her. "Jim, are you hurt? You sound strange." He needed to keep her talking.

The ship continued to tremble under his feet and his eyes couldn't stop straying to the readings showing her stats. Her pulse was becoming tachycardic and her blood pressure was too low. She needed to be beamed out and it needed to happen now. McCoy was so focused on her that he didn't even notice Spock's arrival into the transporter room until he was stood right next to him.

An hysterical giggle sounded through the communication. Shock McCoy's mind unhelpfully informed him -"My bones, Bones. Get it?"

"Jim? Jim?!? Answer me, dammit!" McCoy shouted as the captain entered the transporter room, his posture straight and shoulders stiff from some unknown tension.

There was a burst of static and he had a moment of fear thinking that they'd lost the transmission when he heard her, her voice sounding far more tired than it should. -"Panel exploded." She grunted.

"Commander Kirk, Commander Scott and I will be transporting you off the station." Spock's voice broke in. Jim's vitals began to creep to the orange and he readied himself for whatever injuries she could possibly have.

"Aye-aye, cap'n" She mumbled.

He could almost imagine the lazy salute from his friend. He regretted not spending his shore leave with her thought back to their last conversation and how selfish he'd been. He'd known Jim had been having problems adjusting to being Spock's subordinate and dealing with his treatment of her. He'd known she'd been harboring a crush on the bastard for months and the constant rejection of even friendship had been driving her almost into a depression.

How stupid could he have been to not realize the kid had wanted to spend time with him and talk to someone who knew about it? She'd needed his support and he'd turned her away.

"Energize."

Both the Captain and doctor stepped away from the controls to wait for her return, Spock was almost as tense as him. Sparkles of gold and silver lit up the pad as the start of transport began and he saw the beginning of her form taking shape, taking note of the hunched posture.

"Captain! I'm losing her signature! Interference from the storm is getting stronger!"

Spock's head whipped around. "Reroute emergency power to the pattern buffers and focus on enhancing the signal!"

Stiles' hands moved frantically over the panel, his face becoming just as panicked as McCoy felt.

"I'm still losing her!"

McCoy watched in horror as Jim started to materialize only for her to fade as their eyes met, her own expression matching his.

"Captain, I've-I've lost Commander Kirk. Her signal's just...gone."
He was numb, his legs like jelly at the tech's words and they barely supported him. No! He had to be wrong!

"Explain." Spock snapped at the tech.

Stiles looked sick, as if he was about to vomit or faint or both. "I can't find her, sir. Scanners aren't picking anything."

The doctor's eyes drifted to the panel showing Jim's readings and what he saw was far too familiar. Flat-lines across the board. Memories of when he had scanned her after her death in the warp core and seeing what he was seeing overlapped each other. It had to be instrument malfunction from the plasma storm. She couldn't be gone!

Spock stepped behind the glass partition, performing the scan himself, his focus and movements calm and calculated but what he saw clearly confirmed Stiles' words.

"Computer, make a note in the log that Commander Jamison Kirk is listed as missing, presumed dead at this point in time."

Spock's calm delivery made something in McCoy snap and he jerked to full attention.

He watched, every movement of the captain searing into his memory, burning and painful. "Captain Spock to the bridge, set a course far enough from the station to ensure our safety from the storm."

McCoy charged, standing toe to toe with the Vulcan. "You're not leaving her behind, are you?"

Spock faced him, his body and face exhibiting calm but his eyes held an intensity the likes of which he'd only seen twice before. When he'd nearly killed his best friend on the bridge after the attack on Vulcan and when he'd dragged Khan's unconscious body into his medbay.

"Lieutenant-Commander, scans show no evidence of Commander Kirk and, therefore, there is nothing for us to transport. It is too dangerous for us to remain to locate what is not there so we must relocate to a safe distance for the crew of the ship as well as those that we have recovered from the station to ensure our survival." He paused, as if the words held little appeal to him and cost him far more than he was willing to pay. "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few...or the one."

He couldn't believe what he was hearing. The cold delivery and the lack of empathy at the potential loss of her.

"Doctor, I believe your services would be better served in the ship's sickbay as there are multiple beings who are injured and require your care."

McCoy's fists balled and he refused to move. "You can't just leave her behind!"

"I have a duty to the 487 people on board this ship and I will not risk their lives on the slim possibility that the commander is alive when scans show otherwise."

"You son of a bitch! You have a duty to Jim! She is just as important as the rest of us!"

Spock was unmoved by his emotional outburst. "This is an action that she would agree with if she was in the same situation."

"That is bullshit! She would never leave someone behind. If this was your goddamn girlfriend you
would be trying harder! You always wanted her gone. You've treated her with nothing but disdain and indifference from the moment you became captain! You're happy she's gone!"

Spock raised a brow and he wanted to punch those from his face. "You are attempting to elicit an emotional response. You will not succeed."

"Of course I won't because you're just a green-blooded, cold, fucking computer and you don't give a damn about anyone or anything!" He hissed.

Spock's eyes narrowed at the accusation and McCoy could see the repressed anger. "Doctor McCoy, you are relieved of duty and confined to quarters. You are emotionally compromised."

"You're fucking right I'm emotionally compromised, you heartless bastard."

The intensity of the human's emotions battered against his shields, leaving him unprepared for the psychic assault but the wild swing of McCoy's fist was predictable. The captain smoothly stepped aside, avoiding the attack and watched dispassionately as the doctor crumpled to the floor as he applied pressure to the join between his neck and shoulder, performing a flawless nerve pinch to incapacitate the agitated man.

The ever-present shaking of the ship subsided to a calm he did not feel as the Enterprise moved away from Omicron III and his chance to save the blond woman who'd slowly become the central focus of his life.

xXx

Once the storm passed, Spock had locked himself in the computer labs, analyzing the scans and data they had collected. He didn't trust the competence of his science staff despite their impressive qualifications. He couldn't stomach the idea of losing her.

The electrical interference from the storm had caused considerably more damage than had been initially predicted and he was not able to retrieve many of the files that were needed to determine exactly what had happened. His hand gripped the stylus he had been using and it snapped under the pressure, his frustration leaking through as his shields began to fray. He had not been able to successfully meditate since her loss four days ago and his control was weakening.

Word of the loss of Commander Kirk and of his action of leaving behind the small chance of rescuing her had spread through the ship at a speed beyond that of warp. Grief and resentment towards him permeated the atmosphere like an insidious cloud settling over the crew. His seemingly lack of emotion only fueled it despite his feelings on the inside.

"Spock?"

He ignored the voice behind him, instead continuing his desperate search. He'd begun to ignore his required duties as captain. He couldn't stop! He'd spent so much time trying to protect her, to keep her safe from harm, and trying to ensure she learned everything that she'd need to become a better commander (and eventually captain) so she would never come to harm.

He needed her to be safe but he could never allow himself to become close to her. He couldn't bear losing her again. She'd made herself a part of him early in their relationship and when he'd lost her to Khan it had very nearly destroyed him. The only thing that had stopped him murdering the augmented human had been when Uhura had shouted that Jim could be saved.

"Spock?" A gentle touch to his the bare skin of his neck caused him to recoil and he felt the hurt radiate off Nyota which turned to determined resolve.
"Spock, you need to rest and meditate. You can't save her if you're not at your best." Brown eyes swam into his vision as she knelt in front of him. "I know you worry about her but I'm worried about you. I love you. Right now you're hurting yourself and your crew. They need you." She paused, hurt at his lack of response. "I need you." She whispered.

Spock moved to embrace Nyota and rested his head on her shoulders, letting her weather the storm of his emotions. Her strength and calm permeated his being and he relaxed for the first time in days as she pressed a gentle and loving kiss to his forehead.

"I cherish thee, k'diwa, and thank thee for thy wisdom." He loved her but he felt such conflict in his thoughts and heart about the two women. Nyota was a perfect match that promised safety, security, love, and calm while Jamison was the embodiment of chaos but she brought forth the passions of his people that he fought to control but her differences only complimented him a way that Nyota could not.

She held him tighter and stroked his back. "I know. I know." She let his weight bring them down to the floor and held him until she felt his shaking from exhaustion subside. "You'll find her."

Nyota knew that emotions ran deep in his people and that they weren't the same as a human's. They were more focused, single-minded, and, at times, dangerous. She wondered just how deep his care for Kirk went and if she could only match it in the heart of the man she loved.
Chapter Four

Commander Spock had been shocked at the differences between his universe and Commander Kirk's. The thought of losing Vulcan and his mother to Nero had been disturbing. In his universe his parents had been off planet as Sarek had been negotiating a treaty for the planet Betazed to join the United Federation of Planets. Earth had been the planet that had fallen victim to the Romulan Nero's insanity in his timeline.

He had been forced to meditate to process the information that Jamison-no-Jim, had provided. On their end there had been no plasma storm and there was no base designated as Omicron III despite the coordinates matching their location. Scans had shown abnormalities in subspace but it was a puzzling enigma. He enlisted the help of Lieutenant Commander Scott in an effort to study their transporter to see if an attempt to simply artificially create the conditions that brought Jim to them to return her to her reality. So far, the results had not been promising. The test pods had come back smoking and the metal warped with unstable molecular cohesion. He decided to focus his search by utilizing the current and past theories in regards to the situation at hand.

Spock also, in deference to his human side, considered the possibility of fate. The philosophical debate of the universe attempting to correct a conceived wrong and, therefore, bringing a person or soul that should have been present here. There are the facts that there was no storm in their situation nor was there a deep space station so there would be nowhere to attempt to beam Jamison Kirk back safely and it would risk her life to beam her back as the circumstances here are vastly different.

Jim had been similarly disturbed when she had been told of the events in their universe. The fact that their version of Kirk and the mother and brother that she was genetically "related" to had perished on Tarsus IV during the massacre instigated by Governor Kodos as well as the destruction of Earth had greatly upset her. The death of George Kirk and the destruction of the USS Kelvin was where the similarities ended in regards to Jim's personal history.

Doctor McCoy had, at that point, forced him to leave citing emotional distress of his patient and that she needed her rest to heal. Spock had decided to limit her involvement in the project to prevent further emotional pain. It was only logical.

His thoughts drifted to the connection he had felt during their brief contact, the way her mind had automatically sought his to forge a link between them had been an experience he had never thought he would have with another being. It was a myth on Vulcan that the possibility of a bond like that, a t'hy'la bond, existed. It was considered a perfect connection signifying the other being was your soulmate, your other half, a perfect match, and it was revered by his people. He couldn't help but yearn to feel it again. His mind and heart ached at the loss he had felt when the connection had been broken. He did not want to lose it.

He wondered if what he was doing was the right thing by attempting returning her to where she had
come from where his counterpart appeared to be indifferent to her. It was a selfish thought but one he could not place to the back of his mind.

He also was curious as to whether this other version of Spock from her home had experienced this connection. He had not been able to see far enough in their shallow link to determine if there was a bond between the two but it seemed unlikely. For that he would need to perform a full meld but his instincts told him that there wasn't a bond nor would a meld between herself and him be welcome so early in their association. She did not trust him and he had his alternate counterpart to blame for that. Had there been a bond then the strain that the separation from her own Spock would have been evident by her scans and she would likely be suffering from psychic shock as a psi-null being she would be unable to defend or shield herself from such an event.

Why would the Spock of this other universe choose to not complete this bond? Was he unaware of it? Was he indifferent to it or simply did not care to to have it? Despite Spock's combined upbringing on Earth and Vulcan he was well aware of the different bonds between Vulcan mates and any Vulcan, despite the universe they are from, should know about a t'hy'la bonds and the significance behind them.

Jim's conversations about her captain were generally limited to the professional aspects of their relationship and any further information was not provided by her. He could feel pain and sorrow emanating from her in waves when he lowered his shields slightly. It was surprisingly powerful. What had his counterpart done to cause this?

Captain Pike, also, seemed unusually curious about Jamison Kirk especially when she had revealed the friendship she had had with his own counterpart. His behaviors seemed almost...protective? It was similar to his father and mother's behaviors towards him.

Spock ran through his latest set of calculations to return Jamison home but his thoughts were disordered and chaotic. Perhaps he needed further meditation to center himself. Instead, his curiosity led him to seek Jim Kirk out.

He easily found her in the mess hall. Clearly the doctor had released her but with restrictions as he noticed the medical bracelet on her right wrist. She was eating a small bowl of soup but her attention was on the people in the room. She was still pale and there were still bruises adorning her face and swelling around her left eye and cheek. She had a brace on her left wrist but she looked well enough as she moved with minimal but sluggish behaviors signifying she was still on medication from medical. He noticed she was wearing Starfleet issued blacks but they only served to emphasize how pale and drawn she was. Despite the advances in medicine, it would still be a few days before the deep bruising would be completely gone and fractures healed.

He went to the replicator and typed in the commands for vegetarian lasagne and joined the blond. He noticed she flinched as if in fear of him when he sat down. It was an understandable reaction to the foreign atmosphere but it was still disconcerting. Just what had the other Spock done to illicit such a reaction?

"Commander, how are you feeling?" He asked.

The corners of her mouth turned down and she delayed her answer, stirring her soup. "I'm fine. Your Dr. McCoy is an excellent physician if a bit too friendly with the hypos. I guess it's a universal constant since mine is the same."

Spock frowned at the answer. "Fine has variable definitions."

Jim sighed in frustration and put her spoon down. She had clearly not been eating as the contents
were still at a high level in the bowl.

"I'm freaked out, ok? One minute I was doing my job and things made sense and now?" She paused, as if searching for answers. "Now, I'm seeing ghosts, my home planet is gone and things are-they're different."

She held out her injured arm. "And my wrist fucking hurts."

Spock listened to her outburst with a raised eyebrow. "The former issue I am working to correct. As to the latter, perhaps the doctor was premature in releasing you and may assist in relieving the discomfort."

"No thanks. I'm already feeling too fuzzy with the meds he's given me." She glared at the bowl as if it had caused her problems. "I hate hypos and seeing a version of my best friend that doesn't know me and has never known me is painful." Jim looked away, her eyes shining with unshed tears.

Spock nodded in understanding. "I am gratified that you have confided in me."

Jim smiled, her eyes softening at him and Spock's heart skipped a beat. The young woman was an intriguing mystery. One Spock hoped to investigate and solve.

Jim pushed the bowl away. "I think I'm gonna go to my quarters and rest. I just need to process...this." She waved a vague hand around to show her meaning.

The commander pushed his own untouched food away. "I will escort you if you wish."

She smiled again, her countenance lighter and more relaxed and Spock hoped to elicit more of those responses.

"I'd like that very much, commander."

xXx

Jim spent the night going over available data in regards to universe multiplicity but quickly found her access limited to scientific articles rather than current readings and past historic Starfleet encounters that were public record of this type of occurrence as she wasn't a crew member. It was, to say the least, frustrating. She had then attempted to access the Enterprise's sensor data from the accident but was locked out for the same reason.

Jim thought back to her one experience of a person out of time and out of place in a reality that was not his own. The older Spock who had come through a singularity that was now trapped in an alternate reality. Considering the situation behind Earth's destruction was very similar to the massacre at Vulcan in her time then it stood to reason that there was more data and there was a possibility that a version of him was here or had been here as well but, once again, her access was locked. She growled in frustration. She debated hacking into the system to see it but ultimately decided to hold off and respect the hierarchy here for now.

She woke the next morning after only an hour or two of sleep with a blinding headache and her injuries seemed far more uncomfortable than yesterday. Her wrist ached and her face and upper body looked as if a rainbow had appeared on her skin. On the left side of her face she could see bags under her eye and both eyes looked slightly bloodshot. Jim considered the med bracelet adorning her right wrist. The knowledge that every function of her body was being reviewed and
monitored constantly by medical made her squirm uncomfortably. She turned at the pile of hypos and grimaced, refusing to take one. She hated those things.

Instead, she just grabbed the PADD that had her limited info and her own calculations, determined to gain some answers and to try and provide her own input and assistance and was heading to the door when it chimed announcing a visitor.

Puzzled, she opened the door and saw Commander Spock waiting on the other side. "Commander Spock?"

His stance shifted and she had the impression that he was nervous? Maybe impatient or guilty? Eager? He almost looked as if he'd been kept from something that he had desperately wanted and had been forced to wait. This Spock was very different to her own. He was easier to read but, at the same time, harder due to her lack of familiarity. It was just different; a larger variety of behaviors and emotions than what she was used to. He seemed more...balanced. It was like he was a younger version of the elder Spock with his attitude but that he had been able to accept the balance of being both human and Vulcan far earlier in life than either of them. She wondered if her Spock would ever achieve that same peace and hoped that he would.

"I have not yet had breakfast and wished to know if you would like to accompany me to partake in your morning meal."

She looked him over and was surprised to find he was genuine in his offer. There seemed to be no ulterior motive. Again, the differences were so vast between the two Spocks that it caused a visceral pain in her to potentially have someone she might be able to call friend and then have to leave him because this wasn't her home. Bones, her mother, her brother, and her crew back on her ship needed her and she needed them.

"Sure." She smiled. "We can go over the sensor readings and research as well while we're eating to get me up to speed."

Faint lines appeared between Spock's eyebrows in a small frown but he still nodded and stepped aside to allow her the space to walk next to him. "Perhaps your involvement in the project to return you to your home this early may cause you distress or delay your recovery. Dr. McCoy was adamant that you rest and heal, both mentally and physically, to be able to absorb the reality in which you currently are in as well as to not tax you unduly with work. I would be remiss in my duties if I did not follow our CMO's orders."

The blond waved off his statement. "Nah. I'm good. something to focus on will help me to not go insane. I get restless when I have nothing to occupy my time." The frown lines deepened between Spock's eyebrows showing his displeasure.

"Very well. I will discuss some of the information but I will have to confer with Captain Pike as to the amount of what you may view due to security protocols with non-Starfleet personnel."

Jim clenched her jaw at the bald statement that she wasn't an officer but accepted that she was considered an unknown here.

They quickly gathered their trays and sat down. Jim looked around the mess hall and it was so strange to see entire families on board as well as crew members she knew from her own universe with so many differences. She saw Samuel Hendorff but he was with Thomas Wright holding hands, Hikaru Sulu with his husband, Ben, and their daughter Demora, Sally Henson with Uhura's yeoman Thae and many others. Everyone looked...happy and settled. It was different from the tense atmosphere that had permeated her Enterprise under Spock's command.
She pulled out the PADD and started to discuss the theory behind her own calculations to recreate the accident as well as known data about parallel universes which was, admittedly, limited.

"So," She spooned a bite of her apple-cinnamon oatmeal and started eating. "What have we got?"

Spock launched into an explanation, going into teacher mode and Jim wondered if he had been a Starfleet professor in this universe. If he hadn't then it was a travesty. He was amazing at it. "As our experience regarding these circumstances is limited we do not know what the shape of space-time is exactly but the prominent theory is that it is flat and can go on forever, however, it stands to reason that universes may, in some instances, be repeating themselves. The number of possible particle configurations in multiple universes could possibly be limited to \(10^{10^{122}}\) distinct possibilities to be exact. So, with an infinite number of cosmic patches, the particle arrangements within them must repeat and differ-infinitely many times over. This means there are many parallel universes with cosmic patches the same as ours containing someone exactly like yourself as well as patches that are different from one particle position, patches that differ by two particles position, and so on down to patches that are completely different from ours which will make it difficult to identify exactly which universe is yours." The Vulcan explained and Jim looked away, thinking over the answer. Physics was truly her weak point unless it involved tactics. She had taken the required courses at the academy but they never covered this possibility. She struggled to keep up with what Spock was saying.

"Any other ideas?" She asked, nervous about the answer.

Spock looked distinctly unhappy and she wondered if it was some misplaced belief that she couldn't handle it. She may not be the best but she could try. Jim's face fell slightly. She wasn't so sure of herself anymore but she pulled herself together and tried to shake off her self-doubt. She smiled but it didn't reach her eyes.

"There is also the possibility that the multiple universes can follow the theory of quantum mechanics, how subatomic particles behave, as part of the "daughter universe" theory. If you follow the laws of probability, it suggests that every outcome that could come from one of your previous choices that were differently acted upon that are independent and separate. There would be a range of data for each one. For example, if you had decided on a different career path or simply took a different road down the street and so on each universe would be different especially as it would also be different due to the infinite number of beings that could or would also make different decisions and that would increase the difficulties immensely making it almost impossible to locate your home with the probability so minimal I would be unable to calculate it."

Jim pushed away her food at the discussion, the negativity that came from the clearly difficult process involved in returning her home. She no longer felt hungry. As the commander continued she felt a migraine growing behind her left eye. This was why she had stuck with tactics and command at the forefront of her studies at the academy.

The Spock in her universe didn't know about her skills in botany and she had preferred it that way. The few times she'd tried to engage him in discussion she'd been dismissed with a 'this would not interest you as you do not have the necessary skills or ability to comprehend the complexity of the subject' despite it being a topic she was infinitely skilled and qualified in.

She'd never been able to confide in him or trust him to let him know of her accomplishments or the reason behind them. Sulu knew of her skills, even going so far as reading her college and university research and thesis's. He'd seen the funding and results of her's and Thomas Leighton's research and development of quadrotriticale that had been completed under a simple anagram of her name next to his. Bones knew of her projects and of Tarsus. The reasons behind their work kept hidden
"There is also the added difficulty of recreating the event in the exact manner that brought you here. The situations between here and your home are vastly different and our readings were severely limited due to systems failing with power surges on the Enterprise. You may have to accept that you cannot be returned and, for that, I apologize." Spock looked at her with sympathy but she refused to accept even the possibility that she was trapped here.

A voice with a familiar Scottish brogue interrupted Spock. "Oh, aye, lassie. We'll get you home."

She jumped at the sudden intrusion and saw Lieutenant-Commander Scott join them, his plate filled with beans, toast, tomatoes and sausage. It was an eclectic breakfast.

"Montgomery Scott." He held out his hand and Jim shook it as he joined them, grimacing as the movement jarred her healing injuries. "But yeh can call me Scotty." She missed Spock's look of aggravation as the engineer sat down.

He pointed to Spock with his fork. "The commander here is the best and Ensign Chekov, as well as meself, are a dab hand at transporter technology so, between the three of us, we'll get you back."

He gently slapped at her shoulder and she had to grit her teeth to stop crying out. She'd forgotten how tactile Scotty was.

"We will make an attempt, however, the possibility remains that you may not be able to be returned, Commander Kirk." Spock frowned and started to focus on his fruit salad that he had ordered.

"Psht. There's no need ta be so negative, Commander. If it happened once, it can happen again." He said through a mouthful of toast and beans.

Jim rubbed her temple with the fingers of her right hand, trying to dispel her headache and was about to ask if she could look over the data when she felt a sting in her neck and she whirled around to see McCoy tucking away a hypo with a glare directed at her. "Stop being a goddamn baby and follow my orders. Your blood pressure is through the roof showing you're in pain and your blood sugar is too low so your readings are practically a yo-yo right now."

"You know you're mean with those. They hurt!" She rubbed the spot on her neck and grudgingly admitted her headache and the various aches and pains were fading but now she only felt tired. The combination of lack of sleep, food, and the meds were making her eyes droop. She'd been using the pain to keep herself awake.

McCoy rolled his eyes at her protest. "Even my six year old tolerates shots better."

The little girl behind him giggled. The doctor pushed her forward and Jim saw a gap-toothed smile and mischievous brown eyes that matched McCoy's. She really was adorable. "This is Joanna, my daughter." He leaned down. "Jo-Jo, this is Miss Jamison Kirk. She'll be staying with us a little while. Did you want to say hi?"

"Hi!" Joanne waved and then her eyes drifted away from them and lit up. McCoy and Jim followed her glance and smiled. There was a Vulcan woman leading a group of children and teens of a variety of species and races to a larger table towards the edge of the mess hall.

"Did you want to eat breakfast with your teacher, Miss T'Para, and the other kids?" He asked and
the small brunette nodded vigorously, hugged her father's leg and ran off before he could even say bye. The mini-McCoy said something to the teacher and raised her hand in the traditional Vulcan greeting. Jim swore she saw a hint of a smile on the woman's lips but it was gone the moment she took a closer look.

"Abandoned for a Vulcan. Can you believe it?" He shook his head but Jim could see the hint of a smile.

"Perhaps she prefers logic and order compared to your...chaotic behavior." Spock replied with a raised brow.

Jim laughed which rapidly turned into a cough when McCoy glared. "Sick patient, remember?" She fake coughed a few more times much to Scotty's amusement and prevent McCoy's ire at her reaction. She really couldn't believe it. Spock making a joke?

McCoy turned to Spock, his face turning red and he was about to reply to him when Jim saw Uhura, or rather this universe's Uhura, step up behind him and place a hand on his arm. He quickly deflated and turned to her, smiling and placing a quick kiss on her cheek. Jim had to stop herself from gaping at the sight. This Uhura had her hair short with curls and she was pregnant. Now that she looked closer she could see matching white gold wedding bands on both of their left hands.

She reached across the table and Jim shook her hand. "Nyota Uhura and ignore Leo." She introduced herself.

"Jim Kirk." Her eyes darted between the two and she just couldn't help her surprise at the fact that those two were together. He looked smitten if Bones'-no. Leo's expressions were anything to go by.

Jim yawned and went to pick up her coffee when McCoy's eyes zeroed in on her and he snatched it away. "Hey! That coffee was spoken for!"

The doctor rolled his eyes and smirked. "Spock, go bring my type-A patient some fresh oatmeal, fruit and a glass of milk and then she is going back to bed for a nap." He smirked and Spock left and quickly, returning with the items ordered.

"Low blow. Very. Low. I just need-"

"-to listen to your doctor and get some food, sleep, and heal. Don't think I didn't notice how tired you look this morning." He interrupted.

"But I need to get working on-" She started and Leo continued arguing over her protests.

"You've got the best people on the ship working on the problem and right now you look like you've gone three rounds with a nausicaan and are about to pass out in your food. I'm not about to be forced to put "death by drowning in oatmeal" in your file so eat and go to sleep, kid."

She supposed she could always go over everything when she got back to her-

He deftly snatched away her PADD before she could even finish her thought. "No. Don't even think about it."

God! Were all McCoy's able to read minds in any universe? Her newly acquired breakfast appeared under her nose and he chuckled at her expense.

Uhura laughed at her as she sullenly started eating and squeezed her husband's arm before moving away to get her own food. She got about halfway through her food before her eyes started shutting and her head started to do that annoying nodding motion when the doctor ordered Spock to take her
to her quarters and put her to bed. "Did you put a sedative in that hypo?"

"No, kid, that's all you."

The commander assisted an increasingly exhausted Jim to her quarters and she tripped over her feet once they arrived. Spock said nothing and carefully took her arm to help guide her to her bed. Once she sat down he knelt and pulled off her shoes. "Why am I so tired? I've done thirty-six hour shifts and have never felt so beat."

"As Doctor McCoy would probably say 'it has been a long couple of days'."

"Don't you have more important things to be doing rather than taking care of me?" She mumbled sleepily as he guided her to lie down and pulled the blankets over her.

"No, I do not." A warm feeling spread through her at his words. He reached over and turned down the light and Jim must have imagined it but she swore she felt his hand caress her cheek and feelings of affection and fond amusement came through his touch but she must have been dreaming. "Sleep well, thy'la."
Chapter Five

Jim sat and leaned back against the wall on the floor next to the room divider with her back to the door, feet flat on the ground and knees up as she tossed the red stress ball that she'd found. She watched as it hit the ground, bounced against the wall and deftly caught it with her right hand when it returned. She was finally starting to resemble a human again now that the swelling had started to go down thanks to McCoy's meticulous treatment regimen. Jesus, that man was a menace. She felt bad for Uhura who was likely being watched like a hawk and mother-henned by the doctor.

She tossed the ball again and watched it bounce back and gripped it as she caught it with a tight fist. She'd handed over her calculations to Spock and Scotty who'd been excited at her insight—well, Scotty had been excited and Spock's eyebrows had shot up so she interpreted it as excitement—but McCoy had forbade them to allow her to work with them until he cleared her, which Spock had annoyingly agreed with.

She wanted to go home despite her Spock treating her like shit. She understood things there, she had a place even if it wasn't what she was hoping for and she had Bones, her friends, and her family. She had her career and she'd have the Ulysses. She had to go home.

It was like a painful form of torture seeing a Spock who was kind to her and he acted affectionate even though he took McCoy's side in forcing her to rest. It was nice. It was going to hurt when she went home. He seemed genuine in his actions and words. She caught the ball and squeezed it. Jim wondered if he would still be kind if he knew her past. Would he turn into her Spock and treat her the same? She wasn't always an innocent bystander in the wreck that had been her past.

She continued tossing and catching the ball when her chime went off. Jim groaned and ignored it. Leo (aka Dr. McCoy) had said he was going to be stopping by to "make sure she's sitting on her damn fool ass".

The chime rang again and Jim groaned and shouted enter without turning around. "I swear to god, Leo, if you are coming to give me another hypo I will shove it so far up where the sun don't shine that M'Benga is going to have to get it out."

"I'm glad to see you and my CMO are getting along nicely."

Jim's hand slipped and the ball went flying past her shoulder and right into her ghost's hands. Christopher Pike stood up from his crouch where he'd caught it and smiled, tossing the ball in the air and catching it again with a smirk.

"Captain Pike!" She started to scramble to stand but he waved her down.

"Don't get up on my account." He chuckled. "You'll bring McCoy's wrath down on me and then I'll be the one to develop a phobia of hypos."

Jim grinned. "It'd get his focus off me, sir."

He became mock serious and pointed a finger at her. "First rule of a starship? Never piss off the chief medical officer—"

"-or the chief engineer. They control the replicators." She continued. "I once had nothing but haggis to eat for a week."
"I've never heard that add-on."

Admiral Pi-er-Captain Pike," she cleared her throat and looked away, her chest tight as she thought of her mentor. "-I heard it from a friend."

The tension in the room thickened. Jim looked back at the double of her Christopher Pike. The differences were negligible. He was obviously uninjured and fit much like when they-no-when she had first gotten to know hers at the academy. Maybe he had a few more gray hairs and a few more laugh and worry lines but he was there.

It made her heart ache to see him. His last memories of her had been of him fixing her screw up on Nibiru when she had been disciplined for not following her captain's orders. Spock had been so determined to save those people even at the cost of his own life and she had refused to let that happen. She'd have done the same thing a thousand times over because she loved him despite his hatred of her and because he was her commanding officer. It was her duty to protect her captain at all costs. She hadn't been fast enough to do so for Pike.

Pike sighed and slid down to sit next to her. "The hurt when you lose someone you care about never really goes away, does it?"

"No. It doesn't."

"I was supposed to marry Winona."

Jim's head snapped up in surprise.

Pike's knuckles turned white as he squeezed the ball and he took a shaky breath. "I was a lieutenant on the Excelsior winding up a five year mission and we were headed to Tarsus. Captain April was dropping me off as a favor so it'd be a surprise for her and the kids, Jim and George Jr."

Jim remained silent.

"Winona was working there as an engineer in the colony. Her latest project was setting up an aqueduct system so that there would be a reliable source of water. I was going to be taking a year off. Starfleet was commissioning a new fleet of starships that could accommodate officers and their families. We were slated for the USS Andromeda."

His voice broke and he cleared it. "We had-we had planned everything from where the wedding was going to take place all the way to the flower arrangements.

We knew something wasn't right when we arrived at the Tarsus IV colony. There was no response to our hails and we could only find life signs for about half the expected number of colonists."

Pike's face seemed to have aged ten years as he told his story and Jim wondered if he'd ever talked to anyone about it before. Really talked about it. Not the bullshit you have to talk about with a Starfleet issued counselor.

"When we beamed down it was like something from a nightmare. There were pits of bodies and the smell-God! The fields were black and there was smoke and people were fighting in the streets over pieces of rotting bread but there was a group of a thousand or so behind a reinforced wall and they were healthy and fine unlike those that were starving." Pike grit his teeth and Jim wished for him to stop talking. Her own memories of Tarsus threatening to swallow her whole.

She could smell the rotting of the fields as the fungus took over, the sickly sweet smell of the bodies as they decomposed in the hot, unforgiving sun. Jim remembered the town square as
Governor Kodos ordered their execution with an almost excited voice and she could hear the screams as her aunt and uncle and cousins were shot down. She'd only been able to save one of her family members, Heather, because she'd been so small that Jim had been carrying her, only six months old. She'd found stragglers along the way. Thomas, Kevin, Sara, Charlotte, Suzie, T'Mera, Skon, Alera, Gar. She hadn't been able to keep them all alive. Starvation had taken Sara and Kodos's men had taken T'Mera and Suzie when she, along with them, had snuck in and turned on the distress signal. Kodos's sick eugenics plan had come crashing down around him when Vulcan, Andorian, and Starfleet ships had arrived and he'd killed himself, burned to an unrecognizable pile of ash and bones so bad DNA couldn't be extracted. It had been a fitting death considering the way he'd burned the bodies of those he'd seen as unworthy.

"I saw her wedding dress, still hanging in the closet of the house." Pike turned to face her and Jim could see the heartbreak in his eyes, the gray somehow more intense. "I loved her."

Jim gripped his shoulder. "I'm so sorry." She shook her head. "We had Tarsus, too. My mom and brother weren't there, though." Jim inwardly cursed her slip of the tongue and she hoped Pike hadn't put it together but, if he was anything like her Pike, he likely had but was tactful enough to put the conversation on hold in that area.

"If I might ask, what happened to your Christopher Pike?"

Jim's grip tightened and she took a deep breath. "A madman killed him. We were in the Daystrom Building when an armed shuttle started shooting at us. I couldn't save him."

He looked hesitant. "Is-Winona alive where you're from?"

She wasn't sure whether to answer. Her mom was a difficult subject. She'd loved her and George but being a single mother had been really hard for her. She'd been forced to leave them with her brother for months when she had deep space assignments but it had come to a crashing halt when she'd found out about Frank's version of discipline.

"Yeah. She is."

George had opted to stay with their grandparents from their father's side after until their mother finished her last assignment until her ground posting on Earth to work on designing and building the ships at the yard and Jim had wanted to go to stay with her cousins from her dad's side on Tarsus. Winona had never let her out of her sight again after.

"Good."

Pike sighed. "I'd offer you a drink if I didn't think Leo would kill me. I think we both could use one."

"You're not wrong." She answered. Shrugging, she stood up. "What he doesn't know won't hurt him."

Pike stood, sobered by their discussion and led Jim to the captain's mess.

xXx

Pike leaned back in his seat observing the young commander in front of him. He still couldn't believe that she was a version of Winona's child. He wondered about the horrors she had experienced in her young life and could see them written on her face when she let her guard down.

There had been hints in her medical report from McCoy but with privacy restrictions he didn't
know the full story nor would he unless it was necessary to the functioning of the ship. He was almost scared to know and he wondered why or how his counterpart had not been involved in her life.

He took a swig of his beer. "So, how did you and your Pike meet?"

She swallowed, looking thoughtful. "Mm. We met at "The Shipyard Bar" in Iowa. I was working as a bartender while waiting to defend my thesis and research on viability and possibility of genetically engineering grain to prevent fungal infections."

Pike's eyebrows went to his hairline. "You met at a bar."

Jim twirled her beer by the neck, remembering her last hours as Jim Kirk, troublemaking genius. "Yeah. It was the last night of freedom for a group of second-year cadets and I was hitting on Uhura at the bar, trying to get her first name. Just harmless flirting when another cadet, Hendorff, and his cronies, tweedle-dee and tweedle-dum, decided that since because I had breasts that I should take an interest in them instead and Hendorff grabbed my ass."

Pike leaned forward, interested. He'd known Ensign Hendorff for two years and the man had never done anything remotely like that.

"Well, you can imagine how a young, independent, angry woman who knows how to fight dirty would react, especially when they're ruining my best pick-up lines."

Pike shook his head in disbelief. "You didn't."

Jim huffed a laugh. "It was an epic bar fight except that Pike had to go and stop it." She looked at him sideways, her eyes sparkling with humor. "I wonder if you have as loud of a whistle as him."

He couldn't imagine meeting his Jim that way but he could see this version was a kick in the pants. "Probably."

Jim shrugged. "After he picked my ass up off the floor he dared me to do better than my dad and to join Starfleet. The rest is history."

Pike couldn't help the grin that appeared. "You joined Starfleet on a dare?"

Jim nodded, her long blond hair dislodging from behind her ears. "And I kicked ass." She swallowed down the last of her beer and stood.

"Thanks for the drink and the talk." She was at the door when she stopped with her back to him. "It wasn't my father that inspired me to join. It was Chris."

With those parting words she left.
Chapter Six

It had been ten days, thirteen hours, ten minutes, and seven seconds since Spock had first set eyes on his t'hy'la and she was "driving everyone crazy". With Dr. McCoy's medical clearance granted five days ago she had been allowed to start work with the science and engineering team assigned to the Herculean task of getting her home. The main assignment currently was rebuilding, archiving, and organizing the damaged sensor readings that the Enterprise had managed to get during the incident.

Pike had decided to allow her limited access to the data and Enterprise schematics but Jim knew enough from her own Enterprise to make up the holes in the data in regards to the ship. Spock had watched with fascination as she worked diligently and with incredible focus on the problem, gracefully admitting when she was out of her depth and asking for assistance and clarification.

She had told Spock that she used to be far more impulsive, but after her mentor's death she had learned, the hard way, to curb her "leaping before looking" behavior slightly. He could see that she was telling the truth...mostly. She still managed to accumulate various burns and bruises when she became impatient and was attempting to put her calculations to practical applications and frequently incurred the wrath of their CMO.

Yesterday, transporter room two had been spewing green rotten egg smelling smoke to Spock's confusion but Scotty had written it off with a laugh and a smile. To Spock's consternation the engineer had proclaimed that they were close to a breakthrough. Spock was unsure how to feel about that announcement.

Spock looked up from his terminal in science lab two and his eyes strayed from lieutenant Jr grade Charon to Jim. His heart beat quicker in his side at the sight. Her blond hair sparkled and shone in the lights and a few small strands escaped her ponytail and were loose as she was bent over her own terminal working. She stood out from the other staff as she was not assigned a uniform but wore civilian clothing, a pair of black pants that hugged her curves with low-heeled ankle boots and a loose fitting blue tunic that matched her eyes.

As if she knew she was being watched, the blond looked up from where she was working and her gaze met him, her smile at seeing him seemed to light up the room and made his heart beat faster. She was breathtaking. Her fair coloring was rare in humans and considered exotic amongst his people but it wasn't just her looks that had him far more interested in her than what was normal. She was brilliant.

Her intelligence shone through in everything she did and, even with work she struggled with, she was humble and determined to learn. Her skills and stamina rivaled that of a Vulcan. The issue was that she simply had too much energy to spend her time solely in the labs. Even now her leg bounced in unspent energy.

She had taken to spending a lot of her free time in the ship's gym running, taking part in tactical simulations with junior crew members after receiving permission from the captain and sparring with others. Even Pike had shown admiration at her creativity in all of the things she did. Crew efficiency had gone up in several departments as she imparted knowledge that she had gained in her own timeline and introduced new things to the Enterprise crew.

The only crew member she had kept a distance from had been him. Spock could not help feeling a
pang of jealousy at that and cursed his counterpart for causing this behavior.

Spock was determined to change this.

The commander noted the time that Commander Kirk had been absorbed in her work and was displeased to see that she had spent all of alpha and half of beta in the labs. He decided that she needed a break. Even though humans had the strange behavior of doing physical tasks during their periods of rest he did see merit in it. It seemed to calm and, at the same time, invigorate them. Jim seemed to be needing this right now.

Commander Spock went to the blond and stood next to her, hands behind his back projecting calm but he was unaccountably nervous about the possibility of rejection. Jim looked up, a nervous smile at his proximity.

"Miss Kirk-Jim," Jim's neck and cheeks flushed at his use of her first name. Fascinating. "I was wondering if you would like to partake in a sparring session with me."

Jim tapped her stylus and bit her lip. Spock, again, cursed his counterpart for instilling this behavior in his t'hy'la. She should not be afraid of him.

"Uh. Well? The last time I went toe to toe with a Vulcan I ended up with a broken hyoid bone, wrist, and cheekbone, and some cracked ribs. I'm not sure I'd be much of a challenge."

Spock stiffened in shock at her words. How could the Spock of her universe hurt her? "I would never deliberately injure you."

Her expression softened. "You know? I actually believe that." Stretching, Jim shrugged. "Ok. I'm due for a break anyway."

xXx

Jim was across from him dressed in shorts and a tank top, stretching on the mat, her lithe body sending Spock's blood rushing south at the sight of the carefully controlled power behind her movements. He had to employ several surakian techniques to control it.

Jim moved to stand across from him and he was intrigued as she was in a suus mahna stance, an ancient form of Vulcan martial arts. Jim twitched her hands to signal him to get started while her eyes took on a mischievous glint. "Don't take it easy on me, commander."

Spock prepared his own stance. "I will endeavor to provide you with an adequate challenge."

Jim bounced lightly on her toes with her taped hands carefully placed at her sides, waiting. He could see that her mind was calculating and planning her mode of attack and the possible moves he would make against her as well as her counter moves. It was invigorating and he felt that she truly would prove to be an interesting opponent.

Spock struck first, his right fist aiming for her head and Jim quickly dodged to the left and used both hands to push his arm down and away and, spinning on her front leg she attempted to kick at his kidneys. But Spock was faster and twisted behind her and swing low to sweep her legs out from under her.

Jim quickly rolled away and returned to an unfamiliar stance with her hands in claws, one higher than the other and she struck, tapping him firmly against his sternum and right above his heart which caused Spock to stumble back. She quickly took advantage and her leg shot out and caught him in the side but Spock caught it and twisted, spinning Jim around where she had to allow herself
to fall to absorb the impact.

Spock moved fast to pin her but Jim's knees came up and pushed him off where she twisted and rolled away. "Had enough, yet?"

Spock's eyebrow raised at the challenge. The commander bounced, her hair had come slightly loose from it's tie and the edges framing her face were dark with perspiration but she was happy and vibrant as she playfully teased him.

Spock's lips quirked in a smile. "As Lieutenant Sulu would say 'Bring it on'."

Jim's answering laugh was enough to spread a feeling of happiness through him. They moved around each other, each attack and defense they launched against each other almost seeming like a choreographed dance.

Jim was quick, feinting right then blocking Spock's strike and returning it with a ju jitsu maneuver, hitting his lower ribs. Spock used her momentum against her and grabbed her right arm and spun on his toes to face her, pushing her to the mat with him on top, one hand on her shoulder and the other holding her wrist. He used his weight to keep her down.

Spock's breath caught at the sight beneath him. Jim's face was flushed from their activities, her pupils blown wide in excitement, and her pink lips were open as she breathed quickly. The fingers on his left hand brushed along her wrist and he could feel her pulse fluttering like small bird's wings beating against him. Lowering his shields he could sense the thrill she felt at the challenge, fierce attraction and...arousal? It was as if someone had turned down the sound in the room to where all he heard was the two of them breathing heavily, no one else and nothing else existed.

Spock moved his head lower to where his mouth was next to her ear and growled low enough for only her to hear, his breath hot against her neck and she shivered. "Do you yield?"

A sharp inhale from her and Jim's pulse increased. He felt her shift under him and he was so focused on the moment he didn't realize what happened until he was flat on his own back with Kirk on top of him and holding him down with surprising strength and agility, smiling triumphantly. She was magnificent. He would only need to lift his head a few scant centimeters to kiss her. "Do you yield, Mister Spock?"

Spock's mouth opened to reply when, suddenly, Jim's head snapped up and, like a switch being flipped, the sounds in the room suddenly returned. He heard gasps of shock and surprise, cheers, clapping, and sounds of groaning with sympathy.

Her face reddened with embarrassment and she scrambled off just as Spock managed a hoarse whisper. "I yield."

Ducking her head in embarrassment, Jim held out her arm to help him up which Spock gratefully took. He could see she was ready to flee but he selfishly wanted her to stay.

He cleared his throat, thanking his Vulcan physiology that he was able to stand especially since they had amassed quite an audience. "That was an interesting move earlier."

Shrugging, the blond rubbed the back of her neck ruefully. "Mok'bara. Klingon Martial Arts. It's called koH-man-ara." Her eyes darted to the crowd of, what Spock estimated to be, fifty crew members avidly watching their session. Jerking a thumb over her shoulder she started backing away. "I've uh-gotta run. Thanks for the exercise."

Spock didn't get a chance to return his thanks before she was gone. He scanned the room and saw
several crew members exchange credit chits and Captain Pike watching him with a far too interested gleam in his eyes as he joined the commander in his effort to leave the gym in a speedy manner.

"I never thought I'd see the day when you were bested in a fight."

Spock raised an eyebrow in response, choosing to remain silent at his captain's attempts to "fish" for information.

"It's interesting, though." He paused, looking thoughtful and Spock wondered if Pike was showing true behavior or if he was bluffing.

"What is?"

"I've sparred with you and had you pinned before and you've never had a problem getting out of it. In fact, you've never lost a fight before."

"Perhaps it is because she has a different fighting style." He evaded but the other man looked skeptical.

Pike sighed. "She's a good officer and the crew seems to be quite taken with her, don't you think?"

A pang of sadness as the thought of her leaving hit him.

"Indeed"

xXx

Jim didn't change or shower, simply needing to get away. God! She was an idiot for accepting Spock's offer. She was letting herself get caught up in her feeling for him and she was absolutely mortified!

Remembering the way he moved, so graceful and predatory caused her to feel a thrill at his focus on her and only her; the way his muscles rippled and flexed as he moved. It caused her face to burn and her stomach to flip. She hated herself for these feelings.

God, though! She had enjoyed it! The raw power he exuded as he pinned her and her turning the tables. His eyes were like pools of dark brown chocolate but when she had been under him they had been blown black, a thin ring of brown surrounding them and she had liked it! She had loved it.

What had she been thinking? What if he had read her emotions? He would have been disgusted at her thoughts. She knew it. It was inappropriate for her to be attracted to him and she would be leaving him soon. She needed to shove them away and back into a box where she wouldn't let them interfere with her work. She couldn't feel these things. They would destroy her when she left.

"Stupid, stupid, stupid!"

She ended up at the ship's botanical gardens and immediately felt a sense of calm in the small amount of nature aboard a ship full of technology. It was a small area that helped provide supplemental oxygen to the ship but the arrangement of the trees, flowering vines, and grass gave the illusion of a small forest.

It was the epitome of the United federation of planets, a mix of all things Terran and alien were present in the carefully tended gardens. Flowers from Betazed, trees from Caita, grass from Earth and even a small Vulcan section with Vulcan vines from the more temperate regions of the planet.
were present. There were plants from all over the quadrant that made the garden more beautiful than she could imagine.

It was late evening on the ship and the dome above simulated this, providing the "forest" with an ethereal glow that instantly relaxed her. The golds, reds, and orange color suffused the garden and Jim walked to the center and off the path. She lay down and looked up at the "sky" just breathing in the cool, moist air and letting it help her to relax from her previous tense feeling.

She had always loved going to the gardens, enjoying a form of meditation to soothe the hurt when her Spock would berate her or cause her to feel sick with pain at his words and behaviors. She had to always put up a front of professionalism and respect towards him despite the fact that he was losing it rapidly in her eyes. He just wouldn't work with her as a team.

Now? Now she was using the garden to try and push aside her growing affection for this new Spock. He had shown nothing but respect and care for her and it was confusing to her. It was as if she was torn in two. Here she had a Spock that she was rapidly becoming attached to and a Pike who had been so wonderful. It was what she had dreamed of. Seeing a version of the two men who she cared for deeply but she could build a relationship with them and get to know them as new and amazing people, working and personal, but her best friend was not here. Her family that she had made on her Enterprise and her biological family was a universe away.

She was selfish and wanted both, the best of two worlds, but she could never have it. This wasn't her home. It never would be and she had to accept it.

A sudden rustling to her right caused her to shoot up into a tense sitting position but she quickly relaxed when she saw a small, brown-haired, gap-toothed Joanna McCoy sneaking through the Bolian tharassa bushes.

Jim smiled at her and Joanna returned the gesture, seeming to relax. "What are you doing here without your dad or Nyota?"

The child shrugged and scrunched her face. "Nyota wanted me to eat Brussel sprouts! It's gross so I left when she went to the replicator to get it."

She chuckled, understanding the plight of the mini McCoy. Even as an adult she despised Brussel sprouts. Jim patted the grass next to her and Jo joined her as they lay back to watch the ceiling change from sunset to a beautiful starscape.

"Aren't your dad and Nyota looking for you?" She asked

"Probably." She sighed and sat up, picking at the grass and finding a Terran daisy. She twirled it in her fingers and her lip came out as she pouted. "You're not gonna tell on me, are you, Miss Jim?"

Jim sat up and started to pick a few daisies herself, joining the stems in a chain and raising her shoulders in the negative. "Nah. They'll find you eventually and I hide from your dad all the time since I got here, too." She shuddered for effect and Joanna giggled.

The small brunette watched in fascination as Jim worked the flowers into a small circle and placed the daisy crown on top of her head with a flourish. Joanna's smile at the simple gift made it worth it.

Jim considered Joanna's problem and came up with a possible solution. "What vegetables do you like?"

Joanna's nose wrinkled in disgust and Jim sighed. "You have to like at least one."
She let loose a put-upon sigh in such a dramatic fashion that and Jim shook her head at the sight. Doctor McCoy was gonna have one hell of a teenager when she grew up.

"I guess green beans, carrots, peas, and cauliflower. I dunno what else but I hate Brussel sprouts a lot!" She glared at her as if it had been Jim that had provided the offending item.

"How about you ask your dad and Nyota if they'll make a deal."

Joanna looked curious. "A deal?"

Nodding, Jim plucked a piece of grass. "Yeah. I did the same thing with my mom when she tried getting me to eat something I didn't like. Tell them you'll eat the veggies that you like and you have to eat them so you'll get your vitamins and minerals but they have to agree to not give you the gross ones."

Joanna's head tilted in thought and she frowned before quickly smiling. "Okay."

Soft footsteps came up from Jim's right and Nyota came up to them, hands on her hips and her belly on display in front of her. It was weird seeing this version of Uhura.

"Joanna Eleanora McCoy! Your father and I have been looking for you and were worried sick! Where have you been?"

Joanna lowered her head looking properly chastised. "I was just talking with Miss Jim." She took off the daisy crown and held it up. "She made me a flower crown. Would you like it?" Her brown eyes sparkled. "I think you'd look pretty, momma Nyota."

Oh, she was too cute and really smart. Uhura deflated and accepted the flowers only to place them back on Joanna's hair. "I think they look better on you." Joanna's face lit up and Uhura became serious but her lips twitched in a small smile. "You'd better get home before your dad has an aneurism."

"Okay!" Joanna waved to them and bounced off, far happier than when she had first come in.

Uhura whirled to face Jim, moving far faster than any pregnant woman should be able to and had placed her hands on her hips again. Jim cringed as Uhura represented every bit the mother she was with Joanna and was going to soon become again with her baby.

"Hey there! How's it going?" She asked carefully.

"Leo is gonna kill you but I think-" Her expression turned to one of kindness and Jim relaxed slightly. "-what you did was amazing. Thank you."

"For what?" She asked.

Uhura carefully sat down next to her on the grass and bumped her shoulder against Jim's. "For cheering JoJo up. I think she needed it today." She told her.

Shrugging, Jim leaned back and looked at the "stars" but they were a poor substitute for the real thing. They were pretty enough but she wondered just what stars her friends were under right now. Looking over, she smiled at Uhura. "What can I say? I'm a sucker for brown eyes."

Uhura gave a knowing smile that made her squirm. God damn it. Looked like she could read anyone like a book by body language by virtue of her skills as communications chief. Fucking universal constant. "I can see that. In fact, I saw it earlier today in the gym."
Jim shrugged, faking nonchalance. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I think you do."

She laughed, unnerved at being read so clearly and stood up to leave. "Nope. Not doing the whole girl talk thing but thanks for being cool about Joanna hanging out with me."

She got about five steps away when Uhura shouted from behind her. "I think he has a weakness for blue eyes, too."

Jim stiffened and knew just who she referred to. She was wrong and, even if there was a slim possibility she was right, Spock would lose interest soon enough and move on. Her Spock had made her inadequacies damn clear. "I've gotta go."

Uhura shook her head sadly. "Oh, Jim. Just what happened to you?" She whispered.
Chapter Seven

Hikaru Sulu carefully pruned Gertrude, the Beauregard Weeper that Jim and he had received as a goodwill gesture from the people of Zeta Reticuli A almost six months ago. Ever since she had gone missing the plant no longer trilled and purred regularly. It's once bright pink petals had faded to a pale imitation of their former glory. He'd been trying everything to get Gertrude back to what she once was. Soil samples, scans, and even spending more time talking to the plant seemed to make no difference. He suspected that the plant knew of Jim's abrupt departure and, in it's own way, was grieving the loss of the commander. Jim had raised that plant from a small seedling.

The general atmosphere on the ship seemed to match that of the Beauregard Weeper. There was a dark cloud that seemed to hang around on the ship. Every department had interacted with Jim and every crew member always saw and talked with her at least once a week even if it was a quick 'hello' in the corridor.

The young helmsman had noticed the emotions varied between sadness, resignation, and anger. Word had gotten out that the commander had asked for the Enterprise to use her transporters to evac when the station's own systems had become too damaged to do multi-person transports and some felt that if they had tried sooner then she wouldn't have been lost.

Sulu had been having to do damage control and Spock's attitude was not helping. The Vulcan had been almost reclusive, spending his off-duty hours in the Enterprise's science labs and, when he'd expressed his concern, the captain had countered with the fact that Vulcans required less sleep than that of humans. Sulu knew this just as he knew that Spock clearly felt guilt over what had happened despite him saying Vulcans do not feel guilt. He'd made sure that those he talked to were aware of the ongoing search and rescue efforts.

He'd seen Chekov practically asleep walking back to his quarters and Scott had actually passed out in the mess hall. Every person that stood a chance at helping to return the Commander to them had been working on it but the answers remained elusive. Many weren't even sure she had survived, let alone be alive in some form. There were speculations that her energy pattern still existed in some form in the plasma storm while other theories were that she had been transported to an alternate universe. The latter theory seemed to gaining speed if the rumors were to be believed.

The sound of the doors to the hydroponics lab opened and Sulu was surprised to see the Captain. Spock looked, for lack of a better word, like shit. His pallor was paler than Gertrude's petals and under his eyes were dark circles. He wondered just what was going on in his mind.

"Lieutenant-Commander Sulu."

He straightened and saluted as protocol dictated. "Yes, Captain?"
Spock acknowledged his gesture of respect with a nod. "At ease." His eyes drifted over to the Beauregard Weeper before quickly settling back to him. "I have just received new orders from Command."

"Sir?"

"It has been determined that we are to continue with our mission and cease our efforts to locate Commander Kirk. She has been declared missing in action, presumed dead. You have been appointed as Acting First Officer based on your skill set and the duties you willingly took on in her absence despite not being ordered to." He paused and took a deep breath. "It was...appreciated."

Sulu stood there, shocked and dismayed. He just couldn't believe that the admiralty was moving on so quickly. Their actions seemed cold and ruthlessly efficient and his ascension in rank seemed...wrong. Almost as if it was some form of consolation prize and not something he had rightfully earned.

The captain seemed to collect himself and continued, his voice no longer betraying his emotions and thoughts behind the orders given to him. "You have been assigned new quarters as your position entitles you to. You are to move into Commander Kirk's former quarters by Alpha shift tomorrow where you are to take on the duties as my XO."

A sick sensation settled in the pit of his stomach and he was forced to press his lips together to stop himself from throwing up.

"Congratulations Commander Sulu."

Without another word Spock turned on his heel and left him there. The young Asian didn't know what to do.

xXx

McCoy carefully handled Jim's prized books, the leather spine and pages showing wear from frequent handling but the cover smelled of the conditioner she lovingly rubbed into it to keep it from cracking. She'd started her collection at the academy, her first volume of "A Tale of Two Cities" gifted to her by her mentor, Christopher Pike.

It was a duty he'd never thought he'd undertake; packing away the parts of his best friend. It was the finality of it that hit him the hardest, the reality that they were having to give her up as lost. He'd had to sign the papers listing her as presumed dead earlier that morning and he'd asked Spock that he be the one to inform Winona of the loss of her youngest daughter.

The woman had been devastated and Leonard couldn't blame her. He understood and shared her pain and they'd spent hours talking about her. It had been doubly hard because Jim had resembled her mother, except for her eyes, and he'd had to cut the connection when it became impossible for him to continue.

He was holding her reading glasses (Damn kid was allergic to Retinax V) when the chime sounded. He almost ignored it, wanting to grieve in private, but he allowed entry.

Sulu, Scotty, and Chekov entered, looking somber, their eyes taking in the multiple containers and McCoy. He knew he looked like shit. M'Benga had taken him off duty when he saw him having to fill out Jim's death certificate. 'Compassionate Leave' they called it.

McCoy squeezed the glasses in his hand, feeling the plastic bend and twist as they cut into his palm. He welcomed the pain. It distracted him.
Scotty was the first to approach him and he looked at the engineer with a critical eye, noting that he looked just as exhausted as him. “How are yeh doin’?”

McCoy violently shook his head and clenched his jaw, unwilling to bare his broken spirit any more than he had. He'd followed Jim into the black and now, without her, he felt lost. Her bright spirit had made it fun, an adventure, and it was as if space was now truly darkness and silence that was pressing in on him without Jim to light it up.

He startled when a hand carefully pried Jim's reading glasses from him and McCoy looked up at Chekov's serious face, understanding etched onto his features making him appear far older than his years. "Let us help you."

"Yeah." His throat tightened at the support. "Thanks, kid."

Chekov gave him a small smile and the crew spent the next two hours carefully packing what Jim had left behind. McCoy had laughed when he saw his Ol' Miss shirt, soft and slightly frayed from age. That little shit had known he'd been looking for it for months and she'd stolen it. He placed it with her belongings to go into storage. It somehow felt right that it should remain with her things.

Sulu had managed to unearth an old fashioned photo album while Scotty opened an eight year old bottle of scotch that he'd brought with him. The four of them, relaxed and warm after a few drinks, spent the night reminiscing over the immense picture collection that Jim seemed to have somehow acquired. There were some of when they were at the academy, shore leave pictures, birthday parties, and even ones when the McCoy family had had a reunion and Jim had officially been 'adopted' as his little sister.

McCoy had never realized just how many memories Jim had managed to capture and archive. No crew member or friend was placed above another in importance.

"I had forgotten about Yeoman S'Parva sparring with Jim!" Sulu pointed at the candid showing the young Katerian quadroped on all fours, teeth bared in a smile with the blond underneath laughing.

McCoy snorted. "Jim got her ass gift wrapped and handed to her and she still went back for seconds." S'Parva had laughed about it for two weeks and it had gone a long way in making her feel welcome when she'd first come on board the ship. The yeoman had been the first Katerian to enroll in Starfleet and Jim had helped her to come out of her shell.

He turned the page and came up on the last picture. A still shot of the bridge, filled to the brim with Enterprise personnel with Jim in the middle of them all, her smile the brightest and her arm slung over his shoulders as he'd stood next to her. It was a fitting final picture.

He choked on the deep emotions that picture evoked in him and it took a few minutes for him to compose himself. He made a mental note to distribute copies of the relevant pictures to the crew.

"We will find ze commander, Doctor. I heff hope, sair." Chekov reassured him and Scotty nodded.

"We're not going to give up on the lass no matter what anyone orders." The redhead raised his glass. "To Commander Kirk who we all know is kicking arse wherever she might be and may she come home soon."

The others followed suit and, before long, they started to make their way out. Chekov, to McCoy's amusement, was supporting Lieutenant-Commander Scott who he'd drunk under the table rather spectacularly. His explanation had been that 'scotch was inwented in Russia'.

McCoy was stacking the boxes feeling that a small amount of the weight of grief and worry he'd
been carrying had lightened. He turned and saw that Sulu remained near him, hovering and uncertain.

When he didn't say anything right away, the brunette indicated they sit on the small couch and leaned back, preparing to wait for him to talk.

"I've been promoted to first officer."

Ah. So that was it. He understood the helmsman's discomfort at the idea of being promoted in the way that he had. When no more words were forthcoming, McCoy leaned back, crossed his arms and raised a brow. It was a look he'd usually give Jim to force her to talk. It clearly was effective on Sulu.

"It's too soon and I don't think-

McCoy threw up a hand. "Now stop right there. You wouldn't have been promoted if you didn't deserve it and you would have been Commander soon anyway."

His eyebrows drew down in confusion at McCoy's words.

"Jim was slated for promotion to Captain of the Ulysses and you were her pick for her replacement on the Enterprise. I only know about it because I was going to follow her. If you don't trust yourself then trust Jim. She knew you were the best and clearly the 'Fleet admirals and the Captain think so too."

The newly minted Commander deflated in relief but still looked unsure. McCoy stood and went to the first box he'd packed, pulling out a large binder filled with paper. Jim was old-fashioned to a fault. He handed it Sulu who took it and opened it.

"It's Jim's latest thesis she was working on to get her PhD. She was working on a way to adapt her original work on quadrotriticale to safely genetically engineer disease resistance into the grain and still make it safe for humanoid consumption. She'd only gotten partway into the theory."

His eyes widened as they skimmed through the first pages of her arguments and the accompanying charts supporting them. "I didn't even know she was working on this." He looked up in surprise. "When did she find the time?"

Pouring himself another drink, McCoy settled into his seat. "She believed that you should never lose yourself in the job. It's unhealthy and I agree with her. I think you should finish what she started. She'd like that."

Sulu smiled and held the binder closer to him and he felt a sense of peace at the thought of some part of Jim continuing in her absence.

"How is it she never went into the sciences? I know of her work only because she told me." He frowned. "I don't think Spock even knows."

McCoy harrumphed. "He never asked. He just assumed Jim didn't know anything and she didn't correct him." Only McCoy knew of the reasons behind Jim's obsession and her secretive nature about it.

Sulu nodded. The bulk of the crew knew of the difficulties between the captain and first officer but they had followed Jim's example to be the best in their chosen fields and show respect. Spock was a good captain but he wasn't a great one. McCoy had a feeling that many of the people on the Enterprise would have followed Jim to her new posting had she not been...lost.
McCoy threw back the last of his drink, relishing the burn and clasped his shoulder. "You're gonna be a damn good XO."

"Thank you, Doctor."

McCoy watched the kid leave and sighed. "Dammit, Jim. Get your ass home."
Chapter Eight

Jim had upped her avoidance of Spock and he did not like that at all. She had started working on the task of getting herself into the labs during the later half of beta and gamma shift so the commander had been unable to catch her even when he elected to utilize his ability that he needed less sleep than humans. She seemed to have an uncanny ability to anticipate when he would be visiting the labs and would be "unavailable" and absent when he arrived. It was...upsetting.

It has now been eighteen days since her arrival and he knew that she had increased her attempts to get home and she had been less than pleased when the Enterprise had been forced to continue their mission and leave the area she had arrived in.

He had heard about Jim's excitement when she had encountered Ensign Gaila Vro and admitted jealousy when she had taken to spending a good deal of her free time with the young Orion and other members of the crew other than him. Had he misinterpreted her feelings towards him and just read himself somehow echoed back to him? Unlikely but there was a slim possibility.

She had become almost a member of the ship's crew despite her lack of rank and her duties only being her working with engineering and the science department on the task of returning her to her own universe. She fenced with lieutenant Sulu despite her continuously losing to him which she brushed off with amusement. She played chess with Ensign Chekov and the two appeared relatively evenly matched, played poker with Ensign Hendorff and the doctor, and even spent time learning different languages and cultural aspects of different species with Nyota. During his informal meetings with the captain even he had experienced displeasure at her avoidance of the Vulcan for unknown reasons.

The few times that he had caught her he could see that she was afraid and forcing distance between them. Nyota had taken to playing 'matchmaker' with mixed results. Each time Spock believed he was making progress with Jim, she'd pull away from him. Nyota had grumbled something about 'locking them in a room' while McCoy suggested 'knocking their fool heads together'.

Each smile Jim gave him he treasured. He continued his efforts to win the blond over. To date, he had been able to have two meals with her and Nyota had ensured they sat next to each other during a 'movie night'. She'd fallen asleep on his shoulder for thirty-seven point six minutes and the warm weight of her resting on him had been calming. Jim had woken at the end when the lights came on and had stammered, red-faced and practically ran away from him before Spock been able to reassure her that he had not minded being her support.

Currently, the Enterprise was being dispatched to the planet Sarpeidon as their star, Beta Naiobi, was due to go super nova in approximately one month. Multiple federation ships in the area had been put on standby. Thankfully, at last report, they only had a small colony of ten thousand. They
are, or were, listed as a warp capable species but no evacuation efforts from the planet had been detected. Their mission was to discover the reason for this and provide assistance if requested.

"Spock, I've been thinking." Captain Pike addressed him as he moved his queen one space to avoid Spock's current strategy.

"Captain?" He asked.

"Chris." He corrected. "Come on, Spock. You've known me for five years, now."

The use of personal titles informed him that this was an informal discussion and he nodded in acknowledgement. "Chris."

Spock carefully restructured his mode of attack on the chess board and Chris frowned in thought. "The admiralty and I have been discussing Commander Kirk and the possibility of her remaining here if we don't succeed in our efforts to return her to her home."

Spock straightened, suddenly very interested in the conversation.

"Her skills and aptitude tests are off the chart. She's also shown skills that she could have only learned at Starfleet Academy and, since Nero, we are always in need of qualified officers." He told Spock in a neutral tone.

"Indeed." He continued to play despite his focus no longer on the game and he could see the captain knew this. "What, may I ask, was their decision in regards to this unusual situation?"

"Well, they thought that she should retain her former rank, with limitations, and give her a sort of test run." The captain moved his bishop and took Spock's last pawn. "The current mission we are undertaking seems to be a good idea to put her to the test."

"Fascinating."

Chris moved his King and Spock tipped his over in defeat. His interest in the game lost as he contemplated the upcoming mission that Jim and he would take part in.

The older man leaned back in his chair. "I'll let you tell her the good news. I think a change in pace is a good idea from the commander, don't you think?"

"I agree."

The conversation between himself and the captain had been...intriguing. Spock made to leave. "Thank you for the game. I believe the commander will likely be off duty and I will inform her about the upcoming mission."

xXx

Spock searched the ship and struggled to locate Kirk. She truly was skilled at avoidance and Spock felt sympathy towards Doctor McCoy as he had yet to perform a full physical, only being able to do the minimum of care necessary to deem her healed from her injuries and fit enough to be able to perform her duties but Spock knew that the doctor had questions that Jim had managed to skillfully avoid.

He had been told from the multiple low risk areas that she was permitted to be in that she had always just left. Sighing, Spock decided to try her quarters.
He made his way to deck five and pressed the chime only to be met with silence. He pressed a second time, again met with no response.

"Computer, please scan quarters 51c. Are there life signs present?"

The computer beeped as it performed it's task. "Affirmative. One humanoid life sign."

Spock was concerned with the lack of response and typed in his override code and stepped into her quarters.

The lights had been lowered to ten percent and he moved around the room, checking the bathroom and the small sitting room area to find no hint of Jim. Spock quietly moved around the partition and gained the answer as to why there had been no response to his requesting entry.

On the double bed Jim was curled up, asleep on top of the blankets and hugging a pillow. He stood watching her as she slept. Her long blond hair spread on the pillow resembled a golden halo and the lines on her face were smoothed away in slumber. He could smell vanilla sugar and saw a small bottle of lotion on her nightstand along with a small paperback book open with one hand resting on it while she slept. It had to have been borrowed from another crew member. They were extremely rare since Earth's destruction.

Moving closer, he carefully picked up the book and turned it around to read the title. "Alice in Wonderland". A small smile appeared on his face and a warm feeling spread in his chest. His mother had read this book to him many times in his youth despite his questions about the passages being illogical. She had told him that that was the point. That the illogic was the point and it ignited the imagination; that it taught one that sometimes the world may not always make sense and that you must come to learn to accept that.

He opened the book and saw that she had only just opened it but must have fallen asleep before truly reading it as she was only a few pages in, barely finishing Alice's fall through the rabbit hole.

A rustling from the bed drew his attention and Jim turned onto her back, her eyes opening in confusion at the sight of the Vulcan standing in her room and Spock felt a sense of guilt for watching the young woman as she slept.

"Spock? What-what are you doing here?" She asked, her voice thick with sleep. She frowned in confusion and Spock's reasons for entering her private quarters disappeared like smoke on the wind.

Spock's grip on the antique tome slipped through numb fingers and he dropped it. Her attention flicked to the book, now on the floor and pages bent slightly at the fall and Jim sat up, her expression now one of curiosity and a small amount of nervousness. She crossed her arms across her chest with her hands on her shoulders as if to protect herself from an attack from him. She had no reason to fear him. He would never hurt her but it hurt him at the unspoken accusation.

"I see you are reading "Alice in Wonderland"." He said dumbly.

An eyebrow raised and clearly she was not expecting his response. "Uh-yeah."

"In an outdated method."

She shrugged but did not remove her hands from their protective location. He wished to touch her to convey his intentions but restrained himself.

"Yeah. I like the feel of the paper in my hands, the smell, and it's as if I have a closer connection to
the author and the story. It makes it tangible." She gave a self-deprecating smile. "I know it's stupid but I enjoy the old-fashioned ways sometimes. You don't fix what isn't broken and it's just as effective as a PADD but more fun." She explained.

"May I ask why this particular book?" He was genuinely curious.

Jim seemed to relax at his curiosity and her eyes warmed, becoming a darker blue.

"The symbolism behind Carroll's writing has always intrigued me."

Spock tilted his head. "Symbolism? I must confess that I sometimes struggle with interpreting human behaviors and emotions, particularly if they are in written form. The meanings are sometimes lost on me."

She bit her lip as the thought about her answer and carefully worded her response. "'Alice in Wonderland' isn't just a children's book, but it can be interpreted as a testament to the powerlessness of individuals in a society that is always in flux-the rules in them. Wonderland's rules and the environment changes almost as soon as Alice comes to accept them. There are no universal truths in Wonderland, nor is there a common way in conversing with or dealing with characters. Each has their own individual realities which are made up entirely of their own codes, signs, and language. Social ideals and rules no longer apply-they are made fun of and completely misunderstood in Wonderland.

Alice's journey brings her face-to-face with a whole host of new ideologies beyond the very specific set she has been taught as a little girl brought up in the 19th century." She smiled ruefully. "And besides, I enjoy the illogic written in the novel. It's fun."

Spock's lips turned up at her answer. It was intelligent, well thought, and something his mother would have said. "Well put." He praised her and she smiled a small smile.

The symbolism of the novel almost seemed appropriate in Jim's current predicament. As if she was Alice who had fallen through the rabbit hole and into a universe that she was struggling to interpret.

She snorted inelegantly. "You would have made one hell of a professor."

"I was." He answered seriously.

Her grin widened. "Nice ego, Mr. Spock."

"I did not mean-" He protested but she put up a hand.

"I'm messing with you." She shifted to stand to be on even footing.

Spock bent down and picked up the book, handing it back to Jim. As she reached out, Spock carefully brushed his fingers against hers and a warmth spread up his arm at the small connection. Jim's eyes widened in surprise and she cleared her throat, her face turning pink. "Thanks."

"If you are interested in antique printed volumes I do have a small collection in my quarters from various worlds including Earth."

Jim blinked rapidly in shock at the, clearly personal, invitation but her expression quickly turned to one of sadness. "I doubt I'm going to be here long enough to even finish this book but thank you."

Spock did not like that answer at all. The reminder that her time was likely limited was unpleasant,
as well as the fact that she was still actively trying to avoid him, especially since their match the other day. Spock was unsure how to make his intentions more clear to the human.

He wanted her in all ways. He wanted to know her, to understand her, to stand by her, and to be able to love her if only she would let him. She was proving to be a formidable challenge. Thankfully, he excelled in all things, challenges included.

Holding the book to her chest as if it was something precious, she addressed him. "I doubt you came by to discuss the merits of 19th century English literature so what are you doing here?"

Spock shifted his stance, placing his hands behind his back as if in parade rest. "Captain Pike has spoken with the admiralty in regards to your current predicament." He told her and Jim's interest peaked.

"Oh?"

"They have determined that it would be advantageous for you to take on more responsibilities in the role of an officer, at least temporarily." He explained

Jim's mouth turned down. "But my research..." She started to protest.

Spock had hoped she would have been excited considering they had seemed to hit a dead end on their work despite their best efforts. He could not help but admit some happiness at the stalling of her being able to leave him-the Enterprise he mentally corrected.

"We would still be working on returning you to your reality. Your temporary lack involvement would have no affect on the work."

Jim threw up a hand. "No! I'm happy to be a part of the crew in more than the capacity that I've been in lately. It's why I joined Starfleet. The excitement of seeing new worlds and new civilizations. It's just I-" Sighing, Jim picked at a nonexistent thread on her sleeve. "I miss my friends and family and it'll be hard for me to leave because I'm becoming attached to all the wonderful people here."

She wouldn't meet his eyes and Spock's heart beat faster, illogically hopeful that she meant him in that admission.

"The captain requests your presence in our next away mission to the planet Sarpeidon where the sun, Beta Naiobi, has been estimated to go super nova in four weeks, three days, and seventeen hours."

"No minutes or seconds in your estimate?" She teased.

"I am endeavoring to answer in a more relaxed fashion, however, if you would like a precise estimate..."

Jim's eyes lit up in humor as she seemed to shed the last of her melancholy like a cloak falling from her shoulders. "You've got some serious sass there."

"I believe it is a skill I inherited from both of my parents." He bowed slightly and left to the sound of his t'hy'la's laughter.
This part of the story I'm stealing my inspiration from the TOS episode "All Our Yesterdays". For those that have seen it...well, you can guess where this will be heading. Now, I've rated this story E so, at some point, it'll have some *ahem* adult parts and I value your opinions. If you don't want me to include them and skip over them then let me know now before I post them. I always do get nervous when posting scenes like that so that's why I'm asking in advance. It won't be in this chapter but it will be coming. *blushes*

Also, I want to say a huge thank you for the kudoses and comments!!! I'm definitely feeling the love!

Chapter Nine

Jim tightened the strap holding the tricorder, small medical kit, and stuffed her phaser in her belt and nervously bounced on her toes in the gold uniform dress of command track officers. She was excited at the prospect of leaving the ship and happy at the opportunity to do more than just theory. She'd been hitting a brick wall with her's and Scotty's work. They just seemed to be missing one element to make everything work to get her home.

Spock's visit last night had caused the small box in the back of her mind that held her feelings for him to start to open. She had tossed and turned the entire night, unable to focus or distract herself from the thought of her with Spock-this Spock who seemed to like her in more than one way.

Every interaction between them had always been instigated by him, never her. Even when she hid from him, trying to avoid her growing feelings for him, he sought her out. He worked to engage her in activities that they both would enjoy and seemed to welcome the idea of touch between them if last night's brush of his fingers was any indication. She knew Spock, any Spock, would never have been so careless with their touch. So, what did it mean?

It was getting harder and harder to reign in her feelings towards the Spock of this universe as time wore on here and she felt torn in two between wanting to go home and staying here. At first she had wondered if it was simply a case of her transferring her feelings from one Spock to another but it wasn’t. He was so different and he was making it hard for her to keep away. Jim was afraid. In the short time she’d known him she knew she was falling in love with him.

She didn't have much longer to think about it before the object of her thoughts walked up and stood next to her on the transporter. She tamped down her surprise and managed a professional greeting. Their beam down was delayed when Dr. McCoy couldn't make the away team because of a yeoman going into labor.

A frazzled young female trill came running in, her long blond hair loose around her shoulders in artistic waves. Jim tilted her head in appreciation and slight jealousy at her curves and how they fit perfectly into her blue medical division uniform showing her as a nurse. Jim's uniforms had never fit quite right.

Jim's head tilted in curiosity as she struggled to remember something. This ensign seemed very
familiar. She also wondered just how far those spots went down.

Spock straightened just as the thought crossed her mind like a piano wire, taut and stiff, and Jim wondered if he could read her thoughts. He practically growled as he ordered the ensign to the transporter pad. It had scared her to the point of dropping her own medical kit.

"Jim Kirk." The blond commander smiled and held out a hand while the woman fumbled with her equipment and shook it.

"Emony Dax." She put the strap over her head and smiled at the greeting. "Uh-I'm coming in Dr. McCoy's place."

Jim's glare at Spock forced him to calm somewhat and she gave an apologetic look at the woman. They all finally assembled and the transporter chief went through the checks.

"Commanders, there's some solar flare activity that is giving off EMP pulses because of the late stages of the star's life that might affect electronics and transporter abilities." He told them.


They materialized in a large storage facility with silver discs and drawers holding them carefully organized. Jim's eyebrow raised in curiosity. Next to her Spock pulled out his tricorder to scan the area. "I detect no life forms."

Jim frowned in confusion. "Well, that confirms the Enterprise's scans."

"Where is everybody?" Emony looked around one of the rows and jumped as a balding human looking man appeared in front of her with a frown.

He came far too close to the ensign which had Jim immediately placing a hand on her phaser.

"What are you doing here? You're very late!" He scolded them and Jim's eyebrows reached her hairline in surprise. That was not the greeting she was expecting at all.

"Please. You need to hurry and use the library to choose your era of interest. There isn't much time." He ushered them all forward and was suddenly gone, as if he'd disappeared into thin air. Jim spun on her heel in alert when the same man came around the corner.

Spock moved to stand in front of them and Jim rolled her eyes at the protective gesture. "My name is Atoz and I am the guardian of the library. You must choose your era. I will assist you."

Spock and Jim both shifted their stances to prepare for any sudden moves.

"You're a very agile man, Mister Atoz. Just what are you talking about? Where is everybody?" Jim asked very carefully.

Atoz's head tilted at the question, looking at her as if she was mad. "I am afraid that each person's chosen era is confidential however, I am here to assist you. I am the librarian."

Spock relaxed slightly but remained on alert, allowing the women to move forward. Emony spoke first. "No. We mean people in general. Where is everybody?"

The man walked around them towards an archway with a computer terminal next to it, gesturing with an impatient hand. "Come! Come! You must choose your era. There isn't much time!"

Spock rose an eyebrow in confusion and Jim had to stifle her 'what the fuck?' comment.
Mr. Atoz pulled a box of silver discs out from underneath and scrutinized Jim closely which was really unsettling.

"I see you like adventure, young miss."

She contemplated slapping him at the misogynistic title he gave her but she really didn't want her first away mission with Pike to end in a diplomatic disaster.

Atoz picked up a disc and placed it in the terminal and, in the doorway, an almost American style western seemed to be playing as if it was a movie. She turned to him.

"I'm not a big fan of westerns, Mr. Atoz. Just what are you trying to show us?"

He looked disappointed. "Perhaps something more...exciting? The library has a large selection and the atavachron can help you get there."

Emony picked up a disc, scrutinizing it closely and placed it in the adjacent terminal and an arctic climate appeared in the doorway, replacing the western scene. Jim shivered, remembering the nightmare that was Delta Vega.

"Fascinating choice, miss. The Sarpeidon Ice Age, approximately seven thousand years ago." He indicated the doorway showing the era with a flourish.

Behind her Spock was surreptitiously scanning the man while he was talking to ensign Dax. Spock must have noticed something interesting since he moved forward.

"Mr. Atoz? You are a hologram?"

At Spock's question the image of him flickered slightly and the hologram frowned. "Of course, sir. All of Sarpeidon bar yourselves has left to safety and it is my duty to ensure everyone on the planet is relocated. There is little time left as the library is due to power down permanently in a matter of hours."

Jim had a bad feeling. As the 'librarian' continued talking to them he seemed to become more agitated at their, seemingly, lack of cooperation.

"What do you mean 'safe'? Where is everyone?" Jim asked.

Atoz started typing on the terminal and turning dials. Jim's eyes drifted to Spock as she slowly moved her hand to hover over her phaser and he mirrored her movements in perfect sync.

"The atavachron relocated them to the past where they can live out the remainder of their lives to escape the death of Beta Naiobi. My creator, the original Mr. Atoz left three days ago to join his wife and children." He finished what he was doing and turned back towards them. "You three are the only ones left that my scans have detected."

"We do not need relocation, Mr. Atoz, as we are not from here. We came to assess if our assistance was needed or wanted to the people of Sarpeidon due to our own scans showing your sun going super nova." Spock explained but Mr. Atoz started moving towards them and they started moving backwards, away from the hologram.

"My duty as librarian is to ensure all the people on the planet have been relocated safely. You will be happy in your new home. It will be different but you will enjoy the excitement of the past." Another Atoz appeared behind them and the hairs on the back of her neck raised. Adrenalin started to flow, igniting her fight or flight response. Jim and Spock fell into line, back to back, protecting
Emony who had started to trip over her feet in her attempt to get away from the advancing holograms.

"No, thanks." He head spun from one Mr. Atoz to another. "Look, dude, we aren't from here. We don't need your 'help'." Jim pulled out her phaser as both holograms pulled out a silver tube-like device. The holograms flickered again and a third, the fourth, appeared, making a hole in their defenses.

The holograms surrounded them completely and, even though their motions were hostile, they showed concern and irritation for them. "We understand your fear of leaving the present but it is not safe. You are out of time to even select a different era disc. We must do our duty as our programming compels us."

"Ensign! Call for a beam up!" Spock ordered.

Emony's hands slipped on her communicator and she dropped it. The trill quickly snatched it up and her voice shook with fear. "Enterprise! This is the away team! We need an emergency beam out! Now!"

-"Enterprise here. Beta Naiobi is putting out huge waves of gamma rays. It's interfering with transporters. We can only beam one at a time. Remain still for transportation!"

Fuck. This was just their luck.

Jim heard the telltale whine of the transporter and she didn't even need to turn to know Ensign Dax was gone so it was just her, Spock, and the crazy holograms at a standoff. She breathed a sigh of relief that the ensign was on the ship instead of in danger.

"Please do not make this difficult on yourselves. We are only trying to help to keep you safe." The hologram to her right told them.

"I think we're good, Atoz." Her head turned slightly to address Spock but her eyes remained on the holograms. "We're good. Right, Spock?"

"We are 'good'." He replied and Jim smiled and shook her head slightly at Spock's acceptance of her humor.

-"Commanders Spock and Kirk."

Their comms went off and Spock pulled his off his belt, one hand still aiming his phaser, his focus on the alien holograms in front of him. "Spock here."

-"Sir, the solar flares have kicked up and transporters are down."

No. This was just their luck. God damn Murphy's Law.

"Understood." Spock replied tersely and he snapped his communicator shut with more force than necessary.

"Son of a bitch!" Jim cursed.

"My sentiments exactly." Spock said in a sotto voice and, if the situation hadn't been so dire she would have laughed.

They needed to get away and get away fast from their 'saviors'. The image of the frozen wasteland
was still in the doorway and Jim didn't particularly want to be a Jimscicle.

Jim took aim and pressed the trigger on her phaser but all that came out was a pathetic squeak. She looked closer at the weapon, shook it, and tried again only to not even get a squeak the second time around.

"It would seem our phasers are out. It is likely due to the sporadic EMP pulses from Beta Naiobi." He, unhelpfully, supplied.

"Ya think?" Jim snapped.

The hologram Atoz to her left moved closer, raising the silver tube-like thing. "You must be relocated. The library will shut in-" he flickered and rematerialized. "-ten minutes."

Jim held out both of her arms. "Hold up! I thought you guys said we had several hours?"

Spock shifted closer to her, his body a warm presence against her back. "I believe that the solar flares are damaging their programming."

"Shit." Jim hissed. She looked up to address Atoz. "Can't we talk about this?"

"No."

At least he was concise.

"Okay." Jim threw her phaser at the closest hologram where it forced him to duck out of the way and she twisted her body to run while Spock did the same but, even though they distracted two of the holograms, there was still the third and fourth. She had a momentary vision of the silver tube pointing straight at her face and then...nothing.

xXx
Chapter Ten

Spock struggled to keep up with the pace in which he was working. His duty to the ship was placed slightly aside in favor of his determination to return the Kirk that belonged in their universe. He still acted appropriately as captain but his attention was divided. He could not help the desperation he felt nor could he stop the fear that resided when he was unable to be at her side to protect her. His concentration was weak but, still, he worked.

He knew he had been defying the orders given to him and the Enterprise crew to abandon the search but he found he did not care. She may have not been his intended or his mate but she was still...important to him.

The agony when he had lost her to Khan had destroyed his controls, his ability to think logically. He had never felt such strong emotions. They had been more terrifying than when he had lost his mother. Something had snapped and he did not wish that to happen again. Even now he felt broken as if the commander-no Jim was an integral part of him and the fact that they were not close was a crime against nature but he had to remind himself that it was because of him. He had chosen to distance himself to keep her away because he knew she loved him and he could not let himself love her.

Spock shook his head and focused on his work. His calculations showed failure and the screen blurred as fatigue crept up on him. Vulcans could go days without rest but he was half Vulcan and his stamina was, therefore, weaker.

The captain shut down the transporter schematics and codes to ensure his work is unable to be accessed by others. Despite the orders given to him he would continue to search but he was did not want to risk the careers of his subordinates unless it became impossible for him to complete the task alone and unaided but it was rapidly becoming evident that he would need help.

Nyota had her suspicions about the time he spent in the science and engineering labs but she refrained from commenting frequently about it, only expressing her concern in regards to his health. Her presence and calm acceptance of his behaviors was a soothing balm to his psyche. She was his match, his soon-to-be intended, and her strengths helped him. She complimented who he was and that was what he needed especially right now.

Commander Kirk was the opposite to him, a strong counterpoint which brought forth it's own challenges. She was the omega to his alpha and it was comforting in it's own way but she elicited such strong emotions that he had struggled to contain even with hours of meditation. It had proven to be very confusing to him. His desire to have her near was a strange thing and he knew it to be an unhealthy need but he could not understand it nor could he control it but he refused to act on it. It was only logical for his choice to be Nyota rather than one who brought out such shameful and
Spock's continuous critiques to the blonde seemed to be read by her incorrectly and he did not know how to fix it. He only wished for her to be a better officer and safer by following procedure. Since the Khan incident when he had lost her he had made the choice to distance himself but he felt a subconscious desire to protect her. He limited her from attending dangerous missions and attempting to protect her from danger, even if it was from herself, was an arduous task that was frequently seen as cruel and stifling on his part and it frustrated him to no end. He would NOT allow her to die again. She was his shield mate, a fellow officer and warrior despite her not being his bondmate.

Sighing, the Vulcan made his way to his quarters. Spock stiffened, a sudden thought coming to the forefront of his mind. He required assistance from someone else, someone who had experienced life in a different universe despite it not technically being known as one. It had been an altered past but the comparison was apt. There was one thing though that he had to do. He could not contact him in this state. He needed a clearer head. He needed rest and to center himself if he was to be appropriately functional for alpha shift.

Spock arrived at his spacious living space to be greeted with quiet with Nyota being on gamma shift to complete the required Starfleet hours and training to gain the qualification needed to allow her to be in command should the situation warrant it. He promptly removed his uniform, replacing it with the heavy black meditation robes of his people and the weight of the fabric comforted him. Spock then moved his office chair to reach up to the small ventilation window high in the wall and pulled out a black, wooden container.

It contained a soft throw blanket of Jim's, it's scent of the blonde long gone, but the simple presence of the item provided a sense of calm that he felt he currently needed. It was not logical to keep this item but he found did not care. Memories should be sufficient but the physical reminder assisted him in ways that were needed.

He took the blanket, a small sense of guilt that he was betraying his intended by keeping it a secret and indulging in this ritual filtered into his mind, but it was...comforting to have it.

Spock lit his usual incense sticks and meditation pot, settling on the mat he frequently used and lay the blanket across his lap to allow his hands to rest upon the fabric. Closing his eyes, he found peace.

xXx

Lieutenant-Commander McCoy stood outside the conference room, his frustration and anger at the captain a palpable thing. The listed title of the briefing was about their mission to Selus, an advanced planet with a lower gravity than that of Earth and, as such, additional training would need happen to ensure the health and safety of the officers that would be attending the meetings with the planet's representatives.

He felt as if they were giving up on Jim ever returning to them and were moving on. Clinically, he knew the stages of grief and he was firmly stuck in denial; believing that there was definitely a way to get her home. He would never accept that his best friend would not return to them. She had to return to them because a life without Jim Kirk in it wasn't a life he wanted. He doubted he would remain in Starfleet, or, at minimum, remain on the ship where they had served together and the ghost of his best friend would haunt the corridors, destroying the good feelings and memories he had associated with the Enterprise.

Sighing, the doctor walked through the door and he saw that he was the last to arrive. The senior
officers all looked to be in the same state as him but they were slightly more composed. McCoy knew that he was not in the best state of mind to be on duty but he had the training to push aside his feelings and do his job if need be.

Spock stood and called the meeting to order and McCoy looked him over with a critical eye, noting that he seemed to have lost at least three kilos since he had seen him last and his posture was so straight that it looked painful. He made a mental note to have M'Benga examine him before week's end. Maybe the loss of Jim was affecting him more than he thought.

Turning his gaze to Nyota, he could see she was in a stressed state as well. She was watching Spock with eyes that seemed to scream heartbreak, sadness, and concern. He knew that they were still together and that they were soon to be betrothed but she was clearly very worried about the Vulcan and, as much as he hated him, McCoy was concerned as well, albeit in a more professional capacity.

"This meeting is off the record in the fact that it does not pertain to the mission to Selus. It is listed as a mission briefing and it is in a way."

McCoy's interest peaked and he straightened in his chair as Spock continued.

"As you all know I have a counterpart from the future. You all saw him during that battle against Khan and Admiral Marcus."

Nods around the table from the senior staff greeted his words.

The captain sighed. "Due to the loss of the commander I felt it prudent to contact the Ambassador to see if an accident, such as this one, occurred in his own timeline and was surprised when I learned that it had happened." Spock paused and McCoy felt a sense of foreboding at the action of the captain.

"When his Kirk had been transported, the parallel universe in which he had arrived was a dystopia. It was a violent and dangerous place where murder was used to advance in rank, the people were ruled with an iron fist by an emperor, and cruelty was frequent and seen as acceptable. It is a strong possibility that the same thing has occurred and our own Kirk was sent there. I believe it to be a logical assumption due to our past incidences bearing remarkable similarity to the Ambassador's own past as well as the fact that the manner in which she was lost is almost identical to the events from the Ambassador's timeline."

McCoy felt a frisson of fear lance through him at the Captain's words. With the possibility of Jim arriving in such a place, would she even be alive? What state would she be in and, if she was rescued, would she even be the same person or would she be so traumatized that she would never recover? Horrible 'what ifs' played through his mind and it made him feel sick. Good God!

His dark eyes looked upon each of them, radiating anger and fear. McCoy knew the bastard could feel but he had never seen him so...passionate. His behaviors towards Jim had always been indifferent, angry, and cold but there had been a determination that had always set the hairs on the back of McCoy's neck on end. He had seemed obsessed with the commander, always seeking to remove her from situations where she was in a position to be forced to use her combat and tactical skills and, as a result, she never felt able to prove herself, never able to flourish to show her talents. Some would see the Vulcan's actions as protective but most saw it as a show of lack of trust and respect.

"I have secured the Ambassador's assistance in returning Commander Kirk to her rightful place. It is limited help as he is not as knowledgeable in our technology nor does he know this Kirk as well
as he knows his own but he does have theories which may be useful to our cause."

He pulled up a holographic screen to show the schematics of their transporter as well as their scans of the plasma storm that affected the rescue of Jim. He reached forward and pulled up the timestamp and video of the transporter at the moment Jim had started to disappear. McCoy's breath caught in his throat at the picture displayed. The blond was semi-transparent, her face forever frozen in fear.

Adjusting the screen to place that information on one side, he pulled up the scans that had been continuously going. He enlarged a small portion that showed a spike in the readings. It was so slight that it seemed insignificant.

"I sent the information to the Ambassador and he determined that this moment was a minute glance into the parallel universe into which the Commander was deposited." He explained. "I analyzed the information and biosignatures detected by our sensors. I believe that those are of the people inhabiting that parallel universe and that they were slightly different to our own which creates the possibility of our locating Commander Kirk as her own will, logically, differ from those of that universe." He looked to the doctor and it was obvious that he was suffering from exhaustion.

"The knowledge that we may be able to detect the anomaly and several locations creates possibilities due to her signature being different than that of the other individuals in that universe and that will assist us in locating the correct parallel universe. We need to focus our abilities in locating a match to these scans to determine her location and adjust our equipment to detect and retrieve her which should be possible despite us having a low probability of success. For this to be possible, I will require assistance from Doctor McCoy to gain access to the medical records and in depth scans of Commander Kirk to attempt to get a baseline for a match as well as help from Ensign Chekov who has the abilities to modify our sensor equipment to detect Jamison and Lieutenant-Commander Scott who has unparalleled skills in transporter technology to adapt it enough to retrieve her." He sighed. "This is something that cannot be done on the record nor can it be done during our shifts because it is not sanctioned by Starfleet in any way, shape, or form. If you feel that this is...that you feel discomfort in not following the order to abandon the search then I ask that you do not speak of this meeting. I must remind you that it is a court martial offense to undertake this task."

He placed his hands behind his back and stood tall, waiting to hear objections but none came.

Scott stood, smiling and excited. "I think I speak for the entire crew when I say that we will help in any way we can. We will nah leave our lass behind."

Spock jerked his head in acceptance as the rest of the crew smiled and nodded their assent, the air turning electric with excitement and hope but McCoy's eyes were on the Captain. Something niggled at the back of his mind despite Spock's speech. The words were right, the tone encouraging, and his efforts showed true care and interest but something was...off.

McCoy had never trusted that green-blooded bastard ever since he had marooned Jim on Delta Vega, let alone that stunt he had pulled on the bridge. Ever since Khan, he had had a strange relationship with his friend and it was damn weird. He would act concerned when she was hurt, as if he cared for her, but the moment she woke, he would go back to his cold, detached persona and it always hurt her and made her feel worthless. There had actually been several moments where he had strongly considered an official recommendation that Jim be either transferred to another vessel where he would follow her or ensure separate shifts from Spock and have the captain seek a mind healer as well as have a talk with him in an attempt to curb his behavior.

He had suggested these actions to Jim only to have them dismissed. Her reasoning had been that it
would appear unprofessional if she was unable to work past these problems. McCoy had been
conflicted, medical duty and his professional judgement based on the mental state of the
Commander or him wanting to help spare Jim from any further pain. Ultimately, his friendship had
won out but it had been a close thing.

The meeting had been dismissed, his crew mates leaving with smiles and excitement causing them
to practically float out except Uhura who was watching her boyfriend with the same level of
concern as McCoy. He wondered what she was thinking and resolved to speak with her the next
chance he got. He needed to gain a better understanding of the Captain's mental state and he hoped
that she would help him.

He turned to leave but not before seeing Spock's eyes soften as he regarded the woman and they
brushed their fingers together in a gentle caress. Nyota's face relaxed and she smiled at him, the
tension leaving her body.

McCoy left to allow them this private moment and he hoped that his worries and concerns about
the vulcan were unfounded.
Chapter Eleven

Jim woke with a mild headache to the sensation of extreme cold and snowflakes falling and melting on her face. She saw clouds drifting above her and a white landscape surrounding her. Ice and snow everywhere with colors ranging from a deep blue signifying ice to a blinding white. Behind her there was a large cliff face but no hint of a doorway back to the 'library' or any form of civilization so there didn't seem to be an obvious way back. Turning, she saw Spock laid out next to her still unconscious and he was a sickly yellow-green pallor due to the cold. She needed to get him out of the cold now! They needed shelter and fast.

"Dammit!" She cursed.

Jim pulled herself up and noticed they had been put on a pallet-type piece of equipment and strapped next to them was a veritable hoard of supplies. She spotted a large, fur lined winter coat and a bag of winter clothes. She quickly took stock of their supplies. There was a large crate that contained about ten days of rations for them both, her medical kit as well as a much larger one underneath, another box of supplies that included survival gear. There was rope, tether hooks, thermal blankets, fire-starter kits, snow shoes and boots and warming heaters with plenty of fuel. There were lanterns, sleeping bags designed for cold weather, and a lot of other things carefully, but clearly, packed in a hurry.

Jim quickly set to the task of putting the coat on the unconscious Vulcan and moved him off the pallet, thankful that the wheels had a quick release mechanism that turned it into a make-shift sled. She pulled him back on, cursing how heavy he was due to his higher bone density, and secured him with the rope. She pulled on the snow boots and shoes, which were a little on the large side but fit well enough, as well as a few of the winter thermal wear items but the pants didn't fit her and she didn't have time to search for better options right now so her legs were still bare in her Starfleet uniform. Fucking sexist bastards at Starfleet. She made a mental note to write a very pointed letter to the people in charge when she got back.

It took quite a few tries to get the sled moving but, once she did it slid easily but only if she kept moving which was hard to do in the deep snow when her feet still got stuck every few steps.

She'd been walking for what felt like forever when she spotted a cave in the distance and a flare of hope that they would survive surfaced. She disconnected the rope that had her attached to the sled to get a closer look but her left foot suddenly slipped on a piece of rock, twisting at an unnatural angle and she cried out in pain. Her world tilted sideways as she fell, her arms pinwheeling in an attempt to right herself and she felt a burst of pain as her head connected with the rock, hot blood rushing from the back of her head. She had a second to think about the fact that Spock was going to...
kill her before her world went black.

xXx

Spock knew something was wrong with him the moment he had regained consciousness on the sled. His emotions were closer to the surface than he'd ever experienced. He carefully lifted himself from the sled and experienced an uncharacteristic moment of panic that he was alone and it only worsened when he located Jamison near him. She was so still-too still and lying on the snow-covered ground.

The sight of Jim in the snow with blood under her head staining the pure white snow crimson had caused him to feel so much fear it had nearly crippled him. Immense relief flooded his body when he had felt a pulse on her neck and anger quickly replaced it when he realized she had neglected herself to protect him by providing him with the more substantial cold weather clothing rather than herself.

Scanning the horizon, he quickly located the cave she had appeared to have been heading towards and scooped her up, placing her where he had previously been and bundling her in as many of the supplied blankets as possible before pulling Jim and their supplies to shelter.

Upon arriving at the cave he ignited a light stick and he noticed it showed signs of previous habitation but it had clearly been many years since it had been occupied. There were animal furs and enough preserved supplies to last them at least a year, if they were careful, that had been clearly cultivated from the Arctic environment.

There was a warmth to the location that indicated hot springs and, possibly, an environment complete with vegetation that could provide a source of food other than the obvious mammals that likely inhabited the planet which would provide meat.

A thick layer of dust covered everything but the supplies from themselves and it appeared the previous inhabitant, or inhabitants, were clearly well organized. Spock quickly set himself to the task of caring for Jim.

He wrapped her in a large fur and covered that in a silver thermal blanket as he set her ankle and bound it, thankful she was unconscious. He repaired the cut with a dermal regenerator to the back of her head but could do nothing about the large bump underneath as he would need a deep tissue version. He then carefully washed the blood from her soft, blond hair, marveling at the softness of it in his hands.

He shook himself from his inappropriate thoughts and scanned her with the tricorder from the medical kit noting that her body temperature was still far too low for that of a human. There was a large supply of wood carefully stacked behind a small gated fence-like structure, likely constructed by the previous resident, and he started a large fire making the cave far warmer and providing more light.

He contemplated the warming packs in the first aid kits that would assist in warming her. It would be logical to use them but he remembered that using combined body heat was just as effective and it would, after all, save them using their limited supplies so that they could be utilized for a more urgent time. Yes. That was the reason.

He shook the dust from what appeared to be a bed made of furs and lay a sleeping bag on top for more cushioning. As he unwrapped Jim, he gazed upon her and he knew he loved her. With shaking hands he revealed her body to him as he removed her clothing. There were scars along her back which caused him to growl at the thought of someone hurting his Jim. He would keep her safe
while she healed.

He removed his own clothing barring his undergarments to get as much skin to skin contact and slid in behind her, covering them with the multitude of furs and blankets and pulled her to him and hoped her temperature would stabilize quickly. He ran his hands along her body, feeling the soft, far too cool skin under his fingers. He nuzzled her neck and inhaled her, smelling the vanilla sugar lotion that she used. His Vulcan blood sang at the contact. He wanted to hold her forever, to be at her side and her at his. He wanted to join her mind to his and build a home there, never to let her go.

He would keep her safe. No-one would ever take her from him. She would never want to leave him and he would make her happy. Spock placed a finger on her temple and sensed she was in pain despite her lack of consciousness and he reached out next to him and grabbed a hypo, carefully depressing the button and delivering the dose of medication to ease her distress and he could sense her relief through their shallow link. He, once again, placed his fingers on her face, initiating a slightly more substantial link, easily breakable, but strong enough that he could monitor her. He wanted more but he forced himself to hold back. There would be time enough to forge a bond between them. They could not leave this place. By now the library had likely been shut down. This was their home now.

He fell asleep with her mind joined to his and felt a sense of peace. She was his t'hy'la, his perfect match and they fit together in a way he had only dreamed of. He felt a strange sense of freedom here and it was wonderful.

xXx

Jim woke to the sensation of incredible, amazing warmth and softness under her, a firm pillow rising and falling under her head and her body held comfortably in place by warm bands. Her head throbbed in pain and her ankle felt compressed and immobilized.

She moaned in pain, confused and the bands holding her body in place released her. She suddenly realized she was naked save her underwear and she was laying on a similarly nearly naked, very warm, firm body. She jerked away but immediately regretted the sudden movement when a spike of pain from her ankle and head stopped her. Gentle hands pushed her down and the familiar sting of a hypo caused her eyes to fly open.

A warm flood of medication caused her to relax back against the body as it rearranged her back into place. Hands carded through her hair, carefully poking and prodding but also gently stroking. Jim practically purred in pleasure and closed her eyes again.

"Mmm. S' nice." She slurred and kept her eyes closed as she basked in the offered comfort as those arms reattached themselves to her.

"I am relieved to see you are concious." A deep voice told her and Jim shifted, the arms of her 'pillow' reluctantly loosened their hold but didn't fully release her.

Spock's face was close to her and he seemed far more relaxed than she had ever seen him before. He almost seemed...happy?

"Spock? What happened?" She pushed herself upright and he let go but his hands still touched her, fingers and palms stroking her back in a way that made her shiver but not from the cold. Jim swayed slightly from the sudden change of position from lying to sitting.

Running a hand over her face to try and clear her head she saw that they were in a cave, flames
from a large fire flickering on the walls and turning them orange. Their supplies were placed against the wall and she was in nothing but her underwear next to, a mostly naked, Spock!

"What happened?" She asked, her tongue heavy in her mouth and her thoughts slightly muddled and fuzzy from a mix of medication and her head injury. A sensation of relaxation and comfort seeped into her thoughts and compelled her to lay back down and rest. She wanted to move away from him and start to work on a way home but something was encouraging her to move closer and snuggle.

A canteen with a straw was pressed to her mouth and she drank gloriously cool water which soothed her parched throat.

"It would appear Mr. Atoz used the atavachron and succeeded in transporting us into the past."

"I know that but what happened after? The last thing I remember-" Her nose scrunched as her thoughts seemed far away but she concentrated hard. "-I remember walking in the snow, pulling you and then-nothing."

The fingers on Spock's right hand gently ran down the side of her face and Jim sighed in pleasure. It felt wonderful. Warm sensations of happiness and love slowly entered her. Something wasn't right but the thought was distant and at the back of her mind. Shouldn't she be freaked out? Upset at the fact that they were trapped in the past?

"You disconnected yourself from the sled and slipped, hitting your head and fracturing your left ankle. You were suffering from moderate hypothermia when I discovered you lying in the snow."

"I located the cave you were heading towards and brought you here. I treated your injuries and determined the best course of action was to use combined body heat to regulate your temperature."

"I could not allow my t'hy'la to come to harm." He murmured and pressed a kiss to the top of her head.

Her carefully constructed box of emotions regarding Spock was wide open. "Why do I feel this way? I'm so tired."

"Shh. Just rest, my shi'masu. I will care for you." He pulled her closer and Jim's eyes closed, feeling far more tired and relaxed than she should in this situation. She just didn't seem to care. Jim fell asleep to the feeling of a heartbeat under her hand placed on his side and love in her mind.

xXx

The next time Jim awoke Spock was sitting next to her, his eyes closed, deep in meditation but he had a hand on her arm. She took stock of her injuries now that she had a clearer head. The back of her head ached and she reached back to feel the damage. Jim hissed in discomfort as she felt a good size lump. She flexed her arms and legs and only felt some bruises except for her left ankle which was carefully splinted and hurt but not terribly so.

She'd just started shifting to sit up when she felt the hand on her arm tighten slightly and release her. Turning, she saw Spock's eyes open and he looked her up and down as if to search for further injury that may have appeared suddenly.

"How do you feel?" He asked quietly.
She looked down and saw she was still only in her underwear and she clutched the blankets close, her face burning in embarrassment. It was stupid. He'd already seen her when he'd cared for her but she felt far more vulnerable now that she was clear headed and he was clothed.

"Fine. I'm fine."

Spock frowned slightly. "Fine has variable definitions."

Jim only refrained from rolling her eyes because it'd give her more of a headache. "I'm a little sore but I'm ok." She pulled the blankets a little tighter around herself. "Do you think I could get some clothes now?"

He didn't move. "Are you not more comfortable how you are? You need to rest and heal for now."

Jim pursed her lips at the statement. Yes, she was comfortable but she felt too exposed. "I might want to walk around and I don't want to 'offend your delicate Vulcan sensibilities'." She joked but Spock simply raised a brow in what Jim interpreted as the equivalent of a vulcan eyeroll.

"I assure you that you will in no way be offensive to me." He shifted and got up, moving near the fire and collected a bowl, spoon, and cup. "It may also serve to encourage you to remain where you are and rest."

Jim snorted and shook her head. "Trust me, Spock, nothing keeps me down."

"Now that I do believe." He detoured by their supplies and collected a set of thermal underwear pants and sweater.

"Smartass." She griped but Jim was smiling at his humor.

He returned and handed her the bowl and Jim was surprised. It contained a hot savory stew. "Thank you." He nodded in acknowledgement as she placed the bowl next to her and pulled on the top, which would be skin tight on Spock but hung loose on her smaller frame. She started to put on the pants under the blanket, trying to keep herself covered but cursed as she got to the splint covering her lower left leg. Knives seemed to be stabbing her as she tried shoving the splint through the too small hole but she was determined.

She grit her teeth and got it halfway over the bulky splint when she felt a sting in her neck that distracted her from her task. Slapping a hand over the spot, she turned and glared at Spock who gave her an unimpressed look. "Acetaminophen." He explained and he moved around to her front and pulled down the blanket, flourishing a pair of medical scissors and proceeded to cut the leg of the pants just enough that her splint would fit through easily.

Her pain quickly faded with the acetaminophen and she smiled. "Show off."

An eyebrow raised at her unusual version of a thank you. "Perhaps if you learned to ask for assistance you would not injure yourself as frequently." He admonished her.

Shrugging, Jim finished dressing. "Growing up I learned that I only had myself to depend on. I guess I still haven't broken the habit."

Spock found that information disturbing but remained silent.

She took a bite and started eating, suddenly ravenous. "Gotta love a man who can cook." He seemed to be pleased at her response but Jim focused on her food and missed the smile on Spock's face.
"I'm fine, Spock. And, anyways,-" She swallowed her mouthful and returned her attention to him. "-we've got to find a way back home."

Spock suddenly became focused on the fire, not looking at Jim. "There is no way back, Jim."

Jim laughed incredulously and put down her half-eaten stew. "There was a way here so there has to be a way back, Spock."

Sighing, Spock came to sit close to her. "Jim, there is no doorway. It has been many hours since we arrived and the library is closed. Our chances at returning to our own time are less than-" He paused, calculating. Jim had never seen Spock, or any Spock, have to stop in the middle of a sentence to do any calculation.

"-1 in 364,532." He finished.

Jim started to laugh as the ridiculousness of the situation hit her full force. So now she was stuck, not only in an alternate universe but, in the past as well. Fate must be up there laughing his ass off.

Spock tilted his head at the unusual response. "Jim?"

"So, you're saying we're stuck here?" Her laughs tapered off and reality sunk in.

"Negative. I am saying our chances at returning are slim to none. It would be more beneficial for us to accept this and use our time here to ensure our survival rather than attempting to return as we have no ability to return without the appropriate equipment." He stated matter of factly.

Jim's eyes narrowed as a hot ball of anger bubbled up. "I refuse to accept this. We don't know exactly what Mr. Atoz meant when he said that the library was closing. It could mean that it was simply powering down for the night. It could mean that the archive portion was being turned off. There are a lot of possibilities."

Spock placed a hand on her shoulder and Jim realized she was shaking. "Jim, there weren't any Sarpeidons present. If it was a matter of the library being shut down temporarily then do you not think that there would have been at least one that returned? The likelihood that every member of the planet was happy with their chosen era and never wanted to return or return to change to a different era is slim to none. It is also likely that Mr. Atoz ensured that there was no way to get back to the 'library'. It was his programmed duty to remove all beings from the present to 'save' them from the planet's eminent destruction. Logically, that would be interpreted as him removing the ability to return in any form."

"What about if the Enterprise attempts a rescue? We need to be near where the doorway was to get back through if they manage open it." She explained, barely keeping her hysteria at their situation at bay. She knew that Captain Pike would never accept the loss of two crew members and he would do whatever it took to get them home. It would be what her Pike would have done.

"It is unlikely. The library may have even self-destructed to prevent this possibility or other beings from tampering in Sarpeidon's past. Captain Pike knows the temporal prime directive and he would not violate that law."

Her body started shaking more, her breathing coming faster. They couldn't be stuck here alone forever in an ice hell.

"I refuse to accept that, Spock." She snapped.

"You must." He told her, his voice in a deep growl.
Her head snapped around to face Spock, her hands balling into fists as she gripped the blanket tight enough that the fibers were probably permanently embedding themselves into her skin. "I won't!"

She needed to get out of here; to get them both out of here and if that meant she'd have to leave to get help alone and return for him then that's what she would do. She had to try! She started to rise but Spock then placed both hands on her shoulders and stood, firmly keeping her sat down and Jim started to fight in earnest, attempting to pry his fingers from her but Vulcan strength was topping her. The blanket fell and she kicked out, crying out in pain when her injured ankle connected with Spock's leg. The Vulcan pushed her to lay flat on her back and situate himself in between her legs but she only fought harder.

"We are trapped and you must accept this fact! Even if we weren't, it would be wise to remain where we are to be able to be located with ease for a rescue attempt. The environment is harsh and you are too injured to make the journey. We MUST survive." He almost shouted. Spock's eyes were black with anger and fear and his grip became painful as he held her down to stop her.

Her eyes widened in realization. Something was very wrong with Spock. He would never just give up. If he wasn't going to help her or himself then she needed to do it herself for the both of them. She needed to get him help.

Jim kneed him in the balls and his hands came away as he stumbled back, clutching himself, his face flushing green in pain. She used the opportunity to roll away and she got to her feet, stumbling as she put weight on her injured limb.

Adrenaline flooded her system and she didn't feel the pain as the splint broke with her chaotic movements. She grabbed the coat and started to pull on shoes and she got a foot away from the entrance to the cave when she felt warmer than human fingers touch the join between her neck and her shoulder. Jim was too slow to avoid him and she tried to twist away but he was faster. He squeezed carefully and she fell into his arms as her world went black once more as he applied the nerve pinch, effectively and efficiently stopping her escape.

xXx

Spock held Jim in his arms, unhappy that he had been forced to resort to rendering her unconscious to prevent her leaving. He could not allow her to leave. He knew of no way to return and he did not want her to leave him. He needed her and she needed him for more reasons than just survival in this harsh environment. She had to accept this.

He looked down and saw that she had re-injured her ankle. He sighed, hefting her into his arms and returning her to their bed. He pulled out the medical tricorder, wincing as the readings showed that the bone had ground against itself and the fracture had worsened in her attempt to escape which only would increase her forced convalescence.

Lips thinning in irritation and worry, Spock reached into the medical kit next to the bed and administered a sedative to keep her down longer. He re-set the bone and placed a new, sturdier, splint. Heading to the entrance, he collected snow and ice and bagged it. He placed his bounty on the injured appendage to assist in preventing swelling. He couldn't help the hot feeling of anger that coursed through his very veins.

Jim had tried to leave. She had tried to leave him! She had been desperate enough that she had even injured herself. Was he so terrible that she would do this? Did she not trust his assessment of the situation? He needed meditation but the simple thought of what had happened enraged him. He picked up the bowl next to the bed, throwing it as hard as he could at the wall, shouting in anger at her noncompliance. The satisfaction he felt as it shattered helped him far more than meditation. His
control was failing. Why was his control failing?

Spock clutched the sides of his head in frustration. "I am both Vulcan and human. I am a sentient being, not an animal. I am in control. Emotions are of the mind and I can control my mind." He whispered to himself.

Taking a cleansing breath, Spock knelt next to Jim and started to try meditation. He needed to calm himself, to find his center. He had to keep her safe. She must not come to harm.
Chapter Twelve

Spock had attempted to mediate but he had only succeeded marginally. He had used his limited success to focus on solving the mystery as to why his control was failing. He knew Vulcans were joined in a low-level telepathic field. It was faint, like background noise, but there.

The answer to his failing control came to him during his third attempt to fully calm the chaos of his mind. Vulcan of old was not the Vulcan he knew. Seven thousand years into the past his people had not encountered Surak and had not learned to temper and control their emotions through teachings. The man had not even been born yet.

During that time, pre-reform Vulcan, his people were a savage, almost primitive, war-like race where their passions ruled. It had been considered a shameful time period but Spock currently found it to be liberating. His father had once told him Vulcan emotion ran deep, far deeper than that of humans, and Spock had not believed him, his youth and ignorance denying this fact. However, he now had no choice but to admit his father's truths.

Spock explored the caves where they were staying. It had a small network of tunnels in which Spock discovered a small waterfall which provided safe drinking water which would still require boiling or purification from the carbon filters which had been thoughtfully provided from Mr. Atoz. He continued his exploration and was further pleased when he found a veritable paradise of trees, unfamiliar fresh fruit and vegetables surrounding the waterfall. It appeared the leaves were able to photosynthesize via bioluminescent rocks as well as small holes that led to the surface where patches of sunlight bled through like stars in the night sky.

He had also come across several pools of water that were heated from hot springs deep in the earth which served to heat the caverns above as well as provide them with warm water in which to bathe and relax. Small furred mammals, similar to Terran rabbits ran through the plants that inhabited their underground layers which appeared easy to catch and would provide much needed protein for the two of them. Even the abhorrent thought of eating meat did not seem to disturb him in his altered state.

It was fortuitous that these things were close enough to sustain them during their time here so outside excursions would be rare except to kill larger game. He spent a short time finishing his trek and came across a small patch of grains that closely resembled earth durum wheat, clearly planted by an individual as well as a series of primitive traps that were likely used to catch the small mammals. They had vines and weeds covering them and were brittle with age. Spock estimated them to be over a century old.

If he had any lingering doubt of them not being the first to be trapped here these signs were enough to dispel that thought.

He knew that Jim would be waking soon and he made his way back to their new 'home'. He knew that she would be angry with him and may possibly attempt to leave again, likely injuring herself further, and Spock may not be able to repair the damage a second time. She will need his help to survive and he may need hers.

Upon entering the cavern, he inhaled a cleansing breath to prepare himself for the inevitable argument that Jim would likely instigate and seated himself to watch her so he would be prepared when she regained consciousness.
He watched her sleep, secure in the knowledge that his actions were justified. She slept on, unaware of her audience and Spock felt his emotions, unable and unwilling to control them more than what was required to prevent himself from becoming as savage as his ancestors. He'd never controlled them to the degree that those on his home world had, preferring to embrace both his human and Vulcan heritage, but he still employed some practices. Being here made it...difficult.

Jim was magnificent in repose. Her long, wavy blond hair shimmered in the light of the fire and her skin was sun kissed despite her years aboard starships as if the stars themselves had accomplished this rather than the suns that warmed the many planets she had visited during her time in space. Her body boasted strong, lithe muscles but, also, soft feminine, curves. He longed to see her cerulean eyes that sparkled and shone in the light and the intelligence behind them; to feel her thoughts that fit and complimented his own.

In contrast to her intelligence, she seemed fearful, unwilling or unable to see his love for her—yes, he did love her. He also knew she loved him. Her feelings for him weren't simply because he shared his face with his duplicate. They had started out that way but her care for him had changed in the short time they'd known each other. He had sensed this when he had been holding her through his touch telepathy. It had only been a few times he had had the fortune to experience her true self when he had been able to place his hands on her smooth, soft skin. He longed to feel it again. Her mind was addicting, much like a drug that he needed and wanted. He longed to meld with her and wrap himself in her thoughts.

It was not long before the object of his thoughts began to stir from her slumber, groaning and shifting beneath the furs from the animals that likely inhabited the icy landscape outside of their current 'home'.

She slowly shifted onto her side and her gaze found his, full of anger with fire in her eyes. She abruptly turned away from him and a spike of anger lanced through him at her clear rejection.

"I will not apologize for my actions. They were warranted and necessary for your protection. I will continue to keep you safe from the dangers on this planet and, if needed, from yourself."

She did not even turn when she deigned to give him a response. "Fuck. You."

Spock mourned the loss of the progress he had made with her on board the Enterprise and did not appreciate the discord currently between them. He was hopeful, however, that it would end at some point. It would be a long eternity on this planet with only the two of them as company if they remained at odds with one another. Even if she hated him forever he would still care for her and love her for she was his t'hy'la.

She spun around abruptly to face him, her face twisted in her anger at him. "How dare you!"

"How dare you stop me." She snapped.

"How dare I what?" He asked, knowing the answer but wishing for her to state it to make her understand so that the ensuing argument may be put to rest so that they may move past this issue. Every possible avenue of return had been explored and dismissed as impossible in his mind. There simply was no way back to their time.

"How dare you stop me." She snapped.

"As Doctor McCoy would say 'It was for your own good'."

"For my own good? I want to go home and I know you want the same."

Spock sighed and looked away, searching for a suitable response. "There is no way home and there
She laughed humorlessly. "You won't even try! There has to be a way."

"There is not." He stated simply. "You must accept this."

"There has to be a way. The doorway cannot be sealed forever. If it can be opened once, it can be opened again." She explained her faulty logic and Spock could understand her optimism but he could not understand her determination to want to believe in what was not true.

"That possibility is unlikely."

"Unlikely but not impossible. There's also the possibility that since we are not from Sarpeidon that our physiology is different enough that we might be able to get through." She argued.

"Our biological differences are not vast enough for that." Spock explained, willing her to accept their situation.

"I will still try."

"Very well." He brought himself to his full height despite his sitting position. "I order you to remain here."

"Oh, you order me?" She said the words, her voice thick with sarcasm. "We're the same rank."

Spock's eyes found the ceiling at her tone and he faced her, struggling to maintain his calm. "I do order you by virtue of the fact that I do possess seniority due to the fact that, not only have I been a commander for far longer than yourself, but your appointment to commander was also on a trial basis and you are not from this universe therefore, your status was probationary and I, officially, remove your appointment."

"Well, tough shit. I'm not following that order. We're not on the fucking Enterprise." She shot back.

"I believe you are emotionally compromised."

"You bet your ass I am. I'm leaving." She threw away her coverings and tensed, ready to flee, her injured limb beginning to move towards the floor.

"I cannot allow you to do that." Spock made to stand, moving to put himself between her and the door that led to the chamber which housed the entrance

"You can't allow me? What are you gonna do? Tie me down?"

"If the situation calls for it. I would, however, hope that it does not escalate to the point that I would be forced resort to more extreme force." He growled.

Jim's body tensed, ready for a fight which Spock knew he win. "You wouldn't dare!" She hissed.

"I would do so to prevent your injury or death. I will not allow you to come to harm."

She looked at him closely through narrowed eyes and Spock did not appreciate the scrutiny from her, the judgement from her. "There's something wrong with you, Spock. You need help. Normally you would never give up so easily. What the fuck?"

"Perhaps there is but the fact remains that we cannot leave." He admitted.
"I won't give up. I don't believe in no win scenarios." She continued her argument and Spock was done arguing.

"Then you are not thinking logically." He snapped and Jim tilted her head, her blue eyes watching him carefully.

"You're the one not thinking logically and are emotionally compromised. Why do you want us to stay? Why are you giving up so easily?" She asked suspiciously.

"Because I know we cannot leave."

"How? How do you know we can't leave?"

He took a calming breath. "The available evidence shows me this."

Jim threw up her hands in frustration. "What fucking evidence?"

Spock sighed. "The fact that it was explained to us by Mr. Atoz that those transported to the past could not return and there is also proof all around us that there was even a previous inhabitant in this very cave."

"That is not conclusive proof that we cannot return. It just shows that we weren't the first."

"I have explained the evidence of this. If you are unwilling to believe this I will have no choice but force you to."

"Fuck. You."

"I am sorry, t'hy'la." He moved close to her and knelt, gently carding fingers through her hair but she pulled away, lying down and facing away from him. "Don't fucking call me that, whatever it is, and don't touch me."

Spock's hand closed into a fist at her rejection, hurt flowing through him as his heart squeezed in his side. He closed his eyes and sighed, walking away to the fire to give her some time to absorb what happened.

"I am truly sorry but the sooner you accept these facts, the better off you will be."

xXx

A sense of betrayal settled in her mind, thick and insidious, at Spock's actions, or rather, lack of action. Both. Whatever. She just couldn't believe it. It was as if the universe was laughing at her, throwing her into impossible situation after impossible situation. Not only had she been transported to another universe, now she was in another time and with the one person she was struggling to not love and fight against her feelings.

She wanted a way out. She wanted to push away what she felt so her heart could and would not be broken when he discovered her past and who she was and become disgusted with her and reject her like the Spock in her own universe or when she was eventually transported home and away from him. She would not be able to handle it a second time.

And now? Now, she was well and truly stuck with the one person that she loved, yes-she couldn't delude herself any longer. Jim loved him. She tried to push everything away. She couldn't let him know. She wondered how long she would be able to stop this feeling because she could only hold out so long and being here with him and only him was making it harder.
The hard part? The hard part was staying angry. She knew at a base level that he was protecting her. His behavior towards her had been nothing but kindness and, dare she say it, love. It was more than him simply doing his duty to protect a crew member.

She also suspected that the planet or time period was, in some way, affecting him. His behavior seemed unusual, different from what she had seen on the ship and that made her nervous and unsure. She didn't remember much of what had happened when she had woken the first time around but she remembered the exquisite feeling of being surrounded in so much love that she was sure she would drown in it. It had been powerful and all consuming and she wasn't sure if it had been nothing more than a dream.

She spent the day refusing to acknowledge Spock even when he brought her food, only moving from her place on the makeshift bed to use the "restroom" which was little more than a hole in the ground a good distance away from the cave. Every movement was done under Spock's supervision and assistance but she never said a word to him and pretended he wasn't there other than her use of him as a crutch and only because he had demanded it and she had been in too much pain without it.

At night they shared the bed and Jim clung to the edge but every morning she found him wrapped around the her like an octopus. Nightmares that had plagued her since childhood never appeared and she always woke to a feeling of calm. He didn't mention it and neither did she.

It was three days before she decided to break the silence, her anger thinning in the face of Spock's continuous diligent care.

"I think I'm gonna teach Ensign Dax a few basic gymnastics moves. Maybe get her into it when we get back." She told him, stubbornly refusing to acknowledge their forced imprisonment in the past.

She was thankful when Spock chose to follow her example when he answered. "Are you certain? She is quite accident-prone."

"The clumsy ones are usually just clumsy because of nerves. I bet she'd be amazing once she learns confidence and I think she'd be great." Jim poked at the fire with a stick causing embers to fly up. "Besides, in my universe, Emony Dax wasn't a nurse nor was she an ensign. She was a gymnast known all over the Galaxy. She'd won hundreds of competitions and was the most graceful being I've ever seen. She was so confident that she'd put me to shame in the academy." She laughed at the memory. "She also had an ego the size of her home planet Trill and with good reason. She was the best." Jim smiled at the memory of seeing her Emony in action. The graceful way she had moved through her sets, flying and twisting in the air, only to land with almost no sound.

"You had a sexual relationship with her." Spock growled and the thick stick that he'd been using to tend the fire snapped in his hands.

A hot flood of anger filled her and Jim's grip on her own stick tightened. "No! Bones did. Not me. I was their wingman. I'd set them up." She turned towards the fire, stabbing it viscously, the height of the fire mirroring her emotions as it increased. "And, even if I had, it's none of your damned business." She snapped.

"It is my business, Jamison!" He snapped.

Jim's focus turned towards the Vulcan at the uncharacteristic behavior and she scrutinized him closely. His face was flushed green with spots of color high on his cheeks, his eyes seemed to be dark and almost predatory as they were trained on Jim and she shivered at the intense focus aimed directly at her.
Shifting closer to him, she reached out a hand to check his temperature, suddenly very worried. “Spock, are you feeling ok?” She asked and his hand shot out, gripping her wrist in a hard, unrelenting grip. She winced in pain as the delicate bones ground against each other. He suddenly released her and stood, scrambling to move away from her and looking at his hands in a sort of detached horror.

"I am well, commander. I...apologize. I am in need of meditation.” He started to move away to the adjacent chamber.

"I'll say." She mumbled.

He turned back to her, almost angry. "Do not move from your position and rest your ankle. I will know if you do not listen." He snapped and Jim bit her lip and frowned, now very concerned about him. This wasn't like him.

She watched him leave and decided to heed his words, hoping that by giving him space he'd return to his original state soon. She turned her wrist, noticing ring shaped bruises the size of his fingers already appearing. Something was very wrong here.
Ok. For those who are thinking Spock was mean, he isn't meaning to be. He's just scared of losing her and forgot that he was stronger for a moment.

Anywho...here's the E rated chapter. In advance, I wanted to warn readers. It's from Jim's perspective and I'm hoping it's ok. Both of them are emotionally wrecked. Spock because the planet's messing w him and Jim because of past issues so please read with caution and please, if you comment, don't give me flames. It makes me feel inadequate and unsure. I understand constructive criticism but sometimes words do hurt and chapters may end before the next one shows reconciliation and help the reader better understand the situation.

Thank you and I really hope you all like this next chapter. I am always nervous and some of the responses to the last one kind of hurt.

DarkWaters

Chapter Thirteen

The next day dawn broke bright and cold and Jim and Spock almost seemed to be performing an elaborate dance around each other after the events of last night and the previous several days. It was yet another thing that was not spoken about by either party but Jim saw how Spock's eyes, every so often, would drift towards the ring of bruises when her sleeve rode up as she'd reach for something or when she became warm and had to take off the sweater. He looked so ashamed that it broke her heart. There were too many things that they needed to talk about. It was driving her crazy.

She seized the opportunity during breakfast which she prepared before Spock woke. Normally, she wouldn't get the chance but she hadn't been able to sleep with her thoughts continuously falling to the forefront of her mind.

With her ankle injury she felt as if she'd been hobbled and could never move fast enough. Even though Spock and her weren't really talking he still would do everything for her before she even had a chance to try and it only served to frustrate her. She'd always been independent and self-sufficient and, with no real modern technology to heal her break or a proper cast or even crutches, she was reliant on his assistance.

Spock had shown her the caves that housed their water supply, the edible vegetation and small mammals, and the amazing hot springs. She had to grudgingly admit it was a beautiful sight and the feel of the hot springs when she had tested them out had been heaven against her sore body.

She'd just plated up a set of the sweet potato-like vegetables and cut up fruit when Spock came out from their 'bedroom', his eyebrows shooting up in surprise but, just as quickly, coming down in a frown directed at her. Jim rolled her eyes at his concern and held out a plate for him. She despised being a burden on anyone.
"I'm fine, Spock. I used the walking stick you got me and sat down to cook."

Spock still scrutinized her to tell if she was lying and, seemingly satisfied with her condition, accepted the plate of food. "I apologize for my behavior. I have noticed, over the course of your time here, that you tend to minimize and hide injuries as well as pain. It is rather unsettling."

Shrugging, Jim took a bite of her food before she replied. "Habit."

"A habit I hope you will break." He murmured and Jim sighed, not replying.

She missed the friendship that had been developing between them that was now strained. She moved her fork around on her plate, deep in thought at how to start the conversation. She decided to do what she did best. Just wing it.

"Spock?"

Her companion glanced up from his own food, waiting. "Yes, Jim?"

"I..." She took a deep breath, steeling herself for this conversation. "I think we need to talk."

Spock's face became blank, as if shutters had suddenly fallen and blocked out any hint of him. "About?"

"About this!" She waved around the room and then pointed between themselves. "About us!" Spock remained quiet. Jim rubbed her forehead, exasperated by his lack of response. "About everything."

"First off, I need you to back off." He opened his mouth to interrupt but Jim put a finger up to forestall him. "I'm not an invalid and I can do things on my own."

"Very well. I will attempt to reign in my instincts in regards to your need for help." He told her primly.

"Thank y-Hold on. Instincts?"

"However, I will still deny or assist you in certain areas as I see fit." He interrupted.

Jim ground her teeth but gave a jerky nod. She supposed it was a good thing to compromise...maybe. She'd see as time went on. It might make them have a better working relationship when they returned to the Enterprise.

And they would. She refused to believe otherwise.

"Instincts? I thought Vulcans no longer reacted to primitive instincts."

Spock took a bite of his breakfast and chewed slowly, as if pondering how to answer her. "All mammals have instincts to protect those they deem important to them." He eyed Jim pointedly and paused to let Jim absorb the words. "Even those that have evolved to sentience react to their natural instincts. It is logical and necessary."

Jim swallowed a bite, her throat dry. She was important? Did he really think of her that way?
Now came the more...awkward part of the conversation. "I also wanted to-" Fuck. "]-let you know that even when I'm mad at you, I still-" love? "]-like you."

Spock's eyebrows raised nearly to his hairline which had started to grow longer than usual despite their short time here and was uneven due to his attempts to cut it but it was still pushed back and he still was handsome even with the mess. "You 'like' me." He said in a flat tone, an eyebrow raised in disbelief.

Jim frowned in confusion at his tone. "You think I hate you?"

His body language shifted to something different, something almost dangerous at her refusal to admit the truth. "No. I think that you are feeling a far different emotion towards me."

She began to feel a thrill of fear and excitement, her heart leaping into her throat. He couldn't know. How could he know? She'd been so careful. "And what feeling is that, Mister Spock?" She said, her voice strained.

He slid towards her, his movements graceful and very predatory. She felt like trapped prey being hunted. The hairs on the back of her neck stood on end and she shivered in response but it wasn't an entirely scared sensation. It was more like anticipation.

"It is one that I feel myself." His voice was smooth as silk and his pupils dilated and darkened, a knowing smile graceing his lips.

She scooted back, stumbling off her seat and fell onto her back and he climbed on top her her, carefully holding his weight above her but trapping her just as effectively. Her breathing sped up and she could feel the heat of his body seeping through the layers of their clothing. He was close. Far too close. She was scared but excited. Did he truly want her or was the planet affecting him? Would he still want her when they got back?

"Spock, you don't want this. This planet is doing something to you." She said hoarsely. "You don't want...me."

"Don't I?"

Jim placed her hands against his chest to halt his movements. It was painful for her. Here he was, wanting her and she was stopping him out of chivalry. She couldn't let him do this. "Spock, I'm...I'm not what you want. I've done things. Bad things. I'm..." Her voice caught as memories flooded her, her past that she wanted to keep hidden. Tarsus and the things done to her there, her time in Iowa and the many bar fights and low-level crimes she had done to try and get attention from her mom that eventually worked, when she had been at the academy and experimented to just simply feel something, and her shore leaves when she had been on her Enterprise to make the hurt of rejection from her Spock simply fade away but it never worked.

Watery blue eyes found chocolate brown ones. "I'm broken."

He lowered his head, gently nuzzling behind her ear and Jim trembled and her arms slackened slightly. "No. Never broken. Simply fractured but always perfect."

He lifted one hand, gently stroking the side of her face, leaving trails of warm fire in it's wake. Spock's head dipped down, his nose brushing her cheek. "I know your mind. Your wants." He whispered, his breath hot in her ear and Jim shivered, her blood pooling lower as she groaned. "The cravings and emotions you feel in regards to me that are strong enough to break through my shields." His tongue traced a path up the side of her neck and Jim's breathing sped up.
"Spock?" She protested again weakly, trying to get him to see reason. She couldn't take advantage of him. "I'm not what you want. I'm--" Jim paused. "-damaged."

"As am I but you are perfect. What you see and regard as damage, I find them to be a part of you and it does not matter as I want to know all of you, not just parts." He murmured and Jim's resolve to keep him away began to crumble. Would he hate her when they got back? When he was back to normal and saw what she really was? She wanted him so bad that it hurt and her hands drifted down to his arms, letting him in even though Jim knew it would hurt when they got back but at least she would always have this moment, this memory, to hold onto forever.

"Your desires swim in your blood." His hands stroked her shoulders as he put his weight on his knees and situated himself in between her legs that fell open to accommodate him. "The feelings you will not acknowledge and that you hide so deep you may not even know the depth of them yourself."

His head moved lower as he started to mouth at her collarbone, his right hand cupping her breast and Jim felt a familiar tightening in her belly as his left hand stroked her belly.

"Are you saying you read my mind?" She asked breathlessly. Jim could see his control wavering but he seemed calmer with her letting him in, as if he was...at peace with the physical proof of her caring for him. Her own control shook and fell.

His hand wandered under her uniform dress and stopped just under the waistband of her underwear, Spock's nose nuzzling her neck. "The first time was unintentional but what I had seen could not be forgotten. Your mind called to me like a siren song, deadly and beautiful."

His hand moved lower and she felt herself become wet in anticipation as she panted, her body flushing pink down to her neck. "I know your mind, your feelings, your wants." He moved lower and she fisted her hands in his shirt, not knowing whether to push him away or pull him closer as his hand snaked lower and he started to touch her. She gasped, arching into his touch. Teeth grazed her shoulder as a finger dipped inside and Jim's legs spread wider.

"Taluhk nash-veh k'dular. I love you, my Jim."

Those words broke her and she surged up, grabbing his head and kissed him as his hand cradled the base of her skull and a thumb stroked her clit. His hips thrust downwards and she felt a hardness against her. She moaned into his mouth as his fingers penetrated her.

"I will not have you on the floor." He growled low into her collarbone.

She whimpered as he suddenly pulled away but he didn't go far. He scooped her up and carried her to the next room, placing her gently on the bed as if she was made of fine china. No. As if she was something infinitely precious to him.

He settled, once more, in between her thighs and leaned back, pulling off his shirt and revealing a toned chest. Spock surged forward, taking possession of her mouth and Jim melted into the kiss, allowing his tongue to caress hers.

Deft fingers found the hem of her uniform dress and she arched to let him pull it off. His pupils were blown wide as he touched the revealed skin and opened the front clasp to her bra, her nipples hardening as her arousal ramped up in the coolness of the room.

His hot mouth descended onto her breasts as he kissed and licked them, finding her nipples he sucked and gently bit them and Jim held his head in place and gasped as he worshipped her breasts.
His hands moved lower and gently petted her sides, settling on her hips and he moved lower, kissing every part of her body he could reach.

He sat back on his haunches and held the elastic of her underwear, silently asking for permission and Jim nodded. He carefully peeled the garments from her and touched the insides of her thighs, gazing at her reverently.

"I love you, Jim, my ashayem. I will no longer deny this. I will show you this every day that we are together to prove this to you. I want you to be mine."

Tears welled up in her eyes at his words and his image blurred slightly as he stood and removed his own pants and underwear, revealing his hardness to her. Jim quickly wiped the tears away and Spock moved to lay on top of her, his member rubbing against her and his hand dipping low to rub her folds, a finger dipping in and his thumb, once more rubbing her clit as he panted against her neck, his breath hot and moist.

Jim's breathing sped up as a second finger was added and a coil inside her started to tighten as she ground down against his hand urging him to keep going. His movements sped up and he gently started to thrust against her hip. She pulled him to her, opening her mouth against his and his tongue entered and they fought for dominance that he easily won. She began to flex and tense and try to close her legs as the feeling intensified but he wouldn't allow it and she felt her orgasm fast approaching and he continued his pleasurable assault on her. She screamed into his mouth as it overwhelmed her.

As she shook in pleasure, he pushed into her, filling her and she sighed, hooking a leg over his hip. He stilled, tension filling his frame and his face screwed up as he worked to control himself as he felt her tight walls encompassing him and fluttering after her orgasm.

"Tell me the words." He ordered, his voice tight and strained.

Jim shook her head, hiding her face in his neck and pushed her hips up, earning a gasp for the Vulcan.

"Tell me!" He growled and gave one thrust, shoving her up slightly and Jim bit her lip, fighting to keep silent but Spock persisted.

"I know your thoughts but I want you to say them. To admit them!" He held her with one arm as the other, once more, moved back down, tracing where they were joined.

"Tell me." He whispered in her ear and he pulled out an inch and pushed back in, forcing himself to remain still. She could feel it in the way he was shaking and her arms flew to his shoulders as she arched her back, pressing her breasts against him. She could no longer deny it.

"I love you, Spock." She whispered.

He thrust again, just once. "Say it again."

"Say it again!" He ordered.

Her nails scraped down his back as she held on. He started thrusting harder, holding her tight to him. "I love you! I have loved you from the moment I met you and I know I will always love you!" She shouted and that seemed to be the only permission he needed as he thrust in earnest.

Her body clamped down on him as her second orgasm rapidly approached and Spock sped up his movements.
"I need-" He groaned and shook. "I need-"

She knew instinctively what he wanted and needed and she was going to give it to him, to submit to the man that she loved. "Do it! Take it!"

His hand flew up and connected to her meld points as she exploded in pleasure, his unchained Vulcan emotions overwhelming her. Love, lust, longing, possessiveness, everything she had ever wanted flew into her mind, filling every part of her as if he had always been, and always would be, there. She heard him roar as he pulsed inside her, filling her and penetrating her mind far deeper than her body. Her world filled with vibrant colors and thoughts, exciting her and amazing her at the same time and she grabbed at them and him greedily, desperate to hold on forever.

It seemed like hours or years before she came back to herself, wrapped in unimaginable love and held close to a warm body that cradled her. Gentle kisses to the back of her neck caused her to push back against Spock and he held her close. She hoped that he would never let her go but, right now, she didn't ever want him to.
Chapter Fourteen

Jim lay facing Spock after, yet another, round of lovemaking, this time she had taken control, riding Spock slowly and nearly driving him insane. It had been the most amazing sight she had ever seen, Spock powerless in the throes of passion and the fact that it was because of her had been intoxicating. The strength he possessed had been no match for her skills.

Spock reverently traced her jaw, touching her psi points and sending her his love through his touch. She could never have imagined this. Being with him. His emotions ran far deeper than she had ever thought possible and they were all for her. Her heart ached at the thought of being forced to leave him when they would return to the Enterprise and discover a way to send her home. It would destroy her but, for now, she took everything she could, choosing to live in the moment and keep it for herself to last forever deep in her heart.

He held her hand, kissing her knuckles and positioning her hand so that her first two fingers were straight where he rubbed his own up and down them. A feeling of warmth and affection spread up her arm and directly into her mind. "This is how Vulcans kiss." Spock shifted and pressed his lips to hers. "And this is how humans kiss. I intend to explore both sides of my heritage in regards to you." He took possession of her mouth, his tongue tracing the seam of her lips and Jim opened her mouth to allow him entry and his tongue traced the contours of her mouth, exploring and twisting to rub against her own. Jim melted in his arms and Spock's arm wrapped around her, pulling her to him where she wrapped her left leg around him and pressed herself against his growing hardness.

"Oh, God. Spock!" She hid her face in his neck, her eyes screwed shut in anticipation.

He pressed inside once more, sliding deep inside her and he thrust carefully and slowly. He took his time, lazy and perfect as they made love once more. She sighed, feeling him stiffen as he came inside her, filling her with his seed as his fingers pressed against the side of her face and encouraged her to her own orgasm through her mind. She gripped his biceps and tightened her leg, drawing him deeper inside her as she pulsed around him, wanting him to stay in her as long as possible. She loved him and he loved her.

He stayed hard, shocking Jim, and Spock smirked as he turned her onto her stomach and gripped and encouraged her to lift her hips. She pushed herself onto her knees, hips up in the air and her front pushed down as he moved behind her, his hips snapping and pushing her further up onto the bed with every thrust. She moaned in appreciation and he lowered himself, one hand gripping her hips to still her forward momentum caused by the power of his thrusts while the other held her

Well, here's he next chapter in this drama. I hope it is ok and it may take a little while for the next one since I need to write it and it's super crazy here at the minute. Now, everyone please remember that this Spock is acting off because he's on a planet that is messing with him due to the fact that he is 7,000 yrs in the past. Comments and kudoses make my day and help me to become a better writer and they totally motivate me. So, thank you to everyone who does so and to anyone who even reads the story. Thanks for stopping by!
breast and pinched her nipples.

"Mmm...I love you. I love what you do to me." She moaned and tried to thrust herself back onto his cock but he refused to let her move, wanting to take control for this round and it only made it more intense. She willingly submitted to him and it was perfect. She felt the vibrations from his chest as he chuckled and started to run his nose against her neck, gently biting her and running a tongue along the shell of her ear.

"I love how you feel. How you surround me. How your body was made for me and your mind is my perfect other half. You are shi'masu, my oasis and you are my t'hy'la, my everything." He murmured the words, branding them into her very skin. His forehead pressed on her lower neck as he moved faster, his hot breath coming in pants as he moved inside her forcefully and skillfully, hitting every spot inside her that made her toes curl and Jim became frustrated at him limiting her participation. She moved a hand to touch herself and her fingers grazed his cock, causing him to pause and shudder.

Jim shook underneath him as she began to rub herself as Spock impaled her, only adding to his pleasure as she tightened and loosened around him as she hunted for her own orgasm. Her legs trembled as she squeezed his member and she felt the familiar tingle and sparks of her impending orgasm, more noticeable as he pushed in and out of her forcefully. She couldn't get there. She needed more and her tormentor seemed to know this but it was the best kind of torture.

His hand moved from her hip and joined hers to work her and he played her body with incredible skill. She screamed as she came and Spock went one, two, three more times before he roared as spent himself once more inside his t'hy'la.

He rolled them onto their sides and stayed in her as long as he could until he softened and slipped out. She turned her head and kissed him, reaching her hand down and stroking the fingers that held her and Spock groaned and tightened his hold around her body.

"I will never let you go, my t'hy'la. You are mine."

The words should have frightened her but they didn't.

xXx

Spock held Jim as she slept. He couldn't believe that he finally had her and she had him. It went both ways. She was his and he was hers. He gently rested his fingers on her face and letting her thoughts and feelings flow into him. It was perfection and his Vulcan blood sang.

He could already feel the small threads of a weak link forming but only accessible via touch and easily breakable with time and/or distance and he pulled her flush to his body, tilting her hips as if they were puzzle pieces to fit together and wrapped his legs around hers to hold her in place. He fell asleep, calm in the knowledge that he was joined to her in body and mind but wanting more.

Spock felt his mate, yes-his mate, stir in his arms and he realized, with sadness, that they had separated slightly in the night. He could sense her hunger through his touch and her need to go to the bathroom.

He did not wish to let her go but he restrained his instincts in the face of her needs. He needed to provide for her and care for her until she healed. She was so strong but she needed him right now.

Jim spun him his arms and winced at the movement, her face lined with pain that seeped into Spock's mind and he did not like that at all. Her hair was a tangled mess, strands falling into her
eyes and Spock tucked a small section behind her ear to better see her face. He smiled at the beautiful sight before him but Jim frowned. Worry was rapidly replacing her happiness and placing her pain to the back of her mind.

Spock's smile fell and Jim touched the side of his face, but not with affection so much as worry. "Spock? I think something is wrong with you. You're...you're not behaving the same. You're starting to become...different."

Spock pushed away and stood, unashamed at his nakedness and pulled on his pants, deciding to forgo his underwear for speed. He had just gotten to the entrance when he heard a scuffle and a cry of pain.

He spun around to see the blond had fallen to the floor but was trying to stand, her legs wobbling under her weight. There were love bites and small bruises littering her body but it was her unsteady legs and her ankle that caused her to stumble, likely from their activities.

Hot guilt filled the pit of his stomach and he went to her, wrapping her in the furs from the bed and locating her clothing. He helped her to dress and was reaching for a hypo to ease her distress when she stopped him, her expression full of love. "Spock, it's not a horrible thing that's happening to you but it does worry me." She looked away and he could see tears forming in her eyes. She screwed them shut and they fell in lines down her cheeks. "What if you weren't in your right mind when we-" shaking herself, she faced him, her lips turned down and a line forming between her eyebrows. "What if I was taking advantage of you and it wasn't true consent?"

Fear began to take over and Spock could not allow her to think and feel these things. He swiped a thumb across her cheek, taking away her tears and looked her in the eyes where blue met brown, and willed her to believe him.

"I have been affected but my feelings for you had already been present and were simply brought to the surface. I loved you from the moment my mind touched yours on that transporter pad." He raised himself higher on his knees and kissed the tears away on her other cheek. "Why do you think I pursued you so persistently on the ship?"

She closed her eyes in relief but more tears leaked out. Spock moved his lips higher and kissed the lids of her eyes and Jim let out a shaky breath, her body relaxing at his ministrations. "Ok. I trust you."

She started to stand, only to fall back with a wince. "Maybe you can help me up?" Jim asked him, embarrassed by her current state.

He reached towards her and she smacked his hands away. "Oh, no. You are not carrying me!"

She shifted and Spock rolled his eyes and moved quickly, administering the hypospray before she could protest. He wished to have joined her mind and removed her pain telepathically but he knew she might not be comfortable with the full extent of his abilities just yet.

The pain lines on her face smoothed and she stood on shaking legs and leaned heavily on Spock as she hobbled to go to the restroom and make her way to the fire so she could eat.

Spock felt a small sense of smugness when Jim grumbled under her breath about Spock causing her to have to walk bow-legged. "Stop smirking, Mister Spock. You know this means that you're cut off for a little while."

Spock's mouth fell in disappointment.
"We can still do other things though." Her smile was full of promise and Spock's hands trembled at the possibilities and a strong feeling of lust that flowed through his mind as he tried to focus on making breakfast. Oh, the things he could and would do to Jim...

xXx

Jim started to cut up a root vegetable and asked Spock to get a small section of the meat that they were storing in their make-shift refrigerator, ice carefully stacked in the small stone cube. He quickly procured the requested items and, by the time he had returned, Jim was squeezing a citrus fruit over the vegetables, tossing in a salt tablet, and closing the lid on the pot creating some type of stew.

She was becoming creative with their limited selection of foodstuffs and had suggested possibly trying to grow herbs and seasonings from the packaged supplies Atoz had provided to see if they would grow from the cuttings. The idea had merit and Spock trusted it since Jim was quite skilled at botany.

He handed Jim a tuber-like vegetable and she started to cut it into small cubes, putting on a separate pan and off to the side. She wiped her hands off with a wet washcloth and sat, staring at the wall. Spock could see she was deep in thought, her teeth worrying her lip and her eyes not focused.

He sat next to her and stirred the contents of the pot, waiting for her to start the conversation. He started to grow concerned when ten minutes passed and she still had not moved. He started to cook the meat over the fire in the pan and it was only when the smell of their food started to permeate the cave that Jim seemed to come to herself.

She wasn't smiling but she wasn't angry or sad. She just seemed determined. "Spock, I want to see where the doorway was."

Spock clenched his jaw as he divided their food and put it onto plates. He had hoped that she would accept the way things were and couldn't understand why she wanted to continue to put herself through this. It would be a fruitless and dangerous endeavor.

She would never be able to mourn the loss of their former way of life if she continued on the path she was carving. It would only cause her more pain. He had not been successful calculating the odds and numerical statistics, his mind had been clouded since they had arrived and it was difficult to concentrate on anything but being with her...with Jim. His baser instincts had been overriding his grasp on logic and it was an unfamiliar feeling.

Jim didn't take the plate, instead she fixed him with a determined stare. "I need to do this." She shook her head and closed her eyes, clearly fighting back tears. "I can't just give up on ever getting back to the Enterprise and I want to visit the doorway every day."

Her jaw jutted out with stubbornness and her blue eyes turned a darker cobalt as she prepared for a possible fight from Spock. "I have to do this, Spock, and I will do this with or without your help but I'd prefer it to be with your help."

Spock understood the five stages of the human grieving process. Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Right now, Jim was trapped in the first stage. Spock sighed. If allowing Jim to visit the cliff where doorway had deposited them would assist her in moving through the stages of grief then he would do so. He would do anything for her and he knew that she would be far safer if he went with her rather than her being alone and sneaking out. Her injury would put her at extreme risk in the hostile environment. He knew Jim would venture out there
whether or not he wanted her to go so he would help her.

"Very well. We will make the trip tomorrow." The smile that lit up her face and made her eyes glow made all the risks to her that Spock knew were out there faded away.

It may have been her request and idea but he still would not allow harm to come to her. "However, you will ride on the sled since your leg is broken and we will not remain at the cliff for more than an hour. The risk of hypothermia is too great and both of us are highly susceptible as this is not our natural habitat."

"Thank you." She took the plate from Spock's hands and started to eat with enthusiasm, planning their trip in detail and Spock was pleased to hear her thoughts. He was also surprised at the detail in which she had planned everything. It was...annoyingly efficient.

xXx

Jim scowled at the back of the Vulcan who was pulling the sled. He had wrapped her in so many blankets and furs she wasn't sure she would even be able to stand up, much less breathe under their weight. Thankfully, Atoz had included tinted goggles which decreased their chance of snowblindness from the reflection of the sun on the white and, in some cases, blue landscape surrounding them.

She was impressed with Spock's strength as he pulled her and their supplies. She knew that she would not have done as well on her own and was a little grateful that Spock had prevented her leaving without him but she'd never admit it even under threat of death.

They traveled for two hours before the ice cliff began to loom over them, dark and foreboding as if they weren't meant to ever return to that place. She fiddled with the cuff of her sleeve, unsure and feeling guilty at practically forcing Spock to take her here. Just what did she hope to accomplish? They had no communicators, no tricorders other than those in the medical kits, no tools, and nothing that could potentially open the doorway to their time.

She just wanted to see it for herself. She wanted to guarantee that there was no way to return home. Maybe something would happen, maybe nothing would happen but they would never know unless they tried.

They reached the wall of rock, snow, and ice and Spock began to set up a small area that sheltered them from the icy wind. She moved to help him but he forestalled her motion and began to take out the heating lamp, plastic tarp and the food that Jim had prepared in anticipation of their journey.

He helped her maneuver out of her seat and ensured that they were both ensconced in their small tent. "This is the area that we come through, Jim. There is nothing and nobody here." He touched the rock face. "The entrance is sealed and-

In the middle of Spock's dialogue, Jim heard a faint beeping that had no place here. "Shh-"

Spock opened his mouth to argue but she threw up a finger to silence him and she heard it again. "Do you hear that?" She whispered.

Spock's eyebrows drew down and he looked as if he was ready to bolt and drag her away from the place with him, far away and back to their cave. His body became tense and his hands closed into fists. She tilted her head and strained her ears to hear the noise again but it was silent. She almost cried in devastation.

She flung off the blankets and furs and pulled herself up with incredible difficulty to get to the
rock, determined to hear the sound again, to try and figure out what it meant and if it was their
salvation. Spock gripped her waist and she couldn't tell whether it was to pull her away from the
cliff or steady her but she pushed forward and started pounding on the rock frantically, her fists and
wrists bruising with the effort.

"We're here! We're here! Can anybody hear me?" She screamed and screamed, hoping and praying
that somebody would respond.

She almost collapsed in relief when she heard Chekov's voice through the rock face.
"Kommander? Iz zat you? Ken you hear us?"

Jim sobbed into her hand and had to use the wall to support herself as her legs grew weak in relief.
"Yes." She croaked and cleared her throat. "Yes!" She shouted. "I hear you!"

She turned her head to see Spock had backed away from her, his face blank of all emotion.
"Spock?"

He jerked his head in a 'no' to her but reluctantly moved forward to stand next to her, pressing his
hands against the rock wall.

She had no warning before it dissolved in front of them, her weight that had been being supported
by the wall disappeared and she fell straight into Captain Pike's arms.

The sudden change in temperature caused the sensation of needles piercing her skin and Jim
grimaced against the wave.

"Jim? Jim!"

Pike started to panic at Jim's silence, his gray eyes searching for the medical team that he had
ordered to beam down the second they had heard her voice.

Hazel eyes suddenly filled her vision and the whir of a tricorder, far too close to her, filled her with
a sense of panic. The sudden influx of sound was over stimulating for her and she batted the
offending objects away and began to seek out Spock, her worry for him consuming her. She saw
him on a hovering stretcher, unconscious and his skin tinged green as his body adjusted to the
sudden temperature change and Dr. M'Benga began barking order to the staff surrounding him. He
was still, far too still and she began to fight the hands holding her down.

"Spock! Spock!" She couldn't stop the panic that tightened her throat and made the food they had
eaten earlier threaten to come up. She needed to get to him, to make sure he was alright but
Enterprise staff restrained her and forced her onto her own stretcher.

God! No! What if she'd killed him by forcing him to return when he clearly hadn't wanted to. What
if he'd had some kind of psychic connection to the planet and it was hurting him because they'd left
so abruptly that he'd had no time to even prepare. She would never forgive herself if something
happened to him. She loved him more than the world itself!

Another sting to her neck and she went limp. Her head lolled on the stretcher and the worried faces
of Pike and McCoy hovered above her. She didn't want to see them. She had to get to Spock to
make sure he was ok.

"I fucking hate fucking hypos." Jim muttered and she still struggled to rise but Pike's relief at her
response was palpable.

"I know, Jim. I know." He laughed and stroked the top of her head. Jim saw tears in those gray eyes
and, just for a moment, she knew he loved her like a daughter just as her own Pike had.

McCoy started removing her coat, wrapping her in a warming blanket and stabbing her arm with an IV. He was in his element as a Doctor and caregiver but Jim ignored it all, her focus on Spock and angry that she couldn't be by his side.
Hi all! I'm hoping this chapter is well received and that the characters are believable. It's a mix of both universes but since not a lot is going on in the original Captain Spock universe it's just a teeny part. As always, thank you to everyone who sends me kudoses and comments!

DarkWaters

Chapter Fifteen

Captain Spock gripped the stylus so hard it snapped in half in his hand. His ability to modify the Enterprise's sensors to detect Jim's-no, Commander Kirk's biosignature had been unsuccessful yet again. It was the beginning of gamma shift on board and he was working alongside Ensign Chekov. The young ensign's face was pale with exhaustion and so was his. He was close to ordering him to rest. Spock pulled up the duty roster and changed Ensign Chekov's duty shift to beta.

They have been working on a way to return the blonde to her natural universe now for several weeks and crew moral was beginning a slow descent into concerning numbers.

As a possible second rescue option, Spock had assigned Acting-Commander Sulu to work with Lieutenant-Commander Scott to also attempt to have the Enterprise enter the alternate universe. There was a chance that the walls separating them would be weak enough to break through. Scott came up with the theory to use the deflector dish to send a modified pulse beam to open a small window to the desired location. So far, they had been met with utter failure. The few tests they had conducted via the transporter had shown extreme molecular instability of the test canisters containing live cellular samples.

The doctor had also been tirelessly working to ensure that the medical scans of the commander were as accurate and detailed as possible to assist in locating the correct Jamison Kirk. Again, they had been unsuccessful.

His ship had the best minds that Starfleet had to offer and they were rapidly running out of ideas to try but Spock knew that they would be successful. They seemed to have an uncanny ability to beat the odds despite logic telling him that it was impossible.

It had been the most difficult six weeks that Spock had ever experienced during his time as captain during the five year mission, only narrowly coming second to when Jim had sacrificed herself and it had taken six months, seven days, and fourteen hours for her to heal enough to be cleared for active duty.

It was the uncertainty that caused him disquiet. Not knowing if she was safe and uninjured. Spock had vowed to himself not allow her to come to physical harm and he felt he had failed in his responsibility. Typing in the code to shut down the terminal, he breathed a tired sigh. He had a mission to complete in the 'morning' to assist the inhabitants of Selus. The warring factions had requested the Federation act as a neutral party in an effort to end their civil war. It would be an arduous task that will require a great deal of patience and work so Spock needed to be well rested.
Jim woke to the feeling of blessed warmth.

"Ah, you're awake."

She turned to her left and saw Dr. McCoy—not her Bones—but still a caring alternate version of her friend. Kind brown eyes looked her over as he stood from his chair next to her bed. "How're you feeling, kid?"

She quickly took stock of her body and knew that Bones—NO, damn it!—McCoy had healed her. There was only a minor ache in her ankle.

Looking around, the blonde saw that she was alone and Spock was nowhere to be seen. Oh, God! Had returning killed him? "Where's Spock? Is he ok?"

McCoy's lips thinned slightly and his shoulders fell. Jim recognized that look. It wasn't good. He lay an arm on hers. "I need to see him."

The doctor nodded and helped Jim into a wheelchair where she was positioned next to Spock. He looked as if he wasn't even alive and that scared her more than anything. If it wasn't for the monitors above him displaying active vital signs she would believe that he was dead.

"He's ok for the most part. Some moderate hypothermia and a few bruises but the real problem is his brain activity levels. The spike and waves on his EEG are erratic and he seems to be in a deep healing trance but it's different from those that I've seen before. I won't lie. I am concerned enough that we may have to call in a Vulcan healer to help him."

Jim's hand automatically found his and she held it tight, uncaring at the social faux pas and the implications that followed the gesture. Had this been the true reason he hadn't wanted to leave? Had he known this would happen?

Her throat constricted painfully as she tried to swallow away the pain and fear. "Thank you, Leo, for trying to help him." She told him.

A warm hand fell on her shoulder, squeezing it for support but Jim's focus and attention was on the man lying so still and pale before her.

"Kid, you need to rest. Spock is stable for the moment and there's nothing you can do right now."

She shook her head, her eyes burning and vision blurring as she fought and lost her battle against the tears that fell down her cheeks. "I can't. I can't leave him." Jim turned to face the doctor. "I need to be here next to him." She implored and McCoy's eyes softened in understanding.

"Okay." He patted her shoulder and moved away. "But no longer than an hour otherwise I will have no choice but to ban you until you're cleared medically to leave."

"Thank you." She told him meaningfully and she lay her head down and refused to relinquish her grip on Spock's hand. Jim knew that she would have to be physically dragged from Spock because there wasn't a chance in hell she was going to leave him. She strongly felt that her place was here.

xXx Alternate universexXx
Nyota Uhura waddled into sickbay. If anyone ever commented on her waddle she'd introduce them to her booted heels but people were generally smart enough not to. As she made her way into her husband's territory she saw Jim practically lying on Spock's chest as if she was trying to fuse them together and she felt a painful spike of sympathy for the poor woman. She knew that she'd be doing exactly the same if the situation was reversed.

"Nyota? Is everything ok? Is Jo-Jo alright?"

Uhura turned her attention to her husband who was leaving his office, tricorder at the ready, with a speed that unnerved her but warmed her at the same time. She loved this man so much. "No. Nothing's wrong, Leo. I just wanted to check on Spock and Jim to see how they're doing and maybe get her away for a break to eat some dinner with me." She glanced over at her, her eyebrows drawn in concern. "The bridge just isn't the same without Spock and everyone here misses Jim. She's become a part of our family and seeing her hurting and afraid is affecting the crew. We want to show her some support."

McCoy followed her gaze towards the couple. "Mmm...good luck with that. I had to sedate her yesterday to get her to sleep on an actual bed and Pike only managed to pull her away for thirty minutes to eat." He sighed. "Even then she only managed a few bites before throwing up due to stress. She hasn't left his side, except when forced, for two days. If she keeps going the way she is then I'm gonna have to place an IV and admit her."

He shook his head and continued. Nyota could hear the worry in the tense tone of his words. "It wouldn't make a difference though. She'd still be here. She's here so long that she's practically living here."

She turned towards her husband. "Has she slept with help?"

The corners of McCoy's lips turned down in disapproval. "No. Either I have to use a sedative or she passes out due to exhaustion. I'm getting close to confining her to quarters."

"Is Spock showing any signs of waking?"

"No. Not really." He ran a hand through his hair in frustration. "Maybe. M'Benga seems hopeful but I just don't know."

Uhura reached out and squeezed McCoy's hand in support and gratitude for his diligence and care. "Can you help me get her to come with me. Just for a bit?"

"I can try. The last time she left him though she came back in a panic, afraid that something had happened in her absence." He returned her grip. "She's terrified that this is her fault even though the captain and I have explained that it isn't."

Nyota nodded in understanding. She'd pretty much gotten that impression in the blond's behaviors.

Walking to the bay that housed the couple, she saw just how exhausted the woman was. She was far too pale, the dark circles under her eyes stood out looking like bruises. The tenseness in her frame, even though she was dozing, looked so painful. Just what had happened on that planet to cause this level of guilt and problems?

Leo prepared a hypo and she looked at it questioningly.

"Anxiolytic. It might help her to be calm and receptive enough to eat and, hopefully, sleep somewhere that isn't here." He administered the medication gently enough to where Jim didn't even respond to the shot.
Discarding the cartridge, he made an encouraging motion towards Nyota. "Maybe after, or if, you get her to eat something then you could take her to Spock's quarters. I'm hopeful the location might soothe her enough to get six or eight hours of sleep."

"I'll try."

"That's all I can ask, Ny."

She waited for him to leave before beginning the arduous task of getting Jim's attention. She hoped that she might have more success because she wasn't a medical staff member or a person in a position of authority ordering her to leave.

Nyota shook her shoulder and cringed at the bunched muscles under her fingers. That had to be agonizing but, according to Leo, she never once complained about it and put her worry for Spock before her own health. If Jim didn't start taking care of herself she was going to make herself sick and land herself in a biobed next to Spock. Uhura almost wondered if that was her goal so she would not be able to leave his side.

"Jim? Jim?"

She bent lower to try and get her to rouse and suddenly she jerked up, her eyes roving over Spock and then at the monitors above his head, her blue eyes were wild with fear but seemed dulled, likely due to the medication her husband had given to her. She could see why he had. There would have been no possibility of her leaving Spock without the help. At least now there was a chance she'd come willingly and maybe calmly.

"Jim, will you come with me to eat something?"

Jim's mouth turned down and she started to brush Spock's hair off of his forehead in a tender gesture. "No. I haaave t'stay. "She slurred.

Uhura sighed. "Spock is going to be fine." She reassured her and a sudden thought came to her. Maybe if she implied that the dinner wasn't about Jim but it was about helping her. The poor woman always seemed to put others first.

"I need you to help me. Being in the mess hall-" She paused, trying to think of a valid excuse. "Being in the mess hall with me being this big people tend to stare and it makes me uncomfortable and feel isolated. I would really appreciate someone to be there so I don't feel so alone." She tried.

Nyota could see the inner battle waging in the other woman's mind and she was relieved when Jim stood and pressed a kiss to the unconscious Vulcan's forehead, murmuring reassurances that she'd return.

"Okay but jus for little bit."

Uhura immediately linked arms with Jim to encourage movement away from the medical bay but to also provide physical support.

"Thank you."

Jim moved with an unsteady gait and Uhura knew it wasn't just due to Leonard's meds. It was the likely spasming muscles and exhaustion taking it's toll on her. She needed to get her fed and into a real bed as fast as possible.

They made it to the mess hall and Nyota forced Jim into a chair. She didn't trust the poor woman to
not drop her tray. She moved as quickly as she could in her condition and returned with tomato
soup and grilled cheese with a large water for Jim and chicken stir fry for herself.

Jim just stared at the tray and her heart broke at the guilt plaguing the blond. "Eat, please." She
smiled and hoped it was encouraging. "If you don't hurry and eat then I might just steal it." She
smirked. "After all, I'm eating for two."

Jim laughed at the gentle teasing and she was pleased to see a bit of light in her eyes as she started
to eat.

They passed the time in comfortable silence but Nyota was disappointed about the amount Jim ate.
She'd only managed half of her food but it was better than nothing.

It wasn't long before Jim's eyes started closing and she knew that she had to move fast before the
poor woman fell asleep in her chair or face first in her food so she cleared the trays and guided her
to the deck where officer quarters were listed.

"Where we going? Sickbay's on deck five?"

Jim leaned heavily on Uhura as they made their way to Spock's quarters. "Leonard and I want you
to sleep in a proper bed and we figure that this will help you to relax."

Jim frowned in confusion at the door as Uhura typed in the access code. She was very glad that Jim
was wearing scrubs so all she had to do was take off her shoes to get Jim resting.

Once inside, a blast of warm air hit them carrying the faint scent of Vulcan spices from Spock's
incense. Jim's body practically melted in comfort and Nyota smiled.

"I like it here. Spock lives here." Jim told her and Nyota's smile grew.

"I figured as much."

Jim halted in her steps. "But I need to go back t'sickbay."

She tugged Jim harder to get her to the bedroom. "I know but you can go in the morning."

"But what if Sp-"

"Spock would be pissed if he knew you were running yourself into the ground with worry. Just rest
this one night and I won't bug you again." She interrupted.

"It's jus that it's m'fault he's sick. He wanted t'stay."

"It's not your fault. Both of you needed to come back and Spock will heal. He's strong and he will
come back to you."

Jim nodded in agreement and she breathed a sigh of relief, pulling her new friend to the bed and
getting her covered and comfortable. "I love him so much."

Uhura's heart clenched in her chest at Jim's naked honesty. "I know, sweetie, and he loves you.
That's why he's going to be fine. He will come back to you."

In moments, Jim was sound asleep. Nyota paused at the sight. The stress lines that had marred her
face faded and she looked so vulnerable in sleep that Nyota just couldn't leave her to wake up
alone. She quickly commed Leo and let him know she was going to stay with Jim and snuggled
under the blankets next to her.
Jim slept for twelve hours straight. Six hours later, Spock opened his eyes and saw his t'hy'la next to him as she cried in relief.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Hi all! I figured an early update was in order to apologize for the length of time that it took for the last chapter.

As always, I love hearing from readers and all kudos are appreciated!!! It Spurs me on to do better and get things moving! The next chapter may be a little while but the wait will definitely be worth it!

Darkwaters

Chapter Sixteen

Since their return to the Enterprise, Spock had noticed Jim had become more subdued which had surprised him. She still engaged in activities with the crew and spent a large portion of her off-duty shifts with him but she seemed quiet a lot of the time.

He attributed some of her behavior to guilt despite the fact that what happened upon their return was in no way her fault. When they had returned, Spock's mind had been forced to reassert itself to its previous state which had resulted in him entering a deep healing trance for three days due to the sudden severed telepathic link to his ancestors. So deep and unlike a normal healing trance where he would be aware of his surroundings. He had been plunged deep into his mind.

He'd woken to a red-eyed, terrified, and over-emotional Jim sitting next to his biobed. He'd discovered, from his inquiries to the medical staff that she had not left his side except when chased out by Dr. McCoy or when Captain Pike would drag her out to eat and she then would sneak back in as soon as her path to him was clear.

The time they spent together, despite his t'hy'la's subdued demeanor, was still the most fulfilling of his life. Her mind, when joined to his, was like the dawn, warming him from the feeling of his mind being the cold of night and exploding in bright and vivid color in his mind like the sky at the break of dawn. Every joining was like a new beginning. Her mind and body seemed to be made for him to worship. Her eyes were like pools of the bluest water that he wished to dive into despite his desert-bred physiology. He constantly marveled at her strength and intelligence. Everything about her was perfection.

Jim lay next to him, her body glistening with their exertions and a hand on his side where his heart beat under her hand. It seemed to soothe her and he indulged her. Jim's surface feelings flowed into him. Happiness, love, but it was tainted with guilt. This was puzzling to him. She had no reason to feel this negative emotion.

"Jim?"

"Hmm?" She mumbled and moved closer.

Frowning, Spock covered her hand and gently stroked his fingers over her's in Vulcan kisses. "What bothers you? Speak your mind."
She pulled away and Spock immediately felt cold at the loss of her feelings and touch. Jim ran her fingers through her hair and Spock wished for a permanent bond between them to have a better gauge of her emotional state.

"I...I'm scared that I took advantage of you when we were on the planet. You were vulnerable and compromised." She cringed, her body curling in shame. "I love you so much but what if this isn't real? What if you're still suffering from the effects of Sarpeidon?"

Spock could never let her think this. He turned her and pulled her into his arms and she relaxed in his grip as he spooned her and gently touched her, using his touch telepathy to allow her to feel the love he felt for her. "It is real. I can promise you that." He curled himself around her and held her tight, the physical contact providing the comfort they both needed. "When we were in Sarpeidon's past I was affected. That part is true but only in the manner that my emotions were closer to the surface. It may have not been the way that either of us expected to come together but it did assist in us acting on our feelings. I will never regret what happened and I will treasure those memories for as long as I shall live."

Jim's eyes closed in relief and she settled in his grip. "Thank you."

He nuzzled against the soft skin behind her ear, inhaling and committing the scent of the apples and cinnamon from her soap to his memory. "There is nothing to thank me for. Taluhk nash-veh k'dular, ashayem."

"What does that mean?" She asked drowsily.

"I cherish thee, beloved."

Jim's face turned into the crook of his elbow and he could feel the smile pressed into his skin. "I love you, too."

xXx

It was late in gamma-shift and Jim was asleep in his quarters. He had woken as he watched his mate sleep peacefully in his arms, heartbreak causing a sick and wretched feeling as he thought of the progress his science team had made in their recent work to return Jim to her former home. A sudden burst of insight had him leaving the warmth of their bed for the computer lab.

xXx

He was inputting his latest calculations to the program to send her home when the computer screen showed a positive result. His latest addition had finally shown that Jim could return to the alternate universe she had come from. Due to her different biosignatures which matched her to her former home it would be near impossible to get her back if she changed her mind. He'd never find her again unless he was lucky.

His very being fought him at the knowledge that she could now leave him with this new information. The temptation to defy his captain's orders began to overwhelm his sense of duty. He never wanted her to leave. His fingers hovered over the touchscreen and, Spock made the decision that he would fail in this task. He would not lose her. He could not lose her.

Spock carefully encrypted a subroutine into the program to remove his latest work and prevent a repeat of a positive result if anyone else ever came up with the same solution Spock had. He buried his work under lines of code, typing in failsafes to redirect anyone who attempted to continue the work further and he felt a sense of relief when he finished. Lieutenant-Commander Scott was an
engineer and did not possess an A-7 computer rating. His tampering would never be detected.

Spock shut down the program and rebooted the system to ensure the subroutine would take effect. Pleased at the results of his work, Spock stood and started to leave the computer lab but his presence did not go undetected. He was halfway to the door when Mr. Scott entered unexpected.

"Commander Spock? I'm a wee bit surprised to see you here so late." The Scotsman tilted his head, suspicion and confusion evident in his features but Spock blanked his face and refused to show his guilt at what he had done.

"My meditation provided me with a possible solution to our current problem in the calculations we have been using but it was unsuccessful in the desired task." He omitted the fact that the 'desired' task was his t'hy'la returning home. A Vulcan never lied.

Scott smiled sadly. "Aye. I don't want the lass to leave but I know that she has to."

Spock jerked his head and refused to agree with his statement. "I shall see you at the start of Alpha shift."

Spock left, guilt burning hot in the pit of his stomach but he pushed the emotion away with difficulty. He could not lose her.

xXx

Spock arrived early on the bridge and relieved the officer on deck. He arrived at the solution that he needed to convince his captain of the 'futility' of the task of returning Jim home. This was her home now. She was his home.

He calculated a 74.3% chance at the captain accepting his explanation of it being a strain on resources to continue their work. Spock waited, his anxiety having to be forced aside with his Vulcan training.

Alpha shift officers slowly arrived on duty and Spock greeted each one. Nyota struggled to fit in her seat due to the fact that she was now only a month away from delivery but she managed with a grace that few could match. The recently promoted Chekov slid into his customary place next to Sulu and they chatted amiably at their stations. The second Captain Pike's presence was announced he removed himself from the command chair and stepped up to meet him.

The captain appeared surprised at Spock's unusual request for a private audience but acquiesced and led him to the ready room. Spock stood stiffly at attention as Pike sat behind the desk with his customary coffee, his gray eyes searching him for an answer but he trusted his first and Spock knew this.

"Commander, at ease."

Spock shifted his stance and placed his hands behind his back to hide their shaking.

"It's too damn early for formalities, commander. What's so important that it couldn't wait for me to have my first cup of coffee?"

Spock straightened at the gentle rebuke. "Captain, I do not believe that it is currently possible for Commander Kirk to return home. The time and resources used are decreasing crew efficiency and causing resources to become limited due to the science and engineering staff being used to complete this task. I believe that enough time has been allowed in our efforts and it would be more logical to relocate the crew members to their original positions to complete our mission of
exploration and relief efforts." Spock knew he was abusing his captain's trust but, right now, he did not care.

Pike sighed and ran a hand over his face, as if he could rub away his own guilt at failing to accomplish the goal. "I guess you're right." He faced Spock a with a regretful smile. "She's a damn good officer and, despite the circumstances not being ideal, Starfleet will be happy to have her and so will I."

Spock agreed with the sentiment. "Would you prefer me to inform her of your decision?" He hedged.

Pike leaned back and his shoulders straightened, every bit the commanding officer Spock had come to respect. "No. I think it'll come better from me. Thank you." He stood. "I appreciate your counsel and don't know what I'd do without it."

A twinge of something unpleasant hit him but he nodded respectfully and heeded the unspoken dismissal. He just hoped that Jim would accept her situation.

xXx

Jim woke to the soft beeping of the alarm and stretch lazily, muscles she was not used to using ached but in the most pleasant of ways. Spock was a creative and enthusiastic lover, constantly challenging and delighting her in every way. She rolled over to his side of the bed and hugged his pillow close to her, inhaling the scent of his shampoo and she relaxed for a moment and simply enjoyed the knowledge that, for now, he was hers.

The alarm beeped more insistently and Jim groaned and proceeded to get up and ready herself for her shift. Today she was working a double. She had been tasked with the duty of running an emergency evacuation drill, sharing her research with the science and botany department about her creation of quadrotriticale since no-one had created it due to her not existing here, and then returning to her and Scotty's work on returning her home.

Her heart wasn't in it, though. She didn't want to leave but, at the same time, she did. It was confusing to her and she didn't like being unsure. She'd always been confident in everything she did but this task tested her limits.

Ever since she and Spock had returned it had felt like her time here was limited; as if time was a finite thing and not the endless line that she'd always been taught. It felt like there was a clock counting down her final seconds one by one as it wound down.

When she had forced Spock to return with her, she'd felt incredible guilt and sickness. He'd been so happy and the sight of him lying on that biobed with monitors stuck to him, not knowing if he was going to wake all because she'd made him return had almost killed her. It made her think of what would happen when she left. He was still happy, just not as visually evident due to most of his controls returning. Would he move on easily and consider her simply a good memory? Or would he break as surely as she would when the time came? She hated having to make the choice between family, her reality, her ship and Spock.

She'd just started working with security when she received a summons from Captain Pike. Curious, Jim made her way to the bridge. Uhura nodded her head towards the ready room and Jim frowned at the unusual quiet that seemed to permeate the air. She looked to her left and noticed that Spock wouldn't meet her eyes. It was unnerving.

She passed the chair and couldn't help the feeling that she should be there. Jim shook it off,
dismissing it as an inappropriate fantasy and pressed the chime to Pike's ready room. She pulled her gold uniform down to straighten any wrinkles and entered the moment she was granted access.

Chris was sat behind his desk, a grim expression darkening his features and she knew she wasn't going to hear something she'd like. She snapped to attention and he quickly waved her down.

"Take a seat, Jim."

Now she knew something was wrong.

She slowly lowered herself into one of the chairs on the other side of the desk as if by stalling she could put off this conversation.

Pike sighed, looking far older than his years.

"It's been decided that we need to put the project of returning you home on a back burner for now. There hasn't been any progress for a while and the Enterprise needs her crew focusing on the original mission at hand."

It was as if she'd been punched in the chest. She was conflicted and didn't know how to react. The thought of never seeing Bones, her family, her friends was devastating to her. She'd never even get to say goodbye if she chose to remain or vise-versa.

On the other side of her feelings, the knowledge that she wouldn't have to leave Spock, whom she loved, Pike, and the crew of this ship that she'd come to respect and care for, made her feel extreme happiness.

The choice was being taken away from her.

"Why? We're so close. Just a little more time and we'd have the solution." She tried and Pike shook his head, regret practically emanating from the man.

"I'm so sorry." He told her.

Jim slumped in the chair and put her head in her hands, struggling to fight the tears that had started to burn her eyes. She ached to see her family, to see Bones, to be able to talk to them and tell them of her time here.

A warm hand rubbed her back and Jim surged up and clung to Pike, not caring that it was unprofessional. Pike accepted her and wrapped his arms around her as she cried into his shoulder, her grief spilling over.

"I'm so sorry."

He gripped her biceps and leaned back to look her in the eyes but Jim didn't want to meet them. She was angry, sad, happy. So many emotions and she just didn't know which to feel. "Look. I know that this isn't an ideal situation and it's unusual but it could be a great opportunity for you. We need officers of your caliber. You can accomplish so much here."

He shook her to get her to lift her head and she complied. Her face was blotchy and her eyes shining but Pike met them and showed nothing but understanding. "Already you're creating a legacy here. Your knowledge and gift of the quadrotriticale grain is going to potentially end famine. You have helped this crew become better with your unique command style and Spock is more settled than I have ever seen him."
He grinned bright. "You've also gotten McCoy off my back."

Jim laughed and shook her head. "It's only because he's now torturing me and Uhura."

Pike laughed. "True but it works to my benefit. I never said it was a good thing for you. I was simply stating fact."

Jim rolled her eyes and a small smile appeared but it was half-hearted at best.

He became serious and released her except for a strong grip on her shoulder. "It's going to be alright."

"Yeah. I know."

Pike's brow furrowed in concern but it was gone quickly as he straightened into his captain persona. "Take the rest of the day off. Take some time to process everything and let me know if you need more time."

Jim straightened and saluted him. "Yes, sir."

She left with her head down and her mind and heart too full to think.

xXx

Jim spent the next three shifts avoiding everyone and everything, hiding in the observation decks when Lt. Cmdr. Scott warned her that McCoy was on the hunt for her (this McCoy didn't like the reminder of being in space any more than hers did) and secluding herself in the Jeffries tubes when Spock searched for her, allowing the sound of the Enterprise to calm her thoughts and give her the privacy she needed to grieve. Her heart swelled in gratitude at Scotty's understanding.

It seemed like the entire senior staff knew of Jim's situation and wanted to talk to her or offer words of comfort but no mere words could ever take away the pain of the loss that she felt. She might be gaining so many amazing things here but she was losing just as much by being forced to remain. She didn't even have anything to remember them by other than memories.

Jim thought back to something her mother had told her after Tarsus when she'd held her as she'd cried for hours one afternoon. Jim had found a picture of the cousins she'd been staying with that she'd lost to Kodos' insanity in the attic when she'd been snooping around in a fit of curiosity. It had been like she'd been stabbed in the heart and her mother had heard her cries of anguish clear down the stairs.

Winona had held her youngest child, her only daughter, and rocked her while she'd stroked her hair like she'd done when Jim had been a small child. She hadn't hushed her. She hadn't tried to silence her. She hadn't told her everything was going to be ok because the older woman had known it never would be in regards to the loss of Tabitha, Marcus, Michael, and the many others that had perished on Tarsus IV.

She'd told Jim that it was ok to hurt, that it made her human and that the people that they loved and who loved them in return never truly left them when they died. She whispered to Jim that they would always be in her heart and mind and live forever as long as they are remembered. It had been the one thing that had helped Jim far more than the mandatory therapy that had been forced upon her by the fleet medical staff that had been part of the rescue party on the USS Saratoga.

Even though Jim's mind understood that Bones, her family, her crew, and even Ambassador Spock weren't dead; her heart had it confused because she knew she would never see them again. She'd
lost them forever.

Seeing crew members that resembled her own people in appearance did nothing to alleviate that pain and it seemed to make things worse. They weren't her people. They were unique and completely different; their own separate individuals but it still burned.

Jim's eyes watched the stars outside the observation window without really seeing them and ignored her rumbling stomach in the face of her pain. Her face had dried tear tracks on her cheeks and her uniform was rumpled but she couldn't bring herself to really care. She felt as if she'd used up a lifetime's worth of tears.

Scrubbing the grit out of her eyes, Jim sighed and leaned back, shivering in the cold air of the observation deck. She debated going back to her quarters but decided against it to continue her self-imposed exile. She had nothing but time to think and she wasn't sure whether it was what she needed.

Jim sat up suddenly, a thought hitting her at warp ten. "Computer, how far away are we from the planet Vulcan?"

"Distance from USS Enterprise to Vulcan is 700.531 light years." The computer's feminine voice answered.

She pulled herself up on stiff legs to access the wall terminal to view the ship's current course. She saw a wide arc that seemed to cut relatively close to the red planet. "Computer, is the Enterprise scheduled to dock at Vulcan any time soon?"

"Negative."

"Is the Enterprise going to pass within shuttle distance to the planet?"

"Affirmative."

Jim's heart sped up as she asked her next question. "When?" She croaked.

"At current speed and barring any unforeseen incidents, the USS Enterprise is scheduled to pass within shuttle distance in two point three standard days."

She wasn't sure if she wanted to ask the next question but she had to. "Computer..." She swallowed, her throat suddenly dry. "Is there any record of an Ambassador Spock?"

"Negative."

She cursed and slid down the wall, her stomach sinking.

Jim stopped suddenly and wondered if the older Vulcan had taken on the same name as his counterpart. "Computer? Is there any record of an Ambassador Selek?"

Worrying her lip with her teeth, she held onto a small amount of hope.

"Affirmative."

Her breath left her in a rush. "Computer, can you pull up a file on the ambassador and route it to observation deck three's access terminal so I can view it?"

"Affirmative."
It seemed to take the computer an age to pull up the requested data but Jim knew it was only seconds but her mind tricked her because of her anticipation. She almost started crying once the picture came up. It was the older Spock. Not hers that was trapped in her own universe but a Spock all the same. She needed to see him. If anyone understood what she was going through and help her to move past her depression it would be him.

Scrolling through the small amount of data that wasn't classified above her clearance level, she breathed a sigh of relief when she saw his listed residence of Vulcan in the city of Shi'Kar. Jim quickly wiped the evidence of her computer inquiries and shut down the terminal. She knew that if Pike and Spock found out what she had been researching they would never approve her request. She needed this. She needed his help to understand, to be able to learn to accept what has happened and help her to achieve peace.
Spock had been surprised at the unusual request of shore leave on Vulcan that Jim had made and more surprised at Captain Pike's approval of said request. The reasons listed were confidential and limited to the minimal phrase of 'beneficial to the health of an officer'. The captain had not seen fit to inform Spock of the full reasons behind Jim's shore leave and neither had Jim when he had confronted her.

He had been growing concerned since she had started secluding herself from everyone and everything upon being informed of the cessation of the attempts to return her to her former home. Her efforts at avoiding him, bar their one argument when she wouldn't disclose why she was leaving the ship, had been irritatingly successful and had been aided by Lt. Cmdr. Scott who was quite skilled in his knowledge of the Enterprise.

When Spock had nearly ordered the man to tell him where she was he had responded by telling him to: 'Leave the lass alone. She will come out when she's ready. Sometimes, ya need a ship's company to help rather than a person's. Something that is unchanging and will nah judge yeh and to allow you to just be rather than having to consider what others may make of your feelings and words.'

Spock did not understand the illogical reasoning behind his answer but chose to accept it for the time being.

Spock decided to send his own request for shore leave on his home planet to accompany her. His research into human behavior had shown him that support from other individuals was a necessary factor in the healing process for humans. There was also a large amount of guilt he felt.

He calculated a high probability that it would be approved due to the fact that he had thirty point seven standard days of time off accrued as he had never requested shore leave before. He also wished to offer Jim shelter during her respite. His parents lived just outside of Shi'Kar and their home offered a serenity that Spock had frequently appreciated in his youth.

He received approval for a two week stay thirty minutes after his submission with an additional message from Captain Pike to 'keep an eye on Jim'. He fully intended to. Now, he just needed to make the final arrangements.

xXx

Jim packed the small amount of clothing and belongings she had collected during her time here. It was a pitiful amount but she had never needed much. In the past twenty-four hours she had been visited by Uhura who had told her under no circumstances was she to disappear and if she tried then she'd hunt her down. Jim believed it. That woman was scary and fierce.

Sulu and Ben had been by to demand her return as well when her leave was up because they wanted her to help them finish their research and development of the quadrotriticale grain but she knew better and understood that they cared about her and didn't want her to leave.

Chekov explained that she still needed to complete their argument on the achievements of Russia versus America in inventions and discoveries. Scotty had wanted her insight into perfecting his still while Hendorff insisted she owed him thirty credits from their last poker game. Cheating bastard.
She knew that each excuse was an unsaid request for her to stay a part of their family and Jim was touched. She really was but she needed this time away for just a little while.

She'd just zipped up her small toiletry bag when her chime went off again and Jim sighed. She almost wondered if the crew was purposely delaying her to try and keep her on board so she'd miss her departure time.

"Come." She shouted over her shoulder while she continued to shove items into her duffel bag.

"You know, Jo-Jo was mighty upset about you sneaking off the ship without saying good-bye."

Jim's grip on the straps tightened slightly at the voice that was so much like her best friend's that it hurt like a physical thing. She gathered herself enough to face McCoy.

He was leaning with his arms crossed and scowl firmly in place against the dividing wall between the sleeping alcove and the living room area.

"Dr. McCoy, I just need this, ok?" She pleaded.

McCoy winced and looked hurt. "It's Leo. I've told you this, kid. Why is it that you yo-yo with me? You start to accept a friendship then you shift away faster than green grass through a goose."

McCoys and metaphors. A multi-universal constant.

"It's just-" Jim sat on the bed hard and ran her hand through her hair, squinting her eyes at McCoy and forcing herself to see through the vision of her best friend's that it hurt like a physical thing. She gathered herself enough to face McCoy.

He was leaning with his arms crossed and scowl firmly in place against the dividing wall between the sleeping alcove and the living room area.

"Dr. McCoy, I just need this, ok?" She pleaded.

McCoy winced and looked hurt. "It's Leo. I've told you this, kid. Why is it that you yo-yo with me? You start to accept a friendship then you shift away faster than green grass through a goose."

McCoy's shoulders lowered and hazel eyes showed understanding at her explanation. "Yeah, kid. It does." He walked over and gave her a shove to be able to sit next to her. "Why don't you tell me about him, kid."

Jim smiled and relaxed as a weight that she hadn't realized was on her chest lifted. "Well, we met on a shuttle to the academy and his first words to me were 'I might throw up on you'."

McCoy snorted in disbelief. "Sounds like a friendship made in heaven."

Jim's grin widened as she remembered her curmogeonly, prickly, marshmallow Bones. "It was."
Jim scrambled to reach the shuttlebay. She felt lighter after her long talk with McCoy-no. Leo. He had forced a bottle of bourbon on her as well as about a million hypos that he believed she'd need during her stay on the 'hotter than blue blazes planet'. Jo-Jo had also loaned Jim her favorite stuffed rabbit since Jim was sad to keep her company but she had to promise to bring it back so she now had two duffel bags rather than the one she had originally planned on bringing.

Jim had tried reaching Spock before she left but he'd been unavailable. It had stung and she wasn't sure what that meant for them. Maybe they just needed some time apart? He hadn't even said goodbye. Maybe he was mad about their fight when she wouldn't tell him the full reason for her visit to Vulcan?

She'd just reached the Galileo and stowed her bags when she turned and saw Spock walking up the ramp with his own duffel. "Spock? What are you doing here?"

He quickly shoved his own belongings next to hers and took a seat at the pilot's chair. "I have been granted shore leave and intend to take it on my home planet. It has been thirteen months and five days since I have seen my parents." He turned to face her and Jim almost melted at the love shining through his chocolate colored eyes. "I also wish to accompany my t'hy'la and provide her with support."

Jim's throat felt tight with emotion at his explanation and, even though she had wanted solitude and an audience in private with the elder Spock to learn how to handle her grief, she still appreciated Spock's gesture. Maybe she needed his help, too.

She joined his side in the co-pilot's chair and started the pre-flight checklist. "You never told me what that means. You called me that on Sarpeidon."

Spock smiled and held out his fingers for a kiss and Jim met them, enjoying the feeling of love that slowly wound its way into her mind and heart. Spock held her for longer than usual. "It is a term of endearment that can barely encompass everything that you are to me but it is the closest approximation I can express. There are no terran words that can fully translate it's meaning but I will attempt to explain soon. You are my everything, Jim, and I would do anything for you."

Jim's cheeks hurt with the smile she had on her face and her heart swelled almost too big for her to breathe. She loved Spock so much. How could she ever compare this to anything she'd ever had in her past life.

"Spock, you romantic bastard." She scrubbed her eyes with the heel of her free hand and gave Spock's fingers a squeeze, hoping he could sense just how much she loved him. Judging by the softening of his eyes, he could.

"Your proclivity for using vulgar words is impressive." He joked and then his pupils dilated and a strong feeling of lust shot through their contact that made her gasp in shock. "I look forward to eliciting such language in a more private setting and for quite a different reason." He smirked.

She leaned down and whispered in his ear. "Spock, you filthy bastard."

An eyebrow raised, his face showing amusement. "I can assure you that my parents were married at the time of my conception and birth."

She couldn't help the laugh that escaped and shook her head at Spock's sass. He gently released her and the shuttle lifted and left through the open bay doors and started it's journey towards their
destination. Jim had just done a loop de loop to say goodbye to the Enterprise which responded by flashing their running lights to wish them well on their journey which her vulcan found 'fascinating' and he promptly locked her controls to prevent any more 'unnecessary maneuvers'. Jim had found it impressive that he'd been able to keep a level voice when his face had practically turned green.

They had just received permission to land in Shi'Kar's transport hub when Spock dropped a bomb on her that caused her to nearly hit a wrong button when her hands jerked.

"My parents are greatly anticipating your arrival. I believe the expression is 'they can't wait to meet you'," he continued to type in the landing maneuvers as if he'd just asked for milk for his tea. Jim stuttered, her mind going blank.

Jim had had a relatively good relationship with the Sarek of her universe but, as she had come to learn here, the people here were in no way the same people that she knew previously. They had similar mannerisms, almost identical looks, and had some of the same life experiences but they were different. This Sarek still had his wife, had not experienced the loss of his home world, and had a far closer relationship with his son so there was no doubt as to his being different from her own Sarek.

The blond had also never had the experience of meeting her partner's parents. She'd come close when she and Gaila had been in a relationship for two years during her years at the Academy but the circumstances weren't the same. Gaila's mother had escaped from the Orion Syndicate with her daughter after Gaila had been slated for sale when she'd hit her early teenage years. Jim had had a sort of hero worship of both women. Gaila and her had been together for far longer than any relationship she'd ever had and she'd been prepared for meeting her parents (as much as one could be) by virtue of hearing so many stories about the woman but their chance of a meeting under those circumstances had been destroyed when Gaila had been killed in the Battle of Vulcan.

They'd been so close and Gaila had understood Jim's discomfort with the words "I love you". An Orion's concept of love was far different than that of a human's and Gaila had been trying to accommodate Jim's human heritage when she had tried out saying the words. Jim had seen the wreckage of love lost every day of growing up with her mother and had always feared allowing someone to get close. She'd never wanted to be as heartbroken as her mom. Her mom still grieved even more than two decades later.

She had known she loved Gaila despite never saying the words and it had taken a long time to come to terms with her loss. Gaila's mom, Nailli, had ambushed Jim after the memorial service and had shocked her by hugging her like a daughter. They'd spent hours talking about the vibrant redhead and it had helped them both to start the healing process despite there still being a Gaila shaped hole in both of their hearts.

Jim was afraid. She also knew that Amanda was the most important woman in Spock's life. What if Amanda hated her? What if both Amanda and Sarek hated her? Spock still didn't know of her past and she didn't have the courage to tell him. She needed more time and she needed some time to handle the loss of her old life.

Jim was also hoping to connect with the older, alternate version of Spock and she wasn't sure how hers would react so Jim didn't really want him to know. "Uh-" She hesitated and Spock looked confused. "I'm not sure about the whole 'meeting the parents thing'."

Spock frowned and turned towards her, facing her directly. "I was informed that 'meeting the parents' was an important factor in the development of a relationship."
Jim's lips thinned and she forced down her panic, turning her focus to the landing of the shuttle. She considered her reply as she finished landing procedures and got permission from Vulcan to disembark. Sighing, she returned her attention to her boyfriend? Lover? Significant other? She wasn't sure what to call him but she knew she loved him more than anything and she desperately wanted to make him happy but was she good enough?

"I'm not...I'm not sure if I'm 'meeting the parents' material."

"I consider you to be." He countered and a flush of pleasure filled her at his statement.

She bit her lip, thinking. "Can you give me a week? Just a week to get things straight and then I'll come."

He looked disappointed and she hated that she put him in that position.

"Very well. Where will you be staying?"

She told Spock the location of the room she had booked and he seemed appeased. He took her hand and kissed the back of her hand, pressing his lips on her knuckles.

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Jim shifted from foot to foot, nervously bouncing on her toes in front of the large double doors of the listed residence of a Selek. She was clothed in the traditional Vulcan garb for women complete with a hooded robe and a head wrap hiding her blond hair. The only difference was that hers had been modified to assist in regulating her body temperature, designed for humans rather than the desert-bred species usually clothed in this attire.

She started to garner stares from the people walking by her and Jim decided it was now or never. Jim walked up to the door and steeled herself, knocking with an ancient knocker that was made from some type of metal that resembled brass.

An older Vulcan woman answered the door, her hair tied up in an intricate knot on top of her head with silver accenting the edges. Jim wondered just how old she was. 100?, 150? Judging from the shrewd look she received from her Jim believed the older age was probably likely.

"State your business." She snapped.

So much for pleasantries.

"I'm here to see Ambassador Selek. I request an audience with him."

"Do you have an appointment?" She looked Jim up and down, disapproval practically radiating off of her.

Jim had faced Klingons, Romulans, Tholians, and many others but this woman was a force to be reckoned with. "No, I do not. However, I am confident that the Ambassador will see me."

Jim drew herself to her full height and refused to be intimidated. "Just tell him that I need to see him. I've literally traveled across universes."

The woman glared. "The ambassador is a busy man and will not see visitors without an appointment."

She started to shut the door and Jim stuck her foot in to block it. "I refuse to leave without seeing
him and I will wait here for however long it takes until he grants me an audience."

She sneered at her and, for a species that rejected expressing emotion, she sure showed her true speciest colors.

She could feel the heat of anger rising in her cheeks and face. "Look, lady. Stop being a bitch and just give the ambassador this message verbatim. "I have been and always shall be his friend". He'll see me. I guarantee it."

The woman pursed her lips and her eyes blazed but her face remained blank but she could see that she was struggling with her control. "Very well. Come in."

Jim gave her her best 'fuck you' smile and followed her into the entry room, staying in the corner where she indicated. Jim lowered her hood and pulled off her headscarf, shaking out her long, wavy blond hair. Even though her clothing was designed to keep her cool she was still sweating. She longed for a glass of water and somewhere to hang her robe so she could cool off but the Vulcan woman who had let her in had offered neither, probably expecting Jim to be turned out immediately.

It was mere minutes that she was gone when an older male rushed out with the woman trailing behind him. When he turned in her direction, Jim's grin split her face. It was him! Surprise and curiosity lit up his brown eyes and the corner of his lips were turned up in a small smile but he looked like he wasn't sure what to call her because of her gender despite him knowing instinctively who she was.

Jim immediately lifted her hand in the traditional Vulcan salute. "Dif-tor heh smusma, S'haile Selek."

He returned it, albeit a little slower. "Sochya eh dif."

The elder Spock turned to the Vulcan woman. "Cancel my meetings for the rest of today and tomorrow, T'Sal." His eyes locked with Jim's, happiness brightening them. "I will be spending time with an old friend."

She looked like she'd swallowed a lemon and Jim smiled sweetly at her. "Ha, Osu."

Spock lifted an arm and led Jim back to an ornate sitting room where he took her cloak and forced her to sit while he fetched fruit and tea for them. Jim noticed his hands shook slightly as he placed the tray on the table and she wondered if it was due to nerves or age.

He sat next to her, his eyes drinking her in with wonder as if he was a man dying of thirst and she squirmed, nervous at the scrutiny. "James T. Kirk...or is it Jane? Joanne?"

She accepted the teacup. "Jamison but my friends call me Jim."

"How did you find me?" He asked.

She smirked, feeling relief and peace at the sight of him. "Would you believe I just happened to be in the neighborhood?"
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

A short interlude before we get back to Jim's side of the universe.

Chapter Eighteen

*Jim's Original Universe*

Dr. Leonard McCoy finished his shift with a feeling of frustration and a heavy heart. The work that they had been doing seemed to be going somewhere but they were still a long ways off. They had been able to determine the parallel universe that Jim was in and had had an almost successful test with the biological sample container. The cells had come back in the original condition and alive but the cellular cohesion was still weak and the container survived but the biological matter had broken down after several hours. It was still far from safe with live tests.

The other difficulty was the likelihood that Jim was still at the same location was too low of a probability so they were being forced to find her but it was like locating a needle in a haystack. There were, literally, millions of light years she could be located in and they were working on a way to be able to find and track exactly where she was to get her within transportation range. It was proving...difficult.

Crew moral had sunk to an all time low with Jim's absence and the seeming lack of empathy from the Admiralty. She had officially been declared dead two days ago and her memorial service that they had earlier that day had only exacerbated the negative atmosphere on the ship. The news feeds were going nuts with the news of one of the 'heroes' of the Battle of Vulcan being lost in action. They showed footage of flowers and vigils throughout the federation and it gave Leonard a warm feeling in his heart at the outpouring of love and respect that people of all races, species, and planets showed such care for his best friend.

Winona and George Jr. had given multiple interviews telling the people of the Federation about the bravery Jim had and the type of person she was with short stories and her many achievements. Spock had watched one of the programs and McCoy had felt a sense of morbid satisfaction when the vulcan had been shocked at the knowledge of Jim's contribution to the science community with the development and her thesis's on the quadrotriticale grain. He'd had had no clue about her creation of the vital grain that was being used to end universal hunger and famine since she'd gotten her PhD in Botany and Genetic Engineering of Flora along with a masters in Starship Engineering that she completed in the academy.

The crew had no idea of the work that the senior staff were doing to attempt to get their commander back and, as a result, crew efficiency and moral was at a dangerous low which caused the Fleet to send a team to evaluate the Enterprise crew and try and figure out how to improve it. They'd been granted an early shore leave which had improved things but at a level that was still far too low for Starfleet standards. It was dangerous for a crew to have a level that low. It led to complacency and mistakes. Sulu was doing an excellent job but he had some pretty large shoes to fill.

They were currently being ordered back towards where Vulcan had been lost because of unusual
sensor readings by the probes that had been left there to monitor the area due to the fear of the potential return of the Narada. They had believed it to be destroyed by the Kelvin before and caught off guard when it had returned to destroy the planet of one of the founding species of the Federation. They would not be caught off guard again despite the evidence showing the ship had definitely been destroyed in a sense of poetic justice when it had been pulled into the black hole caused by the same red matter that had destroyed Vulcan.

McCoy headed to his quarters and was enjoying a few fingers of bourbon when his door chimed. He didn’t feel like company. Jim’s service had wrung him out and the fact that he had been scheduled for a shift right after had made him bitter about the whole thing. The admiralty had also scheduled a public service for Jim when the Enterprise would be 'conveniently' nearby after their survey of the Vulcan system.

“Come.” He snapped.

The door opened to reveal a very nervous Ensign Chekov. He walked in wringing his hands and dark circles ringing his eyes so dark he almost looked like a raccoon.

At nearly twenty the young man looked closer to forty in his current state. His heart squeezed in his chest at the sight.

“Aw hell, kid. Come in and take a load off.”

Chekov sat across from the doctor and he poured him a small measure of the bourbon he had been nursing moments ago, pressing the glass into the navigator's shaking hands. McCoy wasn't surprised when the kid threw it back but he was surprised when Chekov showed no hint of discomfort. In fact, it looked as if the kid had just drank water. He poured a second glass and leaned back while Chekov rolled the glass between his hands, his gaze a million miles away.

"I did not know ze things you said about ze Kommander in ze memorial service nor in ze interwiews. She is wery impressive."

McCoy hummed noncommittally, preferring to let him talk. Sometimes you had to really listen to someone to get a good handle on the situation. He noticed how Chekov used present tense language, his hunched, defeated figure, and the way his eyes couldn't meet McCoy's and were riddled with guilt. He'd only seen this side of Chekov twice before. Once, when he had lost Amanda Grayson's transporter signal and the second time had been when Jim had allowed herself to be taken prisoner in his place and had been subsequently tortured right in front of the entire away team.

Chekov finally looked up. "She kept lots of secrets, da?"

"Because she was an idiot."

Chekov looked shocked at his blunt answer and the doctor sighed and rolled his eyes.

"She did keep a lot of secrets. She liked to play things close to her chest. If people got the wrong impression of her then she felt it was their fault. I never judged her or thought of her as anyone but Jim and she let me in when she saw that I didn't give a shit about her past, cared about her present, and had hope for her future."

The Russian blushed. "I knew she was smart and talented but she was scared?"

"Mmhmm. She'd only just started talking to people and trusting them."
He looked deep in thought. "Did she not trust us?"

Sipping his brandy, he thought about how to answer that question. "It wasn't a question of trust. It was more of a fear of rejection, of the crew not believing her because of past rumors and her father's accomplishments overshadowing her achievements. She couldn't get over that because it'd either be 'oh, she slept her way through to the top' or 'I always knew she'd do well because she's George Kirk's daughter'. It's never be just because of her."

He nodded in understanding. "I feel zis, too. Back home in Russia, my father was genius engineer. Anything I did, he could do better and I was considered failure so I left to join Starfleet vere I vas not known and could make friends and do things on my own. I vas happy."

Now, that was interesting. Many people on board had questioned why their navigator (and senior staffer) had joined so young. It had just been assumed because of his brilliance. "And you're not now? Happy, I mean."

"Nyet."

"Why?"

Chekov took a sip of his drink, seemingly to fortify himself with liquid courage. "Iz my fault ve lost Kommander Kirk just like it vas my fault we lost Keptin Spock's mother."

Angry fire burned in McCoy's body at the guilt that he was projecting. "No, it damn well wasn't." He snapped.

"It is! I lost Ms. Grayson's signal! I wasn't fast enough! And I recommended not beaming ze Kommander vith our transporters until it vas too late! Vhat if she has been stuck in ze mirror uniwerse being tortured or dead? Ve vould ne-ner get her back or she could be hurt bedly!" He protested vehemently and McCoy gripped his shoulder in a tight hold to reassure the young man.

"It isn't you're fault. With Ms. Grayson, you were fighting incredible odds, against an imploding planet, at even getting one of those people beamed out. With Jim, you followed orders and procedure and, yes, we might have lost her but at least we have found out that she's likely still alive. You did what you were supposed to do. Had you not it would be guaranteed that she would be dead. Even if she is in the mirror universe the Ambassador told us about, at least we stand a chance to get her back."

Chekov slumped further into the small couch. "Zat is if she is ever found, yes?"

McCoy pulled the kid closer to him in a brotherly hug. "It is a small chance but it's still a chance. She'll be found. You are going above and beyond the call of duty," He smiled and gripped him harder, a feeling of warmth and camaraderie filling him. "above and beyond the call of friendship to get our girl back."

Chekov smiled. "I just ne-ner thought ve vould lose her again. After Khan-" He swallowed the bitter and painful words.

"I know, kid. I know but we haven't lost her, yet. It may always seem the darkest before the dawn but the dawn does come."
Chapter Nineteen

Spock walked up the long, dusty road on his parent's estate, enjoying the feel of the sun beating down on him that seemed to warm the perpetual chill of space from his very bones. He enjoyed his career and it was a trade-off that Spock had deemed appropriate when he had chosen his self-imposed exile from his home planet. In Starfleet, he had the opportunity to utilize his skills in a far more practical manner than he ever would have had he accepted the offer from the Vulcan Science Academy where their focus lay more in the theory rather than the practical. The diversity of species also was an unexpected boon that made him feel more at home as it was similar to his experiences in his youth being the son of an ambassador whose homes had been split between the places of his dual heritage. He was simply more accepted with his alien ancestry among those in Starfleet than he ever had been had he only lived among his people and his parents had always supported his choice.

Spock placed his bag on the ground and had just raised his hand to knock on the large double doors when they opened. His hand was still in the air when his mother rushed out and enveloped him in a hug that knocked the air from his lungs. Her happiness filled his very being as it poured from her through their contact and the faint parental bond they both shared.

Spock absorbed the feeling and it was even more pleasant than the sun that had previously warmed him. His telepathy embraced the love his mother projected and he clung to it tightly. His father joined them and his own emotions joined that of his wife's. He had been fortunate that they were not on another world in the middle of negotiations with another planet and species.

Spock closed his eyes in pleasure and sent his own thoughts and feelings towards them and he knew that he had been successful when his father had placed a hand on his shoulder and his mother squeezed harder.

"Aduna, allow your son a moment to collect himself. He has had a long journey." Sarek gently admonished his wife but he failed to follow his own words as he did not release his son either.

Amanda slowly leaned back but did not remove her hands, still holding onto his biceps as she scrutinized him from head to toe. "You have lost weight, do they even feed you on that ship of yours?"

Spock's eyes went heavenward for a moment but he allowed a small smile at her motherly concern. "Yes, mother. I have actually gained one point three seven kilograms but it has been in muscle despite the lower gravity on the Enterprise."

She snorted through her nose in disbelief and her eyes darted to look behind him as if he was hiding someone behind his person. He knew what she was searching for. "Where's this Jamison that..."
you’ve told us about?” Sarek’s brow lifted as he asked the same question without voicing it aloud.

"Jim has recently suffered the loss of her former home and is spending time to find her balance. She has requested solitude in order to grieve and find inner peace.” He told them.

"Logical." Sarek said simply but Amanda pursed her lips, showing her displeasure at Jim being alone and at being denied the opportunity to meet the woman who was rapidly becoming the center of Spock’s life.

"Well, I still expect to meet her before you warp off away and we never see you again."

Spock sighed at the overdramatic statement. "I will not 'never see you again'." He reminded her and he was pleased when she smiled with fondness at her son.

She gave one final squeeze of his arms and led him inside. "You'd better not." She warned.

"It would be wise to follow the words of your mother." His father agreed.

"It is logical to heed the wise words of your elders." He told them and his mother smacked his arm at his sass.

He followed them into the sitting room at his mother's insistence and Sarek went to collect refreshments, instinctively knowing that his wife was too excited to do so. Once he returned he sat next to his wife and both of them fixed their son with penetrating stares. The kind that would make Spock confess all when he was a child.

"Tell us of this human that has captured your attention." Sarek ordered but not unkindly.

"And your heart." Amanda added with a playful shove to her husband.

Spock considered his words carefully. He needed-no. He craved their approval of his choice. "She is my everything." He said with meaning and his mother's brown eyes, which matched his own, softened in understanding.

"How did you meet Jim?" Amanda leaned forward.

"She was transported onto our ship by an unprecedented transporter accident and was injured. She was frightened and I went to help her.” He paused to carefully consider his words. “The moment I touched her I knew her mind. It broke through my shields and touched my own, perfect in every conceivable way."

That had been the moment he knew. It mattered not whether she was male or female. She was perfection in mind, body, and soul.

"And at what point did she return your regard?" Sarek enquired.

Spock frowned. "It was not an immediate thing. It was quite a challenge to gain her favor due to her tendency to shy away from those she may become close to. Once she was willing to acknowledge her feelings towards me then we were able to move forward."

Sarek nodded in understanding. "Humans are notorious in their skills at providing a challenge." He turned towards his wife, affection clearly evident in his expression and Amanda’s cheeks colored a bright pink. "It does, however, make the reward of besting the challenge worth the effort."

Sarek and Amanda continued to question Spock about Jim and about his current interests and
recent experiences. He told them about it all and was pleased that he had been able to take the
time away from his duties and visit with his parents. It may be considered illogical to visit one's family
in person to relate tales that could be communicated just as efficiently via subspace communication
but, to Spock, this was a far more preferable thing.

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"Where did you learn vuhlkansu?"

Jim sipped her Vulcan Mocha (extra sweet) and pushed the last of her ameelah around on her plate.

"I learned Vulcan because, in my own universe, I had been hoping for a closeness-a friendship with
my own Spock but he didn't want anything to do with me." She took a bite, it's sweet, sugary,
banana flavor tasting bitter on her tongue at the memory of her universe's Spock's treatment of her.

The older vulcan's eyes flashed in anger. "To reject one's t'hy'la is a crime against nature and he
would be ostracized among his people if they became aware of it." He growled.

"Maybe we aren't t'hy'la in that universe. Maybe it's just here." She refused to meet Selek's eyes,
pain blossoming in her chest. This line of questioning wasn't a pleasant one and she didn't
particularly want to continue it.

"Negative. James T. Kirk is James T. Kirk no matter the gender, slight physical variations such as
eye color, or variation of the name. Your soul is, at it's core, the same. Your katra is meant to be
joined with Spock's, with any Spock, and this Spock's chance at being with his mate had been
ripped away when his Kirk had been murdered as a child. His heart, his mind, his soul, and his
very being would have recognized you for who you are and what you are meant to be."

Selek leaned forward, but it was far from a relaxed position. His eyes darkened and Jim shivered
despite the warmth of the room. "The Spock of your universe should have done the same but he
foolishly rejected his perfect match. He rejected you." Selek's voice became low and the hairs on
the back of Jim's neck raised in a primal instinct of self-preservation. She knew that Selek would
never hurt her but she also knew of Vulcan anger and he was definitely beginning to show it.

"If I was to encounter him I would be unable to contain my emotions and I would rip him to pieces,
rend the limbs from his body and leave his corpse for the le-matayas to feast upon in the desert, his
blood would soak the sands of Vulcan, turning it from red to emerald." He growled and his mug
shattered in his grip, dark brown tea and bright green blood mixing together as the shards of
ceramic cut hit palm.

Jim gasped in shock and backed away from the table. "That's so...violent."

Selek froze and looked at his injured hand and the mess on the table. He looked up and saw Jim's
fear etched on her face and he closed his eyes to compose himself.

"I...apologize. Vulcans feel deeply. Their unchained emotions are strong and powerful and, when it
comes to the protection and instinctual love of and for their t'hy'la, it brings out these things. He is
fortunate that my counterpart in this universe seems to have a level of control that I apparently do
not have in regards to the mistreatment of our t'hy'la. I did not intend to frighten you."

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not have in regards to the mistreatment of our t'hy'la. I did not intend to frighten you."

Jim shook herself irritably and glared. "I'm not frightened. It was just...unexpected." She snapped
but immediately quietened. "I just don't get what's so special about me."

Her focus drifted towards him and her eyes widened. "Your hand!"
Jim rushed from her seat to the adjoined bathroom and fetched a towel and was lucky enough to have found a first-aid kit under the sink. She quickly returned and stopped Selek from his adorably sad attempts to clean the mess and pulled the injured appendage towards herself and wrapped it in the towel, apologizing when the older Vulcan tensed in clear pain.

Jim shrugged her shoulders and slowly unwrapped his hand. “Like I said, maybe I'm not that to the Spock of my universe.” She mumbled and knelt as she set to work cleaning his wound, carefully dabbing at the cuts and inspecting it for pieces of ceramic in the wounds. Thankfully, it wasn't too deep and she was able to start the healing process with the home regenerator and didn't need to call for a doctor.

She had just finished sealing the cuts and was putting away the scanner when Selek stopped her and put his fingers on her chin, forcing her to meet his eyes.

"It would be impossible that you are not. You do not understand. You are t'hy'la."

Jim shook her head but Selek's grip remained tight and he refused to allow her to hide from him.

"If the Spock of this universe, as well as myself and the older Spock of your universe recognize this, then it is so. A Vulcan who has found his t'hy'la should and would do anything to have a bond with them for they are the other half of their soul. It is a level of perfection that few are fortunate to have. You are shi'masu, an oasis, so rare a thing that a Vulcan would spend a lifetime searching for on a desert planet that, once found, should be cherished with all that they have. You are like las'hark, the very sun that provides life to planets and would provide life to the mind of your mate especially in the throes of Pon Farr.” He told her and, even though Jim didn't know what t'hy'la fully meant or what Pon Farr was, she believed him.

His hands drifted down and he held her hands in his, willing her to understand.

"That Spock is a fool and, as a result, this one is fortunate to have found you for you will complete him in a way that no other ever could."

Jim's heart swelled at his kind words and she gave him a watery smile. "Yeah. I got lucky." She shrugged. "I just wish I could have had a chance to say goodbye to Bones and my family, though."

A line appeared between Spock's eyebrows. "You regret your choice to remain?"

Jim's head jerked back at the strange statement. "There wasn't a choice to make. There wasn't a way back but I wouldn't regret it if I had chosen to stay here because I have Spock and I love him. I also have come to know so many amazing people here. I just miss the ones I left behind."

Selek nodded solemnly. "I understand your loss. Tushah nash-veh k'du. I grieve with thee."

"Th'i-oxalra. Thank you."

xXx

Ambassador Selek, as he had now chosen to identify himself to those he did not know, Ambassador Spock to those he did. Selek had been most surprised at Jim's sudden appearance. It had been a welcome thing to know that there was a Jim Kirk in this universe and that he had had the fortune of seeing her had granted him a sense of peace in his old age.

However, something about Jim's story made him feel ill at ease. His James T. Kirk would say it was a 'gut instinct'. Selek knew something was not right and he was determined to find out what it was.
Jim had appeared fatigued due to the emotional strain from she had been under and he offered her his guest suite. Keeping her close seemed to provide a sense of comfort to them and their shared experiences brought a kinship that helped them to connect.

Spock used his ambassadorial status and had been successful at obtaining the records of Jim's sudden appearance and the work that had been done by the Enterprise crew to attempt to find a way to return her. He had nearly completed his research when something caught his eye. A familiar code sequence that only he would be able to detect.

He spent the next two hours breaking through the code and opened the file showing Spock's successful calculations and modifications to the transporter and sensors that would allow Jim to return home.

"Oh, Spock, what have you done?"
I’m a bit nervous about this chapter but please remember that this Spock shows emotions a little more than the one we’re used to since his upbringing and family dynamic is different. And with that note out of the way- here’s the conversation you guys knew was coming. As always, I adore reading comments! Sometimes they give me fabulous ideas on how to improve things and if I’ve gotten things wrong. Also, thank you for giving kudos to those who do. It makes me feel very appreciated and also encourages others to give my fix a try. :) Thank you!!!
their kisses and he briefly considered-his comm went off again, interrupting that thought.

Jim licked her lips and shrugged. "It's gotta be important."

He rolled off and glanced at the ident on the comm and raised a brow in surprise. Why would his older counterpart be contacting him?

"Spock?"

He turned back to his bedmate who had covered herself but remained close. She looked hesitant. "Thank you."

Spock frowned in confusion at the unusual statement. "For?"

A corner of her mouth pulled back in a shy smile. "For giving me some time. I appreciate it."

His shoulders relaxed and he reached out two fingers which Jim met and he could feel her gratitude and love through their contact.

"I must attend to this but I will see you tomorrow when I collect you to take you to my parent's estate?" He told her-asked her?

Jim bit her lip, worry creating lines on her forehead. "Yeah. Sure."

He bent down, running a finger down her temple, sending her calming thoughts and she sighed at the touch. "Do not be overly concerned, ashayem."

"I'll try."

He illogically wished he could stay and kiss away the lines on her forehead and spend the day showing Jim that she was his and there was no reason to feel anxiety but a call from his elder counterpart had to be important.

xXx

Spock reached the Ambassador's residence where he was quickly led to Selek's study by a young aide. He had just shut the door when-

"Foolish young one."

Spock's hand stilled on the doorknob.

"I am unsure of what it is you speak of. Clarify." He spun around to face the older Vulcan and placed his hands behind his back. The moment he saw the elder Spock he knew that he had discovered his tampering.

The ambassador openly glared at him, anger and disappointment radiating off the older man in waves so strong it hammered at his telepathic shields.

"Do not disseminate. You forget that I know your mind just as well as I know my own as we are one and the same, S'Chn T'Gai Spock, Son of Sarek, grandson of Skon of the house of Surak." Spock was forced to spin in a slow circle as Selek walked around him. "I reviewed the records and found your work showing it was easily possible to return Jim to her natural universe but you hid the equation and put in a code to prevent anyone else from attempting the same resolution, thereby, ensuring a continuous negative result. You gave her no choice and are keeping this information and your tampering from her. She is your equal. Jamison Kirk is not a child that needs her decisions
made for her and should not be treated as such.” He spat the words.

Spock remained silent, gritting his teeth at his counterpart's harsh words. He respected and admired the man but with his existence it created a feeling of inadequacy and insecurity at seeing the older man's achievements...and a fear of his failures. He wondered if he was doomed to repeat them and he resolved to not do so. He forced himself to remember that they were different people with different experiences. Already, his life was far different than that of his counterpart just as it was with the Spock's of Jim's former home. He remained silent, neither confirming nor denying Selek's accusation.

Selek spoke in a low warning tone. “I understand your reasoning but do not agree with it. Our people have passions that rival a human's that we hide beneath a thin veneer of logic. Our deep desires to have a bondmate which means life for a male Vulcan as well as companionship and, dare I say it, love. It is a strong instinct to fight to keep a mate. To have your t'hy'la in front of you is a temptation that is impossible to resist but what you have done is wrong.” Selek moved forward and his robes swirled and fluttered around him. He came almost in touching distance but far enough away that Spock could not.

Spock's eyes flashed dangerously. "How? How is it wrong? The Spock of her universe does not love or want her." He gesticulated wildly behind him, forgoing an admission of guilt. Selek knew of his trespass but he refused to back down in front of him. "He regards her with little more than disdain and refuses to acknowledge the gift in front of him, his perfect match and all that can be, but here? Here she can have happiness and so can I."

Spock stepped forward and closed the distance between them. "I love her with the power of a thousand suns. I crave her more than life itself and would lay down my life for her. My chances of finding my t'hy'la were ripped away from me by a tyrant when James T. Kirk was murdered by Governor Kodos!" He spat.

Selek shook his head sadly, understanding his reasoning but clearly not agreeing with it. "Oh, Spock. I know. However, how will you know if this is truly meant to be? How will you feel confident that she would choose you and choose to be completely yours when you made the choice for her? When you took away everything from her for your own selfish reasons?"

"I beg to differ. It was not an act of selfishness but an act of love and kindness and I know she would choose to stay."

"It may have been an act of love and kindness but it was still a selfish one as well. You must tell her the truth. She must be able to make the choice."

Spock straightened. "I cannot."

"You cannot or will not?" Selek challenged.

"I cannot. She has known such suffering in her own universe and I cannot stand by and do nothing. I will not add to the it by making her have to make the painful choice of either leaving her old life where her friends and family were or leave here where she is beginning to find happiness."

Selek brought his hands together and steepled them in front of his mouth. "Her experiences made her into the person she is today. You must have faith that she will choose you."

"Then it is the answer of I will not." He narrowed his eyes at the older man. "Can you, with honesty, admit you have never done what may be considered as an amoral act to protect your t'hy'la?"
Selek thought back to when he had removed his own Kirk's memories of Miramanee to spare him the agony of when he had lost her. It was wrong and a severe crime to have entered his mind without informed consent and alter his memories but he had done it nonetheless.

His silence was enough for the younger Spock to interpret his answer correctly.

"You have."

"The situation was vastly different."

Spock did not care. Selek had still committed just as wrong of an act to his t'hy'la for their own wellbeing. "Kroykah! You dare to judge me when you have committed committed a trespass of your own against your mate!"

"My actions were not to take away a choice and hide it from my mate. It was to take away pain and not to benefit myself."

Spock moved closer, his nose almost touching Selek's, challenge clear in the lines of his body. "Your logic regarding my actions is flawed. Our actions were one and the same."

"Negative. What you have done is NOT the same."

I growled low and narrowed his eyes. "Do not force my hand, young one."

"I will not comply. I refuse to do as you request."

Selek's face fell and he moved away. "Then I have no choice. I refuse to allow your actions to taint what could be by keeping secrets and removing her free will. Everything that could be accomplished and gained by a partnership between yourselves. A relationship-a bond is meant to be built on trust and honesty. You do not show trust or respect to your potential mate to let her choose you over her old life nor is there honesty when you deceive her."

"I trust her implicitly but I do not wish to see her agonize over this task. I am sparing her unnecessary pain."

The elder sighed. "You must do this or I will have her taken from you. She will never forgive you if you do not admit this and James Kirk or rather Jamison Kirk in this instance, in any universe, has intelligence beyond that of an average human. The longer this deception is not disclosed the more it will poison what you could have and destroy a bond that may or may not happen between you two."

His hands darted out and gripped Spock's biceps. Selek shook him to emphasize his words. "Admit your wrongdoings and have faith in Jim! A human's capacity to love and forgive is boundless and you must do this. You must give her this choice to ensure-"

"I...cannot."

Selek's hands fell and Spock knew he had failed a test for the first time in his life. He hung his head in shame.

"Then I apologize for I have no choice."

Spock's head snapped up. "Allow me twenty-four hours."

Selek straightened to military parade rest and placed his hands behind his back, his expression disbeliefing. "Very well but, understand this, young one. I will not sit idly by and allow this charade to continue."
Spock jerked his head in a nod, his anger only controlled by the teachings of his people but the frisson of fear and doubt that lanced down his spine could not be shoved away as easily.
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Hi all! I just want to say a huge thank you to everyone who has given me kudos and such wonderful comments! Thank you! Hopefully, this chapter is well received and gives a little humor to a mostly angst filled story. :)

Chapter Twenty-One

Spock pulled up to his parent's home in their rented hovercar and Jim fidgeted in her blue dress and was reconsidering her attire. She knew the importance of this meeting and was unsure that it would be successful. She also knew that Amanda and Sarek's opinion meant a great deal to Spock. Hell, the Spock in her old universe had very nearly killed her from her insults against his mother.

The pain of losing her past had started to fade with Selek's help but it was still a raw wound that scarred her psyche, barely healed and Jaime hoped she was ready for being able to be around other people and moving on so soon. Selek had aided her in learning meditation to process and accept the emotions that she was struggling with but she was still a long way from being fully healed. He had explained that it would take a lifetime, and then some, to ever recover. She was looking forward to returning to duty and filling her life with new purpose.

They had just began the long walk up the dusty path when a large, brown-furred animal resembling an Earth bear with saber tooth-like fangs came barreling towards them. Jim stopped suddenly and her jaw dropped at the sight of this thing coming at them. Her heart jumped into her throat and her hair stood on end as her fight or flight instinct came into play.

Her eyes darted towards Spock who had clearly not seen the danger and it was about twenty feet away. Heading straight for Spock. Jim dived at Spock, shoving him out of the path of the monster and hoped it would give him enough time to flee. She wasn't fast enough to get away herself though. Well, that was one way to get out of meeting the parents.

Large paws hit her in the chest and she landed on her back. The air left her lungs as she landed on the ground and large teeth filled her vision. Jim cried out in fear and she couldn't move her arms since the creature was pinning her down. She cringed away and waited for the searing agony of teeth and claws as it ate her and yelped in shock when a large, wet tongue licked her from her neck and up to her face and covered her in drool. Maybe it wanted to taste it's food first?

"I-Chaya!" Spock shouted at the beast and it refused to back down, continuing it's assault with it's tongue and a cold wet nose huffed hot air on her vulnerable throat. Crushing weight made it nearly impossible as it laid down on her but it definitely wasn't it's full weight and vibrations caused her to giggle in disbeliefing hysteria. It was...purring?

Jim tried to shake her head away from the tongue licking her and the cold, wet nose smelling her but every effort only earned her more stern licks and she trembled with laughter as the animal's fur started to tickle her and it then started to lick at her hair, cleaning her like a cat would clean a baby kitten. She was powerless against it's weight and determination. Jim felt a jerking motion and she knew Spock was attempting to pull this 'I-Chaya' off of her but he wasn't having any luck because of it's determination to 'clean' Jim.
"Oh, my god!" Higher pitched laughter than that of Spock's was at her right but Jim couldn't see who it was because she had been forced to close her eyes.

"Sarek!" The woman shouted and running feet came towards them as the beast scooted down her body and effortlessly flipped her onto her stomach and started to lick at her upper body, moving to sniff at the sides near her belly, the back of her neck and head, soaking her and pushing her hair up over her head. Each time Jim tried to crawl away she was gently, but firmly, pulled back by the creature grabbing her dress with it’s teeth and pull her back underneath, much like how a mother cat would pull it’s kittens by the scruff of their necks. After three attempts I-Chaya simply kept her arms pinned to prevent her from getting away from it's 'parental duties'.

“A little help here?” Jim squeaked as a particularly persistent swipe of the tongue caught her under her armpit. The animal pushed her face to the side to ensure that any dust that collected on her cheeks was promptly, and repeatedly, cleaned away.

It seemed like forever before it was pulled off of her and smaller, more delicate hands helped to pull her into a standing position. Jim had lost her shoes in the melee and swayed on her feet at the sudden change in position. Jim looked around and saw a struggling and whining bear...thing fighting to be released from two Vulcan men who were pulling it away with limited success.

To her left was a red-faced woman who was clearly trying to stifle her laughter behind her hands. This had to be Spock's mother, Amanda. Her soft brown eyes were exactly like Spock's but they were shining with tears of mirth. Jim just realized that the hem of her dress hand been hiked up to almost her underwear and that her hair was sticking up in places. She was soaked in drool and covered in dust. She quickly pulled her dress down and mustered as much dignity as she could. She. Was. Mortified.

She held out her hand. "Hello, ma’am, my name is Jim Kir-ahhh!"

She was promptly knocked to the ground again on her back, this time large, soft paws scrabbled at her arms to keep her still. I-Chaya's nose sniffed at her belly and nuzzled her, scenting her much like a cat would.

Jim gave up and just lay still, hoping and wondering if it was possible to die of mortification. She pushed herself up and onto her elbows. "Jim Kirk." She introduced herself and she was rewarded by a long lick down her leg that caused her to try and jerk it away in reflex but large paws continuously repositioned themselves and forced her to still as it carefully held itself on over her with enough weight to stop her from moving an inch. Hot gusts of air caused the bottom of her dress to lift slightly as it huffed and gently continued it's 'work' and Jim tried valiantly to preserve what little was left of her dignity.

"Ama-" The brunette stopped her efforts at trying to hold herself back and doubled over in laughter at the ridiculous scene. "Oh, my god! I am so sorry! I-Chaya hasn't ever done that to a guest! She's only done that to her stubborn cubs!"

Sarek and Spock moved to stand in front of Jim, both of them had matching raised eyebrows but she could see the amusement in both of their eyes. Jim just glared at Spock but she was smiling.

I-Chaya started to become quite disappointed when she was unable to remove Jim's dress without hurting her and had settled for scenting her quite thoroughly, focused on her abdomen where she had sniffed and nuzzled, quickly settling her head there and Jim had tried to push away, laughing uncontrollably when I-Chaya's fur tickled her but she was having none of it and had Jim stuck, helpless and immobile.
"Perhaps it would be best to allow her to finish. We are unable to stop her from her..." Sarek cleared his throat. "...motherly behavior."

“Can I die, now? Please?”

Amanda’s answering snort of poorly concealed laughter made Jim collapse in mortification.

xXx

It had been a further ten minutes before the sehlat had deemed Jim 'clean' enough but she had still refused to leave Jim's side and had followed her to the sonic shower where she had been able to clean up and put on a set of Amanda's pants and a top.

Well, that was one way to meet the parents. She figured that was definitely an ice-breaker if ever there was one.

Jim stepped out of the bathroom to see Spock standing in the bedroom. "I...apologize for my pet's behavior. I-Chaya has never-"

Jim chuckled as they went into the living room. 

"-yeah. I know. She's only ever cleaned her cubs with that much enthusiasm." She gently ruffled the sehlat's fur in affection and moved forward towards Spock but the sehlat was having none of it and bumped it's head against Jim's hip to keep her away.

Spock tilted his head at the strange behavior. "She has also never been this protective except-"

Jim sighed and heeded I-Chaya's clear orders. "Yeah. Her babies. I get it."

Spock gestured to the doorway and Jim went through, stumbling slightly as a big head nudged her along.

The sitting room was very similar to one you would find on earth but there were Vulcan artifacts, tapestries, and a lyre accenting the walls. It was very artfully designed and Jim suspected that Amanda had created the oasis, a blend of human and Vulcan that was perfect.

Sarek and Amanda stood as she entered and Jim raised her hand in a Vulcan salute. "T'nar pak sorat y'rani."

Sarek returned the gesture. "T'nar joral, Jamison Kirk."

Sarek was so similar in appearance to Spock but his jaw was slightly more square and his hair was peppered with silver but it was in the traditional bowl-cut that she associated with Vulcans whereas Spock's style was decidedly more human. His eyes darted to the sehlat still standing between them which growled when he had moved forward and he remained what he clearly deemed was a safe distance with a raised contemplative brow as he watched his let's strange behavior.

Amanda's features were more delicate. Her short brown hair framed her face in a pixie cut and she smiled warmly at Jim. Jim could tell where Spock had learned a lot of his behaviors. He was a perfect blend of both of his parents. It was truly IDIC, the Vulcan philosophy of Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combination.

The look that both of them gave their son was nothing short of absolute love and affection and Jim was surprised when it was also directed at her.

"Clearly, if I-Chaya deemed you to be a-" she cleared her throat and chuckled. "-a part of the
family."

"I'm really glad to meet you." Jim looked down warily and was promptly and gently pushed by the aforementioned animal to sit. "I just kind of wish it had been a bit of a less enthusiastic greeting." Jim smiled at the pair and worked to fight the blush that colored her face but Amanda waved her words away.

"Don't worry about it. It's a good thing." She became serious but looked at the protective 'body-guard' with a curious but thoughtful expression.

Amanda offered Jim some plas-savas juice and Jim had to carefully maneuver to accept it. It was shockingly sweet on her tongue but pleasant.

"Tell me of your intentions regarding my son."

Sarek's blunt words nearly caused her to choke on her drink but Jim recovered swiftly. "I-uh-love him and care for him very much, sir."

"You understand his dual heritage?"

Jim did very well and loved him all the more for it. It made him him. "Yes, sir." She told Sarek as she smiled at Spock.

His brow lifted at her vague statement. "Then you will bond with him in the Vulcan way and marry in the human way."

Jim really did choke. "Uh-it's a bit soon to-"

"It is the next logical step in the natural progression of your relationship. Why would we wait when the inevitable is going to happen?" He told her in a calm voice as if he was simply discussing the weather.

"Uh-well-"

"Do you truly love my son?"

"Yes but-"

"You say you care for him. Is this statement true?"

"Yes but-"

"Do you wish to remain a part of his life forever?"

"Yes but-"

"Then it is settled."

"Uh-"

"Sarek!" Amanda scolded. "Stop scaring the poor girl!" She turned to Jim. "I'm so sorry. Sarek tends to be-" she glared at him. ",-rather...direct when it comes to Spock. It's a common trait with the men from the house of Surak."

She looked apologetic. "It's ok if you want to wait. I did with Sarek but he was...rather convincing." She laughed quietly at what was clearly a private joke. "He's a very skilled diplomat."
Sarek almost seemed to puff out his chest in pride and Jim's eyebrows raised and she hid a smile behind her glass as she took a sip.

"It is only logical to prepare for future events and it may be some time before our son is close enough for us to be present for such an event." He explained his reasoning and Jim gulped. She'd just been strong-armed into marriage by Spock's father. She wondered if Vulcans were more like humans than she had originally thought because it almost seemed like he had just initiated a shotgun wedding.

"I-uh-ok?" She stammered.

Sarek nodded and calmly sipped his tea, watching Jim and almost daring her to contradict him. "I will contact the members of our clan and make arrangements. I believe two days should be adequate time to prepare."

Jim's mouth became as dry as the deserts of Vulcan and her tongue refused to comply with her brain. Amanda was hiding her face in her hands and Spock stiffened next to her.

Fuck.

xXx

"Sarek! I cannot believe you!"

He merely looked up from his current task of pulling up the necessary clan members and sending out the requests for their attendance at the ancestral grounds for Spock's joining. It was not ideal as he was not in the throes of his Time but needs must. He did not have a preliminary bond with a mate to protect him to ensure survival of both parties. He felt relief that he had found a compatible mate and she was his t'hy'la which was unprecedented. A t'hy'la bond had not been seen in over three centuries and Sarek was thankful as it would prevent any challenge against the joining from the clan matriarch, his grandmother T'Pau.

"It is only logical to ensure our son's survival when he enters his time and to ensure his happiness. There is no point in delaying what is to happen anyway. I could see that they were t'hy'la and it is far safer for them to bond in a controlled environment with a skilled mind-adept than to risk damage by an incorrectly formed bond if they were to attempt it on their own."

Amanda sighed at her husband's overprotectiveness and infallible, if forceful, logic and rolled her eyes. "I know that but did you have to terrify that poor girl?"

"Yes." He told her simply. "It is a skill I learned as a negotiator to ensure compliance by 'throwing one's opponent off' to ensure compliance and they cannot form or state falsehoods if they do not have time to prepare them."

"So, you approve of Spock's choice?"

"Of course, Amanda. I did do my research on her and found her to be a worthy mate. I saw the way she protected our son even though it was against I-Chaya. I also observed our son's behavior around her as well as hers towards him and saw that they were a compatible and agreeable match." He explained and turned back to the task he had started, finished with the discussion as it appeared to have reached it's logical conclusion.

"So, you like her?"

Sarek paused. "Yes."
"You know, Sarek? I-Chaya did behave like this once before." She paused, unsure but daring to hope. "You don't think-?"

Her husband paused in his work and considered his wife's words. "It is possible."

She shook her head, a small huff of laughter escaping. "Do you remember? She wouldn't let you near me for three months!"

He raised his hand, fingers outstretched and she met them, affection and hope flowing between them. "I remember quite well, my aduna."

He leaned over and pressed a gentle kiss to her temple.

"Should we say anything?" She asked.

"I believe that the surprise would be more enjoyable if they discovered it themselves."
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

Hi all! Well, this is gonna be a double update since the two chapters are so intertwined. As always, I love to hear from you guys and every kudos makes me smile! Thank you so much for staying with me during this story!

Darkwaters

Chapter Twenty-Two

Nyota Upenda Uhura was no fool. She could easily see the toll that the loss of Kirk had taken on the crew, Spock and McCoy most of all. She would frequently spend evenings and entire nights alone while Spock worked obsessively on a way to get her home and she knew that he felt incredible guilt at the fact that it was his order that was the one that may have been responsible for the accident that resulted in Kirk not rematerializing on the transporter pad. She also knew that it had caused flashbacks to when he had lost his mother in the same way. He may not admit it but it did cause both of these things.

Nyota also knew that he cared for the commander in a way that went beyond that of a co-worker. She just didn't know what exactly it was that he felt for her. It was complicated. She'd seen the way that they worked seamlessly together in a crisis situation and that he would spend hours by her bedside when she was injured. She also had seen it when Kirk had died in front of him and he had lost all focus and had gone on a rampage to avenge her death, only stopping when Uhura had screamed that they needed Khan and could save her.

Then she also saw the strange and unnatural 'professional' distance that Spock forced and had become worse after her 'death'. It was evident that it was taking a toll on the blonde but Uhura couldn't figure out the reason behind it. Spock's criticisms were similar to when he had been a professor demanding the best from his students but it was colder.

Kirk was a buffer between the captain and the crew, a human bridge to ease the command style Spock had. She was often curious how things would have been had Kirk gotten command rather than Spock.

They were currently on gamma shift and it was, yet again, another night that Nyota was left alone with the only company being her thoughts. She'd taken to frequenting the observation decks to watch the stars and wonder if Kirk was among them in some way. She looked at them and hoped that, wherever she was, that she was ok despite the animosity that they had. She did care about Kirk even though they weren't friends. She was among the best and an impressive commander. She had a skill that was second to none when it came to working with the people under her command. She inspired those around her to be better and built relationships that only made the crew stronger. She worked hard, perhaps too hard and Spock tended to push her.

Pulling the quilt her grandmother had sewn tighter around her to ward off the chill of the deck, the communications officer felt her own guilt at not being a better person and accepting the overtures of friendship that Kirk had offered. Maybe it was too late. Maybe they would never get her back and she wouldn't be able to try. Had her insecurities about her relationship with Spock made it to
where she couldn't foster such a relationship? It was likely but there also seemed to be something else. An almost missing thing between the two and that there should have been at least the friendship and that was why it bothered her.

It was strange not having her here. Now that she was gone it was like a dark cloud had descended on the ship and that the energy and warmth that had been present when Kirk had been there was gone. The crew seemed almost broken and poor Sulu was forced to pick up the pieces and glue them back together but the cracks were still there.

As Nyota gazed out at the black, the stars staring back without the twinkle they would have had they been on a planet with the atmosphere causing the visual phenomena, she felt more alone than she ever had. She had friends on board the Enterprise and she had Spock but, right now, in the quiet of the night, she felt alone and isolated in a way she had never felt before. She may have had Spock with her physically but he really wasn't there in person and it worried her. It seemed as if the universe was at odds with itself with Kirk gone but there also seemed to be something missing when she had been here. They needed her back, if only for a short while, to bring peace to those whose lives she had touched.

"Nyota?"

She jumped at the sudden intrusion into her thoughts at the sound of Spock's voice. She hadn't even heard the door open.

Smiling at the fact that Spock had sought her out, she turned and offered her fingers in the ozh'esta which he returned and moved to sit next to her on the floor. A warm and grateful feeling suffused her at the touch and she knew it was Spock projecting. She simply unwrapped her quilt and beckoned him to come closer. Spock shifted and, together, they tucked themselves into the small piece of home she had and stared at the stars together.

It was moments or hours later before she spoke, her curiosity getting the better of her. "Spock?"

"Yes?"

Biting her lip, she couldn't help but ask. She had to know. "Do you-" She shook her head. "-what do you feel for Jamison Kirk?"

Spock sighed and Nyota's anxiety ramped up a notch.

"It is...complicated. I feel concern. I feel a connection with her that I do not understand and fear of becoming close to her as even a friend as I could not bear to lose her again."

Nyota stiffened at his words. "Do you love her?"

Spock's shoulders slumped. "I did not have friends as a child. I was seen as an abomination due to my dual heritage. To have a friend and have that friend die when you have built a strong connection would break me once more."

He turned to face her and she could see the pain and exhaustion in his eyes. "You are one of the few who accept me for what I am and so was Jamison. I am...broken where she is concerned and to lose her again damaged me. If we were to get her back, I would not be able to handle her loss once more. I create a distance to prevent a closeness between us. I project indifference to keep both of us safe because she would die for my person and I cannot allow that anymore than I would want you to do the same."

His words pierced her and she could understand but she also didn't. "But you're losing her
emotionally and by not accepting her as a person."

"I would rather that than her die needlessly."

Nyota pressed her lips together to silence her objections and worries. "Is that why you push her so hard?"

"Yes."

xXx

Spock stood immobile on the bridge. They were due to make their way to Earth in three days for a public memorial service for Commander Jamison Kirk but were currently in the Eridani 40 star system, or rather the Vulcan system cataloging, scanning, and investigating the unusual energy fluctuations that were detected by probes that had been permanently placed by the Starfleet Science Corps. The admiralty had decided to award her the Starfleet Medal of Honor posthumously for her dedication to the rescue of the station personnel at the cost of her own life. The entire affair left a sour taste in the mouths of the crew. It was little more than a propaganda and photo-op by Starfleet PR. If they had truly cared for the Commander they would have sent a scientific team to attempt to retrieve her from wherever she ended up at. The resources Enterprise commanded were impressive but they were not a science vessel.

"Sir?" Ensign Grax visibly trembled and it immediately put Spock on alert. The young betazoid man had been the first of his species to join Starfleet and was among the best in the field. He never spoke up unless it was important.

"The sensors aren't showing it but I can sense millions of minds. It's almost as if a planet was nearby but there isn't one that sensors can detect."

Spock frowned and lowered his own telepathic shields, sensing nothing out of the ordinary but a full telepath like a betazoid had skills and strength that surpassed his own. "Elaborate."

Grax closed his eyes and his eyebrows drew together in concentration. "It's almost as if-" He paused and seemed to be struggling for the correct word. "-they're muffled. Like they're there but behind a fluttering veil." Opening his eyes, his met Spock's. Dark, serious almond shaped orbs seemed to draw the Vulcan in. "I can't explain it, sir, but it is there."

Spock straightened and he turned his attention to the viewscreen, the familiar constellations he had known in his youth no longer provided the comfort they once had. Nero had taken that from him. "Scan on all frequencies." He ordered tersely.

Grax's hands flew over his board while the rest of the bridge crew followed his example. Nyota stiffened, her grip on her earpiece tightened. "Captain, I'm detecting variable tones on multiple frequencies. They're faint and indistinct but they have a regular pattern."

"Sir, a program has become active that I've never seen before! It's showing a positive result for some sort of biosign." Grax almost shouted.

Ensign Chekov and Spock moved to his station with an undignified speed, hoping against hope that it was their program. The one they had set on a continuous scan for Commander Kirk's signature.

Spock's breath caught and the young ensign whooped in joy at the flashing green positive lighting up the screen.

"Ve haff found her!"
"Ensign Chekov, report to transporter room three and run program Spock Alpha One and transport that signature." He watched as the gold-clad man ran for the lift and left. "Lieutenant Uhura, contact Mr. Scott and order him to assist the ensign. Also, contact sickbay and inform Dr. McCoy as to this development."

His instinct to follow was nearly overwhelming him but he had to remain in control. His duty to the ship chained him to the bridge and he had never hated it more. He kept his speculations to himself as to the possibility that they may get the Commander back. He could not raise hope only for it to be dashed.

But he did hope.

Minutes stretched like hours and he could feel the metal of the command chair's arms warp under his tense grip but he could no more stop than he could extinguish the intense feeling that they had indeed found Kirk.

"Captain, transporter room three is signaling the bridge." Uhura's voice was tense with emotion and Spock knew. He just knew that they had gotten her.

"Let them through."

Chekov's voice was loud and excited and none of the careful control trained into a Starfleet officer was present.

"Yo moyo! She iz here! Transporter room to bridge! Keptin! It vorked!"

Spock almost tripped in his haste to get to the turbolift, Uhura and Sulu hot on his heels. The trip took far too long but it was only moments before he stepped through the doors to utter chaos.

Jamison was on the transporter pad, practically smothered underneath Scott, McCoy, and Chekov. She was dressed in a cami top, very short shorts and her long, blond hair was damp and curled. Her skin was tanned a golden brown and she looked whole and hale but when she turned her eyes to him the healthy glow of her skin faded to a sickly white.

The men reluctantly released her as she attempted to stand, only to fall down to her knees. "No! Nonononono!"

She started to become hysterical, her breath coming in pants as she shook her head violently. The action confused and concerned Spock as well as the doctor who turned his focus back to the blond.

"Jim?" He asked.

"Send me back!" She pleaded with Scotty and everyone frowned at her reaction. It did not make sense. Why would she wish to be sent away from her home?

"Jim? It's ok, kid. You're safe. You're home, now." The doctor spoke in calming low tones and gently touched her arm in an attempt to ground the woman but she jerked violently away from him, shaking her head and refusing to accept the touch. Jamison had always been a tactile individual and Spock had never seen her refuse the comfort from her friend before. This was not the reaction he had predicted upon her return.

"I'm not home. This isn't my home anymore!" She spun to look at Mr. Scott with wild blue eyes who exhibited fear at her strange behavior.

"Send me back! I don't belong here!"
"You do belong here! What the hell are you talking about, Jim?" McCoy's hands slowly inched towards his medical bag, likely searching for a sedative. Had they gotten the wrong Kirk? The biosigns matched. Ensign Chekov's head turned rapidly to each officer as if he was watching a tennis match and trying to make sense of the scene unfolding in front of him.

Perhaps she needed to hear a calm voice. This was where she belonged. The universe she had been in was not hers and they needed her. "Commander Kirk, welcome home."

"This isn't my home anymore!" She shouted and Spock looked felt she'd slapped him but he recovered quickly and frowned. Uhura gripped his bicep hard in shock.

"This is your home." He argued. They could not lose her again and they would protect her even if it was from herself.

"No, it isn't!" She snapped and pulled herself up.

The doctor's face flushed a vivid red in anger. "What do you mean this isn't home?"

"I don't belong here anymore." Tears started to well in her eyes and spilled over.

McCoy tried to touch her hands and Jim hit at them to get him to stay away. "Don't." Her breath started to come in pants as she panicked.

Spock reached towards her with a gold clad arm and Jim snarled at him. "Don't you dare touch me!" Spock's hand drew back at the harsh reaction. She had never spoken to him in that way before. It was pure hatred.

Jamison became more agitated as time wore on and McCoy, Scott, and Spock determined she needed to be restrained to prevent her injuring herself but it only seemed to make things worse as she fought them, clawing and kicking at them.

"Jim! You need to calm down! Breathe!" McCoy told her. Sweat beaded her brow and her pallor was gray. She was rapidly going into shock and the doctor could not get to his bag without releasing the struggling woman. He felt the psychic assault hitting his shields. Distress and fear from the blond hit him hard and caused him to flinch away. Spock felt an urgent need to calm her and try to understand just what was causing her to flinch away. She was home. There was no explanation that made sense as to why she would be in this state.

He reached between the men holding her and placed his fingers in a familiar position on her face. He had never melded with Jamison before, his fear at performing such an intimate act with her and becoming close to her was overridden by his extreme worry.

Images of the past two months she had been gone ran like a movie on a mix of rewind and fast-forward. She saw an alternate Christopher Pike, alive and well, visiting and talking with her in her quarters, a version of Doctor McCoy and Nyota, her belly round and heavily pregnant but she was kissing the doctor and played with a small brown-haired child. There was the Commander placing a losing hand of cards onto a table but smiling as Lt. Hendorff lays down his and pulls all of the poker chips towards himself with a grin. Then he saw something that shocked him. Jim being licked and pinned by I-Chaya, a version of his mother doubled over in laughter with soft brown eyes full of affection as she watched the interaction. Pain lanced through his heart as he saw her.

The images slowed and he felt shock at what he saw next.

He was watching her from the corner of her eye in the mess hall-No-not him. A different Spock. The differences were subtle but there. He had on science blues with the rank of commander.
showing on his sleeves. His hair was different. It was parted on one side and brushed back and he was showing far more emotion than he ever had and he seemed...comfortable with it, with not behaving as a full Vulcan should. Jim's emotions spiked at this image and Spock had difficulty controlling his own as deep, all-consuming love filled her. This Spock who she loved who was showing a hint of a smile as she becomes jokingly overdramatic at her losing to him in chess, this Spock breathing hard beneath her when they sparred and she had him pinned, Spock kissing her, Spock hovering over her as he made love to her and whispered Vulcan words of adoration and love into her ear, Spock calling her...t'hy'la...

"GET OUT OF MY HEAD!" Jim screamed mentally and kicked out hard. The film screeched to a halt as she fought against the intrusion and she violently pushed him out of her mind. Spock couldn't stop the surprise at her mental skill and strength and shock at what he was seeing. The emotional transference caused him to gasp in agony and he was breathless. He had not meant to go so deep or complete a full meld to this degree. Her mind was too compatible with his. It was...perfect and it frightened him.

Jamison became even more violent than moments ago and bruises were forming on her arms from their attempts at restraining her. Spock had no choice. He reached out to the join between her shoulder and neck and pressed his fingers together to the bundle of nerves. She went limp instantly.

McCoy sighed in grateful relief and pulled her close to him. "Thank you, Spock." He reached behind him and pulled out a hypospray and several ampoules. "Hell if I know what happened to her." He looked unsure and turned to Spock. "It is her, right? We didn't get the wrong Jim? Only she would never act like this."

A medical team arrived with a stretcher and Kirk was lifted and placed on the hovering device. Spock pressed his lips together in a grim line and contemplated his answer. It was their Jim but it wasn't. The world in which she was found was not what they had expected and Spock needed time to process the images he'd seen.

"Yes, Doctor. It is her."

McCoy brushed a strand of damp hair from her face and closed his eyes in pain. "Just what happened to her over there then?"
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

Part two of the drama :)

Chapter Twenty-Three

Jim paced in her rented room. She had been unable to sleep the night before, Sarek's words had spun around in her head. Married? Bonded? It was too soon! Sure, she had wanted to but it had been a far away thought. She had thought she had time and it caused her to nearly hyperventilate. What would Spock think when he discovered her past from Tarsus IV-the things she’d done to survive? What about her promiscuous past? What if she wasn’t good enough in his eyes? He’d be stuck with her! His mind would be linked with hers and it'd taint his mind-possibly damage him. She remembered just how sensitive he’d been when they had been rescued from the Sarpeidion ice age and she never wanted to see him like that again. Maybe she should leave to keep him safe.

Spock had tried to calm her and reassure her but his words went unheeded in the overwhelming knowledge that in two days she could be fucking married? Bonded? Both?

"I had not anticipated the scenario that took place at my parent's home. I apologize, however, we will likely be unable to avoid them and/or the ceremony as there is no route for escape since the Enterprise is not due to return for another ten days."

Jesus! She ran to the bathroom, her empty stomach heaving and her throat burned as nothing more than stomach acid and bile came up.

She leaned her head on the toilet, the cool porcelain soothing to her overheated face and Spock knelt behind her, stroking her back in a futile effort to calm her. "I hope this knowledge may assist in alleviating your discomfort. In Vulcan culture most bonded pairs are joined in a preliminary bond in childhood, more than an engagement but less than a marriage, and typically do not meet again until the bond is finalized. It is an arranged marriage between clans rather than a joining because of love or affection. Ours would be different."

"No that doesn't help." She snapped.

At least Spock's parents apparently liked her enough that they wanted her to marry their son she thought wryly and she started to laugh hysterically.

Spock paused in his ministrations. His eyes widened in concern at her strange behavior. "Jim? Do I need to contact a doctor?"

His words only caused her to laugh harder. Like a doctor could stop her panic. She thought sarcastically.

He grabbed her shoulders and pulled her to face him. "Jim?"

She wrenched herself free and threw up again.

Spock suddenly looked unsure. "Do you-do you not wish a bond with me?"
He looked so vulnerable in that moment and Jim's heart broke a little at the thought that Spock would doubt her love for him but it was so soon into their relationship. She'd not really had enough time to truly get to know him but she did know that he was her heart and her everything. "I didn't say that."

Spock let out a loud breath of relief but suddenly froze as if a terrifying thing was creeping up on them and he wanted to hide away. "I must-I must also inform you of Vulcan customs and...biology as we are soon to enter into a bond."

"I'm pretty sure I know about the birds and the bees, Spock, so you can skip that part." She told him in a hoarse voice.

Spock's ears turned green and he looked away. Was that shame? "The birds and the bees are not Vulcan."

She sighed, suddenly very tired. "What are you talking about?"

"Once a Vulcan reaches full maturity, which I am close to doing, they enter what is known as Pon Farr, the time of mating. It is a shameful part of our biology where we are forced to bond and mate...repeatedly and over several days with our chosen." Spock refused to meet Jim's eyes and clenched his jaw. She could see just how much this admission was costing him so she remained silent, allowing him the time to speak.

"We are stripped of our logic and become little more animals. If the mating urge is not satisfied we will die in the blood fever- the Plak Tow."

She reached over to touch him but he shied away from her as if he thought of himself as a poison to her. How could he even think that? It was the other way around!

"During our 'Time' we join with our chosen mind, body, and soul to make us one...if no challenge is raised. A preliminary bond, the one usually done in childhood, assists in making the joining easier as our hindbrains will see them as our mate rather than a stranger or challenger. Our bodies change slightly to ensure the mating is a successful one even if the female, or in some cases male if the couple is a pair of men." He swallowed, looking sick.

Jim turned that thought over in her mind and she could understand why such a thing was kept private. To a proud race such as the Vulcans, being forced to lose their logic simply because of a biological urge must be devastating. If humans were forced to go through something like that she was sure they would have the same reaction.

"The urge is only satisfied until the male believes conception occurs or the fever may also be sated by the male's instinct that their mate will not be able to easily break their bond and won't leave them. It is more challenging when there are two males rather than a male and female but not an uncommon occurrence as mental compatibility is the most important factor."

"Oh, Spock." She whispered in sympathy.

"I am unsure as to why my father believes this matter is so pressing and had not expected our joining so soon." He looked at her apologetically. "I had wanted the time to inform you of these things to allow you the chance to make an informed decision as to whether or not you wish to accept..."

She suddenly surged at him and wrapped her arms around Spock's neck and pushed his head to her
chest. She refused to let him feel alone in this. It was a part of him and Jim had promised that she would accept everything there is to him. Jim kissed the top of his head and just held him there. "Spock, I would do anything for you. I know that you would never hurt me and I would never hurt you. I love you. I will stand by your side and bond with you."

Spock deflated and collapsed boneless against her in clear relief. She murmured unintelligible words of comfort in his hair and stroked his back until her back hurt and butt was numb from the cold of the tiles but she didn't care.

Spock eventually crawled up and tried to kiss her but Jim pulled away and scrunched up her nose. "I told you I would do anything for you but grossing you out with my gross mouth after puking is one thing I won't do."

His 'almost smile' appeared and he pressed a chaste kiss on her lips. "I do not care about your 'gross mouth' but I will allow you your effort to protect me from this supposed harm."

Jim leaned back against the wall. "Thank you for telling me about this." She sighed. "I think I'm the luckiest woman in any universe that you don't keep any secrets from me."

Spock seemed to tense in her grip but Jim never noticed, her focus being on reassuring him.

xXx

Jim had just exited the shower when she heard a knock at her door. She knew Spock would answer and so she spent a little longer getting ready. It was when she heard arguing that she sped up and pulled on her shorts and a cami. She ran a hand through her wet hair and opened the door to a Vulcan face off between her Spock and his elder counterpart. They were both tense and facing each other in aggressive stances, their hands almost resembling claws. Jim was scared that they were about to kill each other and she quickly stepped in between them hoping that they wouldn't risk hurting her to get her out of the way so they could fight. She'd only seen the look on a face just like her Spock's once before. It had been right before the Spock of her universe had attacked and tried to kill her on the bridge of the Enterprise during the Battle of Vulcan.

"What the fuck is going on here?" She looked between them but they didn't move or even acknowledge her.

"Have you told her?" Selek growled.

"I have not yet had the opportunity."

"You have had your twenty-four hours." He snapped and said something that sounded a lot like a Vulcan insult or some kind of swear word that Jim didn't know.

"It is not your place." Spock snapped.

Jim's head darted between the two in a type of tennis match between the two. She started to become frustrated and angry as they slipped into a form of high Vulcan that Jim didn't understand.

"What the fuck is going on?" She shouted above their argument and they both finally looked at her. They acted as if they hadn't even realized she was there!

Selek spoke first. "Jim, there is-"

"No!" Spock tried to interrupt and Selek's head spun towards him, his eyes dark and dangerous. Jim felt true fear from them and edged away.
"-something you need to know." He continued and his eyes drifted back to her. His entire countenance shifted to one of almost sadness. Jim relaxed slightly but still remained on guard, at the ready if she needed to intervene between the two men.

"Spock has been deceiving you."

Jim laughed in disbelief at Selek's statement. "Spock wouldn't do that." She glanced over and Spock looked away before she fully faced him. "He would never-" She trailed off at her Spock’s expression and she suddenly knew that Selek was telling the truth. The air rushed from her lungs as betrayal and hurt started to creep into her. "Spock?"

She kept her eyes on him but addressed his elder counterpart. "What do you mean when you say he is deceiving me, Selek?" She asked him carefully.

Selek sighed and he felt far older than his years. "When you came to see me and told me that you could not return to your universe I knew that statement to be false as I had encountered a similar phenomenon in my time when my own James Kirk had been transported to a parallel universe. I had been able to bring him back and this same problem was reported several more times with other Starfleet personnel during my lifetime. Each situation was resolved."

Jim started to feel sick once more but it wasn't nerves this time. She didn't want to hear any more but the old man kept talking.

"I was able to gain access to the research and testing that the Enterprise conducted and discovered a subroutine carefully placed within the system. It was one that had a very familiar style; one which I recognized immediately. It was of a style identical to my own. I successfully located the time stamp for when the program had been tampered with and I accessed the video surveillance of the computer lab. I saw the commander enter the lab, input the sequence and see that the calculation could return you, then Spock programmed a subroutine, encountered Mr. Scott for a short conversation and left."

Jim started shaking. It couldn't be true. Selek had to be the one lying!

"This subroutine, once activated, would make it to where every time a new calculation was entered the simulation would always show it as a failure to remove the chance and the possibility of you being able to leave here. I further researched and uncovered information deep in the computer banks which was partially corrupted due to an attempt to delete it. It was a successful simulation test entered in by Commander Spock."

Selek's faced her with an expression of absolute sadness and regret. "I tell you this not to hurt you but to give you the knowledge and respect that you deserve to make an informed choice. Secrets kept can create an insidious poison that damages bonds and relationships over time and I cannot stand by and allow this to happen."

"Spock?" She asked in a small voice as her throat tightened. "Is this true?"

"Yes." He whispered in a hoarse voice that didn’t even sound like him.

She backed away from him, shaking her head. Her world seemed to narrow until all she could see was Spock, his head lowered and looking broken. How could he do this to her? Why would he do this to her? How could he let her believe that she had failed in her work and take away her past without giving her the option?

"Why?" She breathed.
"Because-"

"Look at me-dammit!" She shouted at him. Jim needed to see. She needed to understand. Did he think so little of her that he would do this and not even look her in the eye as if she was not his equal?

Spock slowly lifted his head and he cringed when he met her gaze. He looked small and defeated like a stray cat expecting to be turned away but Jim wasn't giving an inch. She needed to understand why the man she loved would do this.

"I did not want to lose you nor did I want you to have to make the painful choice between your family and friends or your life here. I wanted to spare you the pain of having to choose but I was also afraid you would not choose me."

Jim tore her eyes away from him. She paced five steps then spun and paced five more, needing to try and dispel the hurt but it only multiplied and morphed into anger. Jim gripped her hair and pulled, facing the Vulcan she loved. "But it was my choice! Not yours! Did you for one instant think that maybe had I had a choice that it might have helped me to accept this life easier? Or that it might have helped me to grieve? Or that I needed to have some form of control over my own destiny?" Her hands came down to her sides in fists. "How could you even think that I wouldn't choose you?!? I love you, you bastard!"

She felt a sensation almost like someone had run a finger down the back of her neck and she shivered in response but continued to focus on Spock. "Who are you to decide for me?"

She narrowed her eyes at him. "I was so stupid to ever think that anyone would ever be fully honest with me or even treat me with the respect that I am due as a person!"

Her eyes burned as furious tears fell down her cheeks. "How can I bond with someone I don't trust?"

Jim felt a yank to the scruff of her neck and it stopped what she was about to say. "What the-?"

Both Spock and Selek looked at her, their fight forgotten.

"Something's wrong." Now it was as if she was being enveloped in a painful and forceful hug around her middle and pulled away.

"Jim?" Spock's arm reached towards her and Jim started to reach back but the world dissolved before her eyes in shimmering lights as a transporter beam ripped her away.

xXx

Jim blinked in shock and her legs collapsed under her. One minute she had been fighting with Spock in her room in Shi'Kar and now? She squinted against the bright white of the transporter room surrounding and blinding her.

"Aye! I told yeh it was gonna work!"

"Yo moyo! She iz here! Transporter room to bridge! Keptin! It vorked!"

"Goddammit! Let me through!"

Jim's eyes finally focused. She was on the Enterprise. But they were still more than a week away on a mapping mission. Why the fuck was she here?
Scotty and Chekov were at the controls, whooping and celebrating and...crying?

Jim's vision was suddenly filled with blue fabric and then worried hazel eyes as Leo's face was there and way too close. She pulled away but his hands gripped her face and refused to let go. McCoy's brows were drawn down in worry and his face was scruffy, as if he hadn't shaved in at least a week. There were dark purple bruises under very red eyes as if he hadn't slept in a month but she'd only been gone a few days. Had something happened to Nyota or the baby?

"Jim? Jim! Say something!" He shouted and shook her.

"So loud." She whispered and the sensory overload caused her to cringe.

McCoy pointed to his head. "You see these gray hairs? Your fault! Every single goddamn one!"

Jim huffed a laugh but was still confused. McCoy started scanning her furiously but Jim noticed his eyes strayed to her far too often for him to be able to properly absorb the readings. It was as if he was reassuring himself she wouldn't disappear on him or as if he simply didn't believe that she was even there. "What's going on? Why am I here?"

McCoy stopped scanning and frowned at the readings. He started to prepare a hypo-

"Oh, no you don't! You promised me! Gah!" She glared and rubbed her neck.

"You have no idea how much I missed that sound!" He laughed, a wet and heartbroken sound escaping his mouth.

"Sadist."

"Baby." But there was no heat in his words. He dragged her to him in a crushing hug and he started shaking in her arms. "Leo? What's wrong?"

He frowned on confusion at the moniker and only squeezed her tighter and Jim didn't think he could hear her. Her shoulder became wet and Jim suddenly realized that was shaking because he was crying. She rubbed her hands up and down his back in an attempt to comfort him but it seemed to make him cry harder.

Scotty and Chekov joined them on the transporter pad and both of them seemed to have aged since she saw them last. Scotty had matching bags under his eyes and Chekov looked far too thin. Something wasn't adding up.

"Oh, lass! We thought we'd never get yeh back!" Scotty pulled everyone together and enveloped them in a group hug. A creeping suspicion started to settle in her mind. They never hugged. A slap on the back, a fist bump, and a shoulder nudge but a hug? She'd only ever been hugged by Bones and, even then, they were very few and very far between.

She started to wriggle under the combined weight of the three men but they refused to move, only holding her tighter which prevented her from moving. "Uh, guys?"

The pneumatic hiss of the door seemed to startle them into releasing her and Jim's heart clenched painfully when she saw Leo trying to wipe his eyes without anyone seeing.

Jim started to stand only to fall back down when her eyes saw who had come through the doors. "No! Nonononono!"

Lieutenant Sulu, a thin, not pregnant, long-haired Uhura, and a bowl-cut, gold clad, Captain Spock
stepped through the door. Strangely, there was relief on all three faces but Jim wasn't feeling any form of relief. She was back in her universe. She'd been taken away from her Spock, Pike, Jo-Jo, Leo, and everyone back there.

She was supposed to be bonding with Spock in a few days! Amanda and Sarek had been harassing her for her formal robes to be fitted. She wasn't supposed to be here! She'd just started to come to terms with losing her old life and now she'd lost her new one!

McCoy's head turned to where Jim was staring in horror. He turned back, his face screwed up in confusion and worry. "Jim?"

"Send me back!" She pleaded with Scotty and everyone frowned at her reaction.

"Jim? It's ok, kid. You're safe. You're home, now." He talked to her in a voice one would use with a small, wounded animal and he carefully touched her but Jim jerked away and shook her head. "I'm not home. This isn't my home anymore!"

"Send me back! I don't belong here!" She told Scotty who looked almost scared at her reaction.

"You do belong here! What the hell are you talking about, Jim?" McCoy's hands slowly inched towards his medical bag.

Spock looked thinner as well and there were lines on his face that hadn't been there before but Jim didn't care right now. She just knew that she needed to get back to her Spock.

"Commander Kirk, welcome home."

Jim had never realized just how...cold this Spock sounded.

"This isn't my home anymore!" She shouted and Spock looked like she'd slapped him but he recovered quickly and frowned.

"This is your home."

"No, it isn't!" She snapped and pulled herself up.

Bones—she still couldn't believe that it was him—Bones's eyes flashed in anger. "What do you mean this isn't home?"

They didn't seem to understand. Why didn't they understand? "I don't belong here anymore." Jim's eyes burned and her vision blurred as tears started to well and spill over.

McCoy tried to touch her hands and Jim slapped at them to get him to stay away. "Don't." Her breath started to come in pants as she panicked. The walls seemed to be closing in on her, her friends from her former life were too close. Why was she here?

Spock reached towards her with a gold clad arm and Jim snarled at him. "Don't you dare touch me!"

There were too many hands trying to hold her and Jim couldn't cope. She'd lost him! She'd lost her Spock! They'd taken her from him.

She fought like a wild woman against the people who were now holding her. "Jim! You need to calm down! Breathe!"

She wasn't breathing? Jim sucked in a ragged breath. She needed him! She felt a warmer than
human touch on her cheek and a small nudge in her mind urging calm and she recognized the touch but, at the same time, she didn't.

Images of the past two months started to spin behind her eyes like a movie on a mix of rewind and fast-forward. She saw Pike when he'd visited her in her quarters, Leo and Nyota, her belly round and she was glowing as she played with Jo-Jo showing her how to make a whistle from a blade of grass. Jim groaning as she tossed down her cards but smiling as Hendorff lays down his and pulls all of the poker chips towards himself with a grin, Jim being licked and pinned by I-Chaya, Amanda doubled over in loving laughter with her beautiful brown eyes so much like Spock's. The film slowed. She saw Spock watching her from the corner of her eye, the Spock she loved who was showing a hint of a smile when she becomes jokingly overdramatic at her losing to him in chess, Spock breathing hard beneath her when they sparred and she had him pinned, Spock kissing her, Spock hovering over her as he made love to her and whispered Vulcan words of adoration and love into her ear, Spock calling her...t'hy'la...

"GET OUT OF MY HEAD!" Jim screamed and kicked out hard. The film screeched to a halt as the fought against the intrusion and pushed him out of her mind. It was private. He was hers and she was his. She felt this Spock's surprise at her mental skill and strength and shock at what he was seeing.

She felt those same fingers touch her neck and then she knew nothing.
Woohoo! Another installment of this fun little story completed! Hopefully it lives up to expectations and I get spoiled with kudos and comments. (Yes, I am shamefully begging! They make me so happy!!!) I love love love hearing from you and can't wait to hear what you all think. I have yet to write the other side of the drama so it may be a little while but I'm sure you can imagine just how our poor favorite alternate Vulcan is reacting to the loss of his t'hy'la.
Any ideas are alway always welcome and may help me get over some I or writers block as just what to do. Thank you so much for reading and giving this story a chance!

Chapter Twenty-Four

Jim opened her eyes and she knew instinctively that it hadn't been a-a dream? Nightmare? Right now, she just felt numb. There was soft beeping to her left and she turned her head to look and saw, not the machine, not Leo but, Bones.

He was slumped half in a hard plastic chair next to her bed and half on her bed, his head so close to her hand that the short, soft strands of his hair tickled the side of her palm. The shadows under his eyes looked far more pronounced in the bright light of the medbay and the stubble on his face hadn't been shaved. He looked as if he was fifty rather than the thirty-six she knew him to be. She ran her fingers through his hair and he sighed and relaxed into her touch but didn't wake.

Her heart squeezed at the sight of her best friend looking so haggard. The last time she had seen him this bad had been after Khan's rampage.

"Oh, Bones." She murmured.

He had to have been beyond exhausted for him to have not woken up. He had always been so sensitive to his environment especially when in the medbay. The smallest change on a monitor would always have sent him from sleep to Doctor mode in seconds. It'd always been a major pain in her ass when she'd be sneaking into their shared dorm after a night out.

"The doctor was quite concerned with your reaction upon your return."

Spock's voice to her right caused her to stiffen and her hand froze in it's motions. It wasn't the same as her Spock's. Whereas his had been soft and soothing, this one's was harsh and clinical. It literally sounded like the computer that Bones frequently would accuse him of being.

She replied without turning, childishly hoping that if she didn't see him then he didn't exist.

"Well, it was a bit of a shock to go from one universe to another with no warning."

"Indeed, commander." A shift of fabric and the air next to her moved. She knew he had sat in the chair on her other side. He wasn't going anywhere.

She turned her head and stared at him balefully. "What do you want?"
He was exactly the same as she remembered. No. He was thinner, his eyes held a haunted look but
they were focused on her with an intensity that she had never seen before and-and he looked tired.

Her scrutiny continued as she looked at him. He was so different from her Spock. The bowl-cut
hairstyle was present without a hair out of place rather than the more human brushed back style she
had become accustomed to. He was still wearing the gold command colors that just didn't look
right on him and he was unnaturally stiff and straight-backed.

"I am here to receive a debriefing from the commander of my ship and to check on the health and
welfare of said crew member."

Jim snorted. She knew exactly why he was here. "Cut the bullshit, Spock. I know you're here
because you want to know if what you saw in my mind was true."

Spock's posture slumped and he placed his joined hands on the bed as if he needed it for support to
keep himself from collapsing. "Yes." He whispered and it was like the word had been forced from
him.

Jim's jaw clenched and she had to take a deep breath to calm herself to prevent the monitors on the
bed from beeping and waking Bones. "It's true."

Spock closed his eyes as if in pain. "You had a romantic relationship with the Spock of that
universe?"

"Yes."

"And you met...my mother?" He asked in a small voice.

"She's not your mother." She grit out. "She's his."

His eyes opened at her harsh words and they narrowed. He frowned in a mixture of confusion and
anger. "And you wish to return to that other reality."

"Yes."

He stood up and tugged his uniform top to straighten it. He was hiding behind the persona of
captain and it only served to anger Jim. "That will not happen as this is your home, commander.
We cannot tamper with other universes and timelines. You have seen what happened in our own
universe. It can have devastating consequences." She knew he was speaking of Nero and the
destruction of his home world. She understood his pain and reasoning logically but she couldn't
accept the loss of her place-her home that she had made in that alternate universe.

"Why can't I return?" She frowned and tight bands seemed to squeeze her chest at the thought of
losing the man that she loved. "You know as well as I do that this is no longer my home and it's not
like my being there caused any harm. It was my removal from there that is likely causing harm."
She was worried about how her Spock was handling her abrupt departure and couldn't help her
concern at just how far he would go to get her back considering the lengths he had gone to to keep
her with him. What if he inadvertently tore the fabric of time and space itself to return her to him?
What if it destroyed him completely? If her love for him was as strong as his for her just what
would he do? She needed to prevent it. Jim couldn't let that happen.

She glared, her eyes turning from their usual blue to a cold steel gray. "It's not like I'm going to
destroy worlds or start wars. I was happy there and so was my Spock." She threw up her hands in
frustration. "Hell, even I-Chaya liked me."
"You have no knowledge of how your appearance in that other timeline could affect future events. This is where you are supposed to be and my word is final, Commander Kirk!" He snapped.

Bones snorted in sleep and turned his head away from them. Spock took a deep breath and calmed slightly. "The doctor, as well as the crew, worked tirelessly to bring you back here. They did not...function well without your presence. You were..." He hesitated as he thought of the best word. "...missed a great deal."

Jim wondered if what he was saying also encompassed him. She shook herself, dismissing that thought. It didn't matter if it did. He had made his opinion of her very clear.

"They would have survived without me." She sighed and remembered her own efforts to return. "I tried to get back, too." She told him softly. Her guilt at abandoning her work had almost destroyed her but she'd had support to move on and she'd stupidly hoped that her friends and family would have to. Jim had had no idea of the love that they'd had for her, her pain from this Spock's rejection had severely clouded her judgement and had made her feel unworthy of such devotion.

"Indeed?"

She laughed but it was bitter and tasted sour on her tongue. "I did."

"Then you understand the extreme efforts involved and should appreciate the work that the crew did to return you home." He told her.

"I do." She bit her lip. There was guilt and she really did understand. She had had the same exact feelings. She loved them but she had come to accept the loss of her old life and she had thought that they would have done the same. "The longer I spent there and built relationships with the people there the more I became torn between staying and going. It was a battle between duty and responsibility on one side with potential love and happiness on the other."

Her eyes started to burn and she blinked back the tears that threatened. She would never let him see her cry. She wouldn't allow herself to be weak in front of him. Ever. "Did you know that my Spock had actually sabotaged my work to keep me there?"

Spock's eyes widened in surprise. "No. I did not."

She smiled in sadness. She had been so angry and her last words to him had been so awful, designed to hurt him and she regretted them so much. Would he even look for her after what she'd said? "He loved me."

Spock's brows drew down and his jaw jutted forward. "He is not your Spock. You would do well to remember this. You will not be returning to that existence."

Jim opened her mouth to argue but he clearly deemed the conversation to be over. Spock spun on his heel but Jim sure as fuck wasn't done. "He is my Spock!" She shouted at his back and he froze.

"He. Is. Not. Stating a falsehood repeatedly does not make it true. You are not naturally from there. This is your home and this is where you will remain." He bit out and refused to face her, his back and shoulders angry and tense.

Jim's breathing sped up and her heart beat a violent tattoo in her throat. She couldn't stay here! "He is t'hy'la!"

Spock turned and stormed to her side. He gripped the rails and Jim saw the metal bend and warp under his fingers. "Do you even know what that word means? That universe is not your home and I
forbid you to return there!"

How dare he! "I know exactly what it means." She whispered low and dangerous. She knew she was playing with fire and she wasn't afraid. Jim may not know the exact translation but she did instinctively feel what it was. The way Spock would say it to her with such reverence and awe let her know it's definition. "It means I am his and he is mine. It means that we are meant to be. It means that we are soulmates and he is my everything. He is my other half in every way. I will go back whether or not you forbid it and I can promise you that!"

Spock's eyes darkened and she could feel the tension crackling in the air. "Do you not care for this crew or for your friends and your family? Do you feel nothing what they went through at the loss of you? Do you even realize how hard they worked to get you home and how their grief consumed them when it seemed all was lost? If you leave it means that everything they worked for was for naught and that you do not value them as they do you. I will not allow you to return to that universe and I will do all in my power to stop any efforts that you or anyone else may undertake to make that happen." His voice was harsh and cold and she knew that he would go through with his threat. After all, a Vulcan never lies.

Jim's jaw hurt from clenching it so tight and her hands fisted tight enough that her nails cut into her palms enough to cause stinging pain. "Why? Do you enjoy seeing me suffer? I was happy, you son of a bitch!" She hissed at him.

"No. It is not that. I do not enjoy your suffering but you are not his."

"Then who's am I because I certainly am not yours! You've made that pretty clear over the past year when you wouldn't even be my friend." She argued back and Spock's eyes narrowed dangerously.

"You understand nothing!" His face blanked but his eyes still held the anger that he had shown moments before. "You would do well to accept your position and circumstances, commander."

"Aye, Sir." She spat his title as if it was an insult and she knew he heard asshole clearly. She rolled away from him and curled up in a fetal position to dismiss him. Footsteps receded behind her as he left and Jim closed her eyes in pain.

xXx

Jim sat still and silent, staring straight ahead with blank eyes as Bones ran his tricorder over her body. Spock's words spun around in her head creating an insidious, poisonous anger.

She'd heard that the crew had been trying to visit her through Nurse Chell and she had refused to see them but she couldn't escape her best friend. The sound of metal clanging snapped her out of it and she flinched away. She turned to see a very angry Dr. McCoy facing her.

"God damn it, Jim! Talk to me! What the hell was that on the transporter pad?" He threw up his hands. "What happened to you?!? Talk to me!" He pleaded with her and she could see he was close to breaking. His eyes were still red-rimmed and his, normally steady, hands were shaking. When had he last slept properly? She'd known her disappearance would have been hard on him but this was extreme.

She reached out and gripped them, squeezing his fingers and pulling him to her in a hug which he returned fiercely. "Oh, God, Bones. It's ok. Everything's ok." It wasn't but he clearly needed to hear the lie.
His hands twisted in the fabric of her blue medical scrubs. "We thought we'd lost you. I had to write your death certificate."

She had to swallow down the hard lump of guilt that had settled in her throat. Was she selfish to want to leave them and to leave Bones without a second thought? Here was the painful proof of just how much she was loved. They had literally gone to the ends of the universe and into the next one to find her.

"And then Selek told us where you might be and how awful that mirror universe was and we were so horrified at the thought of you staying there. What if we were too late?" She rubbed soothing circles on his back and waited for him to calm.

It took a further ten minutes for him to release her and pull back. His hazel eyes, still bright with tears, met her blue ones. "Were we too late?" Hands, far steadier now, gently brushed her hair away from her face and moved to grip her shoulders as he fixed her with an intense look. "What happened over there for you to be so traumatized on that transporter pad?"

She couldn't answer. She wasn't ready. She turned away and focused on the wall in front of her, mute and expressionless. Spock was going to force her to stay. What was it with the Spocks of any universe deciding what they wanted for her and not asking her? The sensation of helplessness made her feel almost dead inside. She was once again faced with an impossible choice. Where should she call home?

McCoy moved to get in her line of sight and carefully touched her hands. "Jim? Kid? I need you to talk to me." Jim slowly looked down. Bones was scared at her silence. "There's something I found when I examined you that I need to tell you but I need to know..." Her friend closed his eyes in pain for a minute and when he opened them Jim could see his worry etched on every line of his face. "Did they hurt you? Were you forced-" He couldn't finish. He swallowed looking sick and Jim suddenly gripped his hands.

"No. God, no!" What had he found? "What are you talking about? No one hurt me!"

McCoy looked skeptical and she knew that he was adding everything up and coming to the wrong conclusion. "Now, Jim, I saw that you had two separate fractures on your left leg that had been healed, a broken wrist, cracked ribs, burns on your face and hands that had were deep enough that the evidence is still detectable with a deep tissue scan and a recently broken cheekbone." He swallowed, looking sick. "It looks like you were tortured and then there's one more thing."

"Bones-" She knew what it looked like but most of those injuries had been from Beta Sigma and the rest were from Sarpeidon. What had he found?

"I need to know, as your doctor and your friend, what happened over there!"

Jim's stiffened and pulled away. "What the fuck? Bones, no one hurt me! I promise!"

Bones put his hands up and his voice became a level, calm, steady thing that she'd heard him use with traumatized crew members and small children. "Now, Jim, I know that you might believe that but it makes sense. The injuries and your desperation to return to that place even though you're now home and with your friends, and-"

Jim threw off the blanket and stood up. This was really not fucking happening! "I don't have Stockholm Syndrome! I was happy there! That's why I wanted to go back! I got hurt from Beta Sigma Starbase when that panel exploded on me and I broke my leg on an away mission when I was over there, ok?"
McCoy's entire demeanor changed but he still looked skeptical of her answer. A nurse poked her head in at the noise but he waved her away to give them privacy. "I need you to tell me what happened, kid."

Jim sat back down heavily on the biobed and told him everything. A few times her friend balked at her story but he mostly remained silent and let her talk. It felt good to unload. He didn't judge her. He didn't say anything other than to ask for clarification on her injuries. He just listened.

Jim wasn't sure what he thought about her relationship with the Spock of that other universe. She hoped he didn't think it was wrong and that she'd simply transferred her past feelings for the captain to him and she prayed he understood. She loved that Spock. She loved him and it was because it was him and he was different. It felt alien here now that she'd been over there. It was almost like the world was muted and the colors dull and she knew it was because she didn't have her Spock with her. He was her home.

"That would explain everything and-uh-" He paused and looked guilty.

Jim narrowed her eyes. "What?"

"You remember when we were at Xthalanu and you got hit by that spear?"

"Ye-es?" She prompted.

McCoy ran a hand through his hair, his bangs falling onto his forehead. "You were due for a shot."

Jim snorted. "With you, I'm, apparently, always due for a shot. I think you like it a little too much. Maybe Dr. Dehner in psych can help you work on that."

He raised an eyebrow at her sarcasm. "Smartass."

"You know the other Leonard McCoy was the same. It kind of scares me that even across universes all of you enjoy stabbing me."

He rolled his eyes and Jim had to admit to herself that she had missed seeing that more than anything. She had missed him.

Jim shifted on the bed. "So, what does an away mission injury from four months ago and some shot I missed have to do with something you picked up on a medical scan now?"

His brow furrowed and he looked really guilty now. "Well, in all the chaos that resulted your exam got shoved to the side. There was the emergency surgery, the infection-"

Jim raised an eyebrow telling him to get to the point.

"It was your bi-annual birth control shot."

"Shit."

And then it really hit. What he was telling her. "That Vulcan son of a bitch! He knocked me up!"

Her eyes narrowed at McCoy. "I thought men had birth control, too."

He threw his hands up. "Hey, he's not my responsibility. He's this 'Leo's'." He even added quotation marks complete with hand gestures. "And there is such a thing as condoms."

"It's a bit late for that, isn't it?" She snapped.
McCoy chuckled at her expense. "I'll say."

Jim winced. "Well, it was in a cave. We didn't exactly have prophylactics on hand."

McCoy shot her a distinctly unimpressed look. "A cave."

"And there was a fire."

"A fire." He repeated and tilted his head.

"And animal furs." Jim sighed over dramatically and smiled mock dreamily. "It was all really hot."

That got the reaction she'd been hoping for. Bones looked mortified. "Good god, woman! It's like a scene from a bad porno! I don't need to know all that! You're like my sister!" He shuddered. "I'm gonna need brain bleach! Gah!"

Jim glared. "Serves you right!" She jabbed a finger in his direction. "This is all your fault!"

"My fault? I wasn't exactly there cheering you and Spock on from the sidelines."

"Birth. Control. Shot." She reminded him and McCoy returned her wince.

Jim lay a hand on her still flat belly. She was pregnant. And alone. With her Spock's baby. She didn't know what to think. She was happy even though babies had definitely not been in her life plans...ever, but she didn't have Spock to do this with her. If she never got back then he'd never meet his son or daughter.

"He didn't know."

"Who didn't know what?" He asked.

"My Spock. He didn't know about the pregnancy." She murmured and an arm wound around her shoulders.

"Ah, kid. Nobody knew. It's early. If you spotted then you may have just thought it was just a light cycle." He gave her a squeeze and Jim leaned towards him and lay her head on his shoulder.

Jim suddenly straightened, remembering her visit to Spock's parents and I-Chaya's strange behavior. Had Sarek known? Had that been why there had been so much pressure for her and Spock to bond? It really was a damn shotgun wedding! Vulcans were sneaky bastards!

"I think Sarek and I-Chaya knew. Probably Amanda." Jim laughed. "I think he wanted me to make an honest Vulcan out of his son when he was planning our ceremony."

McCoy snorted. "I don't think he was ever that honest and pure if what you told me you two did in that cave was any indication."

Jim smirked and wiggled her eyebrows and he rolled his eyes.

His arm tightened and he yanked her back to him. "I am sorry, kid."

Jim shrugged and let her prickly cactus marshmallow friend do what he wished.

"You do know when I said I wanted to go back it wasn't a case of me choosing him over you. I love you. You're my brother from another mother." He snorted to hide a laugh but she heard it just the same. "There was just a peace there that I'd never felt before and I loved him, too."
"Yeah, kid. I know."
I'm back!!! So sorry for the long wait! Things have been super busy with RL messing with me. I just finished this chapter this morning and I'm hoping it's a good one. The next one will be put up faster since it'll only require some additions and editing. I also want to thank everyone who's been kind enough to give me their points of view, comments, and wonderful ideas! They're definitely helping me so much and I am writing every single one down! It makes this story better and I am shamelessly begging you all to keep it coming! I always read every single comment and review and they always make my day!

Let me know what you all think and to everyone who is kind enough to kudos and comment? Thank you so much!!!!

Darkwaters

Chapter Twenty-Five

*Alternate Universe*

Spock watched in horror as his t'hy'la disappeared right in front of him in a shower of gold, both of their hands desperately reaching for each other never to meet. She was gone. She was taken from him. He'd been told of heartbreak but had never thought it would happen to him. His chest seized despite his heart not being located there. There was agony as if his heart been viciously ripped from his side and it was being twisted and ripped from him leaving a black hole sucking the life from him in it's place. He'd heard the phrase 'It is better to have loved and lost rather than to have never loved before'. Whoever had said that had clearly never been in love. His heart was gone just like Jim.

Falling to his knees Spock did not feel the hard stone of the ground as he collapsed. His face twisted in agony and he turned to the elder version of him, betrayal written in his features. "You took her? Why would you do such a thing? To be cruel? To punish me for my dishonesty?"

The elder twisted to face him and his expression matched the pain he felt but Spock didn't see it. He couldn't see it through the pain that was clouding his vision. He pulled himself up and rushed at the man, adrenalin making him move far faster than he had ever thought possible. He didn't even remember moving across the room. There was nothing but a red haze clouding his vision and found himself with his hands gripping the older Vulcan's shoulders as he slammed him against the wall. "Why?" He growled.

Selek spun in his hand and Spock was suddenly on the ground, his arm twisted painfully behind him and a heavy weight on his back. "I did nothing, young one!" He punctuated his words with a savage jerk of him arm. Spock bucked his body to try to dislodge Selek to no avail but the older vulcan was far stronger than he appeared.

His eyes burned as tears threatened and he went boneless in defeat under Selek's harsh grip. "She is gone." He whispered, his throat tight with emotion and he felt shame for his loss of control but he
couldn't stop it anymore than he could stop breathing.

Selek released him and he slowly stood to face the elder. "We will get her back. I can promise you that but it may take time. The equation you had completed was successful based on her biosignature matching that of her universe. It was akin to using her universe as a magnet to draw her back to her former home. We have no such signature to link her to here."

Spock's fists clenched and he struggled to control his breathing to keep the panic and pain of losing her at bay. Her last words to him resonated in his mind like a painful drum beating against his skull and the look of hurt and betrayal she had in her last moments were burned in his memory. Every time he blinked he saw it behind his eyelids.

"There has to be a way." He whispered desperately.

Selek have him a small, sad smile. "I find myself feeling the human emotion of hope. There is always a way, Spock. We just have to find it."

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Spock and Selek worked through the night desperately searching and running through every sequence they could devise to no avail. They used planetary sensors and even those of docked and approaching ships to try and find a hint of Jim but luck was not on their side. It was almost like she just ceased to exist and had been nothing more than a hallucination or ghost.

Spock struggled with his emotions and was thankful for the guidance Selek selflessly gave to assist him. His human half also helped with tempering the strong volatile emotions of his Vulcan half.

His parents had been frantically attempting to contact him and were becoming rather insistent. It would not be long before he would have no choice but to inform them of Jim's disappearance. The Enterprise was returning early after Spock had spoken with Captain Pike and even Admiral Komack had requested the science vessel USS Galileo assist in the search and potential rescue of Commander Kirk for which he was grateful. Jim had been easily accepted into the fold and Spock had been surprised at the outpouring of support from his friends and colleagues. It just went to show how valued she was as both a person and a member of Starfleet despite the fact that she was a new one under probationary status.

"My son, tell me what has happened. Your mother and I sensed your distress through our parental bond."

Sarek's voice caused Spock to jolt in his seat in surprise and he turned to face his father. He could see the concern painted clearly on his features despite his Vulcan training.

Signing, Spock stood and placed his hands behind his back. He knew that if he didn't he would be wringing them in frustration and worry. "Jamison was transported back to her universe."

Sarek frowned. "Explain."

"It appears that the crew from her original universe were able to retrieve her and I have not had success in my attempts to locate her and bring her back." Spock looked away and struggled to contain his emotions, his pain at the sudden loss of his t'hy'la created a gaping wound that Spock was sure would never heal until she was returned to him. He needed her more than the air he breathed. "My calculations have been unsuccessful due to nothing physically tying her to here."

Sarek closed his own eyes in clear pain and empathy for his son. "Perhaps there is something thing her to this universe."
A flare of hope sparked within the younger Vulcan, bright and beautiful, and he turned to Sarek. "Father?" He questioned.

"There may be a physical tie." He repeated. A look of guilt crossed his features but it was quickly smoothed away. "I believe that Jamison may be pregnant with your child."

His heart sped up in his side, pounding an insistent rhythm that was surely loud enough for his father to detect. Pregnant? The possibility shocked him to his very core. During his youth he had been led to believe he was sterile or, at the very least, unlikely to ever father children due to his mixed heritage. "She would have told me."

Sarek raised a brow. "I do not believe she was aware."

"Then how is it that you have come to this conclusion?" Doubt laced Spock's words.

Frowning, his father moved to take a seat next to Spock's work station, his robes billowing out as he moved close to his son. He admired Spock and did not believe that he would be as composed had he lost Amanda. He was proud of Spock's strength and focus. "I cannot be certain but it is a high probability of it being true." He tilted his head upwards to view his son and to give him silent encouragement to sit with him to listen to his explanation.

Once Spock joined him he continued but his words were slower as though he was almost second-guessing himself. "When you visited us with Jamison I-Chaya greeted her with behaviors outside of the norm for her. She has only done such a thing once before." Spock nodded slowly and waited, his patience beginning to fray. Sarek's eyes softened at a memory. "When your mother was carrying you."

Jim was pregnant? With his child? An almost sort of primal satisfaction suffused him at the thought of such a thing. Warmth and happiness briefly filled him but it quickly gone and ice took it's place when he suddenly remembered that she was gone to him; stolen from right in front of him. Spock looked to his father sharply. "Why did you not tell me?"

Sighing, Sarek pinched the bridge of his nose. "It was a mistake, my son. A severe error on mine and your mother's part." He linked his hands in front of him and looked far older than his years as guilt seemed to weigh in on him and age him in front of his eyes. "It is my hope that this information may prove useful in locations your t'hy'la and return her to her rightful place by your side."

"Hope? That is a human notion." He questioned and Sarek's lips turned up in a small smile.

"It may be but I cannot help but feel it nonetheless." His lips quirked in a small smile. "I blame the influence of your mother."

"Indeed."

Spock considered this new development. It changed things a great deal. The situation now became far more complicated and had increased in difficulty twofold however, there was a better chance of finding her. Not only had he lost Jim, he had also lost his unborn child. He had to find them. He needed to find them even if it took the rest of his life to do so.

Already, too much time had passed and with every moment it may become more difficult to find them. The situation was grim but their child might just be the key to finding just where she is. His mind was spinning with new ideas and calculations to detect the both of them. It would have to be a different method of returning Jim to him. He could no longer simply use a transporter to retrieve
her. The risk was too great and he could not take the chance of beaming the child and losing Jim in the process, possibly losing them both. He would need to go to her.

His eyebrows drew down in a frown. "It still may be impossible. There are millions of possibilities as to her location."

Sarek paused and a slight frown crossed his face. "Humans have a saying that 'it will be like trying to find a needle in a haystack' and the solution in the fable was that you may need to produce a magnet."

"Indeed."

Another roadblock would be the fact that he had no detailed scans of Jim in her current condition or of the child, or rather child-to-be. His previous work had been dependent on locating her due to the differences in her signature than that of those around her. He had used the differences in her scans as a reference previously but now he would need to reverse the data now that he could use the varying biosignatures of those here to find their child. Once he found that he knew Jim would not be far. Spock's eyebrows drew down in a frown. He would need to...guess.

Sarek stood and held up his hand in a ta'al. "I have confidence that you are more than up to the task of finding both Jim and my grandchild. Live long and prosper, Spock."

Though Spock automatically returned the gesture he knew that without Jim he would do neither.

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Sarek returned to his home with a heavy heart, shutting the door with far more slowness than was logical in an attempt to stall the inevitable task of informing his aduna of current circumstances. He knew he would have to tell her but he did not wish to. She would be devastated.

Her excitement and happiness for her son finding his true love had made her eyes sparkle and shine so bright that it had easily surpassed that of the stars in the night sky. To tell her that all may be lost to him would dim that brightness. He could feel the intense worry from Amanda as it battered against his shields and he had to force himself to seek her out.

When he located her his heart ached to see how affected she was. Amanda was pacing, her feet pounding an insistent rhythm against the floor. When she saw her husband she stopped her frantic movements and spun to face him. Her troubled emotions bled through to their bond and threatened to overwhelm him. It forced him to raise his shields slightly to maintain his composure and tell her of the loss of their son's intended even though he knew in his very soul that it would be temporary.

"Is he ok? Is Spock hurt? What about Jim?"

Sarek's lips thinned as he struggled to provide an adequate answer to reassure his wife but came up blank. "Spock is physically fine but Jamison is...missing."

Amanda's eyes closed in pain and her shoulders fell as she sat heavily onto the couch. A conflicting mix of relief and worry took over. "What do you mean 'missing'?"

Sarek could see the toll that this was taking on her and he needed to assist her to understand everything that was happening. In her current state she would not be able to focus and absorb everything. He took a seat himself next to her. Sighing, he laid a hand on her arm and gave a gentle squeeze to reassure her as he continued his explanation. "She was transported in front of Spock and her current location is, as of yet, unknown."
Amanda pulled away and ran a hand through her short hair, causing it to stand up in parts. "How can you be so calm about this?!?" He longed to pull her to him and hold her tight. He desperately wanted to tell her that all would be well but he did not want to get her hopes up even though he had faith in his son's abilities.

Sarek moved to kneel in front of her and met her eyes, the ones that had been the first thing he had noticed about this beautiful woman he had fallen in love with. The same eyes that his son had for which he was thankful for every day. "I am far from unaffected! I am simply stating facts, my wife. It was, and still is, my hope that Miss Kirk is returned to us and us able to becomes a full member of our family. I found her to be a worthy, intelligent, and kind individual if a bit unsure of her worth at times." He touched his fingers to Amanda's, sending warmth and affection to her and she smiled back weakly.

"Do you think he will find her?"

"I do not believe for one instant that Spock will fail in his efforts to bring his t'hy'la or his child back and I will do all that I can in my limited capacity to assist him."
Hi all! Thank you again to everyone who reviewed and left kudos! It lets me know that I'm doing ok in writing this story and I appreciate it more than you can know. Thankfully it's been a calm week here at the homestead so I was able to get this chapter out sooner than expected but the next one may be a little while as its being written from scratch rather than being adapted and edited. Let me know what ya'll think! :)

Chapter Twenty-Six

Jim left the medbay in a daze after Bones had discharged her and went to her quarters with the prescribed meds that she needed to ensure that the pregnancy was safe for her and safe for the baby. Her time aboard the Enterprise was now limited due to the fact that they weren't a family vessel and so she wasn't sure what that meant for her career if she remained here.

Jim typed in the code to get into her quarters and the sight that met her was weird. When she'd last been on board her room had been a bit messy. "Lived in" Bones had called it but now it looked almost sterile. Everything had been cleaned up, her bed made to military standards, and everything in it's place. She didn't know how she felt about the fact that someone had touched all of her personal belongings but she did appreciate not having to mess around with tidying up what had previously been a mess.

Jim went to her small bookshelf and smiled. Someone, probably Chekov, had alphabetized her collection of antique paper books. Her small collection of knickknacks from the various worlds she had visited had been dusted and arranged carefully. She walked to her desk and typed in her code to access mission records to see what she had missed in her absence.

Reading through the reports, she realized she had missed a lot. They'd been to two new worlds and started preliminary exploration, sending reports to headquarters to suggest further study. They'd also solved a planetary dispute over water access. Uhura had been the one to thank for that since one faction had misinterpreted the other's requests and had taken the misunderstanding to the extreme of declaring a pointless war for three generations.

Jim then typed in her access codes to get into the files and reports regarding her absence when large red lettering appeared across her screen.

'Access denied. Clearance level nine required'

"Bastard!" Apparently, Spock went through on his threat and locked out everything. Nobody below a captain's rank could see the records. "Goddammit!" She slammed a fist onto her desk and her delicate rigellian crystal sculpture toppled off and shattered next to her. It perfectly mirrored her feelings. She felt broken in a way she had never felt before.

Jim leaned forward and put her head in her hands, controlling her breathing and trying but failing to calm herself. She needed to get a grip and come up with a plan. She had seven months before the baby arrived and she was going to be with her Spock when that happened.
The irony that she was, yet again, trying to get back to another universe didn't go over her head. Yes, it had been a shock to find out that her Spock had gone behind her back and sabotaged her work to keep her with him but the reasons for his betrayal had been nothing but good intentions. Jim had never thought that she would ever find someone who would love her enough to literally battle universes to keep her with them.

The look on Spock's face when she'd suddenly ripped from him had haunted her waking hours and it perfectly mirrored her own devastating pain at losing him and the life that she could have had with him. Despite the rough handling of his parents, she knew she would've loved being bonded to him. She wanted it more than anything. She wanted to be a part of that wonderful family. They'd accepted her flaws and all without her even having to prove herself. The trust they'd placed in her was humbling and a heady thing that caused a lump of emotion to form in her throat.

Jim worried about how Sarek and Amanda were handling her sudden disappearance and that they may never even meet or see their grandchild. Shaking herself from her morose thoughts, she resolved that her never getting back would not be a possible outcome but then what about her own mother? Was it really fair to take the same thing away from the woman who had given birth to her and lived her just as fiercely? Just like when she was in the other universe Jim was torn in two. Was she selfish to want to return? Sighing, Jim pressed the communication button to contact the bridge.

"Kirk to communications."

Her screen lit up with Ensign Jahara's grey skinned visage. Jahara smiled at the blonde and Jim hid her guilt at the happiness the young crew member showed at seeing her.

-"Jahara here. What can I do for you, commander?"

Jim returned her smile and typed in the frequency she needed. "Can you put me through to San Francisco. Here's the codes to get through."

-"Aye, sir."

It wasn't long before the screen changed to show an older blonde woman shuffling and situating herself on Jim's viewscreen. Before she could say a word, Winona Kirk burst into tears.

"Mom, I'm fine. It's ok. Don't cry." She tried to reassure the other woman but it only resulted in more tears. Jim hadn't seen her cry since she'd been rescued from Tarsus.

It was several long minutes before she was able to compose herself and speak without breaking down again.

-"Oh, sweetheart, I thought we'd lost you forever." She choked back another sob. "And when Leonard told me that they'd got you back I didn't believe it. I couldn't until I saw you with my own eyes."

Jim winced at the reminder of how much pain the loss of her youngest child and only daughter must have been for her mom. She looked like she'd lost weight and dark circles ringed her eyes. Her usually perfect hair was lank and limp around her face. In short, she looked awful.

The older woman's eyes sharpened as she viewed her daughter and immediately they softened in sympathy. -"You look awful, Jim."

She snorted at the criticism. "You don't look much better, mom."
A small smile graced Winona's lips and spark of life started to appear in her eyes. Wagging her finger at the camera, she smiled wider. "Now, don't you sass your mother, young lady." She quickly became serious. -"What happened?"

Sighing, Jim launched into the story of the past several months, glossing over a few things, including her relationship with Spock and how far it had gone but she should have known better than to try and get anything past her mother. They both had genius IQ's and her mother leaned back, crossing her arms and gave Jim a no-nonsense look.

-"You met someone over there, didn't you?"

Jim closed her eyes for a moment in pain and when she opened them she saw understanding reflected back. "Yeah."

xXx

Jim had been cleared for duty but she had some restrictions listed. She was really thankful that McCoy had listed the reasons as "confidential undisclosed medical condition" in the report. It had pissed Spock off to no end and he'd been harassing Bones as to the reason behind her restrictions since she was listed as healthy but he'd met his match with the Doctor who was able to quote Starfleet regs just as good as Spock and, at times, better he refused to bow to Spock's demands. Bones also loved riling him up. He told Jim that it was just an enjoyable bonus.

This gave her a few months of privacy before she started showing and to decide whether she wanted to stay on board for the duration of the pregnancy or leave the ship. Both options weren't something she wanted. On the one hand she wanted her best friend and doctor to deliver her baby because, not only was he the best, she trusted him with her life and that of her unborn child but, on the other hand, she definitely didn't want this Spock to even know about her pregnancy. She just had a gut feeling that it wouldn't end well. At best it would be awkward what with his girlfriend Uhura being present and, at worst, it'd be a nightmare with Spock knowing and maybe feeling that he had some right to it due to the baby's genetics.

She felt a small sense of comfort at the fact that she, in a way, had a small reminder of her time there and a part of Spock with her. Was she selfish to want to go back to Spock after everything her friends had gone through and done to get her back? She didn't know.

It was her first day back on duty and Jim was sitting in the mess hall in a table hidden in the back corner. She wasn't hiding per-se but she was still wanting a bit of time to catch up and absorb the general atmosphere of the ship.

It seemed that word of her miraculous return had spread like wildfire on the ship and she'd seen the reports on crew morale from when she was absent and it had been dismal. Efficiency had fallen more than fifteen percent and to the point that fleet headquarters had sent a specialist to assist in diagnosing and correcting the problem. It had not gone too well. Applications to serve on the flagship had even dropped by at least thirty percent.

But looking around now she saw a relaxed, happy atmosphere and she wondered if the evals had been calculated correctly. Was she that loved? She’d honestly had no idea. Jim had only been doing her job. Jim had loved working here and the people that she worked and lived with but she’d never thought that she was that important. She resolved to ask the ship's psychiatrist, Dr. Dehner, and McCoy the next time she saw them about those reports. There was no way a drop in efficiency and moral could have been that extreme simply due to her absence. In Starfleet history there had never
been a level recorded and that drop was dangerous, especially in any situation, combat or otherwise.

"Oh, my god! Did you hear? Commander Kirk was rescued!"

Jim's ears perked up at the sound of her name and she saw a blond yeoman talking with a Catian. He was a few tables over and clearly trying to remain quiet.

"I know! Maybe with her handling the running of the departments again it'll get that tight-ass off our backs. He just never let up!" The striped Caitian's tail whipped angrily behind him as if it had a mind of it's own.

"I had put in a transfer request and was going to be assigned to the Endeavor but I might stay now. Spock's good with systems operations and regs but he just doesn't know how to work with people. He doesn't get it that we can't do everything perfect or as detailed as he wants. I'm good but I'm not that good."

"Kirk was a good buffer." The Caitian agreed quietly.

Had she really been that important with her handling of the staff? Jim hadn't realized how much the crew relied on her skills to negotiate and keep the peace between Spock and the ship. Her last evaluation from the captain had deemed her "adequate".

"I think I might request to transfer to her ship when she gets her own command." The blond gestured with his fork and the Catian's ears twitched in surprise.

"She's getting her own ship? Where'd you hear this?"

"My uncle is Admiral Sateau's yeoman. He says he saw on a report the admiral signed off for him to file that she was slated for the Ulysses in less than a year."

The door to her right opened and Spock walked in. Jim looked at the pair still talking and she quickly balled up her napkin, weighing it down with a piece of her waffle, and tossed the projectile at the Caitian. She sighed in relief when she hit her target.

His fur puffed out angrily but once he saw Spock both crew members quietened. Jim collected her tray and was halfway to the recycler when-

"Commander Kirk."

Son of a-

Jim turned around with a fake smile painted on her face. "Captain."

Spock's brows furrowed in suspicion but he didn't say anything. He looked better rested since the last time she'd seen him but he still had yet to put on any weight.

"Perhaps you would like to join me for a cup of tea or coffee as our duty shifts do not begin for another thirty minutes."

Jim held up her tray which also had five PADDS balancing precariously on it. Since her return Spock had started trying to engage her in conversation and activities similar to those she had tried with him to be friends before her disappearance. She didn't want to be his 'friend' and it was painful seeing the face that was so similar but so different to that of the father of her child. She was holding onto her calm by a hair. "I'm actually finished here and I have so much-"
"I believe that I may be able to assist you in your work to reacquaint yourself with the ship."

What the fuck was he playing at? They'd never, in her entire time aboard the Enterprise, had...coffee nor had he ever worked with her on her paperwork. He’d always cited that it created independence.

Jim looked at her tray and then at the Vulcan in front of her. She grit her teeth and thought about refusing a second time but the look Spock was giving her told her he wouldn't take no for an answer. It was a strange dichotomy of pleading and forceful that confused her.

"Of course, Captain." She sighed tiredly. If Spock noticed her less than enthusiastic response he certainly didn't comment on it.

Spock nodded and gestured towards the table she had just vacated. "If I may, as I have yet to acquire my food and drink, I can obtain another beverage for you."

"Uh-thanks?" She more asked than told him. She'd started organizing her PADDs to keep busy.

"And what would you like, commander?"

"Decaf coffee with half and half cream, please." She told him distractedly.

Jim suddenly realized Spock was still standing in front of her and she looked up. "I do not believe you have ever chosen that beverage before."

"Uh..." Shit. "Tastes change?" She answered but it seemed to come out more like a question.

Jim's eyes suddenly narrowed in suspicion. "Wait a minute. How would you know what I usually drink?" She tried to deflect but Spock wasn't having it.

"Six months and three days ago I overheard you ordering a raktajino, double strong, double sweet. That is Klingon coffee which is toxic in large quantities to humans due to it's high caffeine content."

"That's-uh-creepy, Spock."

He opened his mouth to reply when Jim's comm beeped and Jim almost cried in relief. "Sorry, captain. Stellar Cartography needs to brief me on the upcoming mapping mission of the Trifid Nebula. Gotta run!" Saved by the bell.

Jim scurried out as fast as her boots would take her and she cursed herself for following Bones' caffeine limits. Who the hell can survive on two cups of coffee a day? It wasn't natural.

xXx

Jim had walked onto the bridge fifteen minutes early to a sea of smiling faces.

"Kommander on ze bridge!" Chekov announced brightly...and so loud!

"Holy sh-" She'd almost fallen on the steps when Chekov had announced her arrival, startling her and she had been forced to grab onto the railing in shock. Every crew member was standing at full attention and saluting her. Even Uhura was standing!

She was taken aback by the sight and she had to shake herself to return the salute but she was grinning. Bones walked up next to her and leaned close. "Smooth, Jim. Real smooth." Did protocol allow her to smack her CMO?
The main senior staff each came up to her and welcomed her back. Chekov and Sulu looked hesitant, probably remembering her less than enthusiastic reaction on the transporter pad. Uhura was polite but she seemed more curious than anything.

The Enterprise bridge wasn’t too different from Captain Pike's ship. His was larger and the accent lines a royal blue rather than the vivid red here but it was mostly the same. She loved the sounds of the bridge. It soothed her like a comforting blanket and almost felt like home. There was just one thing missing and she knew what, or rather who it was. This ship was the best in the fleet and it had the most modern and newest equipment. Everything from the sensors that helped them navigate to even the waste reclamation was far more advanced than anything before it.

Since the refit, engineering had gotten a new warp core that had more secure housing and a new design as well as a new form of dilithium crystal that was far more efficient. A lattice-type structure made the fuel last longer and had increased their top speed to warp seven. Jim would spend hours crawling around the Jeffries tubes with Scotty exploring their ship. Every part of the Enterprise was her favorite and she’d always learn something new every day and whether it be about the ship or her crew it was always something amazing.

Jim straightened her red dress and sat on the chair to relieve the gamma shift lieutenant and relaxed for the first time since her return. It seemed almost right to be sitting there but not quite.

The cut of her uniform was form fitting and she wondered how long she’d be able to pull it off before her pregnancy became noticeable.

Jim focused on the mission briefing even though it wasn't strictly her department. She authorized the requested additional science crew and engineers who were going to attempt to collect a sample of plasma from the nebula for analysis and sent the paperwork to Spock's yeoman for approval from the captain.

The last nebula they had visited had had a rogue planet that had kept the science department busy for over a week. It had been the weirdest thing Jim had seen.

"Captain on the bridge!"

Jim stood respectfully with the crew and felt a deep sadness when she had to vacate the chair. The Christopher Pike of this universe had tried so hard to get her her own command but he'd been outvoted. Admiral Archer had been the tiebreaker. He had still been bitter about Lt Cmdr Scott's removal from Delta Vega and Jim had a suspicion that he was a sexist asshole. She'd looked at his public record and had noticed a pattern of denials to women requesting and being considered for command positions. She struggled to understand how he had come to be so different from his uncle who had been a pioneer with the NX series Enterprise.

xXx

"Can I sit here?"

Jim looked up from her unimpressive lunch that Bones had forced her to order ‘for her health’. Uhura didn't even wait for her reply and Jim knew it was because the communication officer knew that she would have refused.

"I wanted to see how you were doing. I-uh-saw you when you got back. It freaked Spock out." She smiled nervously and it was a weird look on her, one Jim had never seen before on the confident and intelligent lieutenant. She'd always been stiff and impersonal towards Jim bordering on insubordination, especially when she had seized command from her boyfriend during the Narada...
incident, but she never quite went over the line. She was so cold that Jim wondered if she had her period in ice cubes.

"I'm fine." The blond told her succinctly.

Uhura looked as if she was waiting for more and Jim rolled her eyes and gave in. "I'm adapting. It was a shock to be back and things were-" She hesitated and was unsure what to say. The lieutenant and her had never been close so it was even weirder that she'd sought her out.

"Things were different." She finished.

"What was it like? We'd actually contacted Spock's older counterpart and he told us about his Kirk's experience." She shuddered. "It was awful. We were terrified that you'd been transported to that reality."

She blinked in surprise. "I thought Spock would have told you what he saw when he accidentally (on purpose she thought) caught my memories."

Uhura looked offended and pursed her lips. "He told me that it was private. Any mind meld is a deeply personal experience and even I was horrified that it accidentally happened in public on the transporter pad. Even we haven't joined minds because it's so personal and I'm not sure I'm comfortable yet with Spock knowing more than I'm ready to disclose and I think he feels the same."

Jim's head lifted in surprise. She thought that they would have melded by now. They'd been together for over a year and her Spock had touched her mind many times. Not a full meld where memories were exchanged but a strong surface connection that had promised more.

Jim had felt kind of violated by the captain's venture into her memories and now, with Uhura's words about the culture of melding, it confirmed that it had gone further than accidental contact, especially when he'd slowed things down to view her memories closer.

"Well, it was a very different place there." She stirred her potato soup and she knew it had been a personal thing that Uhura had admitted to Jim and a sort of peace offering.

It was not as hard as she'd thought it would be to be civil to her but things were different now in a way that Jim had never thought possible. With her experiences in that other universe she no longer felt the same way she used to in regards to Captain Spock. She didn't feel like she needed his approval because she already had the approval of her own Spock. She had also seen, by virtue of the fact that she had been 'rescued', the loyalty and love from this crew of the Enterprise. She had even heard the respect that she had earned when she had overheard crew members, not to mention the happy reactions from the department heads when she had met with them this morning. She felt confident in a way she hadn't felt since she had been in the academy.

Jim forced her mind back to the conversation at hand with Uhura. "Earth had been destroyed by Nero rather than Vulcan." Jim told her quietly as she sipped at the vitamin infused juice drink Bones had put on her meal card and was pleasantly surprised it didn't taste like hell.

"Oh, God!" Uhura's hands flew to her mouth and Jim stopped drinking.

Fiddling with the pink twisty straw Bones had keyed into her keycard (also not cool), she waited for her to calm her reaction. Jim had been the same. The human population there had not been as decimated as Vulcan's had here. Humans tended to be more bold explorers and fierce pioneers than their Vulcan neighbors and so there were plenty of human colonies that had already been
established on multiple planets. Losing their home world had been devastating on an instinctual level but survivability of their species was not at risk. "Like I said, different."

She pointed at Jim and waved her finger back and forth between them. "Did uh..."

"Your counterpart was there." She smirked. "I liked her hairstyle better."

The answering, almost playful, eye roll at her snide comment had made it worth it. "And yours?" Uhura asked hesitantly.

She debated telling her but ultimately decided to indulge her. "Dead. Died at the age of thirteen. And Jim Kirk was a male there." She shrugged, feigning indifference. "Like I said, different."

Jim pushed away her half-eaten lunch, no longer hungry now with the morbid topic of conversation. As it was she was hanging onto her heartbreak and sanity by a thread. "There were some people alive there that are dead here and visa-versa. Gaila and Pike were there but my entire family was gone."

Jim could see that the news of the Lieutenant’s best friend's survival somewhere seemed to provide a sense of comfort despite the fact that she could see tears starting to pool in her eyes. "When..." She cleared her throat and collected herself. "When you got here you were telling us to send you back. Why?"

Jim raised a brow in surprise at the other woman’s emotion. It almost seemed like she cared but that couldn’t be true. Could it? “I was happy.” She told her simply and Uhura’s face registered surprise and it seemed like there was an underlying hurt present.

"And you aren't happy here?" Her tone was disbelieving and it irked Jim to no end.

"It’s not a simple matter of being happy here versus being happier there." She paused and wondered if her words would be considered cruel but it was the truth. "I love my friends. I love the people here. I love Bones and I thought I was happy here, but over there, I experienced true happiness and I didn't want to leave. I still want to go back but I also want to stay.” She glared at her tray as if it had caused her to feel such turmoil. “It's complicated.” She growled.

Uhura still looked surprised by her answer but seemed to understand. For a woman as skilled as she was at interpreting languages she seemed to have completely missed her commander's body language for the months she had been on the Enterprise. It had been no secret that she had been struggling but, then again, maybe Jim had been more skilled than she had thought at hiding herself and her feelings.

Jim sighed and her eyes met the deep brown of Uhura’s. They almost looked like that of the Nyota’s from the other universe, caring and worried. It was unsettling. “Would you have wanted to leave a place like that? Would you have wanted to leave a home that made you happy? Truly and completely happy?” She asked.

"No. No, I suppose not." Uhura answered softly and Jim felt a sense of closeness when it seemed that she understood
Chapter Twenty-Seven

Spock looked over the sensor data from the USS Galileo, the USS Enterprise, Vulcan, and multiple other sources. The sheer amount of data was overwhelming and he had barely resisted the urge to pinch the bridge of his nose in a very human fashion when he had seen it but it was a near thing as he had been struggling in every other aspect of his emotional control since Jim had been lost. Compiling and organizing everything had taken more than a week even with assistance from the entire science department. Very little of use had been discovered despite the fact that this time around there had been no compromise or damage to any of the equipment.

The commander knew he was on a limited timetable. The ship could not remain stationary and focused on this one task for forever even though Spock and many others on board desperately wished it. Orders had come in for them to disembark and make their way to the Pergium Production Station on Janus VI, a long-established mining colony, to answer a distress call that reported some sort of 'monster' that has been responsible for the deaths of forty-two workers and the cessation of mining.

Data from the Enterprise and copies of everything they had on the recent events centering around alternate universes were transferred to the VSA for the purpose of studying the anomaly rather than the rescue and return of Jamison but that fact did not bother Spock. If anything, it encouraged him. The more minds that focused on the conundrum, the better his chances were. All conclusions and theories were frequently transmitted from the Vulcan Science Academy to the Enterprise and they returned the gesture and, for that, he was grateful. Spock had his father and Selek to thank for that.

Everything just seemed to be taking too long and it frustrated the Vulcan to no end. For the past nine 'days' Spock had been limiting his rest period to three Terran hours which was the required minimum for a Vulcan's survival for long term. He'd been excused from bridge duty since they
were still in dry-dock at Vulcan but that was due to change as soon as all crew members were on board for them to answer the call from Janus VI. Spock had been working through Alpha to focus on his, so far fruitless, search for his mate. Beta and Gamma were where he spent the majority of his off duty time. Currently, the labs were empty apart from him and the solitude was a welcome thing.

He input his latest calculations into the simulation based on his original work and a negative result flashed across his screen. Spock's fists clenched and he forced himself to close his eyes to calm his instinctual reaction to his forty-seventh failure. "I am Vulcan. Frustration and anger are emotions. Emotions are in the mind and the mind can be controlled." Another deep breath. "I am Vulcan. Frustration and anger are emotions. Emotions are in the mind and the mind can be controlled."

Speaking the mantra aloud did little to calm him. He tried. Oh, how he tried but his exhaustion was fraying his control. The emotions he was experiencing would not be calmed. He could not calm them! His hands relaxed marginally but quickly turned into claws. He felt himself snap and he grabbed the PADD, launching it across the lab with a roar for it to smash against the wall where it shattered on impact. His breath left him in staccato bursts as his chest heaved from his exertions.

"Kroykah, Spock!"

He spun around at the voice, his face twisted in anger and his shoulders were in a tense T. T'Pring stood opposite him and her presence radiated a calm Spock did not feel. It was a monumental effort but he slowly forced himself to place a Vulcan mask of blankness on his features.

She came closer and stood opposite him. "Your control is weak, sa-kai tomasu." (Definition-brother kinsman-a form of a male relative not by blood but sharing the same cultural, racial or national background as another)

He could not control the wince as her eyes softened in empathy and she reached out with her hand, resting it carefully on his wrist. He felt a sense of calm slowly reach him through her telepathic projection and the tension slowly leeched out of him.

"Spock, you are harming yourself and I cannot allow that to continue. Your mate would not want this." She challenged Spock and he sagged in defeat.

"I know but I cannot stop." He whispered hoarsely. "I cannot fail her."

Sighing, she saved Spock's work and turned off the console. "You will not fail her and you are far from alone. Allow us to assist you."

Spock looked away in shame and T'Pring bent slightly to ensure she was in his line of sight. "You know why my husband and I were assigned to the Enterprise by the VSA for an undetermined amount of time. Our work is to study this theory and proof provided of alternate realities."

At Spock's lack of reaction she continued. "I will do all within my power to return Jamison to you." Spock looked up in surprise and a small smile appeared on her face. "It is a great honor for us to help you."

"That is not what your assignment is."

She shrugged in indifference. "Having the ability to transport someone from an alternate universe would provide indisputable proof of the evidence before us and be a fascinating area of scientific study." She smirked slightly, her eyes glowing with mischief. "If my interpretation is not strictly adhering to my orders then that is the fault of the VSA for being vague and I have the right to
interpret as I please. They did not specify which aspect of study was requested."

He straightened at her words and almost couldn't believe his ears. "But then you would be lying and risk your career. You could possibly be removed from here."

Straightening in slight offense, T'Pring raised an eyebrow at Spock's accusation. "I am among the leading scientists of our time and still retain the highest testing scores at the VSA. This is not said due to ego. It is fact. I am hardly risking my career as they need me far more than I need them. If I am dismissed then it will have been worth it to have helped a friend and I am confident many other opportunities will present themselves." She told him primly.

"But I may be close to a breakthrough." He protested and T'Pring allowed herself to roll her eyes in a very human fashion. A habit she picked up from him when they were children.

"Now come. You must rest and meditate to reach your full potential. I will not accept anything less. Stonn and I will continue your work while you are indisposed."

Spock still stubbornly refused to move and the woman opposite him glared. For a moment, Spock could see the image of a child T'Pring in a pair of denim dungarees his mother had forced her to wear when they had helped her in her garden overlaying that of the grown elegant woman she was now. The dueling expressions of fond exasperation and annoyance were the same. "If you do not then I will have Stonn nerve-pinch you and drag you to your quarters. It is for your own good. Your Dr. McCoy is also willing to 'sedate your ass' if you do not comply." Reaching out an arm to the commander, Spock weakly accepted the assistance. "I will assist you in your efforts to clear your thoughts."

The walk to his room took far longer than she expected and Spock almost stumbled and fell due to his fatigue finally hitting him. The blast of warmth that hit him upon entering only caused him to relax further.

T'Pring led him to his bed but the moment he sat down he could smell the vanilla lotion Jim used, see the half-finished hardback book resting on the nightstand, and feel the soft blanket she had replicated because she wanted a reminder of her old one from her former home. All of these things assaulted his senses and he shook slightly as he tried to reign in his pain. It was as if his thoughts were one of the sandstorms that frequented Vulcan, dark and dangerous, and he was helpless against the onslaught.

"Speak your mind, Spock."

He felt the bed dip as she sat next to him and a warm hand rested on the nape of his neck. T'Pring gasped in shock at the intensity of the pain Spock felt. "I cannot help you if you do not let me. You may deny it all you want, but you do need it."

He couldn't answer. His focus on trying to hold back was taking every bit of his rapidly depleting energy.

T'Pring squeezes his arm in sympathy. She will forever be grateful to him for helping to find her mate and she understood his pain. She would feel the same if she lost Stonn despite the misconception of other species that they do not have emotions. "You are being as stubborn now as you were when we were children. You risked your life to complete the kahns-wan ritual as a child to prove yourself and you are risking your life now. You have nothing to prove to anyone and to risk your health is illogical." She turned and settled herself next to him, crossing her legs and preparing to assist him in settling his thoughts. "If you are not able to function properly then you will be useless in your endeavors as a commander of this ship and in returning your t'hy'la to her
rightful place at your side."

Spock slowly follows her example with a stubbornness that would rival a Tellerite and she knew he was finally listening, albeit reluctantly. She needed his focus to be diverted for him to relax enough for her to reach him.

"Spock, you know that if it was not for you I would never have found my K'hat'n'dlawa. (Definition-one who is half of my heart and soul in it's deepest sense, became unfashionable after Reformation because of it's emotional connotation). I will never be able to repay you for that. Your family's influence and assistance due to your clan position made our bonding possible. You made it possible by refusing to bond with me when we were children during the kan-telan when you became aware of my regard for Stonn and his for me. You talked with your father to support the joining of my clan and Stonn's as an honorable match." She pauses and carefully chooses her next words, whispering them as if someone could overhear them. "You have always been quite the rebel and clearly a bad influence on me."

Spock snorts a small breath of amusement and T'Pring feels a small measure of satisfaction as Spock's shoulders start to lose a bit of the tension that had been there earlier.

"I do have one more request of you, sa-kai tomasu."

Spock's focus was beginning to slip as exhaustion was rapidly making it's presence known at the soothing tones of T'Pring. He remembered their first months together as children.

There had been no small amount of resentment towards him due to his half-breed status but after he had bested her in several rounds of kal-toh and had matched her skills in all aspects of learning T'Pring had started to shed the behaviors of the belief in the cultural taboo of his mixed blood. She had started to respect him as an individual and quickly became fascinated with him. It was a welcome thing when she even eventually agreed to learn chess in deference to his human half, and taught him the Vulcan martial art of suus-mahna for his Vulcan half, respecting both parts of his dual heritage. It had been a slow and gradual thing but they became friends. Spock, who had felt a sense of loneliness during the two years he had spent on Vulcan as a child, was finally not alone.

"I request your name."

Spock looked up sharply and frowned in confusion. "Explain."

She raised a brow at the slower than normal understanding of her request. "I am with child and Stonn and I would like to name our child after you, Spock, as a sign of respect and gratitude."

Spock blinked slowly, surprised at the unusual request. It was a rare thing in their culture to name a child after another without basing it on the original bearer and a great honor to do so. "I give my name and thank thee for the honor."

"Well, that settles one thing." She reached out her hand and carefully pressed delicate fingertips own his meld points and paused for permission. Spock nodded his head and she took a calming breath. "I consider you to be a close friend. You are far stronger than I to have achieved as much as you have in the short time Jamison has been missing. I do not believe I would have been as successful had my bondmate been taken from me." The brunette reluctantly admitted.

Spock felt her presence fill him, a calm and gentle warmth surrounding him and the swirling storm of calculations, the sight of the failed simulations, and pain at the memory of Jim disappearing in front of him that had been on a constant loop slowed to a gentle wind. She did not remove his thoughts but guided him to place them aside temporarily. In it’s place she pulled forward more
pleasant memories. Images of Jamison smiling at him across from a chessboard as they repeatedly battled, the smell of her golden hair as he held her close to him, and the sound of her musical laughter helped to further push negative memories to the side so that the focus was not all on things that were bad. Spock's breathing slowed and relief swept through him.

“These thoughts are what you should allow yourself to focus upon as they are the reason you are working so hard. Do not focus on the negative and forget to live. Use these to reach for the future as you will be with her once more.” He barely felt it as she lowered him to lay on his bed and covered him with the blanket that Jim had used, the scent of vanilla and something that is uniquely Jim lulling him into a welcome slumber. "Now rest and allow yourself this respite to regain your strength. Stonn will come to guide you through meditation in eight hours as he is far more skilled than I."

Breathing a sigh of relief when Spock's breathing evened out as he finally fell into a deep sleep for the first time in eight days, the brunette turned the lights low and left the commander's quarters only to almost run into Dr. McCoy who was practically bouncing on his toes in agitation and worry.

"So?"

She raised a brow at the emotional display which only seemed to frustrate the doctor more. "I was not aware stalking was part of a CMO's duty."

He rolled his eyes at her non-answer. "It is when I've got a stubborn vulcan defying medical orders. Is he asleep?"

"Yes, doctor, and he will likely remain so for eight hours. Stonn will then ensure that he is successful in meditation for him to restore his controls. I will leave it to your expertise to make sure he takes in the necessary amount of nutrition."

McCoy sagged against the wall in relief and ran a hand through his hair making it stand on end which added to the image of a human in emotional distress. "How'd you do it? I've been bugging him for days to get some sleep."

T'Pring's lips thinned in irritation at the prying nature of Dr. McCoy but she did understand the need for him to be curious. "It is private and up to the commander if he wishes to disclose what we discussed."

Nodding, the doctor straightened and smiled slightly. "Thank you for helping me. I can't help but worry. Every person on this ship is important and Spock is my main concern at the moment. He needs a lot of support and I appreciate everything you're doing." He looked away briefly and swallowed hard. When he turned back she could see his eyes were shining. "The loss of Jim has been hard on all of us and harder on Spock. I can't even imagine what he's going through right now."

She bowed her head in acknowledgment. "I agree with your assessment and will do my best to not allow this to happen again."

He looked at the closed doors leading to Spock's quarters with a sad expression. "I only wish I could do more."

"We all do." She admitted softly.
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

And here's another chapter that I hope will be fun for all to read. The next few chapters are gonna be in Jim's original universe since it's a busy few days for her. I'm basing a lot of this on the Star Trek: The Next Generation episode titled "When the Bough Breaks" but with a twist. I'm borrowing some of the dialogue but the story is different enough so I hope it's enjoyed.

Thank you again to all who've taken the time to review or give kudos! I'm sorry for being rude and not replying. I promise I'll get back to everyone asap! :)

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Jim was cramming a donut into her mouth, holding it with her teeth to type on her PADD. She was enjoying one of the few mornings that she felt human and had just entered the lift when she was joined by Sulu, Chekov, and Spock. She nodded to them and took a bite of her breakfast.

"Is Dr. McCoy aware that you have started to put on weight in your abdominal area? Your pallor is also not that of a healthy human and, though you have put on weight in some areas, your face shows weight loss."

Sulu and Chekov turn slowly, their mouths opening in shock.

Jim choked on a swallow. "Excuse me, captain?"

Spock opened his mouth to repeat what he said and it snapped back shut at her glare.

"Yes. Dr. McCoy is well aware of my health issues." She hisses. "Not that my health is any of your business unless it affects the ship...sir." Her eyes narrowed at him and she was struggling to keep her tone below that of insubordination.

"Then I assume he is taking steps to assist you in this matter."

"I would appreciate it, sir, if this discussion was not in a public setting." She tempered her glare but her blue eyes turned icy at him. Nosy bastard and he was a little too observant for Jim's comfort. She wondered how just how long she truly had before he worked out the reason behind her "strange" symptoms.

"I am simply stating an observation and if your health is not at peak then it could affect the running of the ship."

Jim snorted. She knew for a fact that he would never say something like this to anyone else. "Bit if advice, sir? You never ask or comment to a woman about her weight."

Chekov and Sulu edged away but they watched them warily. Jim could tell that it was more along the lines of them thinking how to stop the fight that was about to start rather than out of true discomfort. Chekov started nodding in agreement with Jim's statement but it went unnoticed by the Vulcan.
"Why?" Spock asked, looking genuinely confused.

Glar ing at him, Jim hit her PADD with a finger far harder than needed to turn it off. "Try saying what you said to me on Uhura and test it out. It'll give you an accurate test sampling on the psychological aspects of human female behavior in regards to body image beliefs and social norms."

The doors opened to the bridge and Jim stormed off to her station with the lieutenant and ensign following behind her.

"Dude." Sulu whispered as he passed.

"I know." Jim hissed and shook her head as she stuffed the rest of her donut into her mouth.

xXx

Jim was miserable. She was tired, nauseous, and her boobs hurt. She'd even fallen asleep for a minute on shift on the bridge and had been forced to be woken up by an ensign. It had been mortifying and it had sent warning bells ringing in her head when she had caught Spock watching her with a penetrating gaze. She had a sneaking suspicion that he was splitting his thoughts between trying to figure out what was wrong with her and monitoring her since he likely knew she was spending every moment she had free (when she wasn't either sleeping or puking) trying to hack into the system to figure out a way back to her Spock. Between her dual duties as chief of security, first officer and working on a way home all while feeling like something scraped off of a klingon’s shoe, she wasn’t doing well at all.

She wasn't having much luck avoiding Spock's scrutiny, either. When a yeoman had bumped into her yesterday it had felt like someone had punched her in her breast. Jim had struggled to not cry out but Spock had caught it. He'd then ordered her to the medbay for a check of her 'injuries' and had requested a report from Bones. He’d snapped at Spock that she was fine and to stop wasting his damn time.

Spock just seemed to be trying to be more involved and he sure as hell didn't seem to like it that she was limiting their interactions to professional only, not even attempting friendship any longer. Nor did he seem to like not knowing something that was going on.

Currently, she was draped over the toilet, her face pale and clammy trying her damnedest not to throw up the crackers she'd tried eating for dinner. She was also wary of the Vulcan next door. She knew he had superior hearing and she'd locked the bathroom door and turned on the shower to try and block out any sound if she did lose it. Morning sickness her ass. More like all day sickness. She'd lost almost ten pounds in the past several weeks and Bones was starting to get worried. The antiemetics he'd been prescribing made her shifts bearable but she was still struggling to keep food and liquids down.

Jim's mouth watered unpleasantly and she heaved into the toilet, her cries echoing as the shower automatically shut off just as she started vomiting. Fucking perfect timing. Once she started, she couldn't seem to stop and she just kept going for long enough that nothing was coming up except strings of foul tasting bile.

The comm panel on the wall started beeping. "Commander Kirk, do you require assistance?"

Jim moaned in misery. "No, Captain. 'M fine." She started to dry heave again and her abdominal muscles protested vehemently at the action. Those were the worst.
"I beg to differ." A deep voice practically snapped at her directly behind her.

Jim looked up with watery eyes and a flushed face at a very pissed off Vulcan.

"No, Spock. Really, I'm fine."

His response was to hit the comm panel with more force than necessary, his furious eyes still trained on the blonde on the floor. "Captain Spock to sickbay. A medical team is needed in Commander Kirk's quarters immediately."

"Belay that! I-"

-"Understood, captain." They interrupted.

Jim glared at Spock but knew it was ineffective when he brought her a glass of water and knelt next to her. She accepted it but didn't want to risk throwing up again so she just rinsed her mouth and spat it into the toilet and flushed.

"Thank you."

"I believe the correct response is 'you are welcome'." His eyes traveled up and down her body and face, slowly assessing and calculating, as if he could determine for himself an answer to the question of Jim's 'illness'.

Jim moved to a sitting position and started to try and stand but her legs had numbed from kneeling for so long on the tile floor and her abdominal muscles were too sore so she stumbled right into Spock's waiting arms. She made to rise again but he held his grip on her and refused to let her rise.

"I'm fine Spock. Let me up."

"Fine has variable definitions and none of them seem to apply to you in your situation." He told her tightly as he held her and Jim struggled against his hold.

"Commander, cease your struggles. You will only injure yourself in your fragile state."

His arms were like steel bands wrapped around her and were completely unbreakable. "I am not fragile, dammit, and I want off the fucking floor!" She snapped.

"Very well." Her view tilted and her stomach lurched unpleasantly as Spock swung her up into his arms and carried her to her bed, laying her on it carefully. She debated getting up again but she just felt like shit and threw an arm over her eyes and focused on her breathing.

"I request that you tell me what is the cause of your illness."

Was that...concern?

"I'm not sick."

A pause. "Then explain why you have lost weight and have been vomiting with increasing frequency since your return."

Jim was saved from answering by the arrival of the medical team her nosy Vulcan had ordered.

"Dammit, Jim. Why didn't you call me?" The voice was gentle as was the accompanying Hypospray to her neck. Her nausea started to calm slightly and she felt safe enough to remove her arm from her eyes.
"The privilege of rank?"

Bones gave her a distinctly unimpressed look. "Dumbass." Bones grumbled at her and started pulling equipment out of his medical bag. He turned around to his Vulcan shadow.

"I've got it from here, Spock."

Spock's lips thinned and he eyed at Bones with distrust.

"Perhaps you may require my assistance."

"I said I've got it!" Bones bit out.

Spock straightened and stood at parade rest, hands behind his back. "The commander’s symptoms appear to be worsening under your care. Maybe a stop at a Starbase with more advanced care and different medical doctors would be warranted."

Jim felt a storm brewing as McCoy's face turned a ruddy color that'd match any security officer's shirt. "Has her condition affected her duties, captain?"

"Not as of yet, but-"

"Then she's fine where she is and you can take your ‘but’ and shove off...captain."

Spock's mouth snapped shut with an audible click. "As you were, Doctor." With a final look at her he spun on his heel and left.

"As you were, you green blooded busybody." He grumbled.

Jim huffed a laugh on her bed. "Remind me to never piss you off that bad." She told him, impressed.

McCoy sighed and pulled out a collapsible IV pole and bags of saline with other items and she grimaced at the sight.

"Bones?"

"Hmm?" He asked distractedly as he focused on running his, ever-present, tricorder over her, focusing on her abdomen and heart.

"Spock won't stop bugging me lately and I don't get what his angle is other than being nosy as fuck."

He put down his tools and bit the inside of his cheek, clearly thinking. "Maybe he saw the chemistry that you and that other Spock had and is jealous. They say jealousy is a green eyed monster. Maybe they should call it a green blooded monster."

Jim rolled her eyes. "No. I don't know. He's happy with Uhura but he's really determined to stop me from going back. It's damned weird."

McCoy shrugged. "Maybe he just wants to be your friend?"

Jim snorted in disbelief at his suggestion. "Yeah. Right. He once told me that 'Vulcans do not have friends'."

"Like I said, I think he saw the dynamic between you and that other Spock and he wants to
experience that." At Jim's dubious expression he continued. "Yeah. He's happy with Uhura but he
might still be lonely. Captaincy can be a lonely thing. It's isolating especially, if you don't have the
right people skills which he obviously doesn't have judging by crew morale when we lost you. He
might just want a friend and doesn't know how to go about it."

Jim thought about his words but she was still angry at his refusal to even consider returning her to
her Spock. "A true friend would want them to have happiness. He won't even acknowledge what
happened let alone consider my request."

McCoy sighed and patted her arm. "I know. I want you to be happy and if that means you riding
off into the sunset in that other universe and never seeing you again then I'd be heartbroken but I'd
want it for you. I think he just doesn't want to lose you. When Khan..." He looked away and
cleared his throat, his jaw working as he pushed his emotions away as impressively as a Vulcan.
"When you died...he kind of lost it and he wouldn't leave your side the entire time you were in a
coma. He does the same thing every time you get hurt. And when we lost you, he spent every free
moment he had working to find you. I almost had to relieve him of duty."

Jim scowled and picked at the sheet on her bed. She didn't know what to make of that.

"He does have a point though, kid. If this doesn't get any better soon I won't have any choice but to
relieve you of duty and, at best, care for you with bed rest and at worst transfer you off ship where
you can get more comprehensive care. As it is, it's my medical recommendation that your duties be
reduced which means I can’t justify you doing double duty as both chief and first officer." He
quickly attached Jim to the veritable bouquet of IV bags now hanging above her. It scared her that
she was this sensitive and she was worried about the baby.

She knew Bones was right and, as much as she hated to admit weakness, she needed to listen to
him. “Looks like Hendorff is gonna get a promotion to chief. He’s good and he deserves to be chief
of security.”

He hummed in agreement and quickly hooked her up to the fluids and set the rate. Jim could see
him fiddling with the lines despite being done with it and she knew there was something on his
mind by the little furrow in between his eyebrows that seemed to be a permanent feature lately
when dealing with her.

She reached out and patted her friend's hand. "I'll be fine. I've got the best doctor in the fleet taking
care of me."

His expression turned grave. "That's what scares me. If I can't get a handle on this then I don't
know who can."

"I've been thinking-" McCoy hesitated and Jim wondered just what he had to say because Bones
never hesitated. "It might be a good idea to contact Sarek or Spock's counterpart to maybe get
Amanda's records. If she went through something like this then they might have a better idea at
how to control this." He ran a hand through his hair and reached out to hold hers.

"What? No!" She jerked away. "They'll tell Spock!"

McCoy rolled his eyes. "Do you honestly believe they would do that? Selek loves you like a
daughter and doesn't like Spock that much." He shook his head wryly. "And, believe me, I saw the
way he reacted to Spock when you were in the hospital. Something Spock said to Selek really
pissed him off." He took a small blood analyzer and poked her arm and continued talking as he
worked "Not to mention you haven't even talked with him since you got back. He's been burning
up the comms to try and talk to you. Hell, I wouldn't be surprised if he shows up in person!" He
continued.

McCoy's jaw tightened. "Also...it might be a good idea to talk to Sarek and get him to bring those records anyway."

A cold feeling settled in the pit of her stomach. "What do you mean 'bring'?" There was something she was clearly missing here.

"I just got the request from headquarters to prepare for transport of the Ambassador and his staff about an hour ago from Salus IV to return them to the Vulcan colony in two weeks. They sent the medical records of the people assigned to him as well as Sarek's medical records just in case."

Jim swore such an impressive amount of curse words in English, tellarite, andorian, Klingon, and Vulcan that a sailor would blush.

Bones laughed, only knowing about two sets of the languages thanks to Jim delightedly educating him on what she had felt were the 'finer aspects' to the languages of other species. "You probably didn't know since you were busy puking your guts up and trying to rearrange your intestines in the process and didn't get a chance to check your inbox."

Jim rolled her eyes as he continued scolding her. "Why the fuck didn't you call me or, hell, even take one of your doses of antiemetics? It would've prevented this clusterfuck of that nosy ass Vulcan finding you in that position and stopped the vomiting and prevented you from becoming so dehydrated that I'm having to give you intravenous fluids and nutrients."

"I take enough of them in the day during duty shifts and I don't want to risk the baby's health." Jim grumbled.

She squirmed under the harsh look her friend gave her. "I would never compromise either of you."

Running a hand through her sweaty hair, Jim deflated at being told what she already knew. "I know. It's just...scary having to be dependent on medication. It brings me back to-" when she'd died in the warp core was left unsaid. Jim paused and couldn't continue. She knew that Bones understood when he nodded back in understanding.

"Idiot. The meds are safe. I promise."

His words were harsh but his touches gentle as he fussed with the line stuck in her arm and moved to check her belly as she hissed in discomfort. "Sorry. Your abdominal muscles are spasming and strained. I have to give you something otherwise you're not gonna be able to stand straight tomorrow."

Jim nodded and allowed the shot. She could never express it enough just how much she fucking hated those things.

McCoy chuckled affectionately and carded a hand through her hair. "Look, kid, you're gonna have to come clean soon. You're starting to look as if you have a small pot belly but your frame and face are starting to thin. It's starting to cause the crew to start to ask questions. I've had no less than three of the senior staff and ten junior officers stop by the medbay asking questions and requesting that I give you an exam. They're getting worried and they think you're not eating due to grief because they saw your reaction when you beamed aboard."

Her crew was awesome but too smart for their own good. "I'll tell them when the time is right."

"There's never gonna be a right time." McCoy tilted his head and his outline became slightly fuzzy
with tears trying to escape. "Have you been going to the support group I recommended?"

Yes. She had. She'd had no idea that there were so many women (and one man) that were pregnant and not with the other parent or donor. It looks like she wasn't the only one that their careers had caused a disconnect between personal and professional lives. "Yeah."

"And?"

"I think it's helping." It was. It didn't make her feel so alone but the difference between her and them wasn't that her career had stopped her child's other parent to not be present. Actually, maybe it was. She made a mental note to bring that up to them. There was no judgement there. Just acceptance.

"Good. I'm glad." Bones put away his scanner and started to disconnect her from the empty bags hanging above her head. She felt a lot better and was ready to pass out. She just hoped it'd be a dreamless sleep. The last few nights she'd dreamt of her Spock and their time together. It'd created a sense of peace but had made her feel melancholy the next morning.

Bones patted her on the shoulder and stood. "I'd better head out." He reached the door and turned around. "Take your damn meds. I don't do house calls for just anyone."

She gave a mock salute. "Aye-aye, Captain McCoy."

"Smartass."

xXx

The next day she felt well enough to eat a muffin and a small amount of strawberry yogurt but didn't want to push it.

"Commander to the bridge."

Jim straightened her uniform and started to head up.

The sight that met her was empty space but Chekov and the science officer Chen were intensely focused on their screens. Bones and Spock stood behind them and both had a slight frowns on their faces.

As she entered, Spock stood and approached her.

"Commander, we've been tracking faint energy readings in an attempt to locate it's source. The trail led us here and has appeared to stop."

She turned to Sulu. "Lieutenant, what's our location?"

"Epsilon Minos system."

Something stirred in the back of Jim's mind. A story her mother had once told her that had stuck with her throughout two decades.

"Aldea!" She gasped, excitement flooding her. Could it be? She looked around the bridge and was met with blank stares from the entire bridge crew.

"Wow. None of you have heard of Aldea?" Everyone shook their heads. "Seriously?" Again, her question was met with everyone shaking their heads in the negative.
Spock's brow furrowed in confusion. "What is this Aldea?"

Jim realized that Spock likely had not heard of the myth surrounding this system. She doubted he had heard many fairytales as a child. "It's-uh-a story I once heard from my mother."

"A story." Spock repeated and his expression was one of doubt.

"It's..." She struggled to come up with an adequate comparison. "...it's believed to be a wonderful mythical world like Atlantis of Earth or Neinman of Xerxes VII." Some recognition seeped into the eyes of the bridge crew at the mention of the similar myths. "It's an advanced culture, centuries old, self-contained, and peaceful. They're technologically advanced far beyond what we are. So much so that it provides for the daily needs of its citizens so that they can turn themselves over to culture, history, and the arts."

McCoy crossed his arms. "And where is this Aldea supposed to be?"

Jim didn't let his grumpy skepticism deter her. She just had a gut feeling and she tended to trust it. "That's the myth!"

Stepping onto the lower platform of the bridge, she addressed everyone to get their attention. "As the legend goes, the Aldeans were able to cloak their planet in darkness to go unseen by marauders and other hostile passersby who might rob and plunder their world." Her hands creates a circle and most of the bridge crew looked as if she was a little crazy.

Spock raised a brow. "That is a fascinating fairytale, commander, however, there is no scientific evidence to support it."

"Myths are sometimes based in fact, captain." Jim argued back.

"Scanners still show nothing, keptin." Chekov reported and Spock glanced over and seemed to challenge Jim's idea. She stubbornly held his gaze.

Chekov suddenly straightened at the science station, his entire body on alert. "Keptin! I am recording a distortion in quadrant 1, mark 9-0!"

Jim bounced on her toes in excitement.

"All stop! Hold this position." Spock ordered.

"All stop. Aye, sir." Sulu replied and the screen stopped it's projection of the stars moving and stilled. Everyone on the bridge was tense and wary compared to her excitement.

"On screen, Chirello." Spock told the navigator sitting at Chekov's station.

The screen showed a plain starscape but soon the image warped and wavered as if it was a dream taking shape. Everyone watched in fascination as a whole planet suddenly appeared. Blue oceans covered most of the planet with white puffy clouds surrounding it. Green continents and sapphire blue oceans seemed to show a virtual paradise and Jim couldn't help the smile that appeared on her face.

"Shields up and deflectors on!"

"Aye, sir!" Chirello answered but Jim's focus was on the screen and not on the ship's operations.

"It's Aldea, captain! It has to be!" She gasped.
Spock glanced at her, shock written on his features at the wonderful and impossible thing that had appeared on the screen and Jim smirked.

"I did tell you that sometimes myths are based on fact." She couldn’t help the smirk she directed at him being proven wrong.
Chapter Twenty-Nine

"Sensors reveal that the shield is electromagnetic—a complicated light refracting system." Chekov reported from the science station.

"A cloaking device?" Sulu asked. "How do they cloak an entire planet?"

Chekov grins in excitement, clearly in his element. "Is simple theory. Ze shield bends light rays around ze planet's contours—like romulan cloaking device but implementation on zis scale...is unheard of."

Spock narrowed his eyes at the screen, still disbelieving Kirk's theory on the origin of this mystery planet. "Raise shields."

"Aye, sir." Chirello answered.

"Lieutenant Uhura, open hailing frequencies." He ordered and she rushed to the task but jerked back.

"Sir, we're being scanned!"

Jim jumped up onto the higher section of the bridge to stand next to Uhura. "Open hailing frequencies! Let them know our peaceful intentions!" She ordered.

She nodded and her hands flew over the board. "They're responding." She smiled in relief and Jim allowed herself a breath. First contact, especially one of this level of importance and, if they were who she knew they were, she couldn't let this go wrong.

Spock turned his back to them and Jim felt a pang of jealousy that it wasn't her greeting them first. "On screen, lieutenant."

The sight of the spinning planet below them coalesced into an image of a human looking woman with long bond hair tied back on one side. She wore a colorful ensemble and her face seemed open and friendly but something caused a feeling of unease to settle in the pit of Jim's stomach.

"I am Rashella. Welcome to Aldea."

"Told you." Jim mumbled without moving her lips low enough that no one except Spock with his superior hearing could hear. She knew she was successful when he gave a minute twitch but otherwise gave no indication and it appeared his focus was completely on the woman,

"I am Spock, captain of the USS Enterprise. We come in peace."

She smiled. "We know."
Jim was glad she was out of view of the camera because that statement made her feel a little more on edge. The legend was that Aldea was a peaceful society but something just didn't feel right. The smile was a little too knowing.

Spock gave no hint of discomfort at her statement. "Many people have heard stories of Aldea. I must confess I had not heard them until my first officer," he indicated Jim and she stepped forward and she plastered a welcoming smile on her face. "-told me the legend of your people but I did not believe it to be true."

Despite the feeling of unease, it was still the most amazing thing she had ever encountered. She never thought that she would be a part of the discovery of a child's fable becoming truth.

Rashella smiled indulgently. "Our shield has confused outsiders for millennia, captain."

"That is a long time to have such technology but why do you reveal yourselves to us now?"

Jim wondered the same thing.

Rashella nodded in understanding. "We are eager to meet and discuss that and other subjects of mutual interest."

Spock stood at parade rest and placed his hands behind his back, projecting a relaxed air. "We are ready anytime."

"Excellent."

With that the screen blanked and the view of the planet returned. Jim opened her mouth to voice her concerns when sparkling lights appeared on the bridge and coalesced into Rashella and another older man. Jim's hand went to her hip where she would normally have a phaser on away missions but never carried one on the ship. She cursed herself and tensed, moving to stand in front of Spock and signaling for security.

The older man put up his hands, clearly sensing the tension. "We mean no harm."

Jim returned to a normal stance but did not relax in the slightest. 'Welcome anytime' her ass. She made a mental note to educate Spock in what to say to alien species because of the fact that things can be taken pretty literal.

Rashella was holding a bouquet of large orange flowers and squinting at the crew but was otherwise calm. "Our arrival seems to have startled you."

"No shit."

Spock recovered from his surprise and stepped out from behind Jim. "It was...sudden."

The man stepped forward and nodded regally to Spock. His hair was a slightly wavy black but with gray highlighted throughout. His clothing was equally as colorful as his companion and he acted friendly but there was something in his eyes. They drifted to Jim far too often for her comfort. She felt as if she was some exotic animal on display and she didn't like it.

"I am Radue, first appointee to Aldea."

Spock greeted him. "Welcome aboard."

Bones jumped out of his own shock and moved to the edge of the raised area of the bridge.
"Captain, they haven't been through decontamination!"

Bones. The ever 'space is disease' paranoid doctor but he was the best.

Spock focused on their uninvited guests. "Our medical doctor is concerned that you didn't go through our usual form of transportation."

"You couldn't have transported us. Our cloaking device may be off but our shield is very much up." The woman explained. "We would like to request a meeting with three of your officers to discuss our reasons why we have revealed ourselves." She winced, covering her eyes but quickly recovered herself in an attempt to hide it. McCoy's eyes narrowed at the gesture but he stayed silent.

"Very well." Spock agreed and Jim raised her hand to try and tell Spock that he should ask them when before agreeing to a meeting.

Jim only had a moment before she felt the telltale signs of a transporter latching onto her and quickly found herself in a room with Bones and Uhura standing before this Rashella, Radue, and some unknown older woman. McCoy looked like he was a wild bird that had ruffled it's feathers and scowled at the Aldeans while Uhura quickly hid her shock at the abrupt abduction, assuming a neutral and open expression. She really was the best with first contacts when helping Jim or Spock to interact with new civilizations. Jim reached for her communicator but it seemed to have gone missing from its place on her hip. This was very much not ok and something was very wrong.

Radue stepped forward, clearly very comfortable in his element as he knew he was in control. Jim did her best to appear calm and friendly but it was hard.

"Welcome to our home. This is my wife, Duana." He indicated the older woman next to him. "And you all know the rest of us." He smiled gregariously at the trio of humans. "Please, have a seat."

Jim jerked her head to the crew indicating they sit and addressed Radue. "This isn't how we normally meet other races. We prefer warning and time to prepare."

The man waved her protests off as if they were irrelevant and Jim's hackles rose but she remembered her diplomatic training and kept up the illusion of calm.

"We feel that it would be time consuming to wait on simple formalities and would, very much, like to start on discussions with your people, if that is agreeable?"

Like they had a choice.

"Very well." She indicated her officers. "I'd like to introduce Dr.-"

"McCoy, your ship's chief medical officer, and your communications officer, Lieutenant Uhura. We know." Rashella interrupted and, again, a sense of foreboding settled in her at them taking control from the Enterprise personnel. There was no equal footing between the two parties and the Aldeans seemed to emphasize that point by parading their knowledge of them.

Duana started the meeting. "Our culture is an ancient one and part of it is that we have a system in place that we are hoping would be acceptable to your people. It is a simple way of life on our planet and similar values appear to be utilized by your own Federation when dealing with other planets. Nothing is ever taken without something given in return."

Jim hoped that it was a simple case of them wanting to become a potential member of the Federation, perhaps becoming a trading post. "That seems an equitable code but that doesn't
explain why we are here nor why you have chosen us to reveal yourselves to."

Radue sighed, a tiredness seeming to come over him. "It has brought us peace however, there are so few of us left to enjoy it."

McCoy bristled. "Why? Is there a disease or something you want us to help with? I'm only concerned because it could affect our people with the fact that you beamed onto our ship without following our procedures and you now brought us here before even informing us about the risks."

Radue's eyes darted to McCoy. "That is part of what we wished to discuss but, no, there is no disease. Our doctors discovered a genetic condition affecting our people. We need help from the Federation. We need a younger generation, young and healthy, to follow in our traditions."

"I don't understand how we can help."

Rashella looked towards the elders, silently asking permission to disclose something clearly personal and whatever she saw Fromm them seemed to give her permission. "We have no children. We have no way for our women to even have children due to this genetic anomaly and that is why we desperately seek your help. The women of our planet no longer have the ability to conceive. Our men are unaffected but, with each passing year, our population is becoming fewer."

"You want what? Help in curing this anomaly?" Bones asked.

Jim stiffened in place and surreptitiously placed a hand over her belly under the table to where her own child was growing. She couldn't imagine losing her child now that she had him or her. It was an integral part of her now and a sign of the time her and her Spock had spent together. Duana's eyes seemed to notice the movement and Jim quickly removed her hand and placed both on the table, loosely clasping them.

"Radue, why, exactly, have you asked us here?" Jim asked carefully.

He leaned forward and placed his hands on the table. "We propose a trade. One which would benefit the Federation and our people as well."

"And the nature of this trade?"

Radue looked at the crew with regret showing in his posture. "We need women that have this ability to rebuild our society and continue the legacy of our people." The Enterprise crew sat back, away from them in shock. "In payment, we will give you information that would take you centuries to acquire."

Jim didn't know what to say to that. They were talking about trading people as if they were things! Thankfully, Uhura covered for her.

"That-uh-might be acceptable in some cultures but not with ours."

McCoy squeezed Jim's knee under the table, instinctively understanding her reaction to the announcement. "Our people are not for sale at any price."

"And that's your answer?" Radue asked slowly.

"That's our only answer." Kirk snapped.

Rashella's eyes began to water at their refusal. "Then we are sorry you are so intransigent." She stood and touched the small device attached to her arm and McCoy and Uhura vanished before her
eyes and, in their place, eight of her fellow crew members appeared next to her. Jim noticed, with a sick feeling, that they were all the women from her pregnancy support group. Her head swiveled to the Aldeans. "What the hell did you do?!?"

Radue stood. "What we must to survive." And left the room. Jim shook with fury. They had to know just what she carried with their scans. "You can't do this!" She shouted at his retreating form but he refused to answer. Instead Duana did.

"We already have, Jamison."

xXx

"It's the women! They lured us here for women because they say that theirs can't have children of their own but-" Uhura frowned, confused. "-I don't understand why they would only take some and random ones at that."

She scanned down the list. "Dr. Elizabeth Dehner from psychiatry, Ensign Erica Palmer from communications, Lieutenant Keiko Yamada from computer sciences, Yeoman Sara Marks, Nurse Debbie Johnson, Dr. Lisa Morrows from oceanic research, and Ensign Cecilia Real from stellar cartography, Lieutenant Marla McGivers who's our historian, and of course, Commander Kirk. There's nothing linking them other than them all being human and female. They're different races, different specialties, and even different ages. I don't get it." She glanced at Spock. "Why them? I was there and am a woman but they only kept Kirk and not both of us."

McCoy listened to Uhura list the crew members, his stomach turning as each name was read. He recognized the significance by the third name. These were the women Jim had been meeting with twice a week; the women in her support group that were all pregnant, all in Starfleet, all single, and all coming to terms with what it meant for their futures.

Spock's brows drew down as his eyes scanned the list for a moment longer than what was needed. McCoy knew that he was having to collect himself because he knew that Spock had an eidetic memory and certainly didn't need to spend longer than a few seconds viewing the list of the women taken. "I want to know the reason why certain members of the crew were selected by the Aldea."

Uhura bit her lip. "Well, we know they cannot have children and the ones might have just been abducted by virtue of being female."

Spock lifted his head. "If that was the case then they would have abducted all of the female crew members. There must be a common factor in why these specific women were taken."

"Ve know zat they scanned and accessed the computer banks, including medical and personal logs." Chekov supplied.

"Then we need to access the same logs and seek the common factor."

McCoy's hand shook as he ran it over his face. These women's lives were private but he had no choice. It affected the ship and safety of the crew. "Damn it all to hell. I know why they chose them."

"Please enlighten us, Doctor." Spock almost looked as if he didn't trust him and he knew why. He'd become increasingly irritated with him because of him refusing to answer his questions about Jim.

"They're all pregnant. More than that, they're all unattached with the fathers, or in some cases, the mothers. I guess the Altair people wanted women that were guaranteed capable of reproduction"
that stood a chance at becoming a part of their society more willingly due to their lack of attachment here. Maybe because they wouldn't have to immediately force them to bear children and it'd instill a sense of trust. If anything, it was a good tactical move and, possibly in their logic." McCoy grimaced at the sour taste in his mouth. "A more...humane thing because it wouldn't tear apart a potential family unit."

Spock sat back as if he'd been punched by his answer. "Jim is pregnant?"

McCoy knew that Spock would know exactly who the father was and he hated having to divulge Jim's secret but regulations forced him to tell them because it affected the mission and changed the parameters.

"Yeah. She's pregnant."

The crew murmured at his announcement and he wondered if Jim was going to hate him when this was all over.

Spock stood and focused his attention on Lt. Cmdr. Scott. "We need to find a way to break through the Aldean's shields and beam our crew members back to the ship. Their power source needs to also be shut down to prevent them abducting the women again."

The Scotsman scratched his head as he thought about the order. "Aye, that we do, but, from what I've seen, it wonna be an easy thing, cap'n. Their technology is far more complicated than what I've ever seen."

"Do it!" Spock snapped.

xXx

Jim walked with her fists clenched angrily, the nails biting into her palms, as they were shuffled into another room by a pair of, what Jim suspected, were guards. Once there, the pair went to a wall and replicated new clothing and several bowls of food and drink, setting it on the table and leaving them alone. She heard the click of a lock and Jim closed her eyes to calm herself.

Yeoman Sara Marks came close, her mocha skin pale and her hair askew. The poor woman was still in her pajamas. "Commander, what's going on? One minute I'm in my quarters and, the next, I'm here."

The other women nodded in agreement. She looked over the others that had been kidnapped and she worried about their safety and the intentions of the Aldeans. When people became desperate, horrible things were done and she knew that the Aldeans were a desperate people.

She explained the 'reasoning' behind their abduction and they spent the next hour brainstorming their escape. She knew the Enterprise was working on it but it never hurt to come at a problem with multiple angles.

It wasn't long enough by far when the door opened and Radue, Rashella, Duana, and a group of other Aldeans came through the door, all looking at the Enterprise women as if they were gods. Jim shivered at the clear adoration, not liking the implications that she had been given that they were the 'saviors' of the Aldean race.

Radue opened his hands, palms up and outstretched, to encompass the group in a grand gesture that just served to irritate all of them and the glares they directed at him caused him to stumble slightly and his expression of 'welcome' to slip for a moment but he recovered quickly.
"The custodian chose all of you to help rebuild our society. Already you carry our future in your bodies and the custodian determined through your own records that none of you have the support or care that you deserve or need and we want to give you this. We are offering you an amazing opportunity for you and your children. We can give you everything you have ever wanted or dreamed of-" He held up his arms in a mockery of benevolence that only made Jim glare at the aldean. "-except your freedom." He added in an almost regretful tone.

Pausing for a short moment in clear disappointment at their negative reactions, Radue moved closer to the group which only caused them all to move back and straighten in defense. "You all are also extremely gifted in the things that make our society a successful one." He nodded to each in turn. "Music, art, literature, and so forth and you will be given tools that can help you cultivate those skills and, finally, be able to enjoy those things."

The corners of Jim's mouth turned down and protests erupted from behind her which she had to shut down with a small hand wave. "Who is this custodian?"

"The custodian is not a person-" Radue shook his head. "-but I will explain that later."

The young aldean, Rashella, stepped forward, a bright smile on her face as she beamed at them. "You have all been brought to Aldea as our guests and, hopefully soon, to become aldean yourselves as you are integrated into our society. We can provide you with anything you need or want."

"Guests are usually invited, not kidnapped and held against their will. This could even be construed as an act of war." Jim growled. "We don't want your hospitality. We want to be returned to our ship."

The Aldeans looked a bit taken aback at the negative responses that they were being given but Jim was determined to make sure they understood the wrongness of the situation but their expressions quickly turned to sad determination.

"We will be assigning you all to units. A unit is a group of people with similar talents and interests that live in close proximity to one another."

The better to prevent them planning their escape Jim thought. She knew the other women thought it as well by the way that they moved closer together as if they could physically attach themselves to one another and not be able to be pried apart.

Jim was furious. "We don't want your 'units' or anything you have to offer. We want to go home. We have fulfilling lives and careers aboard our ship."

Radue tilted his head and gave her a patronizing look. "Can you honestly say that, commander? I have seen Starfleet's official policies regarding those who become pregnant while in the service on active Starship postings as well as your own personal logs, commander." Jim shuddered at the knowledge that he had read something so personal.

"I have seen that you were unhappy after your return. You felt very alone now that the father of your child is now literally a universe away and you have no clue where you will go now that you carry his child. You are alone-" He emphasized almost cruelly. "-and there appears to be no real difference to this location or that of the ship way of life that you would soon be forced to leave due to your condition." He looked them all over slowly, pausing at each one to ensure that they all felt included in the discussion. "That you will all have to leave soon. Each of you can have a place here with us. You will have a sense of fulfillment doing whatever you want-Art, literature, music, and even science! Anything and everything that you could ever desire!"
Jim ignored him and pushed her discomfort aside. "Does Spock know you're doing this?"

Radue seemed disappointed by her lack of positive response. "We keep nothing from him." He then waved the other Aldeans forward and they were surrounded. Jim wanted to fight, to stop this madness but she couldn't risk their unborn children so she signaled for the women to go with their 'units' calmly.

Soon there was only her, Radue, and Duana left.

"Don't we get a say in this? You can't keep us here against our will forever."

He sighed. "Sometimes, something happens which you just have to accept just as you had to recently accept being ripped away from that other universe. I am sorry that you will have to accept this new way of life. You and the other women are now considered members of our society. That fact will not change." Radue pointed at her to emphasize his words. "It is up to you to try and make the transition as easy as possible for yourself and your crew mates because you are their leader. Help them to accept it because nothing any of you, or those on your primitive starship, can change because both of us have no choice." He looked at Jim intently and she did not like that look. "Is it truly such a terrible life we are offering you, Jamison?"

"We are not chattel or breeding stock to be used by your goddamn planet! What's the next step in your plan? Hmm? To take away our babies after their born and give them away to your people? To force us to have more children since your women cannot? You're already forcing us into lives that we don't want. Where does it end and at what point will you stop in your desperation?" Jim's chest heaved as she hurled everything and every horrible thought that crossed her mind at the man. Desperate people do desperate things. She knew this very well from her experiences on Tarsus.

Radue looked horrified at Jim's words. "We would NEVER do something like that. We are offering all of you a life of peace, safety, and the chance to be more than they can be in your environment. You would have the chance to improve the skills and talents that you have and cannot cultivate there. You can find happiness here if you allow yourself to try."

"You're still taking our freedom and that's barbaric." She snarled.
Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

Here's another chapter which actually took me a little while to edit and change around since I couldn't help but add stuff in. :) I actually had it where this story arc had been completed and the next one went on to the main part of the plot but it just seemed too...jumpy. So, I want to say sorry for making this part a bit long and I promise to get back to the main plot soon!

Chapter Thirty

*Original Universe*

Captain Spock was listening to the suggestions of Ensign Chekov and Chief Engineer Scott but his mind was only half on the conversation, his thoughts kept drifting over the events of the past several weeks. He wondered how he could have missed the obvious signs of pregnancy now that he knew of Jamison's diagnosis.

The sickness she exhibited, most prominently in the mornings, sensitivities to touch, McCoy's restrictions and refusals to elucidate the reasons behind them, and her avoidance of him at all costs had been clues that he had attributed to other things. Then there was the meld he had inadvertently initiated between them that had shown the intimacy his counterpart had shared with her. It all fit now that he knew the reason behind all of these things. He hadn't even known it was possible for a hybrid Vulcan to have children. He'd always been told it was impossible.

Yes, Jamison had been avoiding him due to the pregnancy but he also understood that there were other mitigating factors involved to her behavior in regards to that. She was still angry at his refusal to allow her to even attempt to return to the alternate universe as well as their previous animosity that was still very much present. His reasons for her remaining were not completely altruistic. There weren't altogether selfish reasons behind his orders. How could he keep her safe if she was not near. This other Spock had not experienced the pain of seeing her die right in front of him nor had he ever even seen her foolishly and sometimes unnecessarily chivalrously in mortal danger, unable to help her. That Spock couldn't understand the reasons he had been forced to keep a distance to try and keep her from harm's way. If he allowed himself grow close to her he'd risk being emotionally compromised and she could be hurt or killed due to this weakness. He'd almost killed her once due to it when his mother had died.

He was attempting to, as humans would say, 'mend fences' but had been unsuccessful so far. Jamison was performing perfectly as an officer of Starfleet and had been nothing but professional but it was unsettling just how efficiently she had removed any possibility of a relationship other than that of Captain and First Officer. There was clearly no chance of a friendship between them and it was strange to have a reversal of roles in who was seeking who in that regard.

She had been performing her duties with a level of startling efficiency that would rival a Vulcan's skill but it was...unsettling just how well she had been doing it even while suffering the effects of a difficult pregnancy. He had wished to impart the skills of a well-trained officer to ensure that she would be safe and well-informed during her career in Starfleet but this was an extreme he had never predicted. Logically, he should be pleased at her no longer allowing her emotions to
compromise their working relationship but he was struggling with the reality of the situation. His mother had once told him 'that sometimes having a thing is not so pleasing as wanting' and her words had never been more true than in this instance.

"Keptin."

Spock shook off his thoughts and turned to his navigator standing next to the science and engineering teams standing around the large viewscreen in the ready room displaying the limited knowledge they had on the systems the Aldeans employed in their attempts to keep the members of the Enterprise crew.

"Yes, ensign."

Chekov sighed in frustration. "Zair is just no weakness I can detect that can be utilized from outside of ze system."

Frowning, the captain moved to stand behind the navigator to look over his work but couldn't find fault with it. His lips thinned in frustration at the information displayed on the monitor. "Perhaps if we determine what is causing the pregnancy issue maybe the Aldeans will give up the crew." He hypothesized and he wasn't surprised by the sight of the doctor's face turning a vivid red in anger.

"I don't give a good god damn as to what's causing their infertility. We should be focused on getting their crew back not helping the monsters who took them." He growled.

Spock turned to face him, his face outwardly calm and he placed his hands behind his back. "The what would you suggest, Dr. McCoy?"

Frowning, the human remained silent, clenching his fists in impotent rage.

Spock nodded at the lack of response. "Then our options are limited as of this moment. I am focused on their return to us and it is my hope that by helping them the Aldeans may be more likely to give up the crew."

"And, pray tell, just how it will I be able to get to close enough to one of those cold-blooded bastards to examine them and figure it out. I need to at least get a tricorder scan or some form of readings to even give me a small chance to make a diagnosis and treatment plan."

He sighed and struggled to come up with a plan. He'd never fully realized how much he'd depended on his First in tactics before. He was confident that if she was here that a solution to this problem would have been reached a long time ago. A sudden thought lit up his mind at the knowledge of her pregnancy. How had he not thought of it before? "Doctor, all of the crew abducted were human with the offspring from those pregnancies human bar Commander Kirk's?"

An eyebrow lifted and McCoy reluctantly answered. "Correct, captain. Jim's a special little snowflake in that regard."

"And would it be logical to assume that a hybrid pregnancy such as the commander's require additional help? Help that the Aldeans may be unable to give due to their isolation and lack of experience with other species and their unique needs?"

Spock experiences a moment of disquiet at the possibility of Jamison dying from the pregnancy. As it was he'd seen the evidence of just how ill she'd become in the short while since her return. Her weight loss alone was concerning and then there was the extreme amount of work he had
expected from her. Would it cause her to lose the child and perhaps her own life due to Spock's ignorance? "Doctor? Just how much risk is involved in the Commander's pregnancy?"

All eyes turned to him showing extreme concern and the doctor scowled. "There are risks in every pregnancy, even human ones. You can just mind your own business, captain." The use of his title was hissed as if it was an insult and he knew that if McCoy's words were delivered with such vitriol then Dr. McCoy was not concerned to an extreme degree but he still needed that information.

Gritting his teeth, he asked again. "Doctor, I need to know for two reasons. Her health and safety and because this may give us an excuse to visit the planet. The Aldean people desperately want these children to be born healthy to increase their population and they would want every precaution taken to ensure it. It also is unlikely that they would allow Miss Kirk be examined alone. She may have a female Aldean with her and it would give you the opportunity to scan them and possibly determine the reason behind their infertility." His voice lowered in worry. "It would also give you the chance to ensure her safety and ability to continue the pregnancy. Do you care do little that you would allow your pride to compromise Commander Kirk's health?"

Dr. McCoy's eyes flashed in fury and he wondered if the man was going to attack him. "How dare you!"

Spock remained calm which only served to anger the doctor further. "It is a valid question, Lieutenant-Commander, and necessary to be able to implement my idea."

His jaw worked as he ground his teeth and Spock could see a vein throbbing in his temple. "She's fine but she does need additional care. Special supplements and the like."

Satisfied with the answer, he turned back to the crew. "Then it is settled. We will provide the Aldeans with the proof that our visit is medically necessary to ensure a healthy child which is what they want and take advantage of this to attempt to gain information on the physical limitations preventing healthy pregnancies of the female population on the planet."

Nodding to Nyota, he laid out the beginnings of the plan. "Lieutenant Uhura, please work with Doctor McCoy to send the Commander's records to the leader of Aldea, Radue, and see if they will agree to a meeting." He then focused his attention on the others present. "Mister Scott, Ensign Chekov, please continue your efforts to break through the shield."

The resulting 'Aye, Sirs' gave him hope that the rescue of the abducted crew would be sooner rather than later.

xXx

Jim was led down by Duana to what looked like a super-computer. She'd never seen one so complicated and advance before and it almost gave her a sense of helplessness but she quickly shook the feeling away. She couldn't stay here. None of them could and nor would they. A huge console was lit up in front of her and beeped softly.

"This is the custodian, Jamison. Here you can view your friends and verify their safety and comfort. You have been assigned level three clearance and can ask the custodian anything you wish. You must trust us to not hurt you. You and the other women, as well as what you are carrying are precious to us. You are our future." She implored.

Jim felt awful for them. She really did but what they were doing was wrong. She looked at the custodian thoughtfully. Duana almost seemed...naive as Jim peppered her with questions about the
custodian's functions that she couldn't answer. Jim considered what the woman had said. She could ask anything? Well...that certainly opened possibilities and she and other woman abducted were the best when it came to computers and tech. She wasn't former chief of security and an expert hacker for nothing!

"So, the purpose of the custodian?" She asked carefully.

"It frees us from burden and takes care of us. It regulates our lives and allow us to pursue and refine our talents."

"Who built it?"

Duana paused. "The progenitors."

Jim narrowed her eyes at the minimal information provided. Just who were these progenitors? She straightened and pushed that question aside. It wasn't important. What was important was finding out about the computer. "When?"

She smiled. "Oh, hundreds of centuries ago."

Struggling to hold in her smile, she thought over this statement. With the naïveté of the people here it was unlikely that they had maintained this tech and old things tended to break down. Jim needed as much information as she could gather. She needed to find a way back to the ship. They all did.

"What is it's power source?"

Duana frowned, clearly confused by the question. "I do not know. Why is this important? It does what we ask it to and that is all that we need to know."

It was so strange to her to see the lack of knowledge evident in a person. It seemed that the Aldeans were only skilled in their chosen 'talents' but not in anything else. They weren't well rounded and she could use this to her advantage.

Duana started to try and shift Jim away from the computer room. "You ask questions I cannot answer. Come. This is not important. You need to be focusing on your child and expanding your skills so that you may adjust better in our society. The custodian showed you to have a predilection to writing and literature."

Frowning in confusion at the sudden subject change, Jim stood a little straighter. “If you’re wanting me to focus on writing and literature as my ‘talent’, then why show me the custodian?”

Duana’s eyes seemed guilty by Jim’s question. “Because, as the leader of your people, we wish for you to know the level of power that we wield and we hope that by seeing it that you will understand and accept your new role as a member of our society. We want your joining to be as seamless and painless as possible. The custodian is never wrong.”

Jim pressed her lips into a thin line to stop her questions. She needed to talk to Lt. Yamada. She was one of the best in their computer labs and she needed help. The system looked more complex than what she could handle alone.

xXx

It wasn't until the next day before Jim had been able to get to Keiko with the excuse that humans needed the companionship of other pregnant humans for optimum health. Fortunately, that statement appeared true due to the guardian scanning the logs and seeing that they had been in a
support group together.

Jim straightened her uniform and knocked on the door to Keiko's room and was surprised when an older man opened the door. "Uh-I'm here to visit my friend. Is Keiko here?"

"Of course, of course!" He moved back quickly and Jim walked into the room, not enjoying the thought of exposing her back to the aldean.

Keiko was still wearing her uniform to silently protest their imprisonment much like Jim was. Her blue tunic was starting to stretch and show a small bump where her daughter was growing. Jim knew it wasn’t long before she would be in the same situation. She was sitting on a chaise lounge type piece of furniture and holding a strange disc-shaped device that was playing musical notes in her hands. She looked intrigued but not happy by it.

Her head shot up as she entered the room and a relieved smile broke through. "Jim!" She dropped the disc to the side and rushed up to Jim but caught herself just shy of touching her.

"Oh-um-I mean...commander." She cleared her throat nervously and her eyes darted to behind the blonde where she could feel the man's presence as he hovered nearby.

Jim didn't give a damn. She was just glad that she could see that her people were ok. She reached out and pulled the other woman to her and wrapped her arms around her. "It's Jim. Right now, it's Jim."

Keiko just clung tighter, her hands fisting in the red material of her uniform. She had to admit it but it helped her feel better by having the physical proof, literally in her arms, that her people were ok. She knew on a base level that they wouldn't be hurt because they were considered too valuable to the Aldeans but she still didn't trust them. Simply seeing her people on a screen when she'd asked the custodian to show them to her had done little to assuage her fears.

After all, it could've easily been fake images but, then again, these Aldeans seemed a bit...ignorant? Yes, ignorant in the ways of their tech and knowledge of the way things were in the galaxy. They were deceitful but not very good at it. They still had their 'honor code' that demanded they provide something in return for what they took and Jim wanted to use all of these things to their advantage. She just hoped Spock would, too. He was crap at bluffing and she needed him to buy them time so that the Enterprise remained in orbit and the planet remained visible. She needed a ship to get them to. She needed to get them through the shield and onto that ship! If there wasn't a ship they’d be trapped forever because Jim doubted very much she'd be able to build a ship from scratch. They stood a chance at getting off this godforsaken planet but they had to have a place to go.

"Ready to get the fuck out of here?" She whispered. Keiko's vehement nod caused Jim to smile into the woman's soft black hair. Her people were the best at everything they did. They'd get off this planet or die trying.

xXx

Thanks out Jim was better at manipulating the monitoring bracelets on their ankles than she thought. Thank you, Iowa juvenile justice system.

It was clear by the ease in which she had managed this task that their captors had zero experience in keeping prisoners. Especially, when it came to creative Enterprise women. Keiko had been able to set up a loop video of them in her rooms and they were currently working on trying to shut down the custodian with very little luck. The system had a huge amount of failsafes and Jim suspected it was specifically designed by the progenitors to keep the Aldean people separate from the rest of
the Galaxy.

Keiko kicked at the console in frustration. "This is gonna take weeks to get this shut down! There's no way I can do it! It's impossible!"

Jim took the stylus she had been holding in between her teeth out and pulled herself up from her position in the ground under the piece of equipment. "The impossible is only impossible until it isn't." She pulled up the scanning info they’d managed to unlock.

"Maybe we might not be able to get the system shut down but we can get a transporter beam through the shield."

Keiko bit her lip. "Maybe."

"The magnetic shield shows minor fluctuations in spots all over the planet. They look like holes. Do you think you could get through them?" Jim pointed out the red spots that littered the shield on sensors.

"I can certainly try."

Jim's arm band communicator chirped. She sighed and tapped it. "Yes?"

"Miss Kirk, members of the Enterprise crew wish to ascertain your health in order to be willing to continue negotiations. Please come to the conference room. Unit one, section three, five."

Jim grit her teeth at the order but felt a frisson of hope. At least their ship was definitely still in orbit but, for how long, she didn't know. "On my way."

Jim focused back on Keiko. "Keep trying but be careful. You know they're probably gonna be checking on you soon."

She held up a tablet type piece of equipment. "I can start looking at ideas in my room now that I have the basics downloaded."

Jim nodded and transported to the conference room. Bones and Spock were there as well as Radue and Duana.

"As you can see the women are unharmed."

McCoy grunted. "I'll be the judge of that!"

Jim stood still while McCoy started a scanning sequence but Jim quickly saw that we was waving it far around her body, farther than what he’d do to be able to read her functions. In fact-oh, that genius! He was aiming it behind her at Duana! He was gonna try and figure out what was wrong with the Aldean women in order to cure them to get the Enterprise crew back! Jim knew that the scans wouldn't be enough by far since he likely needed more data to analyze but it would give him a good starting point.

As McCoy worked, Spock moved closer to her and Jim could see by the intense, dark look in his eyes that he knew. He knew about the baby. "Are they treating you well?"

Jim swallowed, her mouth as dry as a desert and she had to unstick her tongue from the roof of her mouth. She forced a smile but it probably came out more like a pained grimace. "Yeah-" She croaked. God, what a time for her voice to betray her! "-we don't even feel like prisoners. We're allowed to move around and I've seen everyone and they all seem happy." She hoped that she
would be able to convey that they were working on an escape because of that freedom of movement.

Her message got through if Spock's slight widening of his eyes was any indication.

"That is...enlightening, commander."

McCoy finished his scan and rifled through his med kit, handing Jim a set of hypos. "Here, kid." She winced. She fucking hated those things but she accepted them anyway.

Both men turned to the Aldeans, Bones speaking to Spock. "Well, she seems to be healthy as far as I can tell but I'd need a more detailed reading with more equipment than a simple scanner."

"We would never harm the women and plan to care for them to the best of our abilities." Radue snapped, his face turning red and McCoy glared at him.

"We sympathize with your problem however, this is not an appropriate solution. Surely there is a better way to assist your people that would be mutually beneficial." Spock stated and Jim tensed. Spock really was shit at this. Damn it, Spock! She just hoped his offer would stall enough to give them enough time to get off this damn planet.

Radue smiled at the effort and indicated Jim. "For us the problem is solved and we're giving you an offer that is far more accommodating than is necessary. What more do you want?"

Spock's eyes blazed at the Aldean and his jaw clenched so tight that Jim wondered if he was going to crack a tooth. She could see he was forcing himself to remain calm at the implication that trading people was acceptable. She'd seen this level of anger before and it was damn terrifying but either Radue didn't see it or didn't care. Both options spelled disaster for them and she almost felt sorry for the man. Almost.

The man interpreted Spock's silence correctly and scoffed. "You have our offer. It is final."

"We have to decline. Trading people for knowledge or things is not our custom nor will it ever be." Spock snapped.

Radue looked upwards, clearly frustrated. "Is that your answer?"

"Yes." The captain hissed. Damn. Spock looked ready to choke a bitch.

"Very well. Perhaps a small demonstration of our power is in order to show our generosity and that we are in control of these proceedings. If you do not accept or offer then we have done all we can and this will be over."

Duana touched her arm band and Bones and Spock, once more, disappeared.

Jim didn't even want to face her captors but she needed to know what they meant. "What do you mean a demonstration of your power?"

Radue turned on a viewscreen and Jim's heart leapt into her throat as a small ball of light shot out from the planet and hit her ship. She fell to her knees, numb in horror and fear at the sight of the Enterprise spinning away at such dangerous speeds. Was she going to see them rip apart? We're the Aldeans cruel enough to kill an entire ship of people to prove a point? She felt sick and her head dropped down as she breathed harshly, trying to control her panic. "What have you done?"

A warm, delicate hand attempted to rub soothing circles on her back but it only served to make her
feel worse. Looking up at Radue, she saw there wasn't a hint of kindness or sympathy for her and her situation. It was a blankness that Jim found disturbing.

"The custodian has sent a small repulsor beam to send away the Enterprise. It should take them a week to return." His expression turned dark and she shivered. "If both you and the Enterprise crew continue your behavior then they will be pushed so far away that your children will be grandparents."

Fuck.
Hi everyone!
Well, first off, thank you to everyone who presses that kudos button and are kind enough to leave comments! I love hearing from everyone and seeing each time I get a kudos gives me hope that I'm doing something right. Lol!
Lots of people wanted to see what was going on in the alternate universe and, originally, I had planned to resolve the subplot of Aldea first but I am caving. Hopefully it doesn't make things mishy-mashy with swapping in the middle? Let me know and I can swap the chapters around once I post the resolution.

Darkwaters

Chapter Thirty-One

*Alternate Universe*

The sight of his XO showing a hint of a smile was very welcome. It had been too long since he’d seen it, but Pike knew it was going to be a short lived moment. He'd never seen Spock in such a distressed state except when they lost crewmen under their command and, only then, in private. They had a routine; almost a tradition. The moment their duties allowed they’d both go to Pike's quarters and have a drink to salute their fallen comrade. It was a symbolic gesture to support each other in their joint grief over the loss of a life (or lives) cut far too short and reminisce over the happier memories of that person.

Both of them had always made it a point to get to know every person under their command. It was a source of pride for both captain and first officer and it helped to ensure that each person was able to be a part of the crew to the best of their ability and could grow in their positions. The fact that he had been expressing such heartbreak so publicly showed how affected he'd been by the loss of Jamison. It was a loss they all keenly felt but he knew it far worse for his First.

Spock had, so far, rejected all meetings except those that were necessary with Pike and it spoke volumes to the captain. Perhaps he thought that Pike was following in their tradition of saying goodbye or perhaps Spock couldn't bear to speak of his emotions in regards to the Commander. It was likely a mix of both.

Pike watched as the young Vulcan held Nyota's and Leonard's newborn daughter. The baby looked so small and fragile in his arms but everyone present knew there was no safer place for her to be other than with her parents. Brown eyes were gazing at the infant with a softness that was rarely seen and Spock moved in a gentle swaying motion to rock her while Leonard and Nyota looked on with smiles of their own. It was such a sweet moment that he almost considered leaving the group to their privacy but the door was open in invitation so he stepped inside and placed a hand on Spock's shoulder.

It was a testament to how close they were that he didn't even react. No stiffening of his posture, no motion to remove the touch, nor was there a look from him showing displeasure. There was just acceptance and it helped to let him know the gesture was welcome.
Looking over at the tiny child, he couldn't help but feel a warmth in his chest at the sight of her. She was beautiful and most definitely perfect. She had mocha skin and soft hair that gently curled and covered her head with little chubby cheeks. Every child on his ship was a treasured gift that gave so much joy and happiness to everyone aboard.

She was currently sleeping peacefully in Spock's arms and, with the way Spock was looking at her, he knew he was missing something very important. He was good at reading people. It was a valuable skill as a captain and he could see longing, sadness, and heartbreak. Oh, there was still happiness for the couple and a definite peace that Spock was exhibiting but there was more to it.

Turning his attention to the proud parents, he smiled at them. He could see how exhausted Nyota was but her happiness lit up the room and Leo practically radiated his pride at the newest member of their family.

"So, who is the latest addition to the Enterprise crew?"

McCoy lay a hand on his wife and nodded at his daughter. "Zahra Eleanora McCoy."

"It's Swahili meaning flower and Eleanora after Leo's mother." Nyota told him.

"May I?" He indicated the child and they both nodded so he quickly sterilized his hands and held them out for Zahra. Spock startled at the gesture, clearly focused on nothing but her, and reluctantly handed her over to him.

"Well, hello Zahra Eleanora McCoy. It's wonderful to meet you." In response, she turned her head and snuffled into his uniform and Pike chuckled. "I thought she wasn't due for another month. Looks like she was eager to meet the world."

McCoy's grin widened as he chuckled. "She definitely was."

Rocking the child, he ran a finger down her chubby cheek. "So, a beautiful name meaning flower? It looks like I might have a budding botanist. Hikaru will be pleased."

Leo shook his head. "I think she's gonna follow in my footsteps and be a doctor."

"No. A linguist." Nyota countered and Pike's chest rumbled with laughter.

"Well, with you two as her parents whatever she becomes I know she'll be amazing."

He handed Zahra to Nyota who gratefully cuddled with her new daughter. "Congratulations to the both of you."

Turning to Spock, he gave him a determined look which brooked no argument. "Mister Spock and I are heading out but we'll be back to visit later."

McCoy frowned in confusion but he was respectful enough that he didn't say anything. Pike turned to leave, pleased when he heard Spock's footfalls next to him. He wouldn't let Spock avoid him any longer. He couldn't let him feel alone.

The walk to his quarters was short and he stepped in, hoping the privacy and solitude would relax his XO. He was sorely disappointed when he saw him standing stiffly at parade rest. Sighing, he went to his cabinet anyway and pulled out two glasses. He poured a small measure of brandy for himself and Vulcan chocolate liqueur for Spock who accepted it reluctantly. Chris knew that if he could have then Spock would have bolted.
Sipping the drink, he gestured towards his couch and chairs in the sitting area and took a seat but Spock remained standing. It was a symbolic gesture that he wasn't going to stay any longer than what was socially necessary. He sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose at the other man's sheer stubbornness. "Dammit, Spock. Sit down. You know I hate having to crane my neck to look at who I'm talking to."

Spock sat and Chris waited...and waited but the stubborn bastard wouldn't say a word. Leaning back, he sighed. "You did good on Janus VI. If you hadn't have been there I doubt we'd have been able to solve the mystery of the miners' deaths and the reasons behind them."

"I was simply doing my duty, sir."

"Right now we're not on duty, Spock. It's Chris." Pike grit his teeth and threw back the rest of his brandy. He'd forgotten just how formal his First could be when he wanted to. "Talk to me, Spock. I know you can. We're friends or at least I'd hoped we were friends."

Spock's shoulders slumped in defeat at the reminder. Now they were getting somewhere. "She was pregnant."

Ah. Now it made sense. Spock would have been desperate to get Jim back at any rate but add in the fact that she was carrying his child? Well, that was a whole other ball game. He'd known, or rather suspected, that he and Jim had started a deeper relationship but he hadn't realized just how deep.

Pike liked to consider himself an expert, or as much of an expert as one could be, in Vulcan behaviors and culture. He knew that family was important to them. Whether it was because of the fact that they shared familial telepathic bonds or that they were more similar to humans than they admitted, he wasn't sure but he did know it was a defining characteristic of their culture.

He also knew that Vulcans typically bonded at a young age to prepare for marriage. The reason for why they did was unknown but they did. He'd always assumed that Spock had done so despite his upbringing that emphasized his dual heritage. That belief had been shattered thoroughly when Jim had come aboard and he'd seen the love that had blossomed between the two of them.

"You mean she is pregnant not was. She’s still alive just not where she’s supposed to be which is here with us."

"How long have you known?"

Spock couldn't meet his eyes in a clear effort to hide his pain at her loss and the discomfort associated with discussing such a personal topic. "I discovered this information shortly after she was lost to me."

Pike well understood what Spock was going through. When he'd lost Winona he'd lost it rather spectacularly. He'd become obsessed with the circumstances leading up to the massacre of those on Tarsus IV to try and find someone responsible since Kodos was dead. He'd punched the shit out of Admiral Komack. He'd accused the Starfleet Admiralty of his insane theory of a conspiracy that they'd hidden the truth of their involved in the deaths of those people because they'd appointed Kodos whose real identity was Captain Garth of Izar, a decorated Starfleet Officer. Pike had actually convinced himself that the man whose tactics which was required reading at Starfleet Academy was responsible for the death of Winona, James, George Jr., and four thousand others. He'd been lucky he hadn't been drummed out of the 'Fleet or, at the minimum, demoted down to ensign.

He wanted, no-needed Spock to understand that he couldn't obsess to an unhealthy degree. It led to a singular focus and would make it to where he wouldn't consider other ideas. He also couldn't risk Spock alienating those around him who wanted to support him. While the addition of Stonn and
T'Pring had started the process, he needed to finish it. He could see the man was hurting and it hurt Chris that Spock hadn't told him or talked to him in more than a month.

"Why didn't you tell me? I thought we were friends?"

Spock's jaw clenched and Chris saw a suspicious shine to his eyes. "I did not wish to burden you with this knowledge."

Leaning forward to be closer to his friend, he put his elbows on his knees and let his hands dangle. "There's a human saying. 'A problem shared is a problem halved.' The entire crew wants to help so just imagine how much this issue could be split. Whether it's to help to physically retrieve Jim or just someone to talk to it's help offered and I damn well hope you take them up on it. It'll give them purpose and help them as well."

Spock finally looked at him and his eyebrows drew down as he ruminated over his words. "I had not considered this. I admit that I had not thought of the needs or feelings of the crew in regards to Jim's absence affecting them."

Pike's eyes drifted to the red therapy ball on his desk that Jim had forgotten the last time she'd visited. He'd meant to return it but he'd been so caught up in work that he'd forgotten.

He regretted it. He regretted that he hadn't spent more time with her when he'd had the chance just like he regretted that he'd made the same mistake with Winona, George Jr. and this universe's version of Jim Kirk. She may have been a version of the same person and had similar mannerisms but she was so very different. She was all the better for it though. There was a Jim Kirk shaped hole that she'd left behind and they needed her back.

He leaned back, satisfied that he was getting through to him. "We'll get her back, son. In fact, Chekov and Scotty have a few ideas and so do a few of those in your own science department. They're willing to do extra work off the clock and I don't have an issue with it as long as it doesn't affect their primary duties." Pike eyed him. "The same applies to you."

Spock nodded in understanding and Chris leaned back, his jaw working as he tried to come up with adequate words to express his own pain at losing Jim. He'd started to come to think of her as a daughter in the short time that he'd known her. He'd wanted to keep her safe and he wondered that if he had not allowed her to go to Vulcan if she'd still be here. As Spock would say it was illogical to consider of what ifs and regrets. Kaiidth. What is, is but he was only human and couldn't help it.

"I will also do whatever I can to help in getting her back. I don't have the engineering or science skills which would be useful but I can do my damnedest to get whatever you may need to do so. I care about her, too." He laughs humorlessly. "Hell, I'd put in a request for her to be stationed here on the Enterprise."

Spock's head jerked up in surprise. "In what position?"

He poured himself another measure of brandy and threw it back, enjoying the burn as a sort of punishment to distract himself from the pain of losing Jim. His idea of giving Jim a posting aboard the Enterprise caused him pause. He wasn't sure how the Commander would react to his suggestion so he was hesitant to voice it but he needed his guidance. He depended on it.

"Well, I'd wanted to talk to you about it and get your input but I was thinking of seeing if you'd be willing to split your position considering it's usually handled by two crewmen."

"I do not understand, sir." Spock's brow furrowed in confusion and Pike understood the reason
behind it. Spock likely believed that he'd been performing his duties inadequately when it couldn't be further from the truth.

"You have to understand this isn't a demotion nor is something that is based on your performance. You'd still retain the rank of commander and so would she. I wanted to see if you'd be comfortable with taking the position of Chief Science Officer while she takes over duties as First Officer. It's a position that she is familiar with and I want to have both of you aboard. It's the best solution I could come up with to be able to utilize both of your abilities. I've seen the way she is with the crew and how they are with her. I think she'd be good at it."

Spock's head tilted in understanding and he breathed a sigh of relief. "A logical solution and one that I believe is well thought out."

His lips quirked in a small smile. "It'd only be final if you agree to it. You'd both be equal in rank but it's still your decision. Jim is too talented and I want her for the Enterprise. We'd just need to have her certified and approved by Starfleet Command and your agreement. What do you say, Spock?"

The Commander raised his glass and his shoulders seemed to lose a bit of tension, perhaps due to his conversation focusing on the future. A future that included Jim. "I defer to your good judgement."

"I take it that's a yes?"

"Yes." He affirmed quietly.

Pike leaned back, his body relaxing in increments as their talk seemed to bring a bit of his friend back from the brink. Even though he knew Spock had good control of his emotions due to his Vulcan half, he also valued the man's human half which needed the cathartic release of being able to talk about things. Both positive and negative. "I figured as much. I must admit that my wanting her to stay here was for selfish reasons as well. I care about the kid and I care about you. Now all we have to do is bring our girl home."

xXx

Spock spent the rest of the night after his discussion with Captain Pike deep in meditation. His thoughts mostly centered on his t'hy'la. He wondered how she had reacted to the news of her carrying his child. She had to know about the pregnancy by now. He was curious if she'd be showing any outward signs of it. He also worried that she didn't have adequate support. It was different in their universe. The Enterprise did not have families aboard her and she had the added complication of his alternate self to deal with.

His thoughts then drifted to even less positive ones. Captain Spock. He knew that the alternate version of himself was a singularly unpleasant individual to put it mildly. The mental scars he had left in Jim's mind were far too many. Even one scar was excessive in his opinion. The news of Jim's pregnancy would eventually reach him and he hoped, for her sake, that he would not discover the identity of the paternity. He couldn't predict the other man's reactions and that frightened him to a degree that he struggled to control. It is widely believed and thought that Vulcans behave logically but Spock has seen many instances where prejudice, cruelty, and hatred have been expressed by them. Captain Spock, however, definitely expressed a great deal of illogic and all of the aforementioned behaviors where Jim was concerned.
Rising from his meditation mat and extinguishing his incense he felt the need for a change in location to focus his thoughts.

The cool simulated morning air in the shipboard gardens served to sufficiently revive him and he breathed a sigh of relief. He remembered from his time with Jim that she often sought the refuge of this location and he decided it was a logical choice for himself to start this tradition as well.

His feet took him along the path to the controlled environment that contained the Vulcan plants and he was surprised when he came upon a small figure huddled on the sand clutching a stuffed, brown rabbit. Joanna McCoy jumped when she heard his footsteps and he could see her large, brown eyes were rimmed red but they weren't full of sadness. No. They were full of anger and Spock wasn't completely sure if it was directed at him. They looked so much like her father's that it surprised him.

"Miss McCoy, I must admit that I did not expect to see you here. I had believed that you would be in sickbay visiting your sister." He hedged carefully.

Her little body trembled with suppressed emotion and it concerned him greatly. He did not have adequate experience with the complexities of emotions in children despite his somewhat more relaxed attitude towards Surak's teachings. He did not understand why she would be angry when it should be a happy time for her.

"Why did she leave?"

Spock frowned in confusion at the question. "To who do you refer?"

The brunette suddenly stood, her hands twisting in the fabric of the stuffed animal so roughly that he was sure the seams would tear under the treatment.

"Miss Jamison! She was supposed to come back!" She shouted.

Ah. This was what Chris had meant when he had inferred that a large portion of the crew were affected. He had not considered the effect on the younger population inhabiting the ship.

He kneeled to her level and immediately the seven year old dropped her rabbit and charged at him. Small fists pummeled at his chest and hot tears splashed down her front as she hit him over and over and Spock let her, knowing that she was struggling as much as he was.

"It's your fault! Why did you let her go?"

Spock's heart clenched in his side and his arms quickly circled around her and pulled her to him and the assault quickly stopped.

"I did not let her go."

Her small frame trembled in his hold and he felt his shoulder become damp. Joanna's fists twisted in the fabric of his blue tunic and he held her tighter, moving one hand to cradle her skull. "I waited for her." The feelings of anger from Joanna that he sensed through his touch telepathy quickly faded and morphed to sadness and heartbreak. "Was it me?" She asked, her voice muffled with her face pressed against him.

His throat tightened with emotion. How could she even think that? He had seen how much Jim had treasured the girl. "No, Joanna, it was not you."

She hiccuped and turned her face up to look at him. "Then why?"
Brushing the hair out of her face, he sat on the sand and she curled her body into his. "I believe that
Jim was taken from us because so many people in her old universe love and care about her that
they wanted her back."

"But we love her more." She sniffed.

Spock sighed and moved to adjust his grip on her to allow himself a more comfortable position.
Joanna took advantage of it and settled. "That is true and we will do all that we can to bring
Jamison back to us but it may take some time."

"How long?"

"I do not know." He admitted reluctantly.

"But you will get her back, right?" She asked in a small voice.

"Yes." He informed her and was very confident of this.

"I miss her. She makes the best daisy chains."

Pressing his cheek to the top of her head, he took a deep breath to calm his own emotions so he
could focus on Joanna's pain. "She did make superlative daisy chains." He started rocking the child
much like he did with her younger sister and she started to uncurl from the tense ball she had been
in. "I miss her very much as well."

He would not fail.

It wasn't long before Joanna's breathing evened out and she fell asleep. Clearly her emotional
episode had worn her out. Carefully standing, he shifted his hold on her and he started to walk out
but he remembered the stuffed rabbit that the child was attached to so he bent and retrieved the
item.

He made it halfway to the medical bay when he ran into a frantic Doctor McCoy who almost
collapsed in relief when he saw his daughter. "Oh, thank god!"

McCoy quickly relieved him of his burden and closed his eyes as he squeezed her.

"Not so tight, daddy." She complained in a sleep rough voice and McCoy sobbed a laugh.

"Oh, baby, you scared me. We couldn't find you anywhere."

"M sorry, daddy."

He shushed her and shot Spock a grateful look before leaving him alone in the corridor. Flipping
open his communicator, the commander started his journey to the labs.

"Spock to ensign Chekov."

-"Chekov here."

"Captain Pike said you have some ideas on how to bring back Commander Kirk. Run some
simulations and bring the results to science lab three."

-"I can do zat!"

He allowed himself a small smile. Maybe there was more to this human practice of sharing
burdens than he'd originally thought.
Hi all,
And here's the resolution to the mini story arc. It's a longer chapter than what I wanted but I wanted to finish it to get back to the main story. I'll be posting the reactions and next part as soon as I can. I wanted to incorporate as much as possible to get it as "realistic" as I could. Hopefully, I did an ok job and it's an interesting twist on how the Star Trek:AOS handled it compared to how Star Trek:The Next Generation crew resolved the issue.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Over the next week Jim and the eight other crew members started to settle into a routine with their work and she could see that her and Keiko were making progress but it was too slow. They were putting up a front of cooperation and, so far, it had seemed to deceive the Aldeans. They'd managed to scramble the custodian's sensors enough to where it didn't give accurate readings to Jim's and Keiko's locations and they used it to their advantage by appearing to be visiting the various women and then using the internal transporter to get to the custodian's central computer core. The other women focused on the skills that the custodian determined were Jim and Keiko's and had been doing assignments to make it look like the two women were still working on what the Aldeans wanted so that there didn't appear to be a break in their time. Her people were good. No. They were awesome but they all knew it was a matter of time before Radue simply cut off negotiations and cloaked the planet once more so time was a resource that was extremely limited.

Jim scrolled through the endless series of codes that were slowly starting to become a blur in front of her eyes when a repeating algorithm caught her attention. It was so much like Spock's Kobiyashi Maru program that it made her giddy with excitement and a devious smile lit up her face. She'd beaten that program once before and she'd definitely be able to do it again. "Hey, Keiko."

"Hm?"

Looking over, she could see just how exhausted the other woman looked. Both of them had been struggling and it was slowly starting to take its toll on them but sheer determination drove them forward. "Look at this. Is this what I think it is?"

Yamada moved to stand behind the blonde and Jim felt a thrill of victory when she heard an excited gasp. "Yes! Yes, it is!"

She almost fist pumped the air at her discovery. Keiko's eyes were bright in excitement and her features no longer showed the tiredness that had been plaguing them.

"If I can get this code altered I won't be able shut down the system but I can block anyone else from accessing it except us."

She almost kissed her. Her own work was slowly coming together. While Jim couldn't shut down
the shield she could use the fluctuations to her advantage but it was risky. She had to time the transporter just right and with the same frequency to get a person through. She'd only be able to send one to avoid detection. It was the best she could do.

She really needed Scotty and Chekov. Their skills at transporters and engineering far outstripped hers but she didn't have them so she had to make due. Thankfully, all of her time in that other universe had given her a lot of training and knowledge of transporters that she hadn't had before. She'd spent weeks over there working on them and those skills were proving useful right now.

xXx

Leonard McCoy couldn't help but growl at the tricorder readings he'd gotten from the ONE Aldean he'd managed to gather. There was barely enough data to even begin to hypothesize what was happening to explain the infertility that was affecting them. He didn't even have blood samples. All he had to go on was the physical manifestations of the disease. Infertility, despite advances in medical science, was still a common thing in this day and age. He just needed to find a reason and find it fast. He had less than two days left now and was no closer to a diagnosis let alone any form of treatment.

Rubbing his tired eyes of the grit that had accumulated in them, he pulled away from his computer screen and stretched his back, sighing in pleasure as his spine popped.

"Doctor?"

He turned to the entrance of his office to see Christine Chapel holding a tray of spaghetti, fruit juice, and a large coffee with a PADD tucked under her elbow. McCoy couldn't help but smile at her thoughtfulness.

"Thanks, Chris." He told her and he sincerely meant it.

Shrugging, his head nurse simply slid the tray next to his arm. God, when was the last time he'd eaten?

Chapel hummed in approval as he started in on the food.

"I've finished the lab work on the commander in regards to the risks to the fetus having any genetic abnormalities due to it's mixed heritage and her previous radiation exposure." She pointed out a few concerns but if she was truly worried then she would have been more specific. "I'm not seeing anything too bad. I found it interesting that the Vulcan genes are so dominant. I have a feeling that this little one is gonna be quite the handful."

McCoy harrumphed in amusement. "It's Jim Kirk's baby. Of course it's gonna be a handful."

Suddenly, he felt a sense of guilt. Yes, he'd known and focused on the other half of the genetics on a professional level but he hadn't focused on them on a personal level. What must the other Spock be going through? To know that the woman you love is gone. Then add in the fact that he likely has been told by his father that he, himself, was to become a father and have his child-to-be ripped away to another universe. He couldn't even imagine. While McCoy didn't have any kids, he could feel for him.

He synced up the new data and quickly added in Jim's file. He pulled up her previous records and typed in an addendum. The doctor had been worried when Jim had been healing that she'd never have the ability to have kids. The damage to her reproductive system had been severe to the point where her eggs had a good chance of not being viable and she'd have likely miscarried due to the fetuses being genetically damaged. Jim had just smiled a sad smile and said that she wasn't
worried. She'd never wanted kids anyway but Bones had seen through her lie. She may not have wanted them immediately but she'd definitely wanted the option.

He'd been lucky. An old article from twentieth century medicine had given him the knowledge to treat the damage done to her reproductive system and the chance to have children if she'd ever wanted to. McCoy had seen the look of gratitude that Jim had given and he'd been happy to do it. He wanted her to have every chance she could to have everything she wanted. If only he could help her to get back to the man she loved the he knew she'd be whole again.

xXx

Chekov cursed in Russian, causing Scott to bump his head on the console he'd been working on to try and boost the signal. They'd been working on a way to increase power to break through the shields of the planet.

The young navigator was a genius when it came to computers and transporters much like the chief engineer but he was missing half the equation. It was frustrating and he felt like a failure with every effort. It was a painful reminder of when they had been unable to get the commander back when she'd gone missing and now when they were trying to get her back. He felt like he was a failure with everything.

He leaned on the console, his head hanging between his shoulders. A warm hand lay on his shoulders but he didn't move. He couldn't.

"Don't ya worry, lad. We got her back once and we get her back again. We'll get them all back."

Chekov sighed and lifted his head to look at the engineer, feeling the familiar emotions of frustration and desperation. "I know but I kent help but remember every time ve haff failed the commander. She didn't want to come back and I do not understand vhy. I just know that she wants to go back. She vas happy and now she is not. I feel like it's my fault and I can't help but feel guilt."

Scotty's eyes softened in understanding. "You didna do anything wrong. None of us did. We thought we were helping Jim and we didna know what had happened over there...wherever she was. We love her and we did what we thought was right."

"I know zis." A determined glint lit the younger man's eyes and Scotty smiled at his change of attitude. "I will fix zis."

"I know ye will, lad."

xXx

Jim and Keiko waited, their patience beginning to thin at how long it took the Enterprise to return but it did. They argued over who was beaming over. Her crew wanted her to go to keep her safe, but she had to make it an order for one of them to go. She explained her logic that if the Enterprise couldn't follow their written instructions then they would need both Jim and Keiko to try again.

Biting her lip, a sick sense of worry filled her. She didn't want to even consider that they might fail and kill the person they were trying to beam through the shield. That terrified her on a whole different level but it was a command decision that she had no choice but to make. Jim was scared she'd get it wrong but she had faith in their work. It made her feel awful when she had to pick who
they were going to send. Jim had to choose a crew member whose skills were useless to them. It was sickening and it reminded her of Kodos who'd chosen those to die because of similar reasons. God. What if Keiko and her were wrong with their calculations?

Marla McGivers seemed to be the best choice and they watched and waited until the ship was in geosynchronous orbit right above them, using line of sight to their advantage. The redhead clutched the tablet to her chest, determined and proud to help them in their efforts. Jim prayed that this wouldn't be the last time she ever saw the woman.

"Ready?"

"More ready than I'll ever be." The redhead told them.

Jim pressed the button to send her over while Lt. Yamada sent the virus into the system immediately after. They almost collapsed in relief when it showed as successful.

Keiko turned to Jim, her almond shaped eyes showing her excitement as they lit up. "Now? We wait."

xXx

"Captain, we've arrived at Aldea."

"Assume standard orbit." He ordered Sulu.

A week had passed since they'd been forcibly shoved away from the planet; away from their people and the stress had started to affect the crew. Everyone that had any form of skill to retrieve them had been working to the point of exhaustion.

Spock paced the bridge, giving in to the human behavior and thinking over the problem at hand. He'd been following the progress of the science team and adding input when he could. As of yet, they had been unsuccessful in their efforts.

"Captain, I've determined that the 'holes' we detected are more like...fluctuations weakening the structure in isolated sections."

Turning to Lt. Cmdr. Scott, he frowned as he considered the implications behind the magnetic field keeping them from their people. "I find it surprising that after all these eons that the Aldeans did not perfect their technology. Can we possibly beam an away team down to the planet by utilizing this malfunction to our advantage?"

Scott paused and the captain felt his hopes fall at his expression. "Aye. It's a possibility but it would have to be perfectly timed and there's no guarantee. It's a major risk to anyone who tries to beam down. Not only would the timing have to be perfect with the fluctuations, the ship would have to be positioned just right for line of sight to ensure the signal goes through. We could lose the away team. I considered attempting to beam up our people but that's even more difficult as we don't know where they are on the planet."

Resisting the urge to pinch the bridge of his nose, he simply closed his eyes to absorb what he was being told. "Are there other options that are possible?"

The team that had been working nonstop for the past week had worry written on their faces and Ensign Chekov stepped forward holding a PADD out. "We've also been trying to decipher the code that the Aldeans have been using to beam through the magnetic shield but we are missing haff of the equation. The number of permutations is almost endless. It would take weeks to determine just how
Spock looked away towards the viewscreen, watching the planet spin serenely. It was difficult for him to comprehend that the people who had been revered as so advanced and peaceful could be capable of such an atrocity.

He was interrupted from his thoughts by the turbolift opening and McCoy rushing towards him, waving a PADD. "I've got it! I've figured out what's making the Aldeans sick."

The doctor thrust the PADD into his hands and he started to read over the information, noting with interest that some of the data contained Commander Kirk's medical file. "Explain."

"It's a form of radiation sickness that I've seen before when Jim..." The word died was unsaid but Spock understood anyway.

"But Jim was treated with Khan's antibodies from his blood. This is not a viable solution to the problem at hand." Spock countered but McCoy vehemently shook his head in disagreement.

"No. That's not what was used, captain. Khan's blood stimulated cell reproduction and increased her healing rate but the base treatments still had to be done. We still had to perform surgeries, heal fractures, and treat radiation poisoning much like what the Aldeans are suffering from." Uhura, Sulu, Chekov, Scott, and several members of the crew within listening distance shifted in obvious fear and worry for Jim, as well as the others taken, at the information.

Spock raised a brow in surprise at the new information. He had known that Jim had had to undergo a lot of treatments but the scope of just how much she had been forced to endure had been lost on him. "Then what would you recommend, Doctor?"

Running a hand through his hair, the brunette blew out a frustrated breath. "It'd be a combination of things and it'd take time. There's a lot of factors involved and it'd be different for each patient depending on the severity of their illnesses. The first step would be complete decontamination, then treatment for damaged bone marrow, treatment of internal contamination, gene therapy, and supportive treatment." He looked towards Scott and Chekov. "But it won't mean a damn thing unless we stop what's causing it in the first place."

"Doctor," Spock hedged. "Do you have a theory as to the cause?"

Pulling the PADD from Spock's hands, he quickly scrolled through his research and highlighted an article. "In the late twenty-first century on Earth, radiation exposure was caused by the depletion of the ozone layer. Earth's own sun was killing them."

"Do you believe that may be the case here?" He asked.

"I'm a doctor not a damn meteorologist." McCoy practically growled at him and Spock raised a brow at the abrasive behavior but a more insidious thought started to cross his mind at the reminder of Jim's death. Swallowing against a suddenly dry mouth, he struggled to ask the question that was likely plaguing several of his officer's minds.

"Very well, Doctor. Are the women and their pregnancies at risk with the levels of radiation afflicting the planet?" He paused, considering his next question. "Are they safe?"

McCoy's lips thinned into a white line and they noticed his hesitation at answering. "Yes. They're at risk but it's minimal for now. The longer they're there the higher the damage can become. There's risks inherent in every pregnancy and the possibility of miscarriage is there. One thing is for certain, the earlier the pregnancy, the higher the risk is to both mother and child. Not to
mention their own health. The Aldeans have no clue what they're dealing with so it'd be best if we convince them of just what's going on and remove Jim and the others as soon as possible."

Sulu stepped forward. "Do you think they'll talk to us?"

His comm officer answered before he could and he nodded in agreement. "Oh, they'll negotiate based on their antiquated "code of honor" or whatever they call it." She told the group, anger and disgust lacing every word.

"We must-"

A humming interrupted Spock before he could finish and the group spun to the viewscreen where a bright light took them by surprised, quickly coalescing into the form of Lieutenant Marla McGivers. Vivid red hair and pale skin dotted with freckles only seemed to accentuate the large smile that she wore.

"Yo moyo! Zey did it!"

"Indeed."

xXx

It turned out they only had to wait a few hours before Scotty, Chekov, and a full security team materialized in front of them.

"It's good to see ya, commander!"

"It's damn good to see you guys, too." She slapped a hand on the engineer's shoulder.

"Kommander, lieutenant, zat vas wery impressive. Lieutenant McGivers vas wery helpful! Ve are ready to beam you all up, yes?"

Jim rolled her shoulders and straightened, setting her face in a mask to hide her anger. "Sounds great but I have one more thing to do."

Chekov nodded and started work with the lieutenant, quickly beaming up the remaining crew members that had been abducted.

"Anything happen while you guys were away?" She asked.

"Oh, aye. The doctor figured out a way to help the Aldean women and the captain is gonna help them fix it."

Well, that was amazing. "Are they on the planet?"

"Yes. They're trying to talk to that Radue fella." Hendorff secured his phaser at the lack of a threat being present.

"Send me there. I want to hear this for myself." She ordered and Scotty hesitated.

"The cap'n ordered everyone ta be beamed up to safety."
She sighed. "The system's down. We're not in danger anymore."

The engineer sighed and quickly beamed her over.

The scene that met her wasn't encouraging.

"You've doomed us." Radue looked so defeated it was heartbreaking but she trusted her people. They'd never leave without helping if they could help it.

Spock was furious when he saw her appear but he retained the illusion of calm. She knew that they were going to have a long talk when they returned to the ship and she was not looking forward to it.

McCoy was arguing with the Aldeans but they clearly didn't want to hear it.

"Your people are suffering from a form of chromosomal damage, this is why you can't conceive. It's only the latest symptom. There've been lesions, lack of appetite, light sensitivity? Yes? With the right treatment we can help you!"

Radue shook his head. "Lies! Our scientists would have discovered this."

Jim stepped in. "How could they have? Your people have forgotten how to do anything! Your people failed because of your isolation and not having well rounded skills to challenge yourselves. How can you know if you will like something or learn if you never get to try and discover new challenges?" Jim argued.

At Radue's scoffing she continued. "Had I become a philosopher I would never have any life skills such as computer, science, mathematics, etcetera. Also, your people have not learned self sufficiency. What drive do you have to do better, to be better? Your society has become stagnant and is not evolving. You call yourselves civilized? Is it civilized to kidnap pregnant women and hold them against their will to serve your own agenda? And then to subject them to the same stagnation and decay that is affecting your people and civilization? My people are offering you a better way despite what you have done to us."

Bones cut in. "Your people are suffering from a form of radiation poisoning and, for now, your men seemed to have a natural defense to it but it's only a matter of time before it affects them. It's similar to what Earth experienced in the 21st century when the ozone layer had deteriorated and the surface was flooded with radiation."

Spock continued the discussion and Jim was so proud of her people. "Our people scanned your planet and determined the shield that has protected your planet in one way is weakening it in another. It is the radiation of your own sun that is poisoning your people."

"Lies!" He hit his arm band and visibly wilted when nothing happened.

"We've disabled your custodian. You can't use it to keep us here anymore. If what our Doctor is saying is right then you would doom our people to the same fate as yours, possibly even killing us and our children in the process." Jim sighed at the devastation evident in the Aldean's stance.

"You've read our records and you should know that we aren't in the habit of destroying civilizations and people. Allow us to help you."

"Very well."

Jim stepped forward. "There's alway other options. If you had decided to ask for help rather than take what you wanted like bullies and dictators then we would have helped you." She lifted a hand to indicate Spock and Dr. McCoy. "Our people are still offering help despite what you did and we
still want to help. There's the fact that we're going to help you with your infertility and then there's also the fact that you were willing to accept children and people of differing species. There's adoption. Legal adoption."

Duana frowned in confusion. "Your people would give up children? Why?"

Jim gave a sad smile. "For many reasons. There are those that can't care for children, children who lost their families, those that wish a better life for their offspring than they can or are able to provide, and a variety of other circumstances and they're not 'given up'. They're actually being given a different, hopefully better future and homes to where they're likely going to be cherished because I could sense that you people cared."

Jim's eyes darkened and she felt Spock shift behind her in clear warning. "If you are willing to negotiate with our ambassadors, refuse to hide them and yourselves away behind your shield, and prove that you can care for them properly then those of Aldea stand a great chance of becoming parents in more than one manner."

Radue stepped forward, his face a mixture of shock and hope. "You would do this for us even though we have deceived you?"

Jim scowled at him. "Not me personally and probably not the women you took because I know for a fact they want to keep their kids but there's a few other stipulations. You'd need to agree to the dismantling and removal of your shield and cloaking technology, not so we can replicate it but so we can protect the children. We also request that you allow us to repair the damage to the planet's ozone layer. There's also the fact that you and those involved in our kidnapping would need to face Federation justice for your crimes."

Duana stepped forward desperately. "Done but...why?"

Frowning, Jim looked away, her eyes burning with tears of pity. She could understand loss of hope. She'd experienced it more times than she could count. "Because the people here don't deserve to be dismissed and hurt by the actions of a few bad people. They deserve help and compassion." She faced them, her expression intense. "Starfleet; the Starfleet that I chose to join is a peacekeeping and humanitarian force that would never refuse help to those who need it and we promise to do our best to get your people whatever help we can give. The people of Aldea deserve compassion and who are we to deny you that."

Duana ran over and pulled Jim into a desperate hug, her entire body shaking. Jim slowly raised her arms to encircle her and felt her shoulder become wet with the other woman's tears. "Thank you."

"You are more than welcome and thank you for letting us help you."

She let Duana hold her for a few more minutes before pulling away. Jim decided to not push Spock further as he seemed at the limit of his patience with her remaining on the planet. She called for transport, knowing that the Aldeans were in the capable hands of her captain.

"Enterprise. One to beam up."
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

Well, here's one confrontation between captain and commander. I need opinions and thoughts in regards to it. I've rewritten it so many times a sit going so many ways that I am anxious as to how it will be received and what exactly should be said. We have to remember that, here, she is still a crewman on active duty so she has to remain professional until the end (so to speak).

Things will start to move fast after this so please be patient. I'm finishing up the next chapter and, after that, we'll get back to the Spock we all love. :) For a bit anyway. Please let me know if I should change the argument, the message, or any ideas that need to be addressed because they will be eventually. I promise.

Thank you to everyone who has been so kind in giving me kudos, comments, and a chance.

Darkwaters

Chapter Thirty-Three

xXx

Jim sat up and swung her legs off the biobed. "So-uh-everything alright?"

Jim hated to admit it but she'd been nervous ever since the doctor had explained that radiation poisoning had been the cause of the Aldean's problems. It had brought forward the horrible memories of her death in the warp core. She had a feeling her nightmares were going to be predictable over the next few nights.

Every time she thought she'd put that shit behind her it always managed to somehow rear its ugly head. She felt like she was constantly battling the Lernaean Hydra from Ancient Greek mythology. Every time she chopped off a head, two more would grow in it's place.

McCoy smiled and typed in a code into the computer next to her and immediately the lights dimmed and a hologram appeared in mid-air next to her. "You tell me."

Jim gasped in awe. Her baby. The tiny embryo spun slowly in place. Jim could make out tiny legs curled inwards with tiny arms sticking out. Ten toes, ten fingers. It's head was larger than a fully grown baby's since it was so early in its development but, to her, it was perfect. She noticed the heart was in the chest area and she frowned in confusion.

"Yes, it's in the right place. The baby still has copper based blood but has a few more human characteristics than the father due to it being only a quarter Vulcan but your hobgoblin's genes are pretty dominant. So far, with the shape of the developing brain, it looks he or she will still have at least some limited telepathic abilities. The heart's location is just one of the few human characteristics visible at this time. He..." He rolled his eyes at Jim's questioning glance. "...or she is doing just fine. Your little one is still very little. About the size of a lime at twelve weeks along but a pregnancy of this sort is still kind of an unknown thing as to how long the gestational period will be. A fully Vulcan pregnancy is fifty weeks while a fully human one is forty. We'll have to rely on this little one telling us when it's time to be born."
Jim couldn't tear her eyes away even if she wanted. She drank in the image of her growing child. McCoy's voice faded away into the background as she looked at the hologram. She tilted her head to the left and the right, trying to imagine what he or she would look like when her child would be born. She tried to see if it had Spock's nose or his hands or even his ears even though she knew that logically (heh. Logically.) it wasn't possible to see this early on, but she thought she could still see him in that tiny baby.

"Jim? Earth to Jim! Are you there?"

Jim jerked back into the real world at McCoy's voice and the hand waving far too close to her face. He rolled his eyes but his smile was a knowing, kind one.

"I've been talking to you for ten minutes and I know you didn't hear a word I said."

"I totally did, Bones." She told him flippantly but her rapidly warming face gave her away.

"Yeah. And pigs fly." He started to close down the program and Jim stopped him.

"Wait. Can I-can I just stay here for a bit longer?" She asked hesitantly.

He shook his head ruefully. "Well, I'll be damned. Never thought I'd see the day that Jim Kirk willingly stayed in my sickbay."

"Sucker for punishment?"

"No. I think you're a mother who's seen her child for the first time." He told her very seriously.

Jim smiled. "Thank you." She breathed and she really meant it. He understood her more than anyone else ever had here.

As she viewed the image of the perfect little being hovering in front of her she suddenly felt a sense of sadness and it caused her to pause. "I just don't want my child to grow up without a father." The 'like I did' went unspoken but McCoy heard it loud and clear.

McCoy came close and squeezed her shoulder. "You'll get back to him somehow. I know you will."

She put her hand over his before he slowly left her to her thoughts.

Waving her hand, she spun the image around to take it in from all angles, her eyes glued to the sight. She'd just zoomed in to get a closer look when the sound of the door opening startled her.

"Commander."

Jim jumped up and the image wavered in front of her, its glow casting Spock's features into an eerie sharp relief. "So, it is true?" It was not a question; more of a statement of fact.

Jim quickly hit the button to turn off the projection and the lights automatically came on. She felt like Spock had walked in on a private moment. Turning to him, she saw he wasn't looking at her. His eyes were fixated on where the image of her child had been.

"Yes." She answered carefully. She wasn't sure what to expect from him. So far, his reactions had been unpredictable. She hadn't really had a moment alone with him since she'd been 'outed' so to speak.

He slowly lifted his head to face her and she couldn't read him. There were just too many emotions
flashing in his eyes. "Why did you not tell me this?"

Jim jerked her head back and her face twisted in confusion. "Why would I?"

"The child is part Vulcan."

Jim frowned. "And?"

"It shares my DNA."

Bullshit it does. "Not your DNA. My Spock's DNA." She corrected.

Shaking her head, she needed to change the subject. She can't deal with this. She just can't. It's just one thing too many on her plate right now. She needed to steer the conversation away.

"What's happening on the planet since I was 'rescued'?"

Spock straightened, placing his hands behind his back, and Jim almost felt as if it was right. Him giving her something as simple as a report to her when asked rather than just informing as her superior officer. The gold shirt is what ruined the image. She couldn't help feeling that he was supposed to be in blue, a scientist exploring everything the galaxy had to offer rather than commanding a starship.

"The doctor reports that the inhabitants on Aldea are responding well to treatment. Nurse Debbie Johnson and Dr. Dehner have elected to remain on the planet and care for the people to care for them during treatment. Dr. Dehner feels that the Aldeans require psychological assistance to come to terms with their reintegration into society and, until they do so, it would be counterproductive for them to enter as citizens to the United Federation of Planets. Nurse Johnson will be continuing care until a medical doctor can be dispatched."

That was awesome. Jim was very glad, in a way, that the women felt safe and happy enough to find a place for themselves.

"Our science department has carefully re-seeded the atmosphere but, for it to effectively take, they will no longer be able to use their shield or employ the cloaking device." He continued and Jim almost felt a sadness for the people despite what they tried to do.

"The legend will die but the people will live." Jim whispered.

"Indeed."

"And Duana and Radue?" She asked.

"In the brig to be transported to Starbase 24 for trial."

Jim didn't like the knowledge of them being so close to her considering what they had tried to do to her and the crew but needs must.

Spock remained despite the conversation between them dwindling and she had a sneaking suspicion as to what was eating him.

Spock opened his mouth to talk and she held up a hand to forestall him. "Permission to speak freely?"

Shifting his stance, the captain looked unsure but unhappy because he had to know, on some level, that what Jim was going to say wasn't something he'd like to hear. "Granted."
Running a hand over her face and feeling far too old, Jim slowly looked up to meet Spock's eyes. She was surprised to see regret, sadness, and worry reflected back at her. She could tell the moment that he interpreted correctly that she read him because he quickly shuttered them away like a portcullis from an ancient castle falling and hiding the emotions from view. "Look, I'm tired and I'm hungry. I just want to have a shower, eat some cherry ice cream and go to sleep. Can we just stick a pin in it and deal with this later because I'm so done right now, Spock." Jim closed her eyes to avoid Spock's. There wasn't a need for her to see what he thought of her. "I don't really care anymore what you think of me except in regards to my professional life as my captain. Doctor McCoy has relieved me of duty until alpha shift the day after tomorrow. You'll get my report by end of shift tomorrow."

Jim let out a deep breath, hoping that Spock would get the hint and leave her the hell alone. When she opened her eyes he was gone. Maybe he was finally getting it.

xXx

The week after the news broke of Jim's pregnancy was one of the strangest she had experienced while on board this Enterprise. Now that her secret was out Jim didn't know what to think. She'd been forced to accept a slightly more forgiving cut of her uniform with a set of supportive leggings that helped to hold her growing belly despite it being only a tiny change. It only served to further advertise her pregnancy as more than just a softening of her figure to the crew. It seemed to be a mix of good and bad.

Some, like Lt. Hendorff, started treating her as if she was some fragile Victorian maiden and took over more of the physical aspects of her job despite the fact that she had been able to do them just last week. She was surprised she hadn't sprained her eyes with how much she was rolling them but she knew it was because they cared. Others treated her mostly the same but their eyes constantly traveled downwards to her abdomen but everyone seemed happy for her but somber because they knew the timeframe indicated that the father was in the other universe.

Uhura was a bit of an unknown element to Jim. On the one hand she showed nothing but professionalism and had been polite but on the other there was a bit of a weird distance between them but she understood it. They had never been friends but it was different now to what she was used to. The communications officer, like her boyfriend, had started avoiding Jim like the plague except on duty and she didn't blame her. It was an unusual situation. She wasn't hostile or passive aggressive. In fact, she had been nothing but kind the few times they saw each other outside of their shifts. Jim had started taking beta shift a few times a week to accommodate both of their emotional states. She wasn't doing it to hide per se but she was doing it to respect Uhura and give her time to process the fact that she was having a baby by the alternate version of her boyfriend.

She spent her small amount of off-duty time trying to hack through Spock's code and focus on learning the more detailed aspects of transporter technology to run simulations. The only problem was that it just seemed to leak out of her brain. When she told Bones he explained that, sometimes, women during pregnancy complain of something called 'pregnancy brain'. The fourteen plus hour days probably didn't help either. She needed to get things set up for her own health and with Spock avoiding it was making her job as commander ten times more difficult. While she didn't want to spend an extra minute in his presence, she still had a job to do until her time here was up.

Things were slowly building aboard the ship and she knew it. Even though there was peace and the crew were happy there was still a palpable tension in the air. The elephant in the room that Spock and her had in regards to the baby and what the future held was always present. He had to know on some level that she was going to have to leave the ship sooner or later. The Enterprise wasn't a generational ship like the one where her Spock was and she sure as hell didn't want to deal with the
fallout associated with this Spock if she remained here during the full pregnancy and birth. Each
time she'd tried to broach the subject he always seemed to be able to find something else to do. It
was a far too familiar form of denial that Jim had implemented herself on many an occasion.

She, herself, was still operating under a fog of indecision of what to do should she not be able to go
back. Stay on the ship for the pregnancy? Go planet-side? But where would she go? If she stayed
then she'd have Bones and he was her best friend and the only doctor she truly trusted with her life
and now the life of her child. If she left then she wouldn't have to deal with Spock but she'd be
alone. Her decision shifted so rapidly depending on her mood that it made her head spin.

At least her morning sickness had abated over the past several days.

She talked with Spock's counterpart and explained why she hadn't been responding to his messages.
He had been taken aback by what had happened and his eyes showed a sadness that perfectly
resonated with her. He had expressed happiness for her and an open invitation to his home, but she
wasn't sure if she'd take him up on it, though. It almost felt like she'd be taking advantage of him
and his kindness. She felt like it'd be preying on his feelings of the past for his own t'hy'la that had
been lost so long ago and still caused him great pain. Jim didn't want to add to it.

Sarek had been more difficult to gauge when she had told him of her experiences and the results of
her 'disappearance'. He simply told her he'd talk more with her when he came aboard which
sounded pretty ominous. The blonde felt she didn't have any choice but to tell him because of the
fact that it was better coming from her rather than him finding out when they picked him up from
Salus IV to return him to the Vulcan colony. He'd agreed to bringing Amanda's medical records
which had made Bones happy.

Jim tapped her stylus against her PADD restlessly, finishing her paperwork for submission to the

Jim winced and quickly stopped. "Whoops. Sorry."

The Catian helmsman turned in his seat. "Do not be concerned, commander. My mate experienced
restlessness when she carried our litter of kits."

Smiling sheepishly, Jim quickly typed in the last of her recommendations and concerns regarding
ship's operations to hand in to Spock. The poor beta and gamma shift had been subjected to her
rapid shifts in behavior and emotions and she had to concede that they were about the most patient
people in the universe. Well...in this universe.

Sighing, Jim outlined her 'official' excuse that she was going to use to corner Spock at least in
regards to work. She knew things were coming to a head and she needed to nip it in the bud
and...prepare herself and the ship for when she did leave. She needed to see him in an official
capacity. Sadly, she knew that he wasn't going to allow her to work on going back to her Spock
unless a miracle happened and that didn't look to be happening any time soon.

"One battle at a time. One battle at a time." Repeating the mantra helped calm her and focus her
attention. She hated it but it was true.

She'd just finished her shift and she knew that Spock was in his quarters. Vulcans, as a species,
required less sleep than humans do and it was likely he'd be awake when she rang his chime.
Confirming his location via the ship's computer and double checking the PADDs she had included
everything she needed to address, she pressed the chime and waited patiently to be granted
admittance. Things between them needed to be settled before it started to affect the ship.
When Spock granted her entrance, her first impression was red. Everything was a dark shade of red and on his far wall, in a frightening display, were several ancient Vulcan weapons behind glass that Jim recognized from her time on Vulcan. A lirpa, an ah-woon, and several others were carefully hung behind glass. He must have paid a fortune in credits to acquire the artifacts. It was so different from her Spock's quarters. Commander Spock had artifacts of both Vulcan and Earth and they served a more aesthetic purpose. There had been tapestries, pictures, small statues and knickknacks from both cultures but they had created a sense of peace in Jim whereas this display seemed more...hostile and antagonistic. The stark contrast between the two only solidified the feelings of love she had for the father of her child; her Thy'la.

Over in the corner near a fire pot that was usually lit with incense to assist in meditation was a Vulcan lyre. Her Spock would play his own for her on the Enterprise during rare intimate moments. Many of the pieces he had carefully strummed on his instrument had been pre-reform music, full of the passion that the Vulcan people had carefully hidden beneath the surface of logic. It had always an honor when he would let her see him; all of him. There were times that they had just lay there spent on their bed and he would trace Golic letters on her back after spending hours exploring each other's bodies. It was memories like those she treasured and hoped to some day experience those things again. Shaking the pleasant memories away, she forced herself to the present.

When she had come in Spock was sitting at his desk, likely filling out crew reports and signing off on them as well as updating the logs for their next mission. His body tensed slightly in surprise at her visiting. She'd never been in his quarters nor had they ever really talked outside of duty or necessity.

"Commander." He greeted and Jim considered just how to approach him. She needed to get it perfect. She couldn't afford to appear weak nor could she seem to be unprofessional.

Tilting her head in concern and taking a closer look at Spock, she saw that he looked strained but his body was tense like he was struggling. Jim considered the data and thought over the many months she'd been serving with him. He'd been weird since the Khan incident and Jim wondered if he'd ever received the support he needed. Sure he got love and care from Uhura but maybe that only covered half of his needs; his human half. What of his Vulcan half? He'd been raised in the Vulcan way and not taught about embracing his full dual heritage unlike her Spock. He was a mix of both worlds and unique. She appreciated and had, at one point, cherished him for being so special. She knew he needed both halves to be cared for.

When was the last time he'd been with his people? Seen his father? Seen a healer? Jim knew of bonds. Not in detail but she knew that Vulcans, as a telepathic species, had bonds with family and mates. With how Spock had reacted after his mother had died their bond had to have been strong and for it to have been ripped away from him so suddenly? She couldn't even imagine the agony. Then had also the many many bonds between him and his family members; cousins and and aunts and uncles. Then, as she had learned from her experience with her Spock on the planet Sarpeidon, all Vulcans had a low-level telepathic field with the people of their planet that affected all Vulcans. To have so many connections torn away had to be affecting him and his psyche.

Despite her anger towards him at denying her the chance to return to the other universe she still worried about him. She wanted him to be happy and do well but she no longer wanted be a part of his life in a romantic. There was anger, resentment, and many other negative emotions she felt. Right now, though, he clearly needed her help to be able to function a bit better as captain of the ship so that the Enterprise didn't suffer. Plus she needed to set his ass straight. Don't think she didn't see the hidden comms between him and the colony even though she didn't know the contents.
She fiddled with the PADDs in her hand that held her recommendations and quickly stopped when Spock raised a questioning brow. "I wanted to talk to you about my current duty assignments."

The commander stood and held out an arm to indicate she should take a seat opposite him. Jim shifted from foot to foot and debated whether she should but ultimately decided to acquiesce.

"I was under the impression that you were able to handle your duties."

Restraining the frequent eyeroll that had become a common occurrence, she answered carefully to not give in to insubordination. "Of course I can. I'm a professional but right now I need to focus on my health and it's time for me to start stepping back." She straightened in the chair and slid on of her PADDs towards him, careful to not touch any bit of skin. "I'm recommending Lieutenant Hendorff be promoted to Lieutenant-Commander and take over the position of Chief of Security."

Spock's eyebrow raised in surprise. Yeah. Her and cupcake had had a rocky start but over the past year they'd become friends and colleagues. "It's my belief that, in light of my pregnancy and the recommendations from medical, I need to reduce my workload so I need to relinquish my title as chief of security and I want him to take the job. He's smart, capable, and the best I have seen. I'll retain my title as first officer until I am relieved of duty or I choose to leave due to maternity leave." She pauses and meets his eyes, fully intending to get her point across. "The other possibility is me leaving the ship sooner if you and I are unable to work together but that's up to you, sir."

She watched and waited for him to scan her report. Jim's heart rate started to rise in nervous anticipation for the rest of the discussion.

Jim continues, treading very carefully. "I do have one concern of note that I need to bring to your attention. There's a member of the crew who isn't fulfilling his duties and refusing to work with his subordinate beneath him in the chain of command. His efficiency has dropped by more than thirty percent."

Spock's eyes widened and Jim slid forward her other PADD showing the data she had compiled. It should show perfectly recorded charts and statistics. After all, since Jim had become Spock's First Officer, he'd been on her ass about perfection when filing reports and how to do it. She'd ensured that it was formal and direct per Spock's anal retentive specifications so there'd be no disputing her work.

"That is indeed concerning. The name of the crew member?" Picking up the PADD, Spock began to scroll through the data and reports. She knew what he was looking for. He was looking for just who she was talking about. Spock ran a tight ship and, in most cases, Jim agreed with him. This was the Fleet's flagship and they had to be the best and, in order to do that, they had to have the best crew.

Jim snorted at his ignorance. "Take a guess."

Spock's eyes narrow at the casual tone. "Vulcans do not guess." He told her in a flat tone.

"Of course they don't." She sighed and turned her face heavenward to the ceiling and paused, taking a deep breath. She took a minute and could feel Spock's concern and curiosity ramping up the longer I took for her to answer. Facing the captain, she ensured her expression was neutral. "It's the captain."

As Spock's grip tightened on the PADD, Jim almost wondered if she should have let it go but it needed to be addressed.
"Excuse me, commander? You're dangerously close to insubordination."

"So, sue me."

Spock jolted as if electrocuted by mere words alone. Jim used to be timid around the Vulcan, always too eager to please but she'd never been shown her true self-worth by a commanding officer other than Pike and that had been extremely short-lived. Her short time away had shown her that she could assert herself in more than just an emergency situation and gave her confidence. She'd lost so much of herself being under Spock and allowing herself to be a slave to her emotions.

"You've been avoiding me since it became known I'm pregnant and it's ridiculous. Man up. In order for the ship to function I need you to do your job too and that involves, at minimum, working with me some." Familiar adrenalin started to flood her system as she started her rant in earnest. She was thankful she maintained an air of calm despite the emotions she felt boiling beneath the surface but her words were delivered in sharp, painful jabs. Clearly they hit their target if Spock's eyes flashing at her in suppressed irritation was anything to go by. "If you can't then I will have to place a report in regards to the lack of working cohesion between captain and commander and I know you won't be able to come up with a damn good reason behind the issue on your side besides your childish and possessive behaviors in regards to me and my baby." Her tone was cold but as professional as she could manage.

The longer she ranted, the more Spock looked unsure of himself. She vaguely wondered if he was considering her rank of Commander no longer appropriate. She'd like to think that she'd outgrown it much like a child finally turning into an adult. "If I can deal with losing-" Her adrenalin started to fade quickly in the wake of the sorrow she suddenly felt and she had to swallow around a lump of emotion, "If I can deal with losing the man I love and still function then you can deal with the effects of my condition and the reasons behind it." She glared. "Get over yourself. Not everything is about you." Spock looked shocked and she shoved her remaining PADD at him. "Now, man up or Vulcan up or whatever it is you need to do and sign off on the crew rosters." Sucking a breath of air between her teeth, Jim shoved away as much emotion as she could. "Sir." She added reluctantly as almost an insult. "I want you to understand this isn't me being insubordinate but it's me offering you advice as your first officer which is my duty."

"Barely." He bit out the word and stiffly signed the crew roster, approving the shifts and recommendations she had put forth.

Jim swiped the necessary documents and left, hoping that he'd let things go at least during their shifts. There was so much more that needed to be said.

"One battle at a time. One battle at a time."
Omg! I'm so overwhelmed it's the support that everyone has been showing! Thank you! It definitely cheered me up.

It's actually been a tough week for me. I moved from Seattle to the Philadelphia area a couple of months ago and have had little success in making friends because of my limited interactions of caring for my daughter who requires a lot of care so I've been terribly lonely. My birthday was a couple of days ago and it was hard.

Writing is a release for me and it gives me great joy to see people enjoying it. Thank you so much for giving me such wonderful support.

As you guys can guess, things are starting to speed up a lot and I hope this chapter is entertaining!

DarkWaters

Chapter Thirty-Four

Jim stood at attention with Spock at her side in the transporter room. She could feel the tension in the room, heavy and oppressive. It made Jim struggle to remain neutral as they were waiting for the signal to begin transport from the surface of Salus IV. It was, yet another, strange thing that caused difficulty between Spock and her. He knew of the friendship and frequent correspondence between her and Sarek. His own lack of a relationship with his father likely caused some form of resentment. The fact that they were meeting again in person for the first time since that fateful day above Vulcan? Well...this had the potential to be a giant disaster.

Sarek had told her of the rift between them when Spock had turned down the VSA and of the years they had not spoken. Sarek, though it was illogical, felt regret and guilt for the time that Spock lost with his mother during that time when he had practically disowned him. It had broken Amanda's heart to see such conflict between the two people she loved so much.

She knew he felt terrible guilt for never telling Spock that he loved his mother and that it had not been just a marriage of convenience or simply logic as he was ambassador to Earth. He may never have said the exact words but Jim knew. He had always told Spock that his marriage to Spock's mother was logical and it was just not the way that it was widely believed. It was logical because he loved her.

He had discouraged his son to show emotion and love towards his mother to try and only raise him in the Vulcan way, not acknowledging his dual heritage. Spock had taken it to the extreme, even go so far as to consider undergoing the discipline of kohlinar. And now he no longer had the chance to tell her how he felt. Amanda may have never heard the words I love you from her son because of Sarek and his traditional upbringing but she had always known that he loved her. A mother always knows.

Sarek blamed himself and needed help to heal just as much as his son but they both needed to do so together. Amanda had usually been the bridge between the two stubborn men but now that she was no longer there the distance between the two seemed insurmountable.

Jim had never revealed Sarek's and her discussions to Spock. It was definitely a private thing and it
almost seemed to be a sort of human therapy for Sarek that he had frequently partaken of with Amanda and, despite him never saying so, he missed it. He may have been treated by a healer but she had a feeling that a human connection helped him in some way. Maybe since they’d shared a meld he felt comfortable enough to confide in her and Jim felt honored and humbled by it. She knew he'd never have been able to speak his thoughts to anyone else on the colony and so they had become, she hoped, friends. Sarek talked to her about everything from amusing anecdotes to serious discussions about current politics and even carefully worded personal discussions. Jim returned the favor grateful for the added bonus when, out of ten games of chess they played during their talks, she was able to kick his ass that one satisfying time.

Jim's friendship, or rather association, or maybe it was an equal mix of the two, with Sarek had began when she had gone to the embassy to request the help of a healer for herself. The mind meld Spock's counterpart had performed on her had started causing her extreme migraines. More memories than what was supposed to have been imparted had been placed in her mind had overwhelmed her untrained human mind. She hadn't been able to cope. It hadn't been controlled and it had been too much for her to handle. Selek had been too emotionally compromised and, as a result, Jim wasn't coping well with the inadvertent damage. She'd had constant nightmares, one of which was that she could hear and feel the agonizing screams of six billion Vulcans echoing in her mind as their planet was destroyed and she experienced moments of displacement when she'd see certain people she'd never met or places she had never been. She still did occasionally but it was manageable.

She'd gotten about five steps into the embassy doors when she'd collapsed and had a seizure. No healers had been available or comfortable melding with a human. Sarek recognized the symptoms of a meld gone wrong on a human and had volunteered to help to attempt to heal her mind. He had been a powerful but kind presence in her mind, separating her memories from the alternate Spock's and bringing much needed order to chaos.

Jim shook herself away from her memories and focused on the transporter pad, feeling nervous anticipation at the thought of seeing him again. His words telling her they'd be having a discussion when he saw her from the last time they'd spoken over subspace left her with an ominous feeling that he was plotting something. She wasn't sure whether it was going to be a bad thing or a good thing. With Vulcans, especially freaking smart and crafty ones like Sarek and Selek, she never knew what to expect.

She was surprised when two shapes with suitcases rather than the one that she had been expecting began to take form. She could see out of the corner of her eye that Spock was similarly surprised by the slight frown marring his features. Sarek, and the older counterpart of this Spock materialized. Jim couldn't help the mixed sensation of relief, happiness, and slight nervousness at seeing them in person. She hadn't seen Selek in person in a long time.

Sarek remained stoic, his face a serene mask as his eyes found his son but she could tell that it was a front by the hope hidden in those brown orbs. How could so many people say that Spock had Amanda's eyes. There was just as much Sarek's as there was his mother's. She knew from their correspondences that he had specifically requested the Enterprise and she suspected it was for several reasons. One being her and the other being able to speak with his son. She respected his privacy in regards to the exact reasons why he wanted to meet with him despite their many carefully constructed conversations with him.

The greeting Spock offered was one of pure professionalism, not even a hint of familiarity and she could tell by the slight downturn of his mouth that Sarek was disappointed and hurt. Jesus. She was tempted to lock them together in a room until they worked their shit out. Amanda had to have been the strongest and most patient woman in the galaxy to have put up with this.
Sarek's attention turned to Jim and she struggled to not squirm at the intense scrutiny of the older man completely focused on her. She felt Spock shift next to her and she knew it was because of him experiencing discomfort at their obvious familiarity. When Sarek's eyes drifted lower slightly and showed no hint of surprise at the subtle hint of her pregnancy she knew that Spock had correctly deduced that Sarek had clearly known of the pregnancy and of the circumstances of how it had come about. It was only further evidence that she had a better relationship with him than with Spock. By the slight tightening of his jaw, Jim knew it made him uncomfortable and maybe suspicious.

Spock raised his hand in the ta'al. "Welcome to the Enterprise, Ambassador Sarek and Ambassador Selek." Pausing, clearly unsure of what to say, he carefully phrased his next words. "We come to serve."

Spock's father stepped off the transporter pad, case in hand. "Your service honors us."

Spock indicated Kirk next to him. "And I believe you are acquainted with my First Officer, Commander Jamison Kirk."

She raised her hand in the traditional salute. "Dif'tor heh smusma, S'haile Sarek."

Sarek gave a slight nod of approval. "Sochya eh dif, Commander Kirk."

Spock returned his focus to Selek, also treating him as if he was a complete stranger.

Selek responded appropriately and when Jim was formally introduced it was like a light had been shone on Jim, as if she was everything to the older man. A mix of a daughter and of a dear friend. A slight smile and hint of amusement lit up his features. Spock's fingers curled slightly as if he wanted to clench them into fists but he restrained himself and settled for forcing his features to such a perfect blankness that it would put any Vulcan to shame.

"Nashaut, Pi'Jim." Selek told her, his voice warm and with a kindness that made Jim's face break into a large smile.

Jim's face heated at the informal greeting and the fond title of 'little Jim' while Sarek watched the pair in clear amusement at her reaction. Spock seemed puzzled by it and Jim wondered if it was because he was jealous that she was so close to yet another version of Spock and now it appeared that she was also close to his father. Again, she was frustrated and sad that father and son were too proud to admit fault on both sides and work towards building what they should have instead of mourning what they don't. Where did everything go so wrong between the two? Jim had seen such a close relationship between her Spock and Sarek in the other universe. What had happened here for their behaviors and mannerisms towards each other to be so different?

"The commander will see to your needs during the journey to Uzh-T'Kahsi. If you will excuse me I have ship's business to attend to."

With that, Spock was gone, leaving Jim with the two older Vulcans. "Uh-this way, gentlemen."

With Spock's departure, pretty much all sense of formality between the trio seemed to fade. Jim felt like she'd been left to the wolves...sort of.

"So...how did the peace talks Salus IV go?" Jim asked, feigning a sense of casualness that she certainly didn't feel as she started walking them to their quarters. She'd offered to carry their cases but she got a look directed at her by both men that had stopped her mid-sentence. Both had raised identical eyebrows at her in incredulity at her ridiculous offer and Jim wondered if they'd been
trained to do that.

"It was a delicate situation but it was adequately handled and the two warring continents appear to be pleased with the new treaty." Sarek replied.

Selek walked at a such a slow pace that it was going to make the journey take at least three times as long. She was starting to worry about it since he hadn't needed to move this slow when they were on Delta Vega. The terrain was a lot less difficult by far considering they were on smooth flooring rather than a snowy and icy planet.

"Selek, are you ok? Are you hurt? You seem to be walking a little slower than normal." She asked, concerned.

Selek seemed to consider her question. "Perhaps a visit to your ship's medical bay would be in order."

"It would also afford me the opportunity to deliver the documents your Doctor McCoy requested of me." Sarek added.

"Uh. Ok. Sure." She nodded. "Did you want to drop off your cases now or after?"

"I must admit that I am rather eager to get there." Selektold her and did she imagine a gleam of mischief in his brown eyes?

Jim's lips pursed in suspicion but she changed direction and led them to deck five. About five feet away from the door Selekt started walking at a normal pace.

"It would appear that my speed in walking has improved." Selektold her.

Jim halted and both of them turned and had such innocent looks on their faces that Jim almost believed them. Almost. "Maybe we should head back, then, since there's no-"

"As we are here it would be illogical to make the journey a second time to drop off Amanda's medical records." Sarek pulled out the data chip and they both swiftly turned around to head in, leaving Jim no choice but to follow them.

Bones descended on them like a vulture and was practically glowing with happiness when he received the chip from Sarek...or as much happiness as the cranky southern doctor would willingly show.

Selek watched as he put the data chip in, McCoy's eyes blurring as he read the information displayed on his screen at superhuman speed. Sarek's eyes turned and fixed on Jim despite him addressing the doctor. "Perhaps a comparison between Amanda's and Jim's pre-natal scans would provide an intriguing comparison and baseline. The earliest gestational information I brought with me was Amanda's thirteen week visit which I believe coincides with Miss Kirk's current stage."

McCoy turned and regarded Jim but something seemed to click when he smiled. "Why I think that's a wonderful idea. Jim, would you mind if Sarek was present for that scan? You're due for a check-up anyways." He drawled and Jim rolled her eyes. She'd been had.

Did she say she'd been left to the wolves? More like cunning, curious, nosy, and sneaky foxes...two pointy-eared, green blooded foxes.

"You all may as well be present since it looks like I'm such a sucker." She sighed.
"Well darlin', if the shoe fits." Jim struggled to not flip him off but her answering glare conveyed her thoughts clearly and Bones cackled in response. Bastard. Rolling her eyes and smiling at their skills in cornering her she followed them into the exam room that had rapidly become very familiar to her in the past several weeks.

Bones led the way and it wasn't long before they got to the imaging portion of the exam. Due to the risks involved with any hybrid pregnancy Jim had been forced into weekly exams so the routine was very familiar to her but no less exciting. It was amazing watching her baby develop, each week totally different from the previous one.

Jim quickly changed into the scrubs behind a privacy screen and lay on the biobed. They waited patiently until she was presentable and lying on the biobed. She didn't really mind them seeing but she did feel a bit...exposed and awkward as she lifted her top to expose her rounded stomach. McCoy went through the motions of palpating her abdomen, measuring fundal height, running basic scans, and asking her questions about her activities and if there were any issues. Thankfully, he didn't ask any really embarrassing ones. He probably knew she'd kick him if he did. After all, she was at the perfect height to deliver a devastating blow to him. He then moved onto the portion of the check-up that she always looked forward to. Seeing the baby.

Once he told everyone what was next, her two charges stood up straighter, their focus seemed to sharpen, and the hologram came on as Bones pressed the button to scan her uterus. Her baby floated above her, the light glowing showing the perfect little being that was growing within her. It looked more like a baby now that she was further along. There were eyelids, a more proportional head, and his (or her) arms were now longer and more defined but tiny legs were curled hiding the gender she knew that Bones could probably tell her what the baby was but she wasn't terribly sure she wanted to know. Her friend and Doctor knew her best and would tell her when he knew she'd want to know without her telling him. Jim smiled at the sight.

"We're at thirteen weeks gestation and this little one is the size of a pea pod." Bones told the trio.

Jim smirked. "Just the other week you told me lime. And here I thought you were a doctor not a greengrocer."

McCoy snorted. "She..." Jim's eyes darted up in question but Bones kept talking. "...or he measures at three inches and weighs just under an ounce."

Jim turned her head slightly and the two Vulcans were watching the rotating image with rapt attention. Sarek's eyes softened slightly and Jim was glad that he was there. It might not have been his grandchild but he cared and seemed to feel that it was important to him.

The image was shut off and it looked like the two Vulcans viewed it as far too soon despite Jim knowing that they had eidetic memories and would likely have already absorbed the image in their memory.

"The similarity between the hologram of Jim's child and Amanda's is, as you humans would say, 'uncanny'. The only differing aspect is the placement of the child's heart." Sarek's voice broke slightly on mentioning his wife's name and Jim knew it had to have been a bittersweet thing for him to be there.

xXx

Jim had returned to duty once the Ambassadors had been settled in their new quarters and she spent the rest of the day reviewing progress notes from the results of the nebula they had charted the other week. It had proven to be an interesting find and she was reading over the more detailed
information during her lunch hour when a tray slid on the table across from her.

She saved her progress notes that she was adding to the report to tidy it up and Scotty was sitting across from her, devouring his own meal with enthusiasm. Jim raised a brow and quelled her nausea at the sight of haggis.

Noticing her scrutiny he held up a portion of his food. "Ye want some, commander? The replicator actually made a decent version of it."

Jim swallowed with difficulty and shook her head no.

Shrugging, he started in on his meal again. "Your loss."

She very much doubted that.

Jim focused on finishing her work on the science department's reports and pulled up Scotty's engineering requests to distract herself. Jim frowned at the adjustments to the transporters that he was suggesting. "Uh, what is it you're trying to do with connecting the transporter with the deflector dish? It makes no sense."

He bounced in his seat. "Oh, aye. Chekov figured it'd increase the distance and accuracy so we can successfully beam up a person through electrical storms on planets so we dunna risk tha ship. It's a sound theory."

Jim ran a few calculations on power input and pulled up to view the specs on the conduits and shook her head. "You'd blow out half the circuits on the ship." Scotty's face fell.

Jim's shoulders fell in sympathy. "It's just too dangerous. What if it caused a fire or a crewman was at or near one of those circuits when they blew. It's just too risky. I'm sorry but I have to deny it."

He seemed to be more disappointed with her refusal than usual and Jim bit the inside of her cheek. She hated telling Scotty no to any of his ideas.

The engineer's own shoulders slumped and he moved the remaining food around his plate with his fork. "It was worth a try." He muttered.

Jim sighed and felt awful denying him anything. "If you can figure out a way to increase the load that the system can handle then I'll reconsider your request. It's just that I have Spock breathing down my neck right now and I also can't risk anyone or anything. You know the deflector dish is one of the most important pieces of equipment." She bit her lip. "It'd take at least a year to replace everything if they blew."

"Yer right, lassie. It was just a thought."

Jim felt awful at the expression on the engineer's face and she quickly scrolled through the rest of his paperwork to find something to give him. "Now the changes to the plasma converters in the nacelles? That we can do. I think it stands a chance of preventing that drift at quarter impulse we've been having."

He visibly brightened and changed the subject, pointing his fork at her stomach. "So, Keenser thinks he can figure out whether yer havin' a boy or girl by smell alone."

"Not you, too!"
Jim tossed the PADD with her latest efforts at her returning to her Spock at the wall, feeling a small sense of satisfaction at the sound of it thudding and falling to the ground. She was having to rely on memory to work everything out and, unlike some species, she didn't have the ability to recall everything flawlessly. It was starting to seem impossible despite her belief in no-win scenarios.

She flopped onto her back on the couch and dangled her legs over the arm, staring at the ceiling. She needed to come up with a plan if she didn't get back in time for the birth.

There was always her mom. She was on Deneva colony with Sam and Aurelean. They'd just had her nephew Peter and it'd give her baby someone to play with, a family. Deneva had a huge amount of scientific research stations and she could definitely get a position with a team based on her history with quadrotriticale. She could always expand on the research she had done and improve it. The other plus was she'd have the tools to continue in her efforts to get back to her Spock. Jim shook her head, dismissing the thought. Her family would drive her insane. As it was her mom was trying everything short of hijacking a freighter to visit and check on her.

Another option was that were some Starfleet ships that allowed families. They had wait lists that were years out and, even then, they were mostly freight shipping and transport or, if she was lucky science vessels. It wasn't really something that appealed to her but it was still a possibility.

She could maybe return to Earth, back to San Francisco and she knew she'd be offered a teaching position at the academy. She'd have access to the best scientific facilities in the Federation and the respect of fellow officers. She'd be alone, though.

The sound of her chime going off interrupted her thoughts and Jim rolled her eyes. "Come in, Bones."

The swish of cloth let her know he was in the room. "Yes, I'll take my hypo thing in a minute, Bones."

"I am not this 'Bones'."

Jim startled at the deep voice and fell off her couch and landed on her back. She just lay there in mortification and a very concerned Sarek leaned over her. "Are you injured, Jamison?"

"No, Ambassador. I'm fine." Jim accepted his help up, careful to not have any skin to skin contact out of respect for him.

The moment she was upright she straightened her uniform, hating the fact that her boots were off and her hair was down. She felt...smaller in Sarek's presence. "Is there anything I can do for you, sir?"

His face was a serene mask, calming and authoritative at the same time. "Please, call me Sarek and sit down. I wish to speak informally and of matters that are personal and private in nature, Jamison."

This didn't sound good. She carefully sat and the older man sat down next to her. Jim forced herself to relax.

"I wish to inquire about your plans for the future."

Jim scratched her head. "Uh..."
"Where you will give birth, if you will remain on board the Enterprise during the pregnancy, and where you will live after. These things."

Well, these things were exactly what she had been thinking about only minutes ago. "I'm not sure, yet. I was trying to get back to my Spock but-"

Sarek didn't look pleased with her non-answer and interrupted. "You may not get back there, Jamison. Logically, you must consider alternatives."

She sighed. Sometimes she hated Vulcan logic. "I know."

"And your alternatives?" He prodded.

"Well, there's my mom and brother on Deneva but they drive me nuts if I spent that long with them." She admitted.

"Nuts?"

Jim chuckled at the confused expression. "Don't try and pull that with me. You were the ambassador to Earth and married a human. I know you know what that expression means. You just do it to mess with us humans."

Sarek gave a very good impersonation of innocence that Jim knew was fake. Vulcans are the worst kind of trolls and Jim thought it was hilarious how many people were fooled by them.

She quickly sobered and struggled to not fidget as she outlined another alternative. "There's also going back to Earth but I'm not sure."

Sarek turned serious and placed a hand on her shoulder. Vulcans never touched unless necessary or if it was family. "Then I wish to offer another option for your consideration. I have declared you ko-fu k'thanai, my daughter by adoption. T'Pau has already registered you as such and you have been awarded certain rights and privileges as a Vulcan citizen and my daughter."

Jim's head turned so quickly to face him that she was sure she sprained something. She moved slightly away to look closer at her, now (apparently), father. -the fuck? "Uh...look-you don't have to-it's not Spock's-or rather it's not your son's-I mean this universe's Spock's-" Damn parallel universe logic! "It's not necessary and I don't want to cause any issues-"

"It is done."

"I don't want you to be treated badly or ostracized by your peers for taking in a human that technically isn't related to you."

Straightening, Sarek gave the practiced appearance of aristocracy that he wore well. "I find that I do not care."

Jim fell silent, knowing that once Sarek declared something, it was notoriously difficult to sway him. Probably one of the reasons he was such a successful diplomat.

"I also want to inform you of other facts. I am well versed pregnancy, delivery, and the postpartum stages of human pregnancy. I have experience in caring for hybrid Vulcan-Human offspring and have adequate space in which you and your child may stay. I believe it is beneficial for humans during these stages to have support. It is not a requirement for you to retain your status in our society but merely an option for the both of you."
That's...sweet. "I really don't want to impose-"

Sarek's brows drew down and his eyes flashed in (maybe?) frustration at her prevarication. "I would have not made the offer if it would be an imposition. I implore you to accept."

Jim leaned forward with her elbows on her knees and her face in her hands. "I'd feel awkward and you're so busy with-"

"Perhaps I failed to mention that I would be requesting a sabbatical for a period of time that I deem necessary to ensure the health and comfort of my ko-fu k'thanai and my grandchild." He very nearly smirked at Jim's dumbfounded expression at just how far he was willing to go to convince her. She dropped her head back into her hands and groaned in frustration. She had so much to think about and it was driving her crazy.

(Translation of ko-fu k'thanai- daughter by adoption)

"What would I even do there? I'd have no job, no status...I'd be an outcast and so would the baby. You can't be serious."

"Vulcans do not joke. There is the newly constructed VSA that has offered you a position. In fact, they have offered several positions that you may choose from. Your status would not be questioned as you would be seen as a descendant of the House of Surak. There is also the fact that behaviors towards those of mixed blood has changed significantly in recent years compared to when Spock was a child. Our people are finally embracing the principal of IDIC, especially with our numbers so depleted. There is no longer a choice if our people are to survive."

Jim took her face out of her hands and looked up. "It's not your son's child nor your grandchild. Well...sort of not really. It's the Spock's of where I was. You don't have any obligation to us."

"It is now considered my grandchild but, you are correct in your statement that it is not my son's child. It is not listed as such despite its DNA signifying so. It is, however, a child of Vulcan descent." He sighed in a very human manner at Jim's silence, a habit he likely picked up from Amanda. "Even if it was fully human and the parentage was not part-Vulcan I would still do this for you and your child. You are viewed favorably by my people for your efforts during the tragedy that befell our people and your tireless efforts to help us regain our footing. You will be accepted."

Pausing, the older Vulcan placed his hand back on her shoulder to gain her attention. "I am also thankful that you have kept me informed about my son and appreciate your presence in my life. Your willingness to communicate has brought me a sense of peace and gives me the human feeling of hope that all may not be lost in reconciling with Spock. I enjoy our conversations and hearing about your adventures. It makes me feel...young."

"And if I leave and return to my Spock? You know I am trying to do so."

He nodded slightly. "Then you would have my blessing."

"And if I refuse? It could be viewed as disrespect."

"Where no offense is meant, none is taken." He countered.

Jim sighed. "Do I have a choice?"

Sarek raised a brow as if she was being deliberately obtuse and stubborn. "Of course but I am hopeful it will be the correct decision."

"I'm just nervous doing this without Bones,-" She saw Sarek's confusion and clarified for him. "-Dr. McCoy being there to care for me and deliver my baby."
Sarek looked thoughtful. "There is currently a need for a doctor at the colony that is not Vulcan as we have a larger amount of pregnancies that are not fully Vulcan and some would likely feel more comfortable with a non-Vulcan doctor."

She knew that Bones would accept a position wherever she was. Sentimental bastards, both of them. She smiled at him and he seemed to relax slightly if she was interpreting his body language correctly. "You are one hell of a negotiator. You do know that, right?"

"Of course."

Jim bit her lip and mulled over the offer but she knew that it was the best one she'd find. Sarek knew her well considering he'd poked around in her mind and clearly found her to be acceptable. "Fine. I accept."

Sarek looked relieved...or as relieved as he could.

She put up one finger. "On one condition."

"And that would be?"

"You talk to your son and work out whatever it is that you two are fighting over. He's really not ok and I think he needs help."

Jim waited on tenterhooks for his reply. She hoped that Sarek would be able to break through Spock's defenses and help him to heal. Spock wasn't ok. The refusal to let her leave, his erratic behavior, and multiple other factors only confirmed that he was suffering and, by extension, so was Jim.

Sarek let out a very human sigh. "Very well. I accept this condition."

"It's well past due and I know that you miss him even though you don't say it."

His eyes looked more like his son's than she had ever seen and Jim's heart ached at the sight. So different and yet so alike.

"You are a skilled negotiator yourself, commander Kirk, and I agree with your logic."
Chapter Notes

I want to thank everyone for their kind and wonderful words. It definitely lifted my spirits. Here’s a chapter to wrap up things for a short while on Jamison's current universe. The next set will be the "good Spock's" perspective. Things are starting to heat up and will become more interesting as time goes on. I'm hoping that this chapter will also create some sympathy and understanding as to the issues regarding "bad Spock". He needs so much help that it breaks my heart.

I have written two new story outlines for more work but I prefer to write out the bulk of the story before posting so waiting times are less and I'd love to hear which one I should be focusing on. One is an adorable romance while the other is the ultimate drama which will have two alternate endings which will both be posted at the end for "fun".

It's up to you guys to pick. It'll be a while before they're posted because I want to finish one story at a time!

It may be a little bit before the next chapter as I actually have to write it so it'll be quite the drama and adventure. :)

Thank you all for every comment and kudos. It's so exciting!!! Thank you!

DarkWaters

Chapter Thirty-Five

Selek slowly opened his eyes. He completed his meditation, his return to the present leaving him distinctly unsettled. There were times when he felt such guilt for his failures in correcting the collapse of the star in the Romulan star system, thereby setting in motion the events that irrevocably damaged the natural timelines of this universe. It almost consumed his very being. He had been forced multiple times to employ the disciplines that he had obtained from his failed attempt at achieving kohlinar to calm the chaos in his mind. There was so much that he had to answer for and now he had, however inadvertently by providing his assistance in retrieving her, taken Jim away from a Spock that she loved and who had returned it tenfold.

Not only that, his 'help' had taken her child from a father, breaking up a family. True familial bonds were important in a Vulcan child's development, even in one of mixed descent. Thankfully, the people of Uzh-T'Khasi were rapidly becoming experts in compensating for this situation by similar measures that Sarek was implementing with Jim and they will do so with her child. He was grateful for his interference in this matter and that Jim had wisely accepted their logic.

He was also grateful that Sarek had acquired the skill of implying the full extent of what would be involved in her joining his family. He was a true and skilled diplomat. Perhaps it was a skill not learned from his human side but likely from his father from when he had been in his own time. The knowledge of her and the child bonding with Sarek as a daughter and grandchild in a familial bond would likely have frightened her away and swayed her opinion way from what was best for them and their hole at assistance would have been refused out of a sense of guilt and pride. Selek's suggestion of slowly introducing her to Vulcan culture and customs had been understood and approved of by Sarek. His experiences with Amanda had taught him well when dealing with the
skittish behaviors of humans in regards to their people's ways.

He had failed in his duties to his t'hy'la once again. Once in protecting his own Jim when he had become trapped in the Nexus and had never properly searched for him only for him to later die to, yet another, mad man's actions and now with Jamison. It was enough to break his heart and his spirit. He only hoped that his current and future actions would be enough to help repair some of the severe damage he had caused.

The Vulcan philosophy of kaiidth, 'what is, is' applied here. He struggled to not focus on the past as it cannot be changed but consider that what could be changed is his perception of it. He must not allow himself to view those thoughts with pain but let them instead see the good that is happening fill him with happiness. He wouldn't be able to change the past but, instead, he could use the past to change the present and shape the future. Allowing his lips to quirk into a smile hidden from view of others, he knew that if anyone could shape a future to their liking it would be Jim Kirk...one from any universe.

His joints protested his movement as he rose and he lamented his advanced years and the frequent pain that accompanied it. Pain was a thing of the mind but it was difficult to control for long periods of time. He, now, had to try to relieve it with the help of prescribed medication and increased room temperatures when not in hotter climes.

He was indulging in a hot cup of tea when his chime disturbed his morose thoughts. At the sight of Jim leaning against his door, his demeanor only became further upset but he hid it well under a thin veneer of Vulcan calm, only allowing more pleasant expressions to peek through. He was successful if her reactions were any indication.

In the week-long journey to the colony Jim's belly had grown enough to advertise her pregnancy further. Though she was now only fourteen weeks into her gestation, the fact that her frame was slight made it easier to identify. Vulcan infants tended to be slightly larger than their human counterparts, as well as significantly stronger as a result to their dense bones and musculature. He did have concerns about the birth and development of the child. His own mother had suffered internal and visible external bruising when carrying him when he would kick and his delivery was not an easy one. Even with the fetus being only a quarter Vulcan, it was evident that paternal genes were clearly dominant.

"Please, come in." He gestured to the small table and Jim slowly walked over and lowered herself down. Selek could see from the way she held herself that it seemed as if a weight that she probably had not realized she carried had been lifted from her shoulders.

The young commander adjusted the red tunic she wore that should have been gold and fixed the older Vulcan with a penetrating stare. "I heard something interesting from Ensign Gra today." Her tone was mild but he could feel an undercurrent of amusement but irritation was tainting it.

Selek tilted his head in acknowledgement, choosing to remain silent to encourage her to speak.

"I heard that there's been a few calls placed to Admirals Barnette and Komack." Pausing, Jim's eyes meet Selek's suspicion darkening the normally vivid blue. "They were coded and from your quarters. Care to explain?" Jim's lips turned down in a moue of displeasure at Selek's own delayed reaction to the question as he considered his words to ensure they would not cause offense. Normally, those of his people would simply say the reason behind the communications. Sparing something as intangible as emotions was seen as unimportant when communicating.

Selek and Sarek had both spoken with the admiralty to ensure Jim's and McCoy's leaves and that it wouldn't affect their careers or future postings. He had not anticipated such a negative reaction but
he should have as this Jim was not so very different from the one in his timeline. Stubborn, intelligent, and fiercely independent were only few of the qualities that made up the complex person she was.

Steeling his fingers to rest them against his chin, he met Jim's gaze head on. "We did take the liberty of speaking with the Admiralty in regards to the doctor's and your leaves of absence to ensure there would be no difficulties and no protests from certain crew members." He admitted.

No hint of surprise showed on the young commander's face and Selek was sure that did had known but that she had wanted confirmation from him. She now had it. What remained to be seen was her reaction to their assistance or meddling depending on how it was interpreted and received.

"I don't particularly care to be taken for fool or for someone who is either incompetent or incapable of doing things for themselves."

Selek's forehead wrinkled in guilt and understanding. "I can assure you that it was not our intention to imply any of those things."

A welcome hand, fragile and smaller than that of his own Jim's, rested on his arm and Selek was gratified to see that Jim was not angry despite her frustrations. "I know you guys meant well. I appreciate all that you're doing for me and my baby but there are some things that I need to do on my own and one of those things is getting my house in order."

"Your house-?"

She wagged a finger at him. "Don't even try it, mister. I'm on to you sneaky Vulcans."

Selek's lips twitched as he unsuccessfully hid his mirth but Jim's eyes, far more blue than than that of Earth's sky, failed to hide her own amusement.

"Perhaps some refreshments and I would welcome a game of chess with an old friend." Selek made to stand and Jim rolled her eyes and moved with far more grace than he and she gently pressed him back into his seat.

"I think the title may be more appropriate in relation to you, 'old' friend." She jested. "I will get the drinks and the game board and I might take it easy on you in deference to the lesson my mom taught me in respecting my elders."

Selek's smile grew at the cheeky behavior and he accepted the glass of juice from her. As she set up the tri-D chess board, he could sense her nerves despite not being in physical contact. He had always been attuned to James Kirk of all universes and she was no different despite her gender and the lack of a bond between them or the telepathy that was initiated by touch. She was unsure of her skills as she was used to the one dimensional version. The differences in the game may be small but the challenges it presented were stimulating.

It was only thirty minutes into their game when Jim tipped over her king in defeat, a small amused smile lighting her face.

"I think you like to cheat."

Selek gave her his best 'I am but an innocent alien face' that never failed to work on any Kirk' and she just rolled her eyes.

"You're just using what you learned from your games from when you played against my counterpart to kick my ass."
Setting up the board for a repeat round, he raised a brow in fond amusement. "It is only logical to use all of the tactical advantages I possess to win, is it not." He paused, lips twitching. "And besides, I was under the impression that you did not believe in a no-win scenario and enjoyed a challenge."

Sputtering, she carefully shifted a pawn forward two spaces. "Smartass."

He returned her challenge. "I could, as humans would say, 'take it easy on you'."

She shrugged and shifted her rook, careful to avoid his typical trap. "Nah. I enjoy a challenge." Grinning, Selek wondered if he'd created a monster. "It only makes the one time I achieve victory against you taste that much sweeter when I'm able to beat you against your own game. Bring it on, old friend."

Moving his rook to the second level to avoid her own attack and set up queen's gambit, the mood took on a more somber feeling. "Jim, I feel I must apologize and beg your forgiveness for an old man's foolish, sentimental, mistakes."

Her hand halted over her next move and she set her hands on her lap, fixing him with a penetrating, but curious gaze. "You have made many mistakes, Selek. We all do. None of which require forgiveness from me. To which supposed mistake in regards to me do you refer?"

He did not wish to have such a discussion between them under such an informal setting, needing her full attention on what he was about to tell her. He was grateful that she seemed to understand the gravitate of the situation when she did not protest the abrupt end to the game or give an offer of assistance in his task. Perhaps she knew him too well, understanding the physical aspect of something as simple as putting something away allowing him to mentally phrase what he was to tell her.

She waited patiently as he refreshed their drinks and moved to the seating area of his temporary living quarters, gracefully curling her legs underneath her. Selek sighed, his heart feeling heavy and full of guilt.

"I once told my own Jim that being a starship captain was his first, best destiny."

Jim tilted her head, encouraging him to continue. "His response was that if it was true then mine was to be at his side and that if there was any true logic to the universe then we would end up on that bridge together someday." He took a sip of his tea, scalding his tongue and causing it to stick to the roof of his mouth as he waited for her to absorb his words before he continued. "I still believe this to be true but not in this universe. In my arrogance, I had not taken into account the male pride and arrogance of the admiralty in this universe in regards to a woman taking command of the Federation's flagship or the extreme differences caused by my interference in this timeline."

She took her time replying, sipping her own brew at a more sedate pace and he admitted to feeling a flutter of nervousness. "This is true." She told him simply.

Sighing, he wasn't sure what to say but he wanted to finish."I still believe this to be true and it is likely that it is not in this universe and the Spock meant to be at your side is clearly not this one."

"Yes. " she hedged.

He leaned forward, desperate for a reaction other than the calm neutrality she was exhibiting. He'd expected-no, he'd hoped for anger, hysterics, something instead of this calm acceptance. "Please
The blonde rolled her eyes, her blue eyes showing nothing but fond love and a sad smile gracing her heart-shaped face. "There's nothing to forgive. You need to forgive yourself. Not ask for my forgiveness. Do not allow yourself to carry this burden nor should you have the human behavior of arrogance that only you are responsible for all things and all people, including their behaviors, in this plane of existence or any other." She sipped her tea and Selek could see a smirk carefully hidden. "Besides, you must be forgetful in your old age."

"Excuse me?"

"I now have experience with three Spocks. I know you too well. Do not dwell on such things. Kaiideth. What is, is. Nothing can be done and you must focus on the present and the future." Her eyes drifted over to the bookshelf where more forms of entertainment for guests resided. "Now, how about a game of checkers?"

It was as if a weight had been lifted from his shoulders he had not known had been there. She had lifted the millstone hanging from his neck causing him to drown in guilt and for that he was relieved and grateful. She truly was a universal constant. It seemed that all Jims, no matter the universe, were far too forgiving to all Spocks.

As he set up the board, Jim, once again paused. "I still have to give the Spock of this ship one final chance to do the right thing before I leave."

He agreed and, again, felt the human emotion of hope but knew it was misplaced.

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Jim stood stiffly at attention, McCoy at her side, his support a palpable thing that she could feel surrounding her. Spock pushed aside the disembarkation paperwork he was completing and clasped his hands in front of him. Leaning forward, he viewed the sudden intrusion by two of his senior officers with vague curiosity. He was unaware of a meeting scheduled with them and, for a moment, experienced concern. The only reason the two of them would appear in front of him would be if there was a medical reason that involved Commander Kirk.

"Commander Kirk. Doctor McCoy." He greeted and was impressed by the flawless parade stance the pair exhibited. "I was unaware that I would be seeing you. Is there a particular reason that you need to see me?" He raised a brow and looked between the pair. "Especially in a joint capacity?"

Facing him, Jim's face set in one of remarkable indifference. It was impressive and one he could only ever hope to replicate even by utilizing his many years of learned Vulcan discipline. "Doctor McCoy is here for support." She faltered, shooting an unsure look towards McCoy before focusing her attention once more to her Captain, quickly schooling her features back into impassivity. "I'm not quite sure why but I wanted to discuss a something of a personal nature with you. It's a mix of personal and profession so you may have to excuse the combination of the two."

Leaning towards the pair, Spock could not help but experience a small amount of concern. There was clear determination in their stances and no small amount of camaraderie that the pair exhibited if the way the doctor shifted slightly to close the small distance between them. "Indeed? Please, speak your mind."
The blond did not relax. If anything she became more tense and Spock was sure this was going to be another unpleasant discussion. He wasn't sure but he felt, what Jamison would describe as, a 'gut' feeling that this may be one of the last that would be between them.

He waited patiently while she appeared to collect herself with a grace that only enhanced her image. She looked the picture of what a Starfleet Captain should be despite her current rank insignia located on her sleeves. Confident, sure, and perfectly in command of her decisions, and Spock knew then that maybe she was ready to lead more than something as small as a department. She'd been ready for a long time but hard heads and pure stubbornness by him, as well as a multitude of Starfleet Admirals, had prevented this. Now, current circumstances stalled her advancement and Spock wasn't sure if she truly cared anymore about her career. Her care and attention seemed rooted in the human emotion of love. Love that was focused on the child growing within her, love for a version of himself that should never have met her, and love for a crew in both universes.

There was a sense of finality in the air and he knew if their talk went the way he suspected it would then that premonition would come to fruition.

"Captain, I must ask one more time to have access to the records surrounding my disappearance and return to the Enterprise. I want to continue in my attempts to return to where the father of my child is. I will not let my efforts affect my duties on board the Enterprise for the time I have left here."

Spock leaned forward, his hands coming together under his chin and steepled his fingers. "I will accept your advice from our previous talk as to the handling of the crew and I grieve with thee in regards to the loss of your life in that other universe but kai'dith. What is, is. You must accept the life you were born into. There are many factors in my decision for you to remain here. Some personal and some professional. I know it is not Vulcan to express regret but I apologize for what must be."

McCoy and her both frowned. She had had high hopes that he would at least try to understand her position. All sense of professional decorum faded as Jim set her jaw and raised her chin in defiance. It was so reminiscent of those many months ago when they had been fighting on the bridge against Nero that Spock momentarily had double vision of the two images overlaying each other.

"Bullshit that Vulcans don't lie. I know you don't grieve with me." She glared, her eyes filled with hatred and anger at the man and switched to Vulc. "Bath'paik! Bolaya nash-veh fun-tor na'ta'nash veh kan, na't'nahash-veh t'hy'la faie eh taluhk, nash-veh na'Spock! Ti'amah!" (Translation: Damn you! I need to return for my child, for my soulmate, my Spock! Let me go!)

McCoy's head spun to look at Jim, shock and confusion written on his features as she spoke. The doctor knew the insult. They had joked about it drunkenly as she taught him insults in different languages but the rest was a mystery to him. Both men hadn't know that she had become fluent in vuhlkansu.

Spock jerked back, his cheeks darkening and turning a slight green as his own face heated in anger and extreme surprise at her speaking to him in that manner in his native tongue. He had not known her to be capable of this skill. "Ni'droi ik nar'tor. Klee-fah."
(Translation: I am sorry. You are denied.)

Jim saw a red far more vivid than that of Spock's quarters. "Bolau nash-veh ki'fun-tor ki'ta ish-strukhrta. Taluhk nash-veh na'Spock! Se shan'hal'ak! T'amah!"
(Translation: I need to return to that universe. I love my Spock! Let me go!)
Spock's closed his eyes as if in pain. "Si'ti th'laktra."
(Translation: I grieve with thee.)

"Ponfo-mirann, tu kre'nath!" She snapped.
(Translation: expletive not translated but it must be bad, you bastard)

Spock straightened in his chair and his eyes flashed dangerously.

Jim couldn't believe it. She'd hoped to resolve the issues between them. Jim's face turned so emotionless it would put a Vulcan to shame but her eyes gave her away. The sky blue turned glacial as she focused on him. "Then we are at an impasse."

Sighing, her anger seemed to deflate like that of a balloon popping. Lifting her eyes, there was pity filling them and Spock did not like that at all. It made him feel inadequate and he was not sure how he felt about that. "You told them that I would see to the ambassadors's needs and one of them, despite Sarek's stubbornness and pride, is you. He needs to talk to you, to be able to rebuild a bond between the two of you and work out your differences. You may not believe this but he loves you. I know for a fact that your people feel emotions far deeper than that of humans and, right now, he feels regret and sadness for everything that has transpired between you, but also a profound love for his son. You need to leave the past behind. Meet with him. You know that at any moment your chance to express these things could be stripped away from you so, please, for his sake as well as your own, meet with him before we leave."

"Explain."

"I am resigning my commission as first officer on the Enterprise effective immediately."

Spock stood suddenly. "You cannot!"

Jim smiled with none of her usual happiness. It was a bitter, angry thing. "I can and I will. Not only do I have this right as a pregnant member of Starfleet to start my maternity leave and spend it wherever I see fit, I am also now a Vulcan citizen and, as such, I am afforded the right to even resign my commission completely to be a part of the rebuilding of Vulcan society."

"I refuse to accept your resignation as is my right as your commanding officer."

Jim laughed and it only served to incense the Vulcan. "The admiralty has already approved my leave and your grandmother, T'Pau, ensured it."

"What would my grandmother have to do with your leave?" He had greatly underestimated the resourcefulness of Commander Kirk. She had checkmated him, game, set, and match and covered all possibilities like the brilliant tactician he had known her to be. Though she may not have gotten what she had hoped for with the data to leave this universe she had accomplished the goal of moving far away from his influence and far away from him in order to try and complete the task on her own. He had little doubt that she could do anything she put her mind to and he worried.

"Use your logic and put the pieces together, Spock. She is now my grandmother as well. I am Jamison Kirk cha'Sarek. You are to be an uncle, big brother." She hissed the title as an insult. "Sarek has formally adopted me. Goodbye, brother or sir. Whichever title you deem as necessary." Holding her hand in a perfect ta'al, she stood straight, spine ramrod straight. "Live long and prosper." It was not meant as a sign of respect and he knew it. He recognized the cold symbolism behind it as he had done the same when he had refused his place among those in the VSA.

Jim jerked to attention and snapped off a salute, spinning on her heel and leaving him without
being dismissed. He was a stubborn bastard and so was she. Even if it took a lifetime she wouldn't give up. But, if she could never leave, then she would at least ensure that her child would have the happiness that he or she deserved. If that meant she was no longer in Starfleet then so be it.

McCoy closed his mouth and pulled himself out of his own stupor. "Is this a bad time to let you know that I've been granted a temporary assignment by Admiral Archer to Uzh-T'Khasi as a visiting doctor?"

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Sarek had not been surprised by his son's acceptance of his request to meet before his departure. Jamison had informed him of the disaster between the two of them that had taken place earlier in the day.

Looking at his son, he felt a mix of pity and heartbreak. Spock had clearly been under the effects of his Time and a clear broken bond that had not healed correctly for the past several months. It was likely his hormones started to slowly cause an imbalance and making it difficult to think clearly and logically. He should have been recognizing the signs and symptoms but he likely had been unable to due to the stress of recent events and his son's unwillingness to communicate with the only family he had left. Maybe it was because of the pain he felt that Sarek was the last remaining link to Amanda or maybe it was shame. Whatever the reason, it needed to end now.

The older Vulcan straightened his robes. Careful to give an impression of openness, "I wish to thank you for agreeing to see me before I am to leave."

"You have Commander Kirk to thank for that."

Sarek nodded at the comment. "Then she has my gratitude."

"Why do you wish to speak with me?" He grit out and Sarek frowned minutely at the insolent tone but did not comment out of understanding for the situation.

"Why do you deny your first officer that which would make her happy?" He quietly asked.

The muscles worked in his jaw furiously as he tried to control himself. "It is not a matter of denying her happiness but of my duty to ensure the balance of our timeline. She is not meant to be there."

"You would then lose her by not allowing her to leave."

"I would lose her by her leaving." He countered.

He closed his eyes and strengthened his mental shield to keep control. The pain he felt his son projecting caused him physical pain. "She is t'hy'la to you, sa-fu. Your duty was to cherish her and do all within your power to make her happy. The first step was to be a friend and you have failed in that." The older man admonished.

"That is the point of not allowing her to leave! How can I even attempt to accomplish any of it if she is not here and I do not know how!" Spock shouted at him, his control fraying and beginning to snap. He slammed his hands on his desk and several PADDs fell to the floor, victims of his actions.

Sarek shook his head sadly. "A t'hy'la bond need not be completed but it does deserve acknowledgement and respect. They are revered among our people and the other half of a t'hy'la would do anything for them even if that means letting them go." Sarek moved closer, careful to not intimidate his son. He approached him as if he was a wild, frightened sehlat, ready to bolt at any
moment. "What were your intentions? To simply have her wait? As it is she will be forever mourning the loss of her mate and father of her child and even be witness to the alternate version of him bonding with another." His hand twitched towards his son of its own volition but he retained control.

"Give me your thoughts. I ask this of you not as punishment or judgement but to help you with your pain." Sarek asked, unsure if his son would allow the intrusion.

Spock tilted his head and looked curiously at his father. "We have not shared a meld in ten years, father."

"I am aware and it was an error on my part. I beg forgiveness." He hoped that Spock would allow him this. He needed to help him. He needed to heal what was between them and he selfishly wanted to heal himself. Jamison knew that it was necessary to bridge the gulf that had grown so wide that it risked never being able to be bridged. Amanda would have been ashamed at his actions. "Please." He begged. "I have felt the loss of your mind joined with mine most deeply. It is unnatural to not share in familial bonds and to be so alone. Another regret."

Spock studied his father, perhaps seeing him truly for the first time since that fateful day when he had lost his mother. "I will allow it, sa-mekh." His shoulders drooped, and head fell slightly and Sarek knew that Spock felt shame and such great pain. Sarek wanted to follow the human act of hugging him but he was unsure it would be welcome. This would have to do for now. Spock needed him in a way that they both did.

"Perhaps-" His voice was small like that of when he was a child and his heart squeezed in his side, the pain of guilt for his own actions towards his son causing this horrible feeling. "Perhaps, we should speak further on other matters after."

Sarek nearly smiled in happiness and gratitude. "Yes, I am amenable to that request, my son."

Sarek lifted his hand and was pleased when his son welcomed his touch. He had to force himself to not flinch away when he felt such pain. There was fire and burning running rampant and so much agony. So much pain that it consumed him.

His son was hurting and it, in turn, hurt him to see such suffering. A bond had been broken between him and Jamison from when she had died in the warp core. Unhealed it had caused depression, fear, and near insanity. His mind was damaged and Sarek knew that he had come almost too late to heal the damage it had wrought on Spock's mind. So much damage from Nero's rampage had caused more than enough torment in his son's mind with the loss of his mother and planet, familial bonds had been torn from him.

The fire burning only served to confuse his son further. He was interpreting things wrong and Sarek cursed the teachers from Spock's youth and his own arrogance that he had not seen this sooner and guided his child as a parent should. Spock had never been taught how to understand his telepathy properly and it had caused so much harm. He blamed himself for his lack of foresight to anticipate such neglect and speciest behavior from those he had entrusted with his son's education.

Carefully, focusing on the torn fragments of the bond that had been formed improperly to Jamison, he carefully soothed the damaged fragments and ensure that they would no longer harm him. Once he formed new bonds this one would fade in time. It hadn't been a betrothal bond but his mind had interpreted it as such. It was more of a strong sibling bond fueled by Jamison's love for him and damaged by her death.

The only reason she had not suffered had been because it had been removed completely from her
side when she had died. Sarek imparted this clarification in his son’s mind and sought reassurance that he understood. A strong sense of relief filled him when his son’s mind calmed and showed peace in regards to his broken connection to Jamison.

Sarek explained his behavior was due to the pain and damage of a torn bond from Jamison from when she died, that it had further became damaged with his distance and apathy to try and protect himself because of his fear. His obsession with her due to an instinctual attempt to heal the bond. Jamison is not aware of it because it was fully removed upon her death. His delayed pon far is due to an attempt to complete it and by joining with Uhura it will heal the psychic damage and heal his mind bringing order to chaos. He tells Spock he does care for his captain and would even do so even without the fractured bond damaging him. He is hurting and not fully in control and will regain his control once he completes his bond with his beloved Uhura and a session with a mind healer afterwards. Spock is terribly afraid Jamison will not forgive him and Sarek reassures him she will.

He tentatively moves deeper into his son’s mind once permission is granted and feels the burning of his Time beginning to consume him. It only further showed Sarek that it was time for his son to receive help and relief. With new bonds in place he would heal.

It had been many years since Spock and he had connected. The last time had been when he was a child struggling with meditation. Regret was illogical as you cannot change the past but Sarek felt it anyway. With his emotions bared to his son he felt Spock actively seek him out and the parental bond between them strengthened. Forgiveness and love was projected and Sarek was grateful. He made a promise to his son that he would never let this happen again. Spock was precious to him. He was all he had left of Amanda and he was a part of him that deserved to be treasured.

Sarek retreated from the meld, attempting to cool the fires and need from his Time that his son was feeling. He imparted the knowledge of how to temporarily control himself that should have been taught to him at a young age and retreated fully.

"Even now you are beginning to experience the throes of your Time and she is not to be a part of it because of your actions and choices. Your chosen mate is Nyota Uhura. Was Jamison to sit by, alone, and watch while you bond, marry, and have a life, possibly even children of your own as well? Is it your intention that she suffer?" Sarek remained calm, refusing to bait his son.

"No." He said hoarsely, his pain audible.

"Are you simply upset that she no longer harbors romantic affections towards you? Perhaps jealous that she found another to love?"

"No."

"Or is it that it was because it was another Spock?" His words were harsh but his tone gentle as he tried to understand Spock’s actions.

"No."

The corners of his mouth turned down at the answer. "Lying is illogical and unbecoming of one of your heritage, my son. Either heritage. Human or Vulcan."

"You know nothing." He growled.

"Then tell me. Speak your mind."
Spock's posture collapsed, as if he was a puppet whose strings had been cruelly cut and it caused Sarek to feel physical pain to see his son like this. Amanda would be devastated. "I am a danger to her. She ignites emotions in me that are dangerous and should never be released." Spock's face twisted in agony "I nearly killed her during the attack on Vulcan and very nearly killed another being because of the pain of losing her. She continuously tests my controls when she places herself in danger and it...frightens me. If she is no longer here, then I cannot be assured of her safety." He whispered and Sarek gave into emotion, pulling his son close to him. He wrapped his arms around him and squeezed him tight and Spock clutched at his robes tight enough that the seams strained under the pressure.

Sarek sighed, wishing that he had spoken to Spock of the emotions all Vulcan people felt. That he should not suppress them but control them with logic. Spock's face pressed against his neck and Sarek found he did not care if it would be frowned upon by their people. They needed this. "Your mother tested my controls and I allowed them to falter in order to take the risk. As a result I experienced what few rarely get to have. Love, happiness, and, yes, heartbreak when I lost her but I was better for it and I would not trade a moment of my time with her for anything. The good and the bad go hand in hand. You must be willing to risk the bad to obtain the good. To live a life of safety is to live no life at all."

Sarek breathed deeply. "Do you love Jamison Kirk?" He asked.

"I love Nyota." He whispered.

"That is not an answer. You are prevaricating."

"I am...unsure."

"Then accept my advice. If you truly love something then you must let it go."

Spock trembled. "I appear to have no choice in the matter."

"You do. You can choose to accept the situation with grace or continue to do harm to your t'hy'la by fighting her wishes. As it is, it is now time for you to join with your chosen mate, Nyota Uhura. You may love Jamison but I know your mind. It is not a love born of passion but one of that of a close friend. You love Nyota and nothing will ever change that. It is as it should be."

"Why do you sound disappointed?"

He straightened at the question, hearing the vulnerability in his son's voice. "I am not disappointed by my future daughter-in-law. She is an intelligent, gifted, strong, and beautiful. Everything I would expect and want for you. You love her with a passion that rivaled my own with your mother. I know this as surely as I have seen the true you in your thoughts."

"And myself? Are you disappointed with me?"

Sarek paused. "No. I am not disappointed in you. I love you, Spock. You are my son. You are the perfect personification of IDIC, infinite diversity in infinite combination. You are a mix of myself and your mother, conceived in love, raised with the best of intentions despite our failings in certain areas, and we loved you. I still do. I am disappointed in myself."

He leaned back and faced Spock, still maintaining contact by holding his forearms in an effort to anchor him to him. "I am upset that I made things so difficult for you, that you would choose a rocky path rather than a smooth trail. I admire the courage it took for you to leave Vulcan and venture out into the stars. I believe that was your mother in you." His eyes softened. "You
overcame such profound adversity and have done so well. Your mother would be proud that you have become a captain and so happy that you found Nyota. She would love her."

Sarek gently released him to continue the discussion and looked away in shame. "I blame myself for the fate that befell Commander Kirk. My stubbornness and pride that I forced you to only follow the Vulcan way has made this disaster. It is I who made it to where you are shameful for any feelings that you experience. Our people feel. We feel far more deeply than humans. If anything, you would be able to control your emotions better than that of a full Vulcan because of your human half and I foolishly tried to make you dismiss that part of you."

Spock's eyes widened at his admission and Sarek prayed to the Vulcan gods of old that his words would be heard.

"Why?" Spock asked, his voice small and vulnerable with the small question.

"Because it was expected of me and I did not have the courage to do better unlike you and I am proud of you for doing what you did. You made the right choice and showed the universe that you could be more than any Vulcan before you."

His son stood taller, his posture controlled and it was what made Sarek see just how amazing his son truly was. "I thank thee, sa-mekh."

Sarek gestured to the observation port where the colony spun below them. "I am attempting to atone for my crimes by taking in Jamison and her child." He turned faced Spock, his eyes sad and he felt...small. "I seek forgiveness for my crimes against you and hope that, one day, you may see fit to give it to me." He raised his hand in the ta'al. "Live long and prosper, my son. I will see you on the surface for your kaliftee and I will welcome Nyota into our clan as my daughter." He paused, his jaw working and eyes wet. "I am fortunate for, today, I have gained two daughters."

Spock stood still in shock as Sarek left, his mind struggling to accept and process his father's speech through the red haze that was beginning to cloud his mind. He needed to meditate on these things but his biology made it impossible right now.

For now, he had to survive and, for that, he needed Nyota, his beloved.

xXx

Jamison Kirk stood on the red sands of her new home planet, the heat stealing her very breath and her best friend at her side as he always had and always would be.

"Home sweet home." McCoy grumbled.

"Yeah. Looks like it will have to be." Gripping Bones's hand in a tight hold, she waited for him to face her. "You know there's still time to change your mind."

His features melted into one of brotherly love and he squeezed back. "I told you once that there was only one reason I was on that tin can exploring the black. You're my best friend and I can't leave you behind nor can I let your fool ass leave me behind." Straightening, Jim watched as his Vulcan robes that he'd donned to combat the heat flapped around him and she couldn't help but smile at how ridiculous he looked and how much she loved him.

He smirked. "Besides, kid, I can't let you have all the fun riling up these green-blooded computers all by your lonesome."

Jim's answering laugh joined his and she finally started to feel a sense of peace despite everything.
Hi everyone! I am so sorry for the delay in updating but RL has hit me with a few curveballs. I was told that I'm going to need ankle surgery that will take a long time to heal and I'm trying to figure out how to care for my disabled child when I won't be able to walk for three months. Not only that but we're having to move and I am stressed about that. Then there's a more stressful and terrifying thing I found out. My daughter, who has a genetic disease which grows benign tumors, had an MRI done. It was supposed to be routine checks but her nephrologist found a lesion on her kidney which measures 2 inches and a small tumor on her liver. These are new and sudden and very different to the benign tumors that had been there for the past several years. They're sending us to oncology and think it's renal cell carcinoma and we are terrified. I will likely be a bit slower on updates due to this issue. I'm hoping that it's nothing and that they're simply being paranoid but it's still a possibility. Thank you to everyone who has commented, given kudos, and shown so much support. I really appreciate it. Writing, for me, is a wonderful escape and it depends on how things go as to how much I will be able to do.

Chapter Thirty-Six

*Alternate Universe*

McCoy had to work damn hard to focus on the task at hand. He hadn't felt this tired since medical school. He'd forgotten just how little sleep one would get with a newborn but he wouldn't trade it for the world. JoJo was taking to the role of big sister like a duck to water. In fact, both he and Nyota had to fight her to be able to hold Zahra.

Picking up his report on the latest bout of crew physicals and the notations in crew member's charts that included the latest idiocy the engineering crew members had gotten up to in his absence, he couldn't help rolling his eyes. Damn fool children. Getting back into the swing of things was definitely a challenge.

Fighting back a yawn, the doctor pulled up his latest notes on T'Pring's chart. Thankfully there'd been no complications in her pregnancy and she was progressing well. Non-eventful was just what this southern doctor ordered. The young couple was excited and the fact that it was going to be a little boy had only served to increase their happiness. They may not smile or show it on their faces but he could see the joy in their eyes.

He'd only just caught up refreshing himself with her chart when the swish of the sickbay doors opened to reveal T'Pring and Stonn. She'd hit her twentieth week and, like all women no matter the species, she glowed. Dressed in dark purple robes with gold trim, T'Pring radiated elegance and confidence despite the fact that she was only here for a monthly checkup.

Chapel greeted them and took them back to the exam room. He quickly gathered up his PADD and left his office to greet the pair. Chapel was leaving the room as McCoy arrived and gave him a succinct basic report before he headed in.
T'Pring was lying on the biobed in a plain hospital gown with her bondmate standing next to her. Somehow, not being in her robes, she seemed vulnerable and not as confident of a person as she normally was. Oh, she was still a strong and independent woman but it was like her armor had been removed for the moment and he was seeing her in a different light. She was out of her element and not in control here. The discomfort and, perhaps a small amount of fear that increased with each successive appointment, showed in her posture. Leo worried about how she was going to react when she went into labor where her body was in control rather than herself. He made a mental note to have her sit in on one of his conferences that he'd been having with the Vulcan healers he'd been having lately.

He knew that to a Vulcan - to any person facing the prospect of labor and delivery, was a daunting task where loss of control was terrifying. He wanted her to be as comfortable with the process as possible. Being away from her people had to be having an unsettling effect on her especially in her current condition and with what was to come. You could read and study and practice but when the contractions started everything changed. Nyota had proven that quite effectively when she'd gone through it with their daughter. She'd wanted a natural birth but after twelve hours and giving Leo more than ten deep fingertip sized bruises he'd sported for three days, she'd accepted an epidural to ease her pain. His beloved wife had felt as if she'd failed and it had taken a long talk to reassure her that she'd done everything perfectly, that it didn't matter how Zahra arrived into their arms. All that mattered was that she did and she had done her best and been perfect. He'd explained that Nyota was a mother and had their baby girl been born naturally, with Nyota accepting an epidural or pain meds, via cesarean, or any other way that the end result was the same. It didn't matter how it had happened just that they both were safe. He'd told her that she'd grown their beautiful baby and had helped her come into the world.

After a Herculean effort, he raised a hand in the ta'al respectfully and they quickly returned the gesture with no small amount of amusement that had him scowling. He was grateful beyond measure for their presence and support of Commander Spock. The pair of them may act like emotionless, stubborn robots but he knew better. Between the three of them he had a lot of hope that Jim would be returned to them.

"Well, how are we doing today?"

T'Pring raised a brow, no doubt questioning the unusual phrasing of his question but she answered nonetheless.

"We-" Putting emphasis on the word, ",-are doing well, Doctor."

His features morphed from his familiar scowl to a soft smile. The doctor urged her to lie down and began the process of running the scan of her abdomen and a hologram of her uterus appeared above her. He rotated the image, taking it in from all sides and noting the measurements. Once done, he slowly peeled back the image to get to the fetus. Stonn’s sharp inhale was the only sign that he was affected by the sight. Curled in on itself was a perfect little child and there was a hidden smile on his patient's face. Blood supply, positioning of both baby and the placenta looked good. Blood pressure, hormone levels, and biosigns for both mother and child were spot on.

He pulled on a pair of gloves and carefully cleared his mind just as M'Benga had taught him to so there would be minimal emotional transference. This was one part of the exam that always made him nervous. No matter how civilized the people of Vulcan were even after the awakening from Surak they still had primitive reactions when it came to protecting their mates and the first time he had laid hands on T'Pring Stonn had broken his wrist and snarled before the woman had had a chance to get him off. As it was, Stonn's body vibrated tension and McCoy didn't like pushing him so he made his exam thorough and very damn quick.
While he trusted the equipment in his medical bay to provide accurate images and information, he still preferred to check for himself. Maybe it was a throwback from the days when doctors didn't have equipment to literally see every little thing in vivid images. Maybe it was that, at his heart, he was just an old-fashioned southern doctor who liked the reassurance that his own two hands told him everything he needed to know. Whatever the reason, he still felt the need to verify his crew's and passenger's wellbeing for himself.

He removed his gloves after confirming the readings from the biobed and medical scans, his glare shooting daggers at T'Pring's mate when a low growl had started to work it's way out of him. He could hear T'Pring's own huff of impatience at her bondmate's antics.

After sanitizing his hands quickly, he returned to her side. "Well, it looks like your mini-Vulcan is doing well. All his readings look perfect and my exam confirms that."

"Why do you insist on touching my mate?" Stonn said lowly and McCoy rolled his eyes at the familiar argument.

He smiled sweetly and picked up his PADD to input the latest information. "I like to double check." He shrugged. "Besides, what if my equipment malfunctioned or went down? I need to know everything about my patients and without that I'd be up shit creek without a paddle."

Stonn opened his mouth to question his phrasing but his bondmate headed him off. "Logical, Doctor."

"A Vulcan healer would not need to do such a thing. To repeat an examination when you already have what you need is not efficient." Stonn countered.

He smirked. "Call it a human weakness."

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He was finishing up his shift in his office and finalizing the charts from his patients when he suddenly stiffened as an idea hit him at warp speed punching the air from his lungs. He had to slow his breaths and he almost ran down to the labs. This possibility burned in his mind and he had a gut feeling about it.

T'Pring, Spock, Scotty, and Stonn were huddled over a console and arguing. Well, Scotty was arguing while the three Vulcans were calmly 'discussing' their differing opinions on the issue. The four of them were tense and clearly at odds. It was a frequent event. The loss of Jim had affected many of the crew and the hope of bringing her back was a vain hope that was becoming a smaller chance with each passing day.

"T'Pring, how exactly did Jim get pulled back to her old universe?" He interrupted them out of breath and all four of them abandoned what they were doing. Spock frowned at him in question but McCoy's focus was on T'Pring.

Her lips thinned in irritation. He knows that she'd explained the complicated process to him several times as they'd enlisted his help in their efforts to bring Jim back to them but he needed to hear it again himself. He wasn't a walking computer with an eidetic memory.

"As I have reminded you several times when we requested Commander Kirk's medical data her biosignature was attuned to the universe she was from. We needed to determine and learn how to detect the hidden nuances and subtle differences between ourselves and her. It is likely that her people used the same formula that we extrapolated when she was retrieved." She looked away,
frustration clear on her delicate features as spots of green appeared in a gentle flush. "It is akin to a magnet pulling her to them. Her universe is far larger than one person and, therefore, strong enough to easily attract her. It was not simply a case of them finding her in a specific location. It was more of a random act of finding the person and pulling back her based on her biosignature matching that of her previous home. We have been attempting to reverse that process to cause her to be rejected by them like two magnets repelling each other and force her to return via the trajectory that had caused her to be returned to them but have had no success."

Scotty pulled up charts and data that they had clearly been working on for the past several months. They made no sense to the doctor but he could see multiple sets of data with very slight variations. He was a doctor not a physicist. "Aye, Doctor. We have made some progress. We've been able to learn how to 'see', in a way, the different parallel universes and the walls separating them based on the differences between her and us but we have nah been able ta locate the exact one for her. It's just too small of a difference for us ta accurately detect her amongst a population of billions in an entire universe. She's just one human and it's not like we're a rare breed where she's from. It's like looking for a specific pile of hay out of millions and millions and then looking through that pile, picking out each individual piece of straw and discarding each one to find the match. We havena' even found tha pile, yet, let alone anything else."

"And with a sample of one that task is proving to be challenging in and of itself." Stonn unhelpfully supplied.

"What if we don't look for Jim?" He'd gotten the idea, mulling it over after T'Pring's visit to his medbay. It was a long shot. A really long shot but it was something.

Stonn's frown deepened, clearly not understanding what he was saying. "Excuse me, doctor?"

"The focus has been finding Jim the whole time, right?" He asked.

Spock looked puzzled at the question stating the obvious. "Yes."

"The baby! She's pregnant, right? Sarek told you, Spock." He implored and Spock stiffened at the painful reminder but he continued. "The baby is from here and not where she is from. It's biosigns will match here just like how her's matched her old universe. What if we look for the baby instead?"

A muscle ticked in Spock's jaw. "As we do not have accurate scans of the baby.-" His jaw clenched further. "-or any scans at all, we would not know what to be looking for. We would be in a worse position than before."

He'd gotten the idea when he'd been reading over Zarathiz's notes. The poor Andorian had been suffering from an unknown infection a few months back and it had been damn near impossible to isolate it to prescribe the right antibiotic to cure him. He'd been looking for the bacteria for three days, the yeoman only getting worse the longer he'd been ill.

He'd come in for a follow-up since his lungs had been compromised and was forced to undergo breathing therapy and pulmonary treatments until his lungs reached the capacity they had been at before his unfortunate illness. Between Doctor Sawyer, M'Benga, and him, they'd been stumped. It had only stuck out in his mind because it had been a challenge to help the kid but, the more he'd thought about it, the more he realized that finding Jim was more like finding that tiny bacterial strain hiding in Zarathiz's blood, something very tiny and hard as hell to locate.

"See, the issue is we're basically looking for one person but she's like everyone else there. It's like trying to find one specific blood cell on a planet full of people. What we need to do is find the one
thing that isn't the same, that stands out from the rest."

"Your logic is sound but that theory would only serve to return the child to us not Commander Kirk and the signal may be masked as she is carrying the child." Stonn conceded.

"Can't we just widen the transporter beam to get them both? Pull her to us using the baby as a sort of anchor?"

Spock sighed, almost sounding human and very, very tired. "I am afraid it is not that simple, doctor."

He crossed his arms, refusing to back down. "I'm a doctor not a transporter technician. Why wouldn't it work."

"Selek's and my formula would only be successful if Jim's signature matched that of our universe. Only the baby's does and we would risk literally pulling the child out of her which could kill them both. Also, the main purpose of that method was based on attraction and repulsion. If we use the formula then only the baby would be brought to us since formula. Our calculations and data from that angle focused only on the person and not location. Unlike traditional beaming we cannot widen the the focus of the beam as we do not have a physical location or coordinates. It is simply not possible and that is why we have changed our focus in locating where Jim is." Spock told him in a clipped voice, clearly started to become annoyed at his prodding. "To use your own analogy, first we would need to find the person and then find the one cell but our information is extremely limited." He indicated the charts still displayed on the console. "Right now we are trying to find the body, more accurately the universe that Jim is in. It would be irresponsible and dangerous to attempt your method even if we could widen the beam as you believe is possible. Our best chance is to focus on finding Jim herself."

The chief engineer's head bobbed back and forth as if he was watching a macabre tennis match but he seemed to be far more interested than normal. "I think tha Doctor may have a point." At the sudden, intense looks directed at him he wiggled his hand in an unsure gesture. "Kind of."

"Explain."

Everyone's eyes were on the engineer and he almost looked manic in his excitement. He swiped away the charts and a new program opened. It was a little more simple and Leo could see the ideas forming between the trio. "Now, we've been able to learn how ta detect the different parallel universes and the walls separating them but nah so much tha weak spots to get through. We canna simply go back to Vulcan or tha spot where Commander Kirk was brought to us. Those were unique instance since there were extenuating circumstances surrounding those events that weakened the walls between our universe and theirs but we can maybe-and I mean a big maybe-detect the one thing that doesn't belong." He shot a sympathetic glance at Spock. "We'd be looking for the tiniest needle in the proverbial haystack to find something different but it'd mean searching each haystack individually and then finding a way to tha same haystack."

McCoy's mouth turned into a from line. "But there are billions upon billions of those universes to look through and then we'd still only be able to pull the baby back with us."

Stonn stared at the screen with a look of intense concentration. "Perhaps we can construct a device to mask her signal to match that of ours much like a form of camouflage. We would need to utilize Ensign Chekov's skills but it would necessitate someone traveling to her to place the device on her."

T'Pring looked less enthusiastic at the idea. "However, this still does not solve the problem of
locating exactly where to go. It could take a lifetime to search and find the correct location.”

Spock's shoulders squared in determination. "Then I had better get started."
Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

Hi all!
Firstly, I want to say thank you to everyone who has given me kudos and such kind words and comments. It means a lot.
We met with oncology for my daughter and they referred us to surgical where he is convinced that the tumor in her left kidney is definitely renal cell carcinoma. Surgery has been scheduled for June 29th for embolization of the tumor, partial nephrectomy, and multiple biopsies. It doesn't look good in that aspect but we've been reassured that kidney cancer rarely spreads beyond the kidney and we probably caught it early enough to avoid chemotherapy. I'm thankful that the surgeon at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia is very good and comes highly recommended so I'm hopeful. My daughter has been through so much already and has had far too many battles already in her young life.
We also had court via Skype with her old school district in WA where they'd broken her neck on a school bus and they refuse to pay. It's ridiculous. They're going to take it all the way to Federal court and it sickens me! I had posted the video online to try and force their hand but they just won't listen to reason! Then there's my ankle surgery. This is driving us crazy financially, mentally, and physically. Writing is my escape but it's also hard at some points.
Hopefully, this is an ok chapter. I wanted to bring in this character because I feel she's important to Jim and it was recommended by a few commenters. She'd gone through similar battles and I hope she came across well. Happy reading and I hope to get the next part up soon!
Darkwaters

Chapter Thirty-Seven

"Mom? What are you doing here?"

Commander Winona Kirk shifted her bags to be held in one hand and used the other to straighten her red uniform. She couldn't help but smile at the sight of her daughter's shocked and surprised face.

"Well, turns out an engineering position to help build a new aqueduct suddenly needed to be filled urgently and I was the right person for the job." She feigned ignorance and Jamison rolled her eyes with fond exasperation. "Some Vulcan elder named Selek said the project start date be moved up a year and Ambassador Sarek made the request to Starfleet and here I am."

Winona Kirk dropped her bags on the ground and immediately her arms were filled with something far different as a blonde blur shot across the living room of Sarek's home. Her vision was obscured by She'd missed her so much. It had been far too long since they'd seen each other in person rather than subspace comms across the hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of light years separating them.

She felt Jamison shudder in her grip and her shoulder became damp and Winona knew her
daughter was crying, her agony seeming to transfer and settle into her own heart. She shushed her gently and stroked her hair. She waited for her to calm and they swayed slightly. Back and forth. Side to side until all that was heard was a quiet sniffling.

Pulling back, she met Jim's bright blue eyes that were so much like her father's but shone with tears. There was so much pain in them that it echoing back to her. She understood what she was going through. Both of them had suffered the loss of the man they loved and were tasked with challenge of caring for their child without them.

"Oh, mom, it hurts so much!"

She gripped her hard and pulled Jim back to her chest. "Shh. I know, baby. I know but you will get through this."

Jim squeezed back in a tight hug and Winona rubbed gentle circles on her back. After a little while, she relaxed in her hold and they pulled apart but she wasn't ready to relinquish her hold. "Now, let me look you over." The older woman smiled and held onto Jamison's upper arms, giving her a faux appraising once-over. She was wearing a pair of comfortable black leggings and a soft, blue tunic that only served to accentuate her advanced stage of pregnancy. There was healthy flush to her fair skin and she had clearly put on some much needed weight. Winona was pleased to see she no longer looked gaunt and ill. It seemed her time here was been doing a world of good. Even though she was still heartbroken, she seemed to have found some peace during her respite and stood a chance at healing.

Smiling wider, she released her and stepped back. "Well, I think you'll do. Looks like Leonard and Sarek have been doing their job and treating you well."

Jim rolled her eyes again and her smile was watery but fond. Her hurt was still there but it was pushed aside for the moment. "If by treating me well then you mean mother-henning, then yes, they have. I swear they're worse than you are sometimes."

"Mother's privilege." A trickle of sweat rolled down her neck and she realized just how hot it was with standing in the open doorway with her back to the unforgiving sun. Winona had been surprised at her daughter's choice of where to spend her respite. The harsh conditions of the planet were taking a toll on her and she wasn't the one who was heavily pregnant. "How about you invite an old woman in. We can catch up and talk about how I'm about to become a grandmother for the third time."

Jim stood aside and gave a gentle hip bump as they walked into the cool living room that had clearly been adapted to accommodate humans. Sarek was clearly pulling out all the stops for her daughter and, for that, she'd be eternally grateful.

"You sound just like Bones. You are not old, mom."

"Psht. Lies."

Her daughter eyes lit up with mirth and she smirked. "Maybe like a fine wine, then. Getting better with age."

Huffing a laugh, Winona smiled at the cheek. "Maybe."

It was a matter of minutes when they were settled at the kitchen table and holding glasses of ice-cold plas-savas juice while Jim told her story. She spoke of her crush on this reality's Spock, then her landing in the alternate universe. Jamison told her of falling in love with that version of
Commander Spock, the ice age timeline where they admitted their true feelings (clearly and thankfully edited), and then of her being ripped away from him. She explained her pain, the struggle to adapt to her loss, and her loneliness. Winona's heart clench when Jim cried as she spoke of the joy of discovering the gift of their child's existence. She watched as Jim steeled herself and told her of her determination to return. With each word her heart ached a little more at the suffering her daughter was experiencing but, at the same time, she could see the love, the hope, and the happiness she felt for the child she carried.

God. Jamison may have inherited her father's eyes and compassion but everything else was Winona's. From her nose down to her temperament and behaviors it was all her. The fire and determination was just how she had been and still was. The mirroring of how they had both been after losing the men they loved was unnerving. Everything.

Reaching out to grip her daughter's hands in her own, she was happy when she didn't pull away. It had taken too much time for them to get to this stage of closeness. Winona had made so many mistakes in her youth when Jim had been a baby and young child. She had held onto so much anger, sadness, and pain that she had made the mistake of neglecting her daughter despite the fact that she had been an innocent. She had been so wrapped up in it, so consumed by it, that she had left her and George Jr. by the wayside while her grief had reigned supreme.

Jim's emotions were a tangled mess. The negative and positive feelings were competing with each other but she was coping far better than she had especially at such a young age.

"So," Smiling mischievously, the older woman couldn't help asking the question. "How are the boys getting along?"

Jim threw back her head and laughed. "Oh, my god! I swear they're like a pair of cats at times hissing and needling at each other, but then they team up and work in creepy and far too efficient harmony when they're focused on me and my wellbeing. One memorable moment was when Bones was complaining about the lack of alcohol and not being able to have a nightcap. Sarek, being the logical Vulcan he is, graciously offered him a glass of Vulcan cognac."

Winona's eyebrows raised in surprise. "What happened?"

"Well, he didn't realize that because of a Vulcan's higher metabolism they make their drinks with a hell of a lot stronger alcohol content. The grain they use has a very mild taste even when distilled and isn't easily detectable to the human palate so Bones had two glasses and thought nothing of it." Jim shook her head, giggling and her eyes were full of mirth at the doctor's expense. "He was drunk as a skunk almost until morning and I swear Sarek was laughing on the inside. I swear I saw a smirk. He's crafty, I'll give him that."

She gestured with her glass and continued with her story. Winona was starting to believe that her stay here was going to be very interesting. "Bones told him the next morning while he had the hangover from hell that he couldn't believe that Vulcans would have something like that. That the act of intoxicating one's self for pleasure was very human. Sarek raised a brow-and I swear they must have a class on that or something-and he replied 'There's no need to be insulting.' " Winona barked a laugh of her own but her daughter suddenly became very serious. "I love these guys. They're sacrificing and giving me so much to make me happy and keep me and my baby safe."

"That's what love is, sweetie."

"Yeah. You're right." This time, she reached out to grip her mother's hand. "I love you, mom."

"I love you, too."
It had taken nearly losing them on Tarsus for her to realize the error of her ways and she feared Jim making the same mistakes she had but she still wanted to help her to give her the chance that she never had. She had a feeling that Jamison would give up her search if she had to if it affect the relationship between her and her child. Winona Kirk wanted her daughter to be happy and, in order for her to be truly happy, she needed to be with the man she loved or to at least have the chance to be.

Over the next few days she discovered that her former captain and the crew of the Enterprise had been working on ways to get her home to her love as well as providing the research and what they had done but they'd been being stalled by the Admiralty citing the prime directive and non-interference directives. At every turn they were being sabotaged and it incensed the engineer. She had absolute confidence that she would make it back to her Spock on her own but Winona wanted to give her a boost as much as she could given her limited ability and position in the grand scheme of things. She did have a few tricks up her sleeve to help her, though.

It was two weeks before she had the house to herself away from prying eyes and sensitive ears for her to place a much needed call. Sarek had given her leave to make the long-distance communication and she had taken advantage of it to place a call to Admiral Barnett.

Only a few minutes passed before the spinning Starfleet logo was replaced by a severe looking, dark skinned officer with his admiral's braids very evident on his sleeves. When he saw who was on the other side of the comm his features darkened, the lines in his forehead becoming deeper. She'd known he'd answer immediately. He owed her more than he could ever repay in his lifetime.

"Commander Kirk." He greeted and Winona smiled pleasantly but her attitude was nothing but pleasant.

"Richard."

His eyes became icy and she felt a moment of satisfaction from his anger at her clear insubordination. "I believe that's Admiral Barnett to you, Commander."

Her smile grew wider resembling that of a shark. "No, I don't think so, Richard. This isn't a social call." The blonde leaned forward in her seat. "I'm calling to discuss my daughter, you know—the one who saved the Earth...several times, and has been screwed over by the administration in regards to her promotion to captain. Not only that, but she's being denied the chance and ability to return to the alternate universe where she was happy and where the father of her child is. You're personally blocking the release of information that could be instrumental in doing so in multiple ways."

The lines smoothed out as he leaned back and put on a neutral expression. It was the kind she'd seen far too many times usually when dealing with unruly diplomats. "She's an asset and a valuable officer. She needed time to mature before becoming a captain in command of a ship and she's needed here not there."

"Bullshit." She snapped and her calm facade fell for a minute. "You and your old boys club are nothing more than self-serving sexist assholes."

"You're skating on thin ice, Winona. You may want to curb the attitude or you'll be literally on ice assigned to a planet that makes Delta Vega look like a tropical vacation spot." He growled dangerously but she refused to let the threat intimidate her. After all, she held the upper hand.
She'd refused to wear her uniform to enforce the fact that this wasn't an official call. "You owe me and my family more than you can ever repay. Jamison deserves the chance to find happiness no matter the universe and you are using her for your own gain just like you have since her birth."

"I don't know what you're talking about." He scoffed and she narrowed her eyes dangerously. "She's an important member of Starfleet whose responsibility is here and she's not ready for command just yet." The admiral reiterated.

"'The Kelvin baby'? 'The hero of the Federation'? 'The savior of Earth'? Any of those ring a bell?"

"She's a symbol of hope and perseverance in the face of overwhelming adversity."

Crossing her arms, she glared at the older man. "Jamison Kirk deserves captaincy and she should never have to choose between her service and her child. There are ships that can allow her the opportunity to have just that. You know which she would choose. She should have been captain of the Enterprise."

Barnett sighed and rolled his eyes. "Captain Spock was originally supposed to be captain based on Admiral Pike's orders and recommendation when he commanded her."

"That's bullshit and you know it, Richard. You wanted his promotion to serve multiple purposes. He was promoted when the Enterprise was recommissioned because he was a man and the thought of a woman in command of the flagship made you and the other men in the Admiralty uncomfortable. You also promoted Spock as a damn publicity stunt because of the loss of Vulcan."

He held up in hands in a show of false supplication and it only incensed Winona more. "Maybe that's true, maybe not, but what's done is done. Commander Kirk is an officer of Starfleet-of this Starfleet and not that one and, as such, she is an asset that we have the right to place where she is needed the most and that's a decision that was made at the highest levels. There's nothing you can do about it. This is not going to change in the near future. She will do what is ordered of her and there is nothing you can do to change that."

Winona couldn't help but produce a smug smile at his words which only confused Barnett. He had no idea who he was dealing with. "Is that so?"

"Yes, it damn well is, Commander Kirk!" Barnett snapped. He definitely felt threatened and backed into a corner if his reaction was anything to go by. He had to have known that she had something up her sleeve and he wasn't sure what it was.

"You like to use my daughter as a symbol of Starfleet and it's perseverance. You want to show the United Federation of Planets that my family is strong and that my daughter is the golden child of the service? You wanted to show how strong she is? I can do that, too."

His expression faltered and she could see the uncertainty in his brown eyes. "How?"

She smiled dangerously, leaning forward toward the camera and her face filled the screen. "I'm sure you remember Tarsus IV and Starfleet's involvement in the massacre. I'm also sure you remember my children's involvement as well."

"I know they were there but I also know that you abandoned them there." He smirked and she was appalled at his heartlessness and lack of empathy. How could anyone in the upper echelons of Starfleet, who were there when those awful and very wrong decisions had been made even talk about one of the worst events in history without any regret?

"My children were there, yes. I placed them there because of personal reasons which you have no
right to judge me for. The reason I bring it up is because of the fact that they saw everything." Her voice was calm, low, and her words said slowly. She needed her next ones to hit their mark.

"What of it?"

"They were two of the Tarsus nine. They had been slated to be killed along with the four thousand victims hand-picked by the governor." She leaned back as she waited for effect. "They saw who Kodos was and identified the bastard. With a bit of research I found out the true name of Governor Kodos. You should know who he is. After all, he was a close friend of yours and former Admiral Alexander Marcus."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Commander Kirk." He warned.

"I think you do. Captain Robert April, a power hungry, sociopathic despot that had started to make you and your buddies uncomfortable because his true colors began surfacing after his promotion to captain of the Excelsior. His approval of eugenics and refusal to only have human crew members on his ship started to gain your attention. Then his string of bad missions where his racist, speciest, abhorrent behavior began to have questions being raised. To hide him you all appointed governor to a backwater planet and gave him full reign which he used to enact his sick agenda and when Starfleet heard about the famine resulting in the failure of the colony you ignored their cries for help. You pretended to not know and it resulted in one of the worst genocides in Federation history. If it wasn't for passing merchant ships then it never would have been discovered. Then it became a bigger PR fiasco. Not only were you responsible for this atrocity but it came to light that my daughter, your 'Kelvin baby' was one of the victims on his kill list that your officer, that you put in a position of ultimate power, nearly murdered. Power corrupts but absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Barnett's face paled but she continued her speech in spite of his reaction. "This severe case of bad judgement could never come to light. It would have destroyed the image of Starfleet as a peacekeeping, humanitarian armada and that of the physical symbol of honor of my child and the duty that my husband showed by virtue of my daughter. The sight of George Kirk's widow holding her starved children, seeing the images of bodies in mass graves simply because they were deemed unworthy, and the fact that it could have been prevented was a terrifying prospect to you. How would Starfleet ever recover? You and Marcus and a few of your other buddies would have been ousted and drummed out of the service with dishonorable discharges. Not only that but you would have probably served prison time."

"You have no proof."

She raised a delicate brow. "I don't? My children and the seven other survivors identified Kodos by his service picture. I have recorded statements testifying to this. Those kids were also really fucking resourceful in collecting evidence to prove it. Jim's a genius and was as a child but you know all this already. In the chaos of the days that followed your people weren't fast enough or efficient enough in covering everything up. There are documents showing ships were ordered to avoid the planet at all costs, who Kodos really was, and everything that wasn't shown to the public."

Komack's face quickly turned from an ashy pale to red as anger set in at what she was implying. "I order you to turn over this evidence and destroy any copies you may have."

"You can't order me to do shit in this case. Other things, yes. This, no." She waved a hand as if she was flicking away his order like an irritating fly. "I'm willing to release this information to the press if you don't comply with my demands."

"You wouldn't dare!"
"Try me." She threatened.

"That's blackmail."

"It's negotiation." She argued back.

"Treason."

"Some would call it civic duty to show the public the corruption, apathy, and cruelty within your ranks." Kirk smirked at his arrogance, knowing he didn't have a leg to stand on. She would do anything to ensure her daughter got what she deserved. It wasn't a case of Jamison getting a ship because of this tragedy. She'd earned that ship and earned the right to choose her destiny. Whether it was here or she returned to her Spock; it didn't matter.

"Cheating." He countered and she rolled her eyes. He just didn't get it. He wasn't in a position of power. She was and it was driving him crazy.

"I leaned from the best, my daughter and my husband, and it's simply changing the conditions and parameters to ensure a win when the odds are stacked against you."

"What do you want?"

The engineer crossed her arms and rested her weight on them on the desk. "I want what my daughter is due. She earned command and proved her worthiness time and time again. She was stalled due to antiquated male pride simply because she didn't have a penis and the higher ups didn't like that she did what seasoned male officers in the primary fleet and that of the secondary fleet in the Laurentian system, did. Those which you personally ordered to stay behind. She beat a real-life Kobiyashi Maru and it threatened the 'balance' that was silently enforced. She has also earned the right to the information that is on the Enterprise so she can choose her destiny."

"Get on with it." He sneered.

"Admiral Christopher Pike was a respected and trusted officer that recommended her promotion to captain but was outvoted by the 'old boy's club'. Giver her what she should have had after the Battle of Vulcan. A ship."

"And I suppose you want more?"

"Of course. Stop the block on communications from the Enterprise and allow them to send any and all data pertaining to her time and transportation to the alternate universe. If Jamison wants to go back there then she should be damn well allowed to."

She watched with satisfaction as he punched several buttons on the console in front of him. It wasn't long before she received a data transmission containing everything that they had. "Here it is for all the damn good it'll do her. The Enterprise crew haven't had a hint of success and they're among the best. I doubt she'll have better luck. I'll have to confer with the board to see about Commander Kirk's future. It will take time." She watched as his hands curled into fists on his desk in impotent anger. "Don't bother me again. This was your one and only."

Winona couldn't help the shit eating grin she had learned from Jamison that drove everyone crazy. She knew she'd succeeded when his knuckles turned white as he clenched them tighter. "Yeah-I don't think so. I think I'll keep this information and the evidence in a safe place in case I ever need it again. After all, I have another eight Tarsus witnesses, one of which is my son, and the families of the over four thousand victims slaughtered by that monster to look after, don't I. Never underestimate a Kirk."
He barked a bitter laugh. "Don't I fucking know it. Barnett out." He slammed his hand down and cut off the connection.

Her smile fell the moment the Starfleet symbol spun on her screen and she couldn't help having the last word even if he couldn't hear her. "Asshole."

xXx

Jamison was working at the VSA, her eyes pressed to the eyepiece of a microscope and PADDs surrounding her in piles a mile high in some form of organized chaos that only she probably understood. Winona smiled and knew it probably drove her fellow Vulcan scientists nuts. The room was empty of anyone but them and she breathed a sigh of relief that they could have this discussion in relative privacy. She hesitated briefly with entering, her hand closing tightly around the small data chip where the sharp edges dug into her palm. She wondered for a short moment if she was doing the right thing by giving her daughter this information. Quickly dismissing those thoughts, Winona stepped into the small lab. She wanted a chance to give Jim a choice which she deserved.

Walking up, she placed a hand on her shoulder. Bright blue eyes, George's eyes, lit up when she turned to face her mother. "Hey! Come to see me at my day job?"

"What are you working on?" She nodded to the pile on the table and her face lit up with excitement.

"Our team is trying to adapt the plants native to Vulcan-that-was and the soil from Uzh-T'Khasi to ensure they survive here. We have a limited supply from the seed repository on Earth so we have to make it work without losing any of them. We've been successful with a few but it's been a bit of a challenge to get the mix between the new environment and the plants just right. I've been using my old research with quadrotriticale to keep them healthy but I can't risk changing things too much otherwise they'll no longer be what they were."

She smiled softly. "I'm so proud of you."

Blushing in embarrassment, she shrugged her shoulders in an attempt to avoid the praise. "It's the least I can do. I can't just focus on getting back to Spock. It'd drive me crazy and I can't do anything related to Starfleet right now. It's just a bit too hard for me so I feel like this is a good option for now."

"I have something for you." She reached into her pocket and held out the data chip. Jim frowned in confusion but she accepted the chip.

"What is this?"

"It's everything the Enterprise had on your disappearance and everything they've done and did do to get you back." Jamison stared at the small piece of tech in shock, her whole body still and she hoped she'd done the right thing and wasn't sending her into obsession with getting back to her new home. She paused and considered if she should tell her about their current efforts to return her and ultimately decided that she needed to know. "There's also data showing that they've recently started working on a way to get you back."

"What?"

"They're trying to get you back to where your Spock is."

"Seriously?"
She smiled sadly. She didn't want her little girl to leave but she did want her to be happy. "Seriously."

"Oh my god! How did you get this." Jamison's head snapped up and her gaze met her's with an intensity that surprised her. It shouldn't but it did.

She straightened her shoulders and stood fully upright. What she did wasn't ethical but it was moral. It was exposing a deep wound that had caused such damage in her children's and her own psyche. It may have brought them together but it had been an awful experience that had taken years for them to even begin to heal. At the end of the day, the ends justified the means. "Admiral Barnett very kindly decided to help me."

Jamison's eyes narrowed in suspicion. "Richard Barnett? The man you have cursed to the seventh circle of hell since I was fourteen? That Richard Barnett?"

"Yes."

"What did you do?"

"I threatened to tell the public the truth about that damned planet. Tarsus?"

Jim's eyebrows flew up in surprise. "You blackmailed an admiral?" It was a testament of her strength that she didn't even bat an eye at the mention of that hellhole.

"Think of it as utilizing a resource." She demurred.

As Jim's lips pressed into a thin line of disappointment, Winona felt a moment of uncertainty. "You do know that you aren't going to be able to use that against him again, right?"

She nodded her head slowly in agreement. "Yes. I know that but he doesn't."

Her certainty was quickly swept away as the pregnant blonde's face lit up in admiration. "You. Are. Awesome!"

"I know." She sniffed.

"I fucking love you, mom."

"And I love you."

Giving one last squeeze, she removed her hands and pulled back. "Sweetheart, I don't want you to let this take over your life, though. I wanted to help you but I don't want you to focus on nothing but getting back to Spock and placing it above everything else."

Jamison's hands curled into loose fists and an expression of hurt and disbelief crossed her face. "You want me to just give up on him?" She snapped and Winona winced at the harshness of her words.

"No. Never," She reassured her. "but I want you to try and find a balance. I only want you to be happy. If that means finding a way back and leaving then so be it but I also want you to happy here if that takes a while or if it never happens. I want you to have everything but, more than that, I want you to experience the joy of holding your child and treasuring them no matter where you are and even if it means that you do it here. I also want you to consider staying in Starfleet. There are family ships and you are going to make captain. Jamison, you are meant for the stars, not the
ground. Commanding a ship is your first, best destiny." Her eyes were full of remorse and guilt as she remembered her own faults from her youth. She faced her youngest and Jamison swallowed against a lump in her throat at the impassioned speech.

"I will, mom. I can't promise I'll ever give up and move on but I won't let it affect my relationship with my son or daughter."

Smiling weakly, she knew that her words were nothing but the truth and she felt a sense of peace at them. The soon-to-be grandmother shook off the negative discussion that had been weighing on her. "Now, how about you tell me why you aren't letting us know if my grandbaby is a boy or a girl."

Jamison's smile lit up the room in excitement. "Well, I figured there are so few happy surprises in this day and age that I want this to be one."

She shook her head at her sentimentality. She'd done the same thing to George. They were definitely and very much alike. "Even if it drives everyone crazy?"

Jim's eyes glinted with mischief. "Especially if it drives everyone crazy. You should have seen T'Pau when I told her. I don't think I've ever seen such an expression of frustration on a Vulcan's face in my life. It was classic Bones loves it though because he knows something they don't and he reminds them at every opportunity. I'm pretty sure Sarek's gonna strangle him any day now."
Hi everyone!
I apologize for the long time between updates. Things have been really tough here. I had my ankle surgery and it went well so I have been in a cast which frustrates me but in the long run it will be worth it. I'll finally no longer be constantly falling with an unstable ankle.
My daughter, Charlotte, had her surgery on the 29th to remove the tumor on her kidney and it went well. She's healing ok and is slowly getting back to her smiling self. We are currently waiting for pathology to tell us if it is cancer or not. It is our hope that she will be able to come home later today.
All-in-all, things seem to be progressing in a more positive light so I had time and was feeling the mood to finish this chapter and post it. Hope it's a good one and liked by everyone!
DarkWaters

Chapter Thirty-Eight

*Alternate Universe*

Spock stood at the transporter controls, his eyes fixed on the readings. After months of work he had finally found her. His efforts to utilize the work that he had completed when she had been on board the Enterprise had been successful in transporting him to several parallel universes...just not hers. One had been an unsettling version where cruelty had been prevalent and murder a way for officers to advance in rank. Another had been similar to Jamison's but Kirk was a male and captain of the Enterprise while in a third universe Jim Kirk was, again, a male but a science officer under a Captain Spock. However, the universes all had one thing in common; each Spock and Kirk were bonded and recognized as t'hy'la. He had been forced to recalculate and try a different approach to minimize the possible alternate universes that he would be transported to so that his chances of finding the correct one and not landing in another wrong one would be assured. Every spare moment he had been spent searching and working, the crew, Stonn, and T'Pring, helping in any and every way they could to return her to him.

Another blow to his efforts had been when the VSA had recalled Stonn and T'Pring citing they had enough data and proof to confirm their theory of multiple parallel universes and the ability to transport between them was possible but a complicated and unstable process. Despite their protests the pair were forced to return to Vulcan. Even Sarek's influence had not been enough to sway the council. It had been viewed as self-serving.

His devastation at the loss of his t'hy'la had only compounded when his father had informed him of the child she was carrying those many months ago. He felt a sense of desperation to be there for her, to bring her home and bond with her and join her to him in the most ancient of ways to make her one with him. He loved her with everything he had and it consumed him entirely.

Each subsequent scan of the various versions of Kirk he had been able learn how to detect the differences and was now able to focus the sensors on finding the universe that hers. Ensign Chekov
and Doctor McCoy had assisted with determining the small difference between all the versions and had seen that it was a phase variation rather than just a difference in biosignatures. Once that had been found then it had only been a matter of time to find the correct location where she was and there would no longer be random transporting.

The added benefit had also assisted the engineering team to perfect a cloaking device to adjust Jim's phase variation to match their universe for them to return while it would be used to assist him to transport him to her on the first trip. It had not been tested in the real world. Beta testing and simulations had shown it would be successful but it was still a matter of chance.

"Spock?"

His hands trembled with fatigue and excitement as he saved his progress. He had seen that the walls between their universes were beginning to strengthen again from their previous weaknesses caused by the electrical storms that had brought her to him. He had maybe a month before they cut him off entirely. It needed to be done and it had to be soon. The timing of transport had to be carefully planned and precise. He calculated a period of six hours, ten minutes, and thirty-four seconds would be the optimal time to proceed.

There were so many factors and risks with going down this path. What if he arrived in the correct universe but was on a different planet than her or so far away that he may never reach her or, if he did get to her, would it be in time to return? What if he arrived too far into the past or future? Time and space were so intertwined it was a strong possibility.

Right then, he realized he did not care about the risks. He had to try and he had Captain Pike's blessing as well as that of the Enterprise crew to bring his t'hy'la, his beloved, home.

"Spock?"

He looked up, pulled from his thoughts by his mother's voice. His parents were currently being transported to Betazed for the memorial service for those lost to Nero's madness. He could see by the minute lines surrounding his mother's eyes that the past seven months had taken a toll on her. Her worry for her son, as well as for Jim and the baby, had made her draw nearer to her son in an attempt to comfort them both. Sarek, in an effort to help them all had been accepting more diplomatic requests off world and had calculated them to where the Enterprise was frequently the closest ship. He had achieved his goal three times in the past six months.

"Yes?" His voice cracked and Amanda moved closer to stand next to him, placing a delicate hand on his shoulder.

"You didn't come to dinner."

Spock closed his eyes, exhausted.

"Have you found her?" She asked.

Spock opened his eyes and saw his mother looking at the readings he had carefully saved.

"Yes." Spock breathed the word like a prayer and it was. He prayed he was right. He prayed illogically to the gods of old for the return of his t'hy'la.

"I want to come with you."
Spock stiffened in shock. His mother looked up at him, her jaw set and he saw the determination in her eyes but he could not—would not not risk her.

"No. I will not allow it. It is too dangerous and the risks are too great."

Amanda frowned at his reply. "I am coming with you whether you like it or not."

"You are not a member of Starfleet and, as a result, I cannot allow you to risk your life."

"When do you leave?" His mother planted her feet and glared at him with an intensity that Spock rarely never seen before.

"In six hours. Lieutenant-Commander Scott and Ensign Chekov need to confirm my calculations and initiate the transport." Spock paused and looked down, almost ashamed to admit it. "I also require meditation to...rest and prepare."

"Spock, I am going with you whether you like it or not. She is soon to be my daughter-in-law and was carrying, and hopefully still is, my first grandchild. She is a member of this family, the woman my son loves, and I need to see her. I need to help bring her home." Spock began to protest but she stopped him. "I need to do this. I have to."

Spock reluctantly nodded. "I will ask but I cannot promise that you will be allowed to join me."

Smiling, Amanda gently touched the back of two fingers to his cheek. "Thank you."

xXx

Three hours later, Spock felt centered and felt a small thrill of excitement. He extinguished his fire pot and began to dress. He had, what his captain would describe as, a 'gut feeling' that this would work. It had to.

His door chimed as he was putting his boots on. "Come."

Sarek walked in, his face serious, and Spock knew that word about his mother's wish to include herself in his venture to Jim's universe had reached him.

"Sa-fu."

Spock stood to greet him. "Father, I had anticipated your arrival but had predicted it to be far sooner than now."

Sarek took a deep breath. "I had a rather lengthy and...heated conversation with your mother. Did you tell her she could transport with you to collect Jim?" Spock wasn't surprised that they had fought.

Spock's eyebrows flew up, almost into his hair. "I most certainly did not. I told her 'no' and we, also, had a conversation. She was very adamant that she join me and I told her that I would ask Captain Pike. No more."

Sarek sighed this time, a habit he had acquired from his wife. "She said the same thing. She is a very determined woman."

"It is too dangerous for her, father."

"I agree however, like a hunting lemataya, I have no hope of stopping her. She spoke with the captain." Sarek smiled slightly. "Apparently, you had not asked him if she could attend."
"I did not lie. I told her I would ask. I did not put a timeframe on when that would be." He tilted his head, suspicion beginning to bloom. "Am I to assume by your displeasure that she also had a heated discussion with the captain?"

Sarek nodded. "Yes. And she managed to convince the captain to allow her to join the mission. She is most persuasive." His face darkened. "I wish for you to tell her she cannot go with you."

"I have done this but she refuses to listen."

"Then explain the risks and dissuade her from this course of action!"

"I have also done this. Do you believe that it would matter to her?"

Sarek looked away, anger lining his frame. "No. I do not." He returned his focus on his son, pleading for reassurance. "Will she be safe? Can you ensure her return to me? Both of your safe returns?"

"I can only tell you, sa-mekh, that I can 'do my best'."

"That is all I can ask, then."

xXx

It was all too soon for the pair of Vulcans for the mission to take place. For Spock, he fidgeted, a confusing mix of nervousness, fear, excitement at the strong possibility of seeing his beloved (and possibly his child), and frustration at his mother for her sheer stubbornness. He had been unsuccessful in his efforts to dissuade Amanda and a second device had had to be manufactured to include her in the mission.

The room was filled to capacity. Dr. McCoy, lieutenant Uhura, lieutenant Sulu, Ensign Chekov, lieutenant-commander Scott, Captain Pike, lieutenant Jr grade Gaila Vro, and Sarek all stood across from him and his mother as they stood on the transporter platform.

Pike held a sad smile. He had seen the devastation Spock had experienced with each failure and he hoped that this would not be another such event. "Go get our girl, Commander."

Spock gripped his equipment case, determination in his stance. "I intend to."

Sarek's eyes met his wife's and she met his, a fire in them that none could extinguish and she stood straight and proud. She had refused Sarek's pleas to remain safely behind. She had informed him that she knew this was the one. That this was the mission that would bring Jim and their grandchild home to complete their family and she wanted to be a part of it.

"Energize."

As the room faded from view in sparkling gold, Spock saw the crew suddenly stand at attention and salute them, wishing them success while his father held his hand up and saluted them in the Vulcan way to wish them long life. He knew this had to have been hard on him to send not only his son into the unknown, but his wife as well. It had taken the remaining time that they had been on board for him to shield their bond to remove the risks associated with a severely strained connection. Even now, Spock did not know how it would affect her. He feared that it would destroy her delicate human mind.

His view changed and Spock, as well as Amanda, suddenly saw that they had arrived in an almost identical transporter room. Spock knew immediately the journey had been a success but only in the
aspect of their safe arrival to another universe but was it the right one?

Standing across from him was his duplicate, Captain Spock wearing gold and a Lt-Cmdr Scott standing with ensign Chekov behind the transporter controls. Captain Spock's face twisted in agony when he saw Amanda and Spock knew this was where Jim was. He was sure of it.

"Mother." The captain whispered and fell to his knees, his face showing absolute agony.

Spock's heart twisted in his side in understanding but his focus was on his mate not on this Spock. He heard his mother's gasp of shock but he only cared for Jim. This Spock was the one who had caused so much harm to his t'hy'la.

He stepped off the transporter pad and faced his alternate, no pity in his eyes. "Where is my mate, Jamison Kirk?"
Hi all!
Well, another chapter posted today and it's a doozy! Things are getting there and I am close to finishing so I am excited to hear thoughts! As always, I love hearing from everyone and thank you to everyone who reviews or is kind enough to gift me with a kudos!
On a very happy note, my daughter's tumor was benign so we are beyond happy!

Chapter Thirty-Nine
Jim absently fingered the small IDIC pendant around her neck. It was a gift from Selek. When he’d given it to her right before he left for Romulus to attempt negotiations she couldn’t help but feel that it was the last time she was going to see him. By the look in Selek’s eyes, she thought maybe he felt the same.

Shifting in her seat, Jim found it difficult to get into a comfortable position and focus on the numbers in front of her. It had been six months since she had left the Enterprise and she had regretted being forced to give up her home there but, as Sarek and Selek would say, Kaiidth. What is, is and there was no point in dwelling on it.

She felt a strong kick from inside and it knocked the wind out of her. Her child was clearly impatient at Jim's lack of movement, demanding a walk from her to rock him or her to sleep. Over the past three months she had been having the sensation of a gentle touch to her mind and T'Pau had reassured her that it was normal but unexpected due to the child's largely human heritage. The matriarch believed that the baby was clearly a gifted telepath to be able to form a link so early in it's development.

She'd decided, much to the displeasure of Selek and Sarek, to not find out the gender of the baby and have it be a surprise. They had not understood her logic but Jim suspected it was more along the lines that they were disappointed and eager to meet the latest addition to the clan of Surak. Even T'Sai T'Pau had not been happy at the choice she had made in concealing the sex of the baby. She had practically harassed Jim about it citing the illogic of her choice due to the need to adequately prepare. It had been hilarious to both her and her mom seeing the matriarch practically losing her shit over something so simple.

Jim rubbed her lower back, cursing the continuous low ache that she'd had for the past two days. She was definitely ready to meet her son or daughter.

"Miss Kirk, why are you not at home resting?" Stonn, her fellow researcher came into her small office, an almost-scowl on his face. Since she'd started working at the VSA genetics department she'd noticed an almost overprotective behavior from the males she worked with. It wasn't just with her, though. She saw it with any pregnant female, human or otherwise. Jim wondered how much of it was instinctual or if it was engrained in their culture. It wasn't sexist. It was more like...they cared too much and, despite them strictly controlling their emotions, this was one thing that they didn't seem to want to control.
Jim pulled off her glasses and closed her eyes while pinching the bridge of her nose to try and dispel the tension headache that had been forming behind her eyes. "Hmm?"

"S'hailë Sarek informed us yesterday that you were not returning to work due to the imminent arrival of your child." She heard a hint of a rebuke in his statement as well as a warning in regards to Sarek.

Jim's head snapped up, her headache growing slightly worse. "He what?"

Stonn tilted his head and frowned slightly, probably confused by her question since he'd already told her. "He told us that you were not to continue working."

Jim gripped the metal and glass table in front of her. "Did he tell you that I wasn't coming to work or that I'm not supposed to be here at work."

"There is no difference as both statements are true and his words should be heeded. He did inform us that you are not to be working in your advanced stage of pregnancy." His eyes drifted to her very large belly.

"He did, did he? And what else did S'hailë Sarek tell you?" Jim asked with saccharine sweetness, her smile not one of happiness. She'd thought he'd been joking or making a suggestion when he'd made his proclamation to her last night that she would no longer be returning to work. The thought that it had basically been an order had not even crossed her mind.

Stonn was in the midst of obtaining a PhD in botanical genetic engineering. His focus was ensuring and studying the seeds and plants from 'Vulcan that was' were able to be transplanted successfully on Uzh-T'Khasi and, in order to do that, some adjustments needed to be made to both the soil and the plants. It was an enormous undertaking that was admirable and very needed and Jim was the perfect lab partner what with her past work in plant genetics with her development of the quadrotriticale grain.

During her limited free time she was also taking advantage of the VSA's vast data on alternate realities and Selek's own data chips on the subject to try and return but she just wasn't having any luck.

"Sarek stated that while your work was impressive it was time for you to rest to ensure the health of your child and your own wellbeing." He paused, knowing that his next words would likely not be received favorably. Over the past six months he had become almost an expert on Jim's behaviors and emotions. "We were also to inform him if you were to arrive at the VSA due to your stubbornness." He said apologetically.

Dammit. She was not a child and she knew the limitations of her body. She'd been forced last month to accept help simply tying her shoes since she couldn't bend down and she had had to be pulled out of a chair when she'd gotten stuck and couldn't pull herself up. "Did you tattle on me?"

"Tattle?" He looked confused at the word and Jim chuckled. It was kind of cute.

Jim sighed and rolled her eyes fondly. "Did you tell him about me being here?" She clarified.

"No." His eyes glinted mischievously. "I understand your desire to continue your work. It is fascinating and creates a sense of pride." He seemed to understand her and they had worked closely. He'd even gone as far as helping her in the physics lab with her work on trying to access parallel universes. She'd discovered that she was emitting an unusual particle signature that was slightly different from those around her, almost as if it was a homing beacon and she was trying to
use it to find the right universe.

"Yeah. It does."

Stonn turned serious. "I must warn you that S'haile Sarek will notice your absence from your home and will likely seek you out. His concern is logical. You are his daughter, despite not sharing blood, and carry his grandchild."

Jim sighed, feeling guilt. Sarek had been so wonderful to her and had done so much to ensure her comfort and acceptance into Vulcan society. He had even been spearheading the inclusion of the other races that had been bonding and having mixed children with his people to ensure genetic diversity. "Yeah. He'll be pissed."

"You seek to anger him?"

"No." She explained. "I only tire of his motherhenning."

"Motherhenning?"

"His hovering." She clarified. "I can take care of myself."

Stonn nodded. "He knows this. It is only logical for him, as it is for all of us, to ensure the health and wellbeing of those that are, potentially, carrying the future of our people."

"He cares a great deal and I just..."

"-feel the need to leave behind a legacy? To prove yourself?" Stonn finished for her.

She smiled. "Yeah. That's exactly it." He was a smart young man. She might be spending the majority of her time on the efforts of restoring some of Vulcan's glory but she still spent her nights trying to find her way back to Spock. She touched her belly, gently rubbing the top where their child grew. Jim had wanted him to be there for it but it was looking less likely every day that passed. She was being forced to come to terms with the fact that she would have to cut down the time she worked on it for the foreseeable future. She wouldn't do to her child what her own mother had done during her early years by focusing on the past and not on the child. Jim would give their child the love and attention they deserved.

"I, too, feel the same. It is illogical but it is still true." He said softly

Jim smiled sadly. She knew some of Stonn's history. He'd lost his entire clan and mate T'Pring who had been expecting their own child on Vulcan. He was very much alone but he was proving himself with everything he did. He was going to be an amazing scientist but he needed more confidence in his abilities.

Jim slid back on her glasses, clearing her throat and feeling the need to focus on something else. "The latest crop of fav'nit blossoms seem to be adapting well to soil sample Y-2-B6."

She waited for Stonn's take but he was silent. Jim turned and noticed he was watching her with an intensity that surprised her and made her squirm a bit.

"I must admit to some curiosity as to why you wear corrective lenses on your face when there are medications and surgeries that can repair the problem." His eyes found hers and he leaned closer, forcing Jim to lean back. "Your eyes are very blue."

She frowned, unsure what to say. "Uh-Thank you?"
"Do you not have duties at your own work station, Stonn?"

Stonn jumped and stood up to see Sarek standing less than a foot behind him. Despite his face showing no hint of emotions, Sarek's eyes were dark and even Jim could feel the outrage that was directed at the younger man. Jim had to hide her laughing with a small cough as she watched Stonn practically flee the room and, judging by Sarek's raised eyebrow, she wasn't too successful.

Sarek turned back to the door that Stonn had run through and Jim saw the older man's hands tense and almost close into fists. "He has intentions to bond with you."

Jim's head jerked back in disbelief. "What? No, he doesn't."

He faced her again. "Yes, he does. He visited T'Pau and requested permission to do so and to join our clan. She refused. His emotional response was most disquieting." Sarek's mouth turned into a thin line. "It would appear that he has disregarded our clan matriarch's words and decided to seek your hand anyway."

"I would never bond with him. He's too-it's not-he's just a friend a co-worker."

"Bonds have been formed on less." Sarek told her quietly.

Jim's nose wrinkled. "I'm not interested in him. Hell, I'm pregnant with another man's child. I'm also--" She sighed and looked away, fighting the heartbreak that threatened to overwhelm her. She didn't like showing extreme emotions in front of him. "-still in love with another."

"As is he but many have had to bond and do so to survive. He has affection and respect for you and he also cares for you a great deal."

"Thanks for saving me."

Sarek nodded respectfully and started to shut down her computer. "And now, it is time for you to set aside your work and return home."

"Excuse me?"

Sarek started putting away her PADDs. "You are excused, Jamison." He told her mildly and Jim glared at his false attempt to feign ignorance at the human expression.

"You know exactly what I mean." She snapped. "I am not leaving because you ordered me to like some recalcitrant child!"

Sarek stopped his motions and faced her, drawing himself up to his full height. "You are due to give birth any day and I will not allow you to place your life and that of your child, my grandchild, at risk. I almost lost Amanda and Spock due to similar behaviors from her and I will not lose another person I care about." Jim winced in guilt at his words but it was short lived when he continued. "You will return home and rest, Jamison! I performed a medical scan while you were sleeping-" Jim's mouth opened in shock. "-when I observed that your lower limbs started to show signs of swelling and forwarded the readings to Dr. McCoy in Shannai-kahr. He stated that your blood pressure is reaching inappropriate levels and that you have dilated to two centimeters. It is far past time for you to prepare for what is to come."

"But my work." She argued weakly.

"-is complete." He finished. Jim crossed her arms.
Sarek sighed, a very human gesture. "I understand that you are frightened."

"I'm not scared!"

But Sarek ignored her and spoke in a soft voice full of sympathy. "I know you grieve for your t'hy'la and do not wish to move to the next stage of your life because you feel that you are abandoning him and that you know that you will have to stop searching for a short while because you will be focused on your child but you must accept this." His eyes found hers and she saw a sadness that mirrored her own. "I, too, grieve for a mate taken from me but I know that I must move on and live for others but you, at least, have the opportunity to possibly reunite with yours. Please do not do so at the risk of your life and that of the child you carry." He implored her. "Please do not do so for myself and the doctor." Jim looked away in guilt and he placed his hand on her arm. "We would be lost if we were to lose you-both of you."

Jim's shoulders fell and she felt ashamed. She had not thought of these things. Here was Sarek who had done so much for her and she had not even considered his feelings. And Bones. He had given up his posting to be with her and care for her during this difficult time. And even her mother who had come when she had needed her most. How could she have been so selfish? "Ok. I'm sorry."

Sarek jerked his head in acknowledgement, seemingly grateful at her acquiescence.

Jim stood and twitched, suddenly feeling a damp sensation run down her legs and she looked down in horror. A small puddle of liquid collected at her feet. Her waters had broken.

Sarek's brow raised in surprise. "It would appear that I came at an opportune time."
Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

Well, here's another fun-filled chapter. :) Things have hit a nice calming point at home which will rapidly change towards the end of the week. My daughter is finally healing well post kidney surgery. Her tumor was benign!!! I have a boot on my foot so I can finally walk but we move this weekend. I'm hoping to get another chapter up and set before then but I'm still playing around with it. Without further ado, here we go!

Chapter Forty

Captain Spock stood on the bridge, his counterpart on one side and a version of his mother on the other. To be so close to her caused him unbearable agony. He had finally established a balance when he'd bonded with Nyota and had been treated by a Vulcan mind healer but that control was once again close to his limits. To be so close to the woman who was so much like his mother but wasn't her was torture. He saw the same mannerisms, behaviors, and expressions she had but she wasn't his in any sense of the word.

Spock wondered how his life would have played out had he been able to save her. Such thoughts were illogical and a waste of time but he still had them. His eyes subconsciously drifted to her and soft brown eyes returned his gaze. There was so much empathy and worry reflected back that it hurt. His Amanda had always cared for those around her and it appeared this version was no different.

He quickly turned attention to Commander Spock, contemplative of this version of him. Remembering what he had seen in Commander Kirk's memories, the young captain watched as Spock waited anxiously for their arrival to the colony. His counterpart seemed almost...human. It was a strange dichotomy and he couldn't help but be curious as to what it would have been like had he accepted his human heritage sooner. This Spock stood straight and confident just as he did but it was different. The burden of command did not sit on his shoulders and he seemed all the lighter and happier for it. The blue uniform denoting science track with the stripes of a commander somehow looked right. Spock had considered a career focusing on the sciences, eschewing command track but there had always been a 'what if'.

Commander Spock's jaw was set with a determination that did not surprise the captain. Now that his fractured mind had been healed and his emotions had been properly categorized he knew he would be the same if it had been Nyota that he had lost.

"Time to Uzh-T'Khasi?"

"Three hours and twenty minutes, keptin."

Spock turned to his 'guests'. "You are free to use the facilities on board the Enterprise and be informed when we arrive."

With that, he spun on his heels and left. He could feel Nyota's concern through their bond but he
put up his shields to block it. His thoughts centered on the conversation he had had with Selek before Jamison's departure.

xXx Six months prior

Spock stood in his quarters, his father's words spinning in his head. He did not know what to think. A red haze as vivid as the sands of Vulcan-That-Was clouded his mind. Everything he had worked for was lost. His efforts to protect Jamison had been for nought and he had failed in his task in the worst way.

He had desperately tried to force Jim away from him after she had died in an attempt to protect her as much as protect himself. He had wanted peace and logic to rule him, not his heart. How foolish he had been. Nyota had been a logical choice, her calming influence a perfect counterpoint and a soothing balm to his fractured mind. She had been a close friend and they were perfect together. Did he choose her because of logic or love? He was as conflicted as he was when he was a child.

Every moment with his intended brought him a happiness that filled his very being while being in the presence of Commander Kirk caused him such turmoil. The blond forced such strong emotions in him that he frequently had to exert control and it exhausted him. His focus would deteriorate, he would feel an all consuming love and utter frustration but it wasn't the same as what he felt for Nyota. It was one dimensional compared to the multi-faceted feelings he had for the communications officer that held his heart. It confused him.

He did not know if he had made the right choice. Had he simply been desperately convincing himself of his love for Nyota, confusing it with his feelings for Jim? Or was it Nyota who owned his heart? He loved her and she completed him but there was some unnamed instinct for him to be with Jamison that he failed to understand.

He had tried to protect Jim, forcing her to stay safe on missions and trying to help her become the officer he felt was supposed to be but he had failed. He had hurt her in his attempt to keep her safe from him and all the dangers he saw in the universe. What a fool he had been.

His door chimed, signaling a visitor. "Enter."

Selek stepped over the threshold, his hands behind his back and relaxed despite the tense stance of his counterpart. "Spock."

"Selek." He greeted and his fingers curled in a an unconscious movement of aggression. "What is the purpose of your visit? Have you come to gloat at my failures?"

"No." Selek told him simply and without inflection.

Spock roared and shoved the PADDs and computer off of his desk. They shattered and broke, glass flying as they collided with the wall and fell to the floor. "What!?! What can you possibly want from me?"

Selek did not flinch and Spock’s chest heaved as he drew in deep breaths. "I only wish to understand and offer advice.

Spock clenched and unclenched his fists. "Why did this happen?"

"Explain."

Spock shook his head, feeling his despair as if it was a physical pain. "After I lost her in the warp core, my mind fractured and I became dangerous, the worst example of a Vulcan." Looking away
in shame, the young captain struggled. "Even our ancestors who had not yet embraced logic would have been ashamed and frightened of me and what I had become." Spock trembled at the memory. "When the doctor was able to revive her...I couldn't go near her. I was afraid. What if I lost her again? Would I become a savage? What about when I would lose myself to the curse of Pon Farr? My love and desperation for her runs so deep I may hurt her and I could not bear the thought of it. I tried to keep her safe. I asked for her as my first officer to try and teach her everything I could to do so. I tried to protect her on away missions. In the end...I couldn't protect her from me."

The older Vulcan looked at him closely and Spock moved back. Selek followed and frowned, almost concerned. "Nahp, hif-bi tu throks." (Your thoughts, give them to me.)

Selek reached up, his hand open and Spock almost shrank away but decided that perhaps he needed something; something that only his counterpart could provide. He placed his fingers in the meld position and Spock felt his presence fill him, calm and gentle, familiar but not, soothing to his fevered mind.

Spock saw his memories slowly play in front of him. He watched himself as he fought Jamison on the bridge after his mother's death, he watched him touch her as he checked for a pulse after she had drowned saving a crew member that had been trapped by a rockfall, he saw himself feeling the burn of jealousy when she walked away with the two Caitian women before the Khan incident, and then the feeling of insanity as she was ripped away from him as she died in the warp core. Selek stopped at that memory, and Spock felt the older man's curiosity. Spock did not wish to see that moment and tried to pull back but the older man's mind was stronger than his and he probed deeper.

He waded further into his mind and Spock felt pain, agonizing as Selek sought the tattered shreds of the bonds he had shared with his mother and then Spock felt it. He felt a sense of understanding from Selek and Spock saw a thread, strong and at the same time damaged and frayed as if it had been torn apart and it was blackened at the end. Selek gently reached out and started to touch it with his own mind, carefully removing the black edges and stroking to smooth the thread and Spock felt relief for the first time.

His counterpart finished and pulled out of the meld. A sense of sadness seeped through but it was quickly hidden. Spock opened his eyes and saw Selek's brown eyes, identical to his own filled with heartbreak and pity. "You were telsu, bonded spontaneously without you or Jim knowing or your mutual consent."

"I do not understand." Shocked, his forehead furrowed and shoulders slumped making him look so young.

Selek's breath left him in a tired sigh. "This would explain why you acted as you did, young one. You felt pain when Jim sought others, fear when she when she was harmed as I did any time my own t'hy'la was hurt. This was why you were so angry and so broken after her death. Your bond broke in the most brutal of ways and never properly healed." He shook his head and drew a ragged breath, the meld causing the emotional transference from Spock's previous pain that had been healed by him. "You needed a mind healer and did not know to get one and you felt the instinctive need to be with her but you fought it. Your mind was damaged by the broken bond."

Sighing, the older Vulcan moved to sit on the small couch. "Your mind was confused and your bonding cortex damaged." He clarified. "The bond forced instinctual feelings towards your mate which was Commander Kirk at one point in time. You did love her but it was not a natural love borne of mutual experiences like that of Nyota's and your relationship. It had potential to be more as your katra resonated with Jim's but it was not meant to be."
Selek's eyes filled with pity. "I once told a friend that having a thing is not as pleasant as wanting. You had a bond with this Jim Kirk and it hurt you more than you realize. I implore you to ensure that she has what she now wants more than anything. At least ensure her happiness even if your chance for it with her has gone. Your destinies are your own and rightfully so."

Selek bent down and picked up one of the items that had been thrown from his desk. A framed picture, the glass broken and cracked. "You are going to need a new picture." He carefully placed it back on his desk and left. Spock looked at the picture, forever frozen in time. It had been taken three months into their voyage. The whole crew, at Jim's urging, had posed on the bridge.

He ran his finger over the image. Jim stood next to him, slightly apart with her left arm around her friend Dr. McCoy. Her smile was brilliant and bright and her eyes a vibrant sky blue. When he had seen her earlier today there had been none of that happiness.

He carefully put back down the picture and typed in his request to meet with the senior staff to convince the crew to find a way to get Jim home.

xXx Present

Spock stared at the picture that he had held six months ago of the crew, it's glass still cracked and broken. Next to it stood a picture of him as a small child being held by his mother. Her smile was just as bright as Jim's as she held the serious faced four year old Vulcan. He wondered if she had felt hurt at his choice to ignore and reject his human heritage. Had she felt that he didn't love her because of it?

Next to the picture of his mother was one of Nyota and him when they had been to Sestas III. The local people had been having a moon festival and had welcomed the Enterprise crew for shore leave. She had handed their holo-camera to a passing tourist and had pressed her lips to his cheek just as the picture had been taken. His features had shown no reaction but Nyota had framed the image anyway stating that she could see that he loved her with his eyes. He was afraid that he couldn't see it despite knowing that he had felt it.

He did love her, truly. She was his bondmate and wife. She had saved him from certain death and he treasured her wise counsel. She never asked for more than he could give and she tempered him. She respected his heritage and was supportive. Nyota was his other half. He did not know what he would do without her.

The pneumatic hiss of his doors sounded from his left and he felt cool arms wrap around his middle. He placed his hands over hers and intertwined their fingers.

She slowly moved around and faced him so she could look him in the eye. "I just wanted to check on you. Are you ok?"

He could see the concern in her beautiful brown eyes and he knew that she loved him. When he had broken she had put the pieces of him back together. She had never judged or berated him and had supported him through everything. Spock couldn’t help but wonder if he would ever be worthy of her. He pulled her to him, pressing his lips to hers in a chaste kiss and held her, allowing her strength to hold him up. "I am alright as long as I have you."

The door chimed and Spock reluctantly released Nyota despite not wanting to leave her calming presence.

"Come."
The door opened and Spock saw the woman who was his mother but not his mother. Nyota looked between the two. She was torn between wanting to remain to support her husband in what was obviously a painful position and allowing him privacy to speak with this alternate version of the mother he lost to Nero. "Do you need me to stay?" She asked quietly enough to prevent Amanda from hearing her.

Spock's lips barely twitched in a small smile, thankful for her love and concern. "No, aduna." He held out his fingers in the ozh'esta and she returned it, feeling his gratitude and love through their contact.

"If you need me..."

"I know." He told her softly.

Uhura walked up to the human who, despite not being her husband's mother, still shared the beautiful brown eyes of his that she loved. She bowed her head in respect. "T'Sai Amanda."

"Nyota." She smiled, her face kind and warm. "Thank you for taking care of him."

"Always."

Nyota left with an encouraging smile. She hoped that with this meeting that Spock would find peace.

Spock looked at Amanda, longing radiating off him in waves and the woman went to him, her face twisting in heartbreak. The sight of Spock, of any Spock looking like this hurt more than anything she had ever experienced. She could see the strain that he had endured and it was enormous. It was as if he had a millstone hanging around his neck dragging him down and it was awful.

She knew of the problems between Jim and this Spock. She knew that he had pushed her away and had been cruel but she also understood why. His childhood and her own Spock's had been vastly different. It's not that the alternate version of her and her husband had done wrong by him. It was more along the lines of the lack of care and empathy he received from his peers.

He reminded her of a plant she had once had when she had first arrived on Vulcan. She had tried everything to keep it alive, giving it love and attention, but the harsh climate of her new home had caused it to wither and die. Spock was that plant.

She had heard from her son about the loss of his mother and how it had happened right in front of him. Spock had told her of Khan, Jim's death, this Spock's pain and she understood as any mother would.

"Oh, sweetheart! Come here!" She raised her arms and was so happy when he went to her. He clung to her desperately and Amanda held him. His hands fisted in the fabric of her traditional vulcan dress as he held on tight and she stroked his hair as she had done countless times with her own Spock to comfort him. He shook in her arms and she knew he was trying so hard to hide what he felt.

Lowering her head, she pressed a kiss to the silky strands of his hair. "It's ok. Allow yourself this moment. Allow the feelings you have to ride to the surface to allow them to disperse. You are safe to do so."

"It is illogical. You are my mother yet you are not." He spoke into her shoulder and she shushed his protests.
She held him tighter, hoping he could feel the love she felt and she knew he did when he relaxed in her arms. "I may not have birthed you but in any universe you are my son and I will love you, any version of you."

She felt a sob break through and she stood there, supporting him as he slowly let his grief break through, sharing his pain that she echoed at seeing him so broken. No. Fractured but he could heal and she hoped she had the ability to be a soothing balm to his wounds.

"I...I loved her. I never told her and I regret that I never did."

"She knew you did. A mother always knows."

His breathing hitched and stuttered as he finally allowed himself to fully accept his emotions and she weathered the full brunt of Vulcan emotions that enveloped her in waves and she cried with him.

They moved to the small couch in his quarters and he latched himself onto her as if he was afraid she would disappear at any moment. She gently rocked him and it was a long time, yet nowhere near long enough, before he moved away. His face was flushed green and there were still tears in his eyes that she carefully wiped away. He looked so pale with the gold command tunic. It seemed to leech the color from his skin and made him look ill.

His head lowered in shame and her heart clenched in an almost physical pain. "Do not hide from me, Spock. No one can see you. I would never judge you for doing what you need and this is something that you clearly needed. It is nothing to be ashamed of."

"It is not Vulcan. I should have control."

"Even the best Vulcans have moments of failed control. This is fact."

Spock calmed at her reassurances and Amanda's face softened. She reached out a hand to his chin and lifted his head up so that his eyes would meet hers. "I feel pride and happiness that you deemed me worthy to assist you in this moment. It is not a weakness but a great strength to show these things. You have given me a gift by trusting me to help you."

"Thank you."

She smiled and ran the back of her fingers down his cheek in a parental gesture of affection. "You are more than welcome."

He breathed a sigh of relief. "I...I must meditate."

Amanda nodded in understanding and stood to leave but was halted when Spock's hand shot out and gently grabbed her wrist. "Please stay."

Her hand covered his. "Of course."

xXx

Their arrival at the colony was a welcome relief to Spock. He felt his mission to help his t'hy'la, despite her not being his, was at an end. He felt peace and Nyota felt it as it filtered across the bond they shared. She smiled at him and typed in the codes to hail the colony, waiting for the order.

Spock's counterpart, dressed in science blues, and the alternate version of his mother both had eyes focused on the screen. They were both tense and he could see the anxiety and excitement that they
"Hail S'haile Sarek."

"Aye, sir." Nyota frowned and pressed several more buttons on her board. "I'm only getting audio, no visual, captain."

"Put it through."

"This is the USS Enterprise. We request to speak with Jamison Kirk."

Spock recognized his father's voice immediately but there was an underlying stiffness to his words that signified he was under a great deal of stress. -"This is S'Ch T'Gai Sarek. Miss Kirk is occupied and unable to speak. State your purpose."

His counterpart straightened and his mother placed a hand on his arm.

"It is urgent that we speak with her. There is someone to see her."

-"I request that you cease efforts to contact her at this time." Sarek's reply was clipped and it wasn't his typical behavior.

Spock's brows drew down at his father's dismissal. "Your request is denied. We need to speak with her, now. Time is of the utmost importance."

-"Very well, captain. Please hold."

A moment passed and then the audio came back to life and the crew heard painful moaning, cries of agony that caused them all to wince and look at each other in alarm. They recognized Jim's voice. -"Now is really not a good time!"

Suddenly, Dr. McCoy's voice interrupted. -"Goddammit, Spock! What the hell is so important that it can't wait?"

Jim's cries of pain continued in the background sending alarm rushing through Spock and the bridge crew. Spock's eyes drifted to his counterpart who's hands were in fists, fear written on his features but the alternate version of his mother showed understanding. "Is Jim in labor, Doctor?"

She asked.

-"Yes, dammit! Call back later!"

The crew all smiled in excitement. They had known about the pregnancy and felt a sense of accomplishment that they were finally bringing her Spock to her and just in time.

The call was cut off and both Spock's sighed in relief at knowing why Jim was crying in pain but his counterpart was still unsettled. "I need to beam down. Now."
Well, we finally moved and are at the new place. Moving is a pain. I never recommend it...ever. Things sort of seem to be settling so I had a minute to finish this chapter. Hope it's liked! :)

Chapter Forty-One

Jim panted and moaned in agony as another contraction hit her. "Oh, god! I need fucking drugs! Why won't you give me drugs!"

She leaned forward, her arms resting on Sarek's shoulders but she was still careful to not touch his bare skin. McCoy chuckled behind her. "Kid, I will give you something as soon as you let me examine you. You won't let me touch you."

"Can't you just scan me with a tricorder?" Jim snapped and squatted as another one hit.

Her mom was massaging her back to give some relief but it just didn't seem to help. Jim closed her eyes and tried to focus on her breathing like she'd practiced and took in the calming, flowery scent of her mom's perfume. She forced herself to remember the pain of every contraction was bringing her closer to when she'd be able to hold her son or daughter. Her breath left her in stutters and she gripped Sarek's robe, almost choking the vulcan in the process.

"No. You know that a tricorder only gives basic readings. I'm sorry, kid, but I have to check."

Bones sighed and rubbed her shoulder in sympathy. "Jim, I want to help. You need to let me do my job. You have to trust me."

"It's going to be ok, sweetheart. I promise." Winona reassured her but Jim didn't see the look of concern behind her directed at Bones. The older woman knew it was a harder and longer labor than she'd experienced with both of her children. She hated seeing her youngest go through this and she couldn't do anything to help her other than being there.

Fuck! She did not want anyone to touch her. It hurt so bad. It was as if she was being squeezed and twisted from the inside. "I do. I-I just don't think I can move right now."

"You must, Jim. You need to be checked by the doctor." Sarek tried to encourage her but she just shook her head. Her legs locked in position and tears streamed down her cheeks. Jim felt like a failure and weak.

Jim laid her head on Sarek's shoulder as he rubbed her upper back. "Do you require assistance?"

She had to do it. She had to. Grimacing, Jim pushed aside her fears for the moment and gripped her mom's hand for support. Winona offered a grim smile and hoped for her daughter to draw on her strength. "No. I-I can do it." She carefully stood and waddled to the bed, lying down on her back as Bones put on a pair of sterile gloves. Sarek gently covered her lower half with a blanket for modesty and Jim cringed as the doctor checked her. Everything was just going so fast and to hell in a hand basket. She'd wanted a home birth for the intimacy it afforded but she was wondering if it
had been a good choice. "If I ever see Spock I am going to kill him."

"Looks good." He pulled off his gloves and washed his hands. Jim glared at the men in the room, hating that she and every woman in the universe had to go through this. "You're at seven centimeters and the baby is a bit high but facing the right way."

"Joy." Jim said sardonically and gripped the sheet as cried out against another contraction. "Does that mean you're gonna finally give me something?" McCoy pulled out two small circular discs and lifted her shirt, placing them on her belly where they stuck to her skin and, immediately, the sound of her child's heartbeat filled the room. She knew he had put the sound on as a reminder of why she was going through this. For her child.

"Alright. Now, lie on your side and curl your legs up as much as you can."

Jim saw him preparing a syringe but it wasn't a hypo. It had a giant needle on the end. "What the hell is that?!? You are not stabbing me with that thing!"

McCoy sighed and rolled his eyes. "It's a small needle and it's to stop some of the sensations of your-"

"Don't you come near me with that thing!"

"As I was saying," He continued over her and moved closer. "it's a small needle and it's to stop-"

"That needle comes near me and I will shove that thing so far up your-"

His face quirked into a half-smile and Jim allowed him to roll her onto her side. "Don't be so melodramatic, kid. It'll help. I pro-"

The sound of a beeping comm interrupted the doctor. Jim almost cried as Sarek left her to answer it. She heard the low tones of his voice but it became slightly louder as the conversation went on.

"I hate you." She griped but McCoy barked a laugh and started running his fingers down her spine.

"Ah, but you'll love me in a minute."

The older Vulcan typed something on the computer and transferred the call to a PADD and walked over to where she was lying on the bed. "Admiral Archer is on the comm and very insistent that he speak to you despite my efforts to communicate that you were unavailable."

"Are you kidding me!" Jim growled and snatched the offending item from Sarek's hands.

"I can assure you I am not 'kidding'." Sarek deadpanned and Winona had to cough which unsuccessfully hid her laugh. She received a glare but the older woman was still smiling slightly and shrugged in apology.

Jim struggled to school her features into a neutral expression and pressed the accept button after another contraction to ensure she had a bit of time. The aged face of the admiral filled the screen and she saw him pause in his greeting, tilting his head and scrutinizing her. She knew she looked like shit but, right now, she didn't care.

-"Miss Kirk, allow me to be the first to congratulate you. Starfleet command has promoted you to captain and we are offering you the post of captain of the USS Andromeda when you finish your leave."
Jim bit her lip and focused on keeping her face neutral. There was sweat dripping down her brow her blond hair curled and darkened around her face. "Thank you, sir, but now is not a good time."

The admiral bristled at her disrespectful tone, likely expecting her to be happy and she looked anything but. "Captain, we are aware of your circumstances and we want you to know the Andromeda is a generational ship."

Jim panted and closed her eyes as she felt like she was being torn from inside. "Sir, now is not the best time."

"What do you mean 'now is not the best time'!"

"Because I'm in the middle of having a baby!"

"I-"

The Admiral's eyes widened and Jim hit the button to disconnect the call, cutting him off mid-sentence.

She threw the PADD away, hearing it clatter to the floor, likely breaking with the force of her throw and turned on her side desperate for relief but the computer signaled another incoming transmission. "What now!"

Bones rubbed her back and she felt tears rolling down her cheeks. Sarek pressed accept. Spock's voice filled the room and Jim couldn't help feeling a stab of frustration at the continuous interruptions. She'd wanted this to be a private moment; a chance to be with family and no one else.

"This is the USS Enterprise. We request to speak with Jamison Kirk."

"What's that green-blooded bastard doing calling?" McCoy grumbled as he ran a sterilizing field over her back.

"This is S'Chn T'Gai Sarek. Miss Kirk is occupied and unable to speak. State your purpose." He snapped. McCoy raised his eyes in surprise at his tone but quickly returned his focus to the task at hand. His friend was hurting. He could see the focus and determination she had to bring her child into the world. She'd been in labor for over ten hours and it was beginning to take a toll on her body. Jim had, at first refused any intervention, wanting to honor som human and vulcan practices but things were rapidly turning a corner that made him start to worry.

"Why can't he ever leave me alone." Jim cried into the pillow.

"It is urgent that we speak with her. There is someone to see her." He continued.

Who could want to see her? Especially, right now!

Sarek correctly interpreted her face. "I request that you cease efforts to contact her at this time."

"Your request is denied. We need to speak with her, now. Time is of the utmost importance."

Spock protested and Sarek frowned at his son's impertinence.

"Very well, captain. Please hold." Jim noticed the use of Spock's formal title and felt gratitude at his attempts to dissuade Spock harassing her.

Jim waited before replying, giving McCoy time to insert the needle into her back. The feeling of relief was instant and Jim relaxed physically but she didn't mentally. She didn't want to see the man
who had made her life hell. "Now is really not a good time!"

Suddenly, Dr. McCoy's voice interrupted. -"Goddammit, Spock! What the hell is so important that it can't wait?"

Sarek moved to her side and took her hand. She felt his presence filter through the contact, calming her and Jim squeezed back in thanks. "It's ok."

- "Is Jim in labor, Doctor?"

The sound of a woman's voice broke through and she jolted on the bed. She knew that voice. It wasn't possible! She felt Sarek's shock and she knew he recognized Amanda's voice.

- "Yes, dammit! Call back later!"

Sarek nodded and told the computer to disconnect.

Jim's voice was raw with emotion. "Was that Amanda? Is my Spock here?"

Jim started to struggle to get up but her legs wouldn't cooperate, the numbing medication making them impossible to move far. "Call them back!"

McCoy gently pushed her down. "Right now, you need to focus on having your baby. That's what's important right now."

Jim turned to Sarek and realized his hand was squeezing hers, tight enough to hurt.

xXx

"Okay, Jim, when I tell you to push I want you to push for ten seconds."

"I have been pushing! It just won't come out!" Sweat poured down her face and Jim was stuck at the mercy of her body. She couldn't move, she was exhausted. She'd been pushing for over an hour and nothing was happening. She could see that Bones was starting to get worried and he was starting to pull out bags from his medical kit which caused her to start to worry.

"Why isn't the baby coming out?" Jim sobbed and missed the silent communication between Sarek and Dr. McCoy.

He patted her on the hand. "Ok, kid. Ok. Why don't you take a small break while I talk to our soon-to-be-grandvulcan over here."

Winona nodded at them and continued to dab at Jim's brow. McCoy pulled off his gloves as they moved out of earshot.

"Sarek, I want you to call the hospital. Jim's getting too tired to keep pushing and this baby doesn't seem to want to come out. If it's not born in the next thirty minutes then I'm gonna need her to be transported to the hospital for a cesarean delivery." He looked over his shoulder at the blond and pressed his lips into a thin line. "In fact, just call for transport now. This isn't working. I should never have allowed Jim to talk me into a home birth."

Sarek's eyes drifted involuntarily to where his adopted daughter was laying with her eyes scrunched shut and he knew things were becoming dire. "Is there cause for concern?"

McCoy sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "Right now the baby's heartbeat is stable enough but Jim is the one showing signs of stress. Her heart is showing signs of tachycardia, her blood
pressure is too high, and she's exhausted."

"Perhaps I can assist with a light meld to give her some relief and support her?"

McCoy shook his head. "It's not a matter of support or will power. You're doin' everything right but her body is just too tired. Even with Jim being the most stubborn and determined brat I've ever known she's gonna need more help than I can give her here."

Sarek nodded and went to the computer terminal while McCoy went back to his patient. "Hey, kid. Ready to try again?"

She nodded and curled in, pushing when told and she still couldn't feel any progress. Her legs shook with the effort and she still tried but she knew her body was beginning to fail her and her strength was rapidly diminishing.

McCoy's head dipped below the sheet and when he lifted it, she saw he was as white as the sheet covering her but his voice was steady.

"Now, Jim. You can't push right now, ok?"

She nodded and felt him touch her and push into her and she tried to shift away but his other hand stilled her movement. "Sarek! Call for transport. Now!"

Jim's breathing picked up and it was as if a bucket of ice water had been dumped on her.

Winona tensed and gripped her daughter's shoulder tighter. "What's wrong?"

Bones tried to give her a reassuring smile but it looked more like a constipated grimace. "The umbilical cord has come out before the baby."

Jim grunted as he pushed his fingers higher. "Right now, I'm holding your baby in place so that no pressure is put on the cord which would cut off the blood supply to the baby so I need you to stay calm and not move."

Sarek came back into the room, his features tense. "The hospital is arranging an operating room and getting coordinates. What can I do to assist?"

McCoy jerked his head towards his bag. "There's a vial labeled tri-ox. I want you to give Jim a shot of it. Ten milligrams. Then I want you to place the portable oxygen mask over her face." He turned back to her.

"Jim, I can feel your body trying to push. You need to try and relax. Pant and focus on not pushing." He turned away to face Sarek and Jim felt true fear. "Why the fuck are we not there, yet?!?"

Jim watched as Sarek followed the doctor's instructions and, as soon as he'd placed the mask over her face, she felt the transporter take hold of them.
Chapter Forty-Two

Commander Spock ran up to the hospital reception, uncaring of how he appeared to the Vulcans walking around him sedately. He heard the rapid footfalls of his mother and the Enterprise crew behind him but he refused to slow his pace.

The receptionist was a human male who looked up in surprise at the emotion showing on his face. "Jamison Kirk. She is having my child and I was told she was in emergency surgery."

Spock almost tapped his foot in impatience as he'd once seen his mother do but he refrained and waited while the human tapped at the keyboard.

"Uh...ninth floor-"

Spock didn't even wait for him to finish speaking again before he was running towards the elevators. His mother darted in just as the doors were closing.

"It's going to be alright, sweetheart."

Spock took a shuddering breath. "I have only just found her to only potentially lose her. Nothing is 'alright', ko-mekh."

"I know but it has to be."

Spock shot out of the elevator as if he was running from the hounds of hell. He saw the nurses station and was about to ask where Jim was when he heard the low tones of Doctor McCoy due to his Vulcan hearing, easily recognizing him from the sound of his voice, so like his own CMO.

He went into the room and his breath caught. The alternate version of his father was cradling a small bundle of blankets and walking in small circles, gently stroking something inside but his eyes drifted to the figure on the bed being tended to by Dr. McCoy. Jim.

She was unconscious, her bed at a slightly reclined angle and Spock could see the doctor scanning her. There was an older blonde woman with streaks of silver in her hair stroking the top of Jim's head and talking softly with the Doctor. Spock was torn in half, not knowing whether to go to their child or to his mate, both needing him. He felt joy at finding her but fear at her weakened state.

Sarek looked up at the intrusion and he froze at the sight of Amanda standing in front of him but McCoy was the first to speak. "What the hell are you doing here? Get out!"

"That is not my son, Doctor, nor is that my wife." His voice strained on the last word.
McCoy's forehead furrowed in suspicion but his expression cleared as the crew, plus Captain Spock, suddenly appeared behind him.

Nyota gasped in horror at seeing Jim lying so still and pale on the bed and Chekov squeaked. Sulu gripped Scott's shoulder. "Oh, lassie." He whispered.

Captain Spock, meanwhile, remained stoic and silent.

Sarek deliberately stepped around the alternate version of his Amanda and towards his son-but not his son-to hand the small bundle of blankets to him but Amanda stepped forward and took them from him. "Jim needs him."

Spock sent a look of gratitude at his mother and went to the bed, his hands seeking out hers. "Doctor?"

McCoy sighed. "Don't worry your little pointy ears. She lost a little blood and she's exhausted from labor but she's going to be ok." He pointed the small handheld portion of the tricorder at the baby in his mother's arms. "It was that little one that scared us. The cord slipped out before the baby but babies are tougher than we give them credit for. He came out mad as hell about the drama but perfectly flushed green and with all ten fingers and all ten toes."

Spock ran the fingers of his free hand over the meld points of his beloved, seeking confirmation of the doctor's words. His expression was gentle and he could feel her. He could feel the spark of life, so vibrant and golden but muted through drugs and exhaustion. "Why is she unconscious?"

"It was a hard labor and I had to put her under general anesthetic to get to the baby in time. The baby was in distress because of a prolapsed cord and it was cutting off his oxygen supply but he's as stubborn as any Vulcan and both of them came through fine." McCoy turned his head to the child in Amanda's arms that had started to grunt and coo, likely hungry and wanting his mother.

Amanda shushed him, kissing the top of his head. Spock's head shot up. "I have a son?"

"Yes, Spock. He was a big one. Nine pounds, ten ounces of baby with a giant head and pointed ears." He told him with a smile.

Spock leaned down and pressed a gentle kiss to Jim's forehead, resting his own against hers. "We have a son, ashayem." He whispered and he may have been imagining it but he felt joy through their contact. He returned the emotion, sending his own love to her. He would bond with her, take her home, and they would never leave one another again. "Parted from me and never parted. Never and always touching and touched." He whispered the ancient words of his people, a promise to her.

"Oh, Spock, he's beautiful." Amanda joined them and placed the infant, his son, next to the blond, maneuvering her limp arm to hold the child. He gazed upon the child and noticed, to his amusement, a shock of blond hair. The baby opened his eyes and Spock could barely see them for the swelling of his tiny face but his mother's soft, brown eyes were present. He was perfect.

He moved to hover over Jim, kissing her again and then to his son, pressing his lips to his head and just breathing him in.

The older woman moved away from Jim and held up her hand in the ta'al. "You must be Commander Spock." Her eyes were shiny with tears but she was smiling. "I'm Winona Kirk, Jim's mother."

"Spock."
Winona's hand went to her chest and her emotions were too complex for him to understand but she still smiled at him. Spock could see heartbreak in her green eyes but she also seemed...happy?

Spock heard the whispers of the Enterprise crew at the door. "Come on, Spock. This is private." Nyota whispered and he felt a surge of gratitude at the communications officer.

Sarek came to stand on the other side of the bed next to McCoy and Jim's mother.

"Thank you for taking care of her-of both of them." He told them.

Sarek nodded. "It was only logical." He took an aborted step back but Spock stopped him.

"You are her father as much as my own. Please remain."

Sarek's eyes showed relief and gratitude. "I thank thee."

xXx

Jim opened her eyes and love and happiness that was not her own filled her very being. Jim knew immediately it was him. Her head lolled on the bed and she saw him. She would know her Spock anywhere. His hair was in disarray as if he'd been pulling at it but it was his smile, barely noticeable to most but, to her it was blinding.

She smiled back but her memories suddenly returned. The frantic rush to the OR, the sound of monitors screaming at her, Bones shouting orders as he held her child inside her. Jim surged up, panic clawing it's way up her throat and making her sick with worry. Strong but gentle hands held her in place but Jim fought anyway. "My baby! Oh, God! Where's my baby?"

"Shhh, Jim. All is well."

At the sound of the chaos the baby started to cry, his voice was the most beautiful thing she'd ever heard. Bones came over with a squirming green-flushed, very upset baby. "You've got a hungry little boy wanting his momma, kid."

Jim smiled, her eyes watery and held out her arms, desperate to hold her child to know he was really there and not just a hallucination. She looked at her child with love, hungrily absorbing everything that he was and pressing him to her. Spock started to lower her hospital gown with the convenient ties and pulling the blanket away slightly to allow skin-to-skin contact. The child started to settle once he touched her, uninhibited by the fabric.

Jim watched as a tiny mouth opened, his head turning to seek her breast. Spock assisted as Jim lowered the fabric further and she carefully guided him to be able to eat. Bones moved to assist with latching as Jim struggled but, her son instinctively knew what to do. Jim laughed softly as his tiny arms wrapped around her breast, his hands opening and closing against her skin like a kitten. She recognized his presence gently entering her mind as he started to feed from her.

He had a hint of blond hair and the smallest, most delicate pointed ears she had ever seen. She couldn't see his eyes as they were closed in happiness and satisfaction. He was perfect. God, she loved him.

Jim looked up at her Spock, her smile so wide it her her cheeks. "We have a son."

"Yes, my Jim."

She lifted the arm not supporting her son and touched Spock's face and he obliged, lowering
himself and closing his own eyes. Jim could feel his happiness, his love, and his relief at being there. It was like a dream. "How?"

He opened his eyes but did not move away from the soothing and reassuring contact of his mate. "I never stopped searching for you and I will never let you get away again."

His words should scare her but they only served to give her joy at his promise. "I will never leave you either." She looked down at her son. "And neither will he."

"Taluhk nash-veh k'dular, t'hy'la. I cherish thee." He told her softly.

"And I love you."

He leaned towards her and she could smell the sandalwood and spicy scent of the incense he liked and it filled her with warmth. Tilting her head she sought his lips and was rewarded when he pressed his back. He kissed her as if he was breathing her in desperately to keep a part of her always with him and she loved it.

Jim scooted over very carefully, ignoring the protests of Bones, her body, and Spock climbed in next to her and lowered his head to brush against her bare shoulder, laying one hand on their child and stroking her fingers in an intimate kiss. He closed his eyes and rested, his mind calm with the knowledge they were both safe.

Jim suddenly remembered that they were not really alone and glanced up to see Bones quietly typing on a PADD, likely updating her chart. She saw Sarek watching them, sadness seeming to engulf him and Amanda sitting next to him, her happiness a counterpoint to Sarek's emotions.

Jim flushed a vivid red at the thought of them seeing her exposed despite the fact that what she was doing was natural and she was simply feeding her child and not flashing them. Jim tilted her head.

"Amanda—I mean T'Sai Amanda, what-how?"

She stood and came closer, her attention on Jim and their child. "Oh, Jim. please, call me Amanda..." She smiled even wider and it made her seem so young. "...or mom." She stroked the tiny pointed ear and her son only sucked harder and she felt his excitement at the contact from his grandmother.

"I had to come. You're my daughter." Tears welled in her eyes making them bright. "You have given me my first grandchild and make my son so happy. I needed to be there for the three of you."

"What's this 'first grandchild' thing? I think one is more than enough!" Jim protested.

Amanda's response was a high, tinkling laugh and she leaned down to wrap an arm around her, squeezing in a modified hug. "Well, a grandmother can always hope." She pressed a kiss to the top of her head and Jim closed her eyes at the motherly gesture.

"I'll leave you to rest. I think you need it after the excitement of today."

Jim tried, unsuccessfully, to stifle a yawn but McCoy snorted. That bastard never miss a thing she thought affectionately.

Jim watched as her soon-to-be mother-in-law left.

Sarek came over as she left but Jim could see the pain reflected in his eyes. Jim empathized with the older man who watched a woman who was the twin of the wife he lost. She knew how painful it was to lose the one you loved only to see an alternate version of them. They were so similar yet
so different and not yours.

Sarek straightened and focused on the trio on the biobed with happiness, but still a degree of sadness was there. "You have done well, ko-fu."

Jim's throat tightened at the address. "I thank thee, sa-mekh." Jim had never called him such and his eyes grew suspiciously shiny.

"I-" His voice cracked and he cleared his throat, blinking rapidly. Jim did not comment on his lapse of control. "I know you must leave but I find that I do not wish you to. I have grown close to you in the time you have been here and to lose another I care for...it will be difficult. I understand why you must return to your home but I will...miss you when you leave but I ask that you name your son in our ways."

Jim nodded, knowing the importance of the ritual Sarek requested. He wanted his adopted grandchild to be listed as such and as a member of the clan of Surak.

Sarek ran the back of his hand over her cheek, a Vulcan parental gesture and Jim closed her eyes as they burned and a tear leaked out and rolled down her cheek. Sorrow at leaving the man who had saved her and accepted her filled her but he combatted that as he sent his own love and Jim calmed.

"Rest, ko-fu. I will visit you tomorrow."

Jim looked around the room but couldn't see her mother. "Where's my mom?"

Bones looked up from his charting. "She's handling the crew and Starfleet. She's also talking with your brother to tell him he's an uncle."

Jim shifted and smiled. She still couldn't believe it. It was like a dream and she was so scared she'd wake up. She now had her two boys with her. She slowly shifted the, now sleeping, baby and laid him on her chest, skin to skin and shifted so Spock could touch her and she fell asleep with her best friend watching over her and the touch of her child's and Spock's minds.
Chapter 43

Chapter Notes

Yay!!! Double update! Mostly because I feel bad about my other works taking so long so I want to get this one settled so I can focus on my other works. I want to say a huge thank you to everyone who has helped me with constructive criticism (for example letting me know I have run on sentences, grammar issues, typos, etc) and those who have helped with ideas, and everyone who has given me such kind words of encouragement! Thank you!

Darkwaters

Chapter Forty-Three

Spock held their small son...well, not so small, and his smile was subtle but there as a pudgy arm waved outside the blanket and touched his father's nose. "I believe that he has your nose, ashayem."

"Hmm...I think he has yours."

"A Vulcan never lies. It is yours. My mother concurs in my assessment."

Jim wrinkled the aforementioned feature. "Poor kid. I like your nose. Its cute."

Spock's eyes found hers, sincerity in them. "I think yours is 'cute'."

She rolled her eyes at the absolute sappiness. "You're biased."

His eyes crinkled in amusement. "Perhaps."

"I was thinking...David for him." Spock paused in his rocking motions and Jim back pedaled. "We don't have to! I know it's a bit too human."

"No. It is a good name. He is part human and I wish for him to have a name reflect his dual heritage but, if I may, I would like to add in the name of Sajek?"

Tilting her head curiously, Jim tried to remember where she had heard that name before.

"It is the name of a renowned Ka'athyra maker from Vulcan. It may inspire creativity in our son."

She remembered the hours Spock played for her and the peace it instilled. She loved it. "It's perfect. S'Chn T'Gai David Sajek." Jim tried out the name and it somehow suited him.

David started to fuss, his voice high-pitched and musical, much like that of his namesake, and Spock brought him to her and she quickly started to feed him. She loved this, the feeling of closeness as she fed him despite the fact that it hurt like a bitch when he latched on. It was the presence of David's mind entering hers when there was skin contact. She felt his happiness and contentment within him as he joined with her.

"Captain Pike believes that you will, likely, achieve captaincy in four years, perhaps three."
Jim pushed back and let the momentum of the rocking chair swing her as she nursed her son. "Mmm...three years?" She smiled and stroked the soft hair. "I think I could do it in two."

Spock hummed in thought. "Do not be so eager. You may be quite busy with our son and the added duties of being captain would take a lot of your time; time away from him."

She pulled her child closer and he grunted in protest. "Maybe." Jim looked up into the soft brown eyes of the man she had been searching for for the past six months. "But I'd be a bitchin' captain and mom." Jim told him with a smirk.

"What does 'bitchin' mean?"

"It means awesome."

Spock nodded in understanding but she could see the internal eye roll.

"Then I agree with you that, if you were to become captain, you would definitely be a "bitchin" captain and mother." He deadpanned and Jim couldn't help laughing at the fact she got Spock to say bitchin'.

Jim's smile faded and she turned her focus to the baby, avoiding Spock's gaze. "I have become captain." She laughed bitterly. "I was promoted while I was in labor to the USS Andromeda."

"You did? Do you...wish to stay here?" He asked carefully, clearly afraid of her answer.

"Andromeda, also known as the chained maiden." Jim snorted. "Very appropriate."

Spock kneeled in front of her and took her hand. "If I remember my Greek mythology correctly, Andromeda is one of the Greek constellations, named after Andromeda, the daughter of Cassiopeia and Cepheus, who was chained and left for the sea monster Cetus to eat as a sacrifice to the gods."

Jim nodded in agreement. "Yes, but you're forgetting the rest of the story. She was saved by Perseus." Her eyes softened and her smile was bright enough to light up the room. "Perhaps you're my Perseus coming to save me."

Spock brought her knuckles to his lips and kissed them. "Perhaps, indeed."

She knew by the smile she could feel against the back of her hand that he understood what she meant. She was going home. He had saved her in so many ways, not just by coming to get her, but by simply loving her and letting her love him in return. She would follow him to wherever he led her and he would do the same. Her place was at his side and his at hers.

He surged up, kissing her and Jim twined her fingers in his hair, as soft as her child's and she was so happy. The room, her pain, and the past months faded away as if it had never happened. Jim wanted this moment of peace to never end but life had a tendency to interrupt even the best, most private of moments.

A tentative knock at the door caused Spock to pull away and Jim saw a Uhura in the doorway, clearly unsure if her presence was welcome and holding a small bunch of flowers and gift bag tightly as if she felt she'd be shoved away like a stray into the rain at any moment. She shifted her stance from foot to foot and Jim had never seen her so out of her element. She wasn't in her usual uniform, clearly opting for a white Vulcan tunic and leggings which only made her look more beautiful despite her discomfort etched on her face.

Jim bit her lip and she debated turning her away but Spock stood and made the decision for her.
"My mother is waiting, likely finding and purchasing the entirety of the market for her grandson."

Jim appreciated the privacy he was giving her and she held out her middle and forefinger and Spock returned the kiss, his own fingers curling around hers. He left with a nod to acknowledge the lieutenant as he passed her.

Jim waved her in and she sat on the window seat, placing the items she brought with her on the rolling tray next to Jim. Her posture was tense and Jim hated it, the awkwardness of the situation.

"Uhura."

Her head turned to where Spock had been and she shifted in her seat and Jim could see the curiosity (and sadness?) in her. "So, that's Spock."

"Yes."

She tilted her head, considering her next words. "He's...different than I expected."

Jim's lips twitched in a fond smile. "That he is. He had a very different childhood than that of your husband."

Uhura turned to face her, confusion written on her face. "You know we married?"

"Of course. Spock is a member of the Clan of Surak just as I am. I was invited to the ceremony as the sister of Spock but it was...too awkward and I knew it would be for both of you so I stayed away." Jim explained.

"You really love that Spock, don't you?"

Jim's head jerked back. "Of course."

Uhura finally faced her. "I've never seen love like that."

"Your Spock loves you. I've seen it, believe me. Why do you think I was so jealous of you two?" Jim bit her lip and looked away. She needed to say this. "I wanted him to be happy and if that was him with you then so be it. All I wanted was to be his friend."

Uhura's lips turned down and there was heartbreak in her eyes. Jim's chest tightened in empathy. "My Spock loved you, too. I could see it when he watched you die in the warp core. The only thing that stopped him killing Khan was hearing your name. He didn't even respond to me til he heard your name."

"He did love me but not in the right way. It was you he always loved and he got a raw deal. He was pressured into something that wasn't to be and that was very wrong from the start." Jim sighed and looked down at David who had fallen asleep and she adjusted her hold and covered herself. "It wasn't his fate nor was it mine. Don't ever doubt your Spock's love for you."

Uhura smiled, reassured, and her attention drifted to the baby who Jim thought was perfect but she knew she was very biased.

"He's adorable. What's his name?"

"David."

"A human name?" She asked, surprised.
"Yes. Spock believes in emphasizing both his human and Vulcan heritage. His middle name is Sajek." Jim held him out. "Did you-you want to hold him?"

Uhura lit up and reached for David, gently supporting her son. "He's beautiful."

"I'd like to think so but Spock says he has my nose. Poor kid."

She gently rocked the child and Jim wondered if her Spock and her would decide to have one. Jim was sure it'd be one hell of a smart kid. The thought of Uhura and Spock didn't hurt anymore and she was honestly happy for them. Life was too short to hold a grudge. She wished she could spend the time to try and build something but her own Spock had told her of the time limitations and the difficult choice they had to make but she was going.

"Are you really going to leave?"

Jim nodded, sure of her decision.

She looked up from David, her eyes almost pleading. "You both could stay here. I know Spock and you have had your differences but he's different now. He spent every moment he could to get your own Spock here after you left. I think-" She turned away to collect herself before returning her gaze. "-I think he wanted to try and mend the bridges he burned with you."

Jim hadn't known that and it surprised her. "I guess the old adage 'Actions speak louder than words' applies here." She sighed and closed her eyes. "It's a bit late but I do forgive him." She smirked. "Besides, I think two Spocks in this universe is far more than enough. Three would be crazy."

"Yeah. I guess you're right but no Kirks just doesn't seem right."

Jim understood her meaning and reached over, giving her a reassuring smile. "If you were me, I know you'd do the same. I have to follow my heart." She shrugged. "Besides, I know Sulu is gonna make an awesome XO."

xxx

Jim hated hospitals. They reminded her too much of the months she had been in one after Tarsus to heal physically and mentally but Spock and Bones provided a safe haven for her. They worked hard to make the experience tolerable despite Bones' constant nagging.

A throat cleared to her right and Spock pulled away. Some of former crew from the Enterprise stood shifting awkwardly in the doorway. Chekov, Sulu, and Scotty were waiting with, what looked like, half of a gift shop, but Jim knew that the Vulcans had no such thing so they must have spent a month of replicator rations each. Flowers, balloons, stuffed animals, and, probably, six months worth of baby clothes were balanced precariously in their arms.

Spock quickly moved to grab a blanket to cover and wrap her legs as Jim ushered the trio in. David shifted and pulled turned his head in curiosity so she adjusted herself and moved him out to see what was going on even though his vision was blurry. Her room filled with the warmth of her friends-no-her brothers in arms.

xxx

"And-" Sulu was laughing so hard, gasping for air, that Jim was afraid he was going to pass out from lack of oxygen. "And then some goon held up a syringe and the terrorist leader said 'Do you know what this is?' And Jim said, so calm that you would have thought she was just talking about the weather, and I swear to god these are her exact words! 'A scale model of your penis?'"
Spock turned to Jim who simply shrugged, a small smile on her face. Spock looked over at McCoy, surprise written on his features. "She really said something like that to antagonize her captors?"

McCoy rolled his eyes. "I've always said she was a few knights short of a crusade but yeah." He growled but it was in good humor.

Sulu gasped, his laughter causing him to wheeze. "That wasn't the best part! The best part was the look on the woman's face when Jim said that!"

"She was a female? Then why would Jim suggest that she had a-"

"Hey, she neither confirmed or denied what was going on in her pants. There are plenty of races in the quadrant that have-"

McCoy pointed at Jim. "You know exactly how to tell apart Tellerite males and females."

Jim threw up her hands but there was mirth bright in those blue eyes of hers "Hey, man, one can never be too sure and I have learned not to judge in case they may be undergoing."

Scotty joined in. "Tha look on Spock's face was priceless. I dinna know which one he was wanting ta strangle. Tha commander or tha tellarite!"

"That's captain now." Jim corrected with a smirk and Sulu rolled his eyes.

"Is it true you were in labor when Archer promoted you?" Chekov asked.

She waved a hand dismissively. "Multitasking is an awesome skill in a captain."

A throat cleared behind them and, instantly, the happy atmosphere in the room fizzled and a cloak of seriousness descended silencing the group.

"Speak of the devil and he shall appear." McCoy murmured.

Jim needed to do this. In two weeks she'd be leaving everyone and everything behind and Spock and her needed to clear the air completely; to put to rest the demons that plagued them.

"Hey, guys. A minute?"

Sulu, Scotty, and Chekov said their goodbyes and promises to see her again when they had a free moment while Bones practically growled at the Vulcan hovering in the doorway and threatening him with bodily harm should her monitors show even a hint of stress.

Her Spock, on the other hand, clearly did not want to leave. He knew of the emotional scars that Jim had from his treatment of her. It had taken a while to gain her trust and, even now, she still has a hesitance about her as if she expects him to leave at any moment. She has illogical self-sacrificing behavior in regards to their upcoming bonding despite her love for him. He can see she does not wish to 'trap' him but she doesn't want to leave him. It is a strange contradiction.

The commander pointedly held out his middle and forefinger in the ozh'esta and, as Jim returned it, he pulled on it to bring her closer and kissed her on her forehead pointedly in front of the Spock in the doorway. A gesture that may speak of tenderness to most but he meant it as a warning that Jim was his and she was fragile. His eyes, as he left, were cold and threatening and Jim saw the captain almost shiver in fear, his face practically going white! Vulcans are pacifists her ass.
Spock walked into the room and Jim assessed him. He looked truly afraid and his body language spoke of a regret deeper than she had ever seen before on another being. She gestured to the seat that had previously been occupied by Sulu and Spock sat down. His hands seemed to fumble and Jim had a feeling that he would normally hold them behind his back to hide the telling behavior.

"You look well." He started awkwardly and Jim almost rolled her eyes but she had to remember that Spock, and most Vulcans, were emotionally constipated and sometimes lacked in social skills.

"I am." She opened her mouth to say something but David started to cry and startled them both. Jim made to get up to collect him from his bassinet and winced as her wound made itself known. Modern medicine had come far but it still took time to recover from major surgery.

Spock stopped her and Jim sat back down.

He indicated the crying bundle. "May I?"

"He probably just needs a change and a cuddle."

Jim watched as Spock, very slowly and overly carefully, picked up David. She could see David looking at this stranger and she could feel his confusion and curiosity through the new parental link they shared.

Spock placed him on the small changing table the room had and looked helplessly at the diapers and Jim chuckled. She instructed him at the removal of David's diaper and didn't get a chance to warn him about covering him before-

"Oh, man! I'm so sorry!" Jim told him in between fits of laughter. Spock looked at her, pee covering the front of his uniform and him placing him in Jim's arms. "I forgot to warn you." She gasped and Spock looked at her with a long-suffering expression.

"At least it wasn't your face."

He dabbed his front with a towel and sat opposite her. "Indeed. Your son has an unsettlingly accurate aim."

Jim smiled and cuddled her son closer and he settled when he smelled and felt who was holding him. "Don't worry. It's not just you. His dad got a face full the first time. I think we're never going to be bored with David."

Spock's eyebrow raised and Jim steeled herself, ready for Spock's criticism, as he always had done in the past.

"A name derived from Hebrew that has the same meaning as 'ashayem'."

"Beloved." Jim confirmed.

He inclined his head in respect. "It is a worthy name."

"I should hope so. It took me months to decide." Jim joked but Spock remained serious, guilt lining his features. It was a look that caused Jim's own feeling of guilt and gratitude.

"I heard about what you did. Thank you." She told him earnestly.

Spock seemed to relax and he nodded. "Thanks are illogical. It is something that should have been done from the start."
Jim agreed but she knew the admission from Spock that he had done wrong was a rarity. She accepted it for what it was and hoped to move on. It was far from the friendship that had been predicted by Selek. If they had had time it would have eventually developed into one but time was one commodity that was rapidly running out. For Jim, it was enough.

"Would you like to play a game of chess?"

The corners of Jim's former captain turned up in an almost-smile. "I would very much enjoy the chance to play with you."

Smirking, Jim pointed out the set on loan from the hospital. "You do know I'm gonna kick your ass."

"Perhaps."

Grinning, she waited patiently as he set up the board. "Oh, I totally am. It's gonna be epic."
And her it is. The final chapter and epilogue! I want to say a huge thank you to everyone who has stuck by me and been so patient with this beast of a story. Your words of encouragement and advice was appreciated more than you know. I only hope that the end is ok and enjoyed by everyone. Now, I can try and focus on the other two stories I have planned. Now, don't worry, there is a happy romance in the works so it won't be all dark. While "Mistakes" will be a sad story I am working on a sappy romance that will see Spock in a good light.
Thank you again and I can't wait to hear if this ending is ok.

DarkWaters

Chapter Forty-Four

David squirmed in her grasp, clearly hating his Vulcan robes and Jim was stiff with fear of dropping him. The naming ceremony had been brief and to the point with T'Pau looking at her great-grandson with love and sadness. She, along with the entire crew of the Enterprise had been trying to discourage her leaving but they all understood why.

"I apologize for not being present for David's birth."

Jim looked up into the aged face of the person who she loved like a father, brother, and friend all rolled in one. Selek had taken over Sarek's diplomatic duties to allow him to care and assist Jim during her time on the Vulcan colony. He had done so much for her and she could never thank him enough. "The important thing is you're here now."

She handed over the wriggling baby when prompted by the older Vulcan and he looked at his 'nephew' in wonder. "I believe David will do great things."

"With Spock and me as parents I'm suspicious of his great things involving copious amounts of mischief."

Selek's eyes sparkled in amusement. "It is very likely, Pi'Jim."

David gurgled and snuggled into the crook of Selek's ebony robes. Her dear, old friend adjusted his hold to run the back of his fingers against her son's meld points and she could feel the contentment practically radiating from him. Selek looked so entranced with the child that it hurt Jim to think of him not being able to have a relationship with him.

"A friend once told me 'All I need is a tall ship and a star to guide her'." Selek quietly told her.

"I think you forgot the whole quote." Jim smiled sadly.

"Oh?" He asked, indulgent amusement lining his features.

"It goes like this. 'I must down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky, and all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by, and the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking, and a great mist on the sea's face, and a grey dawn breaking'." Jim's eyes burned with tears
she held back. "Sea Fever by John Masefield."

Selek was somber as held David close, like he couldn't bear to let go of a piece of Jim, and his eyes drifted to her Spock who was talking with Bones. Jim followed his gaze and smiled at the sight. "Somehow, unlike Masefield, I don't think my sea of stars will be lonely."

"Agreed."

Jim looked over to her former shipmates and Sarek. "I just wish things could have been different, you know?" Jim turned to her friend who was rocking her child and murmuring words in Vulcan.

"As do I but your destiny lies elsewhere." As he raised an aged hand to lay it upon her shoulder, his eyes softened in affection. "Your presence in this universe brought me a great deal of comfort in my golden years but I know that I will be far more comforted by the knowledge of your happiness being assured in another place with the one you love. You deserve this happiness and the chance to do great things."

Jim smiled, happy and excited for the adventures she knew lay ahead. "It's gonna be epic!"

Jim was ecstatic when the old Vulcan chuckled.

xXx

Winona held her daughter so tight that she almost couldn't breathe. Their comm to George Jr., her brother, had gone as she had expected. It had been painful. She hadn't even had the chance to meet her nephew Peter. Jim regretted that she would never know him, never know the man he would become. It was almost as if she was being selfish to abandon her family here and she told the older blonde so. Her mother knew what it was like to love someone with every part of their being and, if she could have, she would have followed her husband had she been in the same position.

"Jim, don't ever think that!" Pulling away and gripping her biceps, Winona Kirk stared down at her daughter. "What you are doing is right and I know that this is what and where you were meant to be.

Jim had cried with her for hours. She regretted that she hadn't spent more time with her, but she didn't regret her decision to go with Spock into the unknown.

xXx

Sarek was in his study and Jim knew he was hiding. She understood and empathized with him. He'd gained a daughter and grandson with her presence as well as a sense of peace. She found out later that he'd arranged for her to be able to travel with him in his diplomatic endeavors with the excuse that she had experience from her time on the Enterprise. When T'Pau told her of his plans, the matriarch had explained his reasoning. He'd valued Amanda's input during their assignments, an 'alien's' perspective and ability to understand feelings to be able to temper him and guide him as a counterpoint to his own beliefs. She'd felt honored that he valued her so much.

Jim knew he was lonely and it hurt for her to leave him. They had been a balm to each other's raw pain. He had been her rock and helped her through one of the most difficult times in her life and she had been the same to him.
Sarek was facing away from her. She couldn’t help but notice he was wearing black robes which only made him look pale and drawn. Vulcans age slower than humans. Jim knew this but she had seen him practically age in front of her eyes over the past two weeks. He’d avoided the alternate version of his beloved Amanda and had, instead, spent every available moment in her’s and David’s presence when she was not present.

During the many months they had spent together the pair of them had had long talks late into the night speaking of the future. Neither of them had talked about the possibility of her leaving and Jim knew now that it had been because he had hoped, no matter how illogical, that they would always be together as father and daughter.

"Sa-mekh?"

The older Vulcan turned at the quiet voice and she could see the lines around his eyes that had not been there only three weeks ago.

"Ko-fu?"

There was a rough quality to his speech and Jim knew instinctively that he was attempting to control his grief. He had lost so much in his life. He had lost his first wife in childbirth and his first son through misunderstandings and later from Nero’s rampage. Then he had lost his family and the bonds that had grounded him and his t’hy’lara, Amanda. Now he was to lose his adopted daughter and first grandchild. It had to be causing him so much pain but he was fighting to not allow it to show.

Jim came to sit in front of him, carefully adjusting her own navy robes to allow her to be comfortable. "Sarek, I'm so sorry."

He closed his eyes and took a minute to collect himself. He looked anywhere but at her. "Kaiidth, Jamison. What is, is."

She shook her head to brush the ancient proverb away. "No. It is not 'what is, is'. It is not simply something to happen and dismiss. It is something that is wrong to do to you and I am causing you hurt."

His shoulders fell slightly and he looked almost defeated. "Yes but, it is not something you do to specifically harm me. I understand the logic of your choice but I do not wish to accept it." He finally faced her head on. "I had hoped, illogically, that you would not be successful in your endeavors even though I should not."

The admission from Sarek had to have cost him a lot. There had been a subconscious suspicion she had had but to have it confirmed...

"I know."

"Do you truly wish to go out of love or is it obligation?" There it was. A silent plea for her to remain.

"It is love. He is t’hy’la, my other half, and the father of my child. My destiny lies elsewhere and for that I am sorry."

A slight pressure on her wrist and Jim could feel the full brunt of Sarek’s unchained emotions from the gentle touch. Gasping, her heart felt like it was literally being ripped from her chest but then, just as suddenly, it was filled with warmth and a fatherly love. Just as quickly as it was there, it was gone as if he’d never even touched her.
He may have not spoken the words but she understood him the same. "Then I wish you luck and a prosperous journey, daughter."

"Thank you." She breathed in relief.

xXx

Spock had sat with her during her painful goodbyes, a sentinel to watch over her and provide her with the support she desperately needed.

Jim turned to him and he pulled her close and Jim closed her eyes, enjoying the warmth and love she felt from him.

"Meld with me?" Jim looked up at him, her vulnerability shining through and Spock slowly raised his hand and placed it on her face and Jim fell, letting Spock catch her.

Her world exploded in a supernova of color. She watched as Spock was born, as he fought with his peers and won. She watched as he explored new worlds, his mother and father at his side. Jim saw and felt the excitement he felt at each new thing he experienced and the pride his parents showed as he graduated from Starfleet academy, so different from the Spock of her universe.

Jim watched her own birth, simultaneously tainted by the death of her father but also there was absolute joy at her existence from her mother. Spock held tight as she experienced the nightmare that was Tarsus but there was the healing afterwards that had only made her stronger. He watched as her mother hugged her in the hospital afterwards and they built a new and amazing future together as mother and daughter.

He saw her create a new and amazing grain to prevent it from ever happening again at seventeen. He saw the bar fight that started it all, meeting Bones, Pike, and everyone that supported and loved her for who she was rather than her name.

Spock watched the destruction of his planet in another universe as she desperately tried to save her own and succeeded only to be pushed aside for Spock to be captain. The betrayal she'd felt at the decision but she used it to her advantage, gaining the skills that she needed to be a better commander, and eventually, captain.

There was Spock's memory as he saw her appear on the transport pad and she felt what he did when he touched her. She watched, as if in a dream, as he pursued her with focused determination, knowing she was the one for him as he watched her building relationships with the crew, becoming a part of their family and the respect he felt as she showed her abilities. He saw her own point of view, felt her fear and hesitance as becoming too close to the alternate version of the man who had rejected her at every turn. He sensed her confusion at his interest and her own unsure feelings that she was simply confusing him with her latent feelings for his alternate. Then there was the feeling of true love that blossomed as she really came to know him as an individual.

Then they saw the ice cave and how they had finally joined in love, Spock forcing her to admit her feelings and her acknowledging them and gaining the trust that she did feel for him. She felt his amusement at I-Chaya's antics as the sehlat sought to protect her and the joy he had felt at his parents loving her as a daughter.

The last memory was Jim's agony and regret at the way she had left him, her last words cruel. The loss and being so alone as she held onto the one thing that was a gift from him. David.

*Never again. I will always be by your side, ashayem. I love you with all that I am. It is an honor
and my right, my k'hat'n'dlaw. We are two halves of the same soul.* He whispered in her mind.

Jim felt a small tendril-no-a rope, golden and pure reaching for her and love and respect emanating from it. There was gratefulness for her trust in showing him her life and she knew it was Spock that was reaching for her, wanting to be a part of her and she reached for him with her mind. It was beautiful and she wanted to hold onto it forever. Spock saw her reach out and the joy he felt mirrored her own.

Another golden rope emerged from her own mind, twining and joining with Spock's own and it brightened, perfect and Jim and Spock, one and forever. There was an all encompassing love on both sides and she knew that the bond between them would never break. It would only grow stronger when they would fully bond during his Time.

She slowly felt herself come back and her room seemed small. She longed to return to Spock's mind, so perfect and he wanted the same. The trust they shared was infinite and Jim lifted herself, turning her head and Spock leaned forward to press his lips to hers. They kissed and the emotions passed between them were too numerous to count and she didn't even try. Thy'la. Friend, brother/sister, and lover. Forever.

xXx

The next day dawned too soon, and yet not soon enough. Their time here at an end.

Amanda held David, a small bag at her side with the gifts and David's ceremonial robes from his naming yesterday carefully packed within. Jim's small collection of books and holos of her family was next to her along with a crate of seedlings and animal embryos from Earth in the hopes of bringing back some of the extinct species since their planet had been lost in Spock's timeline.

Sarek, T'Pau, and Selek stood, solemn in front of them in front of the transporter pad and Jim felt a sense of grief. Bones had been avoiding her and she'd not had a chance to say goodbye. Maybe it had been too painful for him but it was a great deal more painful for her.

The Enterprise crew seemed to have abandoned her as well.

She'd barely had the thought when the doors opened and the senior officers filed in with varying expressions of heartbreak and happiness for her. As Scotty moved to man the controls and input the complicated equations, a blur of blue flew into the room and Jim's heart lifted in joy as her best friend came to stand next to her, his scowl firmly in place and the band secured to his bicep to adjust his signature to allow him to join her.

"Are you sure?"

"You think I'm letting you to go to another universe without me? You know damn well, kid, I'll never leave you behind. I followed you into the black and I sure as hell will follow you into this new universe."

Her smile was blinding and she practically leaped at him and into his arms.

"Besides, who else is gonna keep your ass alive." He grumbled into her hair and Jim laughed at his antics.

She smirked. "You say the sweetest things." She slapped him on the back. "Besides, Bones, it'll be fun!"
He rolled his eyes and gave a long-suffering sigh.

They straightened and assumed their positions and the crew saluted, the Vulcans holding their hands up in the Vulcan salute.

"Live long and prosper, my daughter."

Jim turned to Scotty. "Energize."

xXx- Epilogue

Captain Spock watched as lieutenant Bassett guided the Enterprise into Jupiter station with Commander Sulu at his side. Their five year mission was finally complete.

His armrest comm beeped urgently as, the recently promoted, lieutenant Chekov jerked in surprise at his station. "Keptin, I am detecting abnormal ion signatures! Zey are focused on deck six!"

Spock immediately went on alert. His senses heightened at a potential threat to his ship. He hit the comm to warn the tech manning the controls, noting it was from deck six, the transporter room.

Crewman Saren answered. "Captain, we have received...several packages. They have writing on them addressed to you and..." There was a long pause. ".one of the crates is making whining and growling noises and has Ambassador Sarek's name on it."

Spock raised a brow in confusion and ordered security to join him.

xXx

Spock arrived back in his quarters to see Nyota sitting on the oversized chair she had fought to bring aboard the Enterprise that was not regulation. Her long, slender legs were curled up underneath her and she was reading a PADD with her back to him, her focus on the contents so intense that she did not notice his arrival.

A small smile graced his lips as he took a moment to watch her. He loved her dearly and would spend the rest of their lives showing her. Walking up quietly behind her, he pressed a kiss to the back of her neck and she stretched, leaning back and returning his smile.

"So, I didn't hear what was in the crates before I went off duty. I'd assume it was nothing bad otherwise we'd have been told."

Nyota barely had time to turn around when a small bundle of dark brown fur with a lurid pink bow leapt up into her lap.

Spock moved to sit on the couch, a PADD in his hand. "It was from Jim."

"What?"

The small animal wriggled and whimpered, it's entire body vibrating with excitement at meeting a new person and a rough pink tongue starting lapping her face. Nyota tried getting away by leaning back but it only served to make the bear-like animal try harder to lick the lieutenant's face. She giggled and was pinned to her chair by the sheer size of the baby sehlat. Her eyebrows raised in surprise. "Really?"
Spock tried valiantly to hide his amusement at the sight but, by his wife's glare, he wasn't too successful. "There were plant samples as well as several species of animal embryos from their Vulcan." The items contained had caused him a great deal of joy and the representative from Uzh-T'Khasi had expressed eager anticipation for them, going so far as to send out a vessel to collect the items immediately.

He gestured to the sehlat that was now settling, quite happily, on Nyota's lap. It may have been a baby but it was still rather large. "The sehlat is for my father according to the tag attached to her."

Spock had mixed emotions on the other items contained in the shipment. The crew had been ecstatic. "There were several messages, one for each member of the senior staff, as well as a few for other members of the crew, and one each for Sarek and Selek."

"Oh?"

Spock experienced a small sense of nervousness when he had seen a file for himself and Nyota. "There is also one for us." He held out the PADD and she waited patiently for him to continue.

"I have not opened the file." He admitted.

He held the PADD and Nyota took it from his hands. "Do you want me to?"

He could not explain his trepidation at the simple task but he nodded to his bondmate, silently requesting her assistance.

They waited was the file loaded and, once it did, they watched.

A heavily pregnant Jim settled in front of the camera, her face beaming with happiness. She wore a short-sleeved version of captain's uniform. It hugged her, emphasizing her curves. The yellow only served to give the appearance of her glowing rather than washing her out.

"Hi Spock! Uhura! I'm hoping you guys managed to get our care package alright."* She smirked and Spock knew that she had known what the sehlat would do.

Uhura snorted at her antics and rolled her eyes fondly.

*I bet Uhura just rolled her eyes." She grew serious but her expression of happiness remained. "We detected a small window to your universe, just small enough to send a few items and it closed too fast for us to do any more than that. Admiral Pike, Sarek, and my Spock were the main people who worked on getting these things sent while I worked with Scotty to make sure we could send them. I really hope they got there okay. Especially Bubbles."*

Spock's brows furrowed in confusion.

*I bet Uhura just rolled her eyes." She clarified and Uhura giggled at Jim seeming to read him from across universes. She must have honed her abilities from her own Spock. "It's a pup from I-Chaya's litter. I thought she could keep Sarek company when he's not on assignments. I know he missed I-Chaya even though he'd say it was illogical but I want him to have her."*

Jim smiled sadly, her countenance bearing signs of guilt which was not a usual expression that either of them had seen in a frequent manner.

*I admiral Pike lost the use of his legs in a shuttle accident saving eighteen cadets during a training exercise but he's doing well. Two McCoy's are a force to be reckoned with and they managed to limit the damage to his legs but he couldn't stay captain. He suggested I take his place as captain
and, when the Enterprise has finished it's refit sometime in the next two years, I'll be shipping out. He's currently enjoying his retirement on Risa,* Jim's eyes glowed with amusement. *, the sly bastard."*

A small, blond blur with delicately pointed ears suddenly crashed into the pregnant blond, almost knocking her over. She carefully lifted him and Spock saw a three year old David smiling and waving at the camera, Jim chuckling at his exuberant behavior. "*As you can guess, this is my little man, David. He's soon to expect a baby sister, Saavik, and he keeps me on my toes."* She smiled self-deprecatingly. "*I might be able to command a starship but, in our home, Spock is the captain and David is the first officer because I can't even make a batch of Amanda's famous cookies without burning our quarters down."*

Her Spock settled next to her in his uniform blacks, relaxed and looking at Jim with as much love, if not more, than when he had first seen her in their universe. "*That is not accurate. You can make them without burning our quarters down. You just burn the cookies and create a dangerous amount of smoke."* Jim rolled her eyes but leaned closer to Spock where he slipped an arm around her.

"*Anyway, I wanted to thank you for getting me home and send you a little something to help. Amanda-"* She glared at Spock next to her but he seemed unaffected by it. "*-since I can't cook apparently made you some kreylya biscuits, real plomeek soup and I packed some tea varieties that Sarek recommended."

Jim continued. "*We're doing well. Bones is teaching and terrifying medical track cadets on Betazed until the refit. The doctor McCoy that was CMO here has decided to take a few years off in Georgia with his two girls and Nyota so Bones has been promoted to CMO of the Enterprise when she's ready. Lieutenant Kevin Riley is now our communications officer. He's amazing!"*

She became somber once more. "*There's a few messages to my mom and brother stationed on Deneva. Over here, and I'm hoping I'm just being paranoid, there was an attack by a parasite that killed everyone on the research station and I'd really appreciate it if you could keep an eye on them."*

David started to wiggle to crawl off of his mother and go into his father's arms, clearly becoming bored with the whole thing. "*I'm really happy here. I just-I just wanted to let everyone know that."*

The message cut out on the image of Jim, Spock, and David. What followed next was a picture of the Enterprise bridge filled with the entire command crew and, in the center, was Jim standing tall and proud decked out in her command golds with Spock standing next to her on one side and two McCosons on her other. In front of them all was a small group of children that Spock was able to identify as those of the crew's, David sat at six months old with a mocha skinned, slightly larger infant that scowled at the blond baby and both were being held by a small brunette with large hazel eyes that were a match to the doctor's. Several people that were clearly spouses of the crew were standing mixed in, their lack of uniform telling. It was a perfect image and Spock saved the image to print and frame it. He knew the perfect place. Next to his own picture Jim had insisted on. The frame was still cracked but he knew it was time to fix that. A final reminder and tribute to his friend.

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