Cretan Holiday
by Radiolaria

Summary

“If this is an attempt to get me to step out of the house before 1000, it is poorly thought-out. I told you I would leave you alone. It’s your vacation. You’ll have a pleasurable time, I promise.”

“Without you?”

Philippa invites Michael to join her for a vacation in Greece and accidentally designs her own Hell. Michael knew what she was getting herself into and is convinced she can handle it.

Notes

Originally a tumblr prompt that got out of hand. I have about 10k of mutual pining on vacation divided in small chapters and I am still finishing the last two chapters, but I am curious about publishing in parts a story with so much romantic tension, so here it is. I will update every other day; it’s immensely fun to try to match the pace of intradiegetic time.

This is pure mutual pining and fluff in the sun for July, nothing serious. I hope you enjoy this casual cancellation of canon.

Thank you to nomisunrider for her beta and cheering!
The Little Frilly Dress That Is Not For Michael

Three cotton blouses, as many tank tops, her old pair of shorts, three casual dresses, and flimsy slacks.

Repeat in a different palette.

Humming to herself, Philippa neatly folds the clothes on her bed, switching piles in the hope of giving a sense of efficiency to a process that is already taking far too long.

Autumn in Greece is hot and she generally packs light when she visits, but she contends with someone’s presence this time. Looking like an old hippie is not a particularly appealing prospect, no matter how relaxing she intends to make the holiday for her guest.

Peace requires work.

Not that Michael would take offense to her superior out of her uniform — if she is too well behaved to make a comment when Philippa comes out of a beastly encounter with an artistically slashed uniform, she will not frown at old beach mules — but self-consciousness is difficult to wave off when what was supposed to be ten days of complete carelessness surrounded by strangers became ten days of being with Michael.

They are professionals who happen to be friends, enjoying their time together on shore leave as much as they do at work; carelessness around Michael is absolutely feasible.

Philippa shakes her head and one fancier dress joins the pile for the odd invitation by a wandering admiral, which unfortunately can happen even in this remote corner of Earth.

Short, frilly, colourful.

Very short.

Okay. Maybe the other one. Yet…

It is for a potential acquaintance, she argues, not for Michael. It’s not like they will spend their time together; Michael enjoys her privacy and most likely joined her because she knew Philippa would give her just that. Nikos’ house is small, but there is plenty of space for two people who don’t want to step on each other’s toes, even if Philippa knows from experience Michael doesn’t mind her presence in close quarters.

Michael would have refused if she had any concern and probably doesn’t see much difference between spending time with Philippa and an aunt.

Philippa shoves the nearest pile, the bluest, into her bag and heads to the cupboard to retrieve a satisfying sun hat, putting her energy to better use than worrying.

Not that there is a point to her apprehension as her invitation is nothing but hospitality on her part: a catastrophic malfunction in the transportation network in Vulcan’s area caused by a stellar storm had left her first officer without a pied-à-terre for leave and Philippa wanted nothing more than for Michael to enjoy her vacation thoroughly. After every crewmember left, Philippa offered Michael a ride to Earth and a bed in Crete.

While matching a jacket to her hat, her green bathing suit escapes her fingers, sliding from the edge
of the bed to the floor in a swift motion that only makes Philippa more impatient to dip her feet in the azure sea and do absolutely nothing all day.

Why does she have so many bathing suits in her quarters anyway? Rare are the occasions allowing her to swim in space and it’s not like an old girl like the Shenzhou will obtain approval for the latest holo-deck soon.

Remarkably, Michael did not decline her invitation. She did not hesitate before answering, although she seemed profoundly moved by the offer, her delicate brown eyes focused in rest, lost in thoughts when Philippa had mentioned ancient caves to visit and deserted creeks to hike to.

The door to her quarters chimes to signal a request to enter.

“It’s unlocked, Michael,” Philippa calls as she fishes out a sweater from one of the discarded piles.

Michael strides in purposefully, with a manifest energy to her steps that suggests just how excited she is to visit Earth. This will be a field trip for her, but Philippa hopes she can provide a relaxing environment as well, where her batteries can be recharged after wearisome months of arguing with the Orion syndicates.

Her Vulcan-raised Officer makes a great show of pretending Humans and their habits are as alien and curious to her as any newly encountered culture, but Philippa surmised the moment they met that Michael understood and needed Humans more that she let on. It’s a defense mechanism and Philippa, albeit curious, isn’t there to deprive her of it, at least not on vacation.

“You are not finished,” Michael observes upon beholding the state of Philippa’s quarters, hands clasped at her back. “I can come back later.”

“The sooner I am done, the sooner we can go. And I may need your help.”

With an emphatic gesture, Philippa reveals the bathing suits aligned on the side of her bed, earning her a circumspect look from Michael. Unsurprisingly, all her analytic power is immediately poured in the task, and she quickly gives Philippa a satisfied nod.

“Take the black one the crew gifted you for your anniversary, Captain. It achieves a great compromise between aesthetic and ergonomics. Moreover, the fabric offers 92% breathability and 100% UV filtering.”

“What if I want to go with something a little sexier than ergonomics?”

Michael cocks an eyebrow, accepting the informality with only a twitch at the corner of her mouth.

“Ergonomics is always the sexiest.”

Gone are the days when her sense of humour could lead them into battle against a secluded culture because Michael could not take a pun.

“Are you mocking me, Commander?”

“Only your bathing suits preferences, Captain.”

The thought her crew had deliberated on the necessity for her bathing suit to leave her without tan lines had perplexed her at the time, but stranger things had happened on that bridge. Namely that they had picked a bathing suit of all gifts in the first place.
Michael studies the civilian clothes laid out before her with attentiveness, as if they were a selection of specimens on display, with an open yet absorbed expression that Philippa will probably remember on her deathbed, so familiar it has become. To see it applied to her personal effects is intriguing.

“You packed hiking shoes,” Michael points out, impassive.

“For emergency, yes. I am sure you already have them.” Philippa folds her sweater and nudges Michael out of her way to place it in the bag, but as she notices Michael’s perplexed scowl, she adds, “Don’t worry, you won’t have me on your back.”

The tilt of Michael’s head, combined with her unimpressed frown, suggests this promise alone might be difficult to keep.

You can always ask, if you want me, she cannot help thinking.

Philippa shakes her head, disbelieving. She really ought to stay away for Michael’s sake. Having her boss on her back for the first proper vacation in almost a year cannot be fun.

What she should do is make no changes to her plans, remain idle in her sunny corner and allow Michael to go explore as she wishes, like an adult in no need of supervision or schedule.

What she should do…

She picks up the black bathing suit; she can do carelessness around Michael.
Joy-for-joy

Chapter Notes

All chapters will be around this length from now on. Short and sweet, I hope.

An update every over day could work for me, mostly because my chapters are really short and I have no patience.

By no means does Michael encourage Earth archaic use of transportation, especially on vacation, especially given her recent grievances with travel networks, but to deny how agreeable the journey was would be dishonest.

The island is cut from modern materialization technology, save for emergency, for preservation purpose as mass tourism in the time of nearly instant travel had catastrophic consequences on the ecosystem and urbanisation.

The windy ferry trip to Crete proved most pleasant despite, or perhaps because of, her left arm monopolized by Philippa’s early seasickness. Even without the suppressors, her captain is not a fussy patient, but her open dependence on Michael feels rewarding, as if Michael has not come to remain idle. Beyond her personal gratification, she is useful here, to Philippa.

Even the bumpy journey to Agia Galini in a solar jalopy from another century passes by quickly, entertained as she is by Philippa’s stories that she pretended she did not know already. The white lie does not weigh on her conscience, so lively and poetic the impassioned retelling of Cretan history was.

“Almost there,” Philippa sighs, crunched on the backseat in front of Michael. “I’ll set you up at the house and leave you to take care of some things in the back, if it’s okay with you.”

“Anything I can help with?”

“You rest. I just have to make sure the generators and panels are in working order. Otherwise, we eat at candlelight.”

“It would befit the mood,” Michael concedes, pushing against the low roof to compensate for a particularly deep jolt. “What an intriguing place, filled with history and legends intertwined.”

Philippa leans against the window to take the scenic landscape, arid and familiar, the warm colours reflected on her peaceful face lighting here and there flashes of passing radiance.

The sea is close.

“I always feel like Ariadne in this part of the mountains,” she whispers, seemingly chastising herself.

A smile tickles Michael’s lips, “Ariadne?”

Philippa snaps her head back to her and glares, an affectionate smirk belying her outrage.

“Stop pulling my leg.”
“I am not objecting. No professor could tell stories like you do.”

Philippa rolls her eyes, but Michael can tell she is grateful for the informality Michael is trying to achieve and without which this vacation could be uneasy.

Beyond what it is, but Michael came prepared for this discomfort.

“Please continue, Philippa.”

The effect her voice has on Michael is akin to meditation, a most fascinating phenomenon that she would discuss with Amanda more often if broaching the subject did not invariably encourage her foster mother to address her “romantic inclinations”. Michael’s reasoning on the motivations behind her omitted knowledge of Cretan myths is satisfactory as is, even if the conclusion reached is cause for alarm.

The measures she takes to contain the effects of said conclusion is up to her after all, not Amanda.

There are no romantic feelings for as long as she wills them not to be.

Her arduous work to become a trusted first officer justifies her reluctance, Michael argues as Philippa helps her out of the small four-wheeled vehicle parked uphill from the village and thanks the driver. Unconsciously, she walks backward to the village, nestled between the mountains and the coast, so busy she is feeding Michael with information about Minos. Michael falls in step behind her, admiring the ochre slopes flanking the white buildings and the stark contrast with the blue waters beyond.

Admiring Philippa enthusiastically ignoring the world around for her.

Michael’s grip on her travel bag tightens.

She did not strive to rise to become Captain Georgiou’s lover, but her second. To allow such an evolution would likely limit their relationship as well, in its present state, most precious to her, and she dares to extrapolate, Philippa. Their friendship at times feels a greater reward than her career, which she owes to her dedication more than Philippa’s tutelage, however invaluable.

But it is, and the observation is momentarily immobilizing Michael in the middle of the road, a romantic setting that her captain invited her to.

As they enter, the narrow streets come into view, with one, two store buildings at the most, leaves overflowing from nearby gardens onto the road, terraces and stairs shielded from the Sun by walls painted in white, pale yellows and oranges, and the Sun, singular yet efficient... Every detail lends an impression of warmth and slumber to the fishing town, more fitting to a weekend with a loved one than a first officer.

“Do you come here often, Captain?”

Philippa slows down her pace to let Michael catch up with her.

“Philippa will do for the next week. If only to avoid getting me into trouble with the local fishermen. I have managed to maintain my rank secret for the fifteen years Nikos has had this house.”

Michael nods to conceal her surprise. This was a romantic getaway once and she imposed on Philippa’s hospitality by accepting.

“Not that we came here when we were married, mind you.” Philippa squints at her before offering a reassuring smile. “It belonged to an uncle he didn’t really like but who insisted his nephew and
nieces should take turn living here after his death because *there always should be a Georgiou in Agia Galini.*

“Is this why you kept his name?” Michael deadpans, eyes on the road as she steps aside to avoid an electric scooter at the crossroad. “To secure free estate?”

Philippa chuckles under her breath.

“Touché. Nikos was the one who suggested I retreated here on shore leave as I could not stand Athens. Even more sailors there.”

“Why such secrecy?”

“Arguing with sea dogs about the nature of space travel is not making most of my downtime, Michael. Travelling incognito is easier. As for the ones who listen closely to the murmur of the stars, I doubt they’ll spot me out of my uniform.”

Michael halts to raise an eyebrow, unconvinced, and Philippa gestures toward her simple slacks and t-shirt, deceptively large compared to her usual jacket and pants. With her hair in a loose braid, flung across her shoulder and her face free of make-up, Philippa is the perfect picture of idleness and leisure, but she still looks like Philippa, showing not a different face but a different side, willingly, outside Starfleet.

Philippa has never looked this relaxed in front of Michael.

Joy wells in her chest before this show of comfort.

Joy and something else, a steady warmth that spreads from her core and has nothing to do with the Cretan heat.

“You look pristine as ever,” Michael whispers despite herself.

Philippa raises an eyebrow in turn, inviting an explanation that Michael is not in measure to provide without overstepping.

“You look *appropriate* given the circumstances.”

Philippa narrows her eyes, doubtful.

“No… Try again.”

“Anyone who dares infer your appearance is not befitting to your rank will have to answer to me.”

Philippa snorts, signaling Michael the turn of the conversation is much safer.

“Please tell me you are joking.”

“Picking fights with fishermen over fashion comes highly recommended by my guide, Philippa.”

A beat and her hand flies to her face to conceal the look of utter dismay that turns into repressed, then loud hilarity. Tipping her head back, Philippa squints her eyes shut and attempts to stifle laughter, attracting the odd looks from passer-by.

Her large rim hat almost falls from her head, only caught at the last moment, and Michael determines to pay back Philippa’s hospitality and show of confidence with what she appears to be most proficient at giving on this deserted island with no calibration to make or crisis to avert: joy.
She is off to a good start.

When Philippa regains her composure, her blazing smile only increases Michael’s resolve.

“Sorry, Michael. It is unlike you.”

“I have to occupy my time since you declined serving as my guide.”

“Not fair. And really not subtle. If this is an attempt to get me to step out of the house before 1000, it is poorly thought-out. I told you I would leave you alone. It’s your vacation. You’ll have a pleasurable time, I promise.”

“Without you?”

Philippa does not turn her head quickly enough for Michael to miss the way she bites her lip. It feels good to witness how wanted she is here, despite Michael’s initial uncertainty.

“This is the wrong way to the house. Never mind… Do you want to have a look at the docks before we settle?”
A Place Of Birth

Chapter Notes

Warning for cave and underground places, although it is a large cave.

Philippa is a useless national treasure.

The cave is old and soothingly fresh after the heat of the mountains and the dusty trail. The darkness is a welcome change from the blinding slopes, even if Philippa cannot distinguish much apart from the mushroom-lit stairs at her feet and the dark concretions over them. While the light from the wide opening behind grows dim, her hand instinctively finds the wall beside her head for support and caresses the old stone, feeling the cool and anchoring coarseness under her fingers.

A drop of water lands on her naked shoulder from the ceiling of the cave and follows its course down her arm, brushed by Michael’s hand trying to get her attention.

Philippa smiles before schooling her face and climbing a step up back to Michael.

“According to the poet Hesiod, who lived at the end of Earth Archaic period, Zeus, a God in pre-monotheist Greek faith, was born nearby from primordial entities Rhea and Cronos and hidden in such a cave for protection from his murderous father.”

Philippa is quite sure Michael did not pack a PADD on this expedition.

“You’ve studied the subject at length,” Philippa marvels, teeming with pride. “I didn’t even know we would be visiting this morning.”

“That such a restful place could see the birth and early childhood of such a chaotic and destructive entity is fascinating. I wanted to learn more.”

A shiver escapes Michael, loud in the cave where the only sound beside their voice is the sand under their soles and the faint chatter of visitors deep down the cave.

“It is no place for a child, albeit a divine one. I should have brought a cardigan,” she adds, rubbing energetically her clothes against her skin.

Without a word, Philippa promptly swings her backpack to her front and searches through its content for a sweater.

Joining Philippa on the step, Michael extends a hand, yet seems to hesitate a second, hovering before the soft fabric presented to her. Backlit, her expression is unreadable, but the change of pattern in her breathing is speaking for her.

So-called Vulcan restraint made her so sensitive to attention and so exposed in her gratitude that Philippa feels guilty for trying to reacquaint her with Humanity the way she does. At times, it seems Michael is doing more teaching about sincerity than she is.

It requires Philippa to be careful around her.
With a warm “thank you”, she accepts the sweater and dreamy, she nods to Philippa not to wait for her while she puts the garb on. Philippa complies, eager to reach the bottom, but lingering long enough for Michael to catch up with her in a few strides.

The slow descent into darkness is making her uneasy, bringing back memories of crash landings and long, draining solitude in obscurity, waiting for her distress call to get picked up. From behind, Michael’s voice rings, amplified by the echo, yet measured and soft, drawing her back.

“The most interesting aspect of ruins and places of devotion is the weight of the belief inhabiting them, the traces millions of people, believers and tourists alike, left behind.”

Michael stops her progression and the distinct sound of rock scraped breaks the silence.

“Grafitis were likely drawn on these walls too.”

Michael’s steps resonate behind her again as Philippa instinctively slows down her pace until the distance between them is acceptable.

“Well, the restoration program on these islands is ruthless. You wouldn’t find one even with our scanners.”

“But the act of erasing would shape this place just as much as our feet eroding the ground as we walk.”

“Preservation is not a natural process, so aren’t tourists trampling around. Not that you trample around, Michael,” Philippa quickly corrects herself. “The point of such efforts is that other after us will be able to admire the same landscapes.”

“It is for Humans, not nature, I know. But this place is nothing like what it was millennia ago, Humans are nothing like what they were millennia ago. Yet they still ascend the mountains and stumble down in darkness to see where a God resided. The appeal of such a cave is precisely in what Humans brought here, otherwise it is a cave like any other. It is…” Michael trails off, dreamy, before taking a deep breath. “Irrational and beautiful.”

Her voice is filled with delight and that sense of quiet, joyful understanding of the world that never ceases to amaze Philippa and never stops pulling her to her second officer, moved by more than mere curiosity and admiration. Philippa would be lying if she said she enjoys Crete’s caves, but Michael’s blunt wonder, her complete inability not to share it, is well-worth her abandoned plans for sunbathing, her discomfort underground, her repressed—

The sting as she bites through her cheek feels earned and she counts her steps down before talking, only partly to herself.

“How very Human. One can never be alone in here, can we?”

“Tourists do not bother me as much as you seem to estimate it does,” Michael remarks, sarcastic. “They add to the charm.”

“Oh, wait till I get you on a slow boat to Pulau Langkawi. You aren’t going to like them so much.”

“Is this an invitation?”

Philippa’s heart skips a beat. She didn’t see that one coming and yet she put it out there.

“Do you want it to be? It’s a one-way ticket to being forcibly integrated into my family. It is virtually
impossible for me to step foot in Malaysia without having everyone and my uncles know about it.”

This doesn’t deter Michael.

“They are justifiably proud of you and your accomplishments.”

Philippa’s chortle is hopefully swallowed by the cantankerous landing of a small ship far up above the cave.

“If only my town could go about it a little more quietly when I just want to enjoy iced tea outside.”

“I would love to see your country, Philippa. I have always loved the sea, more than it is rational to admit, even now that we are here. I cannot quite understand why, my parents never lived near a shore and Vulcan’s largest body of open water could fit into Galina IV’s smallest sea.”

“It is a beautiful and timeless enigma to love,” Philippa says, echoing her admiration.

Of course, Michael is attracted to the sea.

There is a reason Philippa invited her here rather than Hong Kong. Philippa has been trying for years, ever since Shenzhou’s stay on Juturna, to get them a mission or two on largely water-covered planets. It would go a long way to help morale, at least that’s the argument she used to convince Katrina.

“Why are we underground, again?” she teases.

“There is a pool at the bottom, Philippa,” Michael scolds, playful. “You are welcome to take a dip.”

“I am not that desperate.”

Philippa’s smirk devolves into worrying her lip and she picks up the pace. Michael really is delightful, an appraisal for which she did not need to bustle in the darkness to make. There is no aim to this apprehension over her excitement; she merely enjoys Michael’s company, like Michael enjoys hers enough to ask her here. Captains are encouraged to work well with their first officer and Michael has been hers for what, almost a year now? Their friendship is to be expected. Her caution should really be reserved to other points like Gabriel looming around that five-year mission or Keyla’s next review.

She heaves a sigh, wordlessly admonishing herself before calling out, “Michael, you can come with me to Pulau Langkawi. Whenever you want.”

“Thank you.” Philippa’s heart is in her ears, hanging on the subtle, controlled gratitude she discerns in Michael’s voice coming from behind. “It would have been appropriate for me to reciprocate the invitation, but you have already seen ShiKahr many times.”

Philippa laughs quietly, recalling how eventful their short stay there was, each time. The poor Doctor probably still has nightmares about meeting Ambassador Sarek, but then, conversely, Sarek definitely has nightmares about his wife commiserating with Januzzi.

“I am sure you can come up with plenty of places as interesting and picturesque, Michael. And as close to you heart,” she adds in a breath. Michael had barely contained her pride the first time; it was inspiring. “I would love to show you around my hometown, if we ever find the bottom of that cave.”

“We are not advancing at maximum speed, even with the steepness of the steps taken into account.”
“Are you now suggesting that I talk too much?”

“No, Philippa.” Her name hangs in the air, expectant, and Philippa lets it linger, curiosity piqued at the sudden solemnity in her friend’s tone.

“I am grateful you accepted to accompany me,” Michael gravely says. “With the uncertain satellite coverage, orienting myself in the mountains would have required more time and effort.”

Philippa nods and stares down at her shoes hitting the stairs. Michael’s words are merely politeness, nothing more, even if Philippa knows Michael’s politeness is a great gift. Pragmatic as she is, Michael would not have denied a guide in this arid landscape, let alone one she knows.

“I am glad I came then. Don’t get used to it. I am not here to follow you around.”

She wishes it was as simple as that.

Michael’s presence near her, even in this particular setting, is less difficult, less of an act put on for a first officer than she anticipated, and more of a shared experience with a friend. Which will, eventually, in time, and they have nothing but time on this island, become problematic. But such a time hasn’t come, and Philippa feels safe around Michael, enough to be genuinely unguarded by her side.

She savours being by her side.

The half-shadows of the carefully defined stairs clear at last to reveal the platform at the end of their journey.

At the bottom of the cave, the sun reaches the interior through a collapsed opening, probably one of those late 21st century wounds that prompted the UN to adopt drastic measures against tourism, and, despite the stupendous view below and around them, the impressive concretions and artfully lit waters, Philippa does not spare them a look and turns to behold Michael wrapped in the fluffy red sweater.

The rich carmine compliments her beautifully, even if the fabric looks frivolous on her simple linen clothes. Philippa had picked this one to go with her own bright top after all, not Michael’s… Something stirs inside Philippa, deep and bubbling, like magma, that she tries to ignore. The most dazzling feature presently on Michael is not Philippa’s old sweater but her resplendent smile, her rounded cheeks, her wondrous russet eyes taking in the water-carved architecture surrounding them.

The view is breathtaking.

Philippa bites her lip furiously before talking, “So, um, does it meet your expectations?”

Michael lowers her gaze back to her and grins, sardonic, irresistible.

“Yes, your sweater is very comfortable, Philippa. The stalactites are not lacking either.”

“Sixty-five meters underground and still cocky,” Philippa grumbles for herself, yet she is beaming.

Of Michael Burnham wearing her clothes or widening her eyes at a stack of old rocks, Philippa does not know which one is the most adorable.
Terribly sorry for the delay. I had a combination of plumbing and health issues, combined with subsequent phenomenal lack of motivation.

This one is a little meta-ish. Hope you still enjoy it.

The palace of Knossos was a large Minoan settlement, dating back to the Bronze Age, and associated with the myth of the Minotaur.

Philippa Georgiou is a beautiful woman.

It is both an empirical and statistical conclusion, reached after many observations made in the course of their collaboration on the Shenzhou, and Michael does not see why her observations would stop accumulating here on this island.

She observes her beauty in the morning, when a confounding number of people looks dragged out from the night rather than awake and Philippa looks with appetite and joy at the sunbeams pouring through the shutters; she observes it on the beach and in the water, where the sun kindles her hair and skin, lighting a flame in the smiling, inviting blackness of her irises; she observes it under cover of the pine forests they walk through on their way to secluded villages inland, where Philippa always finds an inconspicuous shed that turns into a temple the moment she sits down to rest; she observes it on the face of every passer-by, every tourist, every shop clerk and fishmonger they meet.

A great deal of focus is required of Michael to watch over her own face.

Philippa is beautiful.

Even here, Michael’s eyes keep stealing glimpses of her rather than the impressive display around them.

They are roaming the augmented ruins of the Knossos Palace. In truth, pseudo-immersive reconstructions of this kind do not particularly appeal to Michael, as they are the results of consultation between artists, historians and engineers, not exact depictions of the past. The craftsmanship involved in creating the delicate semi-transparent structure of the palace rising from the ruins is admirable in itself, but its blue-print is based on insufficient accounts and multiple extrapolations, making this incongruous palace of sun-dried stones and shimmering holograms nothing more but a dream.

“Do you think we could get this into a holodeck program?” Michael wonders out loud before the gaudy reconstitution of a fresco.

Arms folded on her chest and face pinched in concentration, Philippa stands by Michael’s side and studies the inexistent wall intently.

“You are welcome to handle the conception yourself,” Philippa says, squinting comically over her sunglasses at the immaterial lines.
After one or two hours in the luminous maze, the eye tends to lose its sense of depth and, although Michael would never laugh at her friend’s plight, Philippa’s disorientation and exaggerated facetiousness brought a smile to her lips.

Philippa shakes her head, despondently, before turning away, her hand lingering on Michael’s shoulder to distract her from the pyrotechnics. It works.

As they pad on through, the walls briefly fizzle out of sight around them, leaving the esplanade strangely naked before the structure erects itself again, sprouting from the ground in complicated and iridescent patterns. The colours and dots embrace Philippa’s body, her ample slacks flying around despite the lack of wind and espousing her legs in a close, rhythmed dance. Getting to immerse herself in what is essentially a work of art eternally building itself attracts Michael far more than the site itself.

“I do not have the patience for such a large palace,” Philippa murmurs while graciously propping herself up on a crumbled wall overlooking the area they crossed.

“Do you for a small palace then?” Michael teases, settling beside her and grabbing a water bottle from her bag.

Philippa snorts, a hand going to her face as a passing Betazoid in extravagant shorts casts her an affronted glance.

“Yes, Number One, of course, the little time I can spare for myself on my ship I spend pretending I am the Empress of a decadent warrior civilization in a small palace.”

The picture flashes in Michael’s mind with mortifying evidence and details, and her lips involuntarily twitch. Philippa seems too preoccupied by the labyrinth before them to notice and, head thrown back, she combs absently through her hair, a concentrated frown for the top of the palace across her features.

“What would you do with that,” she points her chin in the direction of the esplanade glistening with the ghostly architecture, “if it’s not too indiscreet.”

Michael ponders her answer, with great interest. She does not quite know why transposing this place came to her mind, as out of all the scenic landscapes they have encountered, this amalgamated palace impressed her the least, although she was the one who insisted on seeing it. Her simulations are generally built around reality: they are not fiction, but truthful depiction of environments that Michael requires for meditation or training purposes. Needless to say, she enjoys both and does not require immersion into a fantasy world to seek relaxation.

This palace is a fantasy. Rising from the low ruins, the painted skeleton of walls long gone quivers in the sun, roofs and statues extrapolated and rendered brazenly, as if the whole exercise in reconstruction was not a wild spectacle, speculative and contradictory. It is not the raw and living beauty of Zeus’ cave, preserved and revered, but the radiant and mutilated splendor of a forgotten world, fantasized and corrected.

Yet, Michael can see herself coming back to this dry Earth and its ceaseless wall of singing cicadas to reflect. There is a peculiar beauty to this constructed place, one she could stand to study further on Shenzhou.

Michael can Philippa’s face so clearly, so precisely here.

“It is a temple to memory and creation,” she breathes at last, dazzled by the incongruity of her
reasoning. “Beautiful, serene, inspiring. Sometimes all you need for an effectual simulation is the combination of those qualities.”

“Not people, uh?” Philippa smiles bashfully. ”Your simulations must be pretty empty.”

There is no real bite to her tone, only a touch of disappointment which Michael does not know how to interpret, as she often does with Philippa. Yet Michael can feel her expression harden and Philippa’s face spasms into an expression of aghast guilt.

“Sorry, Michael, I meant to say I thought you would have dates with Lewis Carroll.”

“I do not use simulations for what I want, but what I need,” Michael says, flatly.

Michael knows even less why she experiences a feeling akin to shame upon professing what is merely one of Vulcan’s pillars of thinking.

Philippa makes a clicking noise of exasperation, immediately softened by a mindful squint.

“We are not having this conversation again.” She leans in confidentially and suddenly they are back on the Shenzhou and it is 0400 after a night of watch and debate. “You are allowed to want things for yourself.”

“Desires seldom align between individuals and often escape reality in an attempt to bend it,” Michael answers automatically.

The argument does come regularly between them and Michael would be relieved if Philippa could somehow sense it is a shield wielded to protect her, rather than a display of Vulcan stubbornness.

Selfishness would aptly characterize her behavior when it comes to Philippa. Despite her friend’s assurance and demonstration that vacations are meant to be selfish, Michael is forced to admit that dragging Philippa on visits while she only requested a lounging chair and a hat on the beach is by definition selfish.

“For example, you did express your surprise over the suggestion this place would be an interesting addition to our holo-deck…” Michael trails off and raises a critical eyebrow.

“Right. Walked right into this one.” Philippa nods amiably before looking expectantly at Michael, face open and lovely.

How Michael would love to simply debate on her right to get her own Knossos palace.

She starts, curbing the urge to imitate her friend’s tone, “Be mindful of discordant voices…”

“…but be firm in the expression of yours,” Philippa finishes, satisfied.

“I find I usually am,” Michael protests, not hiding her annoyance.

“Yes, but you do have a tendency to substitute your needs with others’. That’s why listening to what you want might be useful.”

A smirk escapes Michael.

“I am often stronger, quicker and more skilled than the people around me. My needs can wait. It is my duty to ensure the safety and well-being of those under my command and in my care. Listening to my desires would not help them.”
Something passes behind Philippa’s eyes, warm to the point of hotness, and Michael wonders if it is admiration or challenge. Whatever it is, it only makes her beauty more striking, forcing Michael to avert her eyes to the esplanade where tourists are wandering between the projections.

“Not arguing with that, otherwise I would never have approved you for my First Officer. But balance could be nice, don’t you think?”

Michael presses her lips together. They never progress beyond that point. Philippa’s attention is… difficult to contend with, even if Michael is grateful to have it as much she does. Walking with Philippa, looking at her, getting lost in what her senses grasp, hanging on to a thread of reality. Michael studied the effects of amorous transports on her crewmates and prides herself in preventing her appreciation of Philippa’s innate qualities from devolving into anything resembling attraction.

There is nothing unreasonable or hazardous about watching Philippa like she would the stars.

Her desires would not balance anything when they boil down to “I would rather stare at your face for the rest of this vacation”.

“Are you worried about me?” she asks absently, looking at the fantasy they are sitting in.

“Bound to be.” Philippa’s voice is warm and apologetic. “You just suggested we built you a palace on my ship.”

“For meditation purposes. Not fantasies of world domination,” Michael chides her. “Is this palace unworthy of our deck, Philippa?”

Philippa laughs, more breaths than notes, and she sways in Michael’s direction, inching closer to her shoulder, before jumping off the wall and offering a hand to Michael.

“Only of you, Michael. It’s a bunch of overturned stones and a bit of virtual magic.”

Michael has to look away from Philippa’s smile as she grabs her hand to climb down, blinded.

The Shenzhou offers an equally polyvalent demonstration of her beauty, but it also casts a specific light on her, colder and more distant, effectively keeping her at a distance. Taking a snapshot of Philippa here and taking it back to the ship, trapping her in a fiction, is tempting. It might even work in alleviating Michael’s cumbersome appreciation, through meditation and direct confrontation. It does not escape Michael that in the first fantasy Michael envisions to build since childhood, Philippa is central, resplendent, inevitable.

Yet there is no situation, no place in the universe where Michael would pronounce her name with more fervor than on the bridge.
The night is warm, the kind of tangible and supple heat that Philippa associates with home, which is odd because despite the years she never considered Greece to be home, not even when it was Nikos’.

Michael is leaning against Philippa. Her feet hang above the dock’s dark waters, painted in bright colours by the reflected signs from various restaurants bustling with animation across the small bay. Due to their position, almost back to back, Philippa faces the hills and sea beyond rather than the village, but she didn’t lose a drop of the enthusiasm and excitement in her friend’s voice over visiting the Samaria site tomorrow.

“Do we need to pack spare clothes?” Michael asks between bites of ice creams, because of course Michael Burnham, child of Vulcan and Earth, and one of Starfleet’s brightest minds, would bite into her pistachio ice cream.

“I hope not.” Philippa manages to kick off her shoes toward the middle of the pier and presses the sole of her feet against the warm concrete, heaving a sigh of contentment.

“You hope?” Michael’s voice comes out probably a little more delighted than she aimed for, and Philippa confidentially grins. “Your assessment would need to be a little more specific than that to convince me to go.”

Philippa harrumphs in mock outrage.

“Michael, they could dump us on an isolated mountain top without food and water, you would still be interested in going.”

“That is untrue. I would never knowingly put you in any danger.”

Philippa bites back what she very much suspects would have come out as a swoon. Even joking, Michael is...

“Oh, no, you wouldn’t,” she snaps back instead. “But your definition of danger greatly differs from that of the majority of the crew. Not that your recklessness isn’t invaluable, but it’s still recklessness and everyone agrees.”

Not technically true. Michael’s recklessness is closer to curiosity, optimism and bravery than it is to irresponsibility, but to characterize it as such is a way for Philippa to keep her by her side. Despite her Vulcan shell, her soul holds such raw keenness and passion that Philippa considers herself lucky to be allowed to teach her anything for this long. That Michael will make an exceptional captain is a given; Philippa will be with her only for so long and to deprive Starfleet and the unexplored infinity...
of the Universe from Michael’s brilliance would be egoistical.

Yet “recklessness” also nails a warning sign on Michael: she is like Philippa, too alike for comfort, despite what this vacation is easing out of Philippa.

Philippa is far too comfortable around Michael for this situation to be entirely comfortable.

“So let me tell you,” Michael offers, unshakeable. “They cast doubts on the soundness of a mission approximately fourteen times as much as the rest of the bridge. Separately."

A cackle would be undignified, but how Michael is practiced at prompting it.

“I’ll tell them that,” Philippa growls with an air of false menace.

“They will take it as a compliment.”

Licking the chocolate cream on her lips, Philippa tilts her head back to laugh soundlessly and bumps into the back of Michael’s neck. Although the streets are brightly lit, the photopollution is not enough to spoil the sky and no clouds run above them.

Michael shifts against her, leaving Philippa without support for a minute, before the contact of Michael’s blouse against her shoulder blade returns, and, curious, Philippa looks askance to find Michael is sitting along the edge of the quay, almost looking in the same direction as Philippa.

Her delicate and familiar profile stands out against the dancing lights of the bay, lining the curve of her lower lip in blue, the plane of her forehead in yellow and the curls allowed free in red.

Before Philippa’s lack of answer, Michael cranes her neck toward her and raises an inquisitive eyebrow, silently asking where the rest the conversation went.

Philippa inhales before asking, dazed, “are you suggesting I run a ship of daredevils and law-breakers?”

“Far from me the idea of suggesting such a thing, it is a fact well-documented within Starfleet.”

Despite the teasing tone of her attack, Michael’s attention drifts to a point at the end of the pier and Philippa follows her gaze. Two shadows are pressing close against each other, a couple kissing. The sky and sea meet behind them, as closely embraced, and the horizon is an uncertain line in the reliable darkness, drawing a veil on them.

The moment she looks back to Michael, mindful of their privacy, she catches on her a peculiar expression that she may have witnessed in the past, but that her mind at this late hour cannot place. It flashes away in an instant, replaced by Michael’s contemplative and serious mask.

“You really think I would not have read the footnotes in your files?”

Philippa hums as she attacks the base of the ice cream and mumbles, “here I was thinking I had outgrown my childhood dreams of becoming a pirate. How foolish.”

She watches her reaction and Philippa is convinced Michael allows the twitch at the corners of her mouth to be the only tell-tale sign.

“This information fails to surprise me,” Michael flatly observes. 

Liar.
“Careful… I don’t recall you not following me when I go rogue.”

“It might be the clothes,” Michael muses, the degustation of her cone well-advanced in comparison to Philippa’s. “Petticoats and sabers are surprisingly practical.”

“Already tired of our lovely uniforms?”

Philippa knows she shouldn’t, but Michael is so rewarding to banter with, sharp and flexible, impossible to uproot and she takes obvious pleasure in keeping Philippa guessing whether or not she is joking. Michael knows she has the upper hand which means anything Philippa throws at her is fair game, even when it is flirtatious.

Especially when it is flirtatious.

“I am just getting started in them.”

Michael never disappoints.

Philippa chuckles and repositions herself to face the bay, and Michael. There is no point in pretending she isn’t the centre of attention tonight.

“I can smuggle in a choice selection of historical swashbuckler’s attires if they are more to your tastes,” Philippa says in a conspiratorial tone. “Or bathing suits. That would change the face of Starfleet for sure.”

Michael lowers her practically finished cone and seems to consider the offer with great seriousness, her brows knitted in concentration.

“Today was the longest amount of time I spent in a swimsuit, a most pleasant and relaxing feeling. But as uniforms go, it is nowhere near as practical as petticoats and sabers.”

“You really took to those, didn’t you?” Philippa ponders before tentatively taking a good chunk of ice cream into her mouth.

“I wanted to be a knight when I was a young child.”

Philippa cannot hide her surprise at the confession, but Michael is not looking at her, absorbed as she is by the chocolate she unearthed at the bottom of the cone.

“Even if in my mind’s eye, a knight spent more time travelling from land to land than fighting. I wanted to study dragons, not kill them, you see. My mother once took me to see a space Odonata show, I was so young I cannot remember where, and it was the closest I have ever been to a creature resembling a dragon. I still hope to find a species approaching the fairy tales of my childhood, however illogical the hope.”

Michael rarely talks with such precision about her childhood and every one of those rare mentions had been brought by necessity or extreme distress. This is not such an occasion.

“I didn’t know…” Philippa whispers, stunned, before recalling Michael is the one before her and she deserves a little more than surprise. “Thank you for sharing this with me, Michael. I have no doubt that you will discover such a creature, one day.”

When Philippa is ready to avoid Michael’s face and allow her protégée space, as she is used to do, her eyes meet Michael’s, brazen. Philippa is surprised to find a well of uncertainty there, the kind Michael is never comfortable enough to disclose, under any circumstance, be it necessity or extreme
distress. Philippa knows because she would never disclose it as well.

This is new.

What did Philippa do that warranted such a look?

But Philippa also doesn’t feel as afraid as she ought to, of whatever she did, of Michael’s confession, and this is newer and riskier.

Philippa is no fool and this is why she smiles good-naturedly, matronly, she hopes, chews into what is left of the cone and scoops up to her shoes near Michael’s feet.

“If you are hoping to reform Starfleet and branch out in sabers and dragon hunting,” she lightly says, “little word of advice: start small, like forbidding Terral from going anywhere near docked ships that are more than twenty year old.”

Michael, having just swallowed the last bit of her ice cream, laughs in her hand, no doubt recalling what the Vulcan’s assessment had cost the Shenzhou last time.

The worst of Michael’s intensity has passed.

“Did you enjoy it?” Philippa manages as she struggles to clasp back her sandal.

A timid smile blooms on Michael’s face, growing into familiar confidence at warp-speed.

“I am enjoying it. It seems a regressive treat, the amount of sugar and fat more fitting to a growing Human than an adult one.” Philippa glares at her. “But a savoury one, nonetheless.”

Philippa finishes with her second shoe and pushes herself off the ground, dusting off her shorts.

“A criminal one,” Philippa confirms and holds out a finger for effect. “If Anton bothers you with your sugar intake when we come back, you can always say it’s my fault.”

Michael is intelligent, creative and beautiful, devastatingly so, and Philippa treasures their friendship a great deal, to the point of intimacy. Obviously, Philippa feels reasonably drawn to her, like she did with Katrina or Lena in the past. It happens; it doesn’t mean there is something to explore.

Deep bonds are rare in her line of work, or they can be many, but are stretched across systems and galaxies until they become suggested itineraries more than actual relationships. Philippa misses them, craves them and Michael is everything Philippa is willing to cross systems and galaxies for.

The confusion is understandable.

“Aiding and abetting, Philippa,” Michael beams. “But I will get off easy.”

Michael cannot know but her words echo Philippa’s internal struggles. Her smile in this instant will be worth them.
Every morning, before Michael gets up, Philippa silently comes out of her room in a simple dress, slips on her sandals, picks up her straw hat and sneaks out of the house to run errands for the day. Every morning, after a silent watch in her half-obscured room, Michael catches her on the doorstep, staring disapprovingly at Philippa until she invites Michael to go to the marketplace with her.

Michael is justifiably proud of the power play.

“Abandoning ship, Captain?”

“Hardly,” Philippa sighs, trying to conceal her amusement. “What do I have to do to get you to sleep past 0800?”

“Not assuming the entirety of the grocery shopping would be a start. I cannot in good faith let you spoil me in such a manner. This is your vacation too.”

Philippa breathes out a spirited “ah” before offering, tickled, “You realise the irony of you tagging along when I am trying to keep you in bed?”

Michael’s brain is momentarily distracted by the image brought by her phrasing. Philippa’s melodic “good morning”, Philippa’s breakfast in tête-à-tête... An illogical urge as Michael already has been granted those privileges.

This is just them, the way they settled into long-earned friendship and professional familiarity; such words are not out of place on the Shenzhou, let alone on away-missions and Michael can recall several occasions when they were addressed to a bed-ridden Saru or Detmer. Yet, the thrumming of her heart and the dryness of her mouth are new, upsetting manifestations that she has yet to analyse and reflect on.

Her mind is getting carried away in the process of…

What?

Relieving tension? Reviewing options? Or more likely, simply, letting Michael enjoy what she can in a situation which cannot be romantic, despite the premise.

Michael steals a side glance to assess the extent of Philippa’s self-awareness: she is waving at a neighbor with a friendly and most innocent smile spread across the face, before she peers inquiringly at her in turn.

“Michael?”
Michael closes her eyes, briefly, huffing in embarrassment. Philippa invited her here and Michael is taking advantage of the situation.

“You should not have confessed your intent on the first day, then,” she mutters between gritted teeth before remembering Philippa is in no way responsible for this situation. “I should be running errands in your place.”

Philippa’s face radiates genuine sympathy, only making Michael more grateful for the patience and kindness demonstrated.

“Come on, Michael, you insisted on coming with me. Why is this so hard to let me take care of you? It is concretely my job.”

“We are not on duty,” Michael evasively comments, ruminating on how much simpler her situation would be if they were.

On their way down, they often greet shopkeepers and villagers that Philippa knows from previous stays and she never fails to engage in conversation with them, chatting about the weather, sea, family, anything but the tons of metal and glass, their home, hovering light years away from this island. Michael always stops by the house two doors below where a nameless feline awaits diligently, and when Philippa catches up with her, she watches her stroking the black fur with a pleased expression that matches the cat’s.

Michael finds herself invariably arguing against a pet for her next birthday until they reach the marketplace.

Although they never agreed on this, their breakfast starts there, between somnolent trucks and cheerful residents, picking up authentic fruits, bread and cream that, famished, they cannot refrain from tasting before returning to the house. Each day brings a new challenge to overcome: yesterday, Philippa raised a date to Michael’s lips while she was distractedly browsing the display of dried fruits. A fingertip away from a heart attack.

Philippa’s arm links with Michael’s synthetic bag, sometimes around the fishmonger’s stall, sometimes after the dairy booth, but it always does. The proximity is comforting, as much as it is distressing.

Michael lost her on the first day and having her out of sight, if not worrying, makes the whole expedition pointless.

With expert hands, Philippa weighs and examines vegetables and fruits intended for their lunch and dinner while Michael comments on their nutritive qualities. Mischievous, Philippa answers by tossing the fruit at her and taunting her about letting herself feel.

“You should enjoy them with your mouth, just as much as your hands, nose and eyes.”

“It is impractical to look at, let alone prepare,” Michael reasons, bemused.

“It is both. And delicious too. Since I have no idea when Nikos’ cousin last checked the replicator, I am not risking food poisoning when we can simply cook products straight from the farmers.”

“Cutting vegetables for a salad is hardly cooking,” Michael remarks as she turns the soft and ridged specimen between her fingers in an effort to taste with her eyes and hands. “It is closer to engineering than chemistry.”

An exaggerated scowl answers her.
“And holding okra in the air does not a salad make.” Philippa takes a step back and nods appreciatively, no doubt relishing in the view of Michael perplexedly contending with vegetables. “Pick some. I’d like to eat at some point and have a nap after, thank you.”

“How uncharacteristic of you, Captain.”

Philippa’s lips stretch into a slow, delighted cheeky smile, holding such charm and intelligence that Michael freezes.

“Do you want me to give a vigorous slap to the twenty-year old replicator in the hope of fixing it? Would that be becoming of a captain, Number One?”

On day five, they are arguing over a melon that Philippa holds out for Michael to smell. Michael instinctively grabs the fruit to bring it closer to her nose and accidentally traps Philippa’s hand beneath her clasp. Warm on the cold surface, silky against the rough skin, strong under Michael’s suddenly nervous palm, her touch elicits an electrifying sensation in Michael, the effects on her grip, posture, breathing, heart rate barely contained in front of Philippa.

Not even the alarm signaling the end of the oxygen reserve is as terrifying as losing control of her body so brutally, so close to Philippa.

Even if her closeness is a blessing in disguise.

Deep brown eyes hold her gaze, playful, at ease, while Michael can only register how warm she feels all of a sudden, and how welcome the disruptive feeling is. Her scent, the fruity chemicals of her shampoo and moisturising balm mingled, catches Michael by surprise in the air saturated with perfumes. With the intense luminosity and reverberation, anti-UV injections can only protect so much and freckles are peaking on her friend’s cheekbones, around her lips, on her shoulders and collarbones, looking like many stars calling her, waiting to be touched and caressed.

After years of data collection, how easy it is for Michael to speculate, to fantasize, the grain of her skin across her abdomen, the hum of her breath in her ear, the sweetness of her mouth.

They are not one of the couples wandering on the marketplace, hand in hand, calling out nicknames, stealing kisses, though...

“Wanna help with this one?” Philippa’s lilt is excruciating to her ears now.

“I can handle it.”

*Indubitably not.*

Philippa quirks an eyebrow, tongue-in-cheek, and Michael could swear Philippa just shifted closer, punishingly so.

The spots around her lips smile with her, attractively accentuating the plumpness of her mouth.

“The contrary would have surprised me,” Philippa warbles, merciless. “Yet, the melon remains undecided on.”

“This is not quantum physics and I can do it eyes closed.”

Philippa is tougher to handle than quantum physics, more elusive and personal. Michael could do quantum physics in her sleep; she would rather Philippa walked less often in her dreams.
“We will pick this one,” Michael flatly utters, blocking everything bare the fruit in her palm. “My hands, nose and eyes agree.”

Philippa bows her head before gesturing to the seller behind Michael.

Her hand shifts, reluctantly abandoning Philippa’s fingers to put the fruit down in her bag, leaving her confused and wanting. Her breath is undisturbed, her palms are still dry, and her heart steady, but Michael feels frustratingly not in control. The first lesson Sarek taught her in order to cope with extreme emotion was breathing steadily and focusing. Travelling to an idyllic island with Philippa is the not the ideal time to realise touching Philippa arouses extreme emotions.

Beneath the turmoil Michael will break down in small explicable vectors tonight, she discerns a feeling, defined, unmistakable: satisfaction. Its object is unquestionably Philippa; its source is as yet unidentified.

It could be that Michael is relieved she held on. It could well be that she is grateful Philippa does not mind her more and more frequent lapses. One conclusion is safe to advance: the intense reaction is not only to Philippa, but the perfection of the barriers Michael created.

“Shall we go?” Philippa asks while tugging at her arm. “I wanted to have a look at the beach store near the docks.”

Michael silently follows.

Whether her feelings are romantic, her curiosity attraction, her ease intimacy, it is a moot point when faced with the demanding effects Philippa has on her.

Pondering alone on such considerations is selfish and reckless, yet Michael urgently wants to feel joy and Philippa is right here.
A Siren

Chapter Notes

It's Philippa's turn not to have a good time. This is her going "oh shit".

A scene definitely not inspired by my parents.

There must be a way for Philippa to move on to the next page. Niki de Saint Phalle has been in her
studio for what seems like hours and although Philippa’s spatial acuity is exceptional, she does not
have a clue what the damn room looked like. And there is a holo-pic to go with the description.

Perfectly unaware of her ordeal, Michael swims and explores the narrow beach where they retreated,
almost empty save for a somnolent group of friends and an elderly couple. The snorkel and flippers
she brought with her initially led Philippa to assume she would not be seeing much of Michael this
afternoon, but the inconspicuous cove seems to hold her friend’s interest for now.

Thankfully.

At regular intervals, Michael emerges here and there from the water, barely disturbing the tranquil
murmur of nature around them, and waves a hand at Philippa. Removing her mask and shaking off
the droplets of water from her tightly coiled hair, she gazes up at the open sky as if the marvels of the
sea and space were complementary, in need of equal reverence.

Her right hand never leaves the small waterproof recording device hanging on her chest, close to her
heart, no doubt already filled with underwater discoveries she will comment in her logs. Michael
keeps them up-to-date even here, slipping away shortly before dinner to complete them. Philippa is
rather curious about their content.

Oh, to get hold of a notebook, a piece of paper, anything but her reading PADD, to try and capture
the beauty of Michael in the waves...

Philippa doesn’t have Michael’s precise words and would need more than colours to render her
dancing hands in the water, the vibrant smile on her lips, the defined muscles of her back flexing, the
mask tangled in her hair, the way she gracefully dives back and the red bow at the base of her neck.

Her eyes are out-of-focus when Michael isn’t there. Philippa is daydreaming.

Curious. Such a flippant choice of swimsuit coming from her Vulcan first officer. It is not truly
impractical, but it is on the fancy side of design, which rarely factors in Michael’s clothing choice.

“Fancy” is another word for “eye-catching”, really. Michael looks nothing short of astonishing.

Tread carefully here.

Philippa’s skills are wanting, but painting her friend would at least provide her with an acceptable
excuse to follow Michael and ignore the remarkable Niki.

With a brusque movement Philippa puts away the PADD and lowers her glasses, eyes perusing the
blue surface in search of Michael.
Is she really willing to take refuge there? Pretending the growing contentment, the anticipation and the ease she has been experiencing are nothing but admiration for her protégée? That good old admiration. If she had a par sec for every time she referred as admiration for colleagues to what clearly was not, she’d be out there breaking ground on the upsilon quadrant.

Why on Earth did she think inviting Michael to a beautiful island was a clever idea? A romantic destination for many, isolated from the world and pressure, allowing them to unwind and laugh and wake up late and not style their hair and not care?

Philippa sinks deeper into her deckchair, tasting bitter shame for playing herself like a teenager at a sleepover.

Out of acclimation, they have fallen into a softer, slower, lazier state in the past few days, sleeping in the hotter hours of the day, eating late, chatting later; where are their iron-clad discipline and time-consuming love for space? All things, safe, that make Michael the extraordinary woman she is.

Some things.

Looking away from Philippa, Michael's head resurfaces from the translucent water, bobbing slightly as her shoulders rise, and it takes Philippa a good minute to grasp her First Officer is laughing at an object in her hand, pointy like a shell and moving haphazardly on her palm.

Michael has found a hermit crab and Philippa feels a surge of raging affection taking hold of her, unforgiving. There is no coming back from Michael and a crab.

Rookie mistake: Philippa should have known better than to underestimate Michael Burnham. Michael is extraordinary, even when she does not have the stars to admire and the cosmos to challenge her intellect. Excited, glowing, voracious, her joy feeds Philippa’s and this has nothing to do with the wonders of space.

It is entirely Philippa’s fault.

She had not expected Michael to play the game and to join her in her decadent lifestyle. She wanted her to relax, but not... meet Philippa so sincerely, participate to such an extent to her pleasure, share her joy with so little fuss. Michael was supposed to wear a mask like Philippa. A mask that Philippa stopped bothering to wear the moment she saw Michael’s smile at the docks for the first time.

Michael took her cues from Philippa. Exceeded them. As any good First Officer would do in answer to her Captain. Achieving aloofness and detachment before Michael solicited her so much that she never stopped to consider how Michael dropping her guard in her presence would affect her.

Would attract her.

There is the crux of the issue that Philippa has been dancing around for a few months now, as well as the hazard from which Philippa should protect Michael, as a friend.

This is getting complicated.

After kneeling in the water to put down the shell, Michael comes back to the beach at last, her flippers moving about the water with a raucous entrain that the disciple of Vulcan in vain tries to disguise. Her ferocious adoration is back with a vengeance.

“Back so soon?” Philippa calls as Michael walks up to her.

Not losing an ounce of her balance in the process and looking every bit the antique statue caught in a
moment of carefully crafted beauty, Michael stops on one feet in front of her and carefully removes her flippers.

“You were watching me, Philippa.”

*That was difficult to miss.*

From her position upside down, Michael angles her head to fleetingly consider her before tossing the footwear on a nearby towel.

Philippa shifts on her deckchair, feeling the sweat under her legs and across her back, half heat, half attraction. Yes, *attraction*, and there is no way Michael hasn’t noticed with her keen emotional intelligence the evidence accumulating against Philippa, at the marketplace, on the docks, at night.

So much for playing her aunt.

“I was wondering what kind of creatures you had found down there that were keeping you so close to the beach,” Philippa lies, fooling not one crab on this patch of earth. “Why didn’t you try to go further into the sea or follow the coast? The views are beautiful on the other side, I’ve been told.”

Rid of her snorkel and mask, Michael peers at her with prying intensity for a second, the heavy, almost devouring look that Philippa catches every so often fully focused on her. It generally leads to Michael stating that Philippa’s advice/reasoning/attitude is illogical. Presently, it could lead to an uncomfortable argument, especially if Philippa commits to the wounded pride she has been experiencing in response to her silly longings.

But Michael doesn’t deserve an argument, or lies, in return for common sense and agency. Too much is at stake; *Michael* is at stake. She dares to hope their friendship will survive the misunderstanding. So Philippa patiently holds her gaze, wondering what form Michael’s call back to order will take, and prepares her answers.

She will gladly take her displeasure if Michael can feel more at ease around her afterwards.

“Michael, do you want to talk? If you need me to give you more space, just ask.”

Michael blinks out of her daze and shudders as if stepping out of a dream. A smile, incomprehensible, blossoms on her face.

“No, this is satisfactory. The view is exquisite here.” Michael hums, her expression peaceful again, and she calmly toys with the recording device secured by a transparent wire around her neck. “I did not need to explore further.”

She *must be* tired after cavorting in the water for hours, and Philippa must be sun-stroked.

“Okay. Maybe we should—“

Michael raises the small camera before her eye, aiming at Philippa, and stops short of pushing the button.

“Can I take a picture of you?” she nonchalantly asks.

Either Michael is messing with her or Philippa is properly losing her mind and ability to assess reality, because the discrepancy between the tone and atmosphere of this conversation is worrying.

Michael knows about her fondness for her; it’s not like Philippa made a secret of it, and she should
be aware Philippa is navigating beyond their usual parameters of comradery and friendship here, so why? Michael cannot be punishing Philippa for a breach of trust because Michael would not do so and, frankly, she would admonish her first.

The woman once argued with Saru’s ganglia.

Michael lowers the recording device a little, revealing a relaxed and confident gaze that her unreliable acting abilities would make improbable under strained circumstances.

“Philippa, I was not teasing.”

She must have been gaping.

*Excellent.*

Philippa was about to ruin Michael’s vacation because she cannot keep her imagination in check. So what, she finds her friend desirable? This is Philippa’s responsibility, not Michael’s. She must not punish her for merely being happy to be here and prompting emotions in Philippa, no matter how inappropriate the emotions between colleagues.

They are not colleagues on this island and they are far more than colleagues on the *Shenzhou*…

*Damn it.*

Who would have thought Philippa would become doddery so early in her life?

“Our fishes and sea-weed will be in poor company,” she manages at last, still reeling from whatever the hell happened for her brain to overload the way it did. “I have been dozing off for the last hour. I must look like a dried jelly-fish.”

Michael’s chuckle is hoarse, breathy, unmistakably *fond* and Philippa feels like she might be screaming inside at how agonising this is.

“I will be the judge of that.”

She trusts Michael; she is a coward; she likes Michael. Years of command and diplomacy are telling her this should be simple.
We are getting there. Michael comes to a conclusion.

I hope you are still enjoying.

In the dark, Michael can see nothing but the lock of hair escaping the braid on Philippa’s neck.

She cannot see the circumstances that led Philippa to fall asleep so close to her on the mat laid down on the floor of the scorching main room, nor does she want to sense that Philippa might be awake despite her immobility.

It is an incomprehensible lock of hair that keeps her blind to everything around her.

The digital clock on the wall calls for her to get up and head to the kitchen to prepare a dinner long overdue. They have a variety of salads from the night before and fresh bread that they can take out for a light dinner, but Michael does not want to disturb Philippa.

The hand not trapped under her head flutters close to the curl, irresistibly, and traces the curve from a distance, memorizing its shape. The exercise focuses Michael for a while, pleasantly grounding her until she gathers her thoughts.

Her mind has accumulated a lot of information these past days, not all of them reliable or even exploitable and all of them contradictory. If her life was a research group, she would request a fresh eye right now. With no recent recruits to the Shenzhou and five years of collaboration under their belt, an unbiased point of view is unlikely to manifest soon in answer to her conundrum. Michael’s physical reaction to Philippa’s silent presence remains the data she can trust the most.

It is crystal clear.

She resists the irrational urge to blow on the strands, for fear of attracting Philippa’s attention, and, transfixed, let her gaze follow the familiar nape, the back of her ears, the piece of jaw, that strong shoulder, that precious ribcage rising and falling with her breath.

Sleep fell on Philippa the moment they stepped inside the house after an afternoon riding in the hills over Bali. Michael never witnessed her Captain’s famed helming skills, luck failing her each time Philippa was forced to take matters into her own hands, but on the backseat of the rented vehicle dashing through the plateaus Michael could not restraint the feeling of awe engulfing her.

If she had known she would be this distracted by Philippa propelling them into space and dust as if they were not dependent on gravity and friction, she may have taken the wheel in her place.

It seems Philippa taught her about flying, all over again. Yet her log entry for today has an incriminating paragraph about Philippa’s patch of naked skin and reluctant curl between her helmet and jacket.

She has been mulling over those five centimeters of skin for the duration of the ride back home, applying all her logic to answering how such a minor detail could disrupt so much in her, how
imperative the need to touch Philippa and be near her was upon sighting it, despite her situation flush against Philippa on a hover-bike.

Her attraction to Philippa has never been an unknown parameter to Michael, at the most a distraction secured by her sense of duty and professionalism, but this past week and her own carelessness sanctioned a development of the problem that borders on unmanageable.

This evolution is not merely a slip on her part; it is a solid, natural growth in their friendship.

A deep breath escapes the form lying by her side, startling Michael, and Philippa rolls onto her back, shifting just enough to avoid meeting Michael’s shoulder. The adjustment allows Michael to remove her hand, surreptitiously, and hide the culpable fingers in her own curls.

After an inquisitive glance that Michael manages to convince is no receivable proof she has been found out, Philippa represses a yawn and whispers with a wrinkle of her nose, “Dinner?”

“It would be wise.” Michael’s answer is stunned, on the cusp of daydreaming. “It is almost 2200.”

“Have I been out that long? You should have eaten without me.”

Logically, a sound suggestion, yet it seemed after the exciting afternoon her body was in urgent need of the kind of informal, contemplative relaxation she has been indulging in by Philippa’s side.

“I needed the rest,” Michael quietly says.

It is no lie, but Philippa flips on her side, staring back at her, one, two seconds too long before getting to her feet while Michael catches her breath.

“We still need to take a bite. This has been a taxing day.”

Philippa is already behind the counter, busying herself in cupboards, bouncing from one corner to another in search of cutlery and plates. Dazzled, knocked out by her own reactions, Michael pitifully lingers on the floor, feeling the warmth of the spot just vacated by Philippa.

The picture on the beach was a blatant breach, as was the episode at the museum. This was…

A transgression.

Philippa has been patient and quiet, but Michael’s apprehension keeps swelling over how graciously the overtness of her feelings has been received so far. It has been significantly impacting their rapport as well, with moments like these when Philippa always seems on the brink of lecturing her about fraternisation.

Her tolerance has become cruel to Michael. By not mentioning what Michael is ashamed to recognise as blatant unprofessionalism, her Captain is also sparing her the humiliation, an attention for which Michael is most grateful.

Yet, Philippa did not invite her here to be professional and she still has not called Michael back to order.

At last, Michael heaves a sigh and pushes herself from the ground, her eyes not leaving Philippa as she sets the table on the ground level terrace.

“Your mastery of the hover-bike commands was praiseworthy, Philippa.”

Philippa hums in answer, distracted, before heading to the counter where various bowls are aligned,
fresh from the refrigerator.

“It’s like a bicycle, Michael.”

“Of the penny farthing kind. Your technique is impressive.”

“How do you even know about… Of course you would. “

Balancing two bowls and a full pitcher in her hands, Philippa carefully edges toward the table, Michael meeting her hurriedly mid-way to provide help. Grabbing the jug, Michael lingers on Philippa’s fingers, noting again how lenient with their proximity the Captain is.

With two leaps and an agile extension of the arm to the kitchen table, Philippa fetches the remaining loaf of bread before dropping soundly on the chair nearest to Michael and patting the one at her side.

“So, tell me how I have impressed you.” Her tongue pushes against her teeth and Michael freezes momentarily, wondering why Philippa woke up so whimsical from her nap. “This rarely occurs anymore.”

“You often do,” Michael answers as she sits down beside Philippa. “Out of concern for the morale of the crew, I do not always voice my admiration.”

A furtive gleam passes in her eyes, too brief for Michael to speculate about its nature, and in an instant, her whole composure loosens; her smile turns into a gleeful, hungry grin and, elbows propped up on the table, she languidly supports her head.

“You robbed me,” she warmly pesters her. “Please, do so in the future. I love leaving an impression, on you particularly, Number One.”

The tone, posture and words involved in the confession set off a chain reaction in Michael, leaving Michael to suddenly question if the joy she experienced in making this vacation as pleasant as possible for Philippa in exchange of her hospitality was not satisfaction, but reciprocation.

Philippa reacts to Michael, missteps and insubordination included, and chooses an answer that is often sympathetic rather than suitable. Michael, alarmingly, accepts it without a second thought.

“How do you factor the breadth of the magnetic stabilizers when you jump?” Michael asks between two mouthful of tomatoes.

Philippa comically grimaces. “You don’t. You make up for the lacking isolation with your arms.” Her elbow prods her side, tender. “Why do you think I was so tired?”

“Maths on a bike can be trying, Philippa. I understood.”

“Says the woman who solved the fourth negative warp-speed equation while piloting a Caesar 56. I am not that old yet.”

“You could out-compute the best of us on the bridge,” Michael pleasantly remarks as she adds olive oil to her bread.

“Not you,” Philippa hums appreciatively and the squint she addresses to Michael almost looks like a wink.

A wave of light panic washes over her as she processes how her actions must have appeared to Philippa, which makes her answer in kind all the more confounding. If Philippa noticed Michael's
behaviour, she did not chastise Michael, did not warn her: she enjoyed Michael’s attention, sought it and returned it like she has just now.

Words, glimpses, gestures; all fall into place like a mathematical demonstration.

What does it look like to the onlooker’s eyes?

Like a seduction, elaborate, slow-burning and agreed upon.

“What do you think of Elafonisi for tomorrow?”

Michael freezes over the pepper salad. The tiny peninsula, a jewel of clear sand, blue water and renewed bio diversity, is protected by treaties upon treaties that regulate the number of visitors per year, as many touristic sites in the area.

“Getting clearance for paradise is difficult.”

“Not for me.” Philippa cocks an eyebrow, savouring Michael’s reaction. ”Not when it is for you. So, care to follow me to paradise?”

Michael cannot believe her ears, her eyes, but it is there. In Philippa’s way of leaning into her when she answers, in the breath she takes every time Michael talks.

Is this an invitation? Is this a first step? After five years on her ship, Michael still does not feel anywhere near reading Philippa properly —she is a tactical expert after all— and she would be a fool to assume this is not just Philippa’s way of flirting.

“I hear one can swim to the peninsula,” Michael muses, trying to distract her mind from the relentless hypotheses.

“Never missing an occasion to go to the sea, do you?”

“It would be difficult not to. On an island, there is nothing but the sea around us,” Michael quips and stiffens immediately.

Oh.

Nothing but the sea.

If Michael wants to reveal herself to Philippa and ask about Philippa in return, this is an ideal occasion. Philippa seems so well-disposed to her informality that she would not condemn what is only a further expression of Michael’s desires and if ever Philippa takes offense to Michael’s initiative, their stay is almost over and the crew will occupy them soon enough.

She needs a strategy first.

“It will be a beautiful trip to close our sojourn. Thank you, Philippa.”

Philippa fills Michael’s glass with fresh water, shaking her head in amusement.

“My pleasure, Michael.”

Or Philippa could have no idea she is doing it. It is a good thing Philippa taught her everything she knows about strategy.

Michael spends the remainder of the dinner in a cloud, guided by Philippa, too stunned to initiate a
request as mundane as “pass the salt” for fear of eliciting more reactions to analyse. Too much data and she has so little time to devise a plan. Philippa leaves her to her quietness, patient and curious, true to herself. No question comes and Michael wonders if Philippa is watching her as closely as she is.

But Michael’s quietness is not a perplexed one; it is exultant and hopeful. Right now, in waves always stronger and higher, joy swells in Michael’s heart, threatening to make it burst, but it would be too loud a demonstration and the last thing she wants is to alarm Philippa.
The Little Frilly Dress That Is Only For Michael

Chapter Notes

Philippa goes out on a date. Michael is a mastermind.

I may have messed up the structure of this one in an attempt to reduce its length.

No admiral showed up. But, as always, because the Cretans are lovely people and Michael has a knack for arguing about ocean preservation in the early 21st century with the fishmongers, they end up invited to dinner, and Philippa’s little dress is given an opportunity to dance.

Not that there will be many chances to dance tonight, but it feels like this is what Philippa is going for.

Over the past two days, a certain urgency has started coloring their daily activities. Philippa wants to chuck it down to the imminent end of their vacation, but Michael’s often expressed eagerness over going back to work and her own excitement for the Shenzhou’s next mission contradict her theory.

“Dil urged us to go down and take the main street rather than walking up the hill from here.” Michael calls from where she is getting ready. “We will reach their house more rapidly.”

“Michael Burnham looking forward to a party… Am I really rubbing off on you only now?”

“Hardly. The scientific community has yet to encounter lifeforms relishing parties as much as you do, Philippa.”

“Went for the jugular, didn’t you? As diplomacy goes, you have to admit parties are the most pleasant way to fight.”

The muffled sound coming out of Michael’s room sounds suspiciously like a guffaw.

“My outfit can feasibly be altered for wrestling, if you request it. Do you plan on fighting tonight?”

“Only the urge to dine and dash,” Philippa replies while tentatively tugging at the loose curls framing her face. “If I had my way, we’d be spending our last evening under the stars. Not debating over moussaka.”

Under the stars. Together. Of course.

Philippa could smack her head.

She is guilty of encouraging the atmosphere, even though Michael clearly enjoys it and wasn’t enjoyment the whole point of this vacation? She still would be wise to come with an acceptable explanation to Michael playing with her hair last night, one that is not pure fantasy, if only for her sanity.

An entire evening with new friends is exactly what they need to set the record straight for her heart, namely that their isolation and the loose atmosphere fed her fantasies.
Philippa is critically inspecting her dress in the holo-mirror of the hall, trying to fit the universal translator into her inexistent pocket, when Michael serenely pads out of her room.

Wearing a white pair of high-waisted trousers and a form-fitting patterned shirt, she looks stupendous. Her hair is worn natural, artfully sculpted back in a dapper mound, and her eyes, unusually but richly made up, contrast divinely with her dark muted lips. The combination is extremely becoming, downright thought out for seduction, and Philippa feels a flutter of anticipation before remembering none of the practical and plain tops or shorts Michael wore the past week have failed to flatter her First Officer in her eyes.

“You look perfect,” Philippa ends up blurting out when she regains her composure, instantly wishing she had picked less absolute words. “I didn’t know you had packed something so elegant.”

Michael doesn’t seem to hear, eyes glued to Philippa. If Philippa has dismissed Michael avoiding her body on display before, reasoning the Vulcan woman gathered enough about Human customs by now not to stare, she knows even less what to make of Michael raking her outfit. She does appreciate the new attention though. Very much so.

“Michael?”

“Sorry, Sir,” comes the distant answer, before Michael shakes herself with characteristically annoyed vigour.

Philippa squeezes her arm encouragingly.

“I hope not,” she chides. “Don’t blow my cover this close to the finish line or I’ll never be able to come back. Let’s go.”

Michael’s eyes at last snap back from the distant realm they were studying and bore into Philippa’s, the penetrating, focused intensity there almost forcing her to take a step back.

“Philippa, your choice of clothing is most pleasing to the eye, but you never look short of enthralling, a calculated move on your part.”

Philippa gapes in search of an answer and removes her hand as if burnt. It seems the argument they have been postponing is inevitable at last.

“I am acting out of line again, sorry.” Her voice immediately finds the detached and controlled inflections needed, even if her heart feels like it’s constricting in her chest and her legs giving in. What a fool she was. “My actions are not intended to make you uncomfortable, on the contrary, but as they did, I have to apologise. I am your superior officer even in this environment and, in the future, I will refrain from engaging in exceedingly informal behaviours.”

Michael frowns at Philippa, examining her face with an air of incomprehension, before her eyes widen in horror.

Her “no!” comes out desperate and leaves Philippa more alarmed than ever.

Michael closes her eyes and takes three deep breaths, before reaching for Philippa’s shoulder and firmly holding her in place. Philippa was swaying.

“I-I apologise, Philippa,” Michael stammers, reassuringly gauche under the circumstances. “My words implied nefarious intent on your part. I meant to say you always make sure your appearance is attractive to me and I am grateful for your attentiveness.”
What is going on?

“Thank you?” Philippa manages. “What do you mean attractive to—”

An unfamiliar smile curves Michael’s lips, between satisfied and indecisive, and she rasps, “We will be late to the Katsaros’ if we do not leave promptly.”

A nod is all Philippa can return at the moment so confused she is. Whether it is unearned tolerance or straight blindness, none of the attributes standard for Michael, there is no rhyme or reason to Michael’s actions. Unless the most obvious answer is the right one, the closest, the most reflective of her own irrational behaviour of the past days.

Attraction.

The thought is not outlandish considering how close and in synch they have been —Terral using the word “dream team” is still one of her proudest moments—, but Michael would simply never let her emotions compromise her career and position with the crew in such a manner, and Michael is nothing if not in control. Her thoughts might be vocal, her passions worn on her sleeve, but they are mastered and harnessed, often used to fuel her work and personal growth, rather than....

Engaging with Philippa would be counter-productive, so it is not logical for Michael to do so.

There is nothing happening here but Philippa losing her damn mind.

They make their way to the hosts’ house without a word, not exactly avoiding each other, but pursuing their trail of thoughts on their own. The arrival is boisterous and Philippa almost wants to excuse herself for the evening when Dil and Tano greet them.

“Dil has been bugging me all day about this: Michael told us her father introduced you. But you told me you are her boss. So, vanilla meet cute or torrid office romance?”

Philippa steals a glance at Michael, confused, and Michael has the decency to avoid eye contact, handing to Tano the bottle of wine they brought for the occasion.

Dil isn’t losing a second of the silent exchange and is smirking in anticipation. How on Earth did first meetings came up during Michael’s heated debates about ocean preservation?

The irony of the situation isn’t lost on her, but this vacation is exhausting and she cannot wait to go back to her ship where Michael’s and her roles are definite, safe and not remotely subjected to her heart’s whims.

“Both?” Philippa breathes, sensing nervous laughter building inside her chest.

At Dil's side, Tano lifts an eyebrow with great interest, no doubt sniffing the story, and how embarrassing for Philippa to admit that there is a story to sense in the first place.

Before Philippa can elaborate, Michael links her arm with Philippa’s and gratifies their hosts with the kind of shocked smirk that Philippa has only seen in correlation to Januzzi’s game nights.

“I have wanted to work under her ever since my foster father introduced us,” she proudly says.

“I knew I liked you,” Dil coos. “You must explain to us how you manage...”

Tano whistles before inviting them in and Michael purposely leads inside a very puzzled Philippa.

“It is a simple play along.” Michael whispers under her breath while Dil sets away the gift. “We have
done it before.”

“As trophy wife and expert in a field not yet invented, dear Dr. Vera Trelundar. Not as us.”

“It is not exactly us. We are not lovers, right?”

Philippa could swear Michael is leering under her neutral expression.

It takes a while for Philippa to process what happened before the dinner, let alone after their arrival. Michael’s discomfort with parties is well known and Philippa does her utmost to dispense Michael of attending, but when she cannot do so, she considers it her duty to make sure Michael is given enough space to tolerate, even enjoy the fun.

But it seems, this time, Michael has everything under control.

For the first time in a hellish week having Michael near goes a long way to appease her instead of adding to the confusion. Every touch is looking less like a misunderstanding and more like a clarification.

We are not lovers, right?

“How come you don’t have nicknames?” One of the guests inquires after Dil introduced them in both vague and quixotic terms. “Because I can tell this is a new thing. Is this part of the thing?”

“Her name already carries love in its meaning,” Michael answers without missing a beat.

Philippa almost spits her drink, recovering quickly enough to wisecrack without embarrassing herself.

“Why, Michael, you almost make me believe this is not merely an arranged date to please your dad. I do love it when you call me by my title.”

They lock eyes, and Dil cannot completely drown the suggestive “uh uh” in his glass.

“As you wish, Boss.”

Michael doesn’t leave her side, nor does her hand Philippa’s hip. This is an act but it clicks: Michael’s display of romantic attention doesn’t differ from Michael’s casual communication with her.

Philippa’s nervous ramblings on their way to the island coupled with her protégée’s extensive knowledge of the Greek culture; Michael letting her hair curl after Philippa’s enthusiastic comments; her insistence Philippa would make a better driver despite her extensive list of piloting licenses; even her choice of bathing suit…

This whole evening.

Truth is, Michael has been attentive, all this time, proactive even, while Philippa has missed every single clue.

Michael has not raised one concern over staying with her direct superior officer in the first place and there is practically nothing this side of reality, not the laws of physics, not Keyla’s anxiety, that can keep Michael from expressing her displeasure or even mild inconvenience. Nothing can coax her to perform in a manner unappealing to her and nothing can stop her from achieving her goal when she is set to do so. She is by far the sincerest person Philippa knows and she is currently tracing soothing circles on Philippa’s back.
Bafflingly, her goals might not be so different from Philippa's.

The simplest explanation… Philippa’s misdemeanors were not suffered, and they might even have been desired.

How did Philippa miss this?

Philippa very much wants to disappear under the table when she comes to this conclusion, between cheese and desserts, and her mortification is loud enough for Michael to pick up over Tano’s laughter. A hand finds hers under the cloth and awkwardly squeezes hers.

Michael is not looking at her as she holds onto Philippa for longer than appropriate. Following one of the guests’ story, she presents for all to see a face glowing with assurance and calm that have been missing this past week, probably because of Philippa.

It seems she made up her mind as well.

Leaning into Michael, face shielded by her locks, Philippa whispers, not closer than she would usually to inform Michael they have to evacuate Nambue from the premises, again:

“I don’t want to spook you, but we really need to talk.”

Michael lets out a proper, honest-to-god snigger that she stifles in her napkin.

“It took you long enough.”

Her eyes, when they finally meet hers, are twinkling. Her expression is as composed as usual, yet over the finely crafted poise something blooms, new and openly inviting. Triumphant.

Beautiful beyond words.

This is not what a call back to order or rebuttal looks like.

“My place or yours?” Michael asks, mordant.

Give it to Michael to excel even at this. Philippa deserves the punishment, however delightful the banter.

“This is not funny.”

“It is. Technically, it is not even your home.”

“No…” Philippa wonders, peering at the intelligent face before her. “Our home isn’t here.”

To think Michael went to this extremity, so far from the comfort of space, to open Philippa’s eyes.

Philippa has a lot to make up for.

She was so intent of preserving a façade that she has not picked on any of Michael’s shows of acceptance, all given in response to her behaviour, one she deemed unforgivable given their position. Michael knew when Philippa didn’t.

Philippa hasn’t spoilt anything. Most certainly Michael has desires of her own that Philippa’s self-inflicted gag has been stifling.

Like a damn adult, she has a voice. What does it say?
Philippa very much wants to seduce Michael and Michael is somehow, incomprehensibly, asking her to. Whatever is happening, Michael enjoys it and Philippa would be damned if Michael did not enjoy her holiday.
This chapter is better known as "oh shit! it's happening", although a gentler, lazier version.

Euler's identity is the name given to a special case of Euler's formula, an equation often used in maths, physics and engineering. It is considered one of the most beautiful equations, as it links some of mathematics fundamental numbers, e (Euler's number), i (the imaginary unit), pi and 0.

Two days ago, Philippa decreed setting camp on the roof with their after dinner herbal tea and blankets would be enjoyable, and Michael cannot deny it is, however informal. Before, the narrow streets inundated with lights and laughter drew them out, though they would never mingle and only went through them to reach the calmer atmosphere of the docks. The crowded terraces on the seaside invariably had them pressed against each other and the sensation left Michael enraptured many times, more than the ever-captivating performance of daylight waning on the water.

Looking at the world from above, even from a humble terrace, is familiar to Michael, as much as sharing it with Philippa.

Philippa’s hand has not left hers since they waved goodbye to the Katsaros and walked the star-lit road descending to the centre, flanked by other guests on their way home downtown. Leaving behind hushed laughter and inebriated swaying, they climbed to the rooftop in silence.

Only when they set to lie on the creaky deckchairs in the dark, side by side, did they notice their palms still folded. All sensations leave Michael’s face as she releases Philippa.

Her arms drop to her sides, useless, and she inhales sharply while securing them at her back, captivated by Philippa sitting down on the chair, feet parted, hunched over her entwined fingers.

“Did this really happen?”

“Mercifully.” Her voice is all but a dry-mouthed, breathless whisper. “Your lack of answer was becoming untenable.”

Philippa glances up, playfully piqued in an instant.

“I haven’t said a word yet.”

“Certain things speak for themselves.”

The vigor with which Philippa straightens from her position shoots tendrils of excitement across Michael’s chest. Michael knows that look, fierce and unapologetic; she sought it, built up to it and beholding it now, jolting her friend into action, is as gratifying as successfully upgrading her EVA suit thrusters.

This will be Philippa’s choice; Michael’s sentence.
“We are not playing that now. Michael, this is not our usual yes, Captain, I trust you with my life or even no, Number One, I will follow you to another universe. What do you think is happening? Because I have been lost this past week, really lost and really...” The range of emotions succeeding on Philippa’s face is challenging to follow so fast and diverse it is. She heaves a sigh and rolls her eyes in defeat, more for herself than Michael. “Really taken.”

Leaning onto her left thigh for support, she is covering her mouth with her hand, leaving Michael on edge about the direction the conversation is going, until she looks up.

Her eyes are all Philippa, the woman who walked by her side for miles in the Gallifreyan desert after they crashed, who risked her life countless times for her and did not mention it the day after, who offered her friendship three years ago when Michael was still fighting Humans.

“Emphasis on taken. With you.” A pause settles, leaving Philippa room to examine Michael, and her well-ordered, grave expression dissolves into softness. “I have feelings for you.”

If Michael had not prepared for the explosion in her chest as thoroughly as she did over the past days, she would have been entirely Human in this instant.

With a small nod, Philippa asks ruefully “You?”

“So do I.”

“Do you consider this to be a problem?”

“It is not.” Despite her best efforts, her breath comes short, trembling syllables hanging on every exhale. This is not how she projected her vocal cords and diaphragm would perform when she was wandering the pearly beaches of Elafonisi with Philippa, following sea gulls as much as she was the meanderings of her plan. Forming sentences that are not monosyllabic appears close to unattainable. Their conversation is real.

Michael can devise an elaborated set-up to get Philippa to pay attention, but she loses her way at the most crucial point.

The point of desire and reality.

Thankfully, Philippa never lost them before.

“I don’t either,” she says, wonder and surprise painted on her features. “What do you want?”

Michael takes a deep breath and thinks, conscientiously, Philippa’s promising gaze not weighing heavy on her.

First, Michael wants there to be romantic feelings. Second, Philippa sees it. Third, she wants it as well. It is an odd conversation to have after all the ones they had other the years, some far more profound and vital than this one. The conclusion reached is unpretentious, as satisfying and brief as Euler’s identity.

Wanting Philippa.

Michael understands the use of the verb “want” in Earth vernaculars for the first time. She previously analysed it as an understandable flaw of Human desire, an expression of their individualism pushed to its paroxysm as the loved one becomes an object of desire. Humans want a new spaceship, power, rain, to discover new galaxies and to go home. Wanting people is debasing as it establishes a hierarchy in desire, mine over yours.
But the act of wanting unveiled a new significance of the word to Michael: assessing the intensity of her desire and measuring it with Philippa’s, not against, not for. The conclusion reached at the end of the comparison must be absolute and unrefuted: want. Otherwise it is a word for another and one might as well talk about “sampling” or “adjusting” someone.

Tonight, Michael wants Philippa, and she tells it to her.

Her silence lasts longer than considered polite given the importance of the declaration, but Michael repeated word for word the reasoning behind her reconciliation with the term, which might account for the stunned delay.

“Under the circumstances,” Philippa starts, even-voiced, “it would be foolish of me to answer that I want you too.”

She lets go of Michael’s hand and Michael is surprised to note she had been clinging to Philippa this whole time, standing before her and contemplating as she was.

“So, Michael: the measure of my feelings is a match for yours.”

Michael just about gurgles out of bewilderment, “It cannot be possibly true.”

She knows her heart and even by Human standards, this feeling imposed itself categorically, this attraction overtook her brutally, in a manner incompatible with Philippa’s nature.

“Try me.” Michael arches her eyebrows and Philippa tilts her head, defied. “No, really, Michael. Because I do like you very much, to an extent that is most inappropriate of my rank or age or even experience. But, know this: my affection is profound and earlier blindness notwithstanding, I will make this situation convenient for us both.”

Michael’s breath catches in her throat.

No…

This is not…

“I want to explore it,” Michael announces, with more confidence than urgency, which she considers a great progress given the terror she experiences.

Her practice of socializing could be described as “infrequent but edifying” and while not making her an authority on romance, it provided her with a blueprint of what gives her comfort and pleasure.

“I do not want a convenient situation as this is not a confession of guilt. I want…” She hesitates, taking in the variation on Philippa’s face. “Dating would be the suitable appellation for what I envision, but it would cast aside many years of friendship which I treasure. Please. I want to explore us, romantically, if it is not too much to ask.”

Nothing but astounded delight stares back at her and Michael has to wait seven seconds for Philippa’s warm answer, faint as a night breeze.

“It is not.”

Her eyes are glossy, trusting, tender, unbearable, and Michael seeks her composure back by lying on the deckchair beside Philippa, immediately finding guidance in the stars above.

She used to know all of them as a child, although the Alabama sky is different from this one, but she
has not visited Earth often enough to cement the memory and Vulcan’s sky has become the backdrop of her ruminations. She will correct this oversight.

“What about you?” she whispers.

“I haven’t properly dated in ages, so you are relieving me of a great deal of pressure by not labelling this anything. I will follow you anywhere, even if a map to where this is going would be nice. If you want to take your time, to discuss further, to press pause, I will understand.”

How impenetrable that someone as sharp as Philippa can fail to understand her so completely at times, but Philippa has reasons that escape Michael’s grasp as well, for now, and her very ability to love people without understanding them perfectly is one of the reasons Michael is in this spot.

Under the starlight, Michael can read every nuance on Philippa’s features, even on her profile as she gazes up: curiosity, confidence, warmth, and the rock-solid admiration that regularly leaves Michael at loss for words on her Captain. It is not such a different face from the one she wears when she announces to the bridge they are to explore a newly discovered nebula.

Turning to her, she smirks, “But I would appreciate if you follow through, because Michael, by Gods, I do want you.”

Michael lets out a low chuckle and closes her eyes to appreciate fully the drumming of her heart and the process by which she lets this deregulation happen.

“Thank you for this.” Philippa continues, the singing quality of her voice enriched by Michael’s blindness. “For your confidence. For your affection.”

“Thank you, Philippa. And now, I have no plan. This is as far as I got.”

Philippa cries out appreciatively, curbing her enthusiasm as she recalls the advanced hour.

“That’s a first,” she says in hushed tones. “Of all the shortcomings I could have sought out in you, not that there are many, incomplete mastermind was not the one I expected to find.”

No come-back answers Philippa. Michael’s body seems encased in weariness, her limbs heavy and warm; talking about feelings is more exhausting than experiencing them.

Michael listens to the night and night shifts around them, cicadas in the nearest pine tree, a distant vehicle, a window being closed, and Philippa’s silence, more calming and closer than it has ever been.

“What do we do now?” comes Philippa’s distant voice.

“We go back to the Shenzhou tomorrow,” Michael replies, snapping her eyes open at the prospect of more plans.

“There is no going back from this,” Philippa muses. No hint of regret strains her features and Michael rolls on her side to study her without getting a sore neck.

“My mother once said that steps willingly, consciously, freely taken can always be reproduced.” Memories of a face, far-away, light-bearing, brings a smile to her face. “Otherwise it means they were not freely taken. Thus, we learn to do something before doing it again.”

Philippa loudly huffs and shuffles at the edge of the chair to squint at her incredulously.
“I think we can go back from this precisely because we are enough to do it again,” Michael explains. Philippa’s face lightens up and Michael feels like pinching herself so surreal the situation is.

“Oh… You mean to say we are wiser from this, not weaker. That we are. Your mother was right.” A hand comes up to massage the bridge of her nose and she groused, “I was so bloody dumb.”

Michael puckers her brow, much to Philippa’s outrage.

“It takes two...”

“Undeniably,” Philippa draws out the first syllable, mocking. “But it suits you. If not, this vacation would not be the nightmare it has been. Gods, Michael, do you have any idea how lovely you are?”

Michael is very lucky indeed to have the stars as distraction tonight, otherwise she would never hear the end of Philippa teasing her about the thin line that must be her mouth at the moment.

She has a point, although “nightmare” is hardly the correct way to refer to the thoughts Michael has been playing with over their stay. Her dreams were gentle, as Philippa and even this acceptance came without surprise. She had travelled too far into herself during this vacation not to find something at the centre, not to come back with a certitude, positive or not, however small. Small but infinitely dense, attractive like a black hole.

“Does it mean I can now kiss you?” she breathes out, hopeful.

“We need to talk to HR first.”

Michael involuntarily lets out a whimper.

“Instant messaging exists for a reason,” she mutters under her breath.

Philippa snorts.

“Texting them won’t just settle it either, Michael. I am the Captain and you are still my First Officer. It is complicated, but it won’t deter me, I promise.”

Michael abandons flexing in the air to stay awake and sinks deeper into the chair. Her limbs are falling asleep faster than her mind and her mind has still such an extensive list of items to complete. She wants to talk about fraternization protocols, about the breakfast they have been sharing for the past years, about gifts and vacations, about sharing shifts under the watchful and inescapably judgmental eye of Saru. She wants to talk about first kisses.

As criteria go, this is not a well thought-out list.

“We should have done it sooner, sitting on the roof that is.” Michael remarks still, hypnotized by the way Philippa is combing a hand through her tresses, slowly, repeatedly. “I think more efficiently and logic is… gentle there.”

“Do not make a habit of passing me through the grinder of logic, Michael. Logic can be a cruel mistress.”

A complaint Michael cannot brush aside after the inexplicable week they had.

“Logic also led me to you, Philippa.”
“Really, how did that go? Something like you exist therefore I am yours.”

“My reasoning was significantly more complex than this.”

“Not mine.”

Michael can feel the blood rushing to her cheeks and ears, a bizarre sensation to experience on the edge of sleep, and Philippa smacks her hand across her eye in mortification.

“It isn’t clever at all. Sorry.”

Michael cannot repress a yawn this time, no matter how charmed she is.

“Okay. That’s it.” Philippa rises to her feet, nimble despite the hour and hauls Michael up. “Time to call it a night. We’ll continue this discussion later.”

They shuffle gracelessly down the narrow stairs, blinking at the crude light in the hall and bumping into each other as they head to their respective room. Michael stills with her hand on the door handle, hesitating.

What does one say in this circumstance?

*Goodnight, Philippa. Do not let this be a dream.*

She is tempted to blindly fuss, pretend she forgot something on the counter, delay looking in the direction of Philippa’s room for fear of finding it close already, but anxious, she peers over her shoulder, only to witness the same maneuvering in the adjoining doorway.

Philippa could not let go either.

Her awkward, red-handed pout is a discovery in itself.

Michael feels so wanted at this moment that walking toward Philippa and taking her in her arms seems the only logical answer. But logic does not apply tonight; she reached the end of it and of emotion somewhere along the lines of Philippa envisaging dates. Her dreams exhausted her and converting them to reality will require time and more plans. More feelings. More nights.

Tomorrow she is ready.

In the doorway to her room, Philippa nibbles her lower lip, embarrassed, but the familiar smile, physical manifestation of her constant invitation to be and enjoy, adorns her face readily.

“Don’t worry. I’ll be there tomorrow. I’ll have the same feelings. Goodnight, Michael.”
If you were waiting for the call to HR management, I am sorry to disappoint, but I'd rather take the silly, fluffy kiss and sillier roommate tropes. I hope the mutual pining was worth this one.

When Philippa wakes up, lids tickled by the sun sneaking through the blinds, she isn’t quite sure she woke up. She might have stumbled from one dream to another, engulfed as she is in delightful, lifelike details from the previous night.

Happiness, confusion, terror, all mixed.

It’s difficult not to feel dreadful for the amount of heavy lifting her friend did for the both of them while her panic was swelling. Michael’s presence and the equanimity with which she handled the conversation helped silence it for a while, a delicious while where Philippa’s heart was hanging onto her every word, reveling in what they disclose, allowed, forgave her implicitly.

She stretches with a long moan, feeling the effect of last night’s prolonged discussion on her back and neck.

As Philippa was building a case for them, in her mind gathering the strings and meanings that escaped her, Michael was building her confidence in what they could have and bringing down walls that Philippa didn’t know she had erected. Where Philippa was measured, justifiably she thought, Michael was relentless, a reversal of their natural position. Years of trying to familiarize Michael with the human ways had brought them there, yet it isn’t Philippa’s teachings that got them down that rooftops.

Michael doesn’t teach her to be more Human or Vulcan; she always goads her to be better than she is. And last night, she did, again.

Commandant Eider is probably still wondering if their conversation was not a fevered dream, but guarding Hell as he is, it comes with the job.

How extraordinary, how empowering to be important to such a woman.

Sliding out of her bed to start her morning routine, Philippa wonders if the clarity with which she recalls every single gesture and the immediacy of their interpretation is the effect of her long discussion with an exceptionally clear-eyed Michael or her going to bed without fear for the first time in days.

The face looking back at her as she brushes her teeth is the most serene it has been in a while and she witnesses herself redden at the reflection. She wasn’t even conscious of how on edge she was.

A small knock the door interrupts her thoughts and she registers only now the time given by the communicator across the room: it is well past 0900 and she hasn’t showered yet.

Cursing under her breath, she dashes into the bedroom, almost tripping on her sheets, and realises in mid-sprint toward the door that she doesn't know exactly why she needs to be running toward the
door. Freezing in the middle of the room, she instinctively raises her hands, helpless, her eyes going from the small bathroom to the door behind which Michael is waiting.

“Sorry, Michael. I am not ready yet,” she shouts, heading to the chair where her clothes are prepared. She must have done that while talking to Eider last night. “Give me five minutes and we can go.”

“Did you experience wardrobe malfunction?” comes Michael’s clear voice.

“A what? What in the world are you talking about?” Her hair is a mess in dire need of the scrunchie she left in her other pair of slacks. In a leap, she is at the cupboard where her neatly folded pants are promptly unfolded.

“Did something happen to your nightdress?” Michael calls again.

“Nightdress? I am still in my Pjs.”

“Acceptable,” Philippa thinks she catches before the door opens without a warning.

The expletive ready to be unfairly hurled at Michael dies on her lips when her eyes fall on Michael’s arms where a large tray balances precariously. Coffee, bread, butter and all fresh delicacies they would pick on the marketplace for their breakfast, plus a few novelties that Philippa would not have thought of.

“Michael?”

Her officer is standing at ease, seemingly all set for their morning trip to the marketplace, but wearing the most ridiculous elated grin Philippa ever caught on her.

“I kept us both awake last night, clarifying delicate matters that would have been better addressed after a night of rest.”

Philippa is gawking, “What?”

“I hope we can continue our discussion now—”

“No, Michael.” Philippa takes a step closer to Michael and grabs the tray from her hands, tugging until Michael releases it. “Did you go to the market and prepare this on your own?”

“Tano brought most of the food half an hour ago as a farewell present,” Michael explains, impassive, and she dives to seize a cup and fill it with coffee. ”But I did make coffee.”

“And you arranged everything on a tray because you thought you had to make up for talking to me?”

“It was an important discussion, Philippa. I heard you move around in your room well after we parted.”

The tray ends up on the bed, where Philippa is quite sure Michael won’t try to be for now.

“Yes, I did... I called the Human Ressource Management Commandant.”

Michael stills, cup hazardously clutched, arm stiffening at her side while her expression goes from surprise to relief to worry before Philippa’s failure to resume her thoughts.

“He advised against any rash decision,” Michael says, voice faint.

Bowing her head, Philippa edges closer to Michael and gently takes her below the elbow, reassuring.
“On the contrary, he took our project very seriously.”

Hearing words like “marriage” or “fraternisation exception under the cohabitee law” past 0200 turned out more daunting than asking the Federation for authorisation to ignore the prime directive, which is why in most urgent cases she bypasses asking Starfleet entirely. Yet under the circumstances, for Michael's sake, Philippa took the warnings and the derision, the reminder of the requests to file and the paperwork to fill, and at last the unexpected and a little inappropriate cheering.

But Michael doesn’t need to hear about this for now and her expression is apprehensive enough for the both of them.

“I do think we are in the clear,” Philippi clarifies, careful not to make it sound like it will be a walk in the park, “as long as we keep him updated and buried in agreements.”

Michael’s features relax immediately and a slight “Oh” escapes her lips, neither relief nor surprise.

“Are you upset?”

“No, I make sure I keep my knowledge of Starfleet policies up to date, because it is always evolving, a sign of strong and well-thought out laws, I have to concede. As a result, I was aware that given the specifics of our situations, Commandant Eider would have to grant you permission, albeit vocal only. But I...”

Her eyebrows twitch, such an infinitesimal display that Philippa could have missed it had she not been monitoring every reaction on Michael’s face.

“Michael?”

A groan, distinct, frustrated, leaves her otherwise perfectly collected countenance.

“I feel disappointment over the disclosure that your late night agitation was not the product of excitement. I must commend your ability to convert feverishness into productivity, Philippa.”

Philippa’s brain short-circuits and for a good thirty seconds she can do nothing but stare.

This is going to be a long journey home, isn’t it?

“I did not realise I left you feverish,” she utters at last.

Michael sounds and looks miffed now, “I voiced my desire to kiss you on two occasions, Philippa.”

Philippa softly laughs and walks up to her, raising a hand to brush her cheek. The gesture is not new, because Gods know what emotionally draining situations they’ve found themselves in over their time together, but it bears a different weight now, and even the pressure of her own fingers seems changed. Eyes keen, Michael leans into her touch.

“I argued for many things last night with Eider and it was on top of my list, I promise.”

“You are a tough negotiator,” Michael breathily retorts. “I can assume you won your claim.”

Philippa hums, fingers absently tracing up her cheekbones.

“I certainly won something...”

“I—“
Michael abruptly creases her forehead, troubled, and Philippa suspends her caress.

“The coffee is cold,” Michael blurts out, looking down despondently at the cup in her hand.

Philippa bites her bottom lip as Michael grumbles under her breath and drops the cup on the tray, preparing to carry everything back to the kitchen.

“Let me,” Philippa stops her and snatches breakfast from her hands. “I talk too much.”

They hurry to the kitchen, Michael a step behind her, bumping into each other like strangers huddled on a busy transporter deck. It’s an odd situation to find herself in now, suddenly so unacquainted with the body of someone she could mirror with her eyes closed that she can barely walk straight.

Michael leans against the counter, conscientiously following Philippa’s trajectory from the sink to the antique coffee machine. Her gaze on her is heavy and Philippa at last retrospectively deciphers much of the silent gazing she has been subjected to since the beginning of this vacation.

*Oh,* indeed.

Considering the panel below her palm, enthusiastically thrumming with the coldness only machines can display, she recalls the softness of Michael’s cheek moments before, the fondness of her smile, and comes to a conclusion.

“Done with carelessness,” she proclaims, turning toward Michael who promptly stands to attention. “Can I do something rash now?”

“Oh, for the love of Gods, Philippa, please do.”

Closing the distance between them in an instant, Philippa places her hands back on Michael’s face, where it seems they belong now and Michael lunges forward, blindly, eagerly. Finger on her chin, Philippa pushes back, forcing Michael to look at her in the eyes, before slowly meeting her.

Sucking a sharp breath, Michael welcomes her and presses smiling lips on hers.

It's sweet, *deliberate* unlike anything Philippa expected from Michael's earlier intensity. Philippa mostly tastes toothpaste but Michael does not seem to mind, nibbling her lip as she does. Her hands hover above Philippa’s back, her ribcage, her abdomen, never resting, making it quite apparent that she wants to touch her but isn't sure how. It is no small victory that both her hands left the secure spot at her back.

Parting, they lock eyes, equally amazed.

Philippa’s grasp slides down to her wrists, pulling her closer and Michael doesn’t have to be told twice. Something crashes into Philippa’s back, probably the fridge, but her senses are monopolized by the palms splayed across her waist and biceps, the solid pressure of Michael’s body against hers, the rhythmic excitement in her chest.

Michael, eyes closed, her long lashes trembling, catches her breath.

“It’s okay, Michael. We have time.”

Michael shakes her head, her frown a cross between strongminded and desperate.

“I have wanted to be near you for so long. I do not think I can hold you as close as I need to.”

Philippa’s chuckle feels a bit wet and she feels like cooing, “I like a challenge. We established the
need was mutual, remember.”

Michael nods, now staring at her, and a wave of wonder washes over her features.

“It is mutual.”

With an air of gravity Philippa is used to associating with quantum physics, Michael lifts her chin and captures her mouth again. As often with Michael, science induces passion and her kiss doesn’t stay reverent. Philippa answers in kind with a keening sound originating deep in her chest and shortles with joy, before deepening the kiss thoroughly.

All that pent up closeness and trust, spread across years, dissolve on their lips, in their mouth, leaving Philippa drunk. It almost feels this is a step down from their friendship, but Philippa wants to see it as a renewal, another way to take care of Michael, to give her joy.

And Michael is very much enjoying this, if the grip on the small of her back is anything to go by, but Philippa is getting dizzy, squished as she is between Michael and the fridge’s door.

“Airways, please,” she mutters against her lips, half laughing.

They break the kiss, trying to finding their footing again, their breath. Michael, up close, is spectacularly distracting. Philippa cannot find the strength to push her away and seek more room.

“Sorry.” Michael does not sound remotely apologetic. “I appreciate kissing you.”

“So I’ve noticed,” Philippa replies dryly, earning a sarcastic eyebrow raise.

The touch of Michael’s fingers comes grazing her jaw, faint, and settles at the base of her neck, making her shiver with contentment. It is good to have her so close where there is nothing Philippa cannot give her or promise her: Michael’s trust and affection are precious gifts.

“I am sorry,” she starts, wincing at her past clumsiness and stubbornness. “For everything that I missed and for my caution last night. I was…”

“Lost. You said it.”

Philippa’s hand tentatively joins Michael’s on her hip and strokes the delicate knuckles, soon seeking to interlace fingers.

“I was going to say afraid, even if I overcame it. But you did well, amazingly even. I cannot help but feel pride.”

“For outsmarting you?”

Philippa beams before answering, “For making me less afraid.”

The proud smirk on Michael’s face is worth her slightly wounded ego.

Philippa draws her for a peck on the lips, then another one, nimble, gentler, calmer, parsing out her sensations, the soft gasps and chuckles of Michael and the way their lips always seem to meet closer. She takes her time to admire Michael’s sated joy reaching the corner of her eyes, her trembling shoulders, her dancing fingertips on Philippa’s collarbone.

She is going to make her happy, whatever it takes.

*Five bloody years. She should know how to.*
With bated breaths, Michael tilts her mouth out of Philippa’s way and presses her hot temple against hers. Her hand flies to Philippa’s lips, the cool fingers startling after the warmth, and traces their shape with gentle fascination so humbling that Philippa starts shuddering under her touch.

“Something there?” Philippa exhales. “Don’t tell me I missed some toothpaste.”

“You have freckles.” It sounds like a question, her voice croaking with amazement.

“I’ll repair the skin when we’re back on the Shenzhou.”

“Don’t. I have been wanting to kiss them ever since they started appearing on your skin.”

Philippa is at loss for words.

Michael nods strenuously, lips pursed, obviously pleased with herself.

“Boldness affects you. How interesting.”

“Oh, be quiet,” she chides, elbowing Michael out of the way and turning her attention back to the coffee machine.

They still haven’t eaten that breakfast and Philippa almost wishes the food here had the power to trap Michael here for eternity. Or six months.

Six months in space, six months near the sea.

Philippa is too much in love to take away Michael from the stars.
Title from the famous first line of Joachim Du Bellay's poem XXXI from Les Regrets, which translates as "Happy the one who is like Ulysse" and recounts of the joy of going home after a long journey.

In Ovide's Metamorphoses, Alcyone and Ceyx were two lovers turned into birds after death (by sea) separated them.

Thank to nomisunrider for the help and a fair share of headcanons, such as Philippa's weak inner ear. Go read her fic, Across The Stars, it's a founding text of the pairing.

Thank you to everyone who read and commented on this silly and fluffy July adventure. I hope you enjoyed it!

As a scientist, there are a few laws that Michael takes for granted: the law of Universal Gravitation, Newton’s three principles, Einstein conservation of mass and energy, the laws of Thermodynamics, Coulomb’s and Gauss’ laws of Electrostatics and quantum mechanics.

Then, there is what she named Philippa’s law, shortly after discovering it almost six years ago.

It is a law as simple and effectual in practice as the woman’s commanding style is itself, yet sustained by a great many principles that Michael recognized were years in the making and honed in contact with the people she developed ties with. Its discovery by Michael simplified and expanded her understanding of the world the way only essential laws do. Michael finds particular pleasure in the form the applications of Philippa’s law have been taking for the past hours.

They packed, chatted, ate en route, together, with the same assurance and ease as before, but their eyes were changed, always finding each other, appreciating a mirroring anticipation and elation there, smiling with knowledge.

Yesterday marked a breakthrough; today forecasts the start of an inspiring journey.

Sitting on the deck of the Alcyone, one of the two ferries to leisurely link the island to the continent and witnessing the oblong rusty silhouette of Crete growing smaller, Michael considers with quiet astonishment her inability to experience wistfulness.

Philippa’s hand could explain it, absently outlining her knuckles in the narrow space between them as she dreamily looks out to the calm waters. It is a fitting parting view, boundless, turquoise and ever-moving, reflected on the intelligent face of her friend. A whole new world seems to have opened with her, one Michael did not suspect before, where observation becomes collaboration and waiting expands anticipation.

Excitement courses through her body, tickling the back of her brain, of her throat and Michael collects the data with as much enthusiasm as she would share her recent discovery on antimatter with Jira. However long, broad and informative this journey turns out to be, Michael will commit to enjoy
Giving flesh to desire and letting it bend reality to the extent of completion might be the most remarkable effect of love. A tingle of delight travels up her spine as she takes the measure of their proximity on the ship, how tempting it will make their time together. Temptation has its perks, when it is shared and rewarded. And enjoying rewards and making plans with someone who knows her so well, who understands her goals in life so intimately is as exciting as it is petrifying.

Is fascinating.

Something of the joy Michael is experiencing must have reached her fingers and Philippa turns her attention to her with an air of surprise. Quickly taking in Michael’s expression and the ravished look on her face, she opens her arms, an invitation at the corner of the mouth.

“If you want…”

Michael peers around the deck, almost empty at this hour of the day. However new and anomalous holding Philippa still is, the road they took to be there, etched across years, warrants any un-Vulcan readiness Michael displays so effortlessly.

“Can I?” Michael asks, enchanted, and Philippa playfully tilts her head.

“Yes, please.” Her hand taps on the back of the bench, beckoning her closer. “I have an inkling the next week will be difficult and I think we both can do with the comfort.”

Michael cannot argue with that and, with a satisfied sigh, scoots up to lean into Philippa, secure in her arm, chin resting on her shoulder.

“Do you really think Starfleet will hinder superior officers dating?”

Everybody does it remains unsaid, but neither Michael nor Philippa are everybody and what would satisfy most officers certainly will not assuage Philippa.

Her lips thin, disappearing in a contemplative line and she mulls over Michael’s question before answering.

“I think that as much as I want to be a good date, I’d rather be a good Captain, to you, to the rest of my crew. And it means taking certain measures, against me. Starfleet will make do, but you could easily be hurt by this arrangement.”

“This is by no means an arrangement,” Michael states unpretentiously. “I want to engage in a romantic relationship with you and you are currently my direct superior officer. It is within my emotional capacity to understand how the facts are incompatible and equally important to us both. No compromise is required, only a solution, efficiently applied. I have faith we can make the facts compatible, more so as we know precisely what obstacles we face.”

Philippas hums in satisfaction.

“Lena warned me when she passed down the torch that you were too sensible and stubborn for my own good.”

Michael cannot help but smile upon summoning the memory of her former Chief Science Officer and friend.

“A remarkably perceptive woman.”
Philippa’s chuckle drives Michael’s head from her shoulder and Michael settles for her chest, Philippa tilting her body to provide more comfort.

“She thought you were gunning for my chair.”

“I can do both,” Michael retorts, highbrows disappearing under her curling fringe. “I am allowed to want things for myself. Remember?”

Philippa’s hand on her shoulder slides down to her elbow to pinch her tenderly.

“You do listen when I talk about feelings! I feel like I shattered the entirety of the Vulcan culture just now.”

“Such presumption. I am at present cuddling with the revered Captain Philippa Georgiou, the admiralty’s secret weapon in peace as in war.”

Philippa harrumphs, the vibration spreading pleasantly across Michael’s frame.

“Pray tell me how high you scored in hand-to-hand combat again?” Michael dryly continues. “I believe Commander Jackrum referred to you as ‘a demon warrior with the mind of a great conqueror’.”

“I should never have introduced you to him. I won’t tell anyone, if you don’t.”

Michael readjusts her position, wedging her forehead in the crook of Philippa’s neck while her chin rests on her collarbone. Her large hat shields them from indiscreet looks, offering a provisional haven to their last moments of freedom. Just above Michael, the reflection from the water dances on Philippa’s cheekbones, her half-closed lids and peaceful lips. Peeking from under her lashes, her dark eyes study her unabashedly, adoringly, invitingly.

It takes all her willpower not to crane her neck and steal a kiss from her mouth.

“This feels nice,” Michael murmurs instead. “Optimistically, the Shenzhou will provide a more comfortable surface on which to embrace.”

Philippa chortles and a thought passes over her features, interrupting her laughter.

“What were you on about earlier with your nightdress and malfunctions?”

Michael frowns. It was not her most glorious moment and certainly not how she hoped to woo Philippa.

“I needed to make sure you were not in a state that would have embarrassed you, had I entered the room without prior notice.”

“I believe the expression you were searching for was: are you decent?”

“I had found it but did not deem it appropriate,” Michael remarks, curling her mouth when she pinpoints the comeback. “After the dress you wore last night, referring to you as decent would be illogical.”

The effects on Philippa’s hand, on her chest and profile are immediate and Michael delights in finding a well of levers to pull in light of their new connection.

“Gods, Michael,” she groans.
“Too early?”

“Rather. I really need to sit down with HRM first. You have no idea how much paperwork is waiting for us. How much…”

Her sigh is laced with apprehension, but Michael cannot help focusing on the peculiarity of feeling across her heart the sigh itself. This is what she had been seeking unknowingly, an alignment of mind and body, although not her own body. Desire truly is remarkable.

“There is no need to worry about it before the facts,” Philippa evenly says. “This is still your vacation. Katrina will have all the time in the world to moralize me later.”

“I would never have pegged you for a paper pusher when it came to your private life,” Michael reflects, following the light playing on Philippa’s hair, with her eyes only, then with reverent fingers.

“Better safe than sorry. I don’t want this to affect your brilliant career.”

“And it will not affect yours?”

“I recall a certain experiment on Ataraxi IV seven months ago when Starfleet would have beheaded me if they could. I did worse.”

“I know; I was there.”

They laugh quietly, invigorated by the reaffirmation none of this is sudden and many of the steps on the road to trust, companionship, vulnerability have already been taken and stepped upon to rise higher. Her mother was right: their relationship is solid without romance and will survive itself.

Michael would prefer if it does not have to.

“Promise me this is not some vacation experiment.”

“I would never do that to you,” Philippa whispers, squeezing her shoulder reassuringly. “If only because Eider has already prepared all the documents and is probably throwing us a party by proxy of Shockley when we come back.”

Michael raises her head from her chest and eyes her with alarm.

“A very confidential one,” Philippa rectifies, making a grimace that acknowledges this situation is not exactly preferable. “I made clear that now was not the time to test my patience over breach of confidentiality. I will rip someone’s head off before they try to undermine you for this.”

Michael frowns and lifts her chin questioningly.

“What is this?”

“Being happy.” Philippa pauses, searching for a reply on Michael’s face, and Michael reflects she will never get tired of being such a source of answers for Philippa. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen you this happy on my bridge, celestial events and scientific breakthroughs aside.”

Michael leans away from Philippa to protest, but Philippa stops her with a shake of her head.

“It’s okay. You deserve to find happiness, whatever the form, but I feel I will have to fight a few admirals and a great deal of self-esteem to ensure your smile stay this happy.”

Michael purposely straightens to be at eye level with Philippa.
“I will fight with you.”

“Of course, you will.” Philippa crooks a smile, on the rogue side of impish. “Thank you. I hope it won’t come to that. You know what they say about love and war…”

Her hand rises to rest on Michael’s cheek and starts drawing small circles above her ear, as if to soothe the excitement away and anchor the moment. Michael lets it.

Up until now, Michael could not foresee a situation in which she would have to go head to head with Starfleet and its principles. For Philippa, she can see it as clearly as the coast of Greece, its modern architecture and bustling activity over Philippa’s shoulder.

The Island, its warm tones and earthy fragrances, joyful yayás and melodious cicadas, disappeared long ago and Michael did not notice.

Still, Michael will experience a sense of nostalgia when she will look back on this brief stay in Crete. Her life at many times uncoils in front of her like a sinuous river, never straight and with falls and obstacles she rarely envisions. Falling in love with Philippa was one of them. Yet, in the process of doing so, she never imagined the experience would lend itself to a recollection as Romanesque and forthright as the holo-novels her uncle and Amanda enjoy in secret.

How absurdly mundane their confession was. How comfortingly undefinable the rest of their story will be.

In Crete it was simple, and Michael experienced many of the misunderstandings and states typical of such novels, and none of the ethical, logical and professional quandaries to expect from the reality of the situation, or to such a minimal extent it is dishonest to identify them thus. Michael truly did not care and she enjoyed it.

Philippa’s smile slopes into a wistful curve, not pained, yet mourning and Michael edges closer even.

“Philippa, you seem troubled.”

“It’s a shame we are already leaving. I would have loved to bring you on a first date here.”

Michael huffs, before regaining her spot on Philippa’s chest, near her heart, and snuggling into her more boldly. The spaceships above the coast roar louder and louder, proclaiming with fanfare that their journey has come to its end, welcoming them to a land where time passes ordinarily and space is not made of faded dreams.

To think they travelled so far on a land of stories, pushed by joy and desire only, escapes logic.

“In twelve days, we are to rescue a couple of space manatees on Darillium, the planet with a million skies. I doubt you could devise a more beautiful first date.”

Michael hears the smile in Philippa’s instantaneous retort, “Is this a challenge, Number One?”

Space is close; home closer.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!