They'd call us star-crossed (If they called us at all)

by HanaSheralHaminai

Summary

He plucked a star from the sky and gave me back the sun

In which Spock has to come to terms with the terrible loss of his entire planet and Jim does his best to help him heal.

This is the story of how they came to be what they are - the best Command team in the Fleet - and how they found the strength and courage to trust each other completely. The story of the birth of t'hy'la.
Hello and welcome to this hellfic!

In which Jim and Spock slowly build a tentative relationship while stationed on New Vulcan before they are given the Enterprise and Spock is suffering so much but trying desperately not to let it show and Jim helps him through it but then Into Darkness happens and everything goes to hell?

I hope you enjoy it!! The only warning is... there's going to be a lot of grief. But by now you know that I'll never leave a story without a happy end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I was just guessing at numbers and figures

Pulling your puzzles apart

Questions of science, science and progress

Do not speak as loud as my heart
“C’mon, sir, you know I’m right.”

Kirk was pacing inside his mentor’s office, cadet uniform in disarray and eyes shining with a feverish light that betrayed his focus and his resolve; the uncharacteristically grim line of his mouth was, perhaps, the most glaring evidence of the tragedy he had barely survived, and his willingness to overcome it.

“I’m sorry, Jim, but I don’t understand,” Pike said, steepling his fingers over his desk. “I thought you hated the guy.”

Sunlight streamed in from the open window and spring approached, a rich, colourful spring that smelled like pollen and tasted like strawberries. The Academy’s gardens seemed to tremble in anticipation, the trees growing lush and tall and strong as bird after bird collected on their branches; their sweet songs of mating filled the air.

Still, though the sky was a bouquet of forget-me-nots and there was not a cloud in sight, a darkness seemed to linger over the campus: one that did not let the festive mood into the buildings and spoke of mourning, of loss.

A week after the Narada incident Starfleet had yet to regroup; wounded in its very core and felled by the loss of one of Federation’s founding planets, it seemed to waver in its very purpose as an organisation – a defence system that should serve to prevent such catastrophes as the one that had just been consumed.

But Starfleet had failed – they all had.

Jim stopped finally in his aimless wandering, planting his palms flat on the desk. “I don’t hate Spock,” he said slowly. “I just don’t.”

He couldn’t. Not after everything that had happened – not after he’d met Spock the Elder, not after he’d shared his thoughts, his memories… his pain and the love from which it spilled. He understood him, better than he wished to, and with understanding there could be no hate. There was sympathy. Admiration. Maybe even trust.

“Oh, please, Jim, be serious.” Pike rubbed his thumb and index finger against his temple, leaning back into his wheelchair. “The two of you have never seen eye to eye and since the Kobayashi Maru it’s gotten even worse. It’s actually painful to watch.”

Kirk shook his head quickly, raked his hand through his hair. “New Vulcan needs the best defence technology the Federation has to offer, and you know I can work the coding.”

“I already assigned Spock to that position,” the soon-to-be-Admiral repeated wearily, “And you still have three exams to take.”

The cadet carelessly waved the notion away. “I can manage,” he insisted. “And Spock and I can share.”

“Commander Spock is perfectly capable of working alone,” Pike objected, though he knew, deep down, that there was no swaying the boy now that he had made a decision. But he had to try, or he would have nothing to say to Spock when he came whining to him because he assigned the genius troublemaker to his post. “And he won’t welcome your interference.”
“I think he could use the help,” Jim said vaguely. He fished an energy bar from one of his pockets, opened it, ate it in two bites. “Besides, it would be a… formative experience for the both of us. I know how you value those.”

Pike let out a humourless laugh. “Just tell me why – the real reason – and the job’s yours.”

Kirk smiled. He took his sweet time answering, pondering what he should and should not reveal about the things he had seen in future Spock’s past. Possibilities and what-ifs merged in his mind, the image of the best crew Starfleet had to offer, led by an unconventional, dauntless command team, a Vulcan First Officer and a Human Captain…

“Could be the start of the greatest friendship in the century,” he finally said, not entirely losing the hint of mockery in his tone. His gaze was, however, terse. Honest. “Look, I’ve never asked for favours. And I wouldn’t, I really wouldn’t, but I need to do this. And I think Spock… does too.”

“Very well.” Pike pushed away from his desk, turned towards the window, to the cadets filing quietly across the grounds. Their movements were stilted, subdued, the reds of their uniforms dimmed somehow. “But if you break him, I’m gonna give you hell, understand? Be nice.”

“Yessir!” Jim cheerfully agreed, jumping up from where he’d sat on the one hard chair.

“And try to get on T’Pau’s good side while you’re at it.”

Those blue eyes of his lit with mischief then. “Aw, don’t worry about that, sir. Vulcans just love me.”

Spock winced from the pain resonating through his mind.

New Vulcan was truly a suitable planet on which to establish a colony of survivors – his counterpart had been right, of course. It had taken the young Science Officer one point sixteen seconds to establish that. Its star was close enough that the heat it gave off closely resembled that Nevasa used to grant the mother planet before it was destroyed. The air was dry, comforting, and carried 104% of the oxygen his people required to breathe well.

A perfect replacement indeed.

But it had three moons that poked their curves behind sparse clouds, and no T’Khut. Vulcan’s sister planet still orbited 40 Eridani A, no longer watching but mourning the loss of its companion, so fresh, so entirely… unbelievable.

Even if it was etched in the faces of the survivors, even if it bled from the damaged web of bonds that linked them all. Spock felt the pain in his mind more keenly than he would have felt a flesh wound. He had raised powerful barriers against it, shielded himself from the consequences facing it would have brought, and yet he remained unable to ignore it completely.

It had been eleven days since reconstruction had begun; a city was starting to form, and all of the ten thousand refugees had already received housing. Hospitals had been built, and a learning facility from which to base a network of support for the young ones. Now the Vulcan Science Academy – the very heart of their culture, the source of their knowledge and prestige – had to be restored.

Spock had been called upon to aid and observe the process, amongst other things.

He knew his assigned quarters were located close to the very centre of the as-of-yet-unnamed
capital of the Confederacy of Surak. As he walked across the city he tried his best not to let anything about it (how empty it was, the way it looked like a skeleton, a dead thing left to rot, how nothing looked the way it should) shatter his composure – he had not expected he would have such a destabilising reaction to the sight of the colony.

It was logical, was it not, to be grateful that despite everything a beginning was possible. That there was a chance, however slim, for survival. That life could go on even without the very world that had brought it into existence, that wounds could be mended and bonds could be sealed, that the end had been postponed no matter that they’d stared it in the face a little over two weeks before.

There was logic in that, so why was it so difficult for him to accept?

Why was it so difficult for him to face the facts – the truth of what had befallen his planet, his mother – why couldn’t logic be enough?

He allowed his emotions the meagre outlet of one brief sigh, squared his shoulders and pushed any thoughts of the Narada, of Nero and Amanda and death, *so much death how could it be*, from his mind. At least he attempted to.

The building he was to reside in for the next 29 days and a half was plain, essential, and reminded him of the *Enterprise* in its swift lines and minimalistic approach. For some reason, he found the similarities soothing.

When the doors slid open after he keyed in his entrance code, a wave of warmth enveloped him, along with the scent of tea – *Vulcan tea*. For the fraction of a second, he could envision his mother waiting nearby, wearing that human smile of hers which brought a flush of pink on her cheeks. And then it was gone, and he was left to stare wide-eyed at the cadet who stood grinning before him.

“Hi there,” James Kirk said brightly. “They told me you’d be arriving just about now. Ever the punctual one, aren’t you?”

He handed him a hot cup which Spock took automatically, blinking through his confusion as he attempted to gather his bearings. Perhaps he had been given the wrong address? “What are you doing here?” he asked, far too thrown for useless terran pleasantries.

“Starfleet sent me to help with the reconstruction,” Kirk explained with a shrug. He stepped back, giving him some space, and flopped down on a cushion that had been haphazardly left on the floor by a low desk. Again, he smiled at him. “And they decided to have us share quarters, which, hell, I definitely didn’t ask for, but they must have their reasons, right?”

Spock looked down at his tea, then at the human’s quirked lips, and finally at the messy state the room was in. “Get out,” was all he said. “Get out, now.”

The cadet chuckled, not at all offended by the Vulcan’s harsh words. “If you need some time to adjust, I can head out for a while, but this is where I’ll be for the next month.”

“Twenty-nine days and a half.”

In an effort at overcoming his distaste for the situation he’d been forced in, Spock stepped forth, tiptoeing across the various items in his way until he stopped to stand by the table. Kirk smiled up at him. It was a surprisingly gentle expression.

“I can make you dinner if you’re tired,” the human offered, sliding back to his feet in a fluid motion. “I brought some fresh greenies from San Francisco.” When he was met with the
disbelieving arch of a slanted eyebrow, he snorted quietly under his breath and gestured to the adjacent room. “You can come watch me if you don’t trust me.”

“That would not be an issue,” Spock said, out of politeness and because he really did not know how to react to this abrupt change in demeanour the brash, unruly cadet who had managed to save an entire world had undergone. “I still do not understand why you are here.”

“Ask Pike,” Kirk told him with a shrug and a vaguely unnerving grin. “I’m making lasagna. Do you want me to make it vegetarian or not?”

Closing his eyes for point seven seconds to collect the jagged ends of his control, Spock nodded. “Yes, please,” he murmured, deciding he did not care enough to debate the unfortunate arrangement Kirk ultimately had no jurisdiction over. What is, is.

“All right, I’ll be done in an hour. We can eat together, I’ll tell you what’s been going on in the past couple of days.” The wide blue eyes were full of warmth and welcome, and the Vulcan was utterly thrown, especially upon realising that he had, in fact, unwound against his better judgement. “Bathroom’s down the corridor to the right, your room is to the left. I opened the window a couple hours ago so the air would change.”

“Thank you,” Spock said sincerely, picking up his bag from where he’d set it on the floor. He had very few personal possessions left, anyway.

“Feel free to raise the temperature if you want,” Kirk added.

The Vulcan bit at his lower lip to keep his astonished reply in check – the cadet was already wearing a threadbare t-shirt and very light sweatpants, and it was no secret how dire the desert climate was on his delicate species. That he would make such an offer regardless… “I do not believe that will be necessary.”

“Okay, so I’ll see you in a few. If you need anything, let me know.”

“I shall.”

Spock doubted he would ever ask Jim Kirk of all people for help, but it was with a suffused sense of well-being – or perhaps a simple receding of his restlessness – that he crossed his quarters and turned to readying himself for the month to come.

He reported to the VSA the next morning.

He’d risen early, far earlier than any human would, and had forgone both meditation and breakfast in order to avoid interacting with Kirk; for some reason he did not wish to examine, he couldn’t bear to face his optimistic mood, or the warmth in his sparkling eyes. It would feel like betrayal, to give in to such undeserved welcome.

Instead, he walked into the ghost city, leaving the inhabited area for what was to become the town-centre, but for now was still in construction. Dawn painted the sky white, and the new-born rays of the sun washed the buildings of their colours, forcing long shadows out of the people and machines overseeing the site.

It had been agreed that these structures would be built according to the ancient customs, so as to retain what they could of their lost past – Spock feared it was capricious, wasting time and energy in duplicating the archaic ways when so much was still left to do, but he understood the need.
The best and fastest computers had been installed in what would become the new VSA; since he had been the one to plan and enhance the latest update in the technology, it was logical that he should tend to it. If a defence system was to be devised, the computers could not fail.

From the bare windows in front of his station, the young Vulcan could just make out the sharp profile of the still-empty Embassy. It was nothing like the palace he’d grown up in, even though there were few visible differences. But it had never been so silent – bereft.

He would have to see his father soon; he should have gone to visit him already. After all, neither Sybok nor Michael were anywhere to be seen, and as for Amanda… Spock was keenly aware of the loss of her presence – of the severed link he could not stem. He was Sarek’s only family now.

Procrastinating on their meeting as he had done was most un-Vulcanly of him. But how could he face him after he’d failed so utterly and completely?

After he’d let mother die?

Berating himself his loss of focus, Spock returned to his work, to the complex simplicity of circuits and coding and formulas, to the safety of logic and easily-attainable knowledge.

As he absent-mindedly corrected the faults in the machinery’s circuitry so it would draw less power while maximising its performance, he contemplated his predicament, the absurd twists of chance that had brought him back at the Science Academy when all he’d ever desired was to flee it.

Three other scientists sat in the barren room with him; no words were exchanged because none were needed. In his blue Starfleet uniform, Spock stood out as other, alien in the very home he was trying to restore. But then again, if he’d stayed on Vulcan instead of joining the fleet, the odds were he would have certainly died during the Tragedy.

There was a strange loneliness about the place – the kind he had rarely felt, though he had been acquainted with many other types, a loneliness that was more than the absence of companions and kinship, more than a need for understanding. It reminded him of earth’s oceans: infinite, inscrutable, dangerous in its sheer power and cold in its frightening depths.

He was surrounded by others, and yet.

Spock shook his head – the ghost of a movement, in truth, unnoticed by those who were not paying attention – trying to banish the chill from his mind; he knew, theoretically, that it was nothing but the after-effect of the shock having so many bonds abruptly cut-off had given him; he knew, theoretically, that it was to be expected, and given time and treatment it would come to fade and perhaps pass altogether. He knew this.

But never had theory and practice seemed so distant to him.

He itched for contact – experienced the ridiculous urge to share, to speak, to scream; longed for a welcoming presence, as welcoming as Kirk had been the night before. And still he found himself repulsed by the very idea of letting another witness his grief, of showing the naked weakness of emotionality.

It was… confusing to say the least.

The air was tense and heavy with the vibrations of a planet’s sorrow, a planet’s death. As with all things that survived, the k’war’ma’khon had strengthened, changed: and where once had been an endless network of quiet links, now stretched scattered strands of screaming disbelief.
As the computer churned out data on soil composition, on flora and fauna and medium temperatures, Spock drew a chart of all the things that had yet to be investigated upon, and another comparing Vulcan and New Vulcan’s figures, wondering if it was at all possible to restore the endangered species or if they were condemned to extinction.

He sighed softly.

Jim lay on the floor, half-buried under a pile of computer components and circuits; he snapped them together with practised ease, only occasionally glancing at the Padd that displayed his current project.

As per Starfleet’s instructions, the Vulcans had left him to his own devices, trusting the elder who had so graciously offered to supervise his progress, and who now sat cross-legged beside him.

“I understand you are living with Spock?” he asked, gentle as with everything he did or said. His lined hands flew over the machinery, but his eyes were fixed on the human’s face and carried nameless emotions he would likely never share.

Kirk flashed him a glance. This Spock was as different from his own as water was from desert sand; a kind presence, sharp intellect tempered by compassion and a profound sense of empathy that seemed to give him a special understanding of all that was alive. Even now that grief tainted the warmth of his gaze there was quiet in his movements and care in his actions.

Jim thought of the young Vulcan with whom he was sharing his quarters – how he kept sneaking out so early in the morning every day since he had arrived, how he always went out of his way to avoid interaction, how he shied away from any friendly gesture Kirk tried to offer… Restless and pained, he was haunting in the desperate control he barely held around the looming void.

Well acquainted with that ugly void that came after so great a loss, the human worried.

“Yeah, I’m living with him alright,” he said, smiling at the elder when he leaned closer to inspect a particularly convoluted line of coding. He accepted the correction graciously, then cleared his throat. “And he’s just about ready to snap.”

For a moment, Spock merely looked at him. Jim wondered whether the Vulcan was going to reveal something of importance to him, and his mind instantly flew back to the one meld they had shared, the impact it had had on him.

“Was it wise of you to make such arrangements?”

The unexpected question gave the human pause. “I think so,” he told him slowly. “He could use the company, anyway.” When the elder offered him no immediate reply, he decided it was worth it to prod a little for answers. “You know, that look of his… I’ve seen it before,” he ventured.

Spock nodded gravely. “I know, Jim. And I trust your judgement.”

Leaning his hands heavily on his knees, the old Vulcan pushed himself up from the floor and went back to sit on his chair. Kirk heard a light sound of cracking joints, drowned in the soft shuffling of heavy traditional robes. The elder picked up a Padd and crossed his legs, scribbling quickly on the receptive surface as images danced around it.

The human had stopped in his tracks and turned to him, staring fixedly. “You’d be the first, then,” he said flatly.
Raising his head of neat grey hair so he could meet his stunned gaze, Spock let his lips curve upwards. He raised an eyebrow as if daring Kirk to contradict him, then said, slowly and clearly: “My trust is justified.” A hint of amusement entered his tone. “It is the others who are wrong, of course.”

Jim snickered. “Of course.” For a moment they shared a strangely familiar, private little joke. The elder’s eyes sparkled in delight, and the human revelled in the easy complicity he was presented with. “Seriously, though. How can you know I’m like him? You know, the other me?”

Perhaps it was for the tentative way he’d asked, or perhaps he detected the hint of self-doubt – insecurity – that threatened to resurface in the casual tone he’d wrapped the question in, but the elder did not shut down like he did every time the late Admiral was mentioned. Instead, he stood and went to touch the very tips of his fingers to the human’s shoulder.

Kirk froze. There was more meaning in the delicate brush of those slightly trembling fingers than in the countless hugs and kisses he’d received throughout his life.

“You forget that I have seen your mind, Jim.”

Looking up at the earnest expression painted on the Vulcan’s face, the human felt words elude him. A part of him wished to know what the elder had shared with the Jim that had been his Captain and friend… But in truth, he realised he wished his own Spock would trust him so, rely on him, offer comfort and expect it in return.

Shaking his head a little, he returned to his coding, and the elder’s touch faded away. Still, the thought stuck to the back of his mind.

The desert was eerily silent that evening, the only sound the soft passing of Spock’s boots into the sand as he walked steadily towards nothing.

As per usual, he’d stayed at the VSA long after completion of his duties strictly required, burying himself under the familiar weight of work and logic so his mind would not wander to paths it should avoid. But there was only so much he could do in one day, and even Vulcans saw merit in rest…

So he’d fled to the only place that had ever brought him peace.

A light, warm wind blew over his face and the last rays of the sun danced about his figure, painting shapes all over his Starfleet uniform. He would have looked up at the sky, at the new-born stars coming to life one after the other, but he did not dare.

He did not dare stare at a universe he had loved only to see it dull and barren and faded.

Russet sand rose around his feet in a poor imitation of clouds, and he studied the patterns the grains drew for lack of something better to do. New Vulcan’s desert was magnificent, a rich stretch of soft shades of red and yellow, and the plants scattered over the surface were sturdy and sweet-smelling.

No doubt he would have been most enthusiastic about exploring its width, had the circumstances been different.

But he was no more interested in exploring as he was in returning to his quarters, where Cadet Kirk would be, pestering him with amiable questions and demanding he ate and offering a kindness he most definitely did not deserve.
Colours blurred around him as he kept walking forward.

Everything was different – at that point he would have welcomed a le-matya, come to tear his flesh to pieces, for it would have meant that not all was lost, that his actions, his life had had meaning and purpose and logic. But there were no big predators on this planet so far from home. Only poisonous plants and hard-shelled insects and the silvery light of those three moons whose glare Spock was most afraid of meeting.

He bowed his head and tried to see nothing but the grains of sand.

“Reconstruction is going well,” James Kirk had told him. “It’s going to be alright.”

**Going to be alright.** It frightened him how ridiculous that notion sounded. Reason failed him in the face of the Tragedy, and the Philosophies upon which he had based his entire self were crumbling, just like Vulcan had under the irresistible pull of Red Matter, and he felt as if the black hole had been opened into his mind, too, and not only in the heart of his planet.

There had been times when he’d come to hate it fiercely, as a child and teenager growing up shunned by society, warring with himself and the two conflicting worlds of his parents, constantly faced with the horrible choice between the two, never at home except alone in the desert under the distant eyes of the stars.

Now there was only guilt.

If he hadn’t resented Vulcan so much, would he have given it more in its time of need? Sacrificed more?

Had he lacked in caring? Had he lacked in humanity? Had he lacked in logic?

A moment of hesitation on his part – no matter how brief – was all it took for his mother to die.

Slowly he let himself sink to his knees, laid down into the sand. Pressed against its heat that enveloped him like a blanket, he closed his eyes and let himself believe that it was home.

The wind brushed above him, threw countless burning grains against his face, and he welcomed the sting, sunk his hands into it. Maybe, if he allowed his mind to open, pool away from him and into the desert, the pain would go too, pass into the sand and the rocks below and the molten centre of this foreign planet that made a refugee out of him.

Maybe he, too, would become sand, crushed into a million insignificant shards of nothingness as the mountains had been before.

Maybe then he would not have to listen to the broken bonds screaming endlessly for a help that would never come.

He did not know how much time passed in that fashion. The air cooled a little around him – not as much as it did on Vulcan – and insects shuffled nearby, but he drowned their noise out, lost in this extreme kind of meditation that called for the relinquishing of one’s self.

He became nothing. Nothing…

And then, after this muffled silence that was like existing underwater, a touch.

A hand pressed against his shoulder, shaking it.
A warmth seeping into his skin through his uniform, a strong hold that refused to be deterred.

“Spock?”

His name, called firmly and in worry.

“Spock, are you alright?”

He looked up and met a pair of striking blue eyes. The fingers curled around his shoulder tightened their grip for but an instant, then let go, their heat leaving behind an imprint long after they were gone.

“Spock?”

Kirk’s voice was gentle as he crouched down in front of him, his expression open, welcoming. Again, undeserved. “What’s wrong? Did you faint or something?”

The Vulcan barely raised his head to meet his unwavering gaze, but it was too much to bear, that bare strength pouring from the human’s mind and crashing against the telepath’s shields. He returned to staring at the blood-red sand and contemplated the lie he was about to tell.

“I am in optimum health, Cadet Kirk.”

Scoffing lightly – his breath fanned damp against Spock’s left cheek and he drew back instinctively – Kirk presented him with a frown that terrans were fond of referring to as ‘pouting’. “You know you can call me Jim, right?”

Having heard such a request from him precisely seventeen times in the past eight days, the Vulcan merely nodded. “There was no need for you to come all this way.”

Perhaps he should have been more annoyed at Kirk’s interruption, at the gross breach of social mores he had committed in touching him without permission, but the human’s concern was genuine, and it enveloped him pleasantly. It was a tender intrusion, washing over his mind like water that bloomed in the heart of a prosperous oasis.

Curious. Compelling. Possibly frightening too.

“I think there was,” Kirk kindly argued. He got up to his feet in a surprisingly graceful motion, then offered him his hand. “I won’t ask, so don’t bother coming up with a lie as to what, exactly, you were doing face-down into the sand.”

“Vulcans do not lie,” Spock lied. He studied the cadet for nearly a full minute, wondering how to refuse his offer politely – was he expected to touch fingers with him? Was the human this ignorant of Xenobiology? Could he know the meaning of such contact?

He extended his arm slowly, wanting to see what Kirk would do and ready to snatch it back promptly should the need arise; his eyes widened when the human grabbed him just above the wrist, carefully avoiding his skin as he pulled him up with little effort.

They stood, close enough that the Vulcan could easily count the freckles the desert sun had scattered about the golden face and the evanescent flecks of darker blue in those cerulean eyes.

“I think we should go home.”

There is no home.
Kirk turned, walked away. After a moment of hesitation, Spock followed.

Nobody said it was easy

It's such a shame for us to part

Nobody said it was easy

No one ever said it would be this hard

Oh take me back to the start

- Coldplay, 'The scientist'
Chapter End Notes

So... If y'all liked this first chapter, please drop a hint of your presence! I'd really love it!
The Subdued

Chapter Summary

In which Spock finds himself endlessly fascinated by Jim, which is good because it means he occasionally thinks of something that isn't the destruction of Vulcan. Suppressing the pain so he can forget about it seems like the most logical option - is it though?

Also, Sarek makes an appearance to wreak havoc with his questionable parenting skills.

Chapter Notes

I'm so super happy for the support chapter 1 has gotten! Thank you all so much!! I hope you keep on enjoying this story!

This chapter is slightly less angsty than the first. Marginally so, mind you. But there's lots more of Jim and Spock interaction so that's definitely a bonus, right? Unquestionably.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2

The Subdued

Is this the place we used to love?

Is this the place that I've been dreaming of?

Oh, simple thing, where have you gone?

Cadet Kirk was a most fascinating individual, Spock decided.

In their years at the Academy, he had never bothered to get to know him better, so to say, even though he had experienced a brief bout of curiosity when he’d examined the eventful records that so strikingly clashed with his stellar grades. He had heard enough of the cadet’s reputation that steering clear of him and his circle of friends had seemed like the only logical option at the time – but he was starting to believe that such reputation was wildly exaggerated, even undeserved.
Nyota had a very low opinion of him, and since she was Spock’s closest acquaintance – dare he name her friend? – on Earth, he had taken that opinion to heart, and fully supported her in her dislike of him. It was also true, however, that after his sloppy advances had been once rejected, Kirk had not repeated them and had always been respectful of her boundaries.

Again, they might have been mistaken about him.

“May I inquire something of you?” Spock asked one evening as they sat in front of a disassembled computer. Pieces of machinery littered the floor around them like casualties from a war, and the other Vulcans working that late into the night avoided their general area as if afraid they’d catch their chaotic ways.

When he looked up at him from where he was lying supine on the floor, Kirk’s expression was earnest, his lips curved into a bright smile. “Sure, fire away.”

Carefully ignoring both the colloquial phrase and the strange, tingling warmth pooling into his chest for some reason best left ignored, Spock fixed his gaze on the open circuits he was assembling. “Why did you cheat on the Kobayashi Maru?” he slowly asked.

Laughter fell chiming from the human’s mouth. The Vulcan glanced at him, ready to rebuke him for not taking the question seriously, but something held him back. Perhaps it was the sheer absence of malice in Kirk’s voice, the clean honesty he radiated.

“I did not cheat,” the cadet said over what was left of his chuckle. He flipped his body so he was now lying flat on his stomach, stretched his free arm forwards and fit it with some difficulty in the risible space between the torn-down computer and the floor. In one quick motion he had removed the lowest panel, allowing for an easier access to the heart of the machinery.

He returned to Spock, smirking a little when he saw the surprised admiration filling his face. “I told you. I don’t believe in no-win scenarios,” he added, taking the Padd from him to examine the plans they had devised together the night before – and again the Vulcan had been taken aback at how stimulating it had been to work with Kirk.

Regret was illogical, but he found himself regretting not having approached the human earlier. For purely intellectual reasons, of course: it was not every day that he found someone who could challenge him so completely, and the cadet’s line of reasoning was truly captivating, a curious mix of inspiration, academic knowledge, intuition and logic. Yes, even logic.

Spock had been thrown.

“I do not understand,” he admitted. He snapped two wires together, twisting them so they were safely out of the way of the rest that had yet to be fixed. Kirk insinuated his right hand underneath the Vulcan’s wrists to better reach a burnt cable; though the human clearly took care not to touch skin, Spock’s eyes immediately fell on those dexterous fingers, following their practiced movements as the cadet replaced the ruined band with a new one.

Pulling himself up on his knees, the Vulcan threw his head back to examine the dead screens; perhaps something had gone wrong with the liquid crystals. He ran an analysis with his tricorder to check whether both polarizing screens were still operative, and found that the horizontal one had become almost completely neutral.

He looked around for the Polariser. Before he could even think about asking for it, Kirk let the instrument fall into his hand. “Here, need this?” he quipped, without even raising his eyes from his work.
Spock blinked. That was... unexpected. But of course James Kirk was a highly intelligent individual, and he had probably merely predicted the Vulcan’s next logical move and acted accordingly.

Shaking himself from his musings so he could concentrate, Spock decided to return to the subject at hand. “You cannot deny that no-win scenarios exist,” he observed, running the instruments over the surface of the screens; a soft beeping sound filled the quiet. “There are fights that cannot be won.”

It was only when the image of his mother plunging to her death filled his mind that he realised he had not thought about the Tragedy for more than sixteen hours – he had been too absorbed in his research and in the mystery that was Jim Kirk.

The cadet raised both eyebrows at him. “That depends.”

“Depends on what?” Spock insisted.

“On how much you’re willing to sacrifice,” was Kirk’s ready reply. He jumped back up into a sitting position, brushing non-existent dust from his clothes, and offered the Vulcan a very grave expression. “It’s a matter of balance, of price and prize.”

Sensing there was a lot hidden behind that simple sentence but still unwilling to interrogate the human further, Spock settled for pointing out neutrally: “It is not logical to sacrifice more than what is to be gained.”

“Yes, but it’s a subjective choice.”

The Vulcan arched his eyebrow and pursed his lips. “A Captain cannot be subjective,” he said, observing as Kirk disentangled a dozen ruined wires and plugged them back to where they belonged. “They are responsible for the lives of their crew, and possibly the lives of the people they encounter during their voyages.”

“That’s true.” The cadet yawned into the crook of his neck, shook his head like a sehlat. He got up, walked to the replicator in the corner of the room and punched in a code. As he walked to and back, every Vulcan turned to glance at him briefly, and Spock felt the corners of his lips curl up in amusement.

Smiling as if he’d caught that ghost of expression on the Science Officer’s face, Kirk went to sit cross-legged by his side. He passed him a cup of hot tea, which he accepted gladly.

He had grown accustomed to such spontaneous kindness on the human’s part, but he still couldn’t fathom the reasons behind it.

“You said the Kobayashi Maru’s purpose is to evaluate how one reacts in the face of defeat, of certain death,” the cadet told him quietly. “But it’s only a simulation. The most you can be afraid of is failing it.”

“One should always give their best regardless.”

“It’s easy to give your best when you’re sitting in a simulator at the Academy.”

“Starfleet cannot endanger its cadets for the sake of an exam,” Spock sharply rebuked him. “We cannot devise a real tragedy just so they can prove themselves.” A shiver passed down his spine at the very thought. “But perhaps you believe that the Kobayashi Maru should be beatable?”
Kirk shook his head. “I believe that you can’t predict how a person will behave in a crisis,” he said. For the first time since they’d met, he lowered his eyes, staring off and away, as if afraid his gaze – always so transparent – would give too deep an insight into his mind. Intrigued, Spock leaned forward, just enough that he could still catch a glimpse of piercing blue.

The cadet heaved a sigh. “That it is only when faced with the real thing that we’ll see if they rise above expectations or fail.” His voice was lower, tone carefully controlled. “And when they fail, then it’ll be too late for an evaluation.”

Spock had a passing thought that Kirk could be a perfect Vulcan if he wanted to.

“I am aware of that fact,” he replied, conceding. “The aim of the Kobayashi Maru is to evaluate a Captain’s ability to use all the knowledge they possess in order to minimise casualties and losses.” He cocked his head to the side, choosing his words carefully. “The way they interact both with their subordinates and a potential enemy.”

Nodding his agreement, Kirk set his empty cup of coffee on the floor. “I’m not saying the Kobayashi Maru should be beatable,” he explained slowly, “I’m saying it shouldn’t be unbeatable.”

Somehow, Spock understood the difference – the difference between death and survival, between the destruction of an entire planet and the reconstruction that must follow, between wounding and healing. But Starfleet had been broken, and the lives and cultures and cities and histories that had been wiped away by Nero would never return.

They had faced their no-win scenario already, and they had lost.

“It is only logical to test the worst possible case set-up.”

Jim Kirk’s smile was truly something to behold. “You know, one thing a Captain should never lose is hope.”

“Hope?”

Their eyes met, held. There was such gentle compassion in the human’s gaze. Spock looked away.

“Yes. Hope is what enables us to go on,” Kirk said firmly, placing both hands on the floor, towards the Vulcan, as if reaching for him, determined to convince him. “Hope is what sent us to the stars in the first place.”

Spock’s lashes fluttered as he blinked repeatedly, trying to absorb the sudden fiery passion directed his way. “I shall… consider it,” he murmured, watching a grin spread across the human’s face. “Hope.”

And for that, Jim Kirk thanked him cheerfully and clapped his shoulder.

Again, the touch left an imprint on his skin. It was warm.

Jim yawned widely, stretching a little into the chair he had dragged in the living room he shared with Spock. It was hard, it was uncomfortable, and he was tired – he slid down to the floor, crossing his legs and closing his eyes. Just for a moment, he told himself.

He had been studying for something like nine hours straight, and the letters were starting to blur together, losing meaning and purpose in the face of his exhaustion. Well, he had no one else to blame but himself – those three exams he had left were the bane of most Starfleet students, and he
had decided to skip revision in favour of working at the VSA’s computers…

He was blissfully dozing off when the sound of light footsteps caused him to jump back to awareness. Collecting his limbs into a slightly more presentable sprawl, he stared blearily up at Spock, who was peeking his head sideways from the door.

“May I?” he asked politely, as if he didn’t live there too. With his wide eyes and pointed ears, he looked like a lost cat, and Kirk fought the urge to laugh.

“Sure,” he said, gesturing vaguely at the pillows piled around the low table. “I’m sorry, did I wake you?”

“I do not require sleep at this time,” the Vulcan replied in the evasive tone he used when he was hiding something. Crossing the room in clean strides, he went to stand by the open window, into the cone of silver light that poured from the sky. He glared at the three moons and since his hands trembled, he balled them into tight fists. For a moment he was still, then in a sharp, abrupt motion he grasped the curtains and drew them, shutting the world out.

Jim watched in silence as Spock turned his back to the window, walked slowly to the nearest pillow, dropped down on it in a kneeling position; pale fingers came up to press forcefully against his temples, and the Vulcan shivered, hiding his emotions well but not his pain.

“Do you have a headache?” Kirk asked in a low voice, inching closer to him out of instinct and concern.

Spock swallowed and took a deep, steadying breath. When he spoke, there was no trace of feeling on his face and even the tense lines of his back had softened – and Jim wondered at the effort it must have taken, at the grief and confusion and weariness trapped beneath the pretence of relaxation and quiet…

“I am quite alright, Mister Kirk,” he said. “You are, however, human. Should you not be sleeping at this time? It is 3:13 in the morning.”

Kirk smiled. “Would it kill you to call me Jim?”

“I do not believe so, Jim,” the Vulcan murmured. It was the first time he had caved: that night it seemed he was too worked-up to fight him. “Though I do not understand why you insist this much.”

Laughing openly, the human reached into a velvet bag and produced two brightly coloured lollipops. “I insist because we’re friends, Spock, and we live together.”

Spock blinked. For a moment it looked as though he wanted to refute the statement, but his eyes softened, the ghost of a smile passed over his lips and he offered a nod. “Indeed. Jim.” He extended his hand, palm up. “Could I have one, please?”

“Yeah, they’re sugar-free,” Kirk said, surprised and delighted that the Vulcan would care for so silly a treat. He offered him the blue lollipop with a flourish. “There you go, sweetheart.”

Half-way to raising the candy to his mouth, Spock froze. “This is the fifth time you refer to me as sweetheart. Why is that?”

Embarrassed, Jim scratched the back of his head, messing up his already unruly hair. “Uh, sorry about that,” he hastened to say. “I picked it up from Bones – you know, Doctor McCoy? If it bothers you I’ll stop, no hard feelings.”
The Vulcan sucked absentmindedly at the treat. “It does not bother me,” he eventually decided. “You may continue.”

Kirk chuckled lively, then flopped down on the floor, occupying three pillows at once; Spock arched an eyebrow in clear disapproval, but the cadet ignored him in favour of collecting his Padds. “To answer your earlier question… I’m still awake cause I have to study.”

Curious, the Vulcan picked up his own cushion and settled closer, reading over his shoulder. “I do not believe this is a healthy course of action,” he pointed out.

Jim’s customary grin grew wider. “It never is,” he intoned. “And besides, I’ve got the three final exams waiting.”

“Perhaps you are overworking yourself,” Spock told him plainly. “I wonder what your doctor friend will think.”

Piqued, the cadet narrowed his eyes and pointed a finger at him threateningly. “Shut up, you’re worse and you know it.”

“Perhaps,” the Vulcan conceded gracefully. He appropriated the Padd in one swift motion, balanced it on his left knee. “I believe humans revise better together; if you wish, I am willing to help you,” he offered unexpectedly.

“Really?” Kirk clapped his hands. “Well then, in that case, we’re gonna need coffee! And some snacks!”

He jumped up to his feet, gathering his Padds as he went. Spock threw his head back and looked at him in confusion. “You are… already diverting from the stated matter?”

“Nonsense!” Jim called, running out of the room. “You can quiz me in the kitchen, come on!”

Spock heaved a soft sigh. He would never understand humans, but the cadet was an outstanding cook and very mindful of his personal preferences and cultural needs; it wouldn’t hurt to humour him and eat something. Collecting the bag of lollipops in case he wished for more, the Vulcan followed his… friend… in the kitchen.

“What are your thoughts on the Prime Directive?”

The open window gave way to the light of the late afternoon sun, letting it pool beautifully on the silvery floor of the living room; it hung from the low table and traced the delicate shapes of regulation cups and spoons, melting into golden tea.

Spock and his father kneeled facing one another, both stone-still, both sporting identically placid expressions, both keeping their arms folded about their chests. Silence coiled between them, cold as the ice-planes of Delta Vega, and the ghost of their last encounter – the Tragedy, a million shattered threads, pain like nothing that had ever existed – laid heavy within their minds.

Finally, Sarek spoke. “You are sharing quarters with Jim Kirk,” he said, collecting his teacup with one hand. He drank with the kind of poised grace Spock privately thought he would never be able to replicate, which was why he moved as little as possible.

“I am.”

The Ambassador nodded slowly, set the cup back on its plate with the lightest of sounds. “He has
made himself known in these past two weeks,” he mused, staring unblinkingingly at his son, at the Starfleet insignia embedded in his clothes.

Spock shifted uncomfortably under the scrutiny – a minute tilting of his head and shoulders, the sharpening of the curve of his lips – and lowered his gaze to the table. “Please, elaborate.”

“He is an interesting individual,” Sarek told him flatly, giving no outward indication that he had noticed his uneasiness. “A man of contradictions. That such brash, impolite ways could be coupled with an intellect like he has…”

“Jim is neither brash nor impolite, father.” The younger Vulcan interrupted him for what had to be the first time in five years. He unfolded his arms, resting his palms against the smooth surface of the transparent aluminium tabletop, and leaned forward just slightly. “He is a highly sensitive individual, gifted with a compassion that is rarely found in humans.”

He raised one eyebrow, as if daring his father to contradict him. “Or Vulcans for that matter.”

The Ambassador appeared to read much more in his impassionate defence of the human than Spock would have expected. “You seem to be… quite taken by him,” he murmured. It was difficult to know whether he was merely stating a fact or if it was disapproval hardening his voice.

Wrapping his fingers around his steaming cup, the Starfleet officer bought himself time by slowly sipping his tea. He contemplated how best to answer for point thirty-six minutes, longer than was strictly required but not long enough that would warrant comment. He settled for what he believed to be true: “I have simply had the opportunity to get to know him better, so to say.”

It seemed impossible to him that someone would think ill of James Kirk if they so much as spent one day in his company; he now understood both Pike’s implicit trust in him and doctor McCoy’s fierce protectiveness, and was self-aware enough to realise he would have acted much as they had, if he’d found himself in their place.

There was something about Jim – his warmth and his confidence and his kindness – that endlessly fascinated him.

Sarek narrowed his eyes at him but let his comment slide. He reached across the table and poured some more tea in their pristine cups, using his left hand as was the custom. “Your bond with T’Pring has broken,” he very slowly said, apropos of nothing.

Spock swallowed, remembering the blinding pain that had flashed across his mind from the tear. “Since she is alive still, I can only surmise the link was too weak to resist the shock.”

Oh. He had never considered that option.

In the aftermath of his planet’s destruction, he had counted the surviving links in his head and assumed there were no others; he had mourned the loss of his intended, not because he loved her – neither as a Vulcan nor as a human – but because throughout his childhood she had been his one and only ally, his confidante, the companion with whom he shared his wishes and fears and facts. The only one to whom he had told he would be joining Starfleet, and the only one with whom he’d remained in contact after his father had rejected him.

“T’Pring is alive?” he repeated, unable to contain that very human, very instinctual reaction. He was well aware his eyes were betraying a measure of his relief – his joy, even – at hearing that extremely welcome news, and he hoped the Ambassador would not consider it too grave a breach in social mores. “I am… gratified to know that.”
Sarek picked up six grapes of *hirat* fruit and let them fall one by one into his cup, where they would melt and lend a sweeter quality to the drink. “It is imperative that the two of you resume your connection.”

Spock allowed a tiny frown to form on his face in response to the sudden request. “We shall not, father,” he calmly said, straightening his back to highlight his resolve. “There are… many reasons why such an arrangement would be illogical.”

Such reasons he and T’Pring had long before agreed upon, but he would not divulge them to his father, because they were of a personal nature, and he could not violate his betrothed’s privacy that way.

The Ambassador raised his chin the fraction of an inch higher. “I do not see any illogic in the consummation of a bond; especially considering the situation our people are in.”

Returning his gaze to the honeyed tea, Spock cleared his throat and pushed the cup away. He watched Sarek’s hands – so different from his own – as they arranged all the chinaware to be perfectly symmetrical, and thought back to the many times he had seen him do that very same thing during their shared meals. Somehow, this was different.

*The things you lose hardly ever return.*

“T’Pring and I have decided years ago that the bond would be dissolved, provided we found suitable mates before the Time came.”

A flash of annoyance blackened the Ambassador’s eyes for the fraction of a second. His lips pursed by a millimetre or so, and through the parental bond that linked their minds Spock tasted displeasure, disappointment even. It was something he was accustomed to; he dug in his heels and sent back silence.

“Circumstances have changed,” his father said sternly. “Surely you must realise you have a duty to the Colony now.”

The younger Vulcan cocked his head to the side, wary as to why Sarek would feel the need to point that out when he had spent the last three weeks working triple shifts at the New VSA. “I already *am* absolving that duty.”

“You are working for Starfleet.”

Spock’s demeanour chilled by ten degrees. “Starfleet has placed the majority of its resources in the hands of the Council,” he said, enunciating each word carefully, steel in his voice and ice in his eyes. “We have come to serve.”

“I shall be direct with you, my son,” Sarek told him, not even batting an eyelid in the face of his son’s irritation.

*Direct with me. As if you ever minced words, father.* As it frequently happened, he did not speak out, merely let the thought hang in his mind for nearly a full minute before he let it go. There was no purpose in displaying open animosity towards the Ambassador, after all. It would do better to exercise patience and try and heed his request.

His father levelled a severe glare upon him, steepled his fingers, took a deep breath. “I wish for you to resign your post and return to your place, here.”

It was clear he was aware of how absurd his request was, how much he was asking his son – and
yet there was no doubt whatsoever in him that his order would be obeyed, that there could be no other outcome but complete compliance.

Spock felt something bitter bite at his stomach, pooling low in his belly to settle a vice grip around his heart. He had believed he’d won that particular fight long before, and yet. “I will do no such thing, father,” he said firmly.

Before the Ambassador could even begin to reply, he slipped away from his kneeling position, got up to his feet and began to clear the table in sharp, efficient motions. All he really wanted was for that conversation to be over – he knew he should not have invited his father, not at the present time, not when his controls were so weakened and tried, not when there were so many dark emotions lurking beneath the rippled surface of his projected calm.

Sarek’s eyes never left him, and they were heavy.

“There is nothing I can offer New Vulcan that would not be put to better use on a Starship.”

Fluidly, with none of the briskness his son was unable to mitigate, the Ambassador stood. “Your loyalty must lie with your people first,” he told him, and his words morphed into the imposing cadences of High Vulcan.

“There is nothing I can do for my people,” Spock whispered. Shame flooded him at his admission of helplessness, but he kept it in check; he picked up the teapot and forced his wrists not to tremble, his lips not to shake, his breath not to quicken.

There is nothing I can do.

Nothing I can do now.

So much I should have done.

Nothing I can do.

Sarek reached out and took the teapot from him, setting it back on the table. He covered the space between them in two brief strides and planted himself before his son, piercing him with that glacial, perceptive gaze of his. “You speak out of emotion,” he pointed out, nearly shattering all of Spock’s defences in a blow.

A shiver ran down the Vulcan’s spine, and he gazed at the hems of his father’s tunic. “On the contrary,” he said quietly, “I speak the truth.” He folded his arms behind his back, clenching his fingers together to spare himself the humiliation of pointless fidgeting. “My presence here is unnecessary.”

Inside the room, nothing spoke of his culture but the many crimson pillows scattered about the floor. Some of Jim’s books occupied the three shelves hanging from the walls, and the rest were Padds and disassembled pieces of machinery. The deep science blue of his uniform stood in stark contrast to the soft greys and purples that surrounded him, putting him under a spotlight when all he desired was to remain unnoticed.

He thought of how welcoming Jim had been, how understanding; how that bright, perspicacious human had pushed him out of his guilt-ridden stupor with the sheer force of his endless, honest enthusiasm. He compared that to how Vulcans generally treated him and raised his head defiantly.

“I would say it is unwanted, even, were it not for the fact that you would never admit it.”
The soft sound of rustling robes erased the silence when Sarek took another step forward and crossed his arms. “Explain yourself,” he demanded.

Spock stiffened. “There is no need to state that which is obvious, father,” he said, politeness filling his tone until it became almost unbearably congenial. “I am half-human, and the Council has already made it quite clear that I should know my place.”

He breathed in, breathed out. “I do. My place is in Starfleet.”

He would not let his father rattle him further – he would collect the shards of his control and piece it back together till he could pretend it had never broken.

The Ambassador shook his head, clearly unwilling to leave him be, to admit defeat. he was so set in his beliefs – so convinced he knew what was best for his son, when he did not know his son at all. Privately, Spock wished for his mother, for her gentle human laugh to break the tension.

“You are mistaken. I have spoken to Michael…”

Eyes flashing in outrage at the sole mention of his sister’s name, the Vulcan refused to let his father finish the sentence. “Why is she not here, then, father?” he spat, resentment welling up within him even as he attempted to quell it. “Why do you not ask of her what you demand of me?”

“You are Vulcan,” Sarek simply said. “There is a difference.”

And hadn’t Spock spent his life uselessly chasing that difference to understand its meaning… Now that all had been destroyed and the meaning had vanished, he was left to wonder what purpose the misery and loneliness and tension had served. “To you, there has always been a difference.”

Before the Ambassador could reply, the doors swished open and Jim Kirk burst in, a half-eaten granola bar in one hand and a packed bag in the other. “Hey, Spock, did you see they opened the market? I bought…”

He cut himself short when he noticed the chilling silence that had fallen into the room; immediately, his demeanour changed, going from bright to wary in the blink of an eye, and he dropped everything against a wall to join Spock by the table. The Vulcan had no idea what kind of emotion he was projecting, but somehow he knew that Jim would read it easily and understand: they shared a quick glance.

“Is everything alright?” the human asked, narrowing sharp blue eyes at Sarek. “Ambassador?”

Spock found himself strangely thankful for Kirk’s subtly aggressive tone – not to mention his very welcome interruption. “Nothing is wrong, Jim,” he said. “My father was just leaving.”

“So soon?” There was no trace of Jim’s customary warmth in his voice; though he was smiling brightly, it was cold, empty – like the sickly smirk he had shown Nero before blowing his ship to smithereens, or the contemptuous grin that had flashed on his face moments before he twisted the Kobayashi Maru’s coding so it would bend to his will. “Won’t you stay for dinner, Ambassador? You would be most welcome.”

Sarek cocked his head to the side and stared curiously at the human, as if trying to figure him out. But this was Jim Kirk, a mystery in and of himself, and there was no way one could capture the nuances of his dynamic mind merely by looking at him.

“I regret that I must decline your invitation,” the Ambassador said, no inflection in his tone. He bowed curtly to both, glanced lastingly at his son one more time. “Spock, I expect to hear from you}
presently.”

With that, he turned his back to them and saw himself out.

Spock experienced the odd, unexpected impulse to lean against the human for support. Instead, he slid down to the floor. Kirk sat with him, close enough that he could feel the alien warmth from his body – the Vulcan revelled in it.

“You know, I heard what he said to you,” Jim murmured delicately, eyes trailed on the iridescent reflexes sunset painted on the silvery walls. “And it’s total bullshit.”

“He is my father.”

“That’s no excuse!” the human said fiercely. Spock winced, and Kirk gentled immediately. He reached out a hand and, as had become a habit, he laid it on the Vulcan’s shoulder in a soft, innocuous touch. “He’s wrong about you.”

“Jim, do you think I am doing enough?”

Spock was unsure what had prompted him to ask that question – did not know why it was that such a display of vulnerability did not bring the bitter taste of mortification in his mouth, did not know why the words flowed so easily, unfiltered. He studied the human’s face for clues as to what he was thinking, and saw him smile again, a lovely smile, so kind and filled with sadness.

“Oh, honey,” he said, very tenderly. “Oh, sweetheart. Of course you are. Of course you are doing enough.” His gaze was serious, earnest, unwavering. “He should be so proud of you. So very proud.”

Unable to bear the truth of that statement, the Vulcan bowed his head and shied away from it; Jim seemed to sense he was overwhelmed and backed off, lifting his hand from his shoulder after squeezing it once.

“So I got us some nice vegetables from the market,” he told him brightly, changing the subject effortlessly. “Do you want me to teach you how to make Plomeek soup?”

Spock accepted the diversion eagerly and let Kirk pull him up to his feet by the wrists, following him into their quarters. He knew full well he would most likely end up watching the human as he worked, but he did not mind; he let himself be thoroughly distracted by the mercurial force that was Jim, by his charming words and the sunshine he radiated, and pushed his pain down and away.

He would deal with it another day.

_I'm getting old, and I need something to rely on_  
_So tell me when you're gonna let me in_  
_I'm getting tired, and I need somewhere to begin_  
_-Keane, 'Somewhere only we know'
So that's it for now! I hope it was good! Stay tuned for the next because... S**t is gonna go down. Next chapter is why I started writing this fic in the first place, so...

Thank you so much for reading! Let me know what you thought?
The Broken

Chapter Summary

In which Jim finally manages to break Spock so he can begin to heal.

Also, Elder Spock and baby sehlats happen.

Chapter Notes

GUYS I CANNOT BELIEVE HOW SUPPORTIVE YOU HAVE BEEN!!!

I wrote this chapter in like, four days. The angst is strong in this one - and may I issue a WARNING: Spock, as showed in tos canon, tends to forgo eating when stressed/worked up. So, yeah, there's that. Food issues.

I've been looking forward to this for weeks so I really hope you enjoy! Lots of telepathy stuff too - my favourite.

Oh, and I added pictures?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

3

The Broken

My dear, we are all made of water

It's okay to rage

New Vulcan’s sun at dawn was a spectacular thing to behold: close as it was to the planet, it occupied the horizon proudly, casting pink and lilac hues over the desert and the people and the city-in-the-making, as if it wished to paint the world anew.

The tiniest smile curved Spock’s lips upwards as he contemplated the scene and let just the faintest hint of melancholy tint his expression: such poetic flights of fancy were better suited for humans than for Vulcans, but he had spent the greater – the first, the best – part of his life with James Kirk as his bondmate and companion, and he felt as if he could allow himself the occasional illogical thought.

His beloved’s touch had left a mark in the elder’s mind that he would forever cherish – but his
glaring absence tore at him grievously even after all those years of separation, and though Spock knew it was not only fair but inevitable that he experience this pain as fully as he had enjoyed Jim’s love, more often than not he caught himself wishing he could erase the years behind him and return to a most dear past.

As his t’hy’la had once said – human.

The air of New Vulcan was still and heavy, laden with a scent that was familiar but not enough – it smelled different, different from home, yet now it was home. The wind caressing the soft sand howled its pride and fury, drawing ephemeral figures that crumbled to pieces in the time of a blink, but it was not the same that had once raged over Mount Seleya and the peaks of Gol. It was… alien. As was the endless expanse of the desert stretching as far as he could see, nearly glowing under a purplish sky adorned by its three moons, all visible in broad daylight.

Strange, Spock thought, this sense of non-belonging. Deeply unsettling as it was, the impression of being a foreigner in one’s own planet, it was nothing new to the old Vulcan standing unmoving amid the dunes; he was accustomed to it, for it had accompanied him since the very beginning of his life, tainting his childhood with melancholy and fears which had not dissipated for many, many years – longer than he cared to remember.

The one change was that now it had become a shared sentiment, multiplied infinitely among his lost, wounded people: though they could not admit it, even to themselves, they would never stop mourning their vanished planet. It was a kind of hypocrisy he had finally overcome, and as he crouched low into the sand and breathed in the taste of a land that was not home, Spock felt no shame in sighing, a small, delicate sigh that tinted his eyes in sadness.

He extended one hand towards the young female sehlat squatting down mere metres from him, and gently beckoned. She licked her muzzle and shook her massive head, disturbed as well by the deceiving familiarity of their surroundings, then gracefully lifted herself on her feet and walked slowly towards the Vulcan; Spock held still, maintaining eye contact as she approached, and did not flinch when one of her fangs grazed his fingertips. He simply raised his hand a little and brushed his palm into the soft fur of her neck, a gentle, calming motion that she gratefully received.

He looked into her eyes and saw infinite sadness mirror to his own.

“You may approach now, Jim,” he called, voice warm and betraying nothing of his feelings but the easy affection he felt for this young, a little more lost, a little more broken version of his Captain and friend. “Please bring the cub.”

Kirk came forth, smiling excitedly with his arms wrapped securely around a two-month-old sehlat; he handled it with the comfortable care of one accustomed to gentling and reassuring small things, and the pup was relaxed in his hold, ruffled muzzle tucked safely in the crook of his neck and quivering tail curved around one wrist.

Spock’s gaze rested fondly on him for half a second, then morphed into concern when he saw the way his counterpart carried himself at the human’s side – standing one step behind and two to the right, shadowing his movements because it was easier than to forge a path of his own in the land of non-belonging.

It was disquieting to behold, that restless, destructive energy burning in those very human eyes, fuelled by its own ashes.

“Are they gonna be okay, changing environment like this?” Jim asked, settling down beside the elder. His smile never wavered as he gently pushed the cub forward, towards the mother, so that
she could sniff it.

“They will be, Jim,” the old Vulcan answered, urging him to let go of the little animal. After a moment of hesitation, Kirk broke his hold and allowed it to slip away. “The change, after all, is minor. They will adapt.”

They exchanged a glance. Neither of them was certain whether the elder was still talking about the wild sehlat that had been rescued or the entirety of a planet’s population. But then again, it didn’t really matter.

As the sky cleared further and the sun climbed upwards, the two predators found their way into the sand, reacquainting themselves with the scents and tastes and sounds of the desert; the powerful instinct that compelled them to survive no matter what overwhelmed by far the initial mistrust they had shown towards their surroundings. Finally comfortable in her new territory, the mother caught her pup between unyielding and yet extremely delicate jaws and trotted away.

The Vulcan bent his legs and stretched his arms forward, resting his elbows on his knees, seemingly lost in thought. Out of the corner of his eye, he watched Spock approach Jim slowly, tentatively, and come to a stop by his right side; he did not sit, but Kirk grinned up at him and jumped to his feet, curling strong fingers around his arm and laughing cheerfully at his evident shock.

A soft light entered the elder’s eyes at the sight, and he felt his tension ease just a little. It was heartening to realise that certain things would forever be constants, no matter the time, or the universe.

“I wish we could take one of these little guys back to Earth with us,” Jim was saying, pursing his lips in an attempt at producing a theatrically upset expression.

“That would be illogical,” Spock informed him, cocking his head of black hair to the side. “I do, however, share in the sentiment.”

Kirk chuckled softly, not at all surprised to hear his Vulcan companion admit to having a sentiment – while the elder Spock blinked in confusion, vague concern making the inevitable slide into worry as he realised how far gone this biting, anguished version of himself truly was. He could see the signs of danger – of emotion threatening to engulf and destroy – building in the locked line of his shoulders and the sharp edge of his mouth and the way he shied away from eye contact, even with Jim.

He recognised the danger, and yet he was powerless to offer help. He was self-aware enough to know the young Vulcan would never accept it, never even accept the idea that perhaps he was unequipped to deal with his grief alone.

Still laughing softly under his breath, Kirk dipped a hand in his pocket and wordlessly offered Spock a lollipop before unwrapping one of his own and popping it in his mouth. “You know, it’s kinda beautiful,” he murmured around the candy, “The desert, I mean.”

Both Spocks glanced over at the horizon, then back at him.

“I have always found the sight to be… most soothing,” the younger admitted, watching the sun catch on his blue-tinted treat as it would on a gem.

“It sure is better than that ice-cube Delta Vega, don’t you think?” Jim teased him, planting an elbow in his ribs. The familiarity with which he interacted with Spock was magnificent to witness –
so simple and yet all the more meaningful for it.

“I am, ah… sorry about that,” the young Vulc said somewhat sheepishly.

Kirk snorted. “Don’t fret, it’s okay,” he told him in easy reassurance. “I half-deserved it anyhow.”

The elder let out a soft sound of amusement. He looked at Jim and Spock and saw promise. Or at least, the promise of a promise… That even in a universe as torn-apart as the one Nero had created with his blind despair they could find their way back to the stars, to their first, best destiny. He wondered idly if he would ever be allowed to glance upon the Enterprise again. Around his neck, the pendant containing his bondmate’s last message served as reminder that perhaps not all hope had been lost – perhaps hope was the one thing that could never be lost.

The colourful wrapping of a lollipop entered his line of vision, and Spock let his mind drift away from his nostalgia and return to the present.

“Fancy one?” Jim offered. “They’re good! Vulcan safe too.”

With a soft sound of popping joints, the elder heaved himself up to his feet. “I thank you, Jim, but I must refuse. I have never had much care for candy.”

“No?” The human seemed to be extremely amazed by this little detail. “That’s so cool! Spock loves them.”

“I do not love them,” young Spock corrected him, sliding away from his grip so he could turn towards him. “I am merely… partial to the taste.”

“Of course,” the elder murmured gently, folding his arms under the heavy robes he wore. “We are, after all, two different people.”

He made to leave, to leave them alone, give them some space and time to get acquainted – reacquainted? – with each other in a relatively comfortable environment; thinking back to how difficult it had been in the early days for him to relax around Jim’s boundless force and unashamed closeness.

Kirk held him back, looking a little dejected.

“When will I see you again?” he demanded.

Spock’s gaze softened, and he arched both eyebrows at the little human, charmed and touched by how easily attached they grew, how ready they were to bestow affection as if it was the very thing that kept them alive.

“Whenever you wish, Jim,” he answered gently. “I have told you your presence is always welcome.”

A blinding smile spread over Kirk’s face, but his blue eyes held that hint of surprise and disbelief that made the old Vulc bristle internally – that James Kirk would ever believe himself unworthy of respect…

“I know that, Spock,” Jim murmured, illogically grateful. “Thanks.”

“You are welcome, Jim,” Spock assured him, putting perhaps a little more emphasis in his words than what was strictly necessary. “Live long and prosper, my friend.” He turned towards the young
Vulcan who had been watching their exchange in resentful silence. “Spock, I wish you well.”

His counterpart was regarding him stiffly, distress and mistrust pouring off him in clear waves that crashed against the Vulcan’s shields unpleasantly; still, he thought it best not to mention the frightening lessening of controls that had resulted in such an all-over-the-place telepathy – after all, he knew far too well how humiliating it could be to have strangers point out your flaws aloud when there was nothing you could do to help them.

He wondered if Jim was aware of how close he was to crossing the line of no return, and if he would be willing to take the fall when the time came.

“Fare thee well, elder.”

A shiver ran down his spine at Spock’s clipped tone.

“Spock, come on, please.” Jim’s plaintive voice filled the quiet of the kitchen; perched upon his chair in a rather unorthodox fashion, he was glaring fixedly at Spock from above his empty plate. “Can’t you eat just a little more?”

The Vulcan glanced up at him for a split second before he returned to examining the contents of his nearly untouched bowl of soup. “I do not require sustenance at this time,” he said flatly, swallowing around the knot in his throat and the distant sense of nausea that had been plaguing him since the destruction of his planet.

Kirk’s eyes narrowed. He crossed his arms and let both his feet hit the ground with a sharp noise, then he leaned towards Spock, reaching out a finger to push the bowl closer to him. “Bullshit,” he spat, “You skipped lunch.”

Worry was etched in his tone, and he examined the Vulcan’s empty expression with a sinking feeling. He did not like to see him missing meals – the very idea made something dark and ugly rear up and scream inside him, carrying about burning memories of hunger and death and fear. “Just like you did yesterday. And the day before.”

Spock blinked at the intensity of the human’s concern – he could feel it brush against his shields and it frightened him because of how pleasant, how soothing, how healing the sensation was. “I am Vulcan,” he pointed out in lieu of an explanation.

“I know that. Now eat.” Kirk picked the spoon up and dumped it in the soup. His warm scent filled the air, and every time he moved the artificial lights from above caught in the unruly strands of his hair, giving it the appearance of molten gold. “I thought this was supposed to be a favourite of yours!”

Distracted as he was, Spock pulled himself away from his contemplation of the many qualities of Kirk’s hair to correct him placidly: “As I have told you, it is illogical to have a favourite.”

He gazed down at the neglected plomeek, rapidly growing cold. He brought the spoon up to his mouth, wet his lips with it, set it back down and took a sip of water, trying to ignore the waves of disapproval Jim was projecting onto him.

“Yeah, right,” the human muttered, grimacing as the strange smell of the vegetarian broth wafted to him. “I made it. For you. Especially. Since I hate the damn thing.” He took Spock’s glass away from him and stared pointedly down at the soup. “So you’re going to eat every last drop of it or so help me I will…”
Up jumped the Vulcan’s eyebrow at the unfinished threat, and his non-expression morphed into a vaguely challenging one as he wondered what lengths Kirk might be willing to go to only to have him eat. “You will what, Jim?”

He floundered for a brief moment before a menacing smirk slowly spread across his face. “I will let Bones know that you have been neglecting your health,” he said, very seriously, sitting back with a satisfied sigh. Munching cheerfully on a breadstick, he waited for Spock’s reaction, which came in the minute raising of both eyebrows and the slightest curve of his mouth.

“Oh, don’t give me that look!” Jim admonished, pointing the breadstick at him like a sword, “You have no idea what Bones will do to you when he finds out.”

The Vulcan narrowed his eyes at him, but he didn’t pick up his spoon. Yet. “Which he will not,” he very softly said. Somehow, he managed to force a warning into his matter-of-fact tone. Under the table, Kirk kicked him lightly on the shin, and he jumped at the unexpected – and unexpectedly playful – contact, losing his composure for an instant.

“No? Watch me.” Jim was quick to grab his Padd from the table; he unlocked the screen with an easy swipe of his thumb and brought up a window for instant messaging. Leonard’s name was listed first, along with the fancy emoji of a skull. “Let’s see how fast I can message Bones…”

Spock watched him type for point forty-five seconds, then finally raised one hand to stop him and conceded. “Very well. I shall eat.”

The human’s earnest gaze fell into his, and the clear relief he saw there softened the edges of his annoyance at Kirk’s insistence. “After all, it would be impolite not to,” he murmured, gentler now. “Since you have been gracious enough to arrange a meal for me.”

Jim smiled wide at him. “Thank you, sweetheart.”

Blushing a little from the pet-name the human had apparently decided to keep for him, the Vulcan swallowed down both his discomfort and his nausea and set about finishing the soup. It tasted almost exactly like the one he used to eat as a child, and for that very reason it was all the more difficult to ingest. Perhaps next time he would ask Jim if he could prepare a terran dish instead.

“I found a great documentary on late pre-warp Andorian music,” Kirk told him after a few minutes of watching him struggle with his food in silence. “We could watch that later if you’re up to it.”

“I am free this evening if that’s what you are asking.”

A disbelieving chuckle escaped Jim’s lips at the answer the Vulcan had readily given him. “You know, Spock, I don’t think you’re half as literal as you pretend to be,” he informed him lightly.

Caught, Spock offered him an amused quirking of his left eyebrow and an extremely minute shrug. “What makes you so certain of that?” he asked curiously.

“Well, for one, the other Spock never picks at my idioms,” Kirk began to explain, waving a hand carelessly in the air as he spoke; the Vulcan followed its movements with his eyes, as per usual. “And you teach Xenolinguistics, so I find it pretty fishy that you claim not to understand Standard.”

He would have mentioned his human mother, but he felt it was too early for it; the wounds were still open and stinging; he wanted to take Spock’s mind away from his tragedies, not force him to dwell on them further.
It seemed, however, that despite his precautions, something in his words had upset the Vulcan nonetheless – all traces of warmth had vanished from his face, and he had dropped the spoon to return to hiding behind his glass.

“What’s on your mind?” Jim prompted softly after he’d watched him finish his water and turn the spoon in three different directions only to leave it gracelessly on his napkin.

It took Spock quite some time to voice his thoughts. A strange sort of sadness had entered his wide human eyes, almost gentle in its quiet sorrow. “You like him better than you do me, don’t you?”

“Huh?” Kirk shook his head in confusion.

“My counterpart,” the Vulcan clarified in a whisper, staring intently at the plain cloth covering the table. “You favour his presence.”

“You mean do I like hanging out with him?” Jim brushed a hand through the mess of his hair, ruffling it. His lashes fluttered when he blinked, then he heaved a sigh. “Of course. He’s a really cool guy.”

“I see.”

Pursing his lips, the human stood up, walked around the table. “Spock…” he called, waiting until the Vulcan lifted his head and met his gaze.

“Yes, Jim?”

“You are two different people, remember? It’s illogical to make comparisons.”

Spock joined the tips of his fingers, mouth pressed into a thin line. “That is not entirely accurate,” he pointed out in a monotone. “The very fact that the elder treats you as if you were his James Kirk proves that the differences are negligible.”

“Not true.” Jim placed his hand on its usual spot on the Vulcan’s shoulder and squeezed it tightly, wanting to reassure him in a way designed to soothe the touch telepathy he had been grievously disregarding. “He’s completely alone in a universe that’s not his own. You can’t blame him for finding comfort in the things he knows.”

Projecting nothing but serenity, the human brushed the very tips of his fingers against the side of Spock’s cheek, holding them there when no protest came forth. “But you are different.”

“He is… better than me,” the Vulcan breathed, frozen like a deer in headlights. The contact was seeping through his skin like honey melting in a cup of hot tea, and Kirk’s positive emotions filtered through his mind, influencing his own.

“No, Spock. He is older. More experienced.” Sighing softly, Jim pushed all thoughts of the meld he’d shared with the elder in the back of his head and focused on his words with extreme caution. “He’s lived differently than you will, than all of us will. You can’t compare. You’re you.” A chuckle escaped him, and he smiled wryly down at his alien friend. “Brilliant, sass-mouthing, logical you.”

His tease served the desired effect, and the Vulcan relaxed visibly. “Indeed,” he offered noncommittally.

Kirk stepped back, pleased, and Spock felt suddenly bereft in the absence of his touch – of that grounding warmth he so effortlessly conveyed. He stared at him and found himself speechless,
mute in the face of all the things he wished to say, all the things he required but would never, could never, ask for.

Perceptive as ever, Jim cocked his head to the side and leaned against the table, docking himself by the Vulcan’s side. “Spock, is there… is there something you’d like to talk about?” he asked. If Spock hadn’t known for a fact that the human was psy-null, he would have accused him of being a telepath.

A thousand answers chased themselves within his throat, but they died before they could reach his lips. Surrendering to his own incapability of reaching out – did he even want to? – he gave Kirk the only reply he could, the only one he ever could. “I do not believe so.”

Then, maybe compelled by Jim’s gentle, inviting stare, he added: “But I am grateful for your offer.”

Unconvinced but thankfully unwilling to press him for more, Kirk presented him with another sunny smile. For the first time, Spock wondered how much it cost him to keep up his appearance of confident cheer. “Alright. If there’s anything you need…”

“I am to tell you at once.” Gliding to his feet in a swift motion, the Vulcan began to clear the table. “You are most kind, Jim.”

They relocated to their shared living room to vision the documentary, and Spock let himself sink into the sofa, maintaining a safe distance from Jim – and yet they were close enough that he was bathed in warmth, and he felt his mind spiral down, down, down, drowning into swirls of the pain that escaped from the shields he had woven around his broken bonds.

There were so many faults in those mental walls; too many.

He focused his attention on Jim and pushed the ache away.

\[
\text{Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale.}
\]

Meditation had never been as difficult. He had put it off for too long, trying to avoid the terrifying things his mind hid from him, the guilt and the anger and the helplessness he could not control, couldn’t even attempt to downsize. He had spoken to Nyota a week before and she had warned him against it, warned him that emotions could only grow ugly and fester when left unattended, but he had not listened.

\[
\text{Inhale. Exhale. Inhale…}
\]

It was becoming increasingly harder to breathe – to regulate his bodily functions so they maintained a semblance of order, as if all was well, as if nothing had changed. His next exhale came out shuddering, and he bit at his lower lip in frustration before he schooled his features back into his resting non-expression.

\[
\text{Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale.}
\]

A shift had occurred in the patterns of his mind, and it was impossible to ignore. Meditation should serve as a way to compose them, to gather his soul back within its confines, to find his centre again. Yet all he found was a void that screamed for attention, a greedy emptiness rushing to devour everything he had ever dared to call his.

\[
\text{Inhale… Exhale…}
\]
He wondered if his father blamed him from surviving – if he had rather his mother lived instead of him; she was (had been) a much better person than Spock could ever hope to be. And the children, the millions of children they had been powerless to save, children with a future, with endless possibilities that would be no more…

_Inhale._

The air was caught in his throat, lodged there as if it wished to choke him. There had been a time when the scent of incense and burning candles brought him peace; now there was only confusion, bewilderment – a month had already passed since his planet had vanished (stolen, killed, lost) but it hadn’t become any easier to accept it, part of him was begging to wake from what seemed to be an endless, horrifying nightmare…

He forced his exhale through clenched teeth.

His broken bonds were sizzling, curling uselessly in his mind, a constant ache that had been unleashed as soon as he’d delved that deep into his conscious, beneath the carefully-constructed cage of logical, clean thoughts and even beneath the unruly ones born from instinct and feeling and physical urges.

The world started to spin quite suddenly, and belatedly he realised he had been holding his breath for far too long. He inhaled.

For the eighty-seventh time, he asked himself whether he could have done more – if there even was more that could have been done. If it would have served to rescue one child more, one person more… If he deserved to feel as deeply as he did, if there was a point to this suffering.

Again, his exhale was choked. He might have whimpered, but it was quiet.

He was not accustomed to holding such darkness in his mind; he was unable to deal with the wounds and the dimness and the _silence_. He was going to lose himself to it, lose his reason and his sense of self to this great tear that had left the _k’war’ma’khon_ – vibration of extended family that was no more – reeling, gaping, ready to unravel entirely and swallow the remaining links to drag them deep into the nothingness…

It seemed to Spock as if there was no more air to breathe.

His stomach turned, nausea hitting him with the strength of a blow, and a strange ringing sound was filling his ears; he could feel his hands shaking, feel his blood rush through his veins in a desperate frenzy – a natural response to the pain enveloping him, the clear demand from his body that he either fight or flee, when all he could do was remain frozen kneeling in his room, trapped within his telepathy that spilled and broke and cried, searching, begging, shattering…

“Spock, snap out of it.”

The voice cut through his insanity like a knife. He gasped and growled and tried to free himself from the clutter of his thoughts, pull his conscious away from the sticky, clenching tentacles of those tangled, frightening remnants of his bonds, and there was a touch on his shoulders, an unyielding grip that sent warmth in his skin and emotions to his mind, soft emotions, pleasant emotions, powerful enough that they blew across it like wind in the desert, and –

He was so overwhelmed but there was a command somewhere deep in that voice, an order he was clearly expected to follow. His name was being called with firm insistence, and he wished to answer, attempted to _make_ himself answer…
“Spock.”

A very human scent filled his lungs when he finally drew in a desperate breath, and he instinctually curled his hands around the ones digging into his shoulders, and then he managed to break free from the deepest levels of meditation, finding himself face to face with Jim Kirk.

He bristled.

“Spock.” Letting go of the obviously very worked-up Vulcan, Kirk backed away a little, not yet allowing himself to sigh in relief as he examined his expression for all the things he would never say. For a wild, adrenaline-filled moment, Jim thought the Vulcan was going to attack him – his wide, stupefied eyes were charged with a sort of destructive, intense energy that begged to be released – and then he snapped up to his feet without a word and made a beeline to the bathroom. The human followed him immediately.

He found him clutching at the toilet, bringing up what little he’d had for dinner just a few hours before, and oh, he remembered it, remembered Tarsus and its aftermath, remembered the nausea and dizziness and being unable to keep food down and not even wanting to eat because what was the point when everyone was dead? And he’d had no one to help him through it, he’d had to heal himself, gather the pieces of what was left and start anew.

He was not about to let Spock deal with it on his own.

With the gentle care born from sympathy and shared pain, he bent around the shivering form, wordlessly offering what little comfort he could. The Vulcan’s miserable whimpers made his heart ache but he pushed the feeling away, focusing on grounding his friend, on projecting nothing, just quiet, the confidence that all would be well.

Slowly, Spock became aware of a warm body pressed against him from behind, a hand rubbing soothing circles into his back as strong fingers wrapped around his head, holding it up, supporting him. He sank his full weight against the human – only distantly surprised that he could bear it – and wished it could all end, that he could end, there, melt away into that anonymous bathroom inside hastily-built quarters on a foreign planet full of dying people.

Numbly, as if he was operating on autopilot, he accepted the glass of water Jim handed him, emptied it, gave it back to him; he let himself be guided into the corridor and towards Kirk’s room, until the doors shut behind them and the lights brightened to 50%.

Spock blinked, shaking himself out of his stupor to fix a disbelieving stare on the human. Those bright blue eyes were on him, shining with pity and concern, and if he looked closely enough he could see himself reflected in them. He did not much care for it.

“Why do you – why are you always meddling?” he asked. Something born from his severe upbringing and darkest fears rebelled against the idea of another witnessing his weakness, his grief and incapability to erase it, his humiliation and shame. “I do not want your help, I do not require help!”

Perhaps if he said it often enough it would become true. An illogical thought, but he seemed he couldn’t really help himself anymore when it came to absurd flights of fancy.

Jim considered the Vulcan’s torn expression for a few minutes, the way his fingers twitched just so and his lower lip trembled and he kept shifting his weight uncomfortably from foot to foot. Then, he made a decision. “You’re killing yourself,” he said, enunciating each word carefully. Spock’s too-transparent eyes darkened in volatile fury. “You’re beyond needing help and you know it.”
Cocking his head to the side, Kirk stepped forward, blocking his exit so he could not escape the confrontation he was trying to instigate. “You’re just too stubborn, too prideful to admit it.”

The Vulcan closed his hands into fists, shoulders quaking in his – admittedly admirable – effort at maintaining control. He could feel himself slipping and he was terrified, of himself and what he would do if he just… allowed his mind the luxury of unrestrained emotion. “Be quiet,” he muttered, and it was almost a plea.

“You think that will make the pain go away?” Jim whispered, wanting to elicit some kind of response from him, any kind, anything beside this helpless, toxic suppression of his that made him swallow down emptily and refuse to eat and choke himself on his breath, his guilt that he was alive when others were not.

“Be quiet!” Spock snapped, a growl in his voice while his eyes had gone almost impossibly wide, silently begging for Kirk to stop, to leave him be, because the human was trying to tear down his walls of denial to reveal the things lurking beneath, things that had the potential of breaking him if set free.

“You think ignoring it is going to make it heal?” Jim asked him gravely. There was no mockery in his tone, but no warmth either – he was hard and cold and unforgiving, as if the Vulcan had disappointed him for refusing to acknowledge that maybe he required assistance, required to talk. But speaking of the truth only served to reinforce it, and he could barely deal with it as it was… “You think you can keep going as if nothing had happened?”

“Shut up!”

This time, Spock’s voice had risen, clipped and rough and seething. Grim satisfaction filtered in the back of Kirk’s mind as he gauged his friend’s precarious condition, as he realised he would only need to push a little further before he would cross the line of no return and break.

He needed to break or he could never heal.

“If what?” the human very calmly questioned. “You’ll go back to pretending everything’s fine and you’ll destroy yourself in the process.”

“You do not…” Spock spluttered, breathing harshly through his nose – and Kirk’s strange, familiar scent only served to unbalance him further. “It is not your place…”

“Perhaps not, but someone’s got to!” Jim stepped forward again, devouring the space between them to pin the Vulcan down with a defiant glare. “You need to face it! Face it, dammit!”

It was almost an order, a challenge, and Spock’s mind latched to it with a kind of ruthless desperation that had adrenaline cursing through his veins and his stomach lurching and his pulse quickening in anticipation of an altercation. He attempted to regulate his reactions, but it was like trying to contain the ocean with his bare hands.

“I cannot – I must not – do you not see…”

Kirk felt for him. That much inner conflict was enough to split a person in two, and yet Spock had existed with it – grown with it – for the entirety of his life; perhaps, had it not been for the destruction of his planet, it would have never become so hard to sustain, that battle between two worlds. But then again, he couldn’t really tell. And so, even though he knew the answer, Jim asked, wanting to hear it from him: “Why not? What’s stopping you?”

“It is wrong – it is not allowed…”
The air was charged with tension, almost sparkling with it. Each breath Spock took clung to him like a vise, and he was shaking with barely-suppressed anger, anger at Jim for forcing him to feel, anger at himself for his failure at concealing his struggles that had prompted the human’s concern and consequent meddling, anger at Nero for tearing his world and mind apart, anger at his elder self for not being able to save Romulus and thus kickstarting the chain of events that had led to this…

This thing that loomed between them, this waiting for Spock to finally snap.

“Screw allowed! These are our quarters, you are in my room, there’s only me here to see it and I am allowing it! Let go.”

Jim was fierce in his determination, and as he met his unwavering gaze, the Vulcan suddenly knew he would not – could not – resist his wishes, resist the pull of him, of his alluring promises of release…

“No – the danger – it is too much, please leave, I need you to…”

He needed so many things and most of them seemed to be tied to this one reckless human who thought provoking him, provoking an emotionally unstable half-Vulcan with three times the strength of any man, not only once but twice to the point of violence was a logical and desirable course of action.

“Fuck the danger, Spock, you coward!” Kirk spat at him, glorious in his convictions and merciless in his judgement of his character, so utterly enchanting and infuriating in his wholeness, in his absurd bravery and kindness and foolishness. “You’re a coward! Face the pain, face yourself, own up to it for once in your life! You need it and you know it so let it out!”

And Spock did. He snapped and raged and screamed, exposed and raw and wild, and somehow Jim smiled at him even as he trashed the place, trashed his room, as he upturned the desk and caught Padds and books alike in an unforgiving grip only to throw them to the floor, as if wreaking havoc inside those Starfleet-assigned quarters would somehow aid him in returning balance to his mind.

Kirk followed him around, never once trying to stop him in his blind fury, merely removing from his path those objects he wished to salvage, eyes full of understanding even then. Spock distantly thought Jim had been so certain he would not be harmed this time – had gambled his safety on the unjustified faith that the Vulcan would not raise a hand against him, not again.

It was… comforting, in a sense, even through the haze of his blackest despair, at that low, low point in his life when he was allowing a stranger – acquaintance, human, friend – to witness this savage, pointless, destructive behaviour, to know that Kirk trusted him. That he would never judge him.

He was unsure of the things that were pouring from his mouth, unsure whether it was Vulcan or Standard or even his mother’s native English, unsure if they were even words, those wretched sounds that completely eluded his control, betraying everything, his shock and grief and fear and the mind-numbing guilt that had spread like a disease within him.

Kirk listened to him anyway. He let him scream and storm and overflow, spill out his guts and his conscious until the room was brimming with them, and when he eventually fell to the floor amidst the ruins of discarded, scattered objects, he sat with him, close enough that the Vulcan could touch him if he so wished.

They were still for a long time, and Jim watched in silence as all traces of anger melted away from
Spock’s face, leeching what little colour he had left until he was ghostly pale and leaving behind nothing but a blank, frightening desolation. That, too, was familiar – the human was intimately acquainted with its sharp claws and punishing thoughts and hopeless cold.

He wanted to apologise, suddenly felt as the universe itself needed to, because it wasn’t fair, it was just too cruel, this terrible thing that had been forced upon such a lovely person, and Kirk had seen his fair share of tragedies and survived them all, but this…

“Oh, Spock,” he murmured, breaking the quiet as gently as he could. The Vulcan’s glazed eyes fell on him, and it looked as if it took him a considerable effort to focus on him. “I am so sorry. I am so very, very sorry, sweetheart.”

Spock surveyed the room with a sort of detached helplessness that made Kirk want to hold him, kiss his head and shield him from his own mind. “I apologise, Jim, I…” He paused. “Forgive me.”

“You don’t apologise for this,” Jim said firmly. “It’s okay.”

“Jim, your things, I…”

“They’re just things. Most of them I can repair.” He shrugged, not bothered in the least by the idea of having to spend his already limited free time working on those repairs too. “The rest… I didn’t really need that stuff anyway.”

“I… there are no words…” Spock flinched. “This was…”

“It’s okay. It’s okay, you hear?” Kirk whispered soothingly, inching closer; he did not offer contact because he sensed that the Vulcan was still too tense for it, too overwhelmed by his own mind to accept the touch of another’s. “This was… logical.”

Swallowing uselessly again, Spock took a deep breath to collect himself somewhat, but it came out weak and wobbly, matching the wet sheen covering his grave, too-emotional eyes, and he watched Jim intently, as if there was something he needed, something he wanted to ask but could not bring himself to.

Smiling softly, the human spread his arms invitingly. “I’m here.”

He let the Vulcan come to him, let him tentatively, painstakingly, fit himself into his personal space; slowly, and then all at once. All at once Spock’s fingers were digging sharply into his shoulder-blades, and his head was buried in the hollow beneath his throat, and he was crying.

His tears felt cold against the human’s heated skin and sobs wracked his form. Jim embraced him tightly and supported him through it all, through those few minutes in which he allowed himself that blissful relief, letting some of his pain seep away from him and leave.

Kirk’s heart broke a little along with the Vulcan.

When Spock’s choked breaths returned to a more normal rhythm, when he was no longer shaking forcefully against him but only trembling a little, the human placed one hand over his head and stroked his hair softly. “You will survive this,” he promised fiercely into his pointed ear. “You deserve it. You deserve your life. It’ll be okay.”

Spock sighed. Jim’s heartbeats and even breathing were all he could hear, and he found himself quite content with it; found that he might be able to recover some slivers of his inner peace, if only he could spend a few hours – days, weeks, years – more in the company of so extraordinary a being.
He had never even dared think he could need, and yet Kirk had met those unspoken needs perfectly.

The Vulcan pulled away from him enough that he could meet his eyes; his expression was naked, vulnerable, but he appeared calmer. “Jim…” He hesitated for a second or so before voicing his question. “How did you know to come to my room?”

“I… I think I felt it,” Kirk explained, doing his best to describe the waves of anguish that had crashed against him, tearing him from his work. “Your mind. Like it was spreading all over, reaching.” He waved a hand in the air, fingers open, then let it fall on Spock’s shoulder, squeezing twice. “I felt your pain.”

Blinking away his surprise, the Vulcan forced himself to formulate words, to give a shape to his thoughts, one the human would recognise. He was finding it increasingly challenging to remember the fact that Jim was not a telepath. “Ah, that… that is…”

Kirk shushed him gently. “It’s alright, you don’t have to speak,” he said warmly, shifting into a more comfortable position on the floor. “I know Vulcans are non-verbal.”

Spock’s jaw fell slightly slack at that, and he was powerless to mask his astonishment in the face of the human’s knowledge and consideration. He frowned, wanting to ask when and why and how he had learned so much about his dying culture, but maybe he had his answer right there in those piercing blue eyes.

“I know it’s all in here.” Smiling brightly in understanding, Jim caught Spock’s wrist and guided his hand to his own face; the Vulcan’s fingers splayed automatically in the position for a meld. “You can touch my mind. If you want.”

It took Spock three point eleven minutes to realise what he had been offered and absorb the truth, the beauty of it. He let Jim’s essence flow over him and sent him a wave of disbelieving gratefulness in return, his deep appreciation for what the human had done for him.

Oh, he had been right before, Kirk’s mind was compelling, dynamic, unlike anything he had ever experienced. His fascination for him grew as the pain receded, and finally, finally, he closed his eyes and relinquished control.

Jim caught him.

Perhaps he could piece himself back together after all.

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_Sometimes it’s okay_

_To rest_

_To recede_

_-Sanobar Khan, A Thousand Flamingos_
This image is no longer available. Visit tinypic.com for more info.

My star trek blog
Sooooo would you like a hug after this emotional roller coaster? Ice cream? Lollipops?

I am very sorry, but, well, this is where it all was leading, anyway. Next chapter will be lighter! Incidentally, it's gonna be the last one set on New Vulcan, then we're boldly going!

And Uhura and T'Pring will be there. Do I ship T'Pura? Yes. Is there gonna be heavy hinting at T'Pura? Also yes. Is Spock gonna play accidental matchmaker? So it appears.

Well! I am super happy you read this far!! Please leave a trace of your passing!
Chapter Summary

In which Jim receives Command of the Enterprise and Spock makes the logical decision to celebrate by inviting some friends over. T'Pring and Nyota pay the two a surprise visit.

Also, Spock comes to the sudden realisation that Jim Kirk is, well, hot.

Chapter Notes

As promised, this is Fluff. Fluff, I tell you! So please ignore the fact that I can't even keep my fluff from being angsty in this fic.

Don't blame me! Blame JJ Abrams and his poor decisions!

A huge thank you to everyone, I am so super happy y'all enjoyed this fic because it's giving me HELL

Anyhow, here's chapter 4

See the end of the chapter for more notes

4

The Healing

You needed each other

I could not deprive you of

The revelation of all that

You could have accomplished together

Soft words whispered in a dreamy tone. “Spock, they’ve given me the Enterprise.”

Spock paid them no mind, not even registering them; without pulling his attention from the fascinating scientific article he had been perusing for twenty-three point seventeen minutes, he
gestured towards the empty side of the sofa, indicating Jim should sit by him.

“I have replicated coffee for you,” he said, pointing at the two cups meticulously set on the low table in front of him. “Please, join me.”

During the last week of their stay on New Vulcan, Spock had come to regard the quiet moments they spent together, merely enjoying each other’s presence, as a part of his daily routine, and a most important one at that, so it was only logical he increased the possibilities of such occasions to occur by procuring the human’s favourite beverage and snacks.

Kirk settled on the very edge of the hard sofa, as if ready to spring back up to his feet at the slightest provocation, and wordlessly slid an open Padd over the one the Vulcan was reading from. Spock glanced down at it, then back up at him.

“They’ve given me the Enterprise,” Jim repeated, voice stronger as the undeniable truth of the fact began to sink in. His budding joy was magnificent to witness – the way it sparkled in his eyes, lighting them up like the sun did the sky at dawn, the way it brought fine laugh lines on his face as his disbelieving grin grew, all pink lips and shiny teeth and piercing blue. “I’m Captain of the Enterprise.”

Spock allowed himself one moment to simply stare at the human, absorbing his more-than-positive emotional state, then he offered him a minute raising of the corners of his mouth. “I had no doubts that they would give her to you,” he told him plainly. “I believe you will make a most excellent Captain… Captain Kirk.”

A ripple of energy passed across Jim’s body, and he seemed to bask in the words, in the unexpected praise. “Captain Kirk. I like the sound of that. Say it again.”

The Vulcan did, if only because he enjoyed the sight of his friend’s overwhelming happiness. “The title does suit you.”

Kirk downed his coffee like a shot, stood in a jump, threw a hand in the air – for once behaving like his age demanded, for once carefree and unguarded and real – then turned towards his friend with a triumphant expression. “This is awesome!”

“Indeed,” Spock confirmed, unbothered by the very human emotionalism. “I believe Admiral Pike will be proud of you.”

“You think?” Jim breathlessly asked, flopping back down on the sofa with a vaguely stunned expression.

Nodding pleasantly, the Vulcan placed both Padds on the table, crossed his legs and leaned towards the newly-appointed Captain, lowering his tone as if he were divulging a secret. “In fact, I am sure of it.”

Jim beamed at him – and there was a distinctive difference between this smile and the rest, because this one was for him and for him alone, though Spock was unsure how he had been able to even ascertain this – and suddenly his hands were on his shoulders, squeezing tightly and with purpose.

“I’ve been wanting to ask you for ages, and now I finally can,” he said, gazing at him with surprising seriousness; the Vulcan felt a shift in the ambient mood of the room and acted accordingly, straightening his spine and focusing even more intently on Kirk.

“I am listening,” he prompted after seven point zero six seconds of silence.
“I want you,” Jim said bluntly. Spock blinked. “I want you to be my First Officer.”

He opened his mouth to tell him that yes, he would be really quite content to be Kirk’s First, and that he was so very honoured by his request, but the human interrupted him hastily before he could even begin to formulate his response.

“Of course I know I can’t expect you to answer straightaway,” he blurted out, letting a touch of nerves reach his voice. “I mean, this is a big decision that shouldn’t be rushed.”

Spock arched an eyebrow in silent disagreement, but chose to listen to his friend run his mouth a little longer, for logical reasons he would have a care to name later on.

“But I promise I’ll try my best,” Jim very earnestly told him, smiling his soft, disarming smile. “I’ll make sure you get the best scientific equipment Starfleet has to offer, and you’ll be able to do your own experiments. And I’ll reprogram the ship’s replicators so the choice of Vulcan foods is wider.”

The ghost of a smile passed over the Vulcan’s lips at the thought of Jim bribing him with food and science so he would accept his offer; as if there was even a question – as if he could envision a more desirable choice, a different choice, as if the Enterprise wasn’t the best ship in the Fleet and her Captain one of the best people he knew.

Once again, he opened his mouth to say so.

“Just promise me you’ll think about it,” the human told him quickly.

Spock resisted the urge to sigh. “I shall give the matter all the thought it is due,” he assured him, deciding that it would be interesting – amusing – to see if his friend would repeat his suggestions in the future. “And I am honoured by your request.”

A winning light entered Jim’s eyes, and the Vulcan wondered if he had been unsuccessful at hiding his intention of accepting the position. “You know what, we should celebrate!”

“Celebrate, Jim?”

“Yeah! Bones is gonna be here for the next three days because T’Pau has finally decided all of Starfleet’s medical personnel should be let in on the secrets of Vulcan biology.” The ‘and it is about time, too’ went unsaid, but Spock nodded as if he’d heard it loud and clear.

“So you’d have a trained CMO who actually knows what he’s doing when treating you,” Kirk pointed out casually. “If you accept.”

“I do not anticipate visiting the Sickbay with any frequency,” the Vulcan immediately replied, the barest hint of disgust tinting his voice. “I am positive I shall be able to take care of myself.” He raised an eyebrow and cocked his head to the side. “If I accept.”

“Anyway, I bet Uhura is gonna be here as a translator too.”

“She is. It was my intention to meet with her in the afternoon.” Spock looked at the human’s expectant expression and contemplated his options. “Perhaps we could ‘invite them over’ for the evening,” he finally suggested.

Jim’s smile was brighter than ever, and the Vulcan reminded himself sternly that it was illogical to experience pride for having elicited an emotional reaction from his friend. “Really? You’d be okay with that?”
“Of course, Jim.”

“That’s great, we could…”

A cheerful chiming at the main entrance drowned Kirk’s voice, and the two of them walked together across their shared quarters, exchanging a curious glance before the human reached out and let the sliding doors swish open to reveal the impassive, elegant face of a young Vulcian woman. Behind her, smirking lightly, was Uhura.

“T’Pring.” Spock greeted his intended softly, taking a few steps back to regard her better, relieved to see her healthy and composed, relieved that she had thought to seek him out when he had not, relieved even though he had known for quite a while she had survived. “Please, come on in.”

She quirked an eyebrow at him. “Tonk’peh, Spock.” Her slanted eyes gentled just so as she regarded him, and she raised her hand slowly, so they could touch the very tips of their fingers together in a familial gesture. “It is gratifying to see you well.”

“Likewise,” Spock replied easily, letting a flutter of affection filter through their contact before he dropped his arm. “Your presence honours us.”

With a graceful nod, T’Pring turned towards the human who had accompanied her. “I believe you know Nyota?”

Chuckling under her breath, Uhura shook her head at the formalities and threw her arms around the Vulcian’s neck, squeezing tightly like she had done the day his mother had died, only this time her touch conveyed nothing but warmth, and he welcomed it instead of finding himself overwhelmed by its strength. “Spock, I missed you!”

“I am pleased that you are here.”

Slipping away from her embrace after precisely thirty-five seconds, Spock returned to standing by Jim’s side. “Captain James Kirk,” he said, privately enjoying Nyota’s poorly concealed surprise at the title. “This is T’Pring, my childhood companion. You have, of course, already met Nyota.”

Laughter filled the room and the Vulcian basked in it. “Yes, I seem to recall a previous acquaintance,” Kirk mused, winking cheerfully at Uhura, who couldn’t contain a small smile of her own in response. “It is an honour knowing you, T’Pring-an.”

“I have heard much about you, Captain Kirk,” T’Pring graciously said, “Though I was not aware you were residing here.”

Spock gestured towards the living room. “I shall acquire drinks. Please make yourselves comfortable.”

Kirk led their guests away, and the Vulcian replicated spiced tea for himself and Nyota, and orange juice for Jim and T’Pring, who had always been especially fond of terran fruit. When he joined the others, carrying a neat tray, he found the two women sitting quite close in front of the Captain, who was entertaining them with a tale from his childhood.

“And then the car fell off the cliff and I found myself alone with that cop.”

Spock snorted quietly, set their drinks on the low table and settled by his friend’s side, enjoying the soft thrum of emotions he projected. “You are the height of illogic,” he remarked, certain his words would be interpreted for the tease they were and no offense would be taken.
Jim bowed at him as if he had just put on a show, then grabbed his glass of juice and drank enthusiastically from it; he had a habit of devouring whatever food happened before him as quickly as possible, and the Vulcan wondered at the reasons behind it.

“Well, what brings you here on this fine logical morning?”

“T’Pring wanted to check up on Spock, so I decided to keep her company,” Nyota easily said. When she reached for her tea, the back of her fingers brushed T’Pring’s wrist, and a green blush spread over the tips of her ears.

*Fascinating.* Spock observed them carefully over the hem of his cup, taking in the subtle gestures that hinted at mutual interest, and contemplated the idea of his first human friend coming to an *agreement* with his childhood partner in crime, finding it to be most pleasant. They would suit one another greatly.

“Nyota has been most helpful in locating and returning ancient Vulcan artefacts from around the Galaxy,” T’Pring pointed out quite out of the blue – high praise coming from her, Spock knew, especially when it concerned culture and history, her preferred area of expertise.

“That’s wonderful!” Jim cried forcefully, instinctively locking his fingers around the Vulcan’s forearm in his excitement. “I hope you’ve been as successful as Spock and I have been piecing the VSA back together.”

How very human of him to be looking at Spock with such pride in his eyes; how very Vulcan of Spock to reach out a metal tendril to reciprocate the feeling. He had not missed how Nyota’s gaze trailed on Kirk’s touch, how the corner of her mouth tightened just so. He arched an eyebrow at her, anticipating a very stern talking-to in his immediate future.

She had been quite concerned about his growing proximity to the Captain, but she did not possess all the facts – which were that Jim Kirk was the most amazing human being he had ever had the fortune of falling in the good graces of. He was sure that, upon spending a sufficient amount of time in his presence, she would easily draw better conclusions.

“Kirk, can I have a word?” Uhura asked quickly; her expression was drawn, unreadable. “In private?”

Jim smiled at her – because other than amazing, Jim Kirk was also completely devoid of self-preservation instinct, which was one of the many reasons why it was only logical that Spock be his First Officer – and got to his feet in a swishing motion, relinquishing his touch on the Vulcan.

“Sure! Fancy a walk? It’s still early enough that we won’t melt.”

When she passed her, Nyota gave T’Pring an apologetic touch to her shoulder, and then she and Jim vanished into the corridor and outside the door.

Silence fell for scant seconds, then Spock allowed himself the luxury of relaxing in the familiar, unhoped-for presence of the person who knew him best in the world. “Humans,” he said, barely raising an eyebrow.

Sharing in on the joke, T’Pring brushed the tip of a finger against his wrist. “You appear to be at peace.”

Spock nodded, walked around the table to sit by her side. “More than I could have ever imagined, considering,” he told her truthfully, studying her elegant face, the lines that had not been there before when they had shared a video call and he was about to bring a certain cadet to court for
cheating on a test. “How are you faring?”

“I am adequate,” she tried, but knew better than to insult his intelligence – his knowledge of her – and quickly rephrased. “I believe I will be.”

*If you require assistance...* A thought, whispered into her mind with the ease that came from familiarity, and even though their link had been severed there were still imprints left over that well-trodden path.

*And you,* she answered immediately, open offer and gentle refusal at once. Aloud, she asked, direct and to the point: “How have you come to meet Nyota?”

“I was her advisor at the Academy,” Spock answered readily, more than willing to volunteer information. “She was an outstanding student and is to this day, a… cunning linguist.”

The light green flush suffused over T’Pring’s desert-tinted skin was enough to tell him she had caught the double entendre. “You value her.”

“Yes.” After finishing his tea, he set down the cup and turned fully towards her, folding his arms in front of his chest with his hands on his elbows in what on Vulcan passed for a gesture of welcome. “She appears to be quite taken by you,” he observed, carefully gauging her reaction.

T’Pring’s light brown eyes widened just so, and she carded her fingers through her long, wavy hair. “Perhaps so,” she allowed, pleased and pointlessly attempting to hide it. “What about Captain Kirk?”

“Jim? Please, specify.”

“You appear to be very close, and yet he is of relatively new… acquaintance.” There was doubt somewhere in her clear voice, and because they had grown up together he had no problem understanding the reasons behind it, the fear that he might attach himself to someone who would later cause him undue pain.

Spock let his expression soften. “You need not be concerned,” he assured her, “I am learning much from Jim. We shared the mental touch.” It had become something of a habit between them, and it would never cease to amaze the Vulcan how this human had so effortlessly managed to incorporate so alien a practice in his usual manners of communications. “He is my friend, and my Captain.”

*Your Captain?* T’Pring repeated, frowning a little as she contemplated the meaning of his statement. “Then you are returning to the *Enterprise*?”

“I am,” Spock said, with finality and merely the barest hint of wariness.

But T’Pring only nodded as if he had confirmed some long-standing theory of hers. “Of course you are,” she murmured, eyes glinting up at him in what could be interpreted as pride. “Where else could you go?”

Where else indeed.

The unforgiving desert sun shone white above them, and shadows shrank as they walked the busy streets, occasionally greeting a fellow officer but mostly making their way amongst the grieving survivors; trying not to look too long in their stern, solemn faces for fear they would reveal the agonies beneath.
“He speaks frequently of you,” Uhura said without preamble, leading Kirk around a building so they could settle on the elegant bench placed under the shelter of its back porch. “Spock. It seems to me that you’ve been given… a lot of trust.”

Jim crossed his arms and nodded gravely, brushing a few strands of sunburnt hair away from his forehead. “Yes. I know.”

For a moment, Nyota merely looked at him, at his eyes that were the colour of ice and yet managed to convey a kind of warmth she had rarely seen on humans, at the light smile that seemed to be perpetually curving his lips. “You’re not taking this lightly,” she concluded, and suppressed the surprise that wanted to tint her tone out of politeness.

Somehow, he caught on to it anyway, and a hint of playfulness passed over his face before he sobered again. “Believe me, I couldn’t even if I wanted to.”

There was much more to it than what he was letting on – Uhura could tell, could read all the little things his body and gestures conveyed, the silent language few people could fully interpret, and even less could control. She wouldn’t put it past Kirk to have mastered that art – chaotic genius that he was – but she detected no deception from him.

Defensiveness, maybe. As if he was annoyed by her interpretation of his character but trying very hard not to let it show.

She tore herself from her observation, thinking that this very young man – federation hero – seemed to be both extremely at ease and absolutely out of place, simultaneously welcoming and secretive, ostentatiously open and still unreachable. The contradictions in him were more than a little intriguing, and it was suddenly obvious to her why Spock had been so drawn to him, even before they met.

Frowning slightly at her own distraction, she rested her chin on cupped hands and decided to afford him the courtesy of plain honesty. “Listen, Kirk, I really don’t want to assume anything here, but I hope you understand what you’re getting into.” She schooled her features so they displayed nothing but the tacit warning she wished to send. “If you make him feel…”

Kirk interrupted her. “He doesn’t need me to feel,” he said, a touch of sharpness on his tongue.

Once again, he seemed to reel himself in, and his mercurial eyes softened in an earnest gaze, the lines around his mouth vanishing as quickly as they had appeared. “But I do understand. I’d never do anything to jeopardise that trust.”

“I have never seen him like that with anyone,” Nyota quietly pointed out, leaning forward, wishing to be sure, sure that this was no game Jim was playing, that he hadn’t underestimated the strength of Vulcan emotion, Vulcan affection. “Not even with T’Pring, and they grew up together. You have been of more help than you can possibly realise, but…”

But I don’t know if I can trust you not to break him right back.

A low hiss escaped Jim’s lips, and he closed his eyes for a second before turning towards her; he set a strong hold around her shoulders, hands warm and steady as he gazed intently at her. “Nyota. I know we haven’t exactly gotten off on the right foot, but you have to believe me,” he very nearly demanded, voice unwavering, charged somehow. “I’m not fooling around here. Spock and I, we’re going to be the best Command team Starfleet has ever dreamed of.”

He could have said a thousand different things – he could have given her an emotional confession or dismissed her concerns entirely, he could have boasted his evident pride at having conquered
the skittish Vulcan’s trust – but the fact that he chose to draw her focus on Starfleet, to keep his
declaration professional and yet all the more meaningful for it…

It gave Uhura a reason to put her faith in him.

“I’m glad to hear it,” she told him warmly. “I misjudged you, Kirk. I’m sorry.”

Jim’s chuckle was loud and good-natured, breaking the quiet of the grieving planet and melting
into its pale sky. “Nah, it’s okay. You had your reasons.”

It was almost unsettling to see him bounce back to his boyish, devil-may-care attitude in the blink
of an eye, shoulders loosening and legs dangling energetically at a staccato rhythm, but by now
Nyota had almost come to expect it.

“We must have met at a bad time,” she offered, thinking back about all the meet-uglies they’d had
at the Academy and wondering whether they had just been very, very unlucky.

“You can say that again,” Kirk agreed, tone cheerful even though his eyes had darkened. He was
quick to change the subject, and the communication expert sensed just how unwilling he was to
discuss that part of his life. “So… You going back to the Enterprise, too?”

“Yes. I’m actually looking forward to working with you… Captain.”

“Right back at you, Lieutenant,” he chirped.

Uhura smiled, and Jim beamed at her in answer, looking genuinely thrilled by the news, and her
fascination with him grew, even as her worries dissipated. They sat in comfortable silence for a
while; Kirk had taken a handful of candies from his pocket, offering Nyota a liquorice straw, and
they ate, each lost in their own thoughts, staring off in the horizon.

Finally, the young Captain spoke softly: “How are you finding New Vulcan?”

Uhura flashed him a glance before leaning back against the hard bench and returning her gaze to
the busy streets, to the Vulcans making their way into their new world. “Good,” she answered
thoughtfully. “Better than I expected. It’s been little over a month and already we’ve come so far.”
She waved an arm in a broad gesture designed to encompass the buildings and the city they had
begun to form, the desert below.

Jim nodded. “It was… difficult, at the beginning,” he slowly said, setting his jaw at the memory of
it. “But these people are really though. They’re kicking back.”

“I know what you mean. Seeing all this… It’s making me believe there truly is hope.”

“Yeah. There is.” A wide smirk crossed Kirk’s face, then, and he cocked his head to the side,
suddenly looking dangerously pleased with himself. “Speaking of which, I think T’Pring really has
the hots for you.”

Nyota carefully masked her reaction at this, along with her surprise at the unexpected topic – the
fact that he should even care to let her know of such a thing. “Since when have you become such
an expert on Vulcans?” she quipped, no real heat behind the words, just a light, amicable teasing.

“Since I live with one?” Jim ventured, chewing on a fluffy marsh melon. “Come on, she couldn’t
take her eyes off you!”

“I would have never imagined you’d be the gossiping type, Kirk.”
“So do you like her?” he asked, undeterred. “The two of you would look so gorgeous together.”

Nyota laughed. She was going to enjoy serving under him.

The first thing McCoy said after crossing the door to Jim and Spock’s shared quarters was: “Oh, joy. Two Spocks.”

He waved off any answer they might have given him, then his eyes zeroed-in on his hosts, and he fixed a threatening glare on the young Vulcan who had made the unfortunate decision of coming to greet him in person. “You look skinny. Have you been skipping meals?”

Before Spock could even begin to formulate a reply, Jim threw his arms around the doctor, effectively silencing him. “Bones! It’s so good to see you!” he chirped, smiling softly when his friend held him back just as tightly.

He pulled back and swept an appreciative gaze over the doctor, pleased to find him well-rested and more belligerent than ever – he was still eyeing the Vulcan with the air of one about to whip out ten hypos and a tricorder, and Kirk stepped quickly between them.

“We’re off duty, Bones, so lay back on the medical examination!” he hastily said, pushing Spock back as if to physically shield him from the doctor’s – admittedly not entirely unjustified – wrath. For some reason, the Vulcan let himself be moved, and folded his arms behind his back patiently, waiting for the subject to change. “You’ll have all the time in the world for that on the Enterprise.”

Leonard’s eyes narrowed, and Jim laughed merrily, enjoying his evident displeasure. “Well, isn’t that just wonderful,” the doctor drawled, making his way towards the replicator to fix himself a mint julep. “I gather you’ll be joining Jim in his madness?”

Spock blinked, and Kirk studied his face as he tried to gather his wits enough to produce a suitable retort. Finally, he seemed to settle on: “I… am considering it.”

“Peachy.” Bones downed the drink in one gulp and dumped the empty glass in Jim’s outstretched hand. “Now I need to worry about keeping that one alive too,” he growled, as if the fault for the Vulcan’s recklessness lied entirely on the newly-appointed Captain’s shoulders.

Kirk laughed brightly, delighted by the undisputable proof that the doctor had taken a begrudging liking to Spock (at least, his version of Spock). “Bones, it’s gonna be fine,” he cajoled, pushing a chocolate muffin under his nose as peace offering.

“Fine my ass, the two of you are gonna get yourselves killed,” McCoy retorted, shooting the young Vulcan a dirty look, which he returned with an unimpressed one of his own.

“Aw, Bones, that’s awfully dark of you,” Jim chanted, elbowing Spock in the ribs gently, so as not to hurt himself; he leaned forward, placed his mouth inches from his beautifully pointed ear, and said, in a loud, conspiratorial whisper: “Don’t you just love him for his optimism?”

The Vulcan blushed a light green from his friend’s very close proximity, but did not recoil. “I cannot say I do,” he coolly observed, arching an eyebrow at the doctor.

Leonard huffed at that but thankfully he did not comment, instead choosing to watch Kirk as he collected a variety of unhealthy snacks on a plate. Spock snorted under his breath at the sight, and turned his back to them to spare himself the trouble of having to take sides – should he defend his future Captain in his right to eat what he pleased or should he side with the doctor’s most logical desire to have him lead a healthier life?
It was a conundrum, and one he would eventually be called upon to resolve. For the time being, he decided to let the ambient noises distract him, soothe his mind with the easy tranquillity of the evening.

Jim had put on some music – a soft, diluted version of the classical beats and shouting he seemed to favour so much, and to which the Vulcan had been subjected once and once only – and Spock let his lips curve up just so as he watched Nyota and T’Pring dance in the middle of their living room. Inviting them both had been a magnificent idea for which he had to commend his human companion. They looked so at ease together, barely touching under the dimmed lights, and if that was to be his last day on New Vulcan, he was glad to have witnessed this.

Leaving Jim and the doctor alone – after all, they were very close friends, Spock could recognise as much, and he would allow them some time to get reacquainted – he wandered to where his counterpart was sitting placidly on the sofa, examining the impressive array of foods Kirk had prepared for the occasion.

There was a light in the elder’s eyes that made Spock shiver inwardly – love and hurt inextricably tied together, recognition melting into nostalgia in a way no one should have ever witnessed. He wondered if he, too, would experience that kind of pain as the decades unfolded and he found himself once again alone.

Banishing such illogical, futile thoughts from his mind, he composed a neutral expression and settled himself on the farthest end of the sofa. His counterpart glanced at him briefly, amusement clear on his lined face as he waited for him to speak.

Deciding there was no point in pleasantries when he was talking to a version of himself, Spock followed the elder’s gaze to where Jim had roped the doctor into a rather dreadful, tentative dance. “Was he like this, the Jim Kirk of your reality?”

The elder chewed thoughtfully on a carrot before he answered, tone low and unhurried. The sense of inner peace he projected was jarring. “He was not nearly as restless, but yes. They are very much alike.”

Defensive for some reason he did not wish to examine, Spock leaned towards the other, narrowing his eyes at him as he finally found the courage to meet his too-knowing stare. “How can you say that?” he pressed, wanting him to rephrase, to take back what he’d told him – to assure him that there was no such thing as two identical universes, two identical, fixed paths, fixed people, fixed personalities.

“I have met many a Jim Kirk in the course of my life,” the old Vulcan murmured placidly, perhaps guessing at the nature of his discomfort – perhaps understanding it far better than he himself did. “I admit it is unsettling at first.” He nodded as if Spock had voiced his doubts aloud, and went on slowly in a gentle, soothing voice. “Witnessing people you intimately know as they are thrust in a completely different setting, as they have grown in a completely different way.”

He paused for a moment, and once again looked over at Jim as he laughed his heart out, one arm around McCoy’s waist and another around Nyota’s shoulders. “Yet I have found that if there is a constant that can cross the universes, then that is Jim Kirk. His life, his bravery, his goodness.”

“I understand,” Spock said, leaning back against the soft cushions he had gathered from the floor before the guests arrived; realising he had unconsciously clenched his fingers too tightly together, he relaxed them, watching the blood flow back to them as he opened and closed his hands quickly. He let the sound of the humans’ laughter calm him further, lowering his shields just enough to absorb the general taste of their positive emotions. Even so, Kirk’s dynamic mind was a beacon
among them, drawing him in, and he had to restrain himself from delving deeper into its depths.

He had already allowed his telepathy to run afoul once – he was not about to repeat such a gross, grievous mistake any time soon.

His counterpart cut through his musings like metal through glass, shattering him for but an instant with his unexpected question: “Have you considered what I have told you when we met?”

Spock’s lashes fluttered as he blinked rapidly, trying to collect himself. Of course – of course he had considered that, who wouldn’t?

_Do yourself a favour_, his own future self had recommended, as if it was easy, as if it was permitted, _put aside logic, do what feels right_. Yes, he had reflected extensively upon that, the foolishness of it all, the thrill; his desire to remain in Starfleet _was_ a logical one – or at the very least, one he could logically excuse – but his wish to serve with Jim – and Jim only – was an entirely different thing.

“I will join Jim on the _Enterprise_, if that is what you are referring to.”

He should not be annoyed at the hint of satisfaction that passed across the elder’s eyes – Spock’s eyes, Amanda’s eyes – at that.

“I commend your decision.”

Spock searched his brain for some kind of witty retort that could wipe the smug look from the older Vulcan’s face, but Jim flopped down between them, effectively ending that line of thought.

“Are you Spocks enjoying the party?” the human asked, reaching forth to grab a handful of sweets under the baleful eye of McCoy, who had remained with Uhura and T’Pring, caught in a discussion about the meeting the three of them had attended in the morning.

“Very much so, Jim,” the elder replied graciously. “Thank you for your hospitality. As ever, your cooking is excellent.”

Kirk beamed wildly at the praise. “Will you be coming to the ceremony?”

“Perhaps.”

Spock restrained himself from scoffing loudly – as if his counterpart would ever miss the opportunity to be in Jim’s company. But then again, who could blame him?

“What’s with you two and smug, vaguely ominous answers?” the human muttered, only half-teasing. “Can’t you just say yes or no like the rest of us?”

Both Vulcans smirked lightly and neither replied. Elder Spock raised an eyebrow at him, while the younger merely cocked his head to the side, choosing to steal some of Kirk’s candy from under his nose.

The human’s blue eyes brightened further in glee and mischief, and he jumped to his feet, pressing his fists to his hips and staring down at the Vulcans in mock-threat. His powerful feelings formed a golden aura around him, shimmering faintly. “Teaming up against me, are we?”

“We would never dream of it, Jim,” the elder said, very seriously.

Kirk shook his head indulgently. “Yeah, right.” Swallowing his last candy, he turned his piercing
gaze on the younger Vulcan, a hint of playfulness still in his tone as he smiled gently at him. “So, how about a dance, Spock?”

For a moment, Spock returned his stare uncomprehendingly. Then he stood in a daze and followed him to the middle of the room, stopping to hover awkwardly by his side. “Very well,” he belatedly acquiesced.

Jim placed one hand on his waist and the other on his shoulder, waiting for the Vulcan to mirror him before he led them confidently in a simple human dance, easy to follow and to learn.

It suddenly dawned on Spock that his friend was, indeed, quite attractive – extremely so, if he were honest with himself. Those expressive eyes of his held as many secrets as he shared, simultaneously revealing and concealing the brilliant mind within; and everything about him was golden, like the sun, warm and dizzying and oddly comforting.

Absurd, that he should find so alien a being this familiar. Entrancing.

They danced in silence to a number of unnamed songs – certainly more than one, but the Vulcan couldn’t bring himself to count, couldn’t bring himself to shift his attention away from Jim, from the affection that softened the edges of his face and the firm grip he held around him.

A shaky breath escaped him when the human called his name. “Spock?”

“Yes, Jim?”

“Have you decided yet?”

If he hadn’t been so taken by the intoxicating scent of sugar surrounding his friend – future Captain – he might have guessed at his train of thought. “Decided?” he repeated, subtly leaning back for a breath of fresh air, anything to clear his suddenly clouded mind. He distantly realised that Nyota and T’Pring were observing him, talking privately in whispers. McCoy had retreated to the sofa and was chatting animatedly with the elder, discussing Kirk.

“If you want to be mine,” Jim said, voice pitched low, only for him to hear. Spock was acutely aware of the fact that the human’s fingers were resting one point seventeen inches from his bare neck. “What say you, First Officer?”

The title dropped him back down to reality – of course Kirk would be referring to his previous request. Of course. They had known each other for little over a month, which was nothing, for human standards they barely qualified as friends, and he himself had dared use that definition only because Jim had done so prematurely, and there was no logic now in attaching other, more complex meanings to the word, and he – Jim – was clearly indicating as much…

Pushing his attraction to the back of his mind to be analysed and dealt with later on, Spock allowed his lips to curve into the ghost of a smile, and bent down to whisper in the human’s rounded ear, much as he had done to him before.

“I believe… when the time comes… you will have your answer.”

There was a sense of promise, of new beginnings, of excitement. Spock wished he could find the courage to let himself feel it – believe in it.

The Enterprise was as bright and lustrous as ever when James Kirk – the youngest Captain, Starfleet’s poster boy, the face of a new era – set foot on the bridge for the first time as her
Captain.

“Manoeuvring thrusters and impulse engines at your command, sir,” Sulu announced, grinning with the eager enthusiasm of one who had waited his entire life for that moment, those words, that mission.

“Weapon systems and shields on stand-by!” Chekov’s chirping voice was lighter, almost laden with giddiness as he looked his way.

Nyota swivelled in her chair to meet his gaze. “Dock control reports ready, Captain,” she said, putting a strange emphasis in the title. They exchanged a complicit glance, and Kirk’s smile was wide and earnest as he realised he had won her over – won her respect and perhaps, if he was lucky, her friendship as well.

He took a few triumphant steps on the polished floor, basking in the clean white lights, in the moment that was everything he’d never known he needed, everything he could have ever desired. “Bones!” he cried, wanting to share in this. He slapped his friend’s shoulder and grinned at his scowl. “Buckle up!”

When he sat in the chair it was like coming home. Like the universe had finally righted itself, and perhaps it had, just a little, perhaps some things were meant to be, meant to return. “Scotty!” he called through the intercom, not even trying to hide the vibrations of joy in his own voice. “How’re we doing?”

“Dilithium chambers at maximum, Captain!” came the Engineer’s elated answer, along with an already resigned scream of: “Get down!”

Jim smiled, a contained smile that nonetheless made his cheeks hurt, and it felt like he had been smiling for a year. “Mister Sulu, prepare to engage thrusters!”

The swishing sound of the turbolift doors opening had him whip his head to the side, and there was no way for him to conceal the undiluted victory that poured over him at the sight of his Vulcan friend grinning amusedly at him in that special way of his.

“Permission to come aboard, Captain.”

“Permission granted.”

Kirk stood and Spock walked up to him – far too close but that had become a habit and neither minded – staring at him as if trying to logically explain the reasons behind his happiness.

“As you have yet to select a First Officer,” he began, speaking in his best professional tone though his eyes gave him away, gave away his subtle pleasure at having surprised him so. “Respectfully, I would like to submit my candidacy,” he offered, as if the Captain hadn’t asked him over and over in the course of the past week, as if he hadn’t pretended all along that he was going to refuse him. “Should you desire, I can provide character references.”

Jim wanted to laugh at that, but he settled for a warm smirk and a light nod. “It would be my honour, Commander,” he said, savouring the words in his mouth because they were new and yet so very right.

Spock looked at him a second more and then lowered his gaze to the ground in that endearing way he had of masking an emotional response. As he stepped to his station, Kirk returned to the chair, facing forward proudly.
“Manoeuvring thrusters, mister Sulu.”

“Thrusters on stand-by.”

“Take us out.”

“Aye, aye, Captain.”

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A friendship that will define you both

In ways that you cannot yet realise

An act of faith

One I hope you will repeat in the future

-Spock Prime, Star Trek 2009
HMU at my Star Trek blog!
Okay so... what do y'all think? Fluffy enough? I wanted to include Nyota threatening to murder Jim if he hurt Spock but I didn't want to go full-on crack fic. Let's just all agree she definitely would.

Next chapter will be me attempting to sum up the year or so that comes between the first and the second movie, then we're back to business - INTO DARKNESS, in which our main pairing almost dies but not quite.

So that's just about it! Updates might get slightly slower because university starts this monday and it's a pretty busy schedule, but I'm dying to finish this!

Stay tuned for the happy end!
The Loving

Chapter Summary

In which the mission begins and Spock is more and more drawn to his Captain.

Is he in love? Well he certainly won't admit it.

Will they face their feelings like adults? Well they certainly will not.

But sharing a bed sounds like a magnificent idea!

Chapter Notes

Soooo I am alive! With the flu! Suffering! Powering through inktober like nobody's business!
But here's chapter 5! The Loving! Aka Spock and Jim behave like a married couple but like, in a totally-not-in-love sort of way. You know the gist.

I hope you have fun with this chapter because Spock is SMITTEN

Also, brief mention of Tarsus IV - the last scene is dedicated to it, or well, to the aftermath of 'The Conscience of the King', or that time when Kodos the Executioner became an actor, performed for the Enterprise crew and his daughter killed all the survivors and then her own father. But, well, we all know how that went... it's what happens after between Jim and Spock that matters!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

4

The Loving

I burned so long and so quiet

You must have wondered if I loved you back

One week into the mission they started playing chess. It was Spock’s idea, for once, Spock’s offer, Spock’s invitation: he had seen the tri-dimensional set in Rec Room III and thought it would be an engaging excuse to expose the workings of Jim’s mind. His Captain had seemed elated at the prospect, claiming he had not played since he was a kid before proceeding to beat the pants off him, so to say.
The Vulcan had found himself inextricably ensnared, captured by the dynamism, the endless possibilities of Kirk’s thoughts, and had immediately requested another game, wanting to be immersed in that erratic, impossible-to-predict strategy of his.

And if there had been a peculiar look in Jim’s eyes when they had first set the board, Spock was too absorbed in his fascination to pay much attention to it, which was why he filed it away to be analysed later, and promptly forgot all about it.

He and Jim spent most of their time together; often they were with the crew, sometimes alone, but they were seldom apart. Spock had the chance to understand captaincy in ways he hadn’t even thought to imagine, and through that, he came to understand his friend.

Kirk made a point to know the people he worked with by name, and he always had a few words or at least a smile ready for whoever greeted him – never, not even for a moment, did he present himself as anything less than confident and at peace. The Vulcan admired him for it, for the effort he put in putting the crew at ease, in keeping up appearances. He admired his unwavering passion and his burning strength and the genuine interest with which he welcomed everyone’s input and opinions.

At his side, Spock learned what it meant for Jim to be human and Captain and leader – though he was frequently lost, he could not take his eyes and mind off him. In very little time Kirk had managed to weave an atmosphere of loyalty and trust throughout the ship and particularly the bridge, and there wasn’t a person aboard who wasn’t proud to serve under him.

It was ride or die with Jim, and the Vulcan had never quite grasped the meaning of the expression before the many away missions he shared with his Captain and his friend. Everything was chess to Kirk, or perhaps he approached chess like he approached life – in an ever-changing flux, a curious mix between bare realism and glorious idealism, the balance of calculating reason and impulsive intuition. Following him was like orbiting a sun just far enough that you didn’t fall in it, but always in danger of being scorched.

He seemed to be painfully aware of causes and consequences, of the weight of the lives depending on him. And Spock, who stood quietly by him, shadowing his every step, protesting loudly for every time he put himself in danger to spare others, was treated to the sight of his fear and his rage and his guilt, revealed only to him and a few other chosen.

It humbled him to be among those Jim called upon for comfort and reassurance, though he rarely saw what good it could possibly do the human to rely on him for emotional security, and he often felt unequipped to provide it, overwhelmed by the need to offer his friend all that he had been given. Somehow, his efforts were enough.

As they played chess, game after game, little by little, bits and pieces of Kirk’s past were revealed to the Vulcan, forming a strangely disquieting puzzle. And it wasn’t merely Jim sharing freely – because, oddly enough, he did not, not entirely at least. He shared random, disconnected anecdotes, flashes of stories, never the whole picture, never spoke of dates and places and names. In truth, what lingered most were the things left unsaid.

The touch of a hand on his shoulder that meant so many different things at different times – I’m glad you’re alive, I’m here if you need me, I just need to lean on you for a second and feel you – the flash of a glance, blue eyes lighting up for a moment whenever they met his, a silent conversation passing across the spaces between them – I got this, Are you in?, Is this okay?, Are we all gonna die? – somehow, Spock understood.

He understood, and he responded, as a Vulcan would, as a human would, as a friend would.
One month, thirteen days and six hours into their mission, it seemed to him as if life on the *Enterprise* was the only life he’d ever known.

Two months, twenty-one days, three hours and fifteen minutes into their mission, they shared a bed for the first time.

It was the week after they lost their first crewmember, a boy aged twenty-two named Michel Portinari, captured by hostile people on a planet the instruments had repeatedly reported uninhabited. Spock resolved to tear his computers apart and rebuild them in a more efficient fashion; he was going to request Nyota’s help, so they could work at her console too.

Jim did not take it well; it was expected, somehow, but the Vulcan would have never predicted the devastating effect that death had on his friend, the darkness it seemed to evoke – *evoke* because it had always been there, hidden under layer after layer of sunshine, just waiting for the right chance to rear up and swallow the human down.

He made a call to Portinari’s family – a mother and a sister and a boyfriend – relaying the circumstances of his death and how well he had carried himself throughout the brief parenthesis of his service; he did not ask forgiveness, not explicitly at least but it was implied. *Forgive that I could not protect him.*

The Captain did not sleep at all for the next four days – Spock could hear him pace on the other side of the bathroom doors, muffled sounds of sock-clad feet and Jim’s roughened voice as he whispered quietly to himself, scant, occasional remarks dotting the passing of time, a Padd falling to the floor followed by a muffled curse.

The tension surrounding his friend grew and grew; Spock let it, thinking the grieving human needed some space, thinking he would not welcome a Vulcan’s intrusion anyhow, for what could a Vulcan understand of a human’s sorrow, a human’s guilt?

They felt so differently.

On the fifth night, however, he let himself into the Captain’s quarters, because he couldn’t bear the sight of his pain any longer – it was logical to wish to comfort him, and Spock was a creature of logic, or at least he tried to live as one, and so he justified his trespassing and ignored the very selfish reasons that had prompted it: that he missed his friend’s warmth, his carefree laughter and the teasing looks they shared on the bridge.

He found Jim sitting on his bed, completely awake, reading from a hardcover book that was among the last produced before the advent of digitalised literature. Shrouded in shadow but for a reddish light hanging behind him, he was eerily still, as if he was forcefully keeping himself as such, restraining himself.

“Captain,” the Vulcan called softly, “If I may?”

The human startled, eyes flashing to him in wild surprise, but he offered him a pale smile nonetheless – the bare upturning of his lips before it melted in a grimace. “Are you the ghost of my past sins?”

A moment of thought before Spock caught the reference – *A Christmas Carol*, an old terran tale – then he arched an eyebrow and smoothly replied: “I do not believe such an intervention is warranted.”

“You have no idea,” Kirk muttered to himself, but he shook his head before his second in
command could inquire further. “Did I wake you?”

“I do not require sleep at this time,” the Vulcan answered promptly, having predicted the question.

“Then why are you here? Do you need something?” He set aside his book and straightened his back, looking expectantly up at him, evidently ready to provide whatever it was the Vulcan might desire; Spock walked closer, breathing into the familiar human scent of his friend, and let his mouth display a very small smile.

“I do not require anything, but perhaps you might,” he said, staring down at the empty cup of water on the strangely bare nightstand, at the mountain of Padds behind. “Companionship, maybe?”

The Captain’s answering grin was a little more genuine when their met. “Sure, if you have time to spare.”

There was a hint of doubt in his voice, a certain vulnerability, as if he thought Spock had a better place to be than with him, better things to do than share his pain as he shared his victories and warmth. The Vulcan reached a decision, then, wanting to banish the weary, hollow look from his friend’s face, the restless glint about his eyes that gave him the appearance of a caged animal waiting to be struck.

“Would you wish me to remain?” he asked, touching a finger to the bedding.

Jim’s mouth popped open in surprise, but he recovered quickly, producing another lifeless smile as he once again doubted the sincerity of his commander’s words. “Would you?”

Spock thought of how best to answer – a million possible things, excuses and explanations and paths of logic neither of them had ever needed. There was no need for him to justify his offer, none past the fact that he wished, very much, to ease his friend’s mind, to be close to him in this moment of confusion and loss. And so he simply said: “Yes. Jim,” in a soft whisper.

His Captain beamed softly and turned away, leaving a space for him to lie on; the Vulcan took his time slipping his boots off and the outer layer of his uniform, folding it neatly on the nearby chair, over a pile of scattered clothes and Padds.

It was… surprisingly easy, settling down beside his friend, even if Jim was now facing him and his eyes were mere inches from him, even if the human’s legs were tangled with his, even if his warmth was all around him and his arm rested across his chest. Spock had never experienced such a sense of tranquillity, and he wondered fleetingly if this exercise was done more for his own benefit than Kirk’s.

Kirk who had very nearly died planet-side, Kirk who had refused his hands and his help and had spat at him when he’d begged they leave to safety, Kirk that had jeopardised it all to rescue a dead man, Kirk who had refused to abandon hope until the last possible moment and after.

And Spock had been terrified, paralyzed to see him in danger, to think he might be killed, so he found solace in the damp heat of the human’s breath fanning against his throat and his weight upon him.

“Was it my fault?” Jim asked after a long silence in which there was only the sound of his heart beating and they held still, so still, existing within each other’s arms.

Impulsively, responding to the emotional turmoil beating against his lowered shields from the Captain’s mind, the Vulcan reached out his hand across the space between them, searched for him, touched the very tips of their fingers together; it was a familial gesture, innocuous in meaning as a
kiss to the cheek would be on Earth… and yet it was so different with Jim, so new. It lingered.

“No, Jim,” Spock murmured, letting Kirk – human, friend, Captain – cover his hand with his warmer one, subtly suppressing the reaction his body and mind wished to make at the prolonged, overwhelming contact. “You are not at fault.”

A sigh slipped into the crook of his neck. He slid closer to his companion into the small bed, closing his eyes as their thoughts blended together just a little. Allowing some of his drowsy relaxation to bleed into the human, the Vulcan gently steered him away from his morose mood, soothing his guilt with glimpses of how deeply he cared for him, how grateful he was for his continued existence.

Jim brushed his fingers through his hair, watching it fall back down into a neat fringe with a contemplative expression on his face. “You’re sweet,” he murmured pensively.

Spock blinked his eyes open, shaken by the unexpected intimacy melting the human’s voice into rich honey.

“Thank you,” Kirk added then. “For this.”

“Of course, Jim,” the Vulcan simply said, reaching for the covers to wrap around them both. “You require sleep.”

“Tell me something first.” Burrowing his face deeper into the pillow so that only the corner of his right eye could be seen, Jim stretched into the bed, long and lean, then curled up on his side, drawing his friend to him. “What made you decide to come back to the Enterprise?”

“You,” Spock answered truthfully. He ordered the lights out and placed his hand on the human’s shoulder to keep him still, feeling his exhaustion ebb away into the secluded peace of the Captain’s quarters. “I wished to follow you.”

After that night, almost all lines seemed to blur between them.

When they worked together in his quarters, Jim leaned bodily against Spock’s side, chin pressed in the hollow beneath his neck as he peered into his Padd; if they were alone, the Vulcan would lie with his head pillowed on the human’s legs, let him card soothing fingers into his hair; he allowed Jim to kiss his forehead and head and cheeks, sometimes their hands brushed and he did not recoil, keeping as close to his friend as he dared.

Spock played the lyre for him, ancient traditional songs at first, but then he learned Kirk’s favourites too, music he had never much cared for but that somehow acquired a different taste, a different sound once it was offered as a gift to his companion.

He discovered the human sang beautifully – I used to sing at bars when I was sixteen, Jim told him over a shrug, humming along the chirping notes of a traditional song. The Vulcan was enchanted, and saved in his memory each occasion in which he caught him in his absent-minded day-to-day life, collecting words and notes as if they were precious stones.

They melded frequently, if only shallowly.

The touch of Jim’s mind became the most familiar place for him to be in, and his favourite; there was a sense of home, of belonging, connected with the hearing of that mental voice, with the heat and light he projected. And if at first he had been fascinated, now he was enraptured.
Five months and two days into the mission, Spock could no longer deny the fact that he was in love with his Captain.

It took him quite a while to accept the truth in all its frightening implications, but he came to a point where it became unavoidable. He confided in Nyota, hoping for advice and sure she would not betray his secret.

“I already knew that, Spock,” she told him with a smile. “It’s rather obvious, if you look for the signs.”

He sat across from her, hiding behind his cup of vanilla tea, and stared at her with plain embarrassment written of his face as he tried to absorb her words – was he that noticeable in his regard for his Captain? Had his behaviour been unprofessional?

“Don’t worry, nobody else knows,” she reassured him warmly, eyes sparkling with a hint of gentle mocking. It occurred to him that she and Jim were very much alike, and that perhaps this was the very reason why they had seemed to be at odds at the beginning, and why now a bond of loyalty and respect and playful complicity had brought them together.

“You should tell him, you know,” Uhura suggested.

Spock never did.

Nine months into their mission, he found out about Tarsus IV. Not from Jim; not from McCoy either, who knew but pretended he did not – and the Vulcan could not fault him from wanting to keep such a secret, shield his friend from the implications admitting it aloud brought, the troubles that would follow.

The Captain had done his best to hide the truths of his past, and Spock himself would have never dared to pry, to violate his privacy in any way, but it seemed as if that past was destined to return and claim Jim’s life that had been spared thirteen years before – and the Vulcan was willing to cross every line, burn every bridge if it meant sparing his friend that fate.

Kirk raged at him when he confronted him about his findings.

He raged even though it was impossible to deny it with Kodos the Executioner walking among them, with his daughter shadowing his every step almost maniacally, protecting him from the Captain’s knowledge, the Captain’s accusations. He raged even though the rest of the survivors had been murdered, even though he was surely to be next, even though the danger he was in was far greater than his discomfort at having his First Officer know about it…

Jim, Spock had noticed, had a tendency of wanting to fight his own battles alone. But the Vulcan stood by him and watched over him, keeping close.

Afterwards – after the emergency had been resolved, after Anton Karidian had been killed by his own daughter, after she had been transported to Starbase 11 for examination and reclusion, after life on the Enterprise had returned to a semblance of normality – Spock invited him to his quarters; he knocked at the door to their bathroom and waited for him to open, a wary look on his face as if he was afraid his Captain would have another go at him. Jim felt a little sorry for him, but not enough that he would regret his outburst of two days before, or apologise for it.

He would have never wanted for his friend to find out – he would have never wanted for the truth to resurface, he had wanted to forever banish the memory of Kodos’s haunting voice spilling forth
orders of death and destruction, of crying children and screaming and hunger and killing.

But circumstances had made it so that the Vulcan had brought Tarsus between them – dug up those very memories only to spit them back up at him like there was no way for him to refuse them, and yes, Kirk understood his reasons, knew that had their positions been reversed he would have done the same… Still he couldn’t accept the fact that now that genocide was part of how Spock saw him, belonged to the many definitions he ascribed Jim – *survivor, desperate, unwanted, abandoned.*

“Let me help,” the Vulcan said, pointing that transparent gaze of his on his face. Jim was powerless to deny him, to refuse that offer, those words that were the most important, the most significant one could ever hear, more beautiful, more tangible even than a declaration of love.

And so he went, into the desert-hot room that smelled like incense and candles, overwhelming and sweet and strangely soothing, following his second in Command as he padded noiselessly on the floor, knelt in front of the finely-sculpted fire shrine. Spock’s quarters were a triumph of reds and browns and yellows, rich tones that enveloped the human like a blanket, like New Vulcan’s sun had months before.

He stared at the velvety black robe that pooled gracefully by him, lapping his knees as he sat cross-legged and waited for his friend to speak, to ask him questions about his tragedy, ask how he had come to survive it, what he had done, how many lives he had taken.

“Your mind is in turmoil,” Spock told him quietly after a suspended moment in which Kirk fought his desire to flee.

Then that pale, green-hued hand slide across the small space between their bodies, reaching for him, and Jim took it, pressed their palms together in a seamless fit, distantly wondering when it was they had begun to share such an intimate contact as if it were normal among friends, and where the touch fell in the confused blend of familiarity and misinterpretations that made up their relationship.

“I would ease your suffering.”

Kirk recoiled. “I don’t want you to erase my pain. *I need* my pain.”

Somehow, Spock understood; he let his fingers glide upwards, until they were wrapped around the human’s shoulder, squeezing firmly, and again Jim covered them with his own, holding him there like some sort of anchor, a vehicle to keep him rooted to the ground, to reality, to the present.

“That is never my intention,” the Vulcan murmured softly, voice flowing like the moonlit desert sands when the wind blew over its dunes, shaping them anew. His gaze was open, earnest, warm eyes shining with the depth of feeling he only ever showed his Captain. “What I am offering is a way to centre yourself.”

For a few minutes, Jim breathed slowly into their shared space, holding his friend’s stare steadily, absorbing the peaceful crackling of the fire and the pungent scents now clinging to his crumpled uniform as he tried to push his guilt away to where he had kept it hidden and silent for the most part of his teenage years and adult life.

Seeing Kodos again, hearing him speak, defend his terrifying choice, had broken the dam, and now he couldn’t reconcile what he had been on the Colony – *child, unworthy, rebel, failure* – with what he was – *Captain, broken, divided* – what he was expected to be – *in control, grown, freed.*
“I would meditate with you, share my mind with you.”

Spock lifted his right hand to trace cool fingertips against his face, his psy-points – a purely telepathic gesture, one Kirk would never presume to interpret as a human would. There was a heaviness, a sense of expectancy stretching around them, as if what the Vulcan was prepared to give him – insight on his mind such as he’d never experienced – would permanently change the unspoken things that lay between them.

“What do you trust me?”

Jim thought they were close enough to kiss – Spock’s lips slightly parted over his even breaths, tinted a soft green because it was late and he wasn’t wearing lipstick anymore, so tempting – but that was a dangerous thing to do, a point-of-no-return kind of thing in the jeopardising-it-all sense, and so the human merely smiled and mirrored the Vulcan’s touch, drinking in the shiver that passed along his friend’s spine as he arranged his fingers in the position of a meld.

“I trust you,” the Captain said.

Spock nodded slowly, looking pleased and solemn and relieved. “Kashkau wuhkuh eh terethur,” he murmured, and an arrow of pure thought passed through his skin to the human’s, drawing them impossibly close. “Our minds, one and together.”

The meld was unlike anything Jim had experienced in his life, unlike anything he had imagined – as different from their casual mental touching as a puddle from the ocean. The outside world seemed to vanish as the Vulcan guided him cautiously into the depths of his mind (and what a thrill it was to feel Spock’s elation as his own). He saw colours and heard sounds and smelled and tasted things human senses were never meant to capture, and through it all reflected back at him was a most peculiar picture of himself, how Spock understood him, Spock’s idea of him.

With surgical precision, he controlled the flow of thoughts and feelings curling between them, careful to keep it bearable, soothing, unobtrusive. There was nothing but comfort in the Vulcan’s mind, and Jim appreciated that, appreciated the warmth poured over him, the fact that Spock wasn’t attempting to communicate, wasn’t even sharing anything past a grounding impression of clear calm.

He was distantly aware that the Vulcan had caught his free hand in his own and had pressed his thumb firmly above his wrist; physical sensations blurred in comparison to the mental awareness of another being breathing into him, existing within him.

You are more than what your tragedy has made you.

He let himself melt into his friend’s unwavering trust, the faith he had in him and in all they had built since the beginning of the mission, and the warmth of the fireplace burning against his left side carried him into a pleasantly dazed headspace as Spock pressed patterns of ancient writing into his skin.

Ka’i – I am here, the Vulcan whispered into his restless mind.

And Jim believed him.

Later – much, much later into the night – Spock lowered the temperature inside his quarters for his comfort and requested he stay. Jim thanked him, though the Vulcan brushed it off with an amused quirking of his eyebrow as he folded his blankets away onto his desk chair.
“We could do this again, sometime?” Kirk ventured, unsure what the protocol was when your First Officer – whom might also have been your lover, in another universe – let you waltz freely inside his mind. “If you like?”

Spock’s eyes brightened. “That would be agreeable.”

“That’s great, sweetheart.”

They laid together as had become a habit, and Jim smiled in the darkness of the room.

He was still upset, still raw, but the memories had lost their insistent, too-vivid flavour, leaving his mind free to restart the painstakingly slow process of growing around them and beyond them. Inside the overly warm bed, with Spock’s head resting on his shoulder and his soft hair inches from his face, he let himself unwind, release the tension that had kept him up and stiff for far too long.

The Vulcan’s fingers were tracing gentle patterns on his arm, once again drawing runes on his skin, and for a moment the human considered asking him about them, about their meaning and the reason why he offered them to him specifically, but something held him back.

Instead, he pressed a fleeting kiss to Spock’s forehead, sending a bout of gratefulness and appreciation through the affectionate contact. A quiet sigh escaped his friend’s lips, and he settled closer to him, arms locked in a loose circle about his form.

“Rest now, Jim. Our mission on Nibiru begins tomorrow.”

_I did. I did. I do._

_-Annelyse German, ‘The Pillowcase’_
Chapter End Notes

This is it. Next Chapter will be Into Darkness.
Hell yeah!
We love, we die, we repress feelings! It's gonna be a blast! An angstfest!

So let me explain my reasoning for having Tarsus IV in here right now. Jim is so OOC in Into Darkness - he behaves so recklessly, so foolishly, so act-before-you-think that I just... can't even watch the movie again without cringing. So for this fic, we're going with this: Jim is so upset and generally off because of his very recent, very fresh close encounter with Kodos the Executioner; add to that the fact that Spock very nearly died under his nose like a couple days after and he had to jeopardise the Enterprise to save him. Plus a few other very important things that happen between the Nibiru mission and the Enterprise being taken from him...
And we have Jim going into a mindless rage to execute Khan, letting those missiles onto his ship without question and basically firing Scotty... Sort of...

I'm trying my best here.

But Well, I hope you're enjoying this story! Because I'm having hella fun writing it! And I'm so super hyped for next chapter! Which is also the reason why this is M rated, though, very mildly, just to be sure?

Thank you all so much for you support! I'll just shut up now eh
LLAP
The Dying

Chapter Summary

In which all the light in Spock's world goes out - and he is ready to argue that the fault lies entirely with him.

Chapter Notes

Okay SO this is Into Darkness right here. Of course, I didn't re-write the entire movie, just a few key scenes to which I added... lots and lots of things. Now be warned, this is the reason why the fic is rated M (though again it's very mild!) so yeah, I mean that happens? And a lot of guilt and grief on Spock's part.

I hope you enjoy my take! It's the only way this all makes sense to me.

Oh, and just assume that the scene in which Carol Marcus strips down to her underwear never happened. It's what I do.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

6

The Dying

We’re a little out of sync, I fear

A little out of rhyme

One universe apart, my dear

And a little out of time

The Nibiru mission was a disaster on all accounts.

Be it that the Captain had not yet fully recovered from his touch-and-go with former governor of Tarsus IV Kodos the Executioner – Anton Karidian, pleading forgiveness from one who had given too much already – be it that no member of bridge crew wished to witness another tragedy so close after Vulcan – witness and not act, stand by powerless, watch in silence – they found themselves making bigger choices than anyone should be allowed to.
To choose whether to let nature take its course, let an entire civilization die, or to intervene and by doing so break the majority of Starfleet regulations, including the Prime Directive of no interference.

At the time, it had seemed obvious.

And Spock had been prepared to die – in that volcano he would have died, he had made his peace with that, thought it was fitting for him to give his life to prevent the destruction of those people when he had been unable to rescue his own. And yet.

He had accepted his fate, and perhaps he should have found it concerning, the ease with which he looked upon the raging lava and waited for it to swallow him down, the absence of feeling as he contemplated his own demise, the glaring emptiness within his mind that reflected the barren landscape of his barely-healing bonds.

But there was no other logical option – were he to allow himself to feel he might find that he did not wish to die after all, and where would that put him? As the heat grew around him he knew he was condemned – had known he would be before he even volunteered – there was nothing else to do, no escaping reality.

*The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, or the one.* Even if that one was Spock. Especially…

And yet Jim saved him.

He risked everything – the *Enterprise*, the crew, his captaincy – just to save him.

*I don’t believe in no-win scenarios*, his friend had told him. *It depends on how much you’re willing to sacrifice. It’s a matter of balance, of price and prize.*

The price had been too high and the prize too low, the costs far greater…

On board, McCoy screamed at the Vulcan, tricorder in hand and eyes flashing dangerously; Nyota wrapped her arms around him and held him tight, relief and joy and concern mingling into their earnest contact; Nurse Chapel poked and prodded at him with her Hypos and berated him his recklessness.

Jim looked at him and smiled.

He smiled as Spock babbled at him his confusion (*Captain, it was not logical – Captain, I do not understand why you would believe that saving one life is worth what you are going to lose for it*) and he smiled as they returned to the bridge and his First Officer stood frozen behind him, eyes on the stars (the stars and the human’s golden hair and sparkling eyes) as he tried to collect himself, and he smiled as the doctor listed all of the things that had gone wrong, all of the things that were now in danger because of *Kirk’s little stun and what’s Starfleet gonna say about this?*

Jim shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

Ship’s day went on in a kind of feverish daze, a sense of no return, of finality, and then evening came – no dinner, somehow it did not seem important – and Jim ambushed the Vulcan by the door to his quarters and he wasn’t smiling anymore, he was frantic and driven and desperate.

It was a tension that had built and built and built, throughout the day and the weeks before and the months, a coiled strength that the human had always kept tightly checked and that now he used to drag Spock with him into a demanding embrace, to press him against the wall into the dimly-lit
room.

“I can’t believe you’re alive,” the Captain hissed into his ear, and the Vulcan shivered from the harsh quality of his voice, from his own daring at circling the human’s back with his arms to hold him there into his personal space.

“Because of you I am alive,” he said, bowing his head a little – their cheeks brushed together and he could feel that wide smile return, feel the pull of it against his skin, and it was strange, that he could experience that smile so fully…

Suddenly they were kissing, and it was only natural, it was only logical for their soul-deep intimacy to progress as such, for them to breathe each other’s breath, for their tongues to tangle and their lips to touch and their fingers to entwine. Spock allowed Jim’s eager, desperate exploration, allowed burning human hands to roam over his shoulders – familiar, charted space – to his chest, around his back – less familiar but somehow still known, still safe – until he had reached his hips to grasp them, so they were impossibly close, bodies pressed together in a writhing, demanding line – overwhelming, new, terrifying.

Jim was sucking bruises into his throat, just below the collar of his undershirt – and the Vulcan spared a passing thought to be grateful for it, that they would not show, after, after… He tilted his head back against the wall to give his Captain more access, and his own scheming fingers were stealing impressions from the heated skin – of numbing fear and fierce relief, of \textit{what would I do if you died, Spock} – even though he had no memory of sliding them beneath the golden shirt.

And then in a ruffle of fabric Jim was slipping to his knees before him, nosing at the unexpected bulge in his trousers – no, not unexpected, he had been wanting for so long, longer than he cared to admit even to himself, and it broke him a little more that the human would never, could never share in this, this thing that frightened him and made him shiver in helpless delight every time Kirk smiled at him – and it was so strange and so right and so \textit{much} for Jim to be pleasing him like this.

Spock held on to his hair for support and because it felt good, and his Captain kept asking him, \textit{was this alright, was he okay with this much contact, was he enjoying this}, and all his treacherous mouth could produce were faint, whispered agreements that were lost in the darkness of those quarters that had become almost his own, and his greedy, disobedient mind sought out Jim’s to cradle it, touch it, bask in the affection it poured on him.

He found himself on his Captain’s bed, and that too was familiar, but not like this, not with his clothes strewn on the floor and the human’s warm weight upon him, not with those wet, questing kisses bestowed on him and those gentling, arousing touches, not with Jim around him, within him, everywhere.

“Never lose you,” the Captain was panting in his ear, mouthing at its point, and Spock thought that a mere three point seventeen hours before he had been inside a volcano ready to die, and then he would have missed this, missed the human’s balmy, intoxicating scent and the taste of his tongue and his skin and the softness of his neck just below his earlobe…

Jim’s name fell from the Vulcan’s lips like a chant, and his mind was spilling from its confines but this time it was delicate, it was beautiful, and all the things his Captain was to him became startlingly clear as those wide, calloused hands grabbed knees and thighs and hips, and he closed his eyes and melted into the sheets that smelled like them both, listening to the human’s beloved voice as it broke in pleasure.

The friend, the brother, the lover…
He was Spock’s friend but Spock wished for more, had always wished for more, and if before he had managed to be satisfied, be grateful for what they had (more than he could have ever asked for, this companionship that went above and beyond the call of duty) now he could not deny himself any longer, and he wanted, oh-so-desperately he wanted to read into this thing that was happening – this sharing he would have never dared dream of.

But he was aware that humans utilised sexual relations as a means for relieving extreme stress; he was familiar with the concept of friends with benefits. The lines between them had blurred long before, that night when Jim had seen it fit to embrace him on New Vulcan and hold him as he cried, and all the months after had done nothing but reinforce this confusion, these lawless habits of theirs.

It would be foolish of him to attach any other meaning to the Captain’s actions, to see them for something other than what they were – a very emotional reaction to his unpredicted survival and the possibly career-altering decision the human had had to make.

Nothing more.

Jim’s needy kisses and searching touches and gentle words… they were wonderful and cherished, and he responded in kind because he couldn’t help but torture himself with something that could never be, should never be, because his friend – t’hy’la – was his Captain and he made a point not to get involved with the crew, and this was sure to be a mistake, a temporary loss of control on his part...

Pleasure blinded him and Spock welcomed the haze and fuzziness and hormones because they blanked his thoughts, and the sense of physical completion could not compare to the rush of their touching minds as they met in that wonderful release.

And in the midst of it all, when he was finally made to realise just how deeply he cared for Jim, how tightly he had bound himself to him (beyond affection, beyond love, even) Spock felt fear.

When Jim woke it was to an empty bed and the faint sound of coughing coming from the bathroom; the covers had been tucked neatly around him, and he slipped out of them, rubbing his eyes in an attempt at chasing away his sleepy confusion. Why was he alone?

His heart sank and the sense of tentative elation that had grown in his mind vanished in a blink as he spotted Spock curled over the sink chocking out breaths, and he began to realise that he had made an error in judgement, that he’d been wrong, foolish to think his friend’s repeated consent had meant he would not regret it later, that he’d been as into it as he had seemed, that he would somehow overcome his fear of attachment for him.

Sighing, he put on his black undershirt and a pair of soft trousers, then stepped towards the Vulcan, trapping his vicious disappointment in a tiny box he would examine later, if he had time, because there was no point in dwelling on it, he had pushed his luck too far and now he had to salvage what could be salvaged, for the sake of their friendship and the functioning of the Enterprise.

But it was a bitter bite to swallow.

Gently, moving as slowly as he could so as not to startle him, he wrapped his arms around Spock’s shivering form, pressing his hands over his sternum. “It’s okay,” he crooned into his pointed ear,
“It’s okay. Breathe with me. In and out. In and out…”

The Vulcan’s fingers were freezing when he caught the human’s hands briskly, holding them tight enough to hurt. He moulded the line of his spine to his Captain’s chest, following him and he chanted his soothing litany: “In and out…”

Long minutes passed, and then Spock loosened his punishing grip.

“It’s alright,” Jim insisted, wishing he could believe it himself, wishing he could promise he would not look at his friend any differently, that he would not look at him and see the possibilities that would never be. “Nothing has to change between us, okay?”

He fit his chin into the Vulcan’s shoulder, trying not to remember how good it had felt when he’d brushed lips and teeth against the soft skin. “This doesn’t have to mean anything you don’t want it to.”

An impression of sadness flowed from Spock to Jim. With a hollow sigh, Spock leaned against him; his heart beat a furious rhythm under the human’s palm, fear had leeched the colour from his face and he seemed so weary, so very weary.

Jim supported him, but he felt like he was supporting the weight of the universe. It had been so easy before but now he was worn.

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Jim had lied.

He had lied when he’d said nothing was to change between them because everything had changed, the world itself had been upturned – Spock felt as if he was watching his own life unfold, spiral down and out of control in an abyss of confusion and disbelief, of broken promises and goodbyes.

Jim had lied – but then perhaps the Vulcan had been foolish to believe him, and he couldn’t fault him for trying to delude himself into thinking they could go on as they had, that they could somehow go back to being blind to the implications of the things they shared, what they were to each other. The distance hurt, and on some level Spock was aware that it was up to him to fill it, to reach for his friend, to rebuild that bridge that his own insecurity had burned, because he could not expect the human to carry all the weight and responsibilities of their relationship.

He should have realised this sooner. Now it was late, and his Captain was tired, wary when he approached him, and it seemed as if all the Vulcan could do was exacerbate his situation, make one mistake after the other.

Jim had lied, and Spock should have known he would but he really hadn’t.

He should have predicted the fact that his friend would not make a full report on what had happened on Nibiru, that he would never disclose the full incriminating truth, that there was no way he would involve Spock himself in it.

And yet he hadn’t known, and Jim had been right to place the blame on him for all that he had revealed and the consequences of it. The Vulcan alone had caused their separation – his Captain had saved his life and had lost the Enterprise for it, because Spock had been too wrapped up in his own convoluted emotions to realise it fell on him to cover Kirk.

But he hadn’t – and so, since he couldn’t even fathom the idea of lying (a lie of omission was still a lie, Surak said, and there was no logic in lying… but then what was the logic in throwing away his life for the sake of the truth?) everything was lost.
Jim had every right to be angry at him, to refuse to see him, and he had, he had fled to Iowa and left his communicator and Padds in San Francisco, he had gone away and would not let Spock near him.

But then again he could not avoid him forever – their duty to Starfleet was irrefutable, even if they wouldn’t be working together anymore, even if the Vulcan couldn’t conceive the notion of having a Captain that wasn’t him, even if he felt like his mind had screeched to halt, refusing to accept the fact that it was all over.

Because of him, all over.

And Jim should have screamed at him, should have never forgiven him because he did not deserve it, had never deserved the sunshine and warmth spilled so freely his way – the human should have just saved them for himself, spare himself the trouble of having to fix a half-Vulcan’s riotous mind.

And yet, when they finally saw each other again, Jim smiled at him, offered understanding and kindness. “I’m gonna miss you,” he told him, and his eyes were full of expectations, though Spock had no idea how he was to meet them, what it was that was silently being asked of him.

Between them, the silence grew until it became a chasm and the Vulcan tried to gather his thoughts, produce an answer that would bare his guilt and his regret and the affection he couldn’t even comprehend; he wondered at the meaning of his friend’s admission – how could he miss him if all he’d brought him was worry and distress and pain?

Kirk waited – he was always waiting for him but that too was unfair…

At last, Spock reached for him, shut his mouth and decided he would simply step closer and touch him, press kisses into his skin and hope to make his meaning clear, but Jim had already turned away. It appeared as if the Vulcan was always a moment too late when it came to the things that truly mattered – a moment too late to save his mother, a moment too late not to put himself in mortal danger inside the volcano and jeopardise it all… a moment too late to keep his t’hy’la.

Admiral Marcus had sent them to fight with seventy-two people trapped in torpedoes, commanded they used them against one man, commanded they obliterated the truth of their existence in one thoughtless act – it was not the Starfleet Spock had believed in and fought so hard to be a part of, and he was baffled and lost and confused and he understood Jim’s anger, his spite, the wish he had to retaliate, to refuse that definition, even though…

Even though it would cost him his life, and the Vulcan was never going to allow it.

As soon as the turbolift doors closed behind him, he began his carefully-constructed speech, hoping against hope that it would serve to something, anything. “Captain, I strongly object.”

“To what?” Jim asked, blue eyes flashing at him even as he readied himself to leave. “I haven’t said anything yet.”

“Since we cannot take the ship from the outside, the only way we can take it is from within,” Spock enunciated quickly, tailing the Captain as he rushed into a corridor – trying to escape him? Saving time? He wasn’t sure. “And as a large boarding party would be detected, it is optimal for you to take as few members of the crew as possible.”

The ship was busy around them, the people tense and on edge, and Kirk navigated the crowd of officers with a disquieting ease, no emotion showing on his face and deadly intent to his stride.
“You will meet resistance, requiring personnel with advanced combat abilities and innate knowledge of that ship,” the Vulcan went on, wishing he was wrong but knowing he was not, knowing there was no other option open to them. “This indicates that you plan to align with Khan, the very man we were sent here to destroy.”

The very man who was the cause of Admiral Pike’s death, the very man who killed him.

He did not say it, but Jim heard it anyhow.

“I’m not aligning with him, I’m using him,” he muttered fiercely, breathing a little faster from exertion and the effort of holding together, of keeping his raging emotionality in check. “The enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

“An Arabic proverb attributed to a prince who was betrayed and decapitated by his own subjects,” Spock quipped, fearing, deep down into his very bones, that his friend would end up dead, that this was the final line for the whole disaster they had been roped in.

“Still, it’s a hell of a quote.”

The Vulcan’s hand shot up to wrap around the human’s shoulder, force him to stop, turn around, look at him. “I will go with you, Captain.”

“No, I need you on the bridge.” And that objection was sound and true and irrefutable.

Still, Spock refused it. “I cannot allow you to do this,” he hissed. “It is my function aboard this ship to advise you on making the wisest decisions possible, something I firmly believe you are incapable of doing in this moment.”

“You’re right!” Jim snapped, clear and transparent and so coiled, like a thread about to break, surviving on will alone. “What I’m about to do, it doesn’t make any sense, it’s not logical. It is a gut feeling.” There was pain in his voice, a pain that shattered the Vulcan from within, the pain that came from culpability, from the heavy weight of responsibility his t’hy’la was forced to bear. “I have no idea what I’m supposed to do. I only know what I can do. The Enterprise and her crew need someone in that chair that knows what he’s doing.”

He paused. “And it’s not me.”

The Commander knew what was coming, opened his mouth to interrupt, say that the only way for the Enterprise to survive was with Jim on the bridge, Jim alive and thinking and proud and…

“It’s you, Spock.”

Spock wanted very much to refute that statement – to force his beloved to see how important, how vital it was that he survived. But he had no more arguments to offer but the fact that he could not bear it if something were to happen to his Captain, to this man he had allowed to become the centre of his very existence, and so he found his hands and pulled him close and retreated into the nearest empty room, where they would be alone, where he would be free to spill his heart out as he tried to convince him to reconsider.

Kirk was eerily silent throughout it all, and he stood passively by him – resigned to having to listen to his First Officer even though there was no way he would be convinced, no way at all. But then, the Vulcan was grateful to even be allowed that much attention from him, that precious, precious time.

“Please, Jim,” Spock said fervently, squeezing the human’s clammy hands in his with a
forcefulness he hardly ever used, but the situation called for it, called for this urgency that filled his mind with anxiety, because he could feel his t'hy'la slipping away from him, could sense that he was so distant already… “Please, Jim.”

Please, what? Kirk’s eyes demanded, full of fire and anguish and guilt.

“I’m sorry for your loss,” the Vulcan whispered, pressing their foreheads together as if his Captain had been a telepath, as if he could hope for him to gather the flavour of his thoughts, of his love. “I grieve with thee.”

Jim’s wrists were shaking, and he pulled him closer, uncaring that someone might come and find them embracing inside the conference room when they should have been dealing with the emergency, with Khan and the warmongering Admiral and seventy-two people asleep within graves of torpedoes and ice. “I grieve with thee but please, do not lose yourself.”

He knew they were all in mortal peril and yet all he could focus on were Jim’s eyes, so hollow, hallucinated, the sight of his nearly feverish concentration, his deadly intent, the shadows on his face.

“Spock, we’re already lost.”

The Vulcan shook his head firmly. “No. No, we are not.” He grasped the human’s chin, tilted it up so he could meet his gaze. “I believe in you. We will find a way out.”

His Captain’s smile was a faded, distorted mirror to the sunshine he usually radiated, and he did not reply, he merely stood there, letting Spock hold him, keep him, for those few seconds they still had before their mistakes would come claim them.

“Jim.”

Impulsively, because he did not know what else to try, because he felt it might be the best way to capture his t’hy’la’s attention or maybe just because he wished it, the Vulcan leaned towards him and placed a human kiss on his chapped lips.

It was a lingering kiss, hard and messy and full of emotions he wasn’t sure how else to express. Jim cradled his hands to his chest and for a suspended minute he returned the gesture with equal passion and nearly as much confusion. Then a sigh fell from his mouth and he gently extricated himself from Spock’s grip, stepping away, leaving him cold to clutch at nothing.

“I have to go,” he reminded him. “And you need to be on the bridge.”

The Vulcan wanted to protest – wanted to rage against his decision of trusting Khan, of putting his life in the hands of that unpredictable, dangerous man, but he was painfully aware that there was nothing else for any of them to do, that his friend was going to have to take his chances and hope the impossible might, somehow, come true.

Spock swallowed down his useless complaints and followed his Captain as he crossed the room, reached out to grasp his arm, hold him back. “Please, Jim,” he repeated.

Please, don’t die.

Jim offered him an apologetic grin – a soft, sad, mindful thing that sent chills to gather low in the Vulcan’s belly and sent his heart into a stuttering frenzy with the merciless finality of it, the unspoken belief that this was goodbye, that time was running short. Then he broke free of his brittle hold and motioned the door to open.
“Yeah. See you in a few, sweetheart.”

Spock felt the world drop from underneath his feet when he finally realised there was no way for him to hold him.

The glass between them was a wall.

A wild, impossible moment existed in which Spock believed he could rent it apart, condemn countless of people to radiation poisoning if only he could reach his friend.

He dropped to his knees before his Captain, his t’hy’la, his sun that had given and given and given and now that there was nothing left to give was quietly burning down do ashes – and when his light disappeared it would take with it what little meaning was left in the universe, the Vulcan knew.

Jim looked at him and his eyes were wide, so very wide, reflecting the flickering lights of the ship, and it felt as if the Enterprise would die with him, because how could it not? How could she remain when her Captain was fading? How, when all that was right and good in the world was being torn away from it, destroyed?

“How’s our ship?” the human asked, and of course he would, of course he would concern himself with his people even if he was the one who was dying. Dying. How could that be?

Spock rushed into his reply, because he would hate for him to wonder, to have to deal with that uncertainty, the responsibility of so many lives a second more. “Out of danger. You saved the crew.”

The relief that filled the Captain’s mottled face tore a wound into his Commander’s soul. “You used what he wanted against him,” Jim reasoned appreciatively with an unsteady nod, as if any of it mattered when, when… “That’s a nice move.”

“It is what you would have done,” the Vulcan told him, struggling to keep even a shred of control for his friend’s sake, because it wasn’t fair to make him see how deeply he was affected – devastated crushed annihilated – it wasn’t fair to have him bear the weight of his void when he was dying.

“And this –” the human’s lips trembled as he spoke, a wheezing sound coming from his lungs as he heaved for air, glassy eyes never leaving Spock’s, pained, searching, frightened. “This is what you would have done. It was only… logical.”

No, no, it was not, the Captain’s death could never, would never be logical, it was cruel, it was unjust, it was terrifying, it should have been anyone but him, anyone but him who was so good and warm and lonely, lonely with his forehead resting against the glass, lonely with no strength left to survive, lonely from having fought so many battles and having lost the last.

Lost – won, the human would have surely argued, he had won the lives of the crew and Earth was saved once more…

“I’m scared, Spock,” Jim admitted, so vulnerable and candid and unreachable – mere inches from him but they could have been lightyears for all it was worth – the Vulcan was desperate to touch him but it was not to be, and his friend was alone, alone and cold and dying.

We will find a way out, Spock had been so sure of that and it was true, Jim had found it, he had saved them all but he was dying.
Please. No.

“Help me not be.” The whispered request sent ice to settle in Vulcan’s soul, and he was powerless, powerless to comfort and soothe and heal and guilt churned in his stomach even as he could hardly exist from the paralysing terror gripping him. “How do you choose… not to feel?”

He did not know, he had never known, and for Jim not to feel… for Jim who was feeling itself… the very idea was poison in Spock’s blood, making it boil, like he was going to burst.

“I do not know,” he confessed helplessly, and it was in and of itself a little death, an admission of defeat. “Right now I am failing.”

The tears that fell down his cheeks were a monument to his devotion and his useless fears, to his incapability of expressing himself, the choice he had made not to tell Jim of his love – and now Jim was dying, and it had all been for naught, and all the chances he could have taken to understand him better, be closer to him, flashed before him as he listened to the gasps and whines ripped from his battered form.

“I want you to know why I couldn’t let you die.” The weary human forced out his voice and it was broken, like brittle glass, full of sorrow and strain. The Vulcan pressed against the locked door as if he could somehow melt it, slip within to go and curl around his beloved as he choaked out his last breaths, cradle him to his chest to protect his precious warmth.

“Why I went back for you.” It seemed to be increasingly hard for Jim to form words, his mouth opened and closed uselessly for a moment as he tried to speak his truth to him, a truth that was too great and yet too simple to be revealed just then, when everything was coming to an end and all was soon to be lost.

Spock felt as if his heart had vanished, or better as if it had ceased its beating – as if the air in his lungs had been stolen, trapped into the chamber along with his dearest, dearest Captain who was dying, dying, leaving… Leaving, like Vulcan had gone, like mother had gone, like hope had gone, like everything he was leaving, and there would be no recovery, even if this time there was no bond to rip apart he knew it was snapping nonetheless, and it hurt…

He thought of those eyes, that blue that was as unpredictable and fascinating as a terran ocean, and of the smile that shone like the Sun, like Las'hark, hair as golden as the desert sand and comforting touches and easy complicity and love, oh the love that they had shared though Spock hadn’t dared called it such, and there was no cheating the no-win scenario, Jim was dying and there was nothing –

“Because you are my friend,” he said, and his voice too shattered with the honest disbelief of a child, stupid denial that this could not possibly be happening and why was it so slow, why did that word, friend, sound empty even to his ears, why was there a hint of dejection in the human’s gaze, why had he not given him the name that truly belonged to Jim, t’hy’la, everything –

He should have told him about the meaning of t’hy’la.

A pained cough, then the Captain raised his arm – and how hard it must have been for him, that brief motion – to press his palm flat against the glass. Spock stared, collecting fragments of his own mind as it tried to understand – understand that this was goodbye.

When he very carefully placed his own hand onto the door, it was shaking. There was no warmth, no contact, no comfort from the action that was a pale imitation of what should have been, but the Vulcan latched on to it anyhow, watched as the human’s fingers parted into the ta’al, into the most
intimate of kisses, and it suddenly dawned on him that perhaps Jim had known all along, known the implications of such a touch, that he had sought it out because he was aware that minds met across it and souls were bound together.

The Captain’s eyes shone with unshed tears and he smiled at the sight of their parted and yet not quite parted fingers, then he looked back up at him.

Spock wondered if his own silent crying made more sense to his t’hy’la than his aborted attempt at returning his smile. He reached again, desperately, this time with his mind, sending forth tendrils of thoughts to wrap around his beloved’s dazed consciousness, to be with him until the end. A flurry of feeling passed between them, vague and rushing and confused, apologies mingling with regret and all the things that could have been and would never be.

And then Jim’s hand dropped and the light was gone.

They’d call us star-crossed
If they called us at all
- @greenjimkirk on tumblr
AAAAND I HOPE YOU LIKED THE PAIN

Next chapter is the thrilling fluffy end to all the pain because the boys deserve it and also because I can't write anymore angst without tearing my heart out (except I totally am because I'm writing a fic for the Old Married Spirk challenge and it's about tos Spock trying to find his memories and come to terms with his relationship with Jim after he's revived and like ANGST)

Stay tuned cause I'll have it ready before the end of october

After that it's NaNoWriMo and I will DIE
He very nearly missed Jim when he woke.

After his frenzied rage against Khan, of which he remembered little and was profoundly ashamed (no Vulcan would, no sane person would, and perhaps he hadn’t been completely sane, perhaps the death of t’hy’la, the death of home after so much had already been lost had broken him to the point of no return) Spock spent the majority of his time by his Captain’s bedside, leaving only when his duty to Starfleet commanded it or he required to make use of the facilities.

He sat in silence and watched Jim’s face as he slept, counted his breaths, held his freezing hand between his own and kissed his unmoving fingers.

There was a sort of quiet happiness bubbling within his chest, a marvelling incredulity he did not dare suppress as he traced the beloved features with his fingertips and felt the life inside, the resting mind – he was drugged with it, with the elation of having his t’hy’la back, heart pounding steadily and golden hair and golden skin and golden light, a warmth that was slowly collecting.

Never had he cherished a sound as much as the unwavering beeping of the biomonitor.
McCoy was a constant presence around them, and Spock learned to find it comforting, to feel secure in the knowledge that the doctor was always near, one call away, ready to intervene at the first sign of danger (and there had been many, oh-so-many, and the Vulcan had felt like dying each and every time, like everything was going to fall apart, and in a daze he had admired the human’s cold composure as he performed the magic that kept Kirk among the living).

He had brought Jim back.

Spock had never been able to fully relax around the doctor, had always found him irritatingly illogical and overwhelmingly emotional, their relationship had always been strained, but now he couldn’t help but be in awe of him, of his unwavering strength, his nearly Vulcan-like levels of focus.

He was the reason Jim was alive.

“You should sleep, you know,” the doctor told him late into the night thirteen point eleven days after his entire universe had been torn apart and pieced back together. “I can set up a bed for you here, no problem.”

“No,” Spock said flatly, sitting stone still into his chair that had long before stopped carving grooves in his skin, and he never ceased staring at the unconscious Captain, perhaps still battling the irrational fear that such a vision would disappear if he only dared blink. “I will not leave.”

Leonard clicked his tongue in annoyance. “Come on, man, you need the rest!” he insisted, pressing a hand against his shoulder. “Jim is gonna be fine.” There was a strange inflection to his voice (as if he himself couldn’t believe it, he who had performed that one-in-a-million-lifetimes miracle) and the Vulcan shivered inwardly at that, at the reminder of all that might have been lost.

“Vulcans require less sleep than humans.”

For a moment, it seemed as if the doctor was going to argue with him, but he shook his head and gave up before he even began the discussion. “Suit yourself, then. But don’t come crying back to me when you can’t see straight from exhaustion.”

Finally, the Vulcan turned to look at him, grasped his wrist to keep him from leaving just yet. “Thank you,” he whispered fervently. “Thank you.”

“What for?” McCoy’s piercing eyes trailed over his face, and Spock felt as if he was being examined, as if his very soul was bare for the human to judge.

“For Jim,” he said simply, because there was no need for him to explain, no need at all: Jim was alive, and it was only thanks to his doctor who had accomplished the greatest feat of all – cheating death.

I do not believe in no-win scenarios.

Leonard smiled and nodded, patting his shoulder before walking away. Spock returned to staring at his Captain; fitting his chin into his folded arms, he sighed and closed his eyes.

Jim woke the next day, and the Vulcan almost missed him, because the Admiralty had called upon him to make the umpteenth report on recent events, and he was tired, tired of replaying those moments in his mind and having to fight the surge of despair they brought…

He stepped back into the Sickbay a moment before Kirk opened his eyes – a flash of blue that was the sky around Spock’s sun. The Captain gasped and coughed and it seemed as if it was taking him
a gargantuan effort merely to turn his head into the pillow…

McCoy was crouching above him and Jim smiled – smiled at his friend in confusion and disbelief, and Spock stood silent and still, unwilling to interrupt what was surely to be a meaningful reunion…

“Don’t be so melodramatic,” Leonard said, running his instruments all over Kirk’s form. “You were barely dead.”

_Barely dead_, as if such a thing could be quantifiable, as if there was a way Jim could have been more dead when he’d felt cold and stiff in the Vulcan’s arms… He banished the memory from his mind and focused on his _t’hy’la_’s amusement, the grin he was sporting as he listened to the doctor run his mouth.

“It was the transfusion that really took its toll,” McCoy explained, walking around the biobed to plug some data into his Padd. “You were out cold for two weeks.”

“Transfusion?” Jim repeated, and Spock’s heart fluttered at the sound of his voice, so soft, so weak, but _there_.

“You cells were heavily irradiated,” the doctor pointed out. “We had no choice.”

“Khan?”

“Once we caught him, I synthesized a serum from his superblood.” Again, he swept a gaze over his patient. “Tell me, are you feeling homicidal? Power mad? Despotic?”

It looked like Kirk wanted to laugh but was still too winded to. “No more than usual,” he answered in a hint of humour. Then he frowned, and that expression too was stilted, difficult. “How’d you catch him?”

“I didn’t,” McCoy said with a shrug, turning back to where he knew the Vulcan was. Spock took it as his cue to walk up to Jim, close, as close as was allowed, drinking in of his presence – his life – as the human smiled at him, eyes alight in emotion and welcome.

“You saved my life,” the Captain stated, as if it was a given.

Leonard scoffed. “Uhura and I had something to do with it, too, you know.”

Kirk arched an eyebrow in his direction, but otherwise he ignored the barb, attention fixed on Spock, awaiting his answer.

“You saved _my_ life, Captain,” the Vulcan began, as if somehow he could convey with words alone the profound gratitude he felt towards this magnificent being who was now staring at him as if he’d placed the stars in the sky. “And the lives…”

Smiling warmly, Jim interrupted him: “Spock, just… Thank you.”

Spock nodded, and he wondered at what his own eyes were conveying, the truths they were spilling. “You _are_ welcome, Jim.”

The Captain fell back into a deep slumber shortly after, and the Vulcan resumed his watch, sitting on his chair with his hands curled around the human’s.

Jim awoke to find Spock sprawled over his bed. He gave himself a moment to appreciate the fact
that he was alive – the speckles of dust floating above him in the sunlight streaming from the
window, the sterilized air filling his lungs, the rough texture of the sheets beneath him.

The Vulcan’s forehead was pressed into his right shoulder, a pleasant, welcomed weight, and his
fingers were wrapped loosely around his hand; his lips parted over even breaths and his eyelids
fluttered, but his neck was craned at a weird angle, and he looked overall extremely uncomfortable,
dangling from his chair like that.

Slowly, taking care not to make any sudden movement that would strain his muscles too much, the
human grasped his shoulders and pushed him up and to himself. “Come here,” he murmured softly,
“Come lie down.”

Still half asleep, Spock followed him and draped himself all around him, heavy and strangely
warm, burrowing into his embrace the way a cat would. Kirk pulled him closer and buried his nose
into the thick strands of his velvety hair, inhaling deeply of his friend’s rich scent.

He felt… tranquil.

“Mmm,” Spock purred into his skin, stirring drowsily. And then he jumped back so they were face
to face, and his eyes were wide and brimming with emotion, voice shaking a little as he called:
“Jim!”

“Yes, I’m alright,” the human reassured him, or himself, he wasn’t sure. “I’m alright.”

The Vulcan’s hands came up to cradle his cheeks in an infinitely tender touch that made his heart
swell. “Jim. How are you feeling?”

“Smashin’,” Kirk answered with a grin, thrilled, so thrilled to be alive. “Everything hurts but I’m
good.”

Spock smiled his pretty non-smile at him, looking like he was about to tear up or something, the
way he had when Jim was dying and they couldn’t touch and it was all falling apart, except this
time he was light, light with elation and relief. “Oh, t’hy’la. I am so happy,” he confessed.

“I am too,” the Captain easily replied, enjoying the way the Vulcan’s legs were tangled with his.
“What did you call me?” he asked, curious, wanting to name the beautiful emotions painted over
his friend’s face.

“It is something I should have told you months ago,” Spock said, staring at him almost
unblinkingly.

“I am too,” Jim pressed after a few moments of silence in which there were only Spock’s soft
caresses on his hair and down his chin.

“T’hy’la,” the Vulcan whispered reverently. He leaned closer, brushed his lips to the human’s and
kept his eyes firmly trailed in his, speaking in an intimate murmur that seemed to reverberate
through his mind. “It is the way I see you. It means… everything.”

Sensing there was more, Jim waited, linking their fingers together to bring them to his chest, over
his heart that beat because he was alive, he had faced death again and again lived to tell the tale,
lived to stare into a Vulcan’s moved eyes, so rare and touching and full of promises…

“It means friend,” Spock said softly. “The friend you will never betray.” Gently, he placed a
lingering kiss on the Captain’s cheek, then drew back. “It also means brother,” he added very
seriously. “The brother whom you turn to for shelter and support.”
Jim smiled, bright and so wide his cheeks hurt, but he couldn’t help himself.

“And it means lover,” the Vulcan finally revealed after a pause in which he seemed to gather his courage; a lovely blush stole over his face and the tips of his ears, and Kirk freed a hand to trace that pointed shape, down to the curve of his earlobe and then the hollow where it met his jaw. “A mate; one to be by your side always. One to cherish and celebrate and protect.”

Jim was holding his breath in stunned disbelief – he felt as if he was walking across a dream, as if the Vulcan was going to blink any moment and take back what he’d said, overwhelmed, recoiling in fright from the emotionality of it all, the inevitability.

But Spock’s eyes stayed warm and focused, voice vibrating in anticipation and nerves. “I am not scared anymore,” he swore. “If you’ll still have me, t’hy’la.”

“You know I love you, sweetheart?” Jim breathed into the small space between them. He caressed the Vulcan’s lower lip with his thumb, smiling in answer when he saw the corners of that tempting mouth curl upwards in response to the touch. “I thought you knew that.”

“Yes, I should have known,” Spock murmured, kissing him again with relish and the assurance that this was a lasting thing, a good thing, a happy thing. “I know now.”

When Jim stood for the first time, it hurt like hell, but he had Bones holding on to him on one side and Spock on the other, and so he stubbornly soldiered on even if it felt as if his legs were made of lead and he was walking barefoot on shattered glass. He focused on how happy he was to finally leave the Sickbay, how good it felt to have the two people he cared for most in the universe supporting him, how eager he was to join the party his crew had thrown in his honour.

It was only a short wait to the nearest Rec room, but it took them an exceptionally long time to get there, both because they kept meeting people who wanted to chat and marvel at Starfleet’s heroes and because the Captain was so very slow and worn and his guardians insisted that he rested frequently, much to his annoyance.

But when they made it at last, Jim was met with the sight of his friends gathered together, waiting for him with drinks in their hands, and they all cheered and clapped as they spotted him by the doors. The elder Spock had come to visit, too, and he stood immediately, eyes shining with his quiet affection as they swept over his figure; he glided up to him to greet him, relief evident on his lined face.

“Jim. I am gratified to see you well,” he said, touching the tips of his fingers to his shoulder. “I was… concerned.”

Kirk grinned, extricating himself from his friends’ careful grasp, and wrapped both arms around the old Vulcan, crashing his entire weight on him because he knew he’d have no problem supporting him. Spock fit his hands at his waist and laughed softly under his breath, a secret meant just for him.

“Shaya tonat,” the Captain whispered, full of affection and sincerity – and he was sure the elder understood, felt in his mind that his gratitude had nothing to do with those words of welcome, that he was thanking him for the faith he’d put in him since the very first moment, for urging him to find a way to work with his Spock, believe in him. “Thank you.”

The Vulcan’s knowing smile lasted for but a moment before he composed his features once again in his usual placid tranquillity. “No, Jim. Thank you.”
He tapped his shoulder again. “I must depart for Romulus now, to resume my Ambassadorial duties.”

“Good luck,” Kirk offered, watching him walk away with a very light limp on his left leg and his arms neatly folded behind his back. His black robes trailed behind him like a lingering shadow, and for the hundredth time the human wondered what it could possibly feel like to be trapped in a universe that was not your own. He shivered.

“Alright, kid, time to rest,” Bones said gruffly, ripping him from his dark musings. “Come on, before I decide to send you back to bed.”

Jim nodded, and let the doctor seize his right arm in a vice grip, lead him to a chair that had been conveniently left empty in the middle of the brightly-lit room. The windows opened on Academy grounds, granting a flawless view of the back gardens and the clear blue sky. The Captain sighed in contentment and gazed upon his crew.

Uhura had dragged T’Pring to the event, and now looked extremely pleased to be sitting in her lap, talking animatedly with Scotty and Keenser as the Vulcan blinked slowly like a satisfied cat. They were all sipping from tall cocktail glasses that had been tinted red for the occasion.

Sulu and Chekov were watching intently as the newly-appointed ensign, a young girl named Janice Rand, performed a magic trick on Christine, McCoy’s favourite nurse; as soon as he had made sure Kirk would not drop dead in the immediate future, Bones rushed to supervise the proceedings, wanting to ascertain Chapel would not suffer permanent damage.

Jim laughed to himself at the sight of his friend’s exaggerated rage.

“I am pleased you are enjoying yourself,” his First Officer murmured, stepping into his line of vision. He offered him a golden drink, carrying a blue glass for himself. “Nyota had assured me you would, but I was not entirely certain.”

“It’s perfect, sweetheart,” Kirk said, squeezing his hand briefly before taking a generous gulp of whatever alcoholic thing he had been offered – he trusted the Vulcan not to feed him anything potentially dangerous, after all. It was cold, sweet and invigorating. “Thank you.”

Spock sat by his side, smirking lightly as he saw T’Pring press a very human kiss on Nyota’s temple.

Following his gaze, Jim laughed again. “She says you play the Vulcan lyre,” he threw in almost casually, glancing at his Vulcan briefly before fixing his stare on Chekov, who was now trying to teach Sulu a very difficult Russian dance. “I’d love to hear it.”

“Of course, t’hy’la. I shall play for you later in the evening.”

Before the human could do much more than lean towards him for a brief kiss, he realised that everyone’s attention was trailed on the two of them. Nyota had left her Vulcan perch and had come to stand quite close, a proud look in her eyes as she smiled beautifully at Spock.

“So, are you two together now?” she asked, voicing everyone’s curiosity.

“You can bet we are,” Jim smoothly proclaimed, catching his First Officer’s hand again and laughing as his people burst into a wild applause to the calls of “Finally!” and “I knew that!” and “Hell yeah they are!” His friend was shifting a little in his seat, perhaps uncomfortable with being under the spotlight, but he made no move to pull away, instead leaning even closer, reinforcing his declaration.
Kirk smiled brightly at him.

And then, to the crew’s loud enjoyment and the Vulcans’ light embarrassment, he kissed Spock full on the mouth.

The night before they shipped out for their much-awaited-for five-year mission, they did not sleep.

Jim made warm tea like the first time they had shared quarters on New Vulcan, and this time Spock sat on the floor with him, resting his head against his shoulder as they gazed at Earth’s stars trace a slow path across the sapphire sky.

“Would you have said, three years ago, that we would end up like this?” the Captain asked softly after their cups had been emptied.

The Vulcan traced his verdant fingertips over the human’s rosy wrist, following the shape of his veins as they branched out into his palm and then his fingers. “Like this, t’hy’la?”

“Together,” Jim explained, smiling brightly. “With a beautiful ship and a wonderful crew and the universe to explore.”

Spock shook his head a little, thinking back to how three years before – after the Tragedy, after everything he’d known had been wiped away – he hadn’t even been able to envision any kind of future for himself, let alone one as precious as that they had built side by side. “No, Jim, I would have never said,” he murmured. “But you taught me differently.”

The human’s golden laughter filled the room, and the Vulcan basked in it and the emotional and physical warmth surrounding him. “You’re such a hopeless romantic, sweetie,” Kirk chuckled, pressing a kiss to his temple because he knew it would send a shiver down his spine.

“Perhaps,” Spock allowed, stretching his legs comfortably as he leaned further into him; his t’hy’la wrapped an arm around his back and pulled him closer. “Or perhaps I am merely stating a fact.”

Jim reached out his first and middle fingers to meet his in an ozh’esta, and his fondness for the Vulcan bled easily into his mind, a familiar taste that evoked the sensation of drunk fuzziness. “I love you so much, baby.”

“I have been and always shall be yours, Jim,” Spock easily replied, linking their hands, and he turned his head to nose at the hollow beneath Kirk’s neck, breathing into his human scent. “Never doubt this.”

For a while they were silent, each wrapped up in their own thoughts, each enjoying the other’s company. The Vulcan reflected upon all that they had shared and the time ahead of them, the adventures and dangers and losses and victories they would face as one, and he experienced a strange feeling – almost a duality, the desire for morning to come at once coupled with the desire to forever bask in the eve of their mission.

“There is something I wish to inquire of you,” he murmured, stroking up and down his human’s arm, feeling him lazily melt into the contact, warm and sleepy and relaxed.

“I’m listening,” Kirk prompted after a few moments, turning so his lips brushed against the line of his jaw.

Spock took a deep, steadying breath. “Would you consider bonding with me?”
“Bonding?” Jim repeated, suddenly alert. “Spock… are you proposing?”

His beloved looked almost alarmed by the notion, and the Vulcan straightened his back as a hint of nervousness entered his thoughts. He cleared his throat. “In a manner of speaking, yes.”

Folding his arms in front of his chest, the Captain presented him with the most dramatic of frowns he could produce, but his eyes were sparkling in mirth and love, shining like stars as he fought to suppress the giddy laugh that wanted to escape his pursed lips. The Vulcan leaned forward, awaiting his answer, wishing he could fit his fingers against his psy-points and catch the flavour of his thoughts but restraining himself to savour the anticipation coursing though his veins like molten chocolate.

“Well, tough luck, Spock, because I was gonna propose tomorrow on the Enterprise and I even got us rings so we’re doing that.”

Spock couldn’t help it, then: he smiled, a full, unfiltered smile, and gathered both of the human’s hands in his, pressing their foreheads together. “I look forward to it,” he murmured, letting his own joy spill into his t’hy’la’s eager mind. “I shall make sure to display the appropriate signs of surprise.”

“You better,” Kirk warned against his lips, “I’ve been planning this for over a month.”

The Vulcan arched a teasing eyebrow at this, privately thinking he’d never seen as beautiful a sight as his Captain’s winning grin and the moonlight framing his face. “You flatter me, ashayam.”

Jim kissed him soundly, stealing his breath and his reason as their fingers tangled again and he could feel the human’s heart beat a staccato tempo against his chest and he was so hopeful, so very hopeful, and for every time their lips met the Vulcan realised he was home, home within his Captain’s embrace, home within his luminous mind and selfless love, home within the feelings he awoke inside his soul, feelings that defined him, feelings that had changed him so completely.

“Come,” his t’hy’la demanded, pulling him swiftly up to his feet. “Come to bed with me.”

Kirk turned, starting to walk away, still holding on to his hand. Without a moment of hesitation, Spock followed.

And gave me back
the Sun
Let me know what you think at my Star Trek blog!

Chapter End Notes

And... there we go. The End. Fin. Fine. So... was this fluffy enough? I snuck in a lil bit more of Elder Spock because I love his so much and I think he's an important figure for Jim!!

Also, you can totally assume Nyota and T'Pring spent that year together because they are in love and the great powercouple we deserve. But I digress.

I hope you liked this story! Let me know what you think of the ending!

And... see you next time? (Next time is OMS challenge btw. Oh I am SO behind aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa)

Oh, btw, the last quote is by me. Ahem.

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